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**Changing Habits:
Unlearning Burnout in the Context of Theological Education of Clergy
Under the Guidance of the Cistercian Monastic Tradition**

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
Person, Community, and Religious Life
2017

Abstract

Changing Habits:

*Unlearning Burnout in the Context of Theological Education of Clergy
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By Natalia A. Shulgina

Burnout, due to lack of rest and violence of overwork, is a growing problem in contemporary western society. While Christian clergy belong to a population of caregiving professionals particularly vulnerable to burnout, the lack of rest and overwork among clergy is a genuinely perplexing occurrence. Why is it that clergy remain “restless,” even though their bodies cry out from neglect, their minds understand the importance of self-care, and scripture clearly commands Sabbath rest?

Broad consensus exists in the clergy burnout literature about the important role that seminaries and other institutions of theological education must play in the work of prevention. However, actual proposals that imagine theological education as an avenue for preventing clergy burnout are scarce.

In this dissertation, the author conducts an in-depth autoethnographic study of the phenomena of rest and burnout in the context of her encounter with the Cistercian monasticism, uncovering the rarely acknowledged complexity in their nature: the existence of a profound negative dimension in what seems to be an unambiguously positive experience of “rest,” and the existence of a powerful positive potential for personal transformation hidden in what is frequently perceived to be an utterly negative experience of “burnout.” Based on the insights gained in the course of the investigation, a proposal is made for teaching rest and forming restful ministers in the context of theological education.

In addition to its unique approach to the problem of clergy rest and burnout, this research is distinguished by its uncommon interdenominational foundations and a highly unusual methodological design. As a work that comes from a researcher who is a lay associate at a Cistercian monastery *and* a prospective United Methodist theological educator, this dissertation draws on the resources of a Roman Catholic contemplative monastic tradition in order to re-imagine the praxis of liberal, mainline Protestant theological education. As a work that comes from a researcher who is an interdisciplinary practical theologian *and* an ordained minister with firsthand experience of burnout, this dissertation makes the experience of the researcher a focal point of the scholarly investigation and develops a qualitative case-study method for practical theological reflection.

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**For my Brothers
at Conyers and Gethsemani**

Benedicite

Acknowledgements

Writing and being ill have one thing in common: suddenly one finds oneself thrust into the vast and frightening expanses of solitude. Such a situation is particularly ironic, if one has previously declared oneself a “seeker of solitude” and gone about, rather militantly, trying to find and safeguard it. In contrast, the solitude of the unexpectedly long years of writing this dissertation, while coping with illness, became for me the means of learning to live and write unarmed, and of facing my deepest vulnerabilities and fears from that inherently unsafe position. That in the end, this part of my journey came to successful completion, therefore, has to do less with my own merit and more with the nature of that solitude—as all *true* solitude, it was essentially communal. My recovery from burnout and my scholarly exploration of the complex process of becoming restful was made possible by the support of many people.

Here, I wish to acknowledge especially:

The members of my dissertation committee, past and present: Drs. Luke Johnson, Mary Elizabeth Moore, David Petersen, Karen Scheib, Theodore Brelsford, Rodney Hunter, Thomas Long, Don Saliers, and Jennifer R. Ayres. Each of my teachers provided me with invaluable wisdom and support on the road to completion. Special thanks to my advisors:

- *Ted, without your gentle nudging, I may have never had the courage to start walking the path between the monastery and the seminary. Without your unconditional support, I would have been far less daring in my attempts to imagine theological education anew.*
- *Rod, your in-depth reading and detailed written response to every piece of my manuscript, throughout the ten years of its making, is an example of academic mentoring compatible with the ideals of monastic perseverance. I will never be able to repay this gift, except by being as faithful and as care-full a mentor to my own students down the road. You have shown me what “generativity” truly is.*
- *Jennifer, you have become a part of my committee at its later stages, but I will never forget your willingness to step up to the plate at that crucial time. Your focus, energy, and guidance have given me the strength for the last mile.*

My other significant seminary teachers: Dr. Valentina Kuznetsova of the Moscow Theological Seminary, Dr. Edward Everding of Iliff School of Theology, Dr. Samuel Johnson of Boston University School of Theology, Dr. Douglas Strong of Wesley Theological Seminary, Drs. Roberta Bondi, Rex Matthews, and Theodore Runyon of Candler School of Theology, and Rev. Dr. Joan Murray of the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. *I thank you deeply, you have shown me theological education at its best.*

The students in RE 501, “Religious Education as Formation and Transformation,” course (Candler School of Theology, Summer 2007): *Many thanks for your honest and whole-hearted participation in this class and for your subsequent support of my research. You have taught me what theological education of clergy really is—and what it yet can become.*

The people of the United Methodist Church, on both sides of the ocean: Bishops Rüdiger Minor, Hans Växby, and Eduard Khegay of the Russia UMC; Dr. Sergei Nikolaev of the Moscow Theological Seminary; congregations of “Love and Salvation” UMC and “Raduga” UMC (Moscow, Russia), Arcola Korean UMC (Paramus, New Jersey), Druid Hills UMC (Atlanta, Georgia), and Ginter Park UMC (Richmond, VA); Lisa H. Katzenstein of the World Communion Scholarship Program at the UMC General Board of Global Ministries, and the community of scholars and friends of the John Wesley Fellowship (AFTE). *Thank you for standing by me, even when things did not go as planned.*

My family: The Kunzes in the U.S., the Shulgines in the Northern Russia, and the Tyus in the Far East, I am deeply grateful for your prayer and abiding love. I thank in particular my husband and my mother who have given up much over the years, so that I could continue writing.

- *Mark, you are a great partner, fine intellectual, and most importantly, a man of a big, kind heart. You are also the closest observer and the most intimate participant in my work of becoming restful. Without your support, and your challenge, I would have never finished. I look forward to continuing on this journey with you.*
- *Mum, you are the hardest worker I have ever known. Even though you could not teach me rest (for you yourself had so little), you have given me the skills, the nerve, the fierce love of my work and determination to see it through against all odds. My love of reading and fascination with writing goes back to our early years together.*

Eloise Hally, my psychotherapist: *Eloise, you have labored quietly alongside the monks at the vineyards of my restlessness. Yours is another gift I can never repay.*

The Painting Class and its teacher, Brenda Stankus, and the Concert Ballet of Virginia and its director, Scott Boyer: *Dear artists, you have given me home, when my familiar one, of the church and academy, was threatening to crumble. Your love and care, your aesthetic sensitivities and willingness to make sacrifices for the art, and your dedication to practice have made my times with you a genuinely healing occasion. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

My writing tribe: Smita Lahiri of U.S.A., Helmut Zepik of Austria, and Amy Bachrach of Australia. *Co-workers at the impossible, you know it all: cheers!*

The final and greatest word of thanks goes to my Trappist family: fellow retreatants, Lay Cistercians, and the conventional monastic communities at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey. I thank in particular Fr. Francis Michael Stiteler, the abbot-emeritus of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, who has welcomed my research; Fr. Augustine Myslinski, the current abbot of the monastery, for his unwavering support at all stages of my work; Fr. Michael Casagram of Gethsemani Abbey and Fr. Gerard Gross of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit for spiritual guidance; and Brother Cassian Russell who kept faith in my becoming, and kept on reading my manuscript, even when the night fell. This manuscript is dedicated to the monks of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and Abbey of Gethsemani. *Thank you for embodying God’s love for people in the world. Thank you for guiding our feet into the way of peace.*

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I invite you...to an exercise in practical theology.

Practical thinking is messy. Most of us are strong on theory, for theory is clear and clean and stands still. But thinking about the ever-shifting face of real life brings terror to the mind. The subject matter does not hold steady. Worse, it takes hold of the thinker, preventing distance and discretion. These qualities are admired before all others in science, so practical thinking is sometimes considered less serious than the sort given to molecules and mollusks. It is not, of course.

It only requires quicker feet.¹

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9.

PART I

CLERGY BURNOUT:

IN SEARCH FOR SOLUTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

This dissertation is an exercise in practical theology. It identifies a problematic situation in the life of the church as a starting point of its investigation. It features an in-depth reflection on the human experience in relation to Scripture, tradition, and non-theological scientific disciplines and sources of knowledge. It aims at the salutary renewal of praxis.² *In this dissertation, I seek to reflect in depth on the phenomena of rest and burnout, in order to re-imagine the praxis of institutional theological education as one important avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout.*

Yet, while my dissertation is an exercise in practical theology, it is also a rather unusual exercise. Three specific features set it aside from the traditional process and format of practical theological reflection. First, even as I identify clergy burnout as a problem that

² In this research project, I follow the definition of practical theology and the model of its engagement with the social sciences, developed by John Swinton, a Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care, and Harriet Mowat, a Research Fellow in the Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability, at the University of Aberdeen: John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006). (I offer a detailed description, critique, and further development of this model in *Part II* of this dissertation, where I discuss my interdisciplinary method.) The Swinton-Mowat model is not the only major work in the recent flowering of literature in practical theology, but it does represent a broad consensus about the practical theological method. The keen attention to the situations and challenges in the life of the church, critical and constructive reflection on experience in light of theological and human sciences, and renewal of ecclesial praxis that characterize Swinton and Mowat's work can also be observed in the work of the majority of contemporary Protestant practical theologians. See for example, James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care, Theology and Pastoral Care Series* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); James W. Fowler, Richard Robert Osmer, and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Developing a Public Faith: New Directions in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James W. Fowler* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).

is long overdue for the disciplined and systematic practical theological reflection, my study is not focused on the instances of burning out per se, but rather on a specific and unusually effective incident of recovery. The “problem in the life of the church” (clergy burnout) is indeed a starting point of my practical theological reflection, and the “salutary renewal of praxis” (theological education of clergy) is its fundamental aim; but the methodological path connecting the two is not straightforward. In my dissertation, I do not proceed from reflection on the problem to the imagining of its solution; instead, I proceed by a series of “looking back’s,” reflecting not only on the experience of the problem but also on the experience of the already found solution, gradually arriving at my own formulation of the constructive proposal for action.

Second, my dissertation features an in-depth reflection on the human experience, in relation to the rich heritage of the Christian tradition. Yet, my primary “conversational partner” is a highly unusual choice for a Protestant practical theologian. The tradition that I bring to bear on the problem of clergy burnout comes from one of the most remote orders of the Roman Catholic monasticism: The Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. In this dissertation, I describe and explore in depth the instance of recovery from clergy burnout, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition. Such cross-denominational engagement provides a highly atypical, and highly fertile, ground for my practical theological inquiry.³

³ Historically, in North America, practical theology has been a largely Protestant discipline. Only recently the systematic reflection on distinctly Catholic contributions to the field has taken place: Claire E. Wolfeich, *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014). This volume features an extremely valuable collection of essays, identifying approaches and issues in practical theology from a distinctly Catholic perspective. My research is both complementary and distinct from this work: the contributors to this text are Catholic theologians who seek to demonstrate that practical theology, in its

The third, and academically most startling, feature of this exercise in practical theology is its focus on the researcher's personal experience of the phenomena. The experience of burnout and becoming restful that I seek to explore is my own.⁴

Thus, my longer thesis statement reads as follows: *My dissertation is a case study of my personal experience of burnout in the context of theological education, and my gradual recovery from it under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition; it seeks to explore, in depth, the nature of rest and burnout and the dynamics of becoming restful through my direct experience of this monastic tradition, in order to draw lessons for the teaching of rest and the forming of restful ministers in the context seminary training, and in so doing, imagine theological education of clergy as an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout.*

Why do I take such an unconventional approach to the problem of clergy burnout?

The primary reason for it is pragmatic. I am an ordained United Methodist elder, with a firsthand experience of burnout and recovery in the context of theological education, as a result of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition. I study my own case, because it is the only data on genuine recovery from burnout to which I have a direct access as a researcher, and because it is the data that I know best: my personal experience of burnout and my gradual transformation into a more restful person and pastor is the key impetus behind my academic work on this topic, the ever-present background to all my

various forms and names, has deep and distinctive roots in Catholicism; I seek to understand and share the nourishment that I received from those roots.

⁴ While the methodological awareness and sensitivity to the influence of the practical theologians' "locale" on their scholarly stance and other issues of contextualization have long been of particular importance for practical theologians, I am not aware of other works in practical theology that make the personal experience of the researcher a focal point of the practical theological investigation.

scholarly learning, and the primary lens through which I view this problem and its solution. In short, my personal experience with burnout is the fundamental basis of any authority that I may claim as a practical theologian who seeks to address this problem.

At the same time, unconventional as it is, my approach is not merely a matter of convenience and circumstance; it is an occasion of a unique opportunity. Provided that the crucial methodological challenges posed by my proposition to study my own case are effectively addressed, my unconventional approach to studying clergy burnout has the potential not only to imagine new ways for addressing this problem, but also to elucidate and deepen the core disciplinary commitments of practical theology itself. Such elucidating and deepening potential of my research is closely linked to its three unusual features.

First, it is precisely because the focus of my research is not limited to my reflection on my experience of succumbing to the destructive power of burnout but also includes the in-depth exploration of my journey of becoming restful in the aftermath of this experience, that my unconventional exercise in practical theology holds a *unique theoretical possibility*. It demands re-conceptualization of the problem of burnout within the framework of becoming restful, creating conditions for discerning the factors that account for attainment of restfulness in the context of burning out—and in so doing, it could teach us something about this phenomenon that, by definition, cannot be learned by studying it purely in the context of ministerial unrest and failure of performance. The wellness-focused orientation that characterizes my unconventional exercise in practical theology complements and expands the problem-centered focus of the traditional forms of practical theological inquiry.

Second, it is precisely because my exercise in practical theology crosses the Protestant-Catholic boundary of our common religious heritage, that it holds a *unique possibility of offering the resource* that is not usually available to the Protestant clergy in their struggle with burnout. As a scholarly exploration of the profound influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition on my recovery from burnout in the context of theological education, my dissertation forges a connection with one of the very few distinctly Christian and still living traditions of resting. At the same time, because my research is a work of a Protestant practical theologian who has entered deeply and genuinely into the encounter with a particular expression of the Roman Catholic religious ethos, it complements and enriches the traditional focus of engagement with the (largely Protestant) religious tradition within the Protestant practical theological guild.

The third unique possibility arises from the third unusual feature (and the greatest challenge) of this research: its deep grounding in my personal experience as the researcher. It is precisely because my dissertation is based on the ambitious proposition to study my own case, that it holds a *unique methodological opportunity*. It creates unprecedented conditions for making the inner (“subjective”) dynamics of burning out and becoming restful an object of a disciplined and systematic (“objective”) scholarly investigation. Such unusual epistemological approach fits well with the traditional awareness and sensitivity to the researcher’s “location” that exists in the field of practical theology; yet, because I propose not merely to *reflect* on the potential effects of my personal and professional location on my scholarly stance but to actually *utilize* it as an primary path to scholarly understanding and insight, my exercise in practical theology forces me to move beyond the purely rhetorical homage to the issues of researcher’s contextual sensitivity, and to engage

instead in the work of developing an in-depth theoretical understanding and systematic method for using my personal experience as a researcher for the scholarly generation of knowledge.

Thus, if I capitalize on the three unique features of my dissertation research as an exercise in practical theology, then I have the opportunity not only to make a substantive contribution to the work of addressing clergy burnout, but also to honor and further develop the core disciplinary commitments of practical theology itself. At the same time, given the profound methodological challenge that the unconventional nature of my practical theological research poses to the standards of scholarly validity, credibility, and ethics, it is very important that I offer a clear description of the fundamental premises of my study, its normative parameters, and the basic outline of my research design. In this chapter, therefore, I name and provide supporting evidence for the normative assumptions of my research, offer the definitions of key terms and identify important limitations of my study, and provide an overview of the manuscript as a whole, showing the reader that, unconventional as it is, my dissertation is a document of responsible scholarship and research.

1.1 Normative Assumptions

My personal experience of burnout and my long journey of becoming restful, in the context of theological education, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, have sensitized me to the presence of ambiguity and paradox in the seemingly self-evident nature of rest and burnout, made me aware of the complex influence of theological education on its students, made me realize that the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition has a

peculiar gift for people in the world, and have made me intensely interested in the role of researcher's personal experience in the scholarly generation of knowledge. These experiences coalesced in five specific assumptions:

1. *Theological education is experienced by its students as both deeply rewarding and very stressful, and ministerial students' level of stress during their seminary training may well establish a predisposition for future vulnerability to burnout.*
2. *Burnout is a paradoxical and complex phenomenon, and its strong potential for destruction is closely linked to its equally strong potential for personal transformation.*
3. *The clergy's frequent failure to keep Sabbath betrays the existence of a rarely acknowledged, negative dimension in what would seem to be an unambiguously positive religious observance.*
4. *The Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition is rapidly growing in its significance for people in the world.*
5. *For practical theological research, the researcher's personal experience is of critical value for the scholarly generation of knowledge.*

Because these assumptions have emerged from my personal experience, and because they are not immediately self-evident or incontrovertible in their claims, I complement these statements with supporting evidence from the relevant bodies of literature. By identifying the current and representative scholarly works that provide substantive verification for each of my assumptive claims, I demonstrate the validity of my normative premises and establish them as the epistemological point of departure for my research.

Assumption 1: Stressful Dimension of Theological Education

To offer substantive evidence for this assumption, I turn to the work of Lutheran minister and professor of pastoral care and counseling, Gary Harbaugh. In the early 1980s, Harbaugh conducted two years of clinical research among M.Div. students at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, which became known as “The Pace Studies.” Combining subjective reporting with the four standardized psychological tests (the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale, The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, The Burns Perfectionism Scale, and a measure for reading speed), Harbaugh found that the seminarians’ level of stress was over two times higher than that of the general American population, and that it was connected with chronic sleep-deprivation, incidents of acute anxiety and depression, increased illnesses, and use of alcohol or other chemical substances.⁵ Harbaugh argues that a strong connection exists between ministerial students’ stress and lack of coping habits during their seminary training and their vulnerability to future burnout.⁶

Four kinds of research support Harbaugh’s findings indirectly. First, there are general studies of theological education: while seminarians’ stress is not their primary focus, these accounts bear witness to it.⁷ Second, there are psychological studies that seek

⁵ The most detailed account of the Pace Studies can be found in Gary L. Harbaugh, “Pace in Learning and Life: Prelude to Pastoral Burnout,” in *Seminary and Congregation: Integrating Learning, Ministry, and Mission: Report of the 17th Biennial Meeting of the Association of Professional Education for Ministry, June 19-21, 1982*, ed. LeRoy H. Aden (Dubuque: 1982), 79-104.

⁶ Harbaugh reflects on this connection in detail in Gary L. Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984); Gary L. Harbaugh and Evan Rogers, “Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 38, no. 2 (1984).

⁷ See, for example, Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008); Jackson W. Carroll et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Roger L. Dudley and Margaret G. Dudley, “Stress Factors, Spirituality, and Commitment among Seminarians and Their Spouses,” *Review of Religious Research* 36, no. 1 (1994).

to evaluate the effectiveness of various resources for stress reduction: their choice of seminarians as their study population reveals their underlying assumption that seminary training is marked with degrees of stress sufficient to warrant the investigation.⁸ Third, there is a number of monographs that seek to offer guidance to the aspiring or new seminarians: their titles and tables of contents reveal stress as a special area of concern.⁹ The last source of evidence about stress in theological education comes from the students themselves: their memoirs, devotions, and collections of prayer offer glimpses into the darker side of the ordinarily high-spirited seminary narratives.¹⁰ Thus, in Harbaugh's clinical studies of the seminarians' stress and the work of other researchers of theological education, my assumption of the stressful dimension of theological education has received important substantive validation.

Assumption 2: Positive Dimension of Burnout

While perception of burnout in common parlance and majority of traditional psychological literature is predominantly negative, Dina Glouberman, a psychotherapist with the firsthand experience of burnout, asserts that this undeniably dark and painful experience has a deep positive value. According to her, burnout is not a signal of failure but an

⁸ For example, Carla M. Dahl, Mary L. Jensen, and Jane L. McCampbell, "A Butterfly Effect: The Impact of Marriage and Family Therapy Training on Students' Spouses," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 38, no. 1 (2010); Alan E. Craddock, "Relational Resources as Buffers against the Impact of Stress: A Longitudinal Study of Seminary Students and Their Partners," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 24, no. 1 (1996).

⁹ Denise George, *How to Be a Seminary Student and Survive* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981); Philip G. Camp, *Finding Your Way: A Guide to Seminary Life and Beyond* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009); Virginia S. Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education as Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Chloe Breyer, *The Close: A Young Woman's First Year at Seminary* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Brian S. Gerard, *Common Passages: Devotions for Seminarians by Seminarians* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998).

indication of the impending renewal and a challenge to enter a new, more authentic, way of life. Glouberman believes that contemporary psychological research on burnout offers an extremely valuable but incomplete picture of this phenomenon, and argues that the contemporary prevalence of burnout must be seen not as an “epidemic that needs to be cured” but a sign of readiness for individual and societal transformation that needs to be honored. From her point of view, the true meaning of burnout is paradoxical: its suffering is at the core of its capacity to engender profound positive change. She insists that it is only by recognizing burnout as a possibility that we could respond to it effectively as a problem.¹¹

Glouberman’s unconventional awareness of the positive value of burnout is substantiated indirectly by the late Israeli clinical psychologist, Ayala Pines. In her own attempt to reinterpret the traditional ways of understanding this phenomenon in the field of psychology, she proposed the “existential perspective” on burnout, arguing that at the root of this malaise is the human search for meaning and the need to transcend the limitations of mortality in an existentially significant way. Pines contends that burnout is an unsuccessful attempt to find meaning in life through work.¹² The existential perspective on burnout offers a way to conceptualize the positive dimension of possibility within the negative view of burnout as a problem: if burnout is a result of the failed quest for

¹¹ Dina Glouberman, *The Joy of Burnout: How the End of the World Can Be a New Beginning* (Makawao: Inner Ocean Pub., 2003).

¹² Ayala M. Pines, "Burnout: An Existential Perspective," in *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research.*, ed. Wilmar B. Schaufeli, Christina Maslach, and Tadeusz Marek, Series in Applied Psychology: Social Issues and Questions (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1993). In her argument, Pines draws heavily on the work of Viktor Frankl and Ernest Becker: Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

existential significance, then this very failure to address the existential dilemma could function as an *indicator* of the less-than-adequate source of meaning and a *catalyst* of a search for a new, more reliable source of meaning—all the more powerful because of the pain that it induces. Thus, Pines’s scholarly exploration of the existential nature of burnout and Glouberman’s psychotherapeutic reflection on its hidden value provide reasonable supporting evidence for my assumption of the positive dimension of burnout.

Assumption 3: Negative Dimension of Sabbath Rest

To substantiate such a radically unconventional supposition about the Sabbath rest, I turn to the work of Judith Shulevitz, a Jewish journalist and literary critic from New York.¹³ Shulevitz’s argument about Sabbath sounds a sharply dissonant note in the overwhelmingly positive estimation of this practice by the contemporary advocates of rest. She speaks of her deep longing and equally deep ambivalence about the holy day of rest, and her searching account of her own Sabbath tallies a formidable list of “costs” that the Queen Shabbat extracts from its practitioners in exchange for its “benefits.” Yet, the value of Shulevitz’s personal reflection on the Sabbath extends far beyond the significance of an ordinary memoir. Grounding her spiritual autobiography in readings from Jewish and Christian religious writings, American literature, and the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychoanalysis, and chronobiology, Shulevitz reinterprets the challenge of the Sabbath observance as a problem of inhabiting the two sharply contrasting orders of time: the secular and the religious.

¹³ Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010).

The *secular order of time*, rooted in industrial and economic advances of modern civilization, is the most prominent kind of time in the American society. Shaped by endless variation in contemporary patterns of work, communication, and commerce, it is fluid, fungible, and increasingly fragmented. It is the time that can be infinitely adjusted to suit our personal preferences, interests, and needs. Because the secular order of time places human agency and will at its center, it lures us with the promise of rest—when *we* would like to have it. But it never delivers: no matter how hard we work to master and become in charge of our time, we end up restless and feeling as if time is in charge of us.

The only way to escape the tyranny of secular time, says Shulevitz, is to submit to its religious counterpart. With its origins in the biblical cosmological imagination, the Sabbath is an occasion for catching the glimpses of the *religious order of time*, when the ordinary activities of the human week part to reveal the creative and redemptive activity of the Divine taking place in the world. As such, the Sabbath has indeed the power to give us rest—by making us stop to remember that we are not the only ones at work in the world. Yet, it is precisely because our desire to enter the world that God has created and is creating clashes so mightily with our investment in the world of our own making that the Sabbath invitation to rest becomes an occasion for fear and trembling: its command to stop, irrespective of the state of our plans and agendas, poses a direct threat not merely to our habitual ways of maintaining social, professional, and financial security but to our deepest and most cherished sources of identity and self-worth. Such is the negative, and usually hidden, dimension of the religious way of resting: the sacrifices that must be made and the losses that have to be endured, if we are to enter God's Sabbath rest.

Assumption 4: Significance of Benedictine-Cistercian Monasticism for the World

Even though at first glance, it seems that suggesting the value of monasticism for people in the world might be a far-fetched idea, there are four sources of evidence that reveal the substantial and rapidly growing appreciation of the value of the Benedictine-Cistercian tradition by people in the world. First, the contemporary domains of music, film-making, and published literature reveal that monasticism in general, and the Benedictine-Cistercian monasticism in particular, occupies a significant place in the popular imagination.¹⁴ Public interest in monastic spirituality and culture is paralleled by the attention that it is beginning to receive in the broader academic setting.¹⁵ At the same time, the rapidly growing movement of the Benedictine oblates and Lay Cistercians reveals that for many people, including Protestant clergy, the growing attraction to the monastic tradition is not merely a matter of fleeting curiosity but a life-long commitment.¹⁶

¹⁴ For example, in 2008, the CD “Chant: Music for Paradise,” recorded by the Cistercian monks of the Abbey Stift Heiligenkreuz (Winerwald, Austria) made number 9—right behind Madonna!—in the “pop music top 10” list and the number 1 in the “classical” list, triggering a number of articles in *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Billboard*, and *Music Week* and earning the “must-have” name among the reviewers. Motion pictures, such as *Into Great Silence* and *Of God and Men*, as well as a number of documentaries featuring monastic life were released by the BBC, the Learning Channel, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and broadcasting companies in several other countries. In the published world, the first book on the importance of Benedictine spirituality for life in the world, appeared in 1984 (Esther De Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1984).); today, the market is bursting with memoirs, guides, and other appreciative books written by the Christian laity (some of which have become the New York Times Bestsellers), and even the works of the monastic writers themselves are now addressed to the wider audience of the spiritual seekers in the world.

¹⁵ For example, the Pitts Theology Library of Emory University has one of the nation’s largest collections of materials by Thomas Merton, to which it has recently added the archives of Thomas Keating on centering prayer and contemplative practice. In 2006, Emory established a “Collaborative for Contemplative Studies Initiative,” a university-wide program aimed at broadening and deepening the knowledge of contemplative practice in the world’s religious traditions.

¹⁶ In the Benedictine monastic tradition, the tradition of forming “oblates” has a long history. For the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, the cloistered Order that is “wholly ordered to contemplation,” such

The final source of evidence of the growing importance of the monastic tradition for people in the world is the most paradoxical: as the rapid growth in number of lay associates to various monasteries corresponds to a perplexing “crisis of vocations” to the conventional monastic life itself, a number of people both inside and outside the monastery have begun to refer to this occurrence as a phenomenon of “lay monasticism.”¹⁷ Lay monasticism could be described in three ways. In the narrower sense, it is a movement of the “third orders” within the Roman Catholic Church that seeks to empower laity to be more involved in religious life. In the second and wider sense, it is a movement that involves people from various Protestant denominations establishing a formal relationship with the Roman Catholic or ecumenical religious communities as “oblates.”¹⁸ Finally, and most intriguingly, the term has come to be used by the neo-monastic communities formed by evangelical Protestants who depart from the traditional Benedictine model but seek to imitate the spirit of radical commitment to the values of the Gospel and discipleship of Christ, characteristic of the ancient monastic founders.¹⁹ The diverse collection of sources

association with people in the world, signals a dramatic shift in self-understanding: in 2008, the O.S.C.O. General Chapter voted to recognize Lay Cistercians as an expression of the Cistercian charism.

¹⁷ For example, Joan Chittister, *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* (Katonah: BlueBridge, 2011); John Main and Laurence Freeman, *Monastery without Walls: The Spiritual Letters of John Main*, Complete ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006); Dennis L. Okholm, *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Important accounts of the oblate way of life include: Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996); Linda Kulzer and Roberta C. Bondi, *Benedict in the World: Portraits of Monastic Oblates* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002); Mark Plaiss, *The Inner Room: A Journey into Lay Monasticism* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003). Interestingly, among the monastic associates today is a growing number of academic faculty, such as emerita church historian Roberta Bondi (Candler School of Theology), Wesleyan scholar Paul Chilcote (Ashland Theological Seminary), professor of pastoral theology and spirituality Edward Sellner (St. Paul University), professor of theology Dennis Okholm (Asuza Pacific University), and many others.

¹⁹ For example, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008); Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From after*

that I presented offers strong supporting evidence to my assumption about growing significance of the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition: people of different cultural backgrounds, walks of life, and religious identities claim to have received a gift from the monastery, which enables them to live their lives in the world with renewed passion, integrity, and not the least, peace.

Assumption 5: Value of Personal Experience for Scholarly Generation of Knowledge

While much of “hard” science seeks to safeguard its epistemological authority and credibility by excluding the researcher’s personal experience from the practice of research, the phenomenological tradition of philosophy describes an epistemological stance in which the researcher’s own experience is of cardinal importance.²⁰ On the level of explicit philosophical commitments, phenomenologists speak of the four “core processes” in the derivation of knowledge. *Bracketing (epoche)* is an activity of setting aside, as far as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived ideas and former experiences of the object of study, in order to experience it as if for the first time, naively. *Phenomenological reduction* follows bracketing with a disciplined description of the object of study, both as external sensory data and the inner experience of the researcher. *Imaginative variation* extends the knowing of the first two processes with the in-depth reflection on the nature of the

Virtue to a New Monasticism (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010). Indeed, according to Fr. Louis of Gethsemani Abbey, the emergence of Protestant monastic communities is one of the most telling signs of the monastic revival: Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, 1967), 188-92.

²⁰ The origins of this tradition lie in the work of the German mathematician, Edmond Husserl, who contended that we can know only what we immediately experience. Excellent introduction to phenomenological way of thinking, core assumptions, and vocabulary can be found in Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). More extensive introductory texts include Maurice Alexander Natanson, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, 2 vols. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); David Stewart and Algis Mickunas, *Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and Its Literature*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990).

phenomenon with regards to time and space, material world and social context. Finally, in *synthesis*, the patterns of understanding that emerged in the entire course of reflection are integrated, to set forth the core meaning of the phenomenon. The four core processes for generation of knowledge are not merely a matter of philosophical speculation, but a foundation for the formal research methodology, “phenomenological method” and its derivative, “heuristic inquiry.”²¹

With its long history in philosophy and social sciences, the phenomenological tradition has had profound influence on the field of practical theology. Some practical theologians employ formal phenomenological methods for the purposes of “situational analysis” in the work of practical theological reflection, in order to gain deeper insight into the human experience and raise new questions for theology and practice of the church.²² And even when the formal phenomenological methods are not used, the philosophical suppositions of phenomenology are reflected in the core disciplinary commitments of practical theology: the value placed on an in-depth reflection, the understanding of lived human experience as crucially important for construction of theological claims, a deliberately descriptive and interpretive (rather than prescriptive) stance, the lasting appreciation of the inherent complexity and ambiguity of the life situations, and the importance of challenging established interpretations.²³ Thus, even though I don’t employ

²¹ In-depth presentation of these two methods can be found in Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994); Clark E. Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990).

²² John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mental Health Care, Pastoral Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2000); Thomas C. Oden, *The Structure of Awareness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969); Swinton and Mowat, 101-32.

²³ For example, Browning; Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm, *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as*

a formal phenomenological method in my exercise of practical theology, the phenomenological tradition of philosophy and the work of practical theologians who embody its normative commitments, confirm that my assumption about the value of researcher's own experience for the scholarly generation of knowledge in practical theological research is well-founded.

Having reviewed and offered supportive evidence for the five normative assumptions of my study, I now turn to the definition of the key terms for this study.

1.2 Definitions of Key Terms

Two terms within my thesis statement—burnout and rest—require more precise definition. Such definition is also difficult, albeit for different reasons. With regards to burnout, the difficulty is rooted in the descriptive ambiguity that characterizes the use of this term in social scientific writing and pastoral literature. With regards to rest, the difficulty lies in the seemingly obvious meaning of the term.

To address the problem of defining burnout, I turn to the work of Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, the researchers who led a part of *Pulpit & Pew*, a multi-year research project on pastoral leadership, sponsored by the Duke University Divinity School and the Lilly Endowment, Inc. In their research into the motivations behind clergy's decision to leave ministry,²⁴ Hoge and Wenger state that burnout presented a challenging category to

It Is in Heaven (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005); Nancy J. Ramsay, *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004); Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

²⁴ I refer to their study of Protestant clergy: Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry, Pulpit & Pew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005). In their earlier work, they studied Catholic priests and their motivations for leaving the priesthood: Dean R. Hoge, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Catholic Priests* (Collegeville:

study because the variation in its descriptive markers was so broad: clergy who left pastoral ministry because of burnout reported stress, strain, weariness, frustration, disillusionment, emotional exhaustion, inability to manage pressures and demands, feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and alienation from others. Their complaints were more general, more colored by self-doubt, and resembled the complaints of depressed individuals, frequently occurring after a strong investment in a new church development that failed or an extended period of overwork with little congregational and denominational support. Despite such variation in symptoms, Hoge and Wenger concluded that this category was broad but distinct enough to study separately. They “lumped these ministers together under the heading of ‘burned out; disillusioned; felt constrained; sense of inadequacy.’”²⁵ There is a similar definitional ambiguity in descriptions of clergy burnout in the contemporary pastoral literature: the accounts of its causes and symptoms are broad and lack specificity. Thus, defining clergy burnout on the basis of its etiology and symptomatology alone is not productive.

What does make burnout distinct from other problems of pastoral ministry, however, is the outcome. Even when their lists of symptoms, suggested causes, and proposals for intervention vary, all authors agree that unattended burnout leads to the serious personal and professional impairment of ministers. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I propose a definition that preserves both the breadth and distinctiveness of clergy burnout:

Liturgical Press, 2002); Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).

²⁵ Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, 115.

a debilitating process that can be triggered by different causes and manifested in a variety of symptoms, but that in its final stages leads to a severe damage to the emotional, physical, spiritual well-being and professional performance of pastoral leaders.

To avoid excessive linguistic redundancy and preserve the emphasis on impairment as the key outcome of clergy burnout, I use this term interchangeably with the term “ministerial failure.”²⁶

To define rest, I turn to the Oxford Dictionary. Among the nominative entries for the word, the dictionary defines rest as “respite from labor or exertion of any kind; refreshment or repose obtained by a pause in activity.”²⁷ Yet, I seek to deepen this definition with the distinct monastic awareness of the difference between rest as “leisure” (*otium*) that are constructive and genuinely restorative in nature, and rest as “idleness, unproductiveness, or laziness” (*otiositas*) that are not merely inadequate but harmful, and its insight into the spiritual nature of restlessness: the opposite of true rest is not merely the experience of work or a state of fatigue, but rather that which denies rest, that is, “business,

²⁶ I am keenly aware that the term “failure” is not a fully equivalent substitute for the term “burnout.” It is at once broader and narrower than the complex reality of personal and professional impairment signified by the notion of burnout: for example, a clergy person might fail in a number of ways without actually burning out; and, in contrast, some clergy continue in ministry despite the mounting symptoms of physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual degeneration. There are two reasons behind my decision to adopt “ministerial failure”—and not, for instance, terms “ministerial exhaustion” or “ministerial collapse”—as a proxy term: first, my desire to not overlook the pervasive feelings of failure commonly reported by the burned out clergy (in the classical definition of burnout, referred to as “reduced sense of personal accomplishment”); second, my awareness of the increasing number of burnout theorists who connect other kinds of ministerial failure (for example, sexual misconduct or financial malfeasance) to the psychosomatic, relational, and spiritual complexity of burnout. Thus, with full awareness of its imperfections, I adopt this term within the confines of this manuscript.

²⁷ Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg, *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1488.

affairs” (*negotium*).²⁸ Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I propose the following definition of rest:

a complex phenomenon that connotes a cessation in exertion, activity, and labor, and as such, has the potential to engender physical, emotional, and spiritual renewal depending on the attitude with which one ceases from activity, as well as the inner dynamics of such inaction.

To avoid excessive repetition and to highlight the spiritual dimension of rest, I use this term interchangeably with “peace.”

It must be pointed out, however, that, precisely because the purpose of my study is to deepen our understanding of rest and burnout, the definitions I propose here are inherently provisional. They are the “initial statements of the problem” that are to be refined in the course of my investigation. Given my assumption of the positive dimension of burnout as a powerful catalyst for constructive personal transformation, in this case study I will seek to understand the factors that make the difference between the destructive and constructive ways of burning out. Given my assumption of the negative dimension in religious practices of resting, I will seek to explore the inner dynamics of becoming restful, especially with regards to the hidden “costs” of such a process.

²⁸ An helpful discussion of the monastic notion of rest can be found in Robert Thomas, *Passing from Self to God: A Cistercian Retreat* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2006). Father Thomas, O.C.S.O, reflects on the fine shades in the meaning of rest found in the writings of the Cistercian fathers: Baldwin of Ford, William of Saint-Thierry, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Gilbert of Hoyland, and Gueric of Igny. For them, of course, true rest is always “holy rest,” a peculiar kind of “active inaction” that is inherently linked to entering God’s own rest, as captured in St. Augustine classic expression: “My God, our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

1.3 Limitations of Study

To carry out my intention for an in-depth study of rest, burnout, and the process of becoming restful, the scope my inquiry must necessarily be narrow. I especially highlight two specific limitations for my case study: limitation of the *context of study* and limitation of the *focus of my inquiry*.

With regards to the *context of study*, my research has been carried out on two specific locations: Candler School of Theology of Emory University, and the Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit that is a part of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, in Conyers, Georgia. As such, I limit my claims about “theological education” to the public documents and the data that I collected in working with Candler faculty and students. Moreover, because my research focused specifically on Candler ministerial students, my reflections on the “seminarians’ experience” pertain only to that segment of Candler student population. Thus, while I recognize that Candler is one of the major Protestant seminaries in the United States, and while I am aware that my study would likely be of interest and use for other theological schools and places of ministerial preparation (especially those belonging to the United Methodist and to other mainline liberal Protestant heritage), I explicitly acknowledge that my research findings are limited to what I have learned in a very specific setting of institutional theological education.

Similarly, I seek to acknowledge the fact that my in-depth reflection on the restorative and peace-producing effects of my encounter with the “Cistercian monastic tradition” took place in the context of my relationship with a particular community and place, the monks of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia. While far greater uniformity exists between the O.C.S.O. monastic foundations than between theological

schools in North America (due to the historical origins, vocational orientation, and institutional identity of this Order), and while my account has found deep resonance with the monks and lay Cistercians from at least one other Cistercian monastery (The Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky), I emphasize the highly contextual nature of my claims.

With regards to the *focus of inquiry*, I highlight the fact that my research is a study of my own case. While in my description and analysis of theological education I draw on published research and my own interviews with the ministerial students and faculty of Candler School of Theology, and while in my reflection on the Cistercian monastic living I draw on my encounters with actual Cistercian monks, nuns, and lay Cistercians and the classical and contemporary monastic literature, the primary locus of my investigation is that of my own firsthand experience. My understanding of the complex formative influence of theological education on its students' ability to rest, my insights into the nature of rest and burnout, and my understanding of the inner dynamics of recovery have been accomplished not merely by the means of theoretical hypothesizing, but by way of in-depth reflection on my own experience of becoming restful, in the context of theological education, as a result of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition. Such narrow focus of inquiry is both the greatest asset and the greatest vulnerability of my research. (I will discuss, in great detail, the positioning my research in the domain of formal qualitative methodology, the normative and epistemological issues raised by the work of using qualitative research methods for practical theological reflection, and the specific characteristics of my interdisciplinary method, in the Methodology section of my dissertation, Chapters 4 through 6.)

1.4 Overview of Chapters

The highly unconventional nature of my research calls for the systematic and extra thorough measures for conducting my investigation, developing argument, and presenting supporting evidence. The overall length and the format of my dissertation reflect these measures.

Chapter 2, "Personal Narrative," delves deeply into my personal experience of burnout in the context of theological education, and search for rest through the encounter with the tradition of Sabbath and the Cistercian monastic tradition. While the narrative of this chapter is unusually subjective in its tone and narrative representation, it seeks to accomplish three important objectives. First, it serves as way to illustrate a complex relationship between clergy burnout, theological education, and the religious traditions of resting. Second, it makes explicit the critically important (but often omitted) phase of practical theological reflection, the evolution in the researcher's understanding of research questions and primary lines of inquiry. Third, it offers the first glimpses into the importance, possibility, and epistemological fruitfulness of intensive reflection on my personal experience of the subject of my research, and as such, an important step towards my scholarly accountability.

The personal narrative of my journeying through burnout generates specific questions for the review of literature on clergy burnout featured in *Chapter 3, "Literature Review."* This extensive chapter positions my research in relation to the current and representative texts on the topic of ministerial failure, identifying the potential substantive contributions of my study to the work of addressing this problem.

Given the pronounced subjectivity of my research, the critical questions about validity, credibility, and ethics that it raises, and the abiding skepticism regarding self-reflexive forms of inquiry in academic research, the task of articulating and defending my method looms large in my dissertation manuscript. That is why, instead of a single methodology chapter traditionally featured in practical theological dissertations, I offer three chapters. Such extensive and in-depth discussion of my methodological commitments and practices is an important way to maintain my scholarly accountability. In *Chapter 4, "Case Study as a Comprehensive Research Strategy,"* I position my case study in the domain of formal qualitative research methodology, describing its specific characteristics in relation to the existing scholarly nomenclature of the case study method and identifying the epistemological and interdisciplinary issues involved in the work of bringing together qualitative research and practical theology. In *Chapter 5, "Prospective Presentation of Method,"* I identify the model for utilizing qualitative methods for practical theological reflection developed by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat as a normative template for my research, discuss the existing scholarly critique of this model, and present a more fully developed version of this model as my own interdisciplinary method.

The final methodology chapter, *"Chapter 6, Retrospective Description of Method,"* is also the most unusual. It offers a retrospective discussion of the challenges, problems, and solutions that I encountered in the course of my research. Traditionally, dissertations in practical theology simply set forth their method, without following it with the retrospective examination. In my research, such examination is crucial, because of the unconventional methodological claim that I make: to study my own case. Hence, in this chapter, I show how the ambitious objective of "disciplined subjectivity" and specific

measures for accomplishing it, set forth in the theoretical discussion of my method, were worked out in the actuality of my practice.

Having discussed and put to rest (in so far as it is possible) the concerns about the validity and credibility of my research in the methodology section, I transition to the presentation of the case study itself. As a way to signal the shift from the preparatory stage of my research to the actuality of case study reporting, I share an excerpt from the writings of the contemporary Trappist monk, Father Matthew Kelty. His short homily, *Come Away by Yourselves to a Lonely Place and Rest*, serves as an “Interlude” between the first and the second halves of my dissertation. While such a long passage of directly quoted material, without commentary or critique, is yet another unusual inclusion in the dissertation genre, it serves an important purpose. It bears witness to the monks’ own awareness of the reality and significance of the laity’s attraction to monastic living, and it validates and elucidates the claims I make in my later exposition about the nature and meaning of the monastery’s “gift of peace” for people in the world.

The Part III of my dissertation consists of four chapters. The Chapters 7 through 9 offer my in-depth reflection on my experience of recovery from burnout and becoming restful under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition. They comprise my case study record. In *Chapter 7, “One Day at the Abbey,”* I describe one of my early day-long retreats at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, inviting the reader to see through my eyes the external events of the monastic day and to observe their impact of the budding sense of restfulness I feel during that time. In *Chapter 8, “The Making of Retreat,”* I draw on a more extended experience of my several days-long retreat, delving below the surface of external events to understand how the particular facets of the monastic culture—its

environment, community, practices, and texts—“create” peace for the monastery visitors. Finally, in *Chapter 9, “Return to the World,”* I focus on the often neglected part of the lay monastic experience, reflecting in depth on my gradual reentry into the outside world with its responsibilities and tensions and exploring the inner dynamics and difficulties that accompanied my journey of becoming restful.

Whereas the intention of Chapters 7-9 is to develop a thorough understanding of my personal transformation into a restful person, the goal of the final chapter, *Chapter 10, “Case Study Lessons and Conclusions,”* is to relate the insights and discoveries yielded by the study of my case to the broader context of practices and objectives of ministerial preparation. In this chapter, I seek to imagine how the seminary, like the monastery, can teach rest and form restful persons, and in so doing to become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL NARRATIVE: JOURNEYING THROUGH BURNOUT

In this chapter, I share my story of journeying through burnout. While roots of my burnout go back to my work as a Korean Russian female minister in the Russia United Methodist Church,²⁹ the most critical years of this journey took place during the years when my church sent me to Emory University to pursue doctoral studies. Hence, the significant events that led to burnout and the significant encounters that made my recovery possible all take place in the context of theological education. The story starts in September of 2002, when my first semester as a Master of Theology student set in motion the sequence of events that lead to my eventual burnout. It ends in December of 2009, when the first signs of my recovery from burnout became manifest.

2.1 Beginnings: Burnout

I arrived at Candler School of Theology with almost a life-long history of academic successes. Since the age of four, when I was taught to read by older kids playing “school,” a desire to learn was one of my two deepest longings (the other one was to be accepted, to belong, to be *Russian*, like others—which was a tall order for a girl of mixed origins, with

²⁹ While the rules of common English usage call for addition of the suffix “n” to the geographical name of “Russia” in formation of the adjective “Russian,” the Russia Methodists have chosen to use the noun form of the word in the official title of the church, in order to underscore a subtle but important cultural nuance. The word “Russian” could be translated in Russian two ways: in the first and narrower sense (*русский, -ая, -ие*), it describes nationality, and in the second and wider sense (*российский, -ая, -ие*), it denotes broader geographical belonging. The United Methodists in Russia seek to honor their multi-national ecclesiastical identity and highlight that the Russia United Methodist Church is the church that is inclusive and open to all ethnic groups in Russia. In my writing, I use the common abbreviation of this name “the Russia UMC.”

some unmistakably Asian features, in Soviet society). My Korean family valued education above all things, supporting, and at times enforcing my first longing (nobody spoke about the second—it went without saying that in the society where “all people are brothers,” some had to work harder to maintain their brotherly status). Education was a way to freedom. A way to claim equality that was not mine by birth. A way to belong. My passport to becoming Russian (if not like the beautiful blond-haired-and-blue-eyed Slavics, then at least, like the brainy ones) *and* a debt of honor to Koreans. As such, education was both awesome and awful. It was not just about making it in school. It was about making it, or not, in life. Beneath its life-giving promises, I have never failed to read the small font of deadly alternatives. Yet, ironically, having the love of learning intermingled with the fear of failure made me virtually unstoppable. With those two powerful engines driving me, I maintained a GPA of 4.0 throughout school, Medical College, and Medical University, as my family moved from a small town in Tajikistan to the cities in central Russia, and then, at the theological seminary of the Russia UMC in Moscow—a place I entered, when an encounter with the Russia Methodists changed the trajectory of my life, taking me away from the twelve-year-long career in surgical nursing, microbiology, and clinical pharmacology, just when it was about to culminate in doctoral studies.

Now this all was about to change.

It was the second day of September 2002. Sonya, a senior student from Candler School of Theology, picked me up at the airport. There was no luggage to unload: somewhere over my second connection in France, it was lost. I too felt lost. An invitation from my Bishop to continue my theological studies in the US was a longed-for gift—but it came sooner than

I expected. In the span of two months following our conversation I chose the school, went through the hurdles of TOEFL, and applied for a visa. It all came through in the nick of time (and not a day quicker): by now, Emory's orientation for international students in mid-August was over; Candler ESL examinations were over; and classes were supposed to start the next day. As she handed me a jug of orange juice, a loaf of bread, and a rotisserie chicken, Sonya smiled reassuringly: "I will pick you up tomorrow at 8...we will do orientation and exams in between classes...don't worry." I did not. I was too stunned. Thus began my Th.M. program at Candler, together with the hardest educational journey of my life.

The next day I learned that English language comes in different shades—different from the one I studied on my (British) textbooks and tapes and practiced with the (American) missionaries. I could only understand about 40-60 percent of it, depending on who was speaking. And as the week progressed, I had another discovery—hard as it was, speaking and listening in English was not enough, I was supposed to read books and write papers as well. And here is the thing, even though I practiced reading in English during numerous lessons at school and assisted the team of interpreters at the seminary on a regular basis, I never actually read real English books as a regular part of my life. I read one whole book in English before coming to Candler, it was 119 pages long, and it took me several months to complete. Now, I was expected to read about 100 plus pages a week. Every week. And then, I had to write papers—not testimonies about how I came to God, not mini-sermons, but—real academic papers. As I sat at my desk, on the eve of my first day at Candler, the reality of fear, my old blood-chilling fear of failure, began to descend upon me. In dull disbelief I stared at the reading and writing assignments of the first week. It

occurred to me that this time I would not make it. That this time it was too high of a bar to jump over. That I would fail and bring a bad name and disrepute to my family, my bishop and the people of the Russia UMC who sent me here, and *the Russians*—one of whom I had finally become, outside of Russia. Like a cornered rat, I prepared to die—but also to fight out of that simple realization. I felt that I did not have much of a choice: after all, I was in the United States, with the visa granted, tuition paid, and body registered for classes, and the way back to Russia was permanently closed (or so it felt) for the time being. I fixed a pot of coffee, turned the lamp on, laid the books and the dictionary side by side and started working.

It was an excruciatingly painful and exhausting undertaking. After all these years when the fear did work, supplying extra-fuel for my studies and my successes, now there was so much of it that it crippled me. After four initial weeks of staying up until three to four a.m. almost daily, I was at the brink of breakdown, ready for this semester and my studies in America to be over. And in early October things got worse. Much worse. They went from “extremely hard” to “impossible”—and that is when I arrived at a peculiar place of rest.

I was having a conversation with a fellow Th.M. student from Cuba who, too, was applying for the Ph.D. (except that she had already been in the US for three years and had completed the M.Div.), and I learned that being accepted for the Th.M. track did not *guarantee* acceptance into the Ph.D. program (somehow that piece of information too got lost in the rush of applying, as I simply assumed that the fact that my bishop had sent me to get a Ph.D. took care of that). I was dumbfounded, struck completely stupid for a couple of hours after that conversation: “This is it...I did my best—and it was not enough...the

game is over”—and then...kaBOOM!!! The tide of thoughts rushing through my head—*Can I complete the Ph.D. application, obtain recommendation letters, pass the GRE scores, and provide an “academic sample” (for Lord’s sake, I did not have an academic sample in English, because it was my first year abroad!) on top of the next to impossible demands of simply surviving my first semester at Candler?...Can I compose all those fancy applications and statements of purpose, and go through the interview, in this forever foreign language?...Can I compete with other applicants, most of whom are native born Americans with degrees from Harvard, Princeton, and Yale?*—swelled and exploded hitting the solid wall of “NO, I CANNOT.” And after that came a great calm. At once I arrived at a place of extreme poverty. So poor that I had nothing left to prove. Nothing to lose. And because of that—nothing to fear. The ground on which I stood was so low, that failure itself became an impossibility.

Something died in me that night. Maybe it was “Natasha one of the rising leaders of the Russia Methodism,” or “Natasha the family pride,” or “Natasha the A-student.” Now, the shiny armor of these titles laid beside me, listless and empty, like exuviae of a molted crayfish. But something went on living. What remained was the self that was extremely pliable and pure, and of all things, peaceful (although not with the warm and plentiful peace of summer, but with the winter peace, austere, sober, and cold).

Nothing changed, and everything changed, at once. Externally, my life remained the same: deadlines had to be met, books read, papers written. I went through the days, navigating through unfamiliar foods, intricacies of language, and codes of social engagement. I inched through the nights with my dictionary, leaving behind a long trail of coffee cups. But internally, there was a world of difference: there now *was* another world,

and that made all the difference. In that world, I was no longer “somebody,” a person with formidable achievements and honorable identities—and equally formidable debts of honor. Rather, I was “nobody,” a human being, poor and alone, caught in a situation so utterly, laughably, impossible that I *had* to believe that it had to have been God who brought me into it, and that it *had* to be God who would “find a way out of ‘no way.’”³⁰ In that world, I came to know poverty as a friend. I discovered that when I expected nothing from myself, and everything from God, fear, my faithful “learning assistant,” no longer had power over me: then, I could work—still in its presence but now—out of its reach. Out of that poverty, day after day, welled up the courage necessary to show up and fight the seemingly unbeatable opponent. Thus, paradoxically, when it was worst, life became easiest: I just quietly worked, first on the weekly Th.M. assignments, then on the GRE, then on the academic sample for the Ph.D. application. And, after a while (if I dared to admit it to myself), it even became joyful: as my life-long love of learning was purified of my life-long fear of failure, I was set free to enjoy and enter learning as never before. Some of my deepest and most significant learning—in pastoral care, practical theology, and spirituality—took place during that first “impossible” semester.

And this all would have been great, if it were not for the grades at the end of the semester. They were “A”-s. A few weeks later came a phone call from the Graduate Division of Religion: a pleasant baritone introduced himself as the chair of The Person, Community, and Religious Practices Program and said, “We are delighted to invite you to join the community of Emory students and scholars. I hope you will accept.”

³⁰ These are the words that stayed with me from a sermon that was played during *PC501, Introduction to Pastoral Care* course, taught by Professor Rodney Hunter, during Fall 2002: Albert Winn, “A Way out of No Way,” recorded August 19, 1990, Central Presbyterian Church (Atlanta, Georgia).

The sense of relief I felt was enormous. I had to sit down. On the floor. There, with the phone receiver still in my hands, I prayed: *Thank You*. Yet, underneath my utter relief—I could not lie to myself about it—was deep regret, even grief: *now, that I have made the grades, they know, and I know, that I can, and therefore I can no longer fall lower than that*. Deeply inside I knew that the very fact that I made it, ironically, did me in: I became “rich” again, armed with my top grades and reconfirmed in my glorious identities—and those very riches brought to life the old curse of expectations, leashing my love of learning back to its former companion, fear.

Did I think about refusing? Now that I had seen the cost of being rich, did I think of making another choice—of *not-accepting*, of *leaving*? It didn’t even occur to me. Newly tasted freedom of poverty *versus* having a degree from a prestigious university that pays my tuitions and fees? Joy of learning *versus* dealing with disappointment of all those who supported my educational journey? I stayed. But from that point on, my life in America became a mere continuation of my life in Russia—the New World became old—the decorations were different, the actors were different, the language was different, the temperature outside was different, but it was the same old drama, or tragedy, or game, just the stakes got higher.

The Ph.D. program was more of the same: books, papers, performing by day, preparing by night. My grades stayed the same. My English improved. But my body was having a harder and harder time supporting my educational endeavors: relentlessly, each term brought new subjects to master, new expectations to meet, new teachers to impress. And halfway through the course work, right before the beginning of another semester—the time when I

am usually filled with excitement and anticipation, buying new pens and pencils, leafing through new books, and making colored tab-dividers for my courses—I found myself seized with fear. It was not the familiar fear of failing *on* the job. It was the fear that I did not have anything left to even start it. I was not sure I *could* climb another mountain of books and term papers. I did not feel I *had* it in me. I felt drained, used up, with nothing left to give. But I was still in the same situation—an international student, with external scholarships, on a doctoral track—and I had to go on.

During that semester, I started spending long hours in my library carrel, earning some not fully deserved praises from the library guard who thought that I was “such a diligent student.” Surely, I did work there; but mainly, I stayed in the carrel because I felt extremely fragile emotionally and wanted to be alone for my periodic “meltdowns.” As the semester unfolded, my feelings of acute exhaustion never lifted, but something else was beginning to take place. My love of learning was growing cold. Increasingly, I found myself treating my weekly readings as “chores” that needed to be finished, running through the assigned texts in search for summaries and focus statements. My in-class participation was becoming perfunctory. I started thinking about the courses in transactional terms: “What is the absolute minimum that I need to do, just to get through the semester without harming my 4.0 GPA?” Nobody seemed to notice, for I still worked hard, but these thoughts filled me with shame. A real “wake-up call” took place when in one of my classes, led by a practical theologian, religious educator, and a remarkable nurturer Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, where I was offered a free choice of the topic for the final paper.³¹ She said that for their “exercise in constructive practical theology” the students could choose

³¹ *Constructive Practical Theology, RLPC 730C*, Fall 2004, Professor Mary Elizabeth Moore.

“absolutely any topic” they wanted. The only requirement was that “it was something that you felt passionately about.”

That was the problem.

As I tried to envision my final project for this course, I faced the same questions over and over again: what is it that I really cared about? What is worth thinking and writing about? My inability to answer these simple questions was a distressing discovery. This inability was all the more startling, because usually my problem with choosing research topics is precisely of the opposite kind: I always suffer trying to narrow down the wide array of exciting topics that spring to mind. But there I was, so depleted that I no longer cared. Then it dawned on me: I cared about *rest!* I cared about the loss of vitality and meaning in my studies. I cared deeply about the “violence of overwork” that seemed to have annihilated my capacity to care. This realization sealed the deal: my project, much more than a “paper submitted for the grade,” was to be on Sabbath.

2.2 Failed Solution: Sabbath

At once, my love of learning was renewed.³² I wrote a passionate statement about the pressing demands of my life as a graduate student and a United Methodist minister, situated my story within the similar experience of chronic overwork among the female clergy in the Russia United Methodist Church, and started my enthusiastic investigations. I went to the library and checked out books on the Sabbath, immersing myself in the stories, rituals, and art of the old Jewish practice of weekly resting. The reading itself felt like rest. The books

³² Part of this reflection initially appeared in my paper, “An Exercise in Constructive Practical Theology: Exploring Meaning of Sabbath in Lives of Female Ministers in the Russia UMC,” for *Constructive Practical Theology RLPC 730C* course.

gave me an internal permission to stop, to take a break. It was said that “it is not the Jews who kept the Sabbath, but the Sabbath who kept the Jews,” and I longed to take part in this noble practice and to see its truth embodied in my life. Yet, I knew I had to practice it wisely. I was still an international student, there was still a lot of work to be done to maintain my “good standing,” and I knew there was no way I could take the whole day off every week and still do what I was supposed to. So, I settled on a compromise—is not the Son of Man the Lord even of the Sabbath?—substituting a weekly “day of rest” for a daily “Sabbath-hour.”

Every night at nine p.m. I stopped my work, set a timer for one hour, and lit my Sabbath candle. During that time, I wrote in my journal, reflected on the passed day, read Scripture and other spiritual writings. After the hour was over, I returned to my studies. Early in the process I began to create my own practices. One—an exercise in renunciation—was especially helpful: in the darkness of my room, in a desperate attempt to escape the crushing weight of my responsibilities and duties, I renounced *who I was not*, the external identities and roles that felt too heavy for my frame. Once, while fighting back the anxiety about expectations, I wrote this poem:

*At the end of the day, Lord,
Tell me who I am not:*

*I am not a scholar, I am not a priest,
I am not the “smart one” in their midst
I am not a student, I am not a monk
I am not a saint of any rank*

*Praying, singing, dancing—blessed they be
These too are from without, these too are not me
Fervor of ambition, success’s tyranny
Stripped of their power by nakedness of me...*

Not great poetry, but it did convey the meaning crucial for me during that time: my inner self is not constituted by my external identities and activities. I—in my true self—am, apart from these roles. At the end of my long recitation of who I was not, accompanied by the growing fear of annihilation—will there be anything left, when all my names are peeled off?—there was still I. This experience was the closest to the taste of freedom and lightness of poverty that I had known during my first “impossible” semester at Emory.

I felt good about this newly discovered practice of Sabbath, my paper, and my vision of the transforming praxis that would bring the same relief and liberation to others. I even started developing a thematic retreat and a short summer course on Sabbath for the female clergy in the Russia UMC. Yet, as the time went by, and the semester was moving to its culmination, my life was getting more hectic and busy. Now, taking a whole hour for Sabbath-keeping every day was beginning to look rather extravagant. Nevertheless, I knew that busyness was not the reason to abandon Sabbath. On the contrary, Sabbath was the “keeper”: it was the practice that can save my life from meaningless toiling, but also save it in a quite literal way. I had thought that I learned my lesson well, and proposed to keep Sabbath “no matter what.”

I was still very serious about my Sabbath-keeping, when a seasonal flu attempted to keep me from my studies and my Sabbatical exercises altogether. I was determined to deal with the disease in the same manner, as I did with my increasingly limited time and mounting academic pressure: once more, I proposed to keep my Sabbath “no matter what.” After all, how could I preach something that I myself did not do? So, I continued with my readings, my practices, and my classes, until my condition worsened to a degree that I had to see a doctor. The doctor was laconic and prompt: he took me to the x-ray area, then to

the oxygen room, and finally announced that it was pneumonia, that both of my lungs were affected, and that hospital was a very likely prospect by Friday. I protested, “It is impossible...I am from Russia and I had never had pneumonia even there, not even during winter!” He was not pleased with an affront to his authority: “This is not about Russia or wintry weather...this is about overextending yourself beyond reason!” And, looking me in the eye, he added, “As an Emory student, you should know what I am talking about.”

I managed not to go to the hospital, but spent the remaining weeks of the semester in bed, received massive doses of antibiotics, and got “incompletes” on all of my courses. At first, I mostly slept, waking up only to take medication, eat another can of chicken soup, and go to the bathroom; later, when I started feeling better, I just stayed in bed, still weak but already awake. It was a strange time. It was strange to wake up and enter the day without rushing. It was strange to be at home, doing nothing—the doctor said grumpily that I had to do the “work of healing”—day after day. From my bed, even my own room looked like a different space: quiet, simple, still. In that unfamiliar and unfamiliarly peaceful space, I faced my first reservations about the Sabbath experience.

To begin with, I had strong feelings. My thoughts were not neutral. They were expressions of a peculiar blend of bewilderment and frustration. I could not help thinking that my illness was somehow connected to my Sabbath-keeping; and I could not help being perplexed by this reality: How could the practice appointed by God result in such an unwholesome outcome? After all, did I not hope, when starting my project on Sabbath, that it would solve—or, at the very least, ease—the acute crises of time and energy in my frantic life as a minister and a graduate student? Was it not supposed to save me from rushed

action and overwhelming busyness, from emotional drain and physical exhaustion, from poor decision-making and empty ambition? Did not the numerous books on Sabbath, that I engulfed, promise “God’s rest for human restlessness,” the dawn of well-being, harmony, and peace? How could it be that my genuine search for rest, fortified by my diligent scholarly investigations, ended up in sickness? I felt that the Queen Shabbat betrayed me. She might have kept the Jews but she has failed to keep me.

Past this angry query, new questions came into view, now connected with feelings of self-doubt: Was it Sabbath that did not deliver what it promised? Or was it *I* who, somehow, heard the very promise incorrectly? My suspicion about the problematic character of my Sabbath-keeping deepened when I started thinking about people at other times and places who were able to practice Sabbath and find rest, people for whom Sabbath “worked.” This meant it was possible to keep Sabbath in a salutary way. Then, could it be that it was not the Sabbath that failed me, but I myself who somehow failed to understand and keep it properly, thus, making void the glorious promises? As I looked at my Sabbath-keeping from this angle, I saw my whole experience anew.

I saw myself caught in the sincere but unsuccessful attempt to put on the “swaddling clothes” of my tripartite scholarly identity: a constructive practical theologian. First of all, I wanted to be an exemplary “*theologian*,” a scholar who takes religious tradition very seriously. My passion was genuine, and my study diligent. Yet, looking back on my fervent academic inquiry, I realized that from the very beginning I viewed the problem of Sabbath as a problem of “not-knowing” or “not-understanding.” In other words, I assumed that people do not keep Sabbath because they do not know that rest is good and necessary for

them. Thus, my initial hypothesis connected the lack of rest with the “lack of information.” Such supposition about the nature of the problem was problematic. Moreover, it had a problematic consequence: since the problem was primarily framed as a lack of information, it had to be cured by obtaining more information. Hence, in my Sabbath time, I found myself reading and writing, doing what I have been doing in school all along, albeit with a different set of sources. Was not there a sad irony of seeking salvation from books and papers in...books and papers?

Second, I wanted to be an exemplary “*practical* theologian” who supplements her in-depth theoretical investigation with genuine attention to practice. Having learned about the pitfalls of the so-called “pure” theology which overlooks the experience of the inquirer and neglects the practical outcome of theological reflection, I did not want to commit a similar mistake. Therefore, together with reading about Sabbath, I proposed to make a contra-movement—to listen to my experience and to engage in practice. And, as with my theoretical inquiry, I engaged in practices of Sabbath enthusiastically and assiduously. Yet, reflecting on the occupations of my Sabbath-hour, I came to recognize a similar line of reasoning there: from the very beginning, I framed the problem of Sabbath as a “lack of practice.” Moreover, I understood practice as centered on “doing.” Such suppositions about the nature of the solution too was problematic: with the general perception of the problem as a lack of practice-understood-as-doing, it had to be cured by more practice-understood-as-doing. Now, on top of my other responsibilities and duties, I had Sabbath. Once again, there was a sad irony of my desperate quest for rest that engendered yet another activity. As I looked back on my several weeks of Sabbath-keeping, I was surprised to see that with

all my reading about the importance of rest, it never occurred to me to set a timer and use my Sabbath-hour for...sleeping.

Third, in my attempts to be an exemplary practical theologian, I proposed to address both the theory and the practice of Sabbath. In some way, I succeeded in this address. Yet, this success, regrettably but perhaps understandably, did not result in a wholesome outcome, because such a *wholesome* outcome requires a movement of genuine integration, rather than pursuit of isolated perfection. Devoid of practice, theoretical learnedness is impotent—no matter how amassing, and in the absence of theory, practical engagement is uninformed—no matter how zealous. Thus, my sincere attempts to balance the theory and the practice of Sabbath, without bringing the two together in a larger context of Sabbath as a way of life, resulted not in a salutary habit but in an achievement-oriented and damaging activity. In my segregated endeavors to be a “practical *theologian*” and a “*practical theologian*,” I failed to be a “*constructive* practical theologian.” Once more, there was a sad irony of illness as a misshapen fruit of my Sabbath.

But there was still more. My faulty efforts to keep Sabbath had something to do not merely with how I understood the individual facets of my constructive practical theological identity, but with my overall scholarly attitude and posture. As I continued to reflect on my experience, I came to see that for the most part, my daily practice of Sabbath centered on intellectual activities. And while they were indeed deeply meaningful and compelling, they left my bodily needs completely neglected. Even my proposal of a retreat for the female ministers of the Russia UMC was framed as an “academic project.” Apparently, my exemplary constructive practical theologian was a rather “heady” specialist. At the same time, I seemed to approach Sabbath with an attitude of scholarly “mastery,” more

concerned with gaining the power to understand, rather than the responsibility to “stand-under” its command. In a quite literal sense, I wanted to “keep” Sabbath on my agenda, from nine to ten p.m., and “no matter what,” I worked hard to make it happen. All the good intentions notwithstanding, my exemplary constructive practical theologian was trying to “lord it over” Sabbath! And at the end, engaged on my own terms—limited to one hour a day, confined to the level of intellectual reflection, and treated as an object of study, not a commandment to obey—my Sabbath had become *small*. Was it really any surprise that it fell short of its salutary purpose? Strictly speaking, this was not even Sabbath!

I felt embarrassed. How could have I made such a glaring error? Yet, in that strange and spacious place of sickness, another unusual thing happened: contrary to my custom, I did not hasten to condemn myself. Rather, I was overcome by curiosity: *What was really going on here? Indeed, how could I have overlooked the very thing I searched for? How could it be that my earnest scholarly investigations missed the most obvious meaning of Sabbath?*

As I pondered this incongruence, my eyes fell on my desk dotted with the “get-well-soon” cards from my friends, and I remembered with gratitude the steady supply of soups, juices, and fruit that accompanied their written wishes. Then it struck me: in her earlier investigations, my exemplary constructive practical theologian was startlingly alone. Even as I worked exceedingly hard to learn and practice Sabbath, in all my efforts I was deprived of the very place where such a practice could be learned: an actual community of Sabbath that could offer example, guidance, and accountability to my journey. Without the living teachers, I had no other choice but to try learning Sabbath “by the book.” At the same time, the community that surrounded me—the fine students and scholars of Emory

University—was anything but Sabbatarian. Of course, it was not a matter of malice or malfunction. Nor was it due to the mere lack of desire or skill for teaching rest. Rather, it was simply a matter of a different focus.

The complex, multidimensional enterprise of the university is dedicated to the performance of a very specific set of goals: the work of education. As a result, the institutional identity of its community—which shapes the collective and individual identities of its participants—is necessarily centered on work, not rest. Moreover, the university’s communal discourse, born out of its central commitment to teaching and learning, reflects its core values: in school, by definition, all problems and their solutions are framed as issues of “knowing” and “not-knowing.” Still more, the traditional educational discourse centers on the metaphors of mastery (“grasping the material,” “developing competence,” “mastering the subject, etc.”)—and these metaphors, in turn, structure our most basic understanding of not only what good learning means, but also how it is to be accomplished. Finally, despite the growing awareness of the issues of embodiment and holistic teaching in higher education in general and at Emory University in particular, “by the book” is still the preferred way of scholarly learning.

I sat still for a long time. Was it really a surprise that I, an eager student in the school of my teachers, turned my Sabbath project into an academic exercise? From this point of view, all my misunderstandings became very understandable.

Yet, it occurred to me that I had come to know rest. Life itself offered a corrective to my scholarly misconceptions, as my body, long neglected, shared with me its own lessons about rest. During my sick days, I learned I could not rest by reading books or writing

papers about it, but by sleeping, eating, doing nothing—by *stopping* in a very literal and bodily way. During my sick days, I learned that rest was not merely another kind of “doing” but a matter of deliberate “not-doing” or even (*gasp!*) leaving things “undone.” During my sick days, I experienced a complete reversal in the direction of power, entering rest not through any “mastery” of mine but through the experience of utter surrender to my physical limits. Thus, my eventual knowledge of rest was a result of neither my purposeful doing nor my successful having, but a consequence of the dis-ease in my being—the weaknesses, inadequacies, and limitations that accompany being sick. The illness itself became my unexpected but skillful teacher.

It struck me that I *liked* being sick. Or rather, not being sick *per se* (for there was nothing inherently pleasant about taking pills, coughing, and fatigue), but the unapologetic permission to rest that sickness gave me. I liked having somebody with the authority of the doctor—the authority I did not have—and the authority that was respected by the graduate school—to order me to rest. And, I came to cherish the strange, qualitatively different time and way of being in the world that my sickness engendered: it was strange but *nice* to wake up and enter the day without rushing; it was strange but nice to tend to my bodily needs, and feel no guilt for doing so; and it was strange but very nice to drop out of the semester-long race of reading and writing, and, for the first time since I arrived on American soil, to be able to think in a slow, unrushed, unconcerned with performance, fashion. There I was, in bed, with incompletes on every course and a failed exercise in constructive practical theology...at last, at peace. I smiled at the delightful irony of “sickness unto rest,” when my very failure to understand Sabbath offered me one of the most significant learning experiences of my life.

Yet, apart from my “significant learning experiences” I still had three incompletes to tend to, and the spring term was quickly approaching. So, I used the remainder of the Christmas break to write three papers, turned my “incompletes” into another set of “A’s,” and dove into my last semester of coursework. But I had not stopped thinking about Sabbath. For one, so fragrant a failure was hard to forget. For two, I still needed rest: my physical and emotional exhaustion, temporarily eased by the few weeks of rest, was quickly making its comeback. For three, even though I felt I learned a lot, now I had more questions than ever.

Why did I have such a hard time with such a natural behavior, resting? Even more perplexingly: why did I continue to fail to rest, even when my body began to manifest the tangible symptoms of acute fatigue, and when my mind was made aware of the abundant scientific evidence about the physical, psychological, and spiritual importance of rest? This was more than an intellectual puzzle: as my own sickness—and the official and alarmingly high statistics of burnout among clergy—revealed, on the other side of the “violence of overwork” was a possibility of a real impairment.

At the same time, what was I to make of the paradox of learning rest via sickness? It mystified me for days that in its effects on me, sickness strangely resembled...Sabbath: it came, whether I was ready or not; it required obedient participation; it made all people equal, giving rest to the learned and the simple alike. Admittedly, it led me to rest by not-so-pleasant a route. It broke into my ordinary world, bringing disorder into my personal schedules and plans, defying the untouchable rhythms of the graduate school, and demanding the sacrifice of what until then I held most-dear—my papers. It highlighted an inconvenient truth about my existence: that I was frail and limited and not in control of my

life, and that essentially, I could not save myself “by works,” but needed to rely on somebody else. The rest that sickness engendered was indeed life-giving; but it came only after a very real death of surrender. So, if the parallels between sickness and Sabbath were valid, could it be that the Sabbath rest too was to be entered by not-so-pleasant a route? Could it be that there was a darker side to the widely acclaimed “godly and good-for-you” Sabbath? Or broader still, could it be that the grumpy doctor who ordered me to rest embodied the power of medicine to challenge the supremacy of work in our lives—the power that religion too once had?

However, it occurred to me, sickness can hardly be a standardized way of teaching rest. Was there another, less invasive way to teach rest to the clergy-to-be? More specifically, could teaching rest in the context of theological education prevent the persistent problem of clergy burnout? But then again, how could we teach rest in the seminary, when its rapid rhythms and pace are defined by its primary purpose of preparing prospective ministers for the responsibilities of their job, in the most time- and cost-efficient way? Could it be that another community—whose identity and ethos is centered on rest, not work—is needed, if we are to teach rest effectively? But if so, where can it be found?—for, as far as I could tell, everyone around me was as busy and hurried as I was.

In response to this last question I sought out an official Jewish community. (*Who else could give me a real taste of Sabbath?*) I attended the Shabbat gathering of Emory Hillel. Then I visited the congregation of Bet Haverim (“House of Friends”) for the Erev Shabbat on Friday night and a Shabbat morning service on Saturday.³³ Both communities welcomed me as a cherished guest, and I enjoyed thoroughly the food, prayer, music, and

³³ Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA.

the distinct blend of Jewish wit and wisdom. Yet, welcomed a guest as I was, I was exactly that—a guest. As a Christian minister and theologian, I did not feel “at home” there: the Jewish Sabbath could be a potential site for an ethnographic study, where I would undoubtedly learn much as a researcher, but never enter as a participant. But is this not a similar situation in which many mainline Protestant clergy find themselves?—in their tiredness and unrest, invited and even urged to keep Sabbath, yet bereft of the actual living community who could offer guidance in learning it? Were there any viable, distinctly Christian, communities of Sabbath who could function as teachers and sponsors of rest for the clergy-in-training?

I knew I was “hooked.” I wanted to pursue these questions, to stop, think, and listen. And to do so, in my usual fashion, I decided to—*what else?*—write another paper: now, my dissertation. It was to be on the problem of clergy burnout and its solution, Sabbath. But what would I say? With my recent experiences of Sabbath-keeping, I could no longer stand behind a proposal with the simple “practice-Sabbath-and-it-will-give-you-rest” recommendation. If Sabbath was indeed the answer, I knew it was not going to be an easy one.

But soon there was no more time to think, much less to stop and listen. As the last semester of my coursework was gaining its momentum, I found myself, once more, slammed against the relentless realities of graduate school education. The familiar tide of reading, writing, classes, and extra-curricular responsibilities swelled and carried me forward forcefully—despite my earnest intentions to pace myself, despite my decision to make rest a priority, despite my quiet resolve not to “lose my soul” again.

But this time my reaction was different: I was very tired but no longer weepy; my anxiety was giving way to anger. Increasingly, I found myself plagued with resentment and frustration. This was disturbing. I was surrounded by nice people. In contrast to the terrifying tales of some graduate schools, my professors were genuinely caring, my classmates collegial, and everybody seemed to do their best. And yet, I felt violated, short-changed. I could not help but see the dynamics and the intensity of my education as violent. Yes, it was violence in the name of the great good, but it was violence nonetheless. But then again, how could I question the wisdom of the prominent university to do its job? I dared not. So, I concluded that “it was me,” and that I needed “more exercise to beat stress.” From that point on I went to classes and stayed at the library during the day, and then did martial arts in the evenings, seeking to match my mental fatigue with physical exhaustion. But my growing disillusionment and disengagement from my studies began to show.

One of the last papers I worked on was for the *Politics of Knowing* class.³⁴ As I wrote about the central notion of the course, “knowing as politically constructed,” and ramifications that such understanding had for the realities of graduate teaching and learning, I confessed that the theorists of the course left me “dissatisfied, discouraged, disquieted.”³⁵ I wondered about the possibilities that such “constructivist” views held—or closed—for living my life more faithfully as a Christian minister and educator. As a part of this paper, I wrote two

³⁴ *Issues of Theology and Education: Politics of Knowing RPLC776*, Spring 2005, Professor Theodore Brelsford. (Printed with the permission of Theodore Brelsford.)

³⁵ “Dynamics of Knowing: Conversing with bell hooks, Mary Belenky, Lorraine Code, C.A. Bowers, Paulo Freire, George Lakoff, Harvey Whitehouse, and James the Theologian,” *Issues in Theology and Education, RPLC776*.

Genesis-like stories of human knowledge, my attempts to create a mythic account about what it used to mean “to know,” and my growing perception of how in the contemporary academy the real knowing was getting buried under the impressive but empty theorizing.

Even now, as I reread some lines of that paper, I remember my American proofreader shaking his head as he read it, smiling, “See if you get kicked out of school,” and I marvel at having the guts to turn it in. What was the source of my courage? Maybe, it was that I just could no longer hold it in. Maybe, it was something about the topic itself which took me through my first, powerful even if deeply painful, experience of “deconstruction.” Maybe, it was something about the teacher of this class, who made me feel unusually safe around him: safe enough to speak my mind, safe to write honestly, safe to disagree. My first encounter with this teacher took place when I was still a Th.M. student. Back then, I saw him move furniture at the beginning of every class: he said that he was seeking a more egalitarian classroom arrangement; and during the sessions, I saw him model and encourage equality in the personal dynamics of the class. He seemed to really listen, offering equal patience and respect to the eloquent American students and to the hesitant, stumbling, and at times enormously hard to understand international ones. He appeared to be intentionally open to the differences in voice and perspective, gently insisting on hearing what we had to say. He even encouraged us to discuss our own possible contributions to the course syllabus. This clashed mightily with my Russian educational upbringing: he was the teacher, we were the students—he was supposed to tell us what to do, what was there to discuss?! Yet, this made me remember him. Now, in this doctoral seminar, he surprised me again, by opening our first session with an unusual and unusually candid observation. He said that he the teacher and we the students were both “brilliant and

deficient” in our knowing, and that in graduate school we perfect the art of highlighting the former and hiding the latter; but that the unavoidable limits to our knowledge are nothing to be ashamed of, but natural, and even necessary, reality that allows us to grow; and that for this course, simply “doing one’s best” would be enough. And throughout the semester, once more, I saw him do as he preached: he was the first person I encountered in the American academy who admitted, in public, not only to the *general* limits to his knowledge but his unfamiliarity with a *particular* book or concept or argument.

Whatever the reason, my paper was submitted, received a grade, and was returned to me with a whole page of single-spaced comments. My teacher commended me on the seriousness of my engagement with the course theorists and my informed reflection, but noted that the feelings of dissatisfaction and discouragement and disquietude permeated my paper, and that my discussion was somewhat perfunctory. He said that he disagreed with my scholarly conclusions, but that he could understand my perspective and the feelings that accompanied it, sharing that his own graduate studies which included a similar seminar, lead to a couple years of clinical depression. At the end, he still gave me an “A”, but asked if he could talk with me about my paper and the issues it raised. Somewhat cynically I thought, “*Who cares?* I have gone through the last semester of my coursework with the 4.0 GPA intact. Then I got curious: Why did he want to see me? I have given him what was due, the final paper, he gave me what was due, the grade—what else did he want?”

He wanted to know how I was. He asked me whether I still had the feelings of disillusionment and dissatisfaction. I could not lie. He said he understood, and that it was OK to feel that way. I do not remember much of our conversation, but I remember how I

felt afterwards: heard, understood, accepted—supported even in my disillusionment. This did not make my anger and dissatisfaction go away, but somehow made me more at peace with it: I was still disillusioned, but no longer alone. Here was a professor, who had his share of doubts and yet his disillusionment did not get in the way of his teaching. Maybe I too had hope: maybe my own disillusionment would not interfere with my learning.

I wanted to think more about theological education, my learning, and my new taste of peace. I wanted to understand why I felt that way, and whether it had something to do with how we could teach rest in the seminary. But once more, I had to move on, to a new chapter of my theological education: on June 6, 2005 I started my introductory unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).³⁶

I was assigned as a chaplain intern to the Emergency Department (ED) of a large children's hospital in Atlanta. This placement delighted me. In the past, as a surgical nurse in Russia, I worked in the emergency room—and I found such work challenging yet deeply rewarding: I knew my work mattered there, and as such it never failed to give me a strong sense of purpose and meaning. A few weeks later, I learned that usually interns do not get assigned to emergency departments, that the reason I was offered a placement was because one of their residents had to interrupt his program due to family circumstances, and the supervisor who did an extensive interview with me concluded, “she is an intern who can do the work of a resident.” And so I did. My past medical experiences helped me not only understand what was going on there, but also to make a genuine connection with the nurses,

³⁶ The Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston, supervisor: Rev. Dr. Joan L. Murray, BCC, ACPE supervisor.

social workers, and even the tough ED doctors in record time. My work was indeed rewarding and deeply meaningful. I was getting soaring evaluations. And, together with the head-nurse of the unit, I started working on developing the specialized “Emergency Department Staff Support Plan,” to be implemented after my departure. Yet, CPE was rough on me. Already depleted from my studies, I had a hard time carrying out the challenges of clinical work, peer evaluations, and night shifts. Within a few weeks the alarming signs of physical and emotional exhaustion made their first appearance. I was losing sleep and weight, and my attempts to compensate through food and coffee were bringing only diminishing returns. The feeling of constant tension started to permeate not only my work time, but also my after work hours. It seemed that I was never “off-duty.” After a couple more weeks of insomnia, headaches, and upset stomach, I found myself forgetting things (I once forgot to offer a worship service in the hospital chapel!) and wanting to withdraw.

My supervisor knew about my interest in Sabbath and self-care, and the staff chaplain who was assigned to me as a mentor specialized in staff support. Both of them encouraged me to “take a more active role in supporting my serving-self.” Under their guidance I reflected on the meaning of rest in the setting of the never-ending demand, experimented with different work hours, and sought to incorporate the practices of self-care into my daily life. I attended the “Caring for the Care-provider” workshop led by my mentor. Yet, despite all these measures, it soon became obvious that my need for rest had become acute. In one of our weekly sessions my supervisor gently observed: “I know you are focused on Sabbath, the ‘solution’...but it seems that it is the ‘problem’ that you are trying to address that is coming to the fore here.” That’s when she told me about the

monastery in Conyers.³⁷ She said that it was “peaceful” there, and wondered if it could be a place where I could “come aside awhile.”

This one word startled me: PEACE-FULL. Until then, I thought about my problem mainly in psychological terms: burnout syndrome, personality traits, characteristics of the job setting, lack of self-care, emotional stress of involvement with other people, etc. But at that moment I realized that the deepest problem was that I had “lost my peace”—and that I could not go on until I had found it. So I went to Conyers. It was not without logistical difficulties: I was still an international student who did not have a car and could not drive. It was not without getting my mind perplexed: what was a United Methodist clergy woman from Russia going to do in the house of Roman Catholic men devoted to the wholly contemplative way of life, in the middle of Georgia? But that one word, “peaceful,” kept me going until I arrived at the monastery gate.³⁸

2.3 Solution: Monastery

I arrived at the monastery on a warm August evening. The first person I met was Father the Guestmaster. He smiled at me with that silent smile which speaks volumes of kindness and welcome. As he introduced me to the daily monastery rhythm, I blurted out: “So, the next time I have to be in the church is at 5:20 p.m.?” He gently but firmly responded, “You don’t *have* to; but you *are* invited.” This phrase set the frame, the paradigm for my

³⁷ Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit, of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.), Conyers, Georgia.

³⁸ Part of the following reflection was given as a “talk” to the monks of Gethsemani Abbey, in Trappist, Kentucky, on July 25, 2011, and subsequently shared with Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit of Conyers.

experience at the monastery: I do not have to do anything to be accepted there; I am invited and accepted as I am. The spacious, gentle space of welcome, which these words created around and within me, was extremely restful and healing for one who lived for too long in the domain of “must” and “ought to”—and “should” on every occasion.

But it was not just about people. The whole atmosphere of the monastery—the austere beauty of the Abbey church and the quiet of the retreat house, its expansive wetlands and simple accommodations, its soft embrace of silence and early-to-bed schedule, the seven hours of prayer and limited access to computer and phone—felt extremely, dumbfoundingly restful. In this setting I did not have to work so hard to rest, it happened naturally and almost without effort, as if I were a speck of iron placed into some strange electro-magnetic field. Just after a weekend of sleeping, eating, chanting psalms, and walking in nature I felt more refreshed than I had felt in years. I knew I had discovered something that “really worked.”

So for a while the monastery was my escape, my refuge, my home away from home. Rest there was not a matter of intellectual abstraction or daily practice, but deep abiding peace that I could feel in my very body. It was the peace that I could remember from long ago when I was a little child, alone in the fields, when the world was still new and loving, and when I was “enough” as I was, and did not have to work so hard to earn “being loved”—by bugs and grasses and birds and occasionally cows and horses—and did not have to protect myself from them or from people. It was peace with a capital “P.” Too deep for words. Too deep for fear. Too deep for my ever so tiring drive to work in order to prove, perfect, secure, and advance myself. No matter what was going on in school or the rest of

my life, I only had to get myself to this place to feel my anxiety and tension ease, as I shed the world with all its restlessness behind.

It was almost like my brief experience of deep liberation during my first Th.M. semester—once again, there was “another world”; once again, I was “nobody”—only better. This time, the alternative reality was not merely a matter of my *interior awareness*, but an *actual place* inhabited by *actual people*. In the monastery world, I was not defined by my national, racial, or denominational identities, my academic credentials and achievements, not even by the talents or hobbies I had. This was the first community in my adult life that did not require letters of recommendation, TOEFL/GRE scores, an autobiography of faith, or the addresses of where I lived for the last five years. Frankly, nobody knew who I was—and thanks to the silence-observance, nobody could really ask. But paradoxically, in the absence of my numerous names and markers, a vast breathing space was created: as I walked the monastery grounds incognito, I came to taste the peculiar and exhilarating lightness of *being*, unconstrained by definitions.

Yet, the restfulness of being nobody was not merely a matter of getting away from people. The prized monastic solitude is always “solitude in community,” and I too was invited to experience this reality. As I cautiously entered new relationships (*Will there be another set of expectations and roles attached?*), another surprise awaited me: the monks did not care whether I was from Moscow, Russia, or Lithonia, Georgia, whether I was a brilliant student or a mediocre one, whether I was ordained or lay, whether I was good at crosstaging or martial arts. The impressive collection of my names and achievements did not seem to impress them. Yet, they still cared about me, genuinely and deeply. Their care never took the form of the exaggerated display of feelings: my arrival elicited no storms of

the “it’s-SOOOO-great-to-see-you!” affirmation; and my departure did not occasion heavy assurances of how much I would be missed. But I always sensed the monks’ genuine joy at seeing me—and experienced “being seen” for real. Their gentle smiles, silent nods, brief “see-you-soon,” and quiet, almost in passing, blessings, made me know, beyond doubt, that I *was* welcomed and loved in that place. This combination of being stripped of my glorious identities and yet loved in my very poverty was the closest experience of “unconditional love” that I have ever had—and that too was intensely, profoundly restful.

Nothing changed at school: even after the completion of my coursework, it continued to be fast-paced and demanding, and the pressures of finishing and returning to Russia mounted with each subsequent year. Yet, my supervisor was right: for me, the monastery became a good place to “come aside awhile”—actually, it turned out to be a perfect spot to periodically “get away from it all.” Come think of it, it was even funny (though nobody, including myself, noticed): I continued to propose Sabbath as an answer for clergy burnout in my dissertation research; but for my own rest, I went to the monastery.

In just a few months, I formed a strong bond with the monastic community. The monks, ladies in the kitchen, lay workers in the bookstore and bonsai garden, and repeated visitors like myself, became something like a “family” to me, people who share common joys and sorrows, and yes, occasional annoyances. And I came to know the place itself deeply: the way the air smelled when I came in the evening, and the way fog clung to magnolia trees in the morning, the silence of the church at night and the path of light through its stained glass windows during the day, the hiding places in the woods where I played my Native American flute and the kudzu branches in the ravine that could hold my

weight to swing on them, and even the monastery wild animals: graceful deer, shy rabbits, worried turkeys, thoughtful blue heron—and chiggers (not so gentle a reminder that true peace is never just a “nice and easy” thing). And at times I felt so happy and fulfilled, so *at peace*, just standing in the field when a breeze was touching my hair and the skin on my face, just being in the church in the morning and watching light come and rest on the open Psalters, and the tiny specks of dust dance in the air, that I felt I could die tomorrow without regrets (even with an unfinished dissertation). So real was this rest that after a while I started to believe this arrangement might actually work: that my frequent retreats at the monastery would give me enough rest to finish my doctoral studies without breaking down.

Wrong.

It all came crushing down after comprehensive exams. In my program, four written examinations are usually taken to demonstrate the student’s competence in four broad bodies of knowledge: religion and theology, human sciences, outside discipline of interest (philosophy, anthropology, literary theory, law, etc.), and specific area related to the dissertation research. These exams are taken over a one-month period—one exam per week for four weeks—and then, followed up by a culminating oral exam. For each of the written exams, the student is given twelve hours at a specified location, to write a response to the exam questions without consulting any outside resources. The culminating oral exam is about two hours in duration, and it offers the faculty an opportunity to discuss the student’s written responses.³⁹ Yet, I proposed to take five instead of four written exams. The rationale behind such an “overachievement” was twofold. On the one hand, I had a strong

³⁹ The Person, Community, and Religious Life Program, Graduate Division of Religion, Emory University.

interdisciplinary interest in both pastoral care and religious education, and I wanted to claim both fields in a responsible and disciplined matter. On the other hand, while I could understand the historical reasons behind the division of theology into specialized fields (e.g., “systematic theology,” or “historical theology,” or “practical theology,” etc.) in Western academia, perhaps due to my Eastern background, I felt strong resistance to such an arrangement and sought to bridge the schism in my own developing scholarship. So, in close conversation with my faculty, I designed five exams that would enable me to engage Scripture, Tradition, and human sciences as a practical theologian, and then, to use this knowledge to envision the practices of pastoral care and religious education. I felt deeply grateful for the flexibility of my program and support of my teachers that enabled me to undertake such creative movement of integration, and I was excited about the possibilities for learning that it held. Yet, as the dates of my written examination were approaching, and I continued to work through my formidably long list of bibliographic sources, I was beginning to wonder if I had bitten more, *significantly* more, than I could chew.

There were also personal “aggravating circumstances”: three months before my comprehensive exams, my Korean grandmother, a woman who raised me when I was a child, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. It was no longer operable, but according to the doctors, was growing slowly. So, my family and I decided that it would be best that I take my exams at the appointed time, and come for a long visit with my grandma Alexandra afterwards. Yet, contrary to the doctor’s predictions, the cancer became aggressive, and one week before my first written exam I learned that my grandmother had fallen into a coma. My teachers offered to postpone my exams for a month. But when I called home, my family did not feel that I would be able to travel to the Far East of Russia fast enough

to see her alive. And given the new visa regulations between Russia and the United States, I knew it would have been next to impossible for me to complete my trip in the span of one month. After numerous international calls and lengthy conversations with my mother and four aunts, I made a decision to stay and take my exams. Once more, in my Korean family, education was weighed and found most important on the “grand scale of things.”

During the five weeks of exams, I often felt like I was having an “out of body” experience. There was a part of me, “cool, calm and collected,” that got up in the morning and went through the familiar motions in a focused, efficient manner: on the non-exam day, she read and took notes; on the exam-day, she checked email for the questions and quietly wrote—page after page after page after page—until it was time to send it off. For her, moving from one set of books and notes to another, it was “business as usual.” In the parallel universe, there was another part of me, hurting so badly that it was no longer able to speak or do anything against the pain: silently, she watched this quiet production of pages with the ever-growing sense of injustice, restlessness, and anguish: it felt so existentially wrong to be writing papers when my grandma was dying on the other side of the globe.

In this fashion, I wrote five papers in five weeks. Grandma Alexandra died two days before my last written exam. Two weeks later, I had the orals. I did well, earning the commendation of “terrific” and “with distinction.” But I hardly cared. It was as if something in me was broken. In the aftermath of my oral exam, when everybody congratulated me, I felt, while surely relieved to have finished, almost bewildered as to what to do next. I no longer felt the familiar tremors of anxiety or surges of anger. On the

contrary, I was startled by the seemingly complete absence of any feeling. All that was left was cold, empty numbness.

As the days after my comprehensive examinations folded into weeks, and then weeks started adding up into months, this lack of feeling and care became alarming. I just sat in my reading chair, staring into space, or walked outside for hours, captivated by the sight of fallen leaves blown along the road by the wind. In a way, I felt like one of them: dry, disconnected from the tree, dying. I no longer cared about a degree from a prestigious university, no longer felt afire about my future ministry in Russia. I reneged on an agreement to teach the pastoral care course that I promised to teach at the local college.⁴⁰ It was not like me. But I could not help it. I could not remember why I wanted to teach. The whole enterprise of learning and teaching felt meaningless. Having finally escaped the greatest fear of my life, the fear of failure, I nonetheless felt like “failure.” I just wanted to be alone. I wanted to quit.

Many people said it was the “comps” to blame, that it was almost like a post-partum depression, and that it that would go away. It did not. My bishop called me from Russia. He listened. He talked about Wesley and Luther. He reminded me that we walk in the dark “on faith.” He was right, of course: faith *was* the key. Except that I could not locate mine.

I looked at the statements of purpose I wrote when applying for the Th.M. and Ph.D. programs at Emory. They were written in English that was still poor, but they were teeming with faith, purpose, and meaning. Where did it all go? I knew I could still “talk theology,” but I could no longer “speak faith.” I remembered my mother, a Russian linguist, who throughout my years in America told me repeatedly, and with increasing exasperation, that

⁴⁰ Introduction to Pastoral Care, La Grange College, January term 2007.

my Russian was deteriorating. I always laughed—I knew I could get it back, I only needed to re-immense myself in the Russian classics: just a few weeks with Dostoyevsky, Prishvin, Bunin, and Tolstoy would be enough. But who had ever noticed that my language of faith was crumbling too? Could I get it back? Where could I re-immense myself in the faith's classics? What has happened to my theological education? How was it that one of the best religious programs in one of the leading universities in the nation brought me to a place like this?

In the spring semester, after four months of pondering these questions and my persisting inability to resume graduate work, I went to see my mentor from the *Politics of Knowing* class, who once understood and shared my feelings of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with theological education. On some level, this recent collapse of meaning felt like a distant outcome of those earlier feelings. On another, I simply did not have anybody else to talk to about the lost sense of passion and purpose in my studies. Still on another, I hoped that he, once more, would understand my feelings and advise me on how to get over them. I wanted to be given the reasons to stay, I wanted to be persuaded to go on with my academic studies. Yet, at the end of my long litany of why I no longer believed in theological education and why I did not feel I could go on, he simply said: “I will support your decision to leave.”

I was not prepared for such an answer. It did affirm my perception of the situation and made me feel deeply understood, but by itself it posed more questions than it solved. Now, on top of my inner suffering of the lost meaning, I had to think about the actual prospects of terminating my program. And there was much to think about: apart from the

substantial personal investment of time and effort and emotion, there was a huge communal aspect of failing the trust of my bishop and the people of the Russia UMC who sent me to the United States to study, of interfering with the fulfillment of the crucial need of the Moscow Theological Seminary for native Russian faculty, and thousands of dollars lost in my scholarships and visa. I felt like I was truly between a rock and a hard place: knowing that I could not afford to quit—and yet, not-knowing how to go forward.

Out of sheer desperation, I decided to go to the monastery for an extended retreat, as monks would say, “to discern.” I hoped that in the peacefulness of that environment I could find the clarity I needed to figure out the way out of my predicament. I also hoped the monks would sympathize with my desire to “leave everything behind,” and that with the support of their prayer, I would find the inspiration to exit my academic program gracefully. But another surprise awaited me in my conversation with my spiritual director. Upon hearing about my desire to leave, he frowned: “You don’t leave when things get tough.” I explained that I did not. I said that it had been “tough” for a long while. That for all these years I had stuck it out. But now I had just hit the wall. He countered with the talk on stability, one of the pillars of the Cistercian spirituality, saying that “staying put” is a prerequisite for spiritual growth. I am not good at arguing with my elders, so our back and forth did not last long. And at the end, he simply said he would pray for me but he did not feel I was called to leave the academy or the world. Instead, he felt I was called to live and serve in there as a lay contemplative.

What was *that* supposed to mean? There I was, having extreme trouble imagining how to carry out the numerous responsibilities that came with who I already was, and now, on top of that—a call to be a “lay contemplative?” But, for whatever reason, the words

stuck in my head. Would becoming a lay contemplative enable me to know freedom and peace amid the relentless pressures of academic existence? Would it protect me from the “violence of overwork,” imposed on me from without and generated within by my own compulsion? And most importantly, would it give me back the lost meaning—the reasons to get up in the morning, to open another book, to put pen to paper, to respond to the never-ending demands of ministry? I was not sure. “Contemplative” was such a strange and unfamiliar word. It so happened that the monastery’s communal retreat on Contemplative Prayer coincided with my personal visit at the monastery. So, I attended a talk on contemplation given by another monk. It was interesting enough, for he talked about contemplation as “simple resting in God” connected to the notion of *hesychia* in the Eastern Church. I could relate to this, remembering how important hesychastic prayer was for the Russian Orthodox monks. But then, the monk changed his course. He admonished us not to limit the word “contemplation” to the activity of prayer or to an attribute of monastic vocation, but rather, to see it as a way of life that reveals God as a sole source and summit of human existence. Contemplative life and prayer then were not something that monks do, but rather it was life “set aside for God,” life in which one abandons every other motivation and meaning in order to seek divine will and purpose. “God alone,” he said, beaming, “is the secret to the happy and fulfilled life, for the religious and the lay alike.”

That sounded nice. Poetic even. But also, when seen against the backdrop of the real tensions and challenges of worldly existence, it sounded extremely naïve or worse, romanticizing. Bitterly I thought, “Easy for *you* to say—sheltered in the peacefulness of this place, without a family or a congregation to worry about, without the threat of losing a job or house or medical insurance!” From the perspective of an average American, the

austerity of the Cistercian life surely seemed severe, but if I looked at this life through the eyes of a Russian child, the perspective changed. In the world where so many people have to face the actual threat of physical violence, lack of medical care, and real hunger, the life of an American monk, poor as he is, is still privileged—because on the most fundamental level, he is protected from the deeper degree of uncertainty and insecurity that many people in the world (especially, the non-North America world) have to contend with daily. Was it even possible to live for “God alone” outside the monastery enclosure—and still make a living, have a meaningful career, and raise a family?

But all bitterness aside, those words too stayed with me. Could the monastery be a place where I can be re-immersed in the faith’s classics? Could this be a community where I can learn anew the habits and the alphabet of faith? The peace and beaming joy on the face of that old monk looked so genuine, so real. I too wanted to know such peace, such joy. So I ruminated on these unfamiliar words and strange ideas about contemplation throughout my retreat, even as I went back and forth on the stony terrain between my academic mentor’s “I will support your decision to leave” and my spiritual director’s “I feel you are called to live and serve in the world.”

And at the end of my ten-day visit, I decided to do...both: to stay *and* to leave. My decision to stay meant I would continue to be enrolled at Emory as a doctoral student, with the usual schedule and academic requirements to meet. My decision to leave meant I would exit the academic world as its “dedicated citizen,” no longer considering its community and unspoken rules and priorities as my primary home. In this way, nothing would change on the level of the external circumstances of my life, but everything would change on the level of my inner commitment. I was not at all sure if this twofold proposal would work.

But then again, what did I have to lose? After all, I could always drop out of school a semester later. So, tentatively, I made up my mind to give “a lay contemplative in the world” a go, and to see where such living and serving and studying for “God alone” would lead me.

Now my visits to the monastery acquired a new urgency. It became a place, a “school” of sorts, in which I secretly enrolled myself, in order to learn a different way of life and an alternative identity, that of a lay contemplative. I intentionally studied and entered, inasmuch as it was possible for the female Protestant clergy, the culture of monastic living, submerging myself in its alternative rhythms, practices, and liturgical expressions, seeking to understand and adopt its ascetic sensitivities, its radically different principles of patterning time and space, and its solitude-based model of interpersonal relationship. I came for retreats at least once a month, at times more often. I watched monks attentively, like a child watches her parents, during the liturgy, work, and occasional daily interactions, seeking to comprehend what “living for God alone” meant in practice. I spent most of the church celebrations, including every Christmas and Easter, in the abbey. And a whole new world of saints, chants, varieties of prayer, and previously unknown religious observances and modes of expression opened up to me. And methodically, as with a new set of clothes, I tried them on. From that time on, my retreats at the monastery stopped being a means of my “private escape” into the protected serenity of its environment, and became the lessons in “perpetual exodus” from my former culture. In this sense, this monastery, its monks, and the Trappist Order at large, became my new “homeland” and “my people.”

Yet, acquiring the new “citizenship” was not cheap. There were obvious external costs to this undertaking: the mounting expenses of making repeated 25-mile journeys from Atlanta to the abbey without a car and the ability to drive; time taken away from school; the reality of my long-term engagement with the Roman Catholic rite, which from the perspective of some posed a threat to my Methodist identity; and not the least, dealing with the escalating emotional alarm from my mother who, seeing the depth of my engagement with the monastic tradition, began to seriously fear I would end up becoming a nun. But there were also deeper sacrifices. As I gradually entered into the world of the monastery, I began to see that my conscious decision to part ways with the culture of the American academy was not sufficient. In a very real sense, I myself was a “child” of the academic culture, and its rhythms and practices, values and priorities, its ways of relating to others, and the very drives that I sought to leave behind had become an indissoluble part of me. Hence, in order to depart from this culture for real, I had to abandon some of *my own* values and priorities, to unlearn my deeply internalized ways of relating to others and patterns of working, and to renounce the very drives that kept me going for years. On this level, learning to rest in God alone was not just about my decision to spend my time and money at the monastery; it was about my willingness to leave behind the old habits of seeing and being in the world and the significant parts of my very self. Like the man in Jesus’s parable who stumbled across a pearl of great price, I was asked to sell everything to come into its possession.

As such, my learning to live in the world as a lay contemplative under Cistercian guidance was the “best of times” and “the worst of times” in my life. It was the worst of times because it called for a radical re-orientation of my life. Unlike monks, I could not

literally sell everything and depart in a clean-cut way, so my path to becoming a contemplative as a full-time doctoral student and a minister with responsibilities that extend back to Russia involved learning to rest in God alone, not *at the exclusion of*, but *in* everything I did. It involved changing the way in which I *relate* to everything, changing the way I *am*—in the academy, in the church, in my own family—and such a change did not come easily to me.

For in order to change the way I *am*, the person whom I *used to be*—who used to rest in her personal and professional achievements, who depended on people’s affirmation for energy and motivation, and who gloried in her reputation and looks—had to die. But the person whom I used to be was the only person I knew, and damaging as they were, my former identities and aspirations were still very dear to me. So, my dying was not the “R.I.P.” kind, but a laborious, protracted, and agonizingly painful progression. At the same time, my journey of personal transformation put a rift between the new “me” and my old “relations.” In my choice to seek silence and solitude, to make prayer the center of my life, to let my action flow from contemplation, I no longer fit into my former communities as seamlessly as before. I became less compatible in the company of my academic colleagues, at odds with some people in my Methodist congregation, and in many ways out of sync even with my family of origin. While I continued to uphold my numerous responsibilities, I had sought to relinquish the many roles I used to play—and people who had known me as a people-pleaser were no longer pleased with me! Finally, and most dangerously, the continuing re-orientation of my life affected my studies. As “God alone” began to impinge upon the former “deities” of my life, no minor disorder was produced in my old ways of working. Bereft of my old ambitions and aspirations, lacking the pressure of my former

values and priorities, I had a hard time mustering enough energy and motivation to maintain the high speed and output to which I was accustomed. It soon became obvious that working “for the love of God” yielded significantly less impressive results than working from the familiar “fear of failure.” But I still had a doctoral dissertation to complete. It is this triple challenge of going through the collapse of my abilities to work, the tangible estrangement from my primary communities, and the loss of my old identity that made my learning to live for God alone the most arduous, demanding, and painful years: “the worst of times.” So intense was this process that eventually I could not help but wonder if the Cistercian cure for my burnout was as severe and dangerous as the disease itself.

Yet, while there was deep similarity on the level of *symptoms*, everything changed on the level of *outcome*. Hard as it was, the strange Cistercian cure worked, and because of that, the “worst of times” was also the “best of times.” The monastery peace began to spill into the messy realities of my daily living, and I had a taste of wholeness that I had not known before, as various compartments of my existence (a student, a minister, a scholar, a daughter, a wife) began to come together into a life that was no longer divided, but flowing from one center, the Cistercian center of “resting in God alone.” I came to see what resting in God alone does to my ministry, my studies, and my family relationships: when this peace becomes a part—or rather, takes possession—of me, not only I but people around me know it (and even animals seem to sense it) and zones of liberation and service are created, without effort and at times, without intention. I came to know the deep restfulness and fruitfulness of work that stems from freely given love, not servile fear. There was also a new community in my life, comprised not only of monks but of lay people like myself, from various walks and stages of life, who too strived and struggled to live “in

but not of the world,” and who found the monastery to be a place that could teach them so intricate an art. Finally and most importantly, there once more was God—not as a *topic of discussion*, not as an *object of study*, but as a matter of *lived experience*, “as real as potatoes!” As I continued to practice the Cistercian vocabulary and habits of faith, I came to know anew the deep abiding Presence, speaking in the silence of my own heart, in ways at once more familiar and more mysterious than before. It is this gradual process of restoration of self and community, of discovery of a new way of working, and the return of the awareness of God that made my learning to live as a lay contemplative in the world the most gratifying and healing times of my life. The “pearl of great price” was indeed worth every penny.

2.4 New Beginnings: Sharing Monastery Gift of Peace

Having had the joy of receiving the Cistercian gift of peace, I was now in position to share it with others. Two occasions in particular stand out in my memory. The first one was the “Religious Education as Formation and Transformation” class that my mentor and I taught at Candler School of Theology.⁴¹ It was a standard two-weeks long “summer-intensive” course, with a regular “three credit hours”-work requirement. What was unusual about this class was our decision to incorporate monastic practices into its curriculum. Importantly, we did not intend to teach the monastic practices, or the subject of monastic spirituality in general, as a part of the course’s *theoretical goals*; rather, we intended to set the monastic practices as a context for academic learning. Behind our decision to bring monastic

⁴¹ RE501, *Religious Education as Formation and Transformation*, Professor Theodore Brelsford, Summer 2007.

practices into the academic environment were the central notions of the course itself: formation and transformation. We sought to infuse our daily class time together with different kinds of religious prayer in order to “experience, explore and reflect upon the formative and transformative potential of such traditions.”⁴² On the level of practice, such an intention affected the physical environment and the structure of the individual sessions. We divided the classroom itself into two parts. In the “academic” part, we set up a circle of tables, so that teachers and students could engage each other from the position of equal inclusion and power. The “religious” part imitated the traditional Benedictine-Cistercian arrangement for chanting of the Divine Office: there were two rows of chairs facing each other, with the altar on the side. A cross, Bible, candle and a small bell to mark transitions between prayer and work, were set there.

While the physical spaces were visibly separated, there was an ongoing interplay of religious and academic activities throughout the daily class sessions. We started each day of the class with the *Office of Lauds* (Morning Praise) and concluded it with the *Office of Vespers* (Evening Praise), and short *Mid-morning* and *Midday* prayers were offered at the beginning of two middle sessions.⁴³ During the breaks between the hourly sessions, as well as during the times of our gathering and parting, we played a CD of Gregorian chant.⁴⁴ Right before departure, all were invited to practice *Examen*, an individual prayerful reflection on the events of our day in order to discern God’s presence in our learning and

⁴² RE 501, Summer 2007, Syllabus, p 2.

⁴³ Judith Sutera, *Work of God: Benedictine Prayer* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997).

⁴⁴ Monastic Choir of St Peter’s Abbey, Solesmes, *Vespers and Compline: Gregorian Chant* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 1982).

seek further direction for life. Handouts with short excerpts from the Epistle of James were offered as passages for individual daily reading.

Two mistaken impressions may be given by this description: because I speak only of the “religious” part of the course (the “academic” one is so familiar that it goes without saying), it may appear that the monastic practices took up an inordinately large portion of the class, and that they were at the forefront of what was going on there. This was not so in practice. Even as we officially added ten minutes to the regular four-hour class period to allow time for the concluding prayer, and occasionally, individual participants lingered over *Examen*, the overall amount of time devoted to monastic practices during the daily sessions was not substantial: *Lauds* and *Vespers* were ten to twelve minutes in duration, *Midmorning* and *Midday* prayers and *Examen* were five. Daily passages from James were printed out ahead of time and offered for individual, out-of-class, reading. And after the first day of becoming familiar with the general order of the Liturgy of the Hours and the practical aspects of chanting the psalms, the monastic “addendum” quickly fell into the background of the familiar flow of readings, presentations, and discussions of assignments. Thus, with the exception of the “fieldtrip” to the monastery at the end of the course, in the daily realities of learning, the monastic practices occupied neither substantial nor center-stage place.

But they did not merely fade away. True to our original intention, the monastic practices *transformed* the course: at the end of our two weeks together, both students and teachers observed repeatedly that this course was “different” from any other seminary course. Yet, the transformation took place in a way we as teachers, neither planned nor expected. What we looked for was the direct formative and transformative influence of the

monastic practices on us as individual learners, the influence of which we would be consciously aware, and upon which we could reflect in a deliberate meaningful manner. Yet, the transformation that monastic practices engendered took place on a much “higher” (for lack of a better word) plane: it involved the academic course itself and the learners together as a community. Like the recording of the Gregorian chant that we played as the “background music” to the course, our daily performance of the Liturgy became something of an invisible scaffolding, a form that protected, supported, and shaped our life together. As such, the influence of monastic practices on us as individuals was unobtrusive and indirect, yet powerful and, by definition, “over our heads.”

As we spoke the words of Scripture (in translations that were not always politically correct), chanted Psalms (at forever faltering pitch), listened to the centuries-old Benedictine prayers (in the incomprehensibility of their Latin), we were becoming a community that had an alternative reason to be together, not merely to teach and learn but to pray—and this additional layer of interaction created a qualitatively different atmosphere, an environment of safety, openness, and honesty. In that environment, both teachers and students were willing to be present to each other, to be vulnerable before the diverse materials of the course, and to bring the whole of their lives to learning, in a degree I had never witnessed before in the academic classroom. In this course, a Korean male student shared (without hiding his emotion!) the realization that “hit” him during his encounter with one of the reading assignments: that in his obedient following of the traditional Asian family role of the husband, he was oppressive to his wife and children. In this course, an American female minister shared the story of a tragic incident that happened to her daughter, and the ways this experience shaped her understanding of clergy identity

and mission. In this course, we witnessed a genuine understanding and camaraderie budding between persons who belonged to the opposite sides of the Christian spectrum, the deeply evangelical and the equally deeply liberal. The papers the students wrote were not dutiful inquiries into the assigned class topics but deep, genuine engagements with the “generative themes” that rose from the very messiness of their lives.⁴⁵ The responses we teachers offered to their papers were both considerably more supportive and considerably more challenging than the usual “comments.” We all, teachers and students, worked very hard, and we all, teachers and students, learned a lot; and yet, it was the most restful course I have ever taken, or given, in my eighteen years in theological education. And at the end, not only did the students meet the formal learning goals and objectives, but they (and we the teachers) spoke of the deepening of faith. On the last day of class, there seemed to be only one appropriate way to finish the course: we celebrated the Eucharist.⁴⁶

The second experience of sharing the gifts of the Cistercian monastic tradition took place in the monastery itself. In 2009, I was invited to lead retreats with the Father Guestmaster,

⁴⁵ The term “generative theme” was created by Paulo Freire, a renowned Brazilian educator and advocate of critical pedagogy. For Freire, education is never neutral. By helping the students to identify the ideas, values, doubts, obstacles, and hopes that arise from their experience and hold particular importance and urgency (generative themes), Freire sought to engender critical reflection and make possible liberating practice. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).)

⁴⁶ While this description of the course and its effects on its participants is written from my subjective point of view, the favorable assessment is not merely a matter of my personal opinion. The students’ formal evaluations, on record at Candler School of Theology, bear witness that they experienced this course as deeply transformative and rewarding as I have described. Moreover, the fact that during my writing of this dissertation, I was able to contact the students and receive an in-depth and enthusiastic feedback on the course (in January, 2013, almost six (!) years after the original course took place) reveals that *RE501, Religious Education as Formation and Transformation*, was indeed a course that stands out in their memory. My narrative description of this experience in this chapter is printed with their full-knowledge and permission.

on a topic of my choice.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, I proposed to teach what I myself desperately needed to learn and what I, however limitedly, already knew: the meaning of the monastery “gift of rest” and its relevance for laity. During the *Spirituality of Active Life* retreat, we sought to understand what happened to us during retreat at the abbey and explored the possibilities and challenges of extending the restfulness of monastic living into the context of busy and heavy-loaded lives back home in the world. During the *Stewardship of Self as Spiritual Discipline* retreat, we focused explicitly on the ways in which the monastic tradition could inform, and possibly transform, the increasingly popular, yet frequently misinterpreted term “self-care.”

Thematically, those were extremely interesting retreats. Following the first day of introductions and the period of transitioning to the alternative pace and arrangements of the monastic day, distinct communities were formed in each retreat, and engaging conversations took place in response to every formal “talk.” It was deeply humbling and gratifying to see the monastery through the eyes of others and to ponder the insightful questions and comments that came up as we explored our retreat topics together.

Yet what stayed with me most was the people themselves. I could not help but notice how different they were from each other—and from me. Coming into close contact with retreatants as a teacher made me realize that until then, somehow, I had assumed that people who were attracted to the monastery were “like me”: highly sensitive, quiet, with pronounced introverted tendencies, and a love of nature. But those two retreats gathered together people of exceptional difference—in ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and

⁴⁷ *Spirituality of Active Life*, January 16-18, 2009 and *Stewardship of Self as Spiritual Discipline*, Sept 7-10, 2009 (Fr James Behrens and Natalya Shulgina), Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA, [2009 Retreat Schedule](#).

denominational affiliations, in levels of education and political beliefs, in stages of life and professional occupations—and some of them with plenty of extraversion and undeniable gifts of loquaciousness and volume. So, my idea about the monastery as “refuge-place for retiring introverts” had to be abandoned. However, as we moved deeper into the retreats, a new discovery awaited me: below the significant differences in our *character* lay a remarkable similarity of *experience*.

During those retreats I came to see, now in other people’s lives, that which I had observed in my own: that people long for rest, and once they become aware of their desire and have a taste of the “real thing,” they are willing to pay a very high price for it; that the cost of resting “for real” is indeed very high, because they have to struggle and overcome a great number of hindrances, within and without; but that the monastery, in its strange, radically different way and logic of life, somehow, has an ability to support them in their longing and their struggle. Invariably, by the end of the third day of their stay, the retreatants not only *talked* about resting better, they were *visibly* more rested: the “concerned” wrinkles between their eyebrows smoothed, their faces brightened up, and there was a new spaciousness in their movements and speech. The quiet monastery “magic” worked on others as surely as it worked on me.

Notably, a number of people who came to these retreats, especially the second one on *Stewardship of Self as Spiritual Discipline*, were clergy. They belonged to different parts of the Church: Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Methodist, Baptist, and Roman Catholic. Yet, despite the vast differences in their denominational affiliation, dogmatic convictions, and individual circumstances of ministry, they seemed to have found a shared ground in their deep longing for and equally deep struggle with rest. In their lives this

twofold dynamic appeared to be more pronounced; yet it was obvious that they too found the monastic “lessons of peace” of great value. As they were departing at the end of the retreat, two ministers stopped me in the corridor, interrupting its silence with their thanks. They said that a course like this “was missing from their seminary training.”

These two experiences stopped me in my tracks. They made me shift my gaze from the restorative effects of the Cistercian monastic tradition on my personal life, to the potential it held for the well-being of others—more specifically, for clergy who ached for rest. Together, the class that my mentor and I taught in the seminary and the retreats that Father the Guestmaster and I gave in the monastery looked like the “bookends” of sorts. On the one hand, there were seminarians who had never set a foot in the monastery before, but whose experience of learning was transformed by their two-week long exposure to monastic practices. On the other hand, there were active clergy from different denominations who in their search for rest had eventually made their way to the monastery, and who had found it there.

At once, I saw my “dissertation on Sabbath,” which throughout these years I had such a hard time writing, in a new light. I saw that in a peculiar, but deeply valid way the Cistercian monastic tradition functioned as a “tradition of Sabbath” in my life, and that it could do the same in the lives of others. And I realized that seminaries and schools of theology could serve as “places of encounter,” educational environments where those who are studying professional skills for doing God’s work today could learn from the community of those who have professed to rest in God alone for centuries. The “double track” of proposing Sabbath as an aid to clergy burnout but going in the monastery for my

own rest had come to an end, but a remarkable one: the two roads crossed and merged into one. At that moment, I *knew* that now I could write my dissertation. Better still, for the first time in a long, long while I began to feel the return of the “spark,” as I remembered the passion that brought me to theological education years many ago.

It was the end of Advent of 2009.

It would take a few more years to nurse that initial “spark” of my passion into a gentle fire, then to learn the intricate art of protecting it from the “storms of life” so that it could burn steadily, and finally to muster enough courage not to hide its light “under the bushel basket” but to offer it to others. Nonetheless, I view the Advent of 2009 as a turning point in my recovery from burnout.

Yet, it was also a turning point for my growing awareness of the real nature and direction of my scholarly work. Until then, my perception of my research was considerably straightforward. *Burnout* was a problem, an occurrence that had undesirable consequences and costs, and that therefore demanded a solution. *Rest*, on the other hand, was a positive objective, a desired practical outcome and a chief reason for carrying out my study. *Sabbath* was a solution, a valuable resource that had the potential to remedy the undesirable reality of burnout and to make rest possible. *Theological education* was a primary conduit, the educational means by which the practices of Sabbath were to be transmitted to the ministerial students in the early stages of their professional preparation. In this scenario, the “heroes” and the “villains” were easily identifiable: burnout was bad, something to be avoided or cured as quickly as possible; rest was good, something to be actively pursued

by means of Sabbath and self-care; and theological education offered the avenue of early intervention.

In light of my own personal experience with these phenomena, however, such a conveniently clear-cut view was brought into question. Now, burnout, Sabbath, rest, and theological education became “grey zones,” occasions of paradox and complexity that resisted simple and unambiguous categorization. My experience of journeying through burnout revealed *burnout* as profoundly multifaceted, as to include not only the painful symptoms of disillusionment, professional incapacitation, and breakdown of relational dynamics, but also powerful possibilities for transformation. My earnest search for rest via Sabbath revealed *rest* not only as an occasion of pure pleasure and delight, but also as an event of ultimate and frightening surrender, and brought to light the hidden negative dynamics of Sabbath-keeping. At the same time, it made me realize that using the *Jewish tradition of the Sabbath* for addressing the problem of burnout among Christian clergy was in itself not unproblematic, and that the *Cistercian monastic tradition*, as an explicitly Christian and still living tradition of resting, could serve as an important resource for the contemporary work of intervention. Finally, reflecting on my experience of burning out and becoming restful in the context of *theological education* made me keenly aware of its paradoxical influence on its students’ ability to rest: seminary training is not merely a passive context for teaching rest to ministerial students, but also an active contributor to their anxiety, restlessness, and stress.

Yet, the greatest shift in my understanding of the nature of my research had to do not merely with the modification in my initial conceptualization of rest and burnout, my realization of the complex contextual influence of theological education upon its

ministerial students, and my appraisal of the importance of the Jewish tradition of Sabbath and the Cistercian monastic tradition for addressing the problem of ministerial failure, but with the radical change in my perception of the role that my *personal experience* played in my practical theological reflection on these issues. From the beginning of my dissertation research, I viewed my personal experience of burnout as an important facet of my scholarly presentation. I intended to use it as an “opening vignette,” as an approach frequently employed in pastoral theological arts to introduce the problem in vivid and engaging terms and to make a pressing case for its solution. From this point of view, the function of personal experience in my research was primarily illustrative. However, as I reflected on my experience of reflecting on my personal experience throughout the years of my journeying through burnout, I began to realize that the personal experience in my study served not merely as an *illustration*, but in itself as a profound *source of insight*. As such, its role in my practical theological reflection was not secondary, but central—indeed indispensable.

These dramatic changes in my understanding of content and method of my research sent me back to the library, demanding the revision of my “already finished” chapter on *Literature Review*. I needed to re-read the current proposals for addressing clergy burnout in light of my new discoveries.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING PROPOSALS FOR CLERGY BURNOUT

The five stark discoveries I named in the last chapter—about (1) the possibility of the positive dimension of burnout, (2) the possibility of the negative dimension of rest, (3) the stress of theological education on its students, (4) the relevance of the Cistercian monasticism as a distinctly Christian tradition of resting, and (5) the value of personal experience in practical theological research—pose important questions about the problem of clergy burnout and the possibilities for its solution. More specifically: If *burnout* is a multifaceted and paradoxical phenomenon, including not only painful symptoms and costly consequences but also powerful possibilities for transformation, then has its positive dimension been sufficiently understood and brought to bear upon the work of its prevention and intervention among ministers? If the Jewish tradition of Sabbath reveals *rest* not only as an occasion of pure pleasure and delight but also an event of ultimate and frightening surrender, then has this negative dimension of rest been taken into account by the popular recommendations of resting and Sabbath-keeping as solutions to the crises of ministry? If *theological education* is not merely a passive means for clergy's professional preparation, but in itself a powerful formative influence on their skills of resting (and habits of not-resting), then has this context been utilized as an important avenue for addressing clergy burnout? If the *Cistercian monastic tradition* can be seen as an explicitly Christian, and still living, tradition of resting, then have its resources been made available to clergy searching for rest? Finally, if *personal experience* holds tremendous value for practical

theological reflection, then has the actuality of clergy's lived experience of burnout and the incidents of their recovery been made a subject of scholarly attention?

In this chapter, I describe the current proposals for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. By reflecting on the promising and problematic aspects of this literature within the framework established by these five questions, I will identify the ways in which my research will serve to further advance this important work.

In the last several decades, the problem of pastoral burnout has received considerable attention. Such attention, however, is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, unlike the study of burnout in psychology, the literature on ministerial burnout has not formed a specialized area of study, but has continued to evolve under the bigger umbrella of pastoral ministry. On the other hand, there seems to be a broad agreement that burnout is common among pastors and that the issues of stress and burnout in the pastorate “dominate much of what has been written about ministry in recent decades.”⁴⁸ Such a widespread but unfocused state of the study of burnout in clergy population poses two challenges for the task of reviewing its literature: the absence of a *formal definition* for the term “clergy burnout,” and the lack of *established nomenclature* for delineating the historical and conceptual evolution of this phenomenon in communal understanding.

As first introduced in Chapter 1, my provisional definition of “burnout” (and the term “ministerial failure” that I use interchangeable with this term), closely connected to the work of Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, is as follows: *a debilitating process that*

⁴⁸ Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson, *That Their Work Will Be a Joy: Understanding and Coping with the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 7.

can be triggered by different causes and manifested in a variety of symptoms, but that in its final stages leads to a severe damage to emotional, physical, spiritual well-being and professional performance of pastoral leaders. For the purposes of this literature review, such a definition would allow me to examine not only the texts that focus on clergy burnout explicitly but also the literature that illuminates this topic in significant but indirect ways, thus, enabling me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

To make sense of this diverse collection of texts, in the absence of the established nomenclature that delineates conceptual complexity of clergy burnout, I have created three analytical categories. In the first section of my review, I classify the literature on clergy burnout by the *context of origin* of its authors. Here I reflect on accounts of burnout that come from clergy themselves, from academic scholars and practitioners, and from ecclesiastical authorities. Such a way of understanding the literature is important, because the variation in professional identity of these writers allows viewing the phenomenon of clergy burnout from a variety of perspectives. In the second section of my review, I organize the literature by the *context of amelioration*, the environment in which the solution to clergy burnout is imagined. I examine the measures for prevention and intervention that have been proposed for the lives of individual clergy, local congregations, larger denominational structures, and for institutional theological education. Looking at these contexts together creates a unique opportunity to assess the current state of the work of attending to clergy burnout and discern the areas that necessitate further development. In the final section I analyze the literature in relation to the *nature of their approach* to the solution. Here I identify and discuss two primary ways in which the work of addressing clergy burnout has been conceptualized: self-care proposals and Sabbath proposals. An in-

depth reflection on the actual strategies of alleviating the suffering of burnout fosters understanding of the strengths and limitations of the resources that have been traditionally utilized for addressing ministerial failure.

Organizing texts according to the three different criteria minimizes the possibility that an important source is missed simply because it did not fit into a particular category. Viewing the texts side by side in three different combinations creates conditions beneficial for identifying the dominant themes and patterns running through the literature as a whole. Bringing the insights of these texts together makes it possible to comprehend the overall shape of the theoretical understanding of clergy burnout and existing avenues for addressing this problem in practice.

3.1 Context of Origin: Proposals from Clergy, Scholars and Care-giving Professionals, and Ecclesiastical Leaders

Proposals to address clergy burnout come from three main areas: clergy themselves, academic scholars and practitioners from various disciplinary fields, and denominational leaders. This is an important way to understand the current work on clergy burnout because the context of origin speaks to the *particularity of the gifts* that are being brought into these attempts to understand and address this problem. This process is similar to inviting various consulting specialists in a medical context to speak to the nature of a disease and its proposed treatment. For a “disease” of such complexity and magnitude as burnout, having the perspectives of a diverse group of professionals is critical. We must ask, “What is going on here?”

Proposals from Clergy and Leaders of Local Congregations

Among the most valuable gifts from pastors and leaders of the local congregations is the gift of firsthand experience: the experience of struggling with, being defeated by, and at times recovering from burnout. This realm of experience is not always pretty, and it is almost always messy, puzzling, and emotionally involved. And the language of these texts reflects this raw quality: it is frequently informal in tone, peppered with idioms, and abounding in colorful expressions. Yet, informal as they are, the stories that clergy tell are crucial for understanding burnout: because of their utter proximity to the epicenter, they offer an unprecedented view of the complex realities that contribute to ministerial failure.⁴⁹

Careful listening to clergy's voices reveals three broad categories of factors that are responsible, from their point of view, for ministerial failure. The first category is the *external vocational demands* that characterize ministerial work. In contemporary times, when most other "solo" professionals (such as physicians, counselors, lawyers) become more and more specialized in their expertise, ministerial work entails a dazzling array of responsibilities. Clergy share with astonishment the list of "hats" that they are expected to wear on any given week: a preacher, teacher, liturgist, evangelist, pastoral counselor,

⁴⁹ The stories that clergy tell take form in the variety of literary genre. Some ministers offer collections of personal anecdotes, short narratives that focus on specific facets of ministry: Jan Linn, *22 Keys to Being a Minister without Quitting or Wishing for Early Retirement*, 1st ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); Kurt R. Schuermann, *Ministry Is a High Calling (Aim Low): Reflections of a Parish Novice*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001); Nick Cuthbert, *How to Survive and Thrive as a Church Leader* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006). Others recount their experience in a longer format of testimonials or memoir-like texts: Lillian Daniel and Martin B. Copenhaver, *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009); Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009); Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2011). There is even a novel about the journey of an Episcopal priest to the other side of burnout written under a pen-name by the clergyman who had this experience: Charles Hollingsworth, *No Foothold in the Swamp: A Story of One Man's Burnout in the Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

spiritual director, administrator, business manager, theologian, community activist, fundraiser, “prayer warrior,” church growth consultant, visionary leader, competent supervisor of volunteers and staff, prophetic voice in world affairs, facility manager, model of personal and family life—and an “all-around really nice person, someone easy to talk to.”⁵⁰

The sheer number of these roles is problematic in itself: there is just too much for one person to do!⁵¹ Yet, the multifaceted nature of ministerial responsibilities harbors three additional problems. First, it creates conditions for potential incongruity or even conflict between various roles: with so many “hats” to wear, some of them are bound to clash.⁵²

Second, it fosters an expectation of consistent competency across all areas of ministry; yet,

⁵⁰ Lee and Fredrickson, 12-13; Schuermann, 3, 10-12; Arthur Gross Schaefer and Steve Jacobsen, "Surviving Clergy Burnout," *Encounter* 70, no. 1 (2009): 37-38, 40-41; Gary Kinnaman and Alfred Ells, *Leaders That Last: How Covenant Friendships Can Help Pastors Thrive* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 29; John Peters Webster, *Rekindle the Fire: Antidote to Burnout* (Orland: Grenfell Reading Center, 1997), 43-55; Barbara G. Gilbert, *Who Ministers to Ministers: A Study of Support Systems for Clergy and Spouses* (New York: Alban Institute, 1987), 6-7.

⁵¹ A national survey of over 800 clergy, which was conducted by the Pulpit and Pew project at Duke University Divinity School in 2001, established that the workweek for the full-time Protestant clergy is between 42 and 63 hours. Preaching and worship preparation was named as the most time-consuming task. Pastoral care was identified as the second biggest task (male clergy appeared to spend more time on the former and female clergy more on the latter). African-American pastors had the longest work hours, with median of 72.3 hours, regardless of denomination. Jackson W. Carroll and Becky R. McMillan, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations, Pulpit & Pew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006); Becky R. McMillan, "What Do Clergy Do All Week?," Pulpit and Pew Project, accessed September, 2013.

⁵² Baptist minister, Charles Chandler, offers a poignant description of the problematic aspects of being a supervisor and a pastor to a church custodian: “I can’t be his pastor and his supervisor too, especially when his work is unacceptable.” Charles Howard Chandler, *Minister's Support Group: Alternative to Burnout* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1987), 21. Another example comes from Rabbi Arthur Schaefer’s description of conflicting congregational expectations for a church leader: “Be a strong moral leader but don’t offend anyone who might leave and hurt the budget.” Schaefer and Jacobsen, 39-40, 44-45. The early study of role conflicts in ministry by Donald Smith remains the most in-depth exploration of this topic. For Smith, ministerial role conflicts are due to three kinds of “tensions”: between various external obligations, between internalized norms and pressures of external situation, and between incompatible values and expectations. Donald P. Smith, *Clergy in the Cross Fire: Coping with Role Conflicts in the Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

possessing such a diversity of gifts and skills by one person is a goal that is, almost by definition, unattainable.⁵³ Third, it contributes to the ambiguity of the ministerial “job description”: with so many roles to fulfill, the main constituents of clergy work become less and less clear, resulting in the infamous dilemma of being “called to be all things to all people” and ongoing need to set priorities among urgently competing obligations of roughly comparable importance.⁵⁴ As such, the high volume and diversity of various ministerial responsibilities serve as a source of considerable and ongoing clergy’s stress. Yet, the strain that comes from the all-consuming character of the ministerial occupation is exacerbated by the difficulties in defining its effectiveness. While faithful preaching of the Gospel, leading the life “worthy of one’s vocation,” and loving God and neighbor are at the heart of successful ministry, these objectives are also too intangible to allow a precise evaluation. With no visible results to gauge the success of their work, clergy are more vulnerable before the cultural images of numerical accomplishment and their own ambition—and before the stress that is generated by their attempts to fulfill, or resist, the mandates of the secular mentality.⁵⁵

⁵³ Lee and Fredrickson, 13; Schaefer and Jacobsen, 40-41; Louis McBurney, *Every Pastor Needs a Pastor* (Waco: Word Books, 1977), 41-42; Edward B. Bratcher, *The Walk-on-Water Syndrome: Dealing with Professional Hazards in the Ministry* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 157-70; Hollingsworth; Linn, 25-30, 75-78; Schuermann, 22-23.

⁵⁴ A Congregationalist pastor John Webster calls this pastoral malaise the “tyranny of the possible.” Webster, 47-55. See also Bratcher, 123-37; Hollingsworth; McBurney, 28-34; Anthony Pappas, *Pastoral Stress: Sources of Tension, Resources for Transformation* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1995), 57-69; Lee and Fredrickson, 33; John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1992), 5-6, 17-21.

⁵⁵ Baptist pastor, Donald Sisk, points out that when pastors begin to play the “numbers game,” judging their work by the size of their church building or budget, the number of programs and people, they inevitably lose—not only when they cannot fulfill their goals but even then they can: while the “stress of failure” stems from the feelings of grief and dejection, the “stress of success” is comprised by the high expectations for future performance and a dangerous illusions of “invincibility.” Ronald D. Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2005), 94-99. See also Chandler, 16-19;

The second group of factors contributing to clergy burnout pertains to the *inherently relational nature of pastoral occupation*. Ministry is a quintessential “people-profession”: hence, pastoral work is defined not only by “what” is being done, but also “with whom.” While this relational domain could be one of the most satisfying aspects of ministerial work, it has an equal potential to become the most draining and stress-producing.⁵⁶ Two areas—expectations and conflicts—are identified by pastors as the especially problematic in their work with people. In their ministerial role, clergy become recipients of many expectations: from individual parishioners, church boards, their colleagues and denominational authorities, and even from the community at large. The main problem with these expectations—spoken and unspoken, realistic and unrealistic, real and imaginary—is that they “vary enormously.”⁵⁷ Their variety makes it extremely difficult for clergy to prioritize and achieve lasting satisfaction in their work. Additionally, clergy are in the vulnerable position because people with expectations are also the people who pay their bills. For this reason, expectations always extract a price from clergy’s energy: if met, it is the energy that is used to fulfill them; in unmet, it is the energy used to contend with

Lee and Fredrickson, 31-33; Schaefer and Jacobsen, 47; Schuermann, 29-30; Jody Seymour, *A Time for Healing: Overcoming the Perils of Ministry* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995), 9-13, 40-45; Sanford, 6-7, 15, 22-31, 78-85; Bratcher, 138-56. For a more detailed exploration of this topic, see Robert C. Schnase, *Ambition in Ministry: Our Spiritual Struggle with Success, Achievement, and Competition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

⁵⁶ A Baptist pastor Tony Pappas distinguishes between three kinds of relational stress: interpersonal stress that is generated in relationship between a pastor and other individual in the congregation; stress of pastoral role, due to the differences in understanding of what it means to be a pastor between clergy and congregation; and congregational stress that is generated in the functioning of the congregation as a social system. Pappas, 30-112.

⁵⁷ Sanford, 7.

disappointment or even possibly rejection and criticism of those who did not get what they thought was their due.⁵⁸

When not handled constructively, the unmet expectations could become the seeds of conflict between clergy and congregations. Other sources of conflict include differences and disagreements over social and political affiliations, theological convictions and styles of leadership, liturgical preferences and budget agendas, and indeed virtually any other issue that can arise when fallible clergy are dealing with fallible people. They could involve clergy and parishioners, staff members, and denominational authorities directly, take place between the various church factions with clergy “walking a tightrope” in between them,⁵⁹ or they may even involve the rare but alarming instances of the “clergy abuse.”⁶⁰ Whatever the source and nature of involvement, conflicts cause a lot of tension and pain for ministers; and ministers who leave the pastorate often identify it as the main reason of termination.⁶¹ It is important to note that the stress and strain generated by relational aspects of ministry need not always be attributed to ill intent or psychological dysfunction. By the very nature

⁵⁸ Gilbert, 5-6; Andrew R. Irvine, *Between Two Worlds: Understanding and Managing Clergy Stress* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 34-39; Sanford, 7-11, 32-48, 60-71; Lee and Fredrickson, 31-33; William Edward Hulme, *Managing Stress in Ministry*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 101-06; Kenneth Alan Moe, *The Pastor's Survival Manual: 10 Perils of Ministry and How to Handle Them* (New York: Alban Institute 1995), 43-50; Schuermann, 53-54; Bratcher, 170-79.

⁵⁹ Arthur P. Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1999); David B. Lott, *Conflict Management in Congregations, Harvesting the Learnings Series* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2002).

⁶⁰ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001); G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1997).

⁶¹ In 2001, another Pulpit and Pew Study of nearly 1,000 ex-clergy from five Protestant denominations revealed that conflict was the main reason clergy left local church ministry. Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, 76-114.

of their profession, clergy spend a lot of time caring for the “people in need” and attending to the situations of genuine crisis, grief, and at times tragic suffering. Unless clergy are intentional about “re-filling their tanks,” the expected depletion of emotional energy in these one-sided relationships puts the personal well-being of the minister at risk.⁶²

Hence, the final category of factors that contribute to clergy burnout has to do not with an additional group of stressors, but with the lack of rejuvenators. Quality time with their family, daily practices of self-care, spiritual nurture, supportive peer relationships, and continuing professional development are the most *frequent and costly* “omissions” in ministerial life. The intrusions of ministry into the clergy’s family life is a complex problem, which clergy attribute to their individual inability to let go of the unfinished business of ministry (the “on-call syndrome”), the lack of public and private boundaries in ministry, congregational expectations for the clergy spouse’s role in the church, and the unalterable fact that for ministers the traditional “family-time” of the weekends and holidays represent the period of most concentrated work.⁶³ Reflecting on their notorious failure to practice self-care, clergy trace the problem not only to their busyness and high workload, but also to the cultural identification of success with hyperactivity and traditional religious mandates of “sacrificial serving.”⁶⁴ The pervasive neglect of personal devotion is

⁶² Sanford, 9-10, 49-59

⁶³ Irvine, 125-42; Lee and Fredrickson, 33-35, 170-98, 224-31; Gilbert, 9-16; Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, 66-75, 143-52; Schaefer and Jacobsen, 42-44; Linn, 13-17, 60-63; Bratcher, 83-107; Brooks R. Faulkner, *Burnout in Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 23-34; Cordeiro, 139-43. A humorous and insightful saga about living in the parsonage comes from the United Methodist minister, Belton Joyner: F. Belton Joyner, *Life in the Fish Bowl: Everyday Challenges of Pastors and Their Families* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

⁶⁴ Ronald D. Sisk, *Surviving Ministry* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1997), 67-75; Schuermann, 113-14; Lee and Fredrickson, 108-47, 203; Schaefer and Jacobsen, 39, 41, 45-46; Faulkner, 59-65; Cordeiro, 115-35; Irvine, 180-97; Hulme, 69-80.

an ironic omission in ministerial life: while all pastors recognize the importance of “abiding in God” in order to be fruitful in ministry, the actuality of “handling holy things all week” gets in the way of “tending to the Holy.”⁶⁵

Similarly, the lack of social support in clergy’s life is something of a paradox: even as pastors spend many hours every day of the week with people, many ministers suffer from loneliness and isolation. Their ability to develop supportive peer relationships is hindered by their “set aside”-status in the congregation, underlying climate of competition among ministers in the same district or denomination, and geographical distance.⁶⁶ Continuing theological and professional nurture is an important factor in clergy growth and maturation; and yet, for many ministers, the challenge of finding time for learning in addition to the ever-ending demands of ministry, as well as the difficulty of negotiating time and money for continuing education on the congregation’s budget, stand in the way.⁶⁷ The final category of the costly omissions that has significant impact on ministerial well-being is also largely outside the ministers’ control. It has to do with the delicate issue of ministerial income. While the length and cost of clergy education is comparable to that of other professionals, as a group, ministers are generally paid much less. The low pay has an impact not only on the standard of living of individual ministers but also on their ability to

⁶⁵ Lynne M. Baab, "A Day Off from the God Stuff: What Is a Sabbath Rest for Pastors, When You Handle Holy Things All Week Long?," *Leadership* 28, no. 2 (2007); Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, 147-68; Cordeiro, 69-112, 35-39; Irvine, 145-59; Hulme, 49-68; Bratcher, 47-64; Webster, 19-27.

⁶⁶ Lee and Fredrickson, 33-37, 148-69; Moe, 14-25; Irvine, 99-112; Gilbert, 8-9, 17-18; McBurney, 61-64; Chandler, 22; Cordeiro, 152-53; Hollingsworth; William H. Willimon, *Calling & Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 83; Kinnaman and Ells, 10.

⁶⁷ Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, 169-86; Moe, 1-7; Schuermann, 27-28.

provide for their family's daily needs and for a good education for their children. Additionally, the continuing tradition of "provided housing" in many denominations places clergy in the vulnerable position of having no equity in the real-estate market for their future retirement. And since religious vocation is often seen as a "higher calling," and the "salary raise" topic appears to be unbecoming for clergy's conversations with church boards and congregations at large, the financial limitations of the profession continue to be a source of frustration, anxiety, and tension for many ministers.⁶⁸

The numerous stressors that arise from the external vocational demands, inherently relational nature of ministry, and the costly omissions from clergy's lives cannot be neatly separated. They "bleed into" each other, creating vicious cycles that take a significant toll on ministerial vitality and well-being. Moreover, these three categories offer only a general sketch of the typical causes of pastoral stress. The unique contextual realities, position in ministry, and various situational factors further diversify pressures that characterize pastoral profession. For example, there are stressors specific to urban and rural clergy, pastors of small or large congregations, women and minorities ministers, senior and associate clergy, "solo" ministers and those in the position of leadership that includes multiple staff, bi-vocational pastors and clergy couples, etc.⁶⁹ And even the same

⁶⁸ Schaefer and Jacobsen, 42-43; Lee and Fredrickson, 14; Irvine, 36; Chandler, 20-21; Gilbert, 10; Cordeiro, 54; Webster, 147-57; Becky R.; Price McMillan, Matthew J., "How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?: A Fresh Look at Clergy Salaries in the 21st Century," *Pulpit and Pew Research Reports* (2003), accessed September 10, 2013, <http://pulpitandpew.org/how-much-should-we-pay-pastor-fresh-look-clergy-salaries-21st-century>.

⁶⁹ A number of authors focus on the challenges that are distinctive of these subpopulations of clergy. For example, Ashley-Anne Masters and Stacy Smith, *Bless Her Heart: Life as a Young Clergy Woman* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011); Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Martin E. Hawkins and Kelli Sallman, *The Associate Pastor: Second Chair, Not Second Best* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005); Steve R. Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor: A Guide to Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); L.

clergyperson can experience variation in stress during the different “stages in pastor’s life.”⁷⁰

The difficulty of obtaining a uniform description of pastoral stress is revelatory of the primary strength of this context of origin: its proximity to experience. When clergy talk about burnout, they do not offer abstract definitions of burnout but bring to life the gripping tales of “what happened to me.” Their stories create conditions for the closest possible encounter with the problem and lend insights that cannot be obtained in any other way. The pitfall of these proposals is precisely the opposite side of their strength: in their utter closeness and strong emotional involvement, they lack a systematic perspective. To be properly understood, the specificity of clergy proposals need to be augmented with the understanding of those whose professional training endowed them with the ability for a systematic assessment.

Proposals from Academic Scholars and Care-giving Professionals

The gifts from the academic scholars and practitioners from various care-giving fields have to do with their ability to step back from the immediate experience of clergy burnout and reflect on it in a disciplined manner. In their scholarly role—as academic researchers and theological educators, pastoral counselors and psychologists, church consultants and

Shannon Jung, *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998); Dennis W. Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

⁷⁰ Rediger observes that there are three times during clergy’s career when the stress is “more severe and therefore more likely to lead to burnout”: during the first or second parish appointment or call, when ministers’ idealism is confronted with the realities of daily parish life; after about ten to fifteen years of ministry, when pastors are confronted with the question of whether or not they would want to spend the rest of their professional life in the parish setting; and finally about ten to five years before the end of their active service, when clergy are beginning to struggle with anxiety about their retirement. G. Lloyd Rediger, *Coping with Clergy Burnout* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1982), 41.

medical doctors—they are able to answer the “what is going on” question with greater discipline and care, by drawing on the highly specialized bodies of knowledge and their skills of critical inquiry. Because of their professional training and explicit focus on the clergy in need, the most important contribution from academic scholars and care-giving practitioners is the systematic analysis of causes, symptoms, and instruments for the diagnostic assessment of ministerial failure.

Careful listening to the voices of the scholarly community reveals four important perspectives on clergy burnout: medical, psychological, theological, and cultural. From the medical point of view, the topic of clergy health has become a subject of growing concern. According to the recent studies across several denominations, clergy increasingly struggle with their physical and mental health.⁷¹ As a group, pastors have high rates of obesity, arthritis, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and depression. In comparison with the average American in the Mayo Clinic sample, they carry a higher risk in the areas of blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, weight, and are significantly more likely to suffer from chronic stress-related conditions.⁷² While pastors still hold an advantage in their low levels of tobacco and alcohol consumption over the general public, their habits of nutrition, exercise, and taking time off for rest and relaxation are poor. And many clergy

⁷¹ Credo Institute, *Episcopal Clergy Wellness: A Report to the Church on the State of Clergy Wellness*. (Memphis, TN: 2006); Gwen W. Halaas, *Ministerial Health and Wellness, 2002 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: ELCA, Division for Ministry, 2002); Cameron Lee, "Patterns of Stress and Support among Adventist Clergy: Do Pastors and Their Spouses Differ?," *Pastoral Psychology* 55, no. 6 (2007); Presbyterian Church (USA), *A Survey of Pastors Serving Congregations* (Louisville: Research Services Presbyterian Church (USA), 2002); Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Sara LeGrand, "Physical Health Functioning among United Methodist Clergy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 3 (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-010-9372-5>.

⁷² Sara E. Zylstra, "Caring for the Caregivers " *Christianity Today*, May 2009, 2009.

report a lack of consistent and affordable access to health care and an inability to maintain continuous relationships with their doctors.⁷³ Importantly, pastors themselves rarely recognize the gravity of the situation and therefore only seldom seek help with their health. Hence, a number of researchers emphasize that if not promptly and properly addressed, the crisis in clergy health could become one of the key factors contributing to premature ministerial failure.⁷⁴

From the psychological point of view, the clergy's vulnerability to burnout has been examined from two main angles: the *characteristics of clergy work* that create conditions for ministerial failure, and the *personality characteristics* of clergy themselves that are strongly associated with patterns of overwork and burnout. The psychology of workplace burnout, Jungian psychology, and broader psychodynamic theories of human development have been employed for understanding the occupational dimension of clergy burnout. For example, following research on organizational stress, seminary professors Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson and clergy educator Lynn Baab identify six negative conditions of ministry work environment that are likely to cause excessive stress and lead to clergy burnout: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown in community,

⁷³ Amy Johnson Frykholm, "Fit for Ministry: Addressing the Crisis in Clergy Health," *Christian Century*, October 2012, 2012. Such assessment is particularly striking in light of the highly positive appraisal of clergy's health and longevity several decades ago: Haitung King and John C. Bailar, "The Health of the Clergy: A Review of Demographic Literature," *Demography* 6, no. 1 (1969); Seward Hiltner, *Ferment in the Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 19.

⁷⁴ For example, Bob Wells, "Which Way to Clergy Health?," (2002), accessed September 25, 2006, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/programs/spe/resources/dukediv-clergyhealth.html>; Lovett H. Weems and Joseph E. Arnold, *Clergy Health: A Review of Literature* (Lewis Center for Church Leadership: Wesley Theological Seminary, 2009), accessed September 12, 2013, http://www.gbophb.org/userfiles/file/health/CFH/FTL_Clergy_Health_Lit_Rev.pdf; Daniel Spaite and Debbie Salter Goodwin, *Time Bomb in the Church: Defusing Pastoral Burnout* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1999); Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

lack of fairness, and conflicting values. They advocate for an honest look at how congregations treat their pastors in order to assess and timely respond to these stressors.⁷⁵

On the other hand, a Jungian analyst and an Anglican priest, John Sanford, and British clinical psychologist, Mary Anne Coate, call attention to the “special difficulties” that lie in the clergy profession *per se*. For Sanford, the most dangerous problem with clergy work is linked not to the climate of the workplace but to the unique psychological challenge of ministry: clergy must function “a great deal of the time through their ‘persona,’” an assumed posture that projects the desired qualities of the self outwards while keeping its other aspects hidden. While the persona is useful and even necessary (e.g., a tired minister who has to conduct a wedding needs to “put on a good front” in order to do his or her job), relating to others through the “mask” is exhausting and anxiety-producing, and a long-term identification with one’s role has detrimental consequences for the healthy psychological and spiritual development of the person.⁷⁶ Similarly, Coate identifies three unique tensions in the religious ministry which contribute to clergy’s stress: the tension between caring for others *and* for oneself; the tension between the requirement to proclaim, in a public and consistent manner, a commitment to relationship with God and a strong

⁷⁵ Lynne M. Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2003), 17-33; Lee and Fredrickson, 37-42. These authors draw particularly on the later work of Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). See also Webster, 37-46; Charles L. Rassieur, *Christian Renewal: Living Beyond Burnout*, 1st ed., *Potentials* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, s.v. “Burnout.”; Frank B. Minirth, *Beating Burnout: Balanced Living for Busy People* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1997).

⁷⁶ Sanford, 11-14, 72-77. Sanford is careful to articulate that the hazards of over identification with one’s persona (whether self-assumed or “handed” to ministers by their congregations) inherent in clergy profession are real but not inevitable. He points out that, for clergy, the very difficulty of ministering as a whole person also creates a unique opportunity for self-knowledge and spiritual growth.

faith, *and* the inevitable fluctuations in one's inner spiritual state; and the tension between the expectation to be a special sort of person (not only in their professional but also personal life) *and* the complex realities of one's humanity.⁷⁷ Both Sanford and Coate insist that the external attempts to understand and alleviate clergy stress and burnout are unlikely to succeed unless these inherent tensions of ministry are given intentional attention.

The insights into the dynamics of clergy burnout offered by the scholars and practitioners who focus on the "work conditions" of ministry are expanded and deepened by those who attend to the personality profiles of people entering the ministerial profession. Studies in obsessive-compulsive behavior, psychology of addiction, codependence, and trauma have been brought to bear on the complexities of clergy life and work, revealing that the roots of clergy burnout need to be traced not only to the problematic aspects of the clergy's environment but to the deeper "wounds" in their psychological makeup. This research is particularly helpful for exploration of clergy's notorious struggle with overwork, for understanding why some clergy take on more than they can handle, have hard time saying "no," and work beyond reasonable stopping points. To say that clergy's tendency towards overwork has a *compulsive* component means that psychologically their desire to serve others is driven to some degree by unconscious motives and as such, it is beyond their volitional control. To say that clergy's struggle with overwork bears a similarity to *addiction* implies that to some degree clergy who do too much have habituated to this level of hyperactivity, and experience acute distress when they try to stop working. Finally, to say that clergy's overwork has to do with *codependence* is to point out that the individual clergy's inability to set legitimate limits to their ministry is perpetuated by the

⁷⁷ Mary Anne Coate, *Clergy Stress: The Hidden Conflicts in Ministry* (Great Britain: SPCK, 1989), 88-168.

problematic interpersonal dynamics within their congregations. While none of the scholars who focus on the clergy's psychological health identify individual psychological dysfunction as a single causal factor for clergy burnout, their writings call attention to the fact that for the work of intervention to be successful, the clergy's maladaptive patterns of driven, perfectionistic, and over-commitment need to be given serious consideration.⁷⁸

Yet, scholarly reflection on these aspects of clergy personality does not focus exclusively on their psychological woundedness. A number of practitioners who work with clergy prefer to study the normal variations of the psychological characteristics of people who go into the formal ministry, as a way to understand their propensity towards stress and burnout. The most widely employed instrument for the formal assessment of clergy personality is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).⁷⁹ Application of this tool to ministry has revealed a number of connections between clergy's personality type and their vulnerability to burnout.⁸⁰ First, significant amounts of data have been accumulated on the

⁷⁸ Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 81-98; Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1991), 67-80; Moe, 51-70; Minirth, 59-80, 167-89; Carmen Renee Berry and Mark Lloyd Taylor, *Loving Yourself as Your Neighbor: A Recovery Guide for Christians Escaping Burnout and Codependency*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 11-41; J. Fred Lehr, *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week--and Other Self-Defeating Practices, Prisms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 10-19, 29-47.

⁷⁹ Following the publication of Jung's *Personality Types* in English language, the MBTI was created by a mother and a daughter with keen interest in Jungian psychology. This instrument features four scores along the bi-polar dimensions—extraversion vs. introversion, sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling, and judging vs. perceiving—as a way to assess the person's natural preference for direction of energy (outwards or inwards), a way of gathering information (by using the five senses or via spontaneous comprehension of the whole), a mode of processing information (by applying the impersonal laws of logic or in relationship to people and values), and the preferred orientation to the outer world (desire for closure or open-endedness). These dual axes render possible sixteen combinations of the personal preferred functions or “personality types.” The MBTI was first validated in the 1950s, and then revised in the late 1990s. See Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1980).

⁸⁰ Important books about MBTI include David Keirse and Marilyn M. Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types*, 5th ed. (Del Mar: Prometheus Nemesis, 1984); Otto Kroeger, Janet M. Thuesen, and Hile Rutledge, *Type Talk at Work: How 16 Personality Types Determine Your Success on the*

“types” that are most frequently found in ministry and on their perception of pastoral role and function. Second, there is research that pertains to job satisfaction, perception of stress, coping strategies, and the symptoms of burnout as displayed by different personality types. Third, the influence of personality type has been explored in the most frequent areas of ministerial failure: relational dynamics, leadership styles, and patterns of conflict management. Finally, a connection has been observed between certain MB personality types and the common “pitfalls of ministry,” such as heresy or sexual misconduct. It is important to note that the practitioners who use the MBTI to understand clergy’s vulnerability to burnout emphasize that the personality types are not “boxes to put people in” but rather dynamic and interdependent processes evolving throughout the life of the minister.⁸¹ These scholars call attention to the need to honor the different aspects in clergy psychological makeup as “gifts” that could enhance ministerial effectiveness as well as “potential liabilities” which may predispose ministers to burnout.⁸²

Job, Rev. and updated. ed. (New York: Dell Pub., 2002); Lenore Thomson, *Personality Type: An Owner's Manual* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

⁸¹ The most comprehensive application of the MBTI to religious leadership is offered in Roy M. Oswald and Kroeger Otto, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1988). Other authors who utilize the MBTI for understanding of clergy burnout include Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 62-69; Bruce Gordon Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Feed the Fire!: Avoiding Clergy Burnout* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 139-58; Lehr, 20-28.

⁸² While the MBTI is the most popular instrument among the practitioners, it is not the only one. Other tools that focus on personality preferences and dynamics include the Enneagram, the Biblical lists of varying Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4), The Ministry Styles, The Spiritual Types, and the like. These are not standardized personality inventories, but collections of easily understandable categories that identify people’s primary motivations, significant stressors, and innate coping strategies in ministry: Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 54-62, 69-79; Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure: A Shepherdcare Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2007), 190-200; Judith A. Schwanz, *Blessed Connections: Relationships That Sustain Vital Ministry* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2008), 41-42.

The final contribution of the researchers who examine burnout from the psychological perspective has to do with the work of formal assessment. In the work of several researchers, the various warning signs of ministerial failure have been integrated into a comprehensive description of symptoms of clergy burnout (either in the form of narratives or detailed checklists as they related to the various spheres of clergy life) that could be used for diagnostic purposes.⁸³ Other researchers have explored the connection between burnout and stress, utilizing the existing scales for stress assessment or creating new instruments.⁸⁴ A third group of researchers puts emphasis on clergy's need to develop personal habits of ongoing self-assessment, both as the means of effective prevention of ministerial failure and as an avenue of growth.⁸⁵

⁸³ Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 1-12, 17-26; Lee and Fredrickson, 39-42; Anne Jackson, *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 94-99; Cordeiro, 59-67; Minirth, 225-35; Faulkner, 38-101; G. Lloyd Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2000), 1-14. These researchers draw not only on the studies related to ministry but also on the general data on workplace stress, such as Christina Maslach, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (Cambridge: Malor Books, 2003); Barbara Bailey Reinhold, *Toxic Work: How to Overcome Stress, Overload, and Burnout and Revitalize Your Career* (New York: Dutton, 1996); Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).

⁸⁴ The most popular instrument used for assessment of pastoral stress is The Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale. It was developed by psychiatrists in 1967 on the basis of examination of over 5,000 medical patients as a way to establish correlation between stress and the onset of medical illness; and in later years, this instrument was found valid for different populations in the U.S., as well as cross-culturally. Most practitioners use the scale in its original form. See Charles L. Rassieur, *Stress Management for Ministers*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 20-24; Wilson and Hoffmann, 225-26; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 44-47; Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, 82-85. Roy Oswald, on the other hand, adapts this tool specifically for clergy and clergy spouses: Oswald, 29-35. Other instruments used for assessment include "The Strain Response" (*ibid.*, 36-37.); "The Level of Distress test" (Wilson and Hoffmann, 111-15.); "Pastoral fitness and unfitness quizzes" (Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 9-10.); and "Burnout inventory" (Minirth, 37-38.)

⁸⁵ The majority of these authors recommend a guided journaling practice as the most effective and non-obtrusive way to monitor the dynamics of one's life and ministry. The formats for this practice vary from simple "questions for reflection," to more involved "assessment exercises," to introduction of the "overall

The researchers who engage the psychological resources for understanding clergy burnout far outnumber those who engage other perspectives. The psychological point of view is very important, because it supplements the knowledge of the external pressures of ministry with the more nuanced understanding of the inner pressures and conflicts. Yet, a growing number of researchers argue that, important as it is, the psychological perspective alone is insufficient: because religious belief and practice lie at the core of clergy's professional identity, an explicitly religious point of view is essential. The work of these scholars has deepened the existing conceptualization of ministerial failure in three ways: by identifying the inherent theological tensions of ministry, by calling attention to the frequently misunderstood maxims of Christian living, and by articulating specific beliefs that foster burnout.

Professors Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson propose that there are two essential tensions that characterize any ministry: the tension between the theological ideal of the "one holy apostolic Church" and the far-from-ideal reality of any local congregation; and the tension between ministry as a "God-given calling" and a job. The two poles in each pair cannot be neatly separated: the dignity of one's vocation has to be fulfilled in the messiness of one's job, and the "people of God" never really stop being "people."⁸⁶ Even more importantly, argue Lee and Fredrickson, while seemingly opposed, the "real" and the "ideal" poles of ministry could conceivably serve as important safeguards against stress and burnout, when held in creative tension: remembrance of ministry as a job in a particular

assessment concept." See, for example: Irvine, 181-88; Schwanz, 29-47; Roy M. Oswald, *How to Build a Support System for Your Ministry* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1991), 20-30.

⁸⁶ Lee and Fredrickson, 16-17. The delightful reminder that "God's people...never stop being *people*" comes from Michael Jenkins, *Letters to New Pastors* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2006), 8.

congregation is a powerful antidote against the early naïveté about life and work in the parish; and the vision of ministry as the sacred vocation set in the context of the church's own holiness is a strong remedy against the possible cynicism of the more seasoned pastor. By holding steady to the both sides of the paradox, ministers could learn to navigate the challenges of ministry in ways that are both grounded and inspired.⁸⁷

“Misunderstood maxims” is a broad category that includes particular images, emotions, and attitudes that are deeply influential in the context of Christian religious living. Some of them come from specific biblical texts and others originate in the history of the religious tradition at large. While central for understanding the essence of ministry and virtuous living, the meaning of these maxims is frequently ambiguous. The biblical images of minister—as “priest,” “apostle,” “prophet,” “suffering servant”—are as noble as they are daunting. The biblical exhortation of caring and giving without a concern for the self (John 15:13) is a source of great inspiration, and threat, for any conscientious caregiver. The valued religious pattern of the *Imitatio Christi*, of following the steps of the sacrificial servant who exemplifies God's care and activity in the world, sets forth a compelling, and formidable, paradigm of ministry. The images of the church as a “mother” whose care is boundless, and a “bride” whose purity is unmatched, create heavy expectations on clergy as its primary representatives. Potentially even more troublesome are the biblical mandates concerning the Christian character: when confession of guilt is emphasized (1 Jn. 1:8), weakness—extolled (1 Cor. 12:9), suffering—counted as nothing (2 Cor. 6:9, Jas. 5:7-11), and anger and bitterness—outlawed (Eph. 4:31), and the ultimate vision is described as nothing short of “perfection” (Mt. 5:48), the resulting emotional state of the person trying

⁸⁷ Lee and Fredrickson, 48-84. See also: Schaefer and Jacobsen, 41.

to fulfill them is bound to be problematic. Undeniably, the Bible and tradition feature images of an embodied and less-than-perfect ministry (1 Kings 19, Rom. 7, Lk. 10) and bears witness even to the utmost humanity of Christ (Lk. 22, Jn. 4, Mk. 11, 15), and there is no shortage of the “very human” saints throughout the history of the church. But these images are somehow less prominent in public religious imagination, and the tension between “high” and “low” depictions of ministry is rarely explored. Moreover, because these guiding images, emotions, and attitudes only rarely become a subject of conscious reflection, their influence on the ministerial behavior and understanding of pastoral identity is particularly powerful.⁸⁸

In contrast to the pressures generated by the misunderstood tenets of religious tradition from without, individual ministers could also suffer from the burdens that are imposed from within. Their personal beliefs about the nature of work and their responsibility towards it could play a significant role in fostering an attitude that disallows rest—even in the face of mounting physical fatigue and sound rational understanding: “if I don’t do it, it won’t get done”; “no one will do it as well as I can”; “if I say ‘no,’ there will be negative consequences”; “I don’t have a right to rest until everything is done”; “if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well,” and so on. Strictly speaking, these statements are not theological in nature. Yet, because they reflect the individual ministers’ core assumptions about who they are, what kind of world they live in, and what line of action would ensure their well-being in the world, these mental habits do function as a powerful

⁸⁸ For a deeply insightful reflection on how the biblical texts and themes in religious tradition that exacerbate the emotional strain of ministry, see Coate, 37-40, 44-48, 94-103, 41-68. For examples of congregational expectations that reinforce the “Messiah complex,” “walk-on-water syndrome,” and other “superhuman” views of ministry, see Bratcher, 22-46; Berry and Taylor, 11-18, 29-41; Chandler, 11-12.

“pseudo-theology,” the rules and principles that govern their behavior. Usually learned early in life, these operational beliefs are especially hard to change because they exercise their power not through intellectual persuasion but emotional pressure.⁸⁹

The theological perspective on clergy burnout reveals that effective measures against burnout must go beyond addressing the unhealthy habits of living and problematic psychological dynamics between clergy and their congregations. It underscores the need to reflect on the deeper theological climate of ministry: the ambiguity of religious language, the inherent contradictions of religious way of life and identity, and clergy’s personal beliefs about work and rest. Theologically speaking, an effective antidote against burnout must include a mature theology of ministry.

The final perspective on clergy burnout comes not from the application of the resources of particular discipline (medicine, psychology, theology) for understanding of its causes, but from the deliberate stepping back and looking at clergy struggle with stress and overwork against the backdrop of the cultural and socio-economic developments of society in recent years. Drawing on his extensive phenomenological study with the clergy of the Church of Scotland, and his subsequent theoretical research of pastoral ministry in Canada, the United States, and Scotland, Andrew Irvine highlights the emergence of two additional stressors that affect clergy’s work in recent years. On the one hand, the dramatic changes in contemporary society (rise of mass-media, consumerism, vast recreational industry, scientific discoveries, religious pluralism, and increasing secularization, etc.) means that

⁸⁹ For a short but insightful reflection on beliefs that foster burnout, see Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 29-31. See also John S. Savage, *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Pastors, Counselors, and Small Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 117-40. Savage calls such deeply held beliefs “life commandments.”

clergy have to work much harder than before to reach, attract, and retain people in their congregations. On the other hand, the corresponding shift in the role of the Christian church itself (from being a normative shaper of culture to a minority sub-culture) poses difficult questions about the identity, influence, or even value of ministerial profession. As a result, clergy have to struggle not only with the increased workload, but also with the inner doubts about the purpose and significance of their lives.⁹⁰

It is important to note that Irvine and other scholars who identify the changes in the socio-economic milieu of contemporary society as an important causal factor in clergy stress do not argue that these changes are inherently injurious to ministerial well-being. Rather, they only insist that these changes have taken place in a dramatically short span of time, and that their stress-producing effect is exacerbated by the lack of explicit reflection on these issues.⁹¹ From this point of view, an effective response to clergy burnout requires not only the in-depth study of the congregational dynamics of ministry, the personality characteristics of the ministerial candidates, and mature theological reflection, but a careful consideration of the larger context of the society as a whole. It calls for an intentional raising and addressing of questions about the meaning of ministerial identity and the skills of leadership for the once-dominant community that is becoming a minority, as well as a

⁹⁰ Irvine, 49-85.

⁹¹ Schaefer and Jacobsen, 46; Carroll and McMillan, 13-16, 31-56; Pappas, 113-37; Victor L. Hunter, *Desert Hearts and Healing Fountains: Gaining Pastoral Vocational Clarity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 3-24; Bratcher, 35; Michael J. Fanstone, *The Sheep That Got Away* (Tunbridge Wells: MARC, 1993). For an in-depth historical overview of the changing status of the clergy in the American society, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, see E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America, Pulpit & Pew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

thorough rethinking about the kinds of gifts that the minority church could offer to the secular society.

Reflecting on clergy burnout within the medical, psychological, theological, and broader cultural frameworks make it possible to gain insight into the complex nature of ministerial failure. As such, the contributions made by the academic scholars and caregiving practitioners are crucial. Their narrow focus and ability to engage diverse disciplinary resources for understanding the etiology of burnout is a unique strength of this context of origin. Yet, the weakness of these proposals is, once more, the opposite side of their strength: the specificity of expertise required for carrying out the analytical process stands in the way of seeing the “big picture.” To be properly understood, the work of these researchers needs to be placed in conversation with those who seek to comprehend the meaning of clergy burnout for the life of the church at large.

Proposals from Ecclesiastical Leaders

The gifts from the larger ecclesial community for understanding of clergy burnout come from bishops and other denominational leaders: members of various programs, boards, commissions, and working groups. By virtue of their particular status, these people are at the greatest distance from the problem: while not infrequently ordained themselves, they are no longer immersed in the daily realities of parish ministry but occupy positions in which they are called to guide, supervise, and minister to ministers. Far from being a hindrance, however, such remote positioning is precisely the strength of this context of origin: in their answer to the “what is going on” question, ecclesial leaders complement the “insider” view offered by clergy themselves with the disciplined look “from without”

provided by the academic scholars and care-giving practitioners who have a capacity to reflect on the deeper significance of clergy burnout for the church and the lives of its clergy.

The most problematic effect of clergy burnout on the church at large comes in the form of the harmful consequences of ministerial failure for clergy themselves, their families and local congregations. The aforementioned Pulpit and Pew research of the nearly 1,000 Protestant clergy from five mainline denominations revealed that twelve percent of all clergy who left the ministry did so for the reasons of burnout.⁹² Given the shortage of ordained ministers in most denominations, this is an alarming number. Furthermore, this number does not reflect the clergy who already experience various symptoms of burnout but still remain in active ministry.⁹³ Even evangelical denominations that traditionally seemed “immune” from burnout are now affected.⁹⁴ Reflecting on burnout as the “disease of the overcommitted,” Roy Oswald argues that it causes the church to lose not merely some of its members, but some of its *most dedicated* leaders.⁹⁵

Significant as it is, the damage done to individual clergy and the resultant harm to their families and congregations are not the only costs of burnout. The decline of ministerial well-being is quickly becoming a growing fiscal burden on denominational budgets. For example, in 2009, the self-insured Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expected that forty percent of its estimated \$175 million in medical claims could have been avoided through lifestyle choices, closer management of chronic conditions, and preventive care.

⁹² Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, 115-29.

⁹³ Lee and Fredrickson, 42.

⁹⁴ Jackson, 29-60; Cordeiro, 11-41.

⁹⁵ Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, v-vii.

These numbers, paralleled by the estimates of other denominations, reveal that clergy burnout is indeed a costly affliction.⁹⁶ Yet, there is a deeper and seldom spoken about price of clergy burnout. It comes in the form of the corrosion of pastoral competence, moral values, and overarching attitude to ministry in clergy who, for various reasons, cannot afford to leave. Such “silent” ministerial failure leads to the loss of respect for the church, deterioration of relationships with God and ability to worship, and the various forms of ministerial misconduct. Commonly hidden until it reaches its most critical point, this is the greatest cost of clergy burnout.⁹⁷

The value of the “big picture” revealed by the ecclesial leaders who write about clergy burnout has to do not only with the computation of how much clergy burnout costs the church, but also with the honest assessment of the church’s own contribution to this problem and its responsibility for creating a healthier environment for ministry. The traditional emphasis on the “messianic” images of ministry, the pastor-centered view of the local congregation, and institutionalization of addictive and codependent behaviors are some of the key ways that the church contributes to propagating the very disease it is trying to address. Additionally, the tendency to underestimate the ecclesiastical responsibility for individual clergy’s burnout, the attitude of mistrust towards mental health professionals, and the lack of intentional allocation of communal resources for ministerial recovery and

⁹⁶ Zylstra, 17; Lehr, 3-5.

⁹⁷ In the aftermath of financial and sexual scandals that have come to light in the church in recent decades, the literature on clergy misconduct is abounding, and a number of authors point to burnout as a frequent factor in its occurrence: Beth Ann Gaede and Candace Reed Benyei, *When a Congregation Is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2006); John Thoburn, Rob Baker, and Maria Dal Maso, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight*, 1st ed. (Carefree: Gentle Path Press, 2011); Peter T. Mosgofian and George W. Ohlschlager, *Sexual Misconduct in Counseling and Ministry, Contemporary Christian Counseling* (Dallas: Word, 1995).

welfare leaves clergy without the much needed support in times of crisis. Finally, there is a growing awareness that theologically, burnout in the church, for clergy and laity alike, should be traced back to an inadequate theology of sacrifice, stewardship, and grace.⁹⁸

While the “big picture” painted by the ecclesiastical leaders about the negative impact of clergy burnout on the larger church is what one might reasonably expect, their reflection on the deeper significance of burnout for the individual clergy takes two surprising turns. First, a number of denominational leaders call attention to the possibility of the *positive* outcome of burnout. Drawing on their experience of working with numerous burned out clergy, Lynne Baab, Catherine and Bruce Epperly, and Roy Oswald observe that burnout has a “redemptive side.” The intense pain and disorientation that it produces serve as a powerful motivation for a process of in-depth examination of one’s life and ministry. The fruit of this journey is a renewed sense of vision and vitality, life-giving changes in clergy’s personal life, ministry, and deepened knowledge of God.⁹⁹ Offering testimonies about their own frightening “shutdown” that followed the years of overwork, Kirk Byron Jones and Wayne Cordeiro speak about the teaching power of burnout. Both are convinced that burnout “saved” their lives as persons of God and ministers of the Word. Their subsequent service in the church, not just to their parishioners but to other clergy and the church at large, has been profoundly shaped by the burnout’s hard-learned lessons.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, vi, 8-10, 104-11; Lehr, 29-58; Rediger, *Coping with Clergy Burnout*, 11-56; Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001), 12-21; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 67-74.

⁹⁹ Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, ix-x; Epperly and Epperly, 5-10; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, 9-12; Cordeiro, 101-44.

Comparing burnout to St. Ignatius's notion of "spiritual desolation," a Jesuit Robert Sabath sees it as a "crucible of conversion," the time in life when one's illusions, false expectations, and excessive identification with the results of one's work are being de-established and removed. He points out that burnout has the equal potential for making people "cynics" or "saints": even as both have the deep knowledge of the discouraging realities of the world's suffering and their own shattered hopes and expectations, for the latter, each failure becomes another step towards placing all hopes in God alone. As such, burnout is an invitation to the ever-deepening journey of maturing in faith.¹⁰¹ These perspectives on clergy burnout do not downplay the reality of its painful suffering and the ever real possibility of destructive outcome; rather, they point out that burnout can become a "gift," because the very pain that it generates can provide the powerful driving force on the path of pastoral transformation.

The second surprising supposition about clergy burnout comes from the United Methodist bishop William Willimon (later joined by the ethicist Stanley Hauerwas). Willimon suggests that the real cause of burnout is not the commonly discussed problem of stress and overwork, but the dissipation of commitment. Drawing on the little known work on burnout by sociologist Ellen Maher, Willimon points out that energies expended in behalf of "meaningful social involvements" have nourishing effect on the persons who perform them. People usually find plenteous time for activities to which they are highly committed, do not perceive them as "work," and are energized (rather than depleted) by them. In contrast, there is usually little energy and time for activities that lack personal commitment; people tend to see them not only as "work" but as "drudgery," with

¹⁰¹ Robert Sabath, "Burnout: A Hazard of Community Life," *Sojourners* 10 (1981).

exhausting and demoralizing effects. From this point of view, the ultimate cause of clergy burnout is revealed not as over-involvement but as under-commitment: the diminution of physical and emotional energy characteristic of ministerial failure becomes manifest not because the demanding nature of ministry has drained all of the clergy's available "energy reserves," but rather because ministry has ceased to produce the "energy infusion" that they experience under the conditions of high commitment.¹⁰²

But why would clergy, whose ministerial journey almost always starts with deep loyalty and devotion, undergo loss of commitment at such an alarmingly high rate? Willimon traces the dissipation of pastoral commitment to the lack of a clearly articulated and commonly upheld understanding of pastoral identity and vocation. In the absence of clarity and consensus about who ministers are (and are not) and what ministers do (and do not do), clergy cannot help but fall prey to the cultural images of ambition and success, ill-defined congregational expectations, and their own ideas about the scope of good ministry.

¹⁰² In her analysis of contemporary work on burnout, Ellen Maher observes that most contemporary discussions of burnout have a shared theoretical assumption: that human energy is a limited resource. She refers to this "scarcity approach" to understanding human energy as Freudian (given Sigmund Freud's understanding of libido as easily depleted) and contrast it with the "expansion approach," best exemplified by the work of Emile Durkheim. Maher argues that the Durkheimian theoretical position is more fruitful for understanding and treating burnout: if we view burnout as an irreparable exhaustion of a limited resource, little besides healthy withdrawal can be recommended as an antidote; if, on the other hand, we see it as an outcome of impaired commitment, then rekindling of commitment could offer numerous possibilities for its renewal. It is interesting to note, however, that even as Maher clearly prefers the Durkheimian model to its Freudian counterpart, she admits that in their understanding of the *effects* of burnout upon the individual, both models are "fully pessimistic." Thus, while she draws on the work of Emile Durkheim and the contemporary interpreter of his work, Stephen Marks, for articulation of the alternative theoretical model, in order to develop her own positive view of burnout, Maher engages the resources of theology, especially the Catholic notion of purgatory. Ellen L. Maher, "Burnout and Commitment: A Theoretical Alternative," *Personnel & Guidance Journal* 61, no. 7 (1983); Ellen L. Maher, "Burnout: Metaphors of Destruction and Purgation," *Soundings* 72, no. 1 (1989); Emile Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1951); Stephen R. Marks, "Multiple Roles and Role Strain: Some Notes on Human Energy, Time and Commitment," *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977).

At the same time, in the absence of the clearly articulated and ecclesiastically shared understanding of the purpose and the scope of the ordained ministry, both individual clergy and their communities continue to search for some plausible way to capture the essence of ministerial occupation. And most frequently, argues Willimon, clergy's work ends up being fundamentally defined as "boundless compassion and care."¹⁰³ While almost poetically beautiful, such definition is deeply problematic. When ministry is conceived as "limitless care," the ministerial commitment becomes harder and harder to sustain: as congregations begin to assume that ministers are "paid basically to do nothing other than to be kind," and clergy begin to respond to such expectations by trying to be all-caring and compassionate, the latter are placed in the position of utmost vulnerability and their ministry becomes a dangerously "draining activity."¹⁰⁴

By tracing ministerial failure to the gradual process of dissipation of commitment, Willimon's position represents a radical departure from the traditional emphasis on stress and overwork as a key factor in the etiology of burnout. Yet, it is important to note that this radical departure does not make his work completely incongruent with the insights into the causes of burnout identified by other scholars, practitioners, and the clergy themselves. Willimon does agree that the extraordinary relational and occupational complexity of ministry, the clergy's psychological woundedness, the institutional decline of the church, the loss of the pastor's cultural status, and plethora of other individual- and society-related factors have a negative influence on ministerial performance. He argues, however, that

¹⁰³ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, "The Limits of Care: Burnout as an Ecclesial Issue," *Word & World* 10, no. 3 (1990).

¹⁰⁴ William H. Willimon, *Clergy and Laity Burnout, Creative Leadership Series* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Willimon, *Calling & Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life*.

clergy's inability to withstand and respond constructively to these factors is not entirely due to their individual deficiencies, but rather a sign of greater malaise that affect the church as a whole. Similarly, Willimon does not deny the possibility of the positive outcome of burnout, pointed out by other denominational leaders. Together with them, he observes that the painful process of burning out can become a necessary means of powerful pastoral transformation. However, he also argues that the positive potential of burnout cannot be limited to the area of personal growth (no matter how important). From his point of view, both the "problem" and the "possibility" of clergy burnout is bigger: it is an invitation to restore and purify the theological rationale for the purpose of ordained ministry in the church, and in so doing to bring forth the renewal of the whole people of God. As such, Willimon's is truly a big picture of clergy burnout. By locating individual clergy's work and rest on the larger canvas of the church's existence, he reveals burnout as an ecclesial issue.

Conclusions

In this section, I reviewed the current literature on clergy burnout in relation to the context of origin of its authors: clergy themselves, academic scholars and care-giving practitioners, and denominational leaders. In conclusion, I share two observations about these texts and my understanding of how my own research could advance their important work.

My first observation pertains to the very *diversity* of the contexts of origin. Hardly any other issue in ministerial practice has received such attention from all segments of the church population. Without a doubt, the tremendous variation in location in which the contemporary reflection on ministerial failure is taking place is a strong asset. It allows one to view clergy burnout from different perspectives, engage a range of specialized resources

for its analysis, and imagine a solution within various disciplinary paradigms. In a very real sense, the diverse origins of the contemporary discussion of clergy burnout are the foundation of its richness. However, the diversity of sources is also problematic. *Practically speaking*, the representatives of different contexts of origin rarely have a chance to engage each other's work. Generally, their professional locale determines the boundaries of their primary community, and these boundaries are only infrequently crossed. The lack of communication between parish clergy, academic researchers, care-giving practitioners, and denominational authorities makes hearing of different perspectives and exchange of ideas difficult. Hence, unless intentionally addressed, the richness of thought and disciplinary resources made possible by the diversity of the contexts of origin remains underutilized due to the practical realities of professional separation. At the same time, *theoretically*, the representatives of various contexts of origin cannot help but approach the problem of clergy burnout within the framework of concerns and questions that are operative in their specific areas of research. When parish clergy, academic scholars, theological educators, care-giving practitioners, and denominational leaders reflect on ministerial failure, the issues in relation to which their reflection is shaped span across topics ranging from congregational leadership, to ministerial growth, to theological education, to pastoral theology, and beyond. The sheer variety of disciplinary headings under which the problem of clergy burnout is examined makes a systematic understanding of the problem very difficult. Hence, unless intentionally addressed, the rich discussion made possible by the diversity of scholarly perspectives is impoverished by their theoretical fragmentation.

Ideally, the realities of practical separation and theoretical fragmentation that characterize the contemporary work on clergy burnout could be addressed through creation of an interdisciplinary community, a gathering of researchers from different ecclesial locations who are explicitly focused on the topic of ministerial failure and who are intentional about breaching the boundaries of their professional guilds. Such community would allow for exchange of ideas, mutuality of exposure to different theoretical frameworks, and practical collaboration on projects related to research and intervention. It would facilitate the dialogue that is lacking in contemporary literature on clergy burnout. In short, an interdisciplinary community of researchers would make the most of the benefits of diversity, while minimizing its problems.

Realistically, as a single researcher, I cannot fashion a community, an actual gathering of the living persons. I can, however, contribute to the creation of the “community of insight” by gathering together the knowledge about ministerial failure that comes from people who are situated in the diverse professional contexts in “one place” of my dissertation manuscript. My research positioning is uniquely suited for such work. On the one hand, my own scholarly identity is multivalent in nature: I am an ordained minister of the Russia United Methodist Church, a scholar of practical theology, a practitioner of pastoral care and religious education, a doctoral student who studies and participates in theological education, and a person with experience of working in denominational structures.¹⁰⁵ As such, I am something of an “insider” to the worlds of clergy themselves,

¹⁰⁵ In my ‘mixed origins’ and bi-valent scholarly identity, I am not unlike a Jungian analyst and Anglican priest John Sanford, a seminary professor and clinical psychologist Anne Coate, Lutheran pastor and a director of the Clergy Wellness Center Fred Lehr, a practical theologian, theological educator, and ordained minister in the United Church of Christ Bruce Epperly, and a United Methodist Bishop and professor Will Willimon. Their bi- or tri-valent identities lend particular depth and insight to their reflection on clergy stress and burnout. There is an important difference between my work and theirs, however: whereas they bring to

academic scholars, care-giving practitioners, and denominational leaders, and can therefore enter those contexts, understand their language, and faithfully communicate their knowledge to the wider community. On the other hand, my research is focused explicitly on the topic of clergy burnout: in this manuscript I engage the problem of clergy burnout not as a secondary topic in another broad area of study, but as a subject matter as an end in itself. Such shift requires that I engage in a careful process of reading and in-depth reflection on the work of writers from different contexts of origin in order to discover, distill, and bring together the essential aspects and implications of their understanding. My work is an exercise in intentional integration of this knowledge, with the purpose of identifying critical issues, underlying patterns of thought, and emergent research directions in the contemporary literature on clergy burnout as a whole. As such, in a small but important way my work addresses the realities of theoretical fragmentation and practical disconnect that characterize the contemporary work on clergy burnout. Akin to an actual gathering of people, the “community of insight” created on the pages of my manuscript allows making the most of the benefits of diversity, while minimizing its problems.¹⁰⁶

bear their personal experience and knowledge of various contexts upon their understanding of burnout, I am intentional about seeking out the formal research on burnout that comes from those contexts. As such, my work is greater in scope and permits a more systematic integration.

¹⁰⁶ A somewhat similar approach to reflecting on the challenges of pastoral ministry is taken by the aforementioned monograph by Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson: the exposition of each chapter of their book is followed by a three-part postscript, a collection of practical suggestions addressed specifically to pastors, congregations, and seminarians; additionally, at the end of their book, they share a collection of “personal letters” from pastors and their families. In this way, Lee and Fredrickson “bring together” in discussion of joys and challenges of ministry the seminarians, lay members of the church, active clergy, and even the often neglected voices of their family members. Yet, there is an important difference between their work and mine: the community of insight that Lee and Fredrickson create on the pages of their monograph is focused primarily on gathering and sharing of *practical* resources for addressing pastoral stress and burnout. In my work of listening to the diverse contributors to the contemporary discourse on burnout, I seek to develop an in-depth *theoretical* understanding of rest and burnout as a foundation for practical intervention.

My second observation has to do with the explicitly religious contribution to the understanding of burnout. As discussed earlier, the surprising discovery of my literature review is that religious leaders seem to recognize the positive potential of burnout with much more readiness than psychologists, among whom the concept of burnout was originally developed. I believe this surprise to be understandable, even legitimate. First of all, by virtue of their positioning, the religious people view burnout not just in the context and relationship to work, but in the context and relationship to human life as a whole. As such, their reflection is more likely to take place within the wider framework of theological anthropology than the narrower framework of medical care. Because the religious understanding of reality has a broader angle of vision, it is only natural that it is capable of revealing more: not only the negative but also the positive dimensions of the burnout phenomenon. Furthermore, the religious observation of human life has a history that is much longer than the history of the contemporary discipline of psychology. As such, religious traditions contain descriptions of human experience—both positive and negative—which psychologists simply have not yet had the time to accumulate. These “varieties of religious experience” form an invaluable background for elucidating the dynamics of burnout, even though it appears to be a contemporary malaise. Hence, Robert Sabath can compare burnout to St. Ignatius’s notion of “spiritual desolation,” or Loren Sanford can be guided by St. John of the Cross’s reflections on the “dark night of the soul.”

In contrast, psychology, as a younger art, lacks similar resources to draw on. Hence, to articulate their alternative understanding of burnout and identify constructive ways to respond to its destructive potential, the psychologist Ayala Pines adopts an “existential perspective” on burnout, and the sociologist Ellen Maher draws on the Catholic notion of

purgatory. And, even the key figures of the burnout field, such as Christina Maslach, Wilmar Schaufeli, and Barry Farber, continue to raise the question of whether burnout is truly a new phenomenon or simply the “old wine in new bottles.”¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the value of religious understandings of burnout may not be limited merely to the clergy in need. The religious community could be seen as a “memory-keeper,” people who do not allow the rest of the society to forget about the hidden value of dark and painful experiences. Sharing of this memory could constitute a unique religious contribution to the contemporary social scientific discourse on burnout.

However, while communal remembering of the positive value of the negative experiences is essential, the memory alone is not sufficient. In order to be of practical assistance to clergy and a valid contribution to the broader scholarly understanding of the burnout phenomenon, the “ancient truths” must be rediscovered in the realities of our own contemporary existence. And it is precisely that which is lacking in the religious literature on burnout: while a number of authors affirm the possibility of the positive outcome of burnout and its strong potential for transformation, the actual disciplined records of such experiences, in-depth reflection on their internal dynamics, and analysis of the conditions which determine the difference between the simply “losing one’s life” to burnout and “losing one’s life in order to find it” are absent.

My research is uniquely suited to play a part in filling of this gap. In studying my own experience of burnout, I describe the complex factors that influenced the onset of this process, examine its internal dynamics and outer effects on my work and life, and identify the conditions that were essential for my recovery. Yet, my subjective story is not merely

¹⁰⁷ 3, 9-11, Schaufeli, 36-37 ; farber, ix

a psychological reflection on the “symptoms and cures” of burnout. Rather, it is an attempt to integrate valuable psychological insights into a larger framework that is provided by the explicitly religious tradition of resting. As such, the constructive contribution of my research is two-fold. On the one hand, my dissertation is a “contemporary record” of the experience that corroborates the basic religious avowal of the positive value of the negative experiences: it reaffirms the alternative view of burnout as a meaningful experience rather than simply an unfortunate failure of job performance. On the other hand, my dissertation is a “work of research” that is aimed at disciplined and systematic exploration of the dark and obscure terrain of the transformative experiences: it goes beyond the stages of disillusionment and deadening, and towards the phases of illumination and revitalization of work and life, seeking to describe not only for the way *in* but also for the way *out*. By offering a testimony to the truthfulness of the spiritual narratives of purification, I stand embedded in the religious community that has brought me up; by bringing to bear the powers of scholarly observation and in-depth reflection on this experience, I take it one small step further.

3.2 Context of Amelioration: Proposals for Clergy, Local Congregations, Denominational Structures, and Theological Education

Proposals for addressing the problem of clergy burnout have been envisioned within four primary locations: lives of individual ministers, local congregations, larger denominational structures, and theological education. This is an important way to understand current research because the context of amelioration raises the question about the *most effective target population*, that is, discernment of the setting that offers the most favorable

conditions for addressing the problem and requires the most immediate attention. The key question that these proposals seek to address is “what do we hope for?”

Proposals for Individual Clergy

Proposals that identify the lives of individual clergy as the primary context for addressing burnout call for change in the lifestyle and habits of ministry. By making clergy themselves a target population for their efforts, these proposals answer the “what do we hope for” question with simplicity and focus. For them, the ultimate normative objective is the *well-being of individual pastors* in the messy realities of ministry. Six facets of ministerial well-being have received special attention: physical, emotional, intellectual, vocational, social, and spiritual. These facets correspond to the key issues associated with ministerial failure. Therefore, attending to them in a systematic manner has the potential not merely to address the problem of clergy burnout but to increase the likelihood of holistic health.¹⁰⁸

Physical well-being is the most fundamental aspect of the clergy’s health. It is also the one most readily sacrificed. Therefore, raising awareness about the discrepancy between clergy’s perception of their own health and the actuality of their physical condition is a starting point for enhancing their physical well-being.¹⁰⁹ Once the consciousness of the

¹⁰⁸ In later sections I will cite individual texts that concern themselves with the specific facets of ministerial well-being, but here I indicate the authors who offer a helpful overview of them together: Halaas, 1-65; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 9-123; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 1-63; Jackson, 121-65; Faulkner, 59-112. Also, the books by Richard Swenson, M.D., who reflects on importance of having a “margin” in each of those areas for healthy living has been widely appreciated in the pastoral literature: Richard A. Swenson, *In Search of Balance: Keys to a Stable Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010); Richard A. Swenson, *A Minute of Margin: Restoring Balance to Busy Lives*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003); Richard A. Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live within Your Limits* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998).

¹⁰⁹ Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, head researcher of the Clergy Health Initiative at Duke University, offers two possible explanations for the discrepancy between the objective measures of clergy’s health and clergy’s subjective perception. On the one hand, the physical demands of clergy’s occupation (“get into a car to drive

need is established, clergy are invited to reflect on their daily choices in food, movement, adequate rest, nutritional supplementation and their impact on their health. The final task of addressing clergy's physical health is theological. A number of researchers emphasize that even the best of insights and resolutions are not sufficient to engender lasting changes in clergy physical well-being unless they also address the important issues of pastoral conviction and belief, such as engagement with the issues of stewardship and appropriate and responsible forms of sacrifice, theology of the body, and the Sabbath.¹¹⁰

Emotional well-being is the second frequently neglected facet of clergy's health. In part, this is so because by virtue of their profession, clergy are placed in position of caring for others: while they often develop strong awareness and skills in responding to the emotional needs of other people, they frequently lack awareness and familiarity with their own feelings. Additionally, the traditional religious emphasis on restraint and perseverance as a part of spiritual living, especially with regards to the feelings traditionally regarded as incompatible with the ideals of the Christian living (e.g., anger, anxiety, doubt, loneliness, despair, lust), set against the backdrop of the larger cultural mistrust of emotions as irrational and therefore disruptive or even dangerous, further inhibits ministers' ability to actively explore the dynamics of their emotional life. Two primary objectives have been identified in addressing clergy's emotional health: clergy are encouraged to develop the basic awareness and familiarity with their personal emotional palette, and to reflect on the

to the hospital, sit down to write a sermon") are minimal, so clergy may not realize how poor their health is, until the time of acute crisis. On the other hand, clergy tend to spiritualize their physical well-being, mistakenly measuring their overall condition by how they feel spiritually. Frykholm, 22.

¹¹⁰ For example, Halaas, 14-26; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 38-61; Cordeiro, 113-39; Lee and Fredrickson, 108-27, 203-06; Wilson and Hoffmann, 170-89; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 64-94; Irvine, 182-83; Schwanz, 35-45; Epperly and Epperly, 23-45; Minirth, 103-07.

impact that the prevalent religious and cultural stereotypes about feelings have on their habits of ministry. The ideal of emotional well-being is not clergy who feel good all the time, but rather clergy who have developed sufficient self-knowledge and mature ability to understand, accept, and properly respond to the full spectrum of their own emotions, and who have acquired the skills of using this knowledge in service of their ministry.¹¹¹

Intellectual well-being is a complex dimension of clergy's health. On the one hand, clergy belong to the segment of the population who achieve high levels of professional education and performance. On the other hand, the context in which clergy exercise their mental powers is usually limited to the work of ministry. Thus, the problem with clergy's intellectual well-being has to do not with the lack of intellectual development but with the excessive narrowing of its focus. As such, the primary ways in which the researchers imagine improvement have to do with the expansion of the concentration and cognitive functioning through the intentional pursuit of leisure: cultivation of hobbies (especially related to the more artistic and tactile ways of processing information), recovery of reading for pleasure, and practice of mindfulness. Not surprisingly, most clergy experience these recommendations as intensely unsettling; the pursuit of music or painting appears as a blasphemous suggestion when "the harvest is ripe but the workers are few." The literature uniformly suggests, however, that when clergy consciously explore the origins of their unease and commit to these activities in the face of apprehension, the pursuit of leisure is

¹¹¹ See for example, Halaas, 21-35; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 95-117; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 83-100; Irvine, 184-85; Minirth, 47-58, 109-25, 99-209. A deeply insightful reflection on clergy's attitude towards feelings in the context of myth and ritual is offered by Coate, 169-91. Henri Nouwen's "secret journal," written during the most trying time of his life, stands as a powerful testimony to the painful and grace-filled dynamics of emotional growth for clergy: Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey through Anguish to Freedom*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

known not merely to increase their mental capacity, but to bring renewed vision, wisdom and resilience to the work of ministry itself.¹¹²

The problem of clergy's vocational well-being is paradoxical. It has to do not with overt omission and neglect, but habitual over-investment. While clergy often take special pride in their deep commitment to ministry, such situation is not unproblematic. Not only does it deprive other areas of clergy's lives of the much needed attention, but in the end, it leads to the impoverishment of the work of ministry itself. Therefore, far from being commended and encouraged in their patterns of over-commitment, clergy are being challenged to explore the darker side of their motivation for ministry. In particular, clergy are asked to undertake a conscious and critical reflection on two sets of factors that make them vulnerable before overwork: the aspects of their personality and personal history that contribute to their inability to establish (or even recognize) healthy limits; and the changing shape of ministerial profession in the church and society at large. Both researchers and care-giving practitioners alike affirm that an in-depth assessment of individual and cultural "triggers" for doing too much, conscious development of the personally significant definition of pastoral ministry, and sound criteria for judging its quality is key to the revitalized and lasting sense of clergy's vocational well-being.¹¹³

¹¹² Minirth, 191-98; Halaas, 36-41; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 62-82; Irvine, 183-84; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 95-117; Epperly and Epperly, 47-63. Rediger especially connects the clergy's mental well-being with brain research, self-awareness, and the exercise of mindfulness. The foundational text on mindfulness often cited in pastoral literature is Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Delta Trade, 2005).

¹¹³ Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 13-37; Halaas, 52-58, 90-98; Irvine, 187-90; Lee and Fredrickson, 64-84, 200-02, 34-37; Wilson and Hoffmann, 65-99; Hunter, 71-149. Several authors seek to offer support for clergy's vocational well-being by providing them with texts that have been traditionally used by the church for setting forth the vision of pastoral ministry. For example, Bishop Willimon offers a noteworthy collection of readings on the essential tasks and roles of ordained ministry, with contributing voices spanning from St.

Not unlike the problem with clergy's vocational well-being, the difficulty with social and spiritual dimensions of clergy's health is marked by a deep paradox. Clergy are involved with many people; but in their personal testimonies they often speak of loneliness and isolation. They are called to provide spiritual leadership; but they themselves often lack spiritual nurture. In both instances, as researchers point out, the difficulty has to do with the *role* of the pastor overshadowing the *person* of the pastor. The heightened social and spiritual demands of ministerial profession get in the way of the personally significant connection with people and God. Moreover, clergy's lack of self-knowledge, unresolved personal issues, as well as the instances of the previous violation of relational trust and underlying ambivalence about the authority of the pastoral office itself, frequently deepen such imbalance even further: the *person* of the pastor may make an unconscious choice to "hide" in the shadow of his or her *role*. Therefore, the proposals for enhancing clergy's social and spiritual well-being share an important similarity: they emphasize that the genuine fulfillment of clergy's social and spiritual needs as *persons* is foundational for their effectiveness as *ministers*.

In response to this normative objective three kinds of practical recommendations have been made for enhancing clergy's social well-being. First, clergy are encouraged to take an honest look at the quality of their relationships, reflecting in particular not only on

Gregory the Great to Rev. Barbara Brown-Taylor: William H. Willimon, *Pastor: A Reader for Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). In contrast, Marva Dawn and Eugene Petersen argue that the ultimate purpose of the pastor is to be "unnecessary," whether for in meeting the cultural and ecclesiastical expectations or clergy's own views about the status of ordained ministry: Marva J. Dawn, Eugene H. Peterson, and Peter Santucci, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). David Rohrer echoes this proposal, setting the example of John the Baptist as a paradigm for true ministry: David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry: Preparing a People for the Presence of the Lord* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012).

the *number* relationships in their life but also on their *depth*, and becoming intentional about cultivating personally meaningful connections.¹¹⁴ Second, clergy are urged to engage in deeper soul-searching, by identifying their personal reasons that account for their isolation and consciously exploring the deeper issues of power and sexuality in ministry.¹¹⁵ The third group of recommendations for improving clergy's social well-being has to do not with the ministers themselves but with their immediate family: clergy are invited to reflect and, in collaboration with their spouses and children, discern creative and faithful ways to respond to the unique challenges presented by the pastoral identity and occupation (e.g., insufficient income, frequent relocation, blurred boundaries between congregation and family, loss of privacy, unspoken expectations, and the need to uphold a public image) to their life together.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Such assessment frequently reveals that ministers are involved in an overwhelming number of relationships that place acute demands on their time and energy: on the one end of this spectrum are the relationships that are predominantly external in nature and allow only for a limited meaningful interaction (e.g., shaking hands with over a hundred people after the service); and on the other end of the spectrum are the relationships that are deep and significant but center on the performance of the key ministerial functions (e.g., offering pastoral care to individuals and families during critical times in their lives). Yet, the connections that are both meaningful and nourishing (e.g., occurrences of significant friendships or interactions in which the minister is on the "receiving" side) are commonly lacking, or even non-existent. Daniel and Copenhaver, 8-17; Halaas, 43-51; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 101-23; Irvine, 89-142, 85-86; Lee and Fredrickson, 148-69; Minirth, 269-98; Schwanz, 9-27, 65-128; Wilson and Hoffmann, 33-64.

¹¹⁵ Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?: The Story of a Pastor, the Women He Sexually Abused, and the Congregation He Nearly Destroyed*, United Church Press ed. (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999); J. Stephen Muse, *Beside Still Waters: Resources for Shepherds in the Market Place* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000); James N. Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); Irvine, 89-113. These researchers argue that clergy's self-knowledge and awareness of the deeper emotional and power dynamics in ministry would enable them to build the relationships that counter the feelings of isolation, sustain pastoral work, and serve as an critical safeguard against inappropriate forms of intimacy and sexual misconduct.

¹¹⁶ Ron King, "Living in the Fishbowl," in *Besides Still Waters*, ed. J. Stephen Muse (Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2000); Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *The Winds of Promise: Building and Maintaining Strong Clergy Families*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007); D. R. Mace and Vera Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Marriages?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); Lee and Fredrickson, 170-98, 224-46. Helpful and humorous accounts written by pastor's wives or "preacher's kids" include: Josh Mayo, *Help!*

Similarly, proposals for renewal of clergy's spiritual well-being focused on the correction of the imbalance between pastoral professional performance and their private life of devotion. On the first and most pragmatic level, the recovery of clergy's religious observance is imagined on the level of practice. Clergy are admonished to study the Scripture not only in preparation for their sermons but as a part of their personal attentiveness to God's Word, to supplement their public prayer for others with their own prayer "in secret," and to let their ministry to others flow from the depths of their personal encounter with God.¹¹⁷ Second, recovery of clergy's spiritual health has been imagined on the relational level: ministers are urged to enter into a relationship of spiritual guidance or companionship with another person wherein they can experience prayer, worship, and pastoral care not as leaders but as receivers.¹¹⁸ Yet, a number of authors recognize the limitations of such "active" approach to ministers' spiritual health. They point out that, without addressing first the reality of the overwhelming business of contemporary pastoral ministry and life, these proposals bear a significant risk of simply adding more stress for ministers who attempt to implement them. From this perspective, the recovery of clergy

I'm Raising My Kids While Doing Ministry (Longwood: Xulon Press, 2007); Lisa McKay, *You Can Still Wear Cute Shoes: And Other Great Advice from an Unlikely Pastor's Wife* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010); Joyce Williams, *She Can't Even Play the Piano!: Insights for Ministry Wives* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005); Lorna Dobson, *I'm More Than the Pastor's Wife: Authentic Living in a Fishbowl World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

¹¹⁷ For examples of devotional guides designed specifically for clergy, see Rueben P. Job, *A Guide to Retreat for All God's Shepherds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Stan Toler, *Devotions for Pastors* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Pub. House, 2008); Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1983).

¹¹⁸ Important texts on recovery of the art of spiritual direction and companionships in the church, see Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001); Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992).

spiritual well-being requires a more radical approach: it calls for the recovery of the contemplative dimensions of pastoral identity and action. Only when such a qualitative shift in how clergy view their spiritual practice has taken place are ministers ready to take effective steps towards its genuine restoration.¹¹⁹

In conclusion, it is important to point out that, while it is helpful to divide the various facets of ministerial well-being for the purposes of analytical exposition, in reality these distinct categories form an integrated whole. The proposals that identify lives of individual ministers a primary avenue for addressing clergy burnout uniformly argue that spirituality must be understood as not merely a “facet” of ministerial well-being, but a central force, a “hub” which connects and brings together all other dimensions of clergy’s health (physical, emotional, intellectual, vocation, and social). It provides a unifying framework of meaning, within which their work and rest, their being with and being apart from others, their serving God and being with God, find their true realization.

A unique strength of the proposals that focus on individual lives of clergy is their ability to establish an ultimate criterion for evaluation of all work for addressing clergy burnout: the effectiveness of each proposal must be measured against the backdrop of the tangible practical difference that it makes in the life of the individual pastor amid the messy realities of serving. Their main weakness on the other hand is lack of attention to the

¹¹⁹ Irvine, 145-59, 90-91; Schwanz, 129-52; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*, 124-50; Halaas, 59-66; Cordeiro, 87-112; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 118-42; Muse, 39-57; Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, 147-68; Epperly and Epperly, 65-81; Minirth, 127-33, 251-68. These authors call attention to the big picture behind the clergy’s inability to reclaim time and space for spiritual nourishment and growth: a strong emphasis on busyness and activism that permeates secular culture, a growing perception of ministry as a task-oriented profession, a prevalence of “doing” over “being” in the dominant patterns of the ministerial identity. Among these sources, the work of Stephen Muse is particularly interesting, as he shares an Eastern Orthodox perspective on these issues.

systemic factors that impact ministerial health and well-being, the influence of the larger ecclesiastical context where ministry takes place. Therefore, to be fully realized, the in-depth reflection on the various dimensions of individual clergy's health needs to be expanded as to include the immediate environment of ministerial living and working: a local congregation.

Proposals for Local Congregations

Proposals that identify local congregations as a context for addressing burnout emphasize the importance of attending to specific aspects of congregational living that routinely threaten personal and spiritual vitality of ministers. By making local communities a target-population for change, these proposals reveal clergy burnout as a systemic rather than individual issue and seek to imagine "what we hope for" on the level of the congregation as a whole. Three areas of change in congregational functioning in relation to ministerial failure have received particular attention: the tangible steps that local communities could take to safeguard clergy's health and vitality; the difficult issue of ecclesiastical conflict; and a systemic perspective on relational dynamics in the congregation, as provided by family systems theory. Attending to these three areas in a deliberate and careful manner has the potential not only to significantly reduce the likelihood of clergy burnout but also to enable the congregations themselves to thrive emotionally and spiritually.

The proposals that focus on how congregations could better care for their ministers identify several broad objectives. On the most fundamental level, church communities are invited to gain a greater understanding of the ministerial role in relation to the common

expectations church members hold for pastors and their families.¹²⁰ At the same time, congregations are encouraged to deepen their awareness of pastors as persons, exploring their underlying resistance to seeing the humanity of their ministers.¹²¹ Finally, congregations are invited to become more intentional about “clergy care.” Such intentionality could be reflected in honoring the boundaries between clergy’s personal and professional life (e.g., extending the basic courtesy of not telephoning clergy at 3 a.m. or during a family vacation, except in cases of real emergency), or specific acts of care (e.g., personal expression of gratitude, or affirmation of clergy’s call via oral and written communication, creation of a specialized “leadership care” committee). A deeper change could be initiated by examining a congregation as a “working environment” (e.g., following the established categories of assessment, such as Maslach’s workplace characteristics that encourage burnout¹²²). Special consideration is requested for the needs of clergy’s families: congregations are invited to consider the unspoken expectations about

¹²⁰ For humorous depictions of common perception of clergy work and conflicting (or downright impossible) expectations that pastors frequently experience from their communities, see Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 63-64; Mark Buchanan, *Spiritual Rhythm: Being with Jesus Every Season of Your Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 79; Dan Hotchkiss, "Why Pay the Preacher?," *Congregations* 37, no. 3 (2010); L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry, Pulpit & Pew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 26; Lee and Fredrickson, 9-10.

¹²¹ For a discussion of the challenges to the congregational perception of ministers not only as pastors but as persons, with weaknesses, limitations, and even emotional wounds, see Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 15-107, 13-18; Gilbert, 34-44; Frykholm. For in-depth reflection on the tension between the holiness and humanness of ministry, see Jay Kesler, *Being Holy, Being Human: Dealing with the Expectations of Ministry* (Waco: Word Books, 1988); Zack Eswine, *Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

¹²² Schaufeli W. B. Leiter M. P. Maslach C, "Job Burnout," *Annual review of psychology* 52 (2001); Maslach and Leiter, 38-60. For adaptation of Maslach’s categories to the realities of pastoral ministry, see Lee and Fredrickson, 38-39.

their clergy's spouse's involvement in the church, special standards of behavior reserved for pastor's children, or even to create and hold their clergy accountable to an alternative expectation, of becoming a "good family (wo)man."¹²³

On a still deeper level of caring for their ministers, congregations are asked to become conscious of their underlying emotional climate with regards to the issues of food and fitness, stress and burnout, and attitudes towards busyness and overwork: What is the congregation's "food culture?" Is it easy or hard to make healthy dietary choices during community gatherings? Are conversations regarding weight maintenance, exercise, and illness considered to be strictly private? What is the basic congregational understanding of stress and burnout? Is self-care seen as a nice but unrealistic concept? On this level, the health professionals present in congregations are invited to take responsibility for leading their communities in exploration of these questions and discernment of the ways to put the emerging understanding into practice. Such work need not focus explicitly on clergy health, yet the increase in communal awareness and intention towards healthier habits of working and living will serve as a powerful context of accountability and support for the clergy's own efforts towards a healthier ministry and lifestyle.

The final objective of the congregational care of clergy is theological. Congregations are encouraged to reflect on their understanding of stewardship of the body as a spiritual discipline: What is the role of the body in human existence? Is there a

¹²³ Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson offer a number of practical suggestions for congregational care of ministers in the postscripts to each chapter of their book: Lee and Fredrickson, 18-20, 43-46, 60-62, 81-83, 103-06, 25-26, 44-46, 65-68, 94-97. For more detailed discussion of how congregations could care for their pastors, see Lorna Dobson, *Caring for Your Pastor: Helping God's Servant to Minister with Joy* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001); Jane Rubietta, *How to Keep the Pastor You Love* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

connection between food, exercise, sleep, and other ways of caring for the body and spiritual growth? How are we to understand health and illness theologically? Last but not the least, congregations that seek to care for their ministers are challenged to consider their own theology of mission. Do the members of the community see themselves as “consumers of religious goods” and clergy as the “vendors of religious services?” Is the Sunday worship service considered as a performance put on by the small group of the church leaders, while the rest of the congregation is reduced to being passive spectators and judges? Or, on the other hand, do parishioners see their ministers as an important but not singular force in ensuring the spiritual vitality of the “body of Christ?” Do they consider themselves as active co-workers in mission, and ministry itself as a congregational service rather than as the pastor’s individual responsibility? The researchers emphatically agree that congregations that take seriously their own call to be the church is the best antidote for clergy burnout.¹²⁴

Whereas the proposals to address clergy burnout via increased levels of congregational care focus on the positive aspects of living in Christian community, the second area of addressing ministerial failure centers on identifying ways of coping with the single most negative event in most clergy’s experience of ministry, church conflict. The most fundamental work of dealing with conflict in the church has to do with teaching congregations to come to terms with the most counter-intuitive realization: conflict is not

¹²⁴ Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 158-69; Lee and Fredrickson, 18-20, 126; Baab, *Beating Burnout in Congregations*, 35-53, 99-113; W. Daniel Hale and Harold G. Koenig, *Healing Bodies and Souls: A Practical Guide for Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

an aberration but a normal part of ecclesiastical existence. Professor Hugh Halverstadt defines conflict as a fundamental human phenomenon, the manifestation of genuine differences between the people which have not been handled constructively. He identifies three unique characteristics of the church as a religious community that make it a particularly “flammable” environment. First, because people’s commitments of faith are central to their personal identity, genuine differences on this level are perceived as more threatening. Second, the message of the Gospel itself has to do with the issues of social and personal change—which are inherently disruptive and divisive. Finally, church is a voluntary organization that abounds in vague job descriptions, unstated role expectations, and imbalance of financial dependence between employees and volunteers, and as such a work environment that is particularly vulnerable to the abuses of power.¹²⁵ Hence, congregations are urged to realize that the fundamental question about church conflict is not whether conflict in a Christian community is a contradiction in terms, but whether Christians can learn to deal with the inevitable conflicts in ways that are compatible with Christian ethics. This reminder about the normality of the conflict in the church is a crucial step in diffusing its negative impact on ministerial performance.

Several disciplinary lenses have been brought to bear on the work of understanding and managing conflicts in congregations: organizational development, psychology, theology and ethics. The *organizational development* theorists seek to balance the spiritual understanding of the church as the “body of Christ” with the reminder that it is also an

¹²⁵ These three characteristics, points out Halverstadt, make conflict in the church not only more likely, but also more corrupt: when the “stakes” are higher and the “controls” are lower, people are more prone to fight and do so in ways that are unfair. Hugh F. Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1991), 1-15.

“institution,” a human organization with the underlying principles of behavior and growth. They encourage clergy and their communities to improve their “internal patterns of communication,” clarify “mutual expectations,” and negotiate “fair outcomes” among the opposing individuals or factions in the church. Effective conflict resolution is seen as an outcome of committed listening, open discussion, and rational decision-making.¹²⁶ The *psychological* researchers emphasize the difference between the content and the process of the church conflict. They help congregations understand that conflict management involves not only negotiating issues but also mediating relationships. Successful resolution of the church conflict is as much an outcome of rational and democratic processes, as it is of deep awareness and intentional attending to the operative emotional forces in the community (overall levels of anxiety, anger, implicit rules and rituals of communication, underlying dynamics of power) and the potential presence of “clergy killers,” the particularly antagonistic individuals or enduring patterns of dysfunctionality in a community’s relationship with its minister or ministers.¹²⁷

In the work of researchers who employ the normative *theological or ethical* perspectives, the understanding of the church conflict reveals undertakes a quantum leap. They invite religious communities to see conflicts in their midst, however painful,

¹²⁶ The aforementioned work of Hugh Halverstadt is a great example of using the knowledge of organizational group processes for understanding and responding to conflict in the church. See also Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); Roy M. Oswald and Barry Allan Johnson, *Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2010).

¹²⁷ Good examples of using the knowledge of emotional processes for managing conflict in the church include Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack*; George B. Thompson, *How to Get Along with Your Church: Creating Cultural Capital for Doing Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001); Kenneth Charles Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Saint Louis: Tebunah Ministries, 2013).

turbulent, and even potentially destructive they may be, as particularly poignant invitations to witness and participate in God's work of bringing greater health and wholeness into the world. From this perspective, conflicts in the church serves a deeper purpose: they must be not merely "managed" but "utilized" as unique opportunities for spiritual growth and maturation.

Given the fact that conflicts that result in ministerial failure usually involve clergy themselves, the general recommendation is that the task of managing conflict is allocated to somebody else. The "third-party" function could be carried by the community's own lay leaders, a formal representative from the greater denominational body, or a hired outside consultant who specializes in church conflict. Whereas a number of scholars value outside consulting services as a way to get an unbiased and informed arbitration in congregational difficulties, others point out the difficulties associated with such a choice. Logistically, most congregations lack time and monetary resources to work with a consulting firm. Relationally, skilled lay leaders in the community—insiders who are aware of the intricacies of the underlying dynamics of the conflict, and at the same time are sufficiently mature psychologically and spiritually to look through them to the deeper issues—might be in a better position to facilitate a constructive management of differences.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Important recommendations are offered for the churches that seek to manage their own conflicts. Prior to the actual work of managing, potential "conflict managers" are invited to explore their own personal assumptions about conflict. Such work involves becoming more aware of one's implicit beliefs and habits of managing difference and disagreement in relationships and, if necessary, updating them in light of Christian perspective on conflict. While changing the gut theologies of conflict requires significant effort, commitment, and time, it lays down a foundation for clear thinking and acting in the midst of emotional upheaval. Halverstadt, 19-43; Speed Leas, *Discover Your Conflict Management Style* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1997); G. Douglass Lewis, *Meeting the Moment: Leadership and Well-Being in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 88-105.

The actual work of internal mediators of conflict rests on several key principles: establishing the “ground rules” for safe and honest communication; identifying the commonalities between the conflicting parties as an initial step in facilitating the conversation about their differences; discerning and attending to the relational structures and stories that ignite the emotional dimension of the conflict; reframing the win/lose mentality and seeking the win/win solution; putting the immediate conflict in the larger context of congregational history and mission, as well as the Christian biblical and theological tradition.¹²⁹ The researchers uniformly agree that the art of effective and godly conflict resolution is neither simple nor easy. But when church conflict is seen as a normal part of ecclesiastical living and approached with intentionality and care, strong organizational and psychological knowledge, and deep spiritual commitment, it could be transformed from being one of the most painful causes of clergy burnout into one of the most powerful contexts for congregational expression of faith, learning of the skills of living in unity amidst diversity, and participation in the redemptive work of God.

Authors who advocate for increasing the levels of congregational care of clergy are focused on positive ways of addressing clergy burnout, and authors who seek to address the issue of church conflict are dealing with the major negative cause of ministerial failure; yet the two kinds of proposals share an important similarity: they view congregation and clergy as interrelated but nonetheless discrete entities. The third category of proposals, based on the

¹²⁹ Helpful overviews of the key principles and practices of managing church conflict are offered in the collection of essays by Lott; Ed Dobson, Speed Leas, and Marshall Shelley, *Mastering Conflict & Controversy* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1992).

work of the family systems theorists,¹³⁰ challenges this assumption by providing a radically new perspective on congregational functioning.

The family systems perspective reveals congregations as extremely complex emotional units, psychological entities with collective identity and internal structure of their own, that is bigger and more powerful than the sum of the individual members that comprise it. Moreover, according to Rabbi Edwin Friedman, there are three important reasons why the emotional processes in religious organizations resemble the emotional processes in personal families especially closely. First, in an invisible yet powerful way, the families of origin of all parishioners and all clergy (whether or not they themselves are formally present on the church membership roll) are forever present and active in their relationships with each other. Second, their influence upon each other in the congregation is not merely a matter of external impact; rather, individual parishioners, clergy, and their respective families of origin are subjectively, internally, and emotionally involved with

¹³⁰ Family systems therapy is a multi-branched approach to understanding of healing relationships that is based on the conviction that individuals' behavior and motivation can be understood only in the context of their positioning in the emotional unit formed by their families of origin. Because the family of origin provides people with their first experience of being in relationship, it has the most powerful and lasting effect on their individual habits of relating to others: it establishes the rules about how relationships are to be maintained (and how relational turbulence is to be handled), forms the primary perception of trustworthy (or erratic) quality of their connectedness to others, and provides the fundamental sense of safety (or threat) of being in the world. Thus, according to the family theorists, people's positioning and action in all other relationships all throughout their lives is heavily influenced by the relational habits that they learned in their families. Among the three broad schools or forms of family therapy (intergenerational, structural, and strategic), the one I know best and utilize here is represented by the school of Murray Bowen. Classical texts for this school of family therapy include Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1988); Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: J. Aronson, 1978); Daniel V. Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990). A brief introduction to Bowen's concepts can be found in Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Falls Church: Leading Systems Press, 2004); Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept: In Leadership, in Life* (Falls Church: Leading Systems Press, 2008).

each other. Finally, the religious community itself creates a new “meta-family” (with larger denominational structures functioning like an “extended family field”).¹³¹ Because religious organizations derive their structure from families, contain families, and function like families, significant changes in any one of the three kinds of church families (parishioners, clergy, and congregation at large), they easily become prime arenas for projection of the unresolved family issues. It is not surprising, therefore, that problems in the church, even over seemingly straightforward issues, tend to be complex, highly charged, and quickly escalate in the involvement of other members.

Four relational patterns have been identified as symptomatic of the emotional imbalance within the religious organizations: emotional reactivity, triangulation, over-functioning/under-functioning, and impairment of the key leaders. The pattern of *emotional reactivity* in the church manifests itself in compliance, power struggle, rebellion, and distancing. Even though on the surface these behaviors appear to be very different from each other, they share an important similarity of purpose: a desire to move away from the sense of threat in relationship but without addressing it directly. *Triangulation* takes place

¹³¹ Friedman pioneered application of Bowen family theory to the life and functioning of religious organizations: Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue, The Guilford Family Therapy Series* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985). Most significant development of Friedman’s work was done by pastors Peter Steinke and Ronald Richardson: Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1993); Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1996); Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). Important recent applications of Bowen’s theory to congregational studies and clergy training can be found in Mickie W. Crimone and Douglas Hester, "Across the Generations: The Training of Clergy and Congregations," in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory.*, ed. Ona C. Bregman and Charles M. White (New York: Routledge, 2011); Randall T. Frost, "Thinking Systems in Pastoral Training," in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory.*, ed. Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White (New York, NY US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

when the two differing persons or groups seek to stabilize their relationship by drawing in a third. Triangles absorb the uncomfortable sense of difference between them by providing an external basis of unity: the third party could be a person whom they seek to save (or condemn), a program they promote (or oppose), an issue they champion (or contest)—the content and direction of emotional charge matters little—but the joining of forces for the “noble cause” distracts the differing parties from dealing with the unresolved issues between each other. The relationship of *over-functioning/under-functioning* happens when some members of the church take increasing amounts responsibility for the feeling, thinking, and actions of the others. While at first glance overfunctioners appear more responsible, healthy, and competent, and underfunctioners seem to be receiving the care that they genuinely need, this pattern of distribution of anxiety and action has detrimental consequences for both sides: as the former take on more and more, they deplete their resources; and as the latter begin to do less and less, they are robbed of the opportunities for growth. Since over-functioning is often perceived as a sign of committed and caring leadership, it is not surprising that this pattern of emotional imbalance leads to the *impairment of the key leaders* in the congregation: deterioration of health, financial or sexual malfeasance, disintegration of spiritual commitment, and burnout. These signs of mental, moral, or emotional breakdown of the church leaders are closely connected to their inability to establish clearly defined but flexible boundaries between themselves and others. The family systems researchers are careful to state that churches do not “cause” their leaders to have heart attacks, steal money, or engage in inappropriate sexual behavior;

yet, the intensity of their emotional processes can serve as a powerful trigger for these symptoms.¹³²

Looking at congregational functioning through the lens of family systems theory offers three critical advantages for understanding and addressing clergy burnout.¹³³ First, the systemic perspective on ministerial failure makes it possible to describe this painful problem in a meaningful but blameless way. Such re-definition is particularly important, because, both for clergy and their congregations, the feelings of failure and guilt are among the most persistent emotions that accompany burnout. Second, the systemic perspective on church functioning facilitates a significant reframing of the question about the etiology of burnout: relationally speaking, the question “what kind of clergy are prone to burnout?” makes little sense; instead, it is necessary to understand “what kind of emotional dynamics in the congregational family as a whole are most likely to manifest in the burnout clergy?” Finally, by shifting the focus of attention *away* from individual clergy’s personality makeup and lifestyle, and *towards* the problematic dynamics in clergy-laity relationships, the systemic perspective makes possible an in-depth reflection on the characteristics of the congregations that are most likely to burn out their spiritual leaders¹³⁴ and discernment of

¹³² For an insightful reflection on these patterns and their effect on congregational functioning, see Richardson, 91-100, 31-43.

¹³³ While there are many writers who apply Bowen’s systems thinking to congregational functioning in general, the authors who are concerned with the problem of clergy burnout are much smaller in number. Most notable reflections on this issue could be found in Friedman, 195-219; William N. Grosch and David C. Olsen, “Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 5 (2000); David C. Olsen and William M. Grosch, “Clergy Burnout: A Self Psychology and Systems Perspective,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 45, no. 3 (1991); Karen D. Scheib, “Why Do Clergy Experience Burnout?,” *Quarterly Review* 23, no. 1 (2003).

¹³⁴ Friedman identifies five characteristics of the congregations that are most likely to burn out their spiritual leaders and/or trigger symptoms in their nuclear families: the degree of a congregation’s isolation from other congregations in their faith community; the degree of distance between the lay leadership and general membership; the lay leaders’ intense relationships with one another beyond congregational gathering (e.g.,

relational skills that would enable clergy to function in such communities in ways that maximize their capacity to retain their spiritual integrity, avoid enervation, and become less likely candidates for burnout.¹³⁵ When fully realized, the insights of family systems theory offer paradoxical but powerful means not merely for prevention of individual ministerial failure but for emotional growth of the congregation as a whole.

The unique strength of the proposals that focus on changes in the life and functioning of local congregations as a solution to the problem of clergy burnout is their ability to reveal the profound influence of religious communities on the well-being and performance of their ministers. The weakness of these proposals has to do with the issue of implementation. A certain contradiction is built into this approach to ministerial burnout. Transformation of congregations into communities that care for their ministers requires highly skilled leadership and teaching. Yet, the persons who are endowed with the primary responsibility this work are the clergy themselves. Not only does such an objective create a subtle “conflict of interests” in clergy’s existing relationship with their congregations, but it also adds another item to their already overflowing list of responsibilities. Under these

by way of marriage or business); the degree of their investment in congregational functioning (especially in the absence of other significant social connections); and, the inability of lay leaders to take well-defined positions in the face of opposition. See Friedman, 217.

¹³⁵ According to the family theorists, the capacity of the spiritual leader to withstand the challenges of their congregation’s emotional systems without burning out is in direct correlation with the degree of his or her differentiation, the ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling, to maintain a distinct sense of self in times of high anxiety and pressure, and to stay emotionally close and connected to others even when they uphold different opinions, values, or beliefs. *Ibid.*, 193-273; Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, *Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2006); Michael J. Aufderhar and Ron Flowers, "Learning to Be Calm in the Storm," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 4, no. 1 (2010); Edwin H. Friedman, Margaret M. Treadwell, and Edward W. Beal, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007).

circumstances, it is essential that the encouragement and support for congregational care of ministers come from the larger denominational bodies.

Proposals for Larger Denominational Structures

Proposals that identify denominational structures as the context for addressing clergy burnout emphasize the importance of attending to the larger institutional factors that increase the potential of ministerial failure. By making a religious body as a whole its target-population, these proposals adopt the broadest angle of vision on the problem, revealing that the ultimate normative objective for transformation cannot be limited to the lives of individual clergy and local congregations, but must extend to the life of the entire church. The denominational proposals, however, have one distinct difference from other proposals: they have less to do with the extensive theoretical reflection found in the formal publications, and more to do with the actuality of work of the various committees, boards, task forces, initiatives and other groups that are appointed by the governing body of the denomination to understand and address the problem of ministerial well-being in the messy day-to-day realities of denominational living. An effective way to understand “what we hope for” on the level of larger denominational structures, therefore, is to review the work-in-progress that various denominations are already doing to support their clergy. Because a review of clergy support systems within several denominations would be both space-consuming and out of place, in this section I examine what has been done for ministerial health and well-being in the United Methodist Church (UMC), the denomination that is most relevant to the seminary in which my research is primarily located. Despite the obvious variations in juridical structures, governing body, and programming between the UMC and other Protestant denominations, such an approach is appropriate because the

“crisis in clergy health” has been reported across a number of these religious bodies, and because they have responded to it with a similar twofold work of assessment and intervention.¹³⁶

In the UMC, the efforts to support ministerial health and well-being have taken place on three levels: on the level of the denomination as a whole, on the level of its various conferences, and via local events.¹³⁷ Historically, the issues of health and well-being has been an important part of the United Methodist understanding of faithful discipleship and wholeness in mission.¹³⁸ However, about a decade ago, given the alarming evidence of an increase in clergy’s disease, obesity and the growing number of health and disability claims, the denominational attention to clergy health received new urgency. The UMC General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB) has taken a lead in examining the impact of church employment structures and culture on clergy health. In 2006, the GBPHB partnered with Duke University to conduct *The Church Benefits Association Survey*, a study that examined self-rated assessment of well-being, religious practices, and job

¹³⁶ For example, John Brooks, "Elca Studies the Health and Wellness of Its Ministers," (4/12 2002), accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/4542>; Gwen W. Halaas, "How Healthy Is Your Congregation's Pastor?," *Seeds for the Parish*, November-December, 2002; Christopher G. Roalson Lori A. Guillory Janelle M. Flannelly Kevin J. Marcum John P. Ellison, "Religious Resources, Spiritual Struggles, and Mental Health in a Nationwide Sample of PcusA Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 3 (2010); Amanda Christine Wallace et al., "Health Programming for Clergy: An Overview of Protestant Programs in the United States," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1 (2012); Paul Vitello and Robin Swift, "Clergy Members Suffer from Burnout, Poor Health," accessed September 16, 2013. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128957149>.

¹³⁷ A brief note on the structure of the United Methodist Denomination: a local congregation is a member of a *District*; districts are members of an *Annual Conference*; annual conferences are members of a *Jurisdiction*. There are five jurisdictions in the U.S., their quadrennial meetings are referred to as *Jurisdictional Conferences*. *Central Conference* is the organizational structure established for the work of the UMC in countries other than the USA. The entire organization of the UMC body is frequently called the “connection.” *General Conference* is the highest legislative body in the UMC.

¹³⁸ Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," *Methodist History* 46, no. 1 (2007).

characteristics, as well as their actual pharmacy claims data, for clergy and laity of ten Protestant Denominations, with United Methodist clergy and laity constituting a majority of the respondents.¹³⁹ In 2008, the GBPHB collaborated with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) in creation of the *Church Systems Task Force*, a formal committee that conducted a multi-phased research process that identified thirteen factors that hold most significance on clergy health.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the GBPHB established the *Center for Health* that conducts annual surveys of clergy health and offers resources for UMC clergy, laity, and their families. These efforts of holistic assessment of clergy health across the entire connection are critical not only for understanding institutional and structural factors that influence clergy well-being but also for guiding the design and evaluation of the denominational work of prevention and intervention.¹⁴¹

On the conference level of the UMC, the Arkansas, Virginia, and two North Carolina Conferences have been particularly recognized for their work of supporting ministerial well-being. In 2006, The Arkansas Conference created the *Holy Healthy UMC*, a health initiative for clergy, staff and laity in their local church and wider civic

¹³⁹ Keith G. Meador et al., *The Church Benefits Association Survey: Health, Well-Being, Spirituality and Job Characteristics, Final Report* (Duke University: United Methodist Church, 2007), accessed June 5, 2014, http://www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/Church_Benefits_Association_Survey_07-23-07.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ The Church Systems Task Force (CSTF), *The Church Systems Task Force Report* (The United Methodist Church, 2011), accessed June 1, 2014.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth G. Hooten, *Clergy Well-Being in the United Methodist Church: Twelve Findings from Surveys across the Connection* (General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church, 2011), accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/FINALFourDataSources9JUN2011.pdf>; Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, "A Holistic Approach to Wellness" *Faith and Leadership* (08/04/2009, accessed June 1, 2010, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/holistic-approach-wellness>; Center for Health, *Predictors of Health among United Methodist Clergy* (The United Methodist Church, 2009), http://www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/Phase_III_Quantitative_6-17-09.pdf.

community.¹⁴² In 2007, the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Conferences of the UMC partnered with Duke Divinity School and the Duke Endowment in establishing *The Duke Clergy Health Initiative (CHI)*, the largest and most comprehensive effort to examine and improve United Methodist clergy health.¹⁴³ In 2008, The Virginia Conference established the *Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries, Ltd.*, a non-profit corporation seeks to foster improved health initially among clergy and their family and eventually among the staff, laity, and families across the entire conference.¹⁴⁴ This ministry has produced a third most influential survey of clergy health and has been considered a “denominational prototype” for clergy support in the UMC. While other Conferences within the denomination do not feature such impressive and well-funded programs, general interest in the issues of health and wholeness and ministerial well-being is growing across the entire UMC. For example, the West Michigan Annual Conference in 2012 and the Pennsylvania Annual Conference in 2013 identified “Healthy World, Body, and Spirit” and “Wholeness: Physical, Spiritual, Relational” their key respective topics, and even the

¹⁴² The official website for the Health Initiative of “Holy Healthy UMC” Program of the Arkansas Conference is <http://www.holyhealthyumc.com> (accessed on June 09, 2014). See also Deborah White, “Effective Ministry Requires Healthy Self-Care, Experts Say,” (07/20 2006), accessed June 5, 2013, <http://archive.wfn.org/2006/07/msg00202.html>.

¹⁴³ The CHI is both a research program and an intervention facility. As a research program, it has sponsored a number of qualitative and quantitative studies of ministerial well-being and published formal research papers. As an intervention facility, it created *Spirited Life*, a wellness program that offers resources for healthy eating, stress reduction, and exercise, monthly consultations with wellness advocates, and small grants for gym membership or vacation to the participating clergy: <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/clergy-health-initiative>; <http://spiritedlife.org/> (accessed on June 09, 2014). The primary focus of CHI attention is United Methodist clergy in North Carolina, but the results of their studies have been used to imagine the theoretical model of holistic health for the United Methodist clergy population as a whole. See Rae Proeschold-Bell et al., “A Theoretical Model of the Holistic Health of United Methodist Clergy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 3 (2011).

¹⁴⁴ The Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries: http://www.vcwministries.org/new_home0.aspx (accessed on June 09, 2014).

younger branches within the connection, such as Central Conferences of the UMC in Eurasia, emphasize clergy well-being and burnout prevention as an important part of its ministerial training.¹⁴⁵

Finally, the most tangible signs of the denominational care of its ministers comes in the form of training events, counseling opportunities, and retreats sponsored by jurisdictions, districts, theological schools, and at times individual persons. For example, Wesley Theological Seminary and Drew Theological School established centers that systematically explore and address the issues of ministerial well-being. In 2009, Wesley's *Lewis Center Church Leadership* produced a thorough review of literature on clergy health; and in 2014 Drew's *Center for Clergy and Congregational Health & Wholeness* sponsored a Clergy Health Day Conference that focused on the issue of depression among clergy.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the South Central Jurisdiction, one of the five large geographic regions in the United States, hosted a *Health Leadership Training Event* in the summer of 2006. Led by Gary Gunderson, an ordained United Methodist deacon and a then-director of the Interfaith Health Program at Emory University, with Judy Johnson and Suzanne Hawley from the University of Kansas School of Medicine, the event focused on encouraging clergy to see

¹⁴⁵ For the information about the Annual Conferences of Central Michigan and Pennsylvania and Central Conference of UMC in Eurasia (respectively), see <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/2012-2012-west-michigan-annual-conference>; <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/2013-2013-eastern-pennsylvania-annual-conference>; <http://www.umc-eurasia.ru/en/search/node/burnout>.

¹⁴⁶ The official websites for *The Lewis Center for Church Leadership* and Drew's *Center for Clergy and Congregational Health and Wholeness* (respectively) are <http://www.churchleadership.com> and <http://www.drew.edu/theological/programs-of-study/center-for-clergy-and-congregational-health-wholeness>

self-care as a part of servant leadership and equipping them to offer the self-care covenant workshops to other members in their congregations.¹⁴⁷

On a smaller but no less crucial a scale, there are individuals who contribute to the well-being of UMC pastors by way of theoretical reflection and other kinds of patronage. Professor Karen Scheib, an United Methodist elder and a scholar of pastoral care and pastoral theology, offers a brief but pointed exploration of the contextual factors in the life of the United Methodist Church today that increase the potential for clergy burnout. Professor Randy Maddox, also an United Methodist elder and a Wesleyan scholar, reflects on the centrality of the concern for physical health and well-being to John Wesley's work and its importance for today's clergy.¹⁴⁸ Reverend Brian Bauknight, a retired United Methodist elder, came back from his retirement at the invitation from the Bishop Thomas Bickerton of Western Pennsylvania, in order to establish a mentoring program for young Methodist clergy to assist their transitions and prevent their premature burnout.¹⁴⁹ The generosity of an anonymous couple from Arkansas with a passion for helping UMC pastors helped to establish *Renew*, a retreat designed specifically for the United Methodist clergy and their spouses; since 2003, the gift of this retreat has been bestowed upon more than

¹⁴⁷ Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray, *Leading Causes of Life*, Rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009); Deborah White, "United Methodists Learn Health Ministry Leadership Skills," (07/20 2006), accessed June 5, 2014, http://archives.gcah.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10516/5330/article19.aspx_files.htm?sequence=1.

¹⁴⁸ Scheib, 82-84; Randy Maddox, "Randy Maddox: John Wesley Says, 'Take Care of Yourself,'" *Faith and Leadership* (07/31 2012), accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/randy-maddox-john-wesley-says-take-care-yourself>.

¹⁴⁹ Jackie Campbell, "Retired Pastor Supports Young, New Clergy," (06/03/2012, accessed June 1, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/retired-pastor-supports-young-new-clergy>.

1,500 participants.¹⁵⁰ Last but not the least, there are now “success stories” from the UMC clergy themselves who bear witness to the support that they have received on their journey to greater wellness and health.¹⁵¹ These are just a few examples of how the results of systematic assessment of clergy health across the connection foster further conversations and become embodied in particular programs and practices of intervention.

In this section I have drawn on my research-based and personal knowledge of the structures and people in the UMC to illustrate how a larger denominational body could serve as a significant avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. While it is important to remember that the UMC is a religious organization with a number of distinctive institutional features that influence its clergy’s well-being,¹⁵² and that there appears to be variations in the specific pathologies that characterize clergy of various denominations,¹⁵³ focusing on the UMC is helpful because the tangible examples of its

¹⁵⁰ Sally Hicks, "For Relationships and Leadership, the Gift of Renewal," (04/23 2013), accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/for-relationships-and-leadership-the-gift-renewal>.

¹⁵¹ Kate Rugami, "Self-Care Is Not Self-Ish," (2012), accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/self-care-not-self-ish>; Yonat Shimron, "Weight Loss Is Ministry's Gain," *Faith and Leadership* (05/07/2013, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/weight-loss-ministrys-gain>.

¹⁵² For example, a distinctive aspect of the United Methodist ordained ministry is itinerancy, a denomination-wide system in which the bishops assign pastors to churches and periodically change their appointments. The ministers are under obligation to serve where appointed. The stresses of frequent relocation (the grief of leaving their former community, the need to reestablish their authority in a new community, as well as logistical, relational, and financial strain faced by clergy families, and the need to accommodate the employment and career needs of clergy spouses) are unique to the United Methodist clergy.

¹⁵³ For example, the studies report that in comparison to clergy from other churches United Lutheran clergy have higher mortality due to hypertension associated with heart disease, while Presbyterian and Episcopalian clergy have higher mortality due to diabetes. King and Bailar; Kevin J. Flannelly et al., "A Review of Mortality Research on Clergy and Other Religious Professionals," *Journal of Religion and Health* 41, no. 1 (2002).

denominational support create a context for identifying several important similarities in the current work of the various national religious bodies for prevention of ministerial failure.

First, in most denominations, support for clergy health and well-being has been conceived along the lines of “employee health programs” or “employee assistance programs,” a polity-wide approach to clergy well-being sponsored by their benefits or pension programs. Second, the motivation for such work is usually twofold: pastorally, the denominations seek to establish effective avenues for “ministering to ministers”; pragmatically, the denominations seek to address the rising costs of health care and attrition rates among their cadre. Third, the denominational work of addressing the issues of clergy health and well-being is usually differentiated into two branches: the denomination-wide work of assessing clergy’s health, and local initiatives for prevention and intervention of ministerial failure. Fourth, even though the specific content of clergy health programming may vary from denomination to denomination, the climate that such efforts create affects the entire religious body: when denominational authorities seek to understand clergy’s experience of stress, burnout, and illness in ministry and to speak about the importance of rest and self-care, when denominational structures, practices, when leading denomination’s scholars seek to re-examine its theological heritage and practices in relation to the issues of health and wellness, then the overall tone and environment of the church becomes conducive to change. In such context, the increase in clergy’s commitment to rest and take care of themselves has to do not merely with their explicit learning about the importance of rest and self-care, but with their implicit yet powerful realization of the institutional “permission” to rest: they begin to sense that they will no longer be rewarded for being workaholics, nor punished for taking time to restore themselves. Fifth and finally, while

most denominational efforts for addressing ministerial failure are associated with the systemic work of assessment and intervention, what must not be overlooked is the quality of personal relationships that can develop between clergy and their judicatory authorities: the individual shepherding of clergy that can take place in the context of genuine trust and care is crucial for their fortitude and recovery in time of crisis.¹⁵⁴

Thus, the greatest strength of the denominational proposals for addressing clergy burnout has to do with their ability to create an institutional environment of accountability and support. The weakness of the larger denominational efforts is once more the opposite of their strength: it is precisely because this context of amelioration is so far-stretched institutionally and geographically, the changes envisioned here are slow to appear in the daily realities of clergy's life. The inevitable bureaucracy of the larger organization, financial constraints, and various institutional factors make denominational support of ministerial well-being less consistent and less accessible to individual ministers. Additionally, the subtle issues of distrust in relationship to authority, asymmetry in the dynamics of power, concerns about confidentiality, and perceived feelings of failure and shame for needing help frequently deter clergy from utilizing the available denominational resources.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the inherent limitations and existing imperfections of

¹⁵⁴ Charles Hollingsworth offers a moving account about the role of the bishop in the recovery of the Episcopal priest, Jeremy Wilkinson, from burnout: Hollingsworth, 79-89, 105-06, 23, 46.

¹⁵⁵ For insightful discussion of the problem of denominational support for clergy, and the reasons why many clergy do not see the provision of these services as fully adequate, see Bobby L. Trihub et al., "Denominational Support for Clergy Mental Health," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010); Michael Lane Morris and Priscilla White Blanton, "Denominational Perceptions of Stress and the Provision of Support Services for Clergy Families," *Pastoral Psychology* 42, no. 5 (1994); Michael Lane Morris and Priscilla White Blanton, "The Availability and Importance of Denominational Support Services as Perceived by Clergy Husbands and Their Wives," *Pastoral Psychol Pastoral Psychology* 44, no. 1 (1995).

implementation cannot negate the crucial importance of utilizing larger church structures as a context for addressing clergy burnout. Whether embodied in the particular policies, health programs, retreats, counseling opportunities, educational resources, or in the form of personal relationship between individual clergy and their supervisors, the denominational efforts legitimize, ground, and provide indispensable institutional support for the individual clergy and communal work of addressing clergy burnout.

Proposals for Theological Education of Clergy

The last context of amelioration, institutional theological education of clergy, is also the one least developed. Lack of reflection on how clergy burnout could be addressed in the places that focus on professional preparation for ministry is particularly striking in light of enduring critique of theological education as not adequately preparing their graduates for the rigors of ministry.¹⁵⁶ A small number of authors who include reflection on seminary training as an avenue for prevention of ministerial failure could be categorized in two groups.

First, there are texts that identify seminarians as a part of their explicitly intended audience. These authors encourage ministerial students to practice self-care, make their families a priority, nurture friendships, and establish the rhythms of Sabbath early on in their ministerial career. Providing a rich sampling of holistic exercises for pastoral

¹⁵⁶ For example, Sandra Beardsall, "'Nothing Prepared Me': Reflections on the Role of the Theological School in Pastoral Formation," *Touchstone* 30, no. 2 (2013); R. Robert Cueni, *What Ministers Can't Learn in Seminary: A Survival Manual for the Parish Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988); C. Franklin Granger, "Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy: Lifelong Partners in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 46, no. 1 (2010); Hollingsworth, 127, 29; Campbell; William H. Willimon, "Between Two Worlds," in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings* ed. Allan H. Cole (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).

formation and healthy ministry, they argue that unless these practices are intentionally cultivated during the seminary years they are extremely hard to develop during the years of active pastorate.¹⁵⁷ The intention of these authors to reach out to seminarians directly is an extremely welcome development in the literature on clergy burnout, the majority of which is directed at the hard-working or already burned out clergy. However, these texts suffer from a significant drawback: their admonitions to rest and practice self-care in the seminary frequently overlook the existing realities of theological training that passively discourage or actively thwart seminarians' ability to do so.¹⁵⁸

The second group of the texts addresses this limitation by shifting the focus of their intended audience. Instead of speaking directly to the seminarians, these authors direct their work to seminary leaders, inviting them to reflect on what can be done for prevention of clergy burnout institutionally. They speak of the need to correct the imbalance in the seminary curriculum and community life, and to address the subtle realities of competitiveness that interferes with the ministerial students' ability to learn the skills of team-leadership and genuine collegiality. They propose that theological education become a forum for critical and creative reflection on the dominant metaphors of ministry and cultural values of success that influence clergy self-understanding, inviting them to prize

¹⁵⁷ Lee and Fredrickson, xiii-xvi, 20-21, 47, 62-63, 83-84, 106-07, 27, 46-47, 68-69, 97-98; Epperly and Epperly; Jaco Hamman, "Self-Care and Community," in *Welcome to Theological Field Education!* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2011).

¹⁵⁸ For example, in their advice to the seminarians to take care of the body, Lee and Fredrickson rightly suggest that "self-care is every bit as important to your ministry long-term as getting that 'A' in New Testament Greek. Take a stand for your health, and talk to your classmates about doing the same": Lee and Fredrickson, 127. What they do not say (and what actual seminarians and their classmates would be quick to point out) is that the not-getting an "A" in New Testament Greek may have immediate negative consequences for the students' progress to degree, continued financial support in the form of denominational scholarship, and the prospect of future academic studies, in the ways that not-taking care of the body would not.

efficiency over fidelity, achievement over relationship, and routinely sacrifice self-care to academic performance. They call attention to the seminary's responsibility to model and reinforce the rhythms, habits, practices, and relationships that can sustain pastoral ministry in the long run, and create opportunities for students to benefit not only from the expertise of specialized faculty, but the experience of seasoned clergy. Importantly, the insightful reflection of these authors on the normative objectives for transformation of theological education is further enriched by their simultaneous raising of questions about the obstacles the current aspects of seminary training set in the way of the desired change: the long-time separation of academy from the church, the traditional four-area curriculum division, the academic habit of viewing spiritual formation as a discrete subject matter rather than an overall orientation of the seminary training, and the unrealistic expectations that are placed on seminary faculty.¹⁵⁹

The aforementioned work of Professor Gary Harbaugh belongs to this second group of proposals. His work, however, stands apart from other proposals for theological education, because he reflects not only on what *can* be done in the seminary to prevent ministerial failure, but also on how what *is* and *is not* being done during ministerial preparation contributes to the perpetuation of this problem. Drawing on his research on seminarians' stress, Harbaugh connects clergy burnout to the seminary's failure to identify and adequately respond to transitional experiences of their students. He sees seminarians' transitional experiences as the incidents of the "little 'd' death," the times during which their attitudes and orientations, patterns of behavior and belief, former roles and identities,

¹⁵⁹ Irvine, 166-67; Gilbert, 63-64, 69-70; Bryan P. Stone and Claire E. Wolfteich, *Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2008), 91-99.

significant communities and environment are being utterly challenged and lost. Yet, he maintains that this experience of acute crisis must be understood not merely as a terrible danger, but as a tremendous opportunity for development of future ministers: by exposing their fundamental concerns, existing habits of thinking and acting, and their emotional wounds, it creates an occasion for re-working them. If entered with intentionality and with adequate external assistance, the dis-integration of the seminary passage prepares the way for deeper integration and formation of the new pastoral identity and skills. If, on the other hand, it is rushed through, without proper awareness, guidance and support, the dissolution of the former identity and way of life are indeed dangerous, because they generate significant amounts of stress, diminish students' ability to learn, and establish the habit of ignoring genuine needs of the self—all of which sets the stage for future burnout.

Thus, according to Harbaugh, theological education contributes to prospective ministerial failure in three ways. First, when it fails to acknowledge transitional experiences of its students completely. Second, when it acknowledges students' experience of transition, yet views it only as negative occurrence, seeking to smoothen and shorten the crisis with logistical and behavioral solutions, while overlooking its tremendous theological implications and the opportunities it presents for integrating students' faith and life in the movement of self-care. Third, when in its overemphasis on the cognitive and professional development, inherited from the secular models of education, the seminary reinforces the attitudes, priorities, and behaviors known to be linked to burnout—such as perfectionism, neglect of the body, non-acceptance of negative feelings, distrust of subjective experience, need of control, competitiveness—that are exposed in the course of seminarians' transitional experiences. Harbaugh argues that the crisis sponsored by the

seminary experience must neither be ignored nor solved, but rather capitalized on. To be a part of the solution, the seminary needs to recognize the positive potential of the seminarian's transitional experience, provide necessary institutional and pastoral support for the existential crisis that it engenders, and lead seminarians in a deliberate theological reflection on the issues of pace in life and learning. Such work requires the correction of the lopsided (secular) anthropology that underlies the current seminary's educational priorities and practices in favor of an approach to learning that attends to all dimensions of personhood.¹⁶⁰

The emphasis on holistic preparation for ministry that characterizes the work of Gary Harbaugh and other researchers' who attend to the issues of rest and self-care in theological education points to the unique strength of the proposals that identify seminary as an important context for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. They reveal that the expectation of a change in seminarians' behavior is utterly naïve unless it accounts for the larger cultural, institutional, financial, and even philosophical realities of the seminary environment, curriculum, and community life. Their weakness is their brevity. With the exception of Harbaugh's work, the reflections on theological education appear in the form of summarizing and concluding sections to the larger monographs on ministerial performance. The creativity of their suggestions has not yet been translated into a comprehensive and systematic articulation of how the practice of seminary training could be transformed as a whole.¹⁶¹ The work of Gary Harbaugh is the most promising in this

¹⁶⁰ Harbaugh, "Pace in Learning and Life: Prelude to Pastoral Burnout," in *Seminary and Congregation: Integrating Learning, Ministry, and Mission: Report of the 17th Biennial Meeting of the Association of Professional Education for Ministry, June 19-21, 1982*; Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person*; Harbaugh and Rogers.

¹⁶¹ For example, the deeply insightful reflection on the desired outcomes and current constraints of the seminary training offered by Stone and Wolfeich appears in the "Conclusion" to their research on sustaining

group, because it is based on empirical research, developed in the course of several publications, and because it explicitly connects burnout in the pastorate with clergy's educational experiences in the seminary. Yet, unfortunately, Harbaugh's in-depth reflection has not been developed into a comprehensive proposal for theological education. His final monograph, *Pastor as Person*, focuses on the important, but much narrower option: creation of a seminary elective course with the same title.

Conclusions

In this section I reviewed the proposals for addressing clergy burnout by their context of amelioration. I have looked at four prominent locations in which the solution for this problem has been imagined: the individual lives of ministers themselves, local congregations, larger denominational structures, and the context of institutional theological education of clergy. When these contexts of amelioration are seen side-by-side, the important observation of difference between them is hard to miss: in contrast to the other three avenues for addressing the problem of clergy burnout, the context of theological education is glaringly underdeveloped.

It is important to reflect on the possible reasons for the paucity of proposals for attending to clergy burnout in the context of theological education. *On the level of practice,*

urban pastoral excellence, and the excellent ideas for attending to ministerial failure in the context of theological education provided by Gilbert and Irvine are part of their broad exploration of the topic of ministerial support. Even the documents that describe the emergent efforts on the part of the various seminaries to attend to their students' health and well-being (surveys, reports, pilot programs, and initiatives) confirm this assessment. The scope of such work is generally limited to individual schools, while the systematic re-imagining of the praxis of theological education with regards to issue of clergy burnout has not yet taken place. See, for example: Drew University, "Improving Clergy Health, Step by Step," (02/25 2011), accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.drew.edu/news/2011/02/25/theo-school-changes-perceptions-on-health-step-by-step>; Mary Chase-Ziolek, "Honoring the Body: Nurturing Wellness through Seminary Curriculum and Community Life," *Theological Education* 46, no. 1 (2010).

it could be that the vast amount of information and skill that the seminaries seek to pass on to their ministerial students simply leaves no room for additional teaching: since the list of “what we hope for” in theological education of clergy is long (and constantly growing), the issue of ministerial failure might be simply left behind. Additionally, *on the level of intention*, it could be that seminary training is the time when faculty and students are more concerned with the task of gaining pastoral excellence rather than sustaining it, so other arts and subjects assume higher priority. Since ministerial students themselves are anxious about not knowing how to preach, offer pastoral care, lead a congregation, or understand Scripture, and faculty is concerned with preparing them well for the work of ministry, the issue of clergy burnout, while accepted by both parties as important in theory, might be simply crowded out in practice. Finally, *on the level of assumption*, it could be that as an educational community we conceive the “work” of ministry primarily in active terms, as a professional enterprise that is centered on doing certain things, while we think of “rest” as something that happens automatically, when we stop working, and requires no special skill. If so, then understandably we would carry out the work of ministerial preparation in such a way that implicitly favors activity over inaction, speech over silence, movement over stillness, and work over rest, while at the same time presuming that resting “competences” need not be really be taught in the seminary, and that we only need to emphasize the importance of taking regular time off.

Whatever the reasons, the absence of developed systematic reflection on how theological education could serve as an avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout is deeply regrettable. Institutional theological education presents a unique strategic opportunity for early prevention of burnout because it offers a setting for: (1) raising

questions about good ministry in connection with rest and cultural patterns shaping students' perceptions of work, (2) teaching new practices and forming attitudes to support and deepen such understanding, and (3) building a community of encouragement and support as a focal point of sustainable ministry. Moreover, the rigors of institutional theological education themselves call for a significant level of fitness and stamina. To learn well, ministerial students need to have the ability to cope with anxiety, manage stress, and to regularly renew their emotional and bodily reserves. Hence, if the seminary fails to teach them the importance and the skills of resting, it may also be far less successful in teaching its primary subject matters. Finally, institutional theological education sets forth a paradigm and implicit standards for the work and life of ministry. The way of life and the habits that prospective ministers establish during their training years have lasting influence on their understanding of pastoral growth and development for the entire span of their careers. If they learn to view the patterns of overwork, frenetic rhythms of living, insufficient spiritual nourishment, absence of physical rest and supportive community as inevitable or even "normal" parts of ministerial life, then the seminary not only puts at risk their future ministerial performance but also hinders their ability to learn something essential about the nature of pastoral ministry.

Because the overarching objective of my research is reflection on theological education in relation to the phenomena of rest and burnout, it has the potential to make a much needed contribution to the proposals for addressing clergy burnout that identify the seminary as their primary context of amelioration. The likelihood and importance of such contribution is even greater, because of the fundamental continuity of focus between my work and the most extensive scholarly exploration of the connection between theological

education and pastoral burnout, the work of Gary Harbaugh. Like Harbaugh, I believe that the seminary's ability to acknowledge and constructively respond to significant transitional experiences ("the incidents of the little 'd' death") of its ministerial students lies at the core of its work for prevention of ministerial failure.

Yet, my research differs from Harbaugh's and other authors' proposals for addressing clergy burnout in the context of theological education in one important aspect: my scholarly identity. I reflect on the seminarians' transitional experiences not as a researcher who studies the seminarians, but as a recent seminarian and a student of practical theology. Such dual "student"-positioning offers me a unique advantage. First, as a recent *seminarian*, I offer a "thick description" of my own transitional experiences in the course of ministerial preparation. As such, my dissertation has the potential to deepen and elucidate Harbaugh's conclusions about the seminarians' experience. Second, as a *student of practical theology*, I bring the specialized skills and tools of my training in service of an in-depth analysis and interpretation of my experience of rest and burnout in the context of theological education. As such, my dissertation offers an opportunity to reflect on the praxis of theological education in explicit connection to the issue of clergy burnout. By identifying theological education as the primary context of my research, I stand embedded in the small community of researchers who view the early years of clergy's professional preparation as a critical time for addressing clergy burnout. By exploring the positive and problematic aspects of the seminary training in relation to the broader phenomena of rest and burnout, I am in position to advance the important work that these researchers have accomplished.

3.3 Nature of Solution: Self-Care Proposals and Sabbath Proposals

The final and most important way to understand the current proposals for addressing clergy burnout is in connection with the nature of their approach. Careful listening to the recommendations about “how we should best proceed” is key for understanding the ways in which their authors conceptualize the problem of clergy burnout—and the reasons due to which such conceptualizations might get in the way of its solution. In my reading experience, the “treatment plans” for clergy burnout have been imagined in two principal ways. I identify them here as Self-care proposals and Sabbath proposals.¹⁶²

Self-Care Proposals

Self-care proposals seek to raise awareness and teach the attitudes, behaviors, and practices that promote clergy’s personal well-being. Their authors call attention to the importance of adequate caring for the self as the means to sustainable ministry. Self-care action plans emphasize the multidimensionality of clergy’s needs and advocate for an approach to rest and restoration that utilizes a broad range of resources. The easiest way to classify these means of self-care is according to the level of support that they envision: personal, interpersonal, and wider communal.

On the level of personal support, self-care proposals seek to attend to the five aforementioned spheres of clergy’s life: physical, emotional, intellectual, vocational, and spiritual. Many authors recommend starting a comprehensive self-care program with the

¹⁶² In the previous two sections of this literature review, where I analyzed proposals by their context of origin and context of amelioration, I made extensive citation of the existing texts for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. Therefore, in this section, to avoid unnecessary repetition, I limit my references only to a “few good examples,” the sources that are especially representative of the issues discussed. Having established the essential familiarity with these proposals, I now intend to expound their particular strengths and potential limitations as related to the nature of their approach to the problem.

work of self-assessment. Their questionnaires, rating scales, and inventories help establish a baseline for clergy's existing quality of self-care.¹⁶³ Doing self-assessment not only offers specific diagnostic insights into the clergy's present condition but also serves as helpful tool for tracking their ongoing progress. Depending on the area that merits special attention, self-care proposals offer resources for physical exercise and dietary recommendations,¹⁶⁴ strategies for stress reduction and relaxation,¹⁶⁵ tools for self-reflection and artistic expression,¹⁶⁶ recommendations for time and financial management,¹⁶⁷ and clergy-specific suggestions for deepening of spiritual life.¹⁶⁸ While exposition of various practices and behaviors, things that clergy are invited to *do*, is a prominent part of self-care proposals, some authors also focus on the attitudes and habits that make possible the work of *not-*

¹⁶³ Irvine, 180-97; Schwanz, 27-47; Halaas, 99-100; Rediger, *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*, 173-79.

¹⁶⁴ Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 141-57; Cordeiro, 130-35; Halaas, 14-26.

¹⁶⁵ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 60-100; Wilson and Hoffmann, 100-38; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 115-20, 81-84. Archibald Hart's general exposition of stress is among frequently recommended resources: Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress* (Dallas: Word Publishing., 1995).

¹⁶⁶ Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, 21-38; Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, 101-68; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 187-88. Popular formats suggested for the practice of journaling for clergy include Ira Progoff, *At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability*, 1st ed., *Inner Workbook* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1992); Ron Klug, *How to Keep a Spiritual Journal: A Guide to Journal Keeping for Inner Growth and Personal Discovery*, Rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2002).

¹⁶⁷ Mark Short, *Time Management for Ministers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987); Kenneth M. Meyer, *Minister's Guide to Financial Planning* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1987); Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 165-71.

¹⁶⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, 30-59; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 91-114; E. Glenn Hinson, *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1999); Urban Tigner Holmes, *Spirituality for Ministry* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2002).

doing. In particular, self-care proposals for clergy emphasize the importance of learning the skills of letting go, ability to monitor personal ambitions, and training in assertiveness.¹⁶⁹ Finally, several authors emphasize the need and offer extensive resources for developing the discipline of pausing in ministry, expressed in the clergy's intentional use of breaks, retreats and sabbaticals.¹⁷⁰

On the level of interpersonal support, self-care proposals seek to provide resources for building effective social support systems for ministerial well-being. These texts emphasize the importance of "peer groups," the gatherings of professional clergy who covenant to support each other in ministry. Both researchers and clergy agree that participation in a peer group ensures not only longer pastorates but also more effective ministry. It creates a sense of professional belonging, helps to validate the unique demands and stresses of pastoral work, and becomes a source of both accountability and encouragement in time of change. The success of the group is heavily dependent on the level of commitment of its members and the quality of the leadership in the group. Even though self-care proposals that view clergy peer groups as an antidote to burnout vary in their recommendations about leadership (voluntary or paid), gender (same-gender or all-inclusive), affiliation (ecumenical or limited to clergy in the same denomination), or specific focus (spiritual formation, prayer, various professional issues), their authors are

¹⁶⁹ Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 173-80. 85-88; Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering Our Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2007); Schnase.

¹⁷⁰ Cordeiro, 185-202; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 121-27; Job; Seymour, 77-102; A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2000). A thought-provoking testimony of congregational learning and growth during its pastor's sabbatical can be found in James R. Adams and Celia A. Hahn, *Learning to Share the Ministry* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1975).

uniform in their view that such communities offer a unique gift not only to the individual ministers themselves, but to the communities that they serve.¹⁷¹

Finally, on the wider communal level of support, self-care proposals emphasize the importance of the external resources for clergy well-being in ministry, such as continued education, psychotherapy, and spiritual direction.¹⁷² The value of continued education for addressing clergy burnout has to do not merely with the possibilities that it offers for deepening of clergy's professional knowledge and experience ("content"), but with its ability to sponsor formation of friendships ("community") that allow clergy to experience supportive interaction with their peers in the context of shared professional interests and goals.¹⁷³ The importance of pastoral counseling, psychotherapy, and broader mental health care services is self-evident during the later stages of clergy burnout, because they provide clergy and their families with powerful and specialized resources for personal and

¹⁷¹ The key steps for establishing a peer support group include assessment of the existing network of relationships and evaluation of further need in social support, identification of the potential members for the group, initial gathering for reflection on the nature and the purpose of the group, and finally, the negotiation of contract (time, place, and frequency of gathering, leadership, size, duration, format of the meetings, the process of joining and withdrawing, and evaluation strategies). Effective peer groups ensure confidentiality, discourage habits of comparison and competition, foster trust and genuine involvement in each other's lives, and allow clergy to become vulnerable and open with to each other. Oswald, *How to Build a Support System for Your Ministry*; Melissa L. DeRosia et al., *The Girlfriends' Clergy Companion: Surviving and Thriving in Ministry* (Herndon: Alban institute, 2011); Chandler; Kinnaman and Ells; Schwanz.

¹⁷² Helpful examples of various models of such communal support can be found in Irvine, 160-79; Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 83-114, 59-63.

¹⁷³ On the denominational level, continued education takes form of specialized training events focused on specialty areas such as counseling, preaching, and worship. On the level of theological education, continued education embodied in Doctor of Ministry programs. Among the national agencies that seek to support clergy based on their professional rather than denominational affiliation are *Alban at Duke Divinity School* (formerly known as *The Alban Institute*), *The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education* and its Canadian counterpart, *The Canadian Association of Pastoral Practice Education*. The value of the ecumenical or interdenominational avenues for continued education is their inherent recognition of diversity, which enables the upfront acceptance of individual differences and builds a supportive network across wider community.

professional recovery. Yet, researchers agree that the greatest benefits of therapy are obtained when it is received early in ministry: its value lies in enabling individual ministers to become aware of and consciously work through their personal wounds and dysfunctions—*before* they have been amplified by the wounds and dysfunctions of those whom they serve. Used earlier in the pastoral career, therapy could serve as a means of prevention rather than treatment for ministerial failure.¹⁷⁴ Finally, spiritual direction and companionship is viewed by the authors of self-care proposals as one discipline that undergirds all others: its fundamental importance is connected to its ability to reveal a bigger picture behind the immediate successes and failures of pastoral ministry. Having a spiritual director or companion is an antidote to burnout not merely because it provides a sense of spiritual grounding and depth that reduces stress and emotional exhaustion and physical fatigue in the first place, but because it invites clergy to see suffering and adversity—including the suffering and adversity of burnout itself—in light of their personal journeying with God.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ While uniformly agreeing on the tremendous benefits of in-depth therapy for clergy, the researchers acknowledge the obstacles that get in the way of utilizing this resource by clergy and their families: the issues of confidentiality and trust, stigma associated with the use of such resources, and not the least significant financial burden. Ray Oswald provides recommendations on how to work with these impediments, and Gary Harbaugh offers criteria for choosing a counseling resource for clergy: Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 162-63; Gary L. Harbaugh, "When the Caregiver Needs Care," *Lutheran Partners*, no. September/October (1991).

¹⁷⁵ The difference between spiritual director and spiritual companion is the degree of experience with intentional living and guiding others that the former has over the latter. Ray Oswald recommends that Protestant clergy look for such guidance within the Roman Catholic Church, because it has a much longer of tradition of spiritual direction. If spiritual direction is not available, regular meeting with spiritual companion or friend for mutual support and accountability in prayer could provide a way to practice this discipline. Helpful guides include Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*; Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World*, New rev. ed. (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2001); Howard A. Addison, *Show Me Your Way: The Complete Guide to Exploring Interfaith Spiritual Direction* (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2000); Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960).

The proposals that recommend self-care as the answer to the problem of clergy burnout vary in their scope. Some, like Gula or Oswald,¹⁷⁶ offer an in depth reflection on one aspect of self-care. Others, like Halaas, Melander and Eppley, or Oswald,¹⁷⁷ take a more comprehensive approach, relating various aspects of self-care to each other. What unites this diverse collection of texts, however, is their focus on the notion of “balance.” The authors of self-care proposals identify an inherent tension in the core of pastoral existence and work. While the term used by various writers to describe the “opposite ends” of the tension vary (e.g., being and doing, intra- and extra-dependency, caring for others and caring for the pastoral self), the ultimate objective of all self-care proposals remains the same: to establish a constructive equilibrium between the ministers’ personal needs and the external demands of ministry. According to these researchers, a fruitful and sustainable ministry occurs when clergy are able to hold the two in creative tension. Ministerial failure, conversely, has to do with the clergy’s inability to achieve or maintain such healthy equilibrium. Thus, on the whole, the self-care proposals conceptualize the answer to the problem of clergy burnout as a recovery of balance.

Four important strengths characterize self-care proposals. Their first strength is a *fundamentally practical orientation*. Because self-care proposals seek to assist clergy in tasting (rather than defining) rest, they provide a more straightforward approach to pastoral renewal. It is not uncommon for self-care proposals to outline a specific “plan of action” or offer “practical tips,” thus, making their resources readily transferable to the actual

¹⁷⁶ Oswald, *How to Build a Support System for Your Ministry*; Richard M. Gula, *The Way of Goodness and Holiness: A Spirituality for Pastoral Ministers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011).

¹⁷⁷ Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*; Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley, *The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2002); Halaas.

ministry settings. The second strength of self-care proposals is their *openness to diverse resources*. Once more, because the primary concern of self-care proposals is to engender (rather than to understand) rest, they are less limited by the standards of any particular discipline or religious tradition, more free to be eclectic in their search for solution, and particularly apt at creating relationships across the fields of inquiry and practice that traditionally lack contact. Since the experience of rest itself is a criterion for assessing the usefulness of any approach, self-care proposals are fascinating in their compilation of practices: the exposition of the Christian spiritual disciplines of rest could be seen alongside practices from New Age religion, autogenic training, and hatha yoga. The third strength of self-care proposals is their *asset-based approach to health and behavioral change*. In contrast to the traditional medical model of care, which establishes motivation by enumerating the detrimental consequences of not-changing (disease, premature ageing, professional impairment, and in critical cases, even death), self-care proposals emphasize that development of new habits is not merely a way to prevent ministerial failure but a powerful catalyst of personal and professional growth. Frequently, self-care proposals include in their narratives the testimonies from clergy whose practice of self-care became not only a way to boost resilience but also to experience genuine joy in their ministry. The final strength of self-care proposals is the *privileging of personal agency*. Without exception, self-care proposals are deeply inspiring to read, because they communicate strong confidence in clergy's ability to make transformative changes to their life and ministry.

The problematic aspects of self-care proposals are related to inadvertent omissions rather than explicit errors, and are frequently the "side effects" of their strengths. The first

weakness of self-care proposals is their *lack of attention to the tremendous power of the momentum of secular culture*. On the most obvious level, the inattention to the cultural influence creates a temptation to underestimate the number and intensity of external obstacles that stand in the way of clergy self-care; yet, the ethos of busyness and activism, the intricate system of economic punishments and rewards, the social pressures to prefer working to resting makes implementing even the sincerest resolutions of self-care extremely difficult. On the less obvious level, the neglect of the culture's influence leaves clergy unaware of the inner hindrances to self-care. The cultural uneasiness about rest does not remain merely "on the outside" of clergy persons but, through life-long conditioning, becomes deeply internalized in the individually specific habits of self-neglect, over-activity, and general unrest. Such attitudes and behaviors make clergy prone to conceptualizing even self-care in active terms, as something that has to be "done." If not fully cognizant of this subtle shift in understanding, clergy and those who seek to help them inadvertently run the risk of turning the very attempt to address the patterns of overwork and overflowing schedule into yet another project. At the same time, given their habitually "active" posture of living, clergy are likely to have difficulty with the practices of self-care that call for an alternative attitude of receptivity and surrender (e.g., *lectio divina*, mindfulness meditation, tai chi). Without proper guidance, clergy may get discouraged by the perceived "passivity" and lack of "results," abandoning the disciplines they need most.

Thus, when clergy are urged to practice self-care, they are in fact asked to build up individual resistance to the external societal influences that encourage overwork and not-resting *and* go against the grain of their own inner habits of attitude and behavior—yet, without being fully aware of such work. Even under the best circumstances, such a position

is extremely vulnerable: unless clergy are explicitly coached in identifying and resisting the pull of these forces, such twofold rebellion is very hard to accomplish. Because self-care proposals pay little attention to the systemic forces of unrest prominent in the contemporary culture, they cannot adequately account for failure to care for themselves on the part of individual clergy even in the face of genuine personal commitment. This is when the darker side of privileging self-agency becomes visible: in the absence of explicit acknowledgment of the invisible but powerful influence of secular culture on clergy, individual ministers are placed in the position of sole responsibility for integrating the practices of self-care into their life and ministry—and, consequently, for failing to do so. With no other identified factors to explain their failure, they are significantly more vulnerable to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-directed frustration. Such vulnerability is particularly alarming, given the fact that one of the most prominent symptoms of clergy burnout is a sense of reduced personal accomplishment and self-deprecation.

The second weakness of self-care proposals is their *lack of in-depth reflection on the theoretical issues connected to the practice of self-care*. Even as the practices of self-care themselves (what needs to be done) and external resources (who can help clergy do it) receive a lot of attention, there is little definition, much less discussion, of the notions of “self,” “care,” and “rest.” While the meaning of these terms appears to be obvious, such unexamined assumptive knowing can contribute to clergy’s confusion about the proper ways of resting and caring for themselves. For example, when clergy work long hours, rush to meet expectations of their parishioners, neglect their families, and generally behave like “messiahs,” they also in a very real sense care for themselves: they seek to preserve their existing patterns of self-understanding, live up to the popular images of ministry, and be

loyal to the fundamental meaning of their lives, however distorted and even damaging it may be. Without deliberate thinking through the nature of the self and the direction of caring for it, clergy are left without the specific symbols and stories to guide their self-care, and without effective criteria to evaluate its quality.

Similarly, in the absence of in-depth reflection on the nature of rest and its relationship to work, clergy are liable to rely on their personal or societal ways of understanding the rationale for taking time off, even when they are not fully adequate. For example, if rest is understood as a “reward” for the work well done, then it follows that without the accomplishment, resting cannot be justified. Or, if rest is viewed as a “fuel,” something that we have to do in order to work, it is easy to assume that rest is secondary in importance to work; then it follows that we have to work as much as we can, and stop for rest only when it is absolutely necessary. For clergy, whose work lacks the easily identifiable markers of accomplishment and already holds a very important status in their lives, such unexamined conceptualizations of rest would further contribute to clergy’s inability to take breaks from ministry. Additionally, when self-care proposals emphasize proper time-management, setting boundaries, and other ways of resisting the personal habits of overwork, they also communicate an implicit assumption that underlies such course of action: *if only* clergy could learn how to say “no” to unreasonable expectations of others, come to terms with their inner insecurity and ambition, and better manage their workloads and schedules, *then* they would be able to rest. In other words, it is the work, both legitimate and compulsive, that prevents clergy from resting. Such a view encourages clergy to see the positive side of rest, presenting rest as something that clergy really desire but have a hard time getting. Yet, at the same time, inadvertently, it prevents the seeing of

the other, more problematic and scary, side of rest. When clergy see rest as an unambiguous and self-evident good, they are much less likely to entertain the (outrageous) idea that the connection between their high workload and their inability to rest might also be the other way around: that they might be *creating* more work for themselves, because they are afraid of something that they have to face during the times when they are at rest. Yet, until clergy become aware of their deep longing for—and their equally deep ambivalence about—rest, their attempts at resting, no matter how sincere, will lack lasting power. The impossibility of rest must be acknowledged and accepted, before rest can become a real possibility.

Thus, because self-care proposals do not allot space for theoretical reflection on the issues connected to the practice of self-care, they undermine the effectiveness of their own, otherwise excellent, plans of action. This is when the darker side of the predominantly practical orientation becomes visible: in the absence of explicit guidance and support for an in-depth exploration of the meaning of “self,” “care,” and “rest,” clergy are placed in the position of trying to change the old patterns of their behavior without being fully aware of the beliefs, values, and attitudes that undergird them. Such approach too is inherently vulnerable to error: unless clergy are taught how to discover (not merely on the level of intellectual reflection but in the realm of deeper existential awareness) their underlying assumptions about the seemingly obvious issues of self and care, and to understand their deeper motivations for work and rest, their efforts to transform practice will fall short of their goal.

The final weakness of self-care proposals is their *lack of an overarching theoretical perspective* to ground and unify the multitude of particular practices that are recommended to clergy. Most authors categorize practices of self-care by the “dimension” of the self that

is being addressed (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, etc.), assuming that their overall objective of personal and professional renewal provides a sufficient basis for their interconnectedness. It might be tempting to dismiss the lack of the overarching theoretical framework as inconsequential. After all, tired and pressed for time, clergy usually look for something that “works” and shun away from the prospects of “another theory.” Yet, the inattention to the theoretical coherency between various practices of self-care has an important negative consequence: the problem of their integration in clergy’s daily life. Even though the authors of self-care proposals usually view their collections of practices as complementary, they are not truly consistent with one another. They come from a variety of long-established traditions that differ, at times radically, in their worldviews, understanding of human behavior and motivation, values, and principles of change.

The lack of internal coherence begets two practical difficulties. First, in order to really learn individual practices, clergy have to go to their sources, the books of the tradition that created them in the first place. Second, in order to integrate these practices into their daily life, clergy have to come to terms with their competing demands for time and their implicit philosophical differences. For example, when I choose to do the Jesus’s Prayer and *lectio divina* for my spiritual nourishment, the mindfulness meditation for stress relief, and tai chi for my physical renewal, before long the individual books on these practices begin to pile on my night stand, competing for my reading time. Additionally, since each of their respective traditions insists that to get real benefits from the practice, it has to be done “first thing in the morning,” in order to implement my self-care plan I have to work through the conflict in their scheduling. Finally, even when I get past the hurdle of deciding what I am going to do when and why, my perseverance with those practices

depends on my ability to come to terms with the subtle or not-so-subtle dissonance between their “creeds.” (In contrast, I would have significantly less struggle with compatibility, had I limited my selection to the disciplines of self-care belonging to a single tradition: their performance “templates,” worked out over the centuries of communal practice, are readily available.)¹⁷⁸ Thus, while they themselves may not see the theoretical discrepancy between the practices as a problem, and may even enjoy the freedom of the “mix and match” approach, the inherent differences of individual practices make creation of a coherent plan of self-care a genuine challenge. This is the darker side of the eclectic methodology of self-care proposals: in the absence of the common theoretical framework, of values, principles, and beliefs that could bring cohesiveness and order to the assortment of individual practices of self-care, the responsibilities for practical and theoretical integration are placed on the shoulders of individual clergy.

The three weaknesses of the self-care proposals present a considerable threat to their effectiveness. Individually and together, the lack of their attention to the formative momentum of the secular culture, the omission of theoretical reflection on the issues of self, rest, and care, and the absence of the coherent framework to ground and unify various practices of self-care create conditions that are favorable for discovery and exploration of

¹⁷⁸ I highlight the practical difficulties of bringing the Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist disciplines together not to argue that the faithful and fruitful integration of Christian faith with the practices and suppositions of other traditions is an absolute impossibility; only to point out that such integration would require additional time and work—the commodities that clergy already have in short supply. On the other hand, when pursued with intentionality and support and sufficient time, such encounters have the potential to enrich and deepen clergy’s understanding of their own heritage. Helpful examples of such integration come from a Trappist monk Thomas Merton and a Jesuit priest William Johnston, for both of whom the encounter with the Eastern religious traditions (Zen Buddhism, in particular) served to deepen their understanding of Christian mysticism and intensify their awareness of the social dimensions of contemplative practice: Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973); William Johnston, *Letters to Contemplatives* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

the valuable avenues of self-care, but highly disadvantageous for development of the coherent and sustainable strategy for personal and professional renewal. Like a buffet-style spread of delectable treats, the feast of resources offered by self-care proposals encourages “dabbling” but provides little help with formation of long-term commitment. As such, self-care proposals are insufficient to reverse the powerful tide of learned self-neglect and not-caring. What is necessary is a place and a community, within which clergy could explore the inner and outer obstacles to their rest and self-care, become aware of their implicit assumptions about the meaning of the self, care, and relationship between work and rest, and develop a theoretical framework that would unify their diverse practices. What is necessary is a tradition that provides a context and serves as a medium for unlearning clergy’s life-long habits of restlessness and burnout.

Sabbath Proposals

The fundamental contributions of Sabbath proposals have their origin in their connection to the distinct tradition of resting, the religious institution of the Sabbath. There exists great diversity in the various authors’ use of the term “Sabbath.” Some, like Marva Dawn, speak to the importance of setting aside a *whole day* for keeping the Sabbath. Others, like Tilden Edwards and Donna Schaper, affirm the value of the Sabbath day, but advocate for intentional integration of the *special quality of time*, the daily “mini-sabbaths” of quiet receptivity and awareness, during the rest of the week. Still others, like Norman Wirzba, pose a challenge of expanding our understanding of the command into the Sabbath *way of life*, wherein the major facets of societal living, such as education, food, economy, environment, and communal worship are gradually transformed in accord with the fullness of God’s *Shabbat*. What unites these texts is their rootedness in the religious tradition of

resting. The majority of Sabbath proposals are positioned within the Judeo-Christian heritage, although a number of authors draw inspiration and insight from the distinctly Jewish guides to Sabbath observance.¹⁷⁹ A few authors point out that some form of Sabbath time is acknowledged and celebrated in all significant spiritual traditions, and incorporate the resources of those traditions into their writing.¹⁸⁰

As will become evident in the ensuing discussion of the details of this literature, it is precisely its rootedness in the religious tradition of Sabbath that endows it with distinctive strength for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. Several significant shifts can be observed in the work of the scholars and practitioners who bring to bear the wisdom of the Sabbath tradition upon their understanding of ministerial failure. First, there is an expansion of focus: the authors of the Sabbath proposals insist that a restful life is not a matter of individual accomplishment, but a communal discipline, lived out in relationship

¹⁷⁹ The modern classic Jewish exposition of the Sabbath comes from a lay Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel. At once a poetic meditation and philosophical treatise, Heschel's *The Sabbath* is well-known and widely acclaimed far beyond the Jewish community. Heschel does not turn to the authority of rabbinic texts to justify the value of Sabbath and demand its keeping on the basis of obedience to Jewish law. Instead, he points out that Sabbath is fundamentally about remembering and claiming our ultimate freedom as human beings. By stepping weekly into the "palace in time," created by the Sabbath, we find God and are liberated from our domination of people and enslavement to things. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, 1951). Helpful historical overviews and practical guides to Jewish practice of Shabbat are offered by Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1970); Barry Rubin and Steffi Karen Rubin, *The Sabbath: Entering God's Rest* (Baltimore: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998); Abraham Ezra Millgram, *Sabbath: The Day of Delight* (Philadelphia: The Jewish publication society of America, 1944); Pinchas Peli, *Shabbat Shalom: A Renewed Encounter with the Sabbath* (Washington: B'nai B'rith Books, 1988). The richly detailed personal account of the Jewish Sabbath is offered by Chaim Grade, *My Mother's Sabbath Days: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

¹⁸⁰ For example, A Protestant pastor, Wayne Muller, incorporates practices from various religious traditions in his Sabbath "exercises." A Roman Catholic journalist, Christopher Ringwald, on the other hand, speaks about the universal Sabbath "instinct," as he seeks to describe the observance of the Muslim *Juma*, the Jewish *Shabbat*, and the Christian Lord's Day in the life of three families. Christopher D. Ringwald, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 12.

with the world as a whole. Second, there is a deepening of insight into the systemic nature of restless working and living. The authors of Sabbath proposals share a critical intuition that clergy's struggle with overwork has deeper roots than lack of time-management and delegation skills, faulty congregational dynamics, or even clergy's personal compulsions. Rather, they trace the lack of balance in work and life to the loss of religious fidelity. The unfaithfulness, however, has less to do with the deliberate violations of moral codes of behavior and ethics, and more to do with the daily discrepancy between clergy's professed creed and their operative beliefs about God and reality: clergy slip into the patterns of business and overwork, when they "forget" that God creates, redeems, and loves them unconditionally. The ultimate objective of the Sabbath proposals, therefore, is not an individual achievement of balance between work and rest but rather a communal renewal of authentic religious living.

Given their expanded understanding of the nature of ministerial failure, Sabbath proposals signal a radical widening in the scope of remedial action: since the "problem" is no longer confined to the disproportions and dysfunctions in the life of individual clergy and local congregations, the "solution" imagined by Sabbath proposals goes beyond the incorporation of additional practices of rest and self-care into clergy's schedule, towards the fundamental alterations in their way of life and patterns of belief. The authors of Sabbath proposals suggest that adequate recovery from the excesses of work is only a "by-product" of a genuine renewal of devotion. The radical expansion of focus from the lives of individual clergy to the life of religious community as a whole, the recognition of the systemic nature of the problem, and the shift in the scope of proposed action, as well as dramatic increase in both practical and theoretical resources coming from the ancient

religious tradition, endow Sabbath proposals with the power to rectify the three aforementioned weaknesses of the self-care proposals.

First, in contrast to self-care proposals, Sabbath proposals have a heightened sensitivity to the tremendous momentum of the secular culture. Because historically the Sabbath institution is so closely linked to Israel's need to preserve its identity in the midst of foreign nations, awareness of the opposing power of the surrounding culture and the desire to circumvent it are built into the very fabric of its religious practice and belief. Sabbath proposals for addressing ministerial failure are characterized by the same cultural perceptiveness, insight, and ability to reflect on the societal forces that make ministerial rest and self-care an incredibly difficult undertaking. As a result, the teaching of rest offered by Sabbath proposals involves not only instruction in specific practices but directives for the deeper levels of behavior and attitude. The most ordinary activities of human living take on new significance and depth as avenues of restfulness when the authors of Sabbath proposals reflect on the cultural importance of *doing* and *having*, and promote the appreciation of *being*. At the same time, the specific skills and practices of rest are seen not as an end in themselves, but as acts and embodiments of creative resistance to the secular way of life. The Sabbath resistance takes form not of an armed combat but non-participation—hence, the emphasis is on ceasing, disengaging, celebration, and other less “active” ways of responding to the inherent tensions of human existence. And in so doing, Sabbath proposals connect the social and the personal, inviting clergy to see not only the power of secular culture to thwart their most ardent attempts to rest, but also their own willing adherence to the postulates of the secular mentality. Thus, because Sabbath proposals intentionally explore both external and internal obstacles to rest created by the

surrounding secular culture, they have strong potential to expose clergy's operative assumptions about work and rest that underlie their perception of ministry—and undermine their attempts at rest.

Second, in contrast to self-care proposals, Sabbath proposals excel in theoretical reflection on the issues of self and care, work and rest, and they exhibit radical alterations in their meaning. To begin with, whereas self-care proposals focus their reflection primarily on the “caring self,” Sabbath proposals expand their reflection as to include the “cared-for self”: they invite clergy to take a close look at the person who comes into view, when conversation is paused, action is brought to a standstill, and ambition is renounced. Additionally, Sabbath proposals challenge the understanding of correlation between work and rest: instead of the often recommended “balance,” the ratio is 6:1, and it is given to follow, rather than open to computation. Rest in turn is viewed as neither a “means” to work, nor as a “reward” for the work well done, but rather as a “fulfillment” of work and indeed the ultimate culmination of human existence. Yet, even as Sabbath proposals assign rest a status of such utmost importance, they are far from presenting it as an occasion of pure pleasure. By insisting that Sabbath is a “command” to be observed, rather than an “invitation” to consider, Sabbath proposals demonstrate deep awareness of the negative dimension of rest. The silence and stillness that ensue when the conversation is paused, activity is brought to a standstill, and ambition is renounced, bear a disturbing resemblance to the silence and stillness of death itself. The authors of Sabbath proposals do not beat around the bush: to enter God's rest, one has to be willing to risk one's life. And yet, it is precisely its ability to terminate the flow of the workaday mentality and lifestyle, and to usher in a new plane of existence, is what makes Sabbath rest qualitatively different from

any other practice of self-care. It is engendered not so much by a personal resolve to take better care of the various dimensions of the self, but by entering into an alternative symbolic world, God's kingdom of peace, and becoming—and therefore, beginning to act as—one of its citizens. Thus, because Sabbath proposals allot time and space not only for exposition of practices, but also for an in-depth theoretical reflection, they are able to link the transformation in clergy's personal behavior to imagination, rather than will, and in so doing increase the probability of lasting change.

Finally, in contrast to the self-care proposals, Sabbath proposals display a unifying theoretical framework and a time-honored template for practice. Grounded in Israel's theology of creation and redemption and intricately connected to its understanding of personal and social salvation, the Sabbath tradition provides a powerful theological rationale for clergy rest. Precisely because of the theological (rather than purely medical or psychological) nature of its authority, the practice of the Sabbath is likely to be more appealing to clergy, more readily integrated into their understanding of ministry, and offer fewer obstacles to its performance. At the same time, given the remarkable specificity of the practical aspects of Sabbath-keeping, clergy's task of integrating the holy day in their week is made somewhat less daunting: those who would like to observe Sabbath face the work of adaptation, not invention. Following the guidance of Sabbath proposals, clergy no longer need to look through, select, validate, and arrange the dazzling array of isolated practices—for their own pleasure and at their own risk: the lack of freedom allowed by Sabbath proposals turns out to be quite freeing. Clergy are free to practice right away because of the well-established path of communal ritual and story. Thus, because Sabbath proposals provide clergy with a powerful theoretical framework and a clearly identified

pattern of practice, they make rest an undertaking that is both more attractive and much easier to begin.

Even as the proposals for Sabbath-keeping are among the most frequently recommended texts for burned out clergy, it is important to acknowledge up front that not all authors who concern themselves with Sabbath seek to address the problem of clergy burnout. The literature on the Sabbath observance is both plentiful and wide-ranging, and the problem of clergy burnout in relation to this topic comprises only a small fraction of its texts. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify three broad categories in this literature, which bear particular significance for the work of addressing ministerial failure: (1) texts that advocate the importance of Sabbath-keeping for the general public; (2) texts that propose Sabbath as an explicit solution to ministerial failure; and (3) texts that deal with the various issues of Sabbath observance.

The most substantial body of literature is produced by the general advocates of Sabbath. Scholars and practitioners from the variety of fields, as well as clergy from many denominations, warn against the dangers of overwork and action-centered lifestyle, arguing the supreme value of the Sabbath observance for contemporary living. They suggest that a day “set apart” by divine command is a remedy against the tyranny of busyness, hyperactivity, and overconsumption that characterize secular society. There is great variety in the literature that promotes Sabbath-keeping for the general public: some authors set their practical recommendations in the context of systematic exposition in theology and history of the Sabbath institution;¹⁸¹ others explore the specific dimensions of the Sabbath

¹⁸¹ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989); Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003); Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

day that make it so different from the rest of the week;¹⁸² still others offer collections of poetry and meditations, weekly devotionals and study guides, biblical passages and stories which could serve as the literary points of entry into the restfulness of the Sabbath day, as well as practical advice for keeping it amid the challenges of daily living;¹⁸³ the last group of authors seeks to set the Sabbath command in relation to the broader issues of spiritual formation and religious praxis.¹⁸⁴ While the general advocates of Sabbath rarely distinguish clergy as a segment of the population that is in particular need of the day of rest,¹⁸⁵ these texts are important for clergy because they reveal that in their business, anxiety, and exhaustion, ministers are not unlike other members of contemporary society, under the

¹⁸² Keri Wyatt Kent, *Rest: Living in Sabbath Simplicity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Don Postema, *Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1997); Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Keeping* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1999); J. Matthew Sleeth, *24/6* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2012); Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: W Pub. Group, 2006).

¹⁸³ Kathleen Casey, *Sabbath Presence: Appreciating the Gifts of Each Day* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2006); Muller; James Richard Wibberding, *Sabbath Reflections* (Telford: Big Fish Publishing, 2006); Martha Whitmore Hickman, *A Day of Rest: Creating a Spiritual Space in Your Week* (New York: Avon Books, 1999); Karen Burton Mains, *Making Sunday Special* (Waco: Word Books, 1987); Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath: The Gift of Rest: 8 Studies for Individuals or Groups, A Lifeguide Bible Study* (Downers Grove: IVP Connect, 2007).

¹⁸⁴ Dorothy C. Bass, "Keeping Sabbath: Reviving a Christian Practice," *Christian Century* 114, no. 1 (1997); Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000); D. C. Bass, "Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 59, no. 1 (2005); Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight, The Christian Practice of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006); Robert Sherman, "Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest," *Interpretation*. 59, no. 1 (2005); Tilden Edwards, "The Christian Sabbath: Its Promise Today as a Basic Spiritual Discipline," *Worship* 56, no. 1 (1982); Thomas R. Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath: Spiritual Disciplines for Pastors* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁵ Helpful exceptions are the texts by a former emergency physician Matthew Sleeth and Episcopal priest Tilden Edwards: Edwards, *Sabbath Time*, 155-56; Sleeth, 136-37. The *Blessed Earth* ministry, chaired by Matthew and Nancy Sleeth, has recently received a three-year grant from The Duke Endowment to develop their *Sabbath Living*, the initiative for improving clergy health by offering resources to individual ministers and local congregations: <http://sabbathliving.org> (accessed on September 12, 2014).

pressures of constant availability, productivity, and consumption. By underscoring the societal dimensions of clergy's restlessness, Sabbath proposals validate the experience of unrest for individual ministers, offer insight into their repeated failure to rest, and lure them with the glimpses of alternative reality in which their work and their rest are set against the backdrop of eternity.

Sabbath proposals directed specifically to clergy and other church professionals are built upon the solid foundation laid by the general advocates of Sabbath. These texts come from the clergy who personally discovered Sabbath keeping as a way to preserve vitality of their ministry, as well as scholars and practitioners who study or care for clergy and other servants of the church. Sabbath proposals that come from the clergy themselves usually originate in the authors' own brush with burnout. Their discovery of Sabbath and gradual realization of the profound impact that it had on their ministry and life serves as a powerful impetus for sharing the gifts of the holy day with others. At their core, these texts could be seen as "testimonial literature": having come very close to the verge of ministerial failure and walked their way back, they reflect on the hard-earned wisdom and heart-felt delight of their experience of the holy day.¹⁸⁶ In contrast, Sabbath proposals that come from

¹⁸⁶ For example, Eugene H. Peterson, "Confessions of a Former Sabbath Breaker," *Christianity Today* 32, no. 12 (1988); MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2012); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1998); Eugene H. Peterson, "The Pastor's Sabbath," *Leadership* 6, no. 2 (1985); Eugene H. Peterson, "The Good-for-Nothing Sabbath: Why the Day Begins at Dusk, and Other Biblical Insights into How God Works--and Rests," *Christianity Today* 38, no. 4 (1994). Peterson offers a humorous but deeply insightful reflection on his "sin" of Sabbath breaking early in ministry and his gradual realization of the fundamental significance of this discipline for clergy's life. Dana, a female Presbyterian minister with a husband and two small children, offers an account of her family Sabbath "project," an attempt to reclaim the unhurried and holy time with God and each other: each chapter of her book chronicles the particular struggles and victories of that month, as well as the practical tips and tricks for making Sabbath children-friendly. The entries in Nouwen's journal reflect a different kind of Sabbath journey, with its solitude and searching of the evolving character of his vocation.

the scholars and practitioners concerned with personal well-being and professional performance of ministers offer Sabbath as a biblically grounded framework for establishing the healthy rhythms of rest and renewal. These authors lament the realities of theological education and ecclesiastical practice that push clergy down the path of the “24/7” existence, describe key steps towards the creative and flexible appropriation of the Sabbath tradition, and seek to identify the ways to make clergy’s Sabbath sustainable.¹⁸⁷ Thus, even though the literature that identifies the practice of Sabbath-keeping as an antidote for ministerial failure is not as plentiful as Sabbath proposals for general public, it is of tremendous value. The significance of these texts lies in their awareness of the unique demands of ministry and personal, congregational, and larger ecclesiastical and societal obstacles to clergy’s rest, their ability to identify clergy-specific practices and models of Sabbath-keeping, and their enduring emphasis on importance of introducing the Sabbath into the wider ecclesial structures and places of ministerial preparation.

The final category of Sabbath texts is the most diverse and at first glance scarcely related to the issues of pastoral overwork and exhaustion. Its authors concern themselves

¹⁸⁷ For example, Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2006); Stone and Wolfteich, 38-60; Spaite and Goodwin, 59-70, 144-67; Baab, "A Day Off from the God Stuff: What Is a Sabbath Rest for Pastors, When You Handle Holy Things All Week Long?."; Margaret A. D. Diddams, Lisa Klein Surdyk, and Denise Daniels, "Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping: Implications for Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 1 (2004); Linda Green, "Clergy Women Rediscover, Reclaim Sabbath," United Methodist News Service, accessed June 1, 2014. http://archives.umc.org/umns/news_archive2003.asp?story={BC415773-DBC2-4784-A70C-80B7CB8356F6}&mid=2406.

with the various issues pertaining to biblical theology,¹⁸⁸ history,¹⁸⁹ and theological interpretation of the Sabbath observance in Judaism and evolution of Sunday in Christianity,¹⁹⁰ as well as various cultural phenomena related to these traditions.¹⁹¹ While it might be tempting to dismiss these texts as irrelevant, there are two reasons why such specialized knowledge can enhance clergy's efforts to incorporate Sabbath into their lives. On the one hand, it deepens clergy's appreciation of the revolutionary character of the Sabbath command and raises awareness of the "powers that be" seeking to extinguish such an act of holy rebellion. On the other hand, familiarity with the broader issues of Sabbath observance equips clergy to help others in their search for rest. Thus, whereas the strength of the general Sabbath proposals lies in their affirmation of similarities between clergy and

¹⁸⁸ Important contemporary studies of the biblical meaning of the Sabbath can be found in Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2014); R. H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); Herold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁸⁹ A thought-provoking reflection on the influence of the Jewish Sabbath on the formation of the seven-day week is offered by Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Helpful studies of the relationship between the Sabbath and the Christian Sunday can be found in D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian university, 1977).

¹⁹⁰ Unique collections of interfaith and interdenominational perspectives on the Sabbath observance in Judaism and Christianity, in relation its history, theology, and liturgy, as well as its role in the emerging global society, can be found in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea, *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Edward O'Flaherty, Rodney L. Petersen, and Timothy A. Norton, *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010).

¹⁹¹ The insightful chronicles of the religious and cultural evolution of Sunday in the Western civilization in general and in the United States in particular are written by Craig Harline, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2007); Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

other members of the contemporary society, and the strength of the clergy-specific Sabbath proposals lies in their recognition of the uniqueness of the ministerial call, the significance of this final category of texts can be attributed to their ability to empower clergy to realize their unique role in sharing the Sabbath way of life with their communities, and in so doing gain a broader communal support for their own Sabbath journeying.¹⁹²

The Sabbath proposals are exciting, beautiful and wise. Yet, in Christian context, this approach to forming restful ministers is not unproblematic. Its drawbacks have to do not with the flaws of the tradition of Sabbath *per se*, but with the difficulties of *learning* it. Sabbath is a tradition, and it must be learned as such—as a living tradition in the context of a community that practices Sabbath as a part of its life. Yet, despite the substantial and rapidly growing body of literature that describes, defends, and offers guidance for the discipline of Sabbath-keeping, the living communities of Sabbath, by and large, are missing in contemporary Christianity.¹⁹³ In the absence of living communities of Sabbath that can

¹⁹² One example of such work is described by Daris Bultena, the Presbyterian minister who sought to create an “intentional community” of Sabbath within his congregation as a part of his Doctor of Ministry project. Bultena speaks about powerful transformation of the community in response to such Sabbath practice. See Daris S. Bultena, “Sharing Sabbath: A Practice for Whole-Life Rootedness in the Presence of God” (Union Theological Seminary, 2005).

¹⁹³ While there are living communities of the Seventh-day Adventists and the Seventh-day Baptists who have made the Sabbath observance the definitive mark of their identity, these communities hold very limited relevance for spiritual practice of mainline Protestant ministers: Jacques B. Doukhan, “Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective,” in *Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Herbert E. Saunders, *The Sabbath: Symbol of Creation and Re-Creation* (Plainfield: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1970). In the Roman Catholic Church, the movement from Jewish Sabbath to Christian Sunday is seen as the sign of fulfillment of the Sabbath promise in the person of Christ: as such, Sunday is understood as the day of the Risen Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the day of the Eucharistic Assembly of the believers, the day of joy, rest and solidarity, and a sign of eschatological feast. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the question of Sabbath-keeping in relation to the celebration of the Lord’s Day has been understood in a unique way, with both days remaining in effect: the Sabbath is the day of rest, all the more so because of the commemoration of the Holy Saturday, the day when Christ “rested” in the tomb; and

serve as a context and medium for learning this tradition of resting, proposals to incorporate Sabbath practices into the life of individual ministers suffer from some of the weaknesses of self-care proposals: the difficulty that clergy have in resisting the momentum of the secular culture and their own internalized habits of unrest, as well as dangers of guilt and self-criticism accompanying failure (all the more so, because of the strong theological imperative of the Sabbath proposals). Inspiring as they are, the narratives of such renown clergy as Eugene Peterson, Tilden Edwards, Wayne Muller, Lynn Baab, Mark Buchanan, MaryAnn McKibben Dana—that describe “successful” learning of the Sabbath on the part of individual clergy—bear testimony to the truly remarkable spirit of determination of these individual ministers, as well as the extraordinary support of their communities (and in case of Wayne Miller, a life-threatening illness to fuel the motivation) for the journey of transformation. Individual clergy who lack such communal assistance for their learning of Sabbath continue to suffer in isolation, caught between their genuine longing for the Sabbath rest and equally genuine inability to enter it. In the absence of living communities to embody the alternative reality of the Sabbath world and teach its alternative way of life, the tremendous potential of Sabbath proposals for addressing the problem of clergy burnout remains less than fully realized.

Sunday is the day of Resurrection, the “First day” of the new creation and the “Eighth day” of the inbreaking messianic banquet. Thus, while the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understanding of Sabbath and Sunday can provide tremendously rich theological and liturgical resources for the contemporary Protestant clergy, neither branch of the church features present-day Sabbatarian communities. The definitive statement of the Roman Catholic understanding of the day is Saint Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Dies Domini of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Catholic Church on Keeping the Lord's Day Holy* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998). The statement of position about Sabbath and Sunday for the Orthodox Christians, see Steven C. Salaris, "Is Sunday the Orthodox Christian Sabbath?," *Sourozh*, no. 90 (2002).

Conclusions

In this section, I reviewed the current literature on clergy burnout in relation to the most important criterion for evaluating the practical value of their proposals, the nature of their approach to a solution. I reflected in depth on the strengths and limitations of self-care and Sabbath proposals for addressing ministerial failure. Specifically, I described three broad problems that are responsible for weakening of the practical effectiveness of self-care proposals: (1) lack of attention to the systemic forces of unrest prominent in contemporary culture that results in an overly active approach to rest and inability to adequately account for failure of self-care on the part of individual ministers; (2) insufficient reflection on the issues of self, care, and relationship between work and rest makes it difficult to attend to the operative assumptions that drive clergy's overwork and restless behavior; and (3) the absence of a unifying theoretical perspective necessary to ground and unify the collection of eclectic practices of self-care, that results in the difficulty of their practical integration. My reflection on Sabbath proposals in turn revealed that their tremendous potential for remedying the weaknesses of self-care proposals remains not fully realized due to the absence of the living Sabbatarian communities in the mainline Protestantism that could serve as a context and medium for clergy's learning of this tradition of resting.

It is important to emphasize that even though the impediments to practical effectiveness of the self-care and Sabbath proposals are significant, they are by no means absolute. These weaknesses could be ameliorated by becoming aware and deliberately attentive to the problematic aspects of these two approaches. For example, when teaching clergy about the importance of self-care, we could be intentional about explicit naming of the problematic influence of the secular culture on clergy's ability to rest. We could also

be deliberate about encouraging systematic reflection on the clergy's existing patterns of self-understanding and underlying assumptions about work, rest, and self-care. And, we could be purposeful in creation of a unifying theoretical framework for clergy's practical attempts at personal and professional renewal. Similarly, when teaching ministers about the value of Sabbath, we could strongly emphasize the crucial importance of a practicing community as a context for individual Sabbath observance, and supplement such emphasis with specific strategies for transforming local congregations into the "Sabbatarian" communities that encourage, support, and hold clergy accountable in their efforts to keep the day holy.

An alternative approach for overcoming the existing weaknesses of self-care and Sabbath proposals—the one that I take in this dissertation—would be to identify another, distinctly Christian tradition of resting that is uniquely qualified to meet the aforementioned challenges. My experience of recovery from burnout, as a result of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition, made me keenly aware of its exceptional value for teaching rest and forming restful ministers, and therefore, for addressing the problem of clergy burnout.

First, like the tradition of Sabbath, the Cistercian monastic tradition is characterized by a heightened awareness of the powerful formative momentum of the secular culture. Second, like the tradition of Sabbath, the Cistercian monastic tradition excels in the richness and depth of its theological reflection, especially with regards to the issues the work, rest, self, and personal transformation. Third, like the tradition of Sabbath, the Cistercian monastic tradition is characterized by a distinctive theoretical perspective: the Rule of St. Benedict, in the context of Scripture and classical writings of the church, serves

as an orienting framework for imagining and practicing the monastic way of life. Such a framework would be particularly fitting for formation of clergy, not only because of its uniform Christian origin but also because of its overarching concern, the deepening of spiritual life. Finally, like the tradition of Sabbath, in recent years the Benedictine-Cistercian monasticism has drawn considerable attention among contemporary Protestants; some of the most prominent authors of self-care and Sabbath proposals, such as Dorothy Bass, Tilden Edwards, Roy Oswald, Bryan Stone, and Claire Wolfeich, have already started to draw on its resources. Thus, as a religious tradition of resting deeply compatible with the tradition of the Sabbath, the Cistercian monastic tradition could provide similar correctives to the aforementioned weaknesses of the self-care proposals.

At the same time, in stark contrast to the lack of living communities of Sabbath in Christianity, generally the Trappists have a number of the active monasteries whose vibrant history continues to the present day. Unlike the Christian Sabbatarian communities, the Cistercian monastic communities have a more pronounced presence in the church, known in its native Roman Catholic context, as well as by the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians. As such, the Cistercian monasticism has a strong potential not only for addressing the current limitations of self-care proposals, but also for remedying the key disadvantage of Sabbath proposals. Contemporary Cistercian monasteries could serve as the educational contexts where contemporary clergy could experience rest and learn valuable lessons about restful ways of living and serving.

The only threat to realizing such promise is the nature of the Trappist vocation itself. Their counter-cultural insights into the nature of work, rest, and personal transformation have been made possible in the protected space of the cloister. That very

cloister, however, creates a three-layered insulation between contemporary Cistercians of the Strict Observance and the rest of the world. First, there is a vocational separation: unlike other “active” religious orders for whom the work of teaching and preaching is a natural expression of their charism, the Trappist life is “wholly ordered to contemplation.” Hence, even as the Cistercian vocation creates unique conditions for learning the skills of resting in God, it also dramatically decreases the possibilities for direct sharing of their gifts with the world. Second, there is a geographical separation: Trappists value silence, solitude, and seek to live a hidden life of work and prayer within a particular monastery, rarely leaving its grounds without a good reason. The intentionally remote locations of the Cistercian monastic foundations physically detach the members of the Order even from the rest of the church. Finally, there is a denominational separation: the traditional lack of engagement between the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches of the church discourages the transmission of knowledge from the Trappist contemplatives to the contemporary Protestant clergy even further. Thus, the chief obstacle to utilizing the resources of the Cistercian monasticism for addressing clergy burnout is the inherently weak ties between the Trappist contemplatives and the rest of the world.

My unusual dual identity as a lay Cistercian and a Protestant clergy, however, presents an exceptional opportunity for bridging the communication gap between the Trappists who learn something essential about rest by dedicating themselves to the life of contemplation within the confines of the cloister and the Protestant clergy who struggle with burnout while actively serving in the world. As a Lay Cistercian, I have a special bond with the communities of monks and lay associates in two Cistercian monasteries, the Monastery of the Holy Spirit (Conyers, Georgia) and the Abbey of Gethsemani (Trappist,

Kentucky). Formally, as a part of my dissertation research, I have been granted access to the cloistered monastery library in Conyers and conducted a field study with its community on the topics of rest and restlessness, practices of formation in the Cistercian tradition, and writings of the Cistercian fathers and mothers who reflect on the topics of rest and becoming restful. Less formally, my learning of the Cistercian tradition has taken place through numerous retreats, spiritual direction, friendship, and other relationships of formative guidance with individual Trappist monks and nuns, as well as through my own extensive reading on the subject of Cistercian spirituality and monastic theology. Yet, I am not merely an academic student of Cistercian theology and spirituality. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have encountered the Cistercian charisms in the realm of my personal experience, by trying to live out the contemplative values and practices in my life in the world, and therefore getting to know them not only on the level of abstract definition, but also in the ordinariness, obscurity, and laboriousness of my daily practice. Thus, as a lay associate with the actual experience of the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition, I am in a unique position to speak about the resources of this tradition with people outside of the monastery in a way that would be respectful of the monks' contemplative vocation and, at the same time, faithful to my own.

Additionally, I approach the Cistercian theology, spirituality, and practice with a specific set of questions. On the one hand, my understanding of the Cistercian tradition has been shaped by my personal search for rest. As an ordained clergy who came to the monastery hoping to find an antidote to my burnout, I am especially attuned to the themes, patterns, and practices in the Cistercian monastic tradition that have special importance for understanding the suffering of ministerial failure and responding to it in a life-giving way.

On the other hand, as a prospective seminary faculty member with a particular focus on ministerial formation, I am situated in a context that is exceptionally fitting for sharing such knowledge with other clergy. While I consider myself only a beginner in the Cistercian way of life and only a developing theological educator, my paradoxical identity—as a lay associate at the Cistercian monastery who is called to share the gifts of the contemplative way of life with the world, and as a Protestant clergyperson who is called to serve in the world—endows me with a unique point of entry and contact with the communities that has traditionally lacked access to each other. As such, I can acknowledge the realities of separation between the Trappist contemplatives and Protestant clergy, but need not be incapacitated by it. In fact, in my research capitalizes on the strength of their “weak ties.”¹⁹⁴

The potential constructive contribution of my dissertation therefore is twofold. First, I seek to offer an in-depth examination of the ways in which the Cistercian tradition helped me to “unlearn” the destructive habits of burnout. I pay particular attention to the dynamics of my personal transformation, as well as the characteristics of the Cistercian environment and lifestyle that have made it possible. Second, I seek to imagine the ways in which the insights into my personal journey of becoming restful under the guidance of Cistercian community can inform the enterprise of contemporary theological education.

¹⁹⁴ The term “strength of weak ties” was coined by the sociologist, Mark Granovetter, in 1973. He defined it by pointing out that “those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive.” (Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1371.) Since ordinarily Protestant clergy participate in the social structures and relationships that are markedly different from those of Trappist monasteries, they can indeed benefit from accessing the alternative “information” about rest and work and personal transformation that has been developed and preserved by the communities of enclosed contemplatives.

Thus, by emphasizing the importance of utilizing the resources of the explicitly *religious* tradition of resting for addressing the problem of clergy burnout, I position my research in genuine continuity with Sabbath proposals for ministerial well-being. By grounding my own proposal for addressing ministerial failure in the *alternative*, distinctly Christian tradition of resting, I seek to expand the collection of resources available for clergy in need.

3.4 General Thesis and Intended Substantive Contributions

In this chapter I have reviewed contemporary literature on clergy burnout. I have described and analyzed the proposals for addressing this problem from three specific angles: by the context of origin of their authors, by the context in which they imagine their solutions to be implemented, and by the nature of their approach. My in-depth reflection on these texts, guided by my initial questions about the positive dimension of burnout, theological education as an avenue for addressing clergy burnout, the negative dimension in the experience of rest, the availability of the resources of Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition to clergy, and the value of personal experience for practical theological research, makes possible five important observations about the current state of understanding and research on clergy burnout.

First, in contrast to the general social scientific view of burnout that is predominantly negative, most writers who study burnout among clergy readily recognize the positive potential of this suffering. By drawing on the memory of the value of dark and painful experiences for spiritual transformation preserved within the religious tradition, these authors acknowledge the damaging effects of burnout on job performance and satisfaction, but at the same time assert the possibility of the greater and more positive *telos*

of such experience, attained through the processes of deep centering and purification. This ability to ponder the meaning of burnout in the context of the human life as a whole (rather than within the understandable but narrow framework of professional functioning) and affirm its hidden positive dimension is a distinguishing characteristic of the current literature on clergy burnout and a foundation of the unique religious contribution to the contemporary social scientific discourse on burnout. What is missing in the current literature on clergy burnout, however, is the disciplined and systematic exploration of the actual clergy's experiences of burning out that could confirm such supposition.

Second, the majority of authors who write about clergy burnout lament the lack of ability on the part of theological education to adequately prepare its ministerial students for the stresses and tensions of real ministry. Several of these authors point out that certain patterns in contemporary seminary training impede seminarians' ability to make rest and self-care a genuine part of their ministerial preparation and further reinforce the attitudes and behaviors known to be linked to burnout. They argue that institutional theological education itself must be transformed, if it is to become an effective avenue for prevention of clergy burnout and a teacher of effective and sustainable ministry. Actual proposals for utilizing theological education as a context for addressing clergy burnout, however, are in scarce supply. The only specific proposal for utilizing seminary training as an avenue for addressing ministerial failure that could be found in the literature is the aforementioned by Gary Harbaugh, who linked seminarians' stress and clergy burnout and suggested a special seminary course, "Pastor as Person," as a way to sponsor holistic preparation for ministry, in the early 1980s.

Third, with regard to the understanding of the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of rest revealed by the Sabbath tradition, there appears to be variation in the current literature on clergy burnout. The authors who focus their remedial efforts on the *practices of self-care* generally pay little attention to the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of rest, building their proposals on the wide-spread assumption of the positive nature of resting and emphasizing its salutary outcomes of renewal, enjoyment, and growth. The authors who bring to bear the resources of the *Sabbath tradition* upon their proposals, on the other hand, show awareness of the negative aspects of genuine resting, connecting it with the need to realize the limits of human mastery, to surrender the overly active and self-assured ways of engaging the world, and assume a posture of humility and trust. A close reading of their work reveals that they understand that experiencing the joy and delight of Sabbath rest comes at the cost of facing and making peace with the frightening conditions for entering Sabbath rest. In this sense, Sabbath proposals for addressing clergy burnout represent a significant development in the current literature for addressing clergy burnout. Yet, their valuable theoretical insights into the nature of rest cannot be fully appropriated by contemporary clergy because they lack access to the actual communities who practice Sabbath as a way of life. Without regular and extended contact with living Sabbatarian communities, clergy are robbed of the teaching presence of those who could embody the practicable ways of engaging the negative dimension of rest constructively.

Fourth, a number of authors who seek to address clergy burnout acknowledge the importance of resources that come from the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition. The monastic disciplines of *lectio divina*, varieties of contemplative prayer, study, chanting, spiritual direction, daily rhythm of prayer established by the Liturgy of the Hours, and

taking retreats frequently appear in the inventories of practices of self-care suggested for clergy. The broader aspects of monastic spirituality, such as silence, solitude, hospitality, psalmody, sanctification of time, and manual labor too are often recommended as a way to create conditions that favor rest and spiritual deepening. Finally, the contemplative heritage preserved within the monastic tradition has been named as essential for recovery of the contemporary practice of the Sabbath. What is lacking in the current literature on clergy burnout, however, is engagement with the resources of Benedictine-Cistercian monasticism that goes beyond the appreciation of its isolated practices, values, and texts. Given the fact that this branch of Western monasticism, especially in its Cistercian incarnation, is one of the few distinctly Christian traditions of resting that is still living and bearing fruit, its contribution to the problem of clergy rest and burnout merits further exploration.

Finally, the writers who seek to address clergy burnout reveal their appreciation of personal experience as a valuable source of knowing in three ways. Some authors use *vignettes*, the composite stories with fictitious characters that illustrate the stressful nature of clergy profession, ministers' propensity to burnout, and various paths to healing. Others share the results of the *social scientific studies* of the clergy population, summarizing and at times quoting directly from the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires administered to individual ministers, in order to identify the recurring symptoms and extent of pastoral impairment, the primary areas of concern, and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. Finally, clergy who have been able to recover from burnout reflect on the *lessons learned* from this experience. What is absent in the current literature on clergy burnout, however, is a detailed record and in-depth scholarly study of the actual experience of

ministers recovering from burnout. The two aforementioned accounts by Charles Hollingsworth and Loren Sandford offer rich and searching descriptions of their personal experiences of burnout and gradual recovery from it. However, the former is written as a novel about an Episcopal priest under a penname, and the latter comes from the genre of testimonial literature, written by an Evangelical clergyman. Both accounts have much to offer to clergy who struggle with burnout, and both accounts confirm the possibility of the greater and more positive *telos* of such experience in the realities of these pastors' subjective experience. Nevertheless, these accounts have not been a subject of a disciplined and systematic scholarly study.

In light of these observations about the current state of theoretical understanding and practical measures for addressing clergy burnout found in contemporary pastoral literature, I identify three potential substantive contributions of my dissertation study:

- *Contribution to theory:* I intend to carry out a disciplined and systematic exploration of the positive dimension of burnout and the negative dimension of rest.
- *Contribution to practice:* I intend to set forth a proposal for utilizing institutional theological education of clergy as an important avenue for preventing ministerial failure.
- *Contribution to existing resources for addressing clergy burnout:* I intend to supplement the insights and practices provided by the self-care and Sabbath proposals with resources from a living, contemporary, and distinctly Christian tradition of resting, Cistercian monasticism, thus avoiding the focus on the isolated individual that has limited much of the scholarly research on burnout and rest.

As such, the intended contributions of my research are in fundamental continuity with the most important developments in the current work for addressing clergy burnout. They are not solely attempts to correct the areas of deficiency but also to pursue appropriate “next steps,” organically unfolding from the promising themes and patterns inherent in the literature itself. After all, I am a student of my teachers.

Yet, in order to make these contributions, methodologically, I have to go beyond what I have been taught in the school of my teachers. Namely: I have to depart from the current avoidance of subjectivity that characterizes the contemporary research on clergy burnout. Each of the intended contributions of my scholarship is dependent upon my ability to understand and articulate what I have come to know about burnout, rest, theological education, and monastic tradition in the depths of my personal experience. My understanding of the positive dimension of burnout and negative dimension of rest stems from my own experience of “dying” in order to rest and discovering myself being “born again” in the darkness of burnout. My conviction that theological education could serve as an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout comes from my own encounter with the stresses and rewards of professional ministerial preparation. My realization of the tremendous potential of the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition for meeting the needs of burned out clergy has been made in response to profound restfulness of the monastic way of life, which I tasted at the time when burnout as a subject of my research became an undeniable reality of my own experience. Thus, to make a contribution to the theoretical understanding of burnout and rest, to the renewal of praxis of theological education, and to the resources for clergy struggling with rest and burnout, I need to engage in a disciplined and systematic reflection on my personal experience.

This, therefore, is the fundamental aim of my research: to offer a “case study” of my own experience of unlearning burnout in the context of theological education under the guidance of the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition, in order to elucidate the paradoxical nature of burnout and rest and to imagine the ways in which the monastic wisdom can inform the praxis of theological education of clergy, so that seminaries might play a better role in prevention of clergy burnout and formation of restful ministers. By the *context of origin*, this proposal comes from a Russia United Methodist elder, a developing scholar of practical theology, a recent seminary student, and a lay disciple to the Order of Cistercians of the Strict of Observance. By the *context of amelioration*, this proposal envisions theological education of clergy as one important avenue for addressing clergy burnout. By the *nature of approach*, this is a modified “Sabbath proposal,” which identifies Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition as a distinctly Christian tradition of resting that can offer unique assistance for clergy struggling with burnout.

PART II

METHODOLOGY:

A FIRST-PERSON CASE-STUDY BASED PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY AS A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY: DEFINITION, STRENGTHS, AND VULNERABILITIES

To say that this research is “my own case study” is to make it vulnerable before the danger of being dismissed as a “purely subjective” account, a mere collection of personal memories and reflections, or at worst, rampant subjectivism, anecdotal evidence, and unethical research conduct. In this chapter, I respond to this potential critique by making an important terminological transition: I shift from using “case study” in a loose sense of the term, as an activity of focused reflection on experience, to speaking about “case study” in a strict sense of the term, as a comprehensive strategy of research. I offer a detailed exposition of the case study method as an overall approach to my investigation, discuss why this methodological choice is particularly fitting for the purposes of my study, and finally, identify and respond to the general and case-specific vulnerabilities of my case study. My core objective is to show that, even though the subject of my study is centered on the realities of my personal experience, my scholarly conclusions rest on the practices of careful observation, thorough documentation, rigorous analysis, and disciplined reporting.

The case study approach to inquiry has a long history in many disciplines: medicine, law, psychology, anthropology, sociology, political sciences, education, and many others.¹⁹⁵ As a scientific method of inquiry, case study research has been most developed in the field of qualitative research. At first, in the 1960-1970s, it was seen as a “final catch-all” category of methods, including the historical, observational, and descriptive studies that did not fit into the more widely appreciated variations of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, surveys, and statistical methods.¹⁹⁶ The 1980s marked a new development in case study method, as noted researchers, such as Robert Stake, Sharan Merriam, and Robert Yin, began to describe the case study as a comprehensive research strategy of inquiry that has its own distinct identity, defining characteristics, and preferred applications.¹⁹⁷ Today, despite the “lingering uncertainty” about the proper positioning of the case study within the complex nomenclature of the qualitative research methods, the case study is being frequently employed in many social scientific disciplines.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 39-54; John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 73-74.

¹⁹⁶ Merriam, 39.

¹⁹⁷ Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988); Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984); Robert E. Stake, "Case Study Methods in Educational Research: Seeking Sweet Water," in *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, ed. R.M. Jaeger (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association 1988). Merriam and Stake focus especially on the use of case study method in the field of education, both in the U.S.A. and abroad. Yin's application of the case study method crosses many applied fields and scholarly disciplines.

¹⁹⁸ Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin offers a thorough overview of the historical development of case study method as a research tool, tracing its origins to the fields of anthropology and sociology: Jacques Hamel, Stéphane Dufour, and Dominic Fortin, *Case Study Methods, Qualitative Research Methods* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993).

In the domain of popular imagination, this approach to inquiry is best-known and appreciated in the context of a good detective story. For example, the captivating adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes are individual “case studies” that bear testimony to the almost uncanny power of careful observation and in-depth reflection. Both the formal applications of case study research in the social sciences and its story-based popular detective manifestations point to the definitive features of the case study method, the characteristics that endow it with unmatched power to sponsor insight, deepen understanding, and render meaning to strange and seemingly disconnected pieces of information.

4.1 Definition: Distinctive Characteristics and Types of Case Study Research

All case study research shares one distinct and compelling feature: a researcher’s desire to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific instance of the object of their interest (a case) in its “real-world” setting.¹⁹⁹ The aim of such an in-depth investigation is to gain greater insight into the nature of the studied phenomenon and to learn about complex contextual conditions and multiple variables that are integral to it’s a complete and accurate understanding.²⁰⁰ Hence, what sets the case study research apart from other qualitative

¹⁹⁹ Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), 4; D. B. Bromley, *The Case-Study Method in Psychology and Related Disciplines* (Chichester: Wiley, 1986), 1.

²⁰⁰ Case study researchers vary in their emphasis on the different facets of this methodological intent. For example, for Yin, case study is an “empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context—especially, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” For Merriam, case study is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system [a case].” Creswell defines case study method as “a qualitative research in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.” Finally, Robert Stake’s

methods and research designs is not merely the *topic* of investigation or the *methods* of study, but its explicit *focus on the unit of analysis*, a single entity “around which boundaries can be placed.”²⁰¹ For example, my interest in how clergy experience burnout lends itself most readily to the format of “qualitative research.” Such a qualitative research project, however, could be carried out by using a variety of methods, determined by the researchers’ primary objectives for the study: e.g., narrative method could be employed to elicit “life histories” of burnout, a phenomenological method could be utilized to capture the “meaning of lived experience” of burnout, a grounded theory research method could attempt to generate a “theory of clergy burnout,” and so on. While the actual sample for all these types of study would have to be defined, theoretically there is no limit to the number of clergy who could be observed and/or interviewed. In contrast, for a study to be a “case study,” one particular clergy person, or one particular congregation, or a specific denomination, or particular program or initiative of responding to clergy burnout has to be identified as an explicit unit of analysis. Thus, my dissertation research is a “case study” because it has “obvious boundaries”: the scope of its examination is limited to one person (me), to a specific period of my life (2005-2015), and place (the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit, in Conyers, Georgia).

definition shifts the focus of researcher’s attention even further, asserting that case study “is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied.” See Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 18; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 40; Creswell, 73; Robert E. Stake, “Case Studies,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 435.

²⁰¹ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 41-42.

A “case,” therefore, is a “bounded system”—a person, community, institution, specific program, activity, policy, event, process, behavioral condition, practical concern, specific decision, organizational change, or any other social phenomenon—that represents an “*instance drawn from a class.*”²⁰² The choice of case is made on the basis of its distinctive feature, something that makes it “special” and therefore worth studying. The case is “special,” if it seems to reveal something unique, interesting, significant or atypical.²⁰³ On the other hand, an “ordinary,” typical, or representative case also could be studied as special, if for example it has been associated with some “unusually successful outcome.”²⁰⁴ In either instance, special cases give access to the material that is by definition rare and therefore not readily available. As such, they have a strong potential to illuminate the upper and lower boundaries of what is known and lend an alternative perspective or a non-obvious, counter-intuitive insight into the phenomenon of interest.²⁰⁵ For example, while my case of a United Methodist clergy who underwent burnout is fairly commonplace, the fact that it is a case of a *recovered* clergy, and that my recovery was an outcome of my

²⁰² Case study researchers emphasize the apparent nature of the case, the fact that its boundaries are easily recognized. Writes Robert Stake: “a case is a noun, a thing, an entity...real things that are easy to visualize.” Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis echo Stake’s observation, stating that the boundaries that define a case “have a common sense obviousness, e.g., an individual teacher, a single school, or perhaps an innovatory programme.” Robert E. Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 1; C. Adelman, D. Jenkins, and S. Kemmis, *Rethinking Case Study: Notes from the Second Cambridge Conference* (1980), 3. See also Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 6; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 40-41.

²⁰³ Robert Yin gives the following examples of “remarkable events” that qualify as good case studies: revival or renewal of a major organization, a new medical procedure, a rare medical syndrome, the discovery of a new way of reducing gang violence, a critical political election, some dramatic neighborhood change, or even the occurrence and aftermath of a natural disaster. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 7.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 39-42.

²⁰⁵ Paul R. Abramson, *A Case for Case Studies: An Immigrant's Journal* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 190.

relationship with a *Roman Catholic contemplative monastic Order*, makes it a rather “atypical” or “special” case.

A researcher’s primary intent for the case analysis determines whether the case is understood as “intrinsic” or “instrumental.” An *intrinsic case study* focuses on the case itself, because it presents an unusual or revelatory situation.²⁰⁶ In contrast, in an *instrumental case study*, a researcher focuses on an issue or a concern, and uses the case as a “vehicle” for understanding it; in this instance, the case itself is of secondary importance.²⁰⁷ This is the nature of my own case study: I study my experience of recovery from burnout in the context of theological education not *as an end in itself* but *in order to* gain insight into the nature of clergy burnout and the dynamics of becoming restful, with the objective of re-imagining of the seminary training of ministerial students as an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout.

It is possible that a researcher would choose to study not one but several “similar sites” in order to understand the same issue or concern; such a case study would be called a “collective,” “multisite,” “cross-case,” or “comparative” case study.²⁰⁸ For example, had I found other United Methodist clergy, at other Trappist foundations with similar dynamics of recovery from burnout, I could have done a multi-site, comparative study. In the absence of such other instances, my case study stands as a “single-site” kind.

²⁰⁶ Robert Stake offers educational examples of the intrinsic case studies: “this particular child, clinic, conference, or curriculum”: Robert E. Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 445.

²⁰⁷ For Stake, the instrumental case study is of “secondary interest, it plays a supporting role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else”: *ibid.*, 437.

²⁰⁸ Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, 5-6; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 49-50; Matthew B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 29.

It is also possible that a researcher would choose not only to examine the case as a whole *unit* of analysis, but also to concentrate on one or several of its specific features, the *subunits* of analysis. In this situation, a distinction would be made between “holistic” and “embedded” case studies.²⁰⁹ For example, the purpose of my research to understand my experience of recovery from clergy burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition necessitates not only an in-depth reflection on my personal experience of transformation, but also an up-close examination of the monastery as a place and community that had a critical influence on my recovery. As such, both my experience of the transformation of self and my encounter with the monastic tradition are clearly identifiable subunits of analysis within my case study, and it is therefore categorized as “embedded.”

Thus, depending on the nature of the case and the specifics of its focus, there are a number of possibilities for its actual design: intrinsic or instrumental, a single- or multiple-site, holistic or embedded. Yet, regardless of these variations in the design of a specific case study, the overall focus of the case study research is a detailed examination on a defined (bounded) system.

However, such focus is not exclusive. The second distinct feature of case study research is the assumption that investigation of the *context and the real-world conditions of the case* are highly pertinent, indeed integral, to its proper understanding. This assumption rests on the recognition that given the inherent complexity of all real-life situations, phenomena and their contexts can never be neatly separated. Therefore, in order

²⁰⁹ This distinction comes from Robert Yin who analyzes organizations and therefore knows that their different facets can be attended with different degree of intensity. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 42-45.

to gain an insight into the nature of the case and its real-world meaning and behavior, it is necessary to go beyond the study of the “isolated variables.”

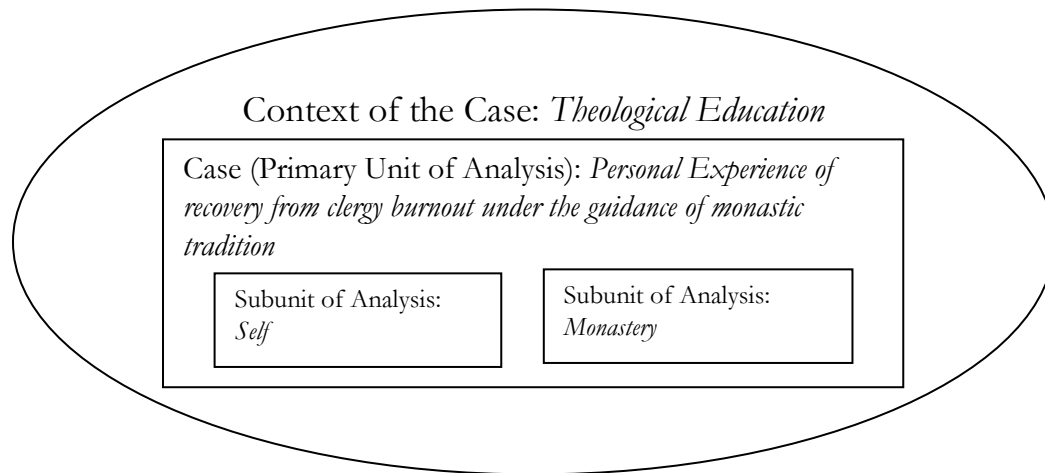
The strong contextual sensitivity of case study method has three practical consequences for doing case study research: first, case study researchers must be intentional about examining multiple rather than singular sources of evidence for relevant data; second, they must favor data collected “in natural settings,” rather than “derived” from experiments and surveys; and third, rather than trying to control or manipulate the phenomenon of interest (as in the laboratory), researchers must immerse themselves in its setting.²¹⁰ According to Robert Yin, the “opportunity to make observation of the human actions, physical environment, real-world events is one of the most distinctive features in doing case studies.”²¹¹ For my case study, the real-life context of the investigation is the setting of institutional theological education of clergy.

Thus, within the existing nomenclature of the case study research, my research project can be seen as a single-sited, instrumental, embedded case study that is investigated in its real-world context of theological education of clergy. Schematically, this research project can therefore be presented as follows (figure 1):

²¹⁰ Robert Stake calls qualitative researchers in general and case study researchers in particular “noninterventionists [who] try to see what would have happened had they not been there”: Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 44. See also Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 4-5; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 7-8, 13-14; Bromley, 23.

²¹¹ Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 11. Yin’s observation is echoed in the writing of Lee Cronbach, who differentiates the case study method from other research designs by the researchers’ intention to arrive at “interpretation in context”: Lee Joseph Cronbach, *Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology* (Washington, DC: American psychologist, 1975), 123.

Figure 1: Schematic Presentation of the Case Study



The emphasis of case study research on both the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest *and* on its broader contextual conditions is complex and somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, in order to be “in-depth,” the case under investigation is always delimited, bounded. Yet, on the other hand, the very boundaries that are so important for delimitation of the case study are blurred by the researcher’s abiding desire to account for the complexity of the circumstances that influence the case by studying its real-world context. It is this distinct twofold emphasis that lends the case study research strategy its noteworthy strengths and practical applications.

4.2 Strengths of Case Study Research: Assets and Applications

In the field of qualitative research, case studies are appreciated for their three unique characteristics: their particularistic focus, heuristic value, and descriptive power.²¹² First of

²¹² Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 43-46.

all, the case study strategy of research is an investigation into the “*valued particular*.”²¹³ In order to see better, the researchers attempt to get “as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can.”²¹⁴ The specific case—person, program, situation, event—is considered important because it offers a particular “opening” into the phenomenon of interest.²¹⁵ At the same time, precisely because the focus of the investigation is so narrow, researchers can have the luxury of collecting multiple types of data from multiple sources of evidence, and analyzing multiple variables and their interaction over a period of time. By examining one specific case, in its unique setting, thoroughly, researchers seek to gain new understanding into the nature of the phenomenon that the case represents.

Secondly, the *heuristic value* of case study research strategy lies in its ability to create ideal conditions for making a discovery.²¹⁶ On the one hand, its up-close examination invites more intense personal engagement on the part of the researcher: whether studying an individual person, organization, or event, the researcher becomes

²¹³ Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 448.

²¹⁴ Bromley, 23.

²¹⁵ Merriam points out that “[by] concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon”: Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 42-43.

²¹⁶ Even though the term “heuristic” (from Greek *heuriskein*, “to find or discover”) has been traditionally connected to the process of general learning, discovery, and exploratory problem-solving, qualitative researchers emphasize a more personal aspect of this process. For example, Gretchen Rossman and Sharon Rallis emphasize that the formally articulated research questions come from the unarticulated knowledge derived from personal experience. Similarly, Clark Moustakas, whose specialty is the heuristic branch of phenomenological inquiry, argues that heuristic research “refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.” Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis, *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 25; Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 17.

“immersed” in the specifics of the case. On the other hand, the variety of the sources of evidence, multiplicity of perspectives, and the voluminous amounts of information that the case study generates brings about a certain “saturation” of data.²¹⁷ The position of methodological proximity in combination with the large quantity of relevant data enables the researcher to make observations, perceive connections, and gain “in-sights” which otherwise would not be possible. Like a skilled detective, a researcher begins the subtle process of “making sense” of the case in the earliest stages of data collection, and continues it into the final stages of writing up the report, gradually arriving at his or her own set of “is’s and because’s.”²¹⁸ As such, even a single case has a strong potential to illuminate the meaning of the phenomenon under examination.²¹⁹

Finally, when well done, case studies result in a holistic, multi-layered account, known for their “*thickness*” of description, the richness of their thematic analysis, and for their strong explanatory power.”²²⁰ The final report can take a variety of literary forms and

²¹⁷ Yin Robert asserts that “the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, observations”: Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 8. See also Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 44-45.

²¹⁸ Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*, Prentice-Hall Methods of Social Science Series (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 110.

²¹⁹ Wayne W. Welch, Research Minnesota, and Minneapolis Evaluation Center, *Case Study Methodology in Educational Evaluation. Proceedings of the Minnesota Evaluation Conference (May 1981)* (1981), 47; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 44.

²²⁰ “Thick description” is a term from anthropology, referring to the researcher’s effort to describe the real-world occurrence in great detail. For qualitative researchers, the value of thick description has to do with the intentional work of creating a richer rendition of the event, which increases their awareness of their preconceptions about the phenomena and reduces their influence. The term itself is commonly, and mistakenly, attributed to Clifford Geertz. Geertz himself however credits Gilbert Ryle with the origin of the term, citing and reflecting at length on Ryle’s fine discussion of the two widely differing social meanings associated with the brief closing of the eye, a “wink” and a “twitch.” See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6-7; Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, New York: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1949).

use creative, compelling prose to illustrate the complexity of the situation and convey the researcher's perception and growing understanding of the case.²²¹ Yet, the value of the well-written and richly detailed report extends far beyond the literary merit. Rather, the very concreteness, texture, and detail of the final narrative are the means of creating such a "vivid portrait" of the case,²²² that the readers themselves are empowered not only to "learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's description"²²³ but also to participate in drawing out the "lessons learned" from the examination.²²⁴

These three particular strengths of case study research—the particularistic focus, heuristic value, and thick description—make this research strategy especially useful for dealing with "questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice."²²⁵ As such, case study is a superb choice for practical problems that have to be

²²¹ Yin offers six possible structures for the composition of case study report: Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 151-55. Merriam points out that the critical decision with regards to the case study reporting has to do with reaching a proper balance between the amount of description and the amount of analysis, interpretation, and concluding assertions, suggesting that such a balance should be 60% to 40%, or 70% to 30%, in favor of description: Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 234-36.

²²² Elliot W. Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 199.

²²³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 51.

²²⁴ The case study researchers argue that what is learned in a particular case can be applied to other situations, and it is the readers (and not only the researchers themselves), who function as the agents of generalization: the readers bring to a case study their own prior experience and understanding; hence, when they find the knowledge generated by the case study personally meaningful, when they feel resonance with the case study's insights and conclusions, they intuitively begin to transfer them to their own contexts and populations. See *ibid.*, 45; Robert E. Stake, "Case Study Methodology: An Epistemological Advocacy" in *Case Study Methodology in Educational Evaluation*, ed. Wayne W. Welch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1981), 35-36; Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 455.

²²⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 43. See also Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 29-32; Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 448; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5-11.

understood in all complexity of their internal features and messiness of their real-world situations. Sarah Merriam, a professor of education at the University of Georgia with a long standing interest in qualitative case study, attests to the particular appeal of case study design for applied fields of study such as education, social work, administration, and public health, especially for the tasks of understanding educational innovations, evaluating programs, informing policy, and improving practice.²²⁶ Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, two leading qualitative researchers, find case studies particularly helpful for “evaluation research”: due to their ability to create detailed lifelike description, illuminate meaning, communicate tacit knowledge, and simplify data for the reader, case studies create unparalleled conditions for gaining of insight, analyzing the process and the outcomes of interventions, and making informed judgements.²²⁷ Robert Yin, an experienced practitioner and foremost advocate of this research strategy, describes a remarkable variety of practical and contemporary applications for the case study, ranging from research on individual persons to broad economic developments.²²⁸ Finally, case study has earned a prominent place in biographical research, clinical psychology, psychiatry, criminology, sociology, political science, business.²²⁹

²²⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 51.

²²⁷ Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Effective Evaluation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 375.

²²⁸ In his *Applications of Case Study Research*, Yin offers examples of case studies related to the specific investigations he designed or conducted: e.g., examination of life in local communities and their public services, specific sectors in education and public health, small businesses, economic partnerships, and dynamics of commercialization process.

²²⁹ Such case studies are frequently known to the general public, in the form of the “stories of famous people, archetypal criminal offenders, [or] ‘everyday’ persons—such as school principals and single-parent heads of households—who have nonetheless done remarkable things with their lives.” Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, xxi.

The significance of case studies for understanding and enhancing practice is matched by their effectiveness as a tool of research. Robert Yin maintains that case study research is an “essential form of social science inquiry” and offers a more systematic rationale for using case study as a research instrument. He identifies three “conditions” for determining when the case study strategy has a distinct advantage over other types of research strategies used in social science (e.g., experiments, surveys, histories, and analysis of archival data). The first and most critical condition is the *type of research question* that the researcher seeks to address: in the familiar series of “who,” “what,” “where,” “how,” and “why,” the case studies are pertinent for the “what is going on,” “how,” and “why” questions. For example, what is happening or has happened? How or why did something happen? How can we make it happen again (or prevent it from happening)? The second condition is the *extent of control* that the researcher has over the studied events: case studies are appropriate when the studied situation and relevant occurrences and behaviors cannot be manipulated. The third final condition is the *degree of focus* on contemporary versus historical events: for the most part, the case studies researchers concern themselves with contemporary situations.²³⁰ Other case study researchers echo Yin’s observation, identifying this strategy as particularly useful when the research objectives are to describe, explain, or explore the phenomena of interest, in their natural settings.²³¹ Rich and holistic

²³⁰ Ibid., 4-5; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5-11. On the basis of these characteristics, Yin differentiates between the three kinds case studies: “descriptive,” “explanatory,” and “exploratory”: R. K. Yin, “The Case Study as a Serious Research Strategy,” *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization* 3, no. 1 (1981); Robert K. Yin, “The Case Study Crisis: Some Answers,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1981).

²³¹ Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 7; Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*; Dawson R. Hancock and Robert Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research: A Practical Guide for*

accounts produced by the case study offer a means of investigating “complex social units” that consist of multiple variables of potential importance for understanding. This is especially true when the variables are so embedded in the situation that they are impossible to identify ahead of time. Hence, case study design is recommended when researchers are interested in “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.”²³² At the same time, the insights gained through such an up-close investigation in turn can be formulated as “tentative hypotheses” that can guide the direction of the future research.²³³

Of course, the boundaries between “applied” and “basic” research are rarely drawn sharply. What starts as a pure scientific investigation may in turn bring about a change of policy or practice; and conversely, the discoveries of practical fields could open up new possibilities for academic inquiry. Yet, even this brief naming of the practical and academic applications of case study reveals that this research strategy is remarkably appropriate, if not ideal, for the purposes of my dissertation study. To begin with, I seek to address a very practical problem: clergy burnout. Moreover, this problem is exceedingly complex, as there are a large number of variables—ranging from the individual psychological profiles of the ministers, to congregational dynamics, to the overarching paradigms and prevalent images of ministry, and to the characteristics of theological education of clergy—that are of potential importance for adequate understanding of the case. Finally, for this proposal, taking into consideration the real-world context is critically important, not only because

Beginning Researchers, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011); John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²³² Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 42-51.

²³³ Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 106-07.

the problem of clergy burnout can hardly be studied in the laboratory setting, and can only narrowly be studied in clinical settings, but also because any proposed solution to it must pass the test of the real-world living and serving.

At the same time, the way I go about learning about and addressing this problem, too, can benefit greatly from the tools and sensitivities of the case study approach. First, my research proposal has a very narrow focus: it concentrates on a specific experience of an individual person, thus, requiring a research tool that can enable an in-depth study. Second, my proposal calls for a retrospective examination that is in service of prospective action: I seek to understand what has happened to me during my long-term recovery from clergy burnout under the guidance of Cistercian monastic tradition and in the context of theological education, *in order to* envision theological education as an avenue for formation of restful ministers. Thus, the types of research questions that I ask are in close correspondence with the questions that give the case study approach a distinct advantage: *What is going on* in my experience of recovery from burnout? *How* did the Cistercian monastic tradition sponsor my learning of rest? What does my case teach us about the phenomena of rest and burnout, and the reasons *why* clergy have such a hard time keeping Sabbath and practicing self-care? In light of the Cistercian ways of teaching rest, *how* could we better teach rest in the seminary? Third, as these questions indicate, for this proposal the setting of theological education of clergy is doubly important, not only as a context in which my personal experience with burnout needs to be understood, but also as the context in which the praxis of burnout intervention is to be imagined. Fourth, in my reflection on my personal experience, I seek to gain insight, develop deeper understanding, and offer an alternative interpretation about the seemingly familiar phenomena of rest and burnout.

Thus, by its nature, my research is descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory—all three categories in which the case study approach to inquiry has an unsurpassed power. Finally, my experience of recovery from burnout is by definition a contemporary, real life situation, in which I as a researcher have had little control over the course of events. As such, the specifics of my study, situated at the intersection of the applied and pure research, lend themselves both to the common recommendations and the unique conditions for appropriate and advantageous use of case study research strategy in social sciences.

Yet, the mere evidence of a remarkable suitability of the case study for the purposes of my research is not sufficient. The discussion of the vulnerabilities and potential challenges of using such an approach in general, and for my individual case in particular, is necessary.

4.3 Vulnerabilities of Case Study Research: General and Case-Specific

Despite the impressive list of strengths of the case study research, traditionally this approach has been looked down upon as a “weak sibling” among social scientific methods.²³⁴ Some researchers shy away from this research strategy altogether; others think of it as a “method of last resort,” and those who do case studies are not infrequently regarded as “having downgraded their academic disciplines.”²³⁵ Much of the conventional disdain of the case study method is due to its perceived inadequacy on the level of methodological rigor, lack of generalization, and the requirements of time and expense involved in investigation.

²³⁴ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, xiii.

²³⁵ Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 5; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, xiii.

Most frequently, this research strategy is denigrated for the lack of rigor and “insufficient precision.”²³⁶ Case studies appear to be “soft” and not vigorous enough to produce reliable data and trustworthy conclusions. This accusation is not entirely unfounded. The very flexibility of case study research which makes it suitable for the variety of phenomena and disciplines necessitates this approach to be “methodologically eclectic”; yet, the very eclecticism of case studies makes offering a thorough methodological guidance for conducting them a challenging undertaking.²³⁷ Hence, for a long time, unlike any other research strategy or method in the qualitative research toolbox, case study research lacked texts that covered this strategy in a comprehensive and systematic manner.²³⁸ As a result, some case studies were done poorly, which in turn only reinforced the conventional prejudice against this approach.²³⁹ The second reason for the concern about the lack of methodological rigor is an apprehension about the researcher’s bias. The up-close, particularistic focus of case study does not seem to offer sufficient

²³⁶ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 10.

²³⁷ Rossman and Rallis, 105.

²³⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, xiv. It is important to note, however, that Yin himself, more than any other researcher in the field, has helped to address this problem: His foundational text, *Case Study Research*, is now in its fifth edition, and its companion volume, *Applications of Case Study Research*, is in its third. With each new edition, Yin continues to expand and diversify the collection of real-life examples for the case study investigation, identify distinguished scholars in various fields who employ this method, and further hone the theoretical and practical aspects of the methodological guidance that he offers. See also Robert K. Yin, *The Case Study Anthology* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004); Robert K. Yin, *The Case Study Strategy: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, D.C.: Case Study Institute, 1982).

²³⁹ Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 6. Yin also connects the traditional prejudice against case study method to the possible confusion between case study as a “research tool” and case study as a “teaching method”: with the latter, the information presented may be “deliberately altered to demonstrate a particular point of view more effectively”; with the former, such a step would be “strictly forbidden.” Yet, given the similarity of the name, the concern about the fair treatment of evidence by case study investigators persists. See Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 10.

protection against the investigators' subjectivity intruding upon their conduct of inquiry and interpretation of results. Without some level of impartiality safeguarded on the part of investigators, the notorious prospects of researchers "finding" what they expected to find seem hard to avoid.²⁴⁰

The final reason for the abiding reputation of the case study research as methodologically deficient is so simple that it is usually overlooked: "good case studies are difficult to do."²⁴¹ In the absence of a prescribed protocol, elaborate research instruments, and specialized computer programs for data analysis, case studies look deceptively easy.²⁴² Yet, precisely because the research strategy for case studies is "not routinized," the requirements of theoretical and experiential knowledge, of practical expertise and methodological fluency, of intuition and common sense, with which the case study research presents its investigators are vast and invariably complex. (Once more, the example of Sherlock Holmes's astounding powers of deduction is helpful: the most obscure of mysteries become "as clear as a day" when his immense theoretical knowledge and

²⁴⁰ Guba and Lincoln refer to this as an "unusual problem of ethics," pointing out that an "unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated": Guba and Lincoln, 378.

²⁴¹ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 11.

²⁴² Robert Yin observes: "Many scientists—especially budding ones—think the case study strategy can be mastered without much difficulty. Their belief is that they will have to learn only a minimal set of technical procedures; that any of their own deficiencies in formal, analytic skills will be irrelevant; and that a case study will allow them simply to 'tell it like it is.' No belief could be farther from the truth. In actuality, the demands of a case study on your intellect, ego, and emotions are far greater than those of any other research strategy. . . . In laboratory experiments or in surveys, for instance, the data collection phase of a research project can be largely, if not wholly, conducted by one (or more) research assistant(s). . . . Conducting case studies offers no such parallel. Rather, a well-trained and experienced investigator is needed to conduct a high-quality case study because of the continuous interaction between the theoretical issues being studied and the data being collected. During data collection, only a more experienced investigator will be able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities rather than being trapped by them—and also will exercise sufficient care against potentially biased procedures." *Ibid.*, 58.

practical expertise in chemistry, anatomy, botany, criminology, and British law are brought to bear upon it; in the absence of such knowledge and expertise, both the renown Scotland Yard officials and the reputable Dr. Watson remain in the dark—even though they are presented with the same evidence.) The real problem with formal case studies, as Yin candidly remarks, is that “we have little way of screening or testing for an investigator’s ability to do good case studies. People know when they cannot play music; they also know when they cannot do mathematics beyond a certain level; and they can be tested for other skills such as the bar examination in law.”²⁴³ No such procedures are in place for the case study investigators.

The second source of prejudice against the case study research is a concern about generalization of its finding to a broader level. This concern is expressed best in a frequent question, especially in discussion of holistic, single-site case study projects: “what can you possibly tell from a sample size of 1?”²⁴⁴ Since a “case” in the case study represents an instance from a class, the unease about applying the results from such a small “sample” to a larger population is only understandable.²⁴⁵ Hence, case study research is frequently

²⁴³ Ibid., 11. Yin argues that the chief source of this difficulty has to do with the traditional lack of definition of the skills necessary for doing good case studies. He observes that this problem has been recognized by the prominent scholars in other fields, citing a keen remark made by the five prominent statisticians: “most people feel that they can prepare a case study, and nearly all of us believe that we can understand one. Since neither view is founded, the case study receives a good deal of approbation it does not deserve.” D. C. Hoaglin et al., *Data for Decisions: Information Strategies for Policymakers* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1982), 134.

²⁴⁴ Merriam routinely poses this question for her students during their defenses of their research proposals: Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 212.

²⁴⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 10-11; Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 18; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 52-53.

critiqued as providing little or no “basis for scientific generalization.”²⁴⁶ Such accusation, however is not entirely warranted: it stems from the widespread misidentification of case study research with the survey-based methods of gathering information. When doing surveys, the most common way of making an inference about a larger population has to do with subjecting the data collected about a sample to the standardized formulas that determine the confidence with which the generalizations could be made.²⁴⁷ In contrast to such “statistical” generalization, the logic of replication that characterizes the case study inferences has to do with development and testing of theoretical conclusions about the phenomena that are being studied: the case study investigators compare their findings with a previously built theory, i.e., making “analytic” generalizations, as a way to confirm or disprove their original hypotheses.²⁴⁸

The final challenge of doing case study research has to do with logistics. The common complaint about this approach to inquiry is that requires extended periods of time “in the field,” involves hefty investments of effort and monetary resources, and results in “massive, unreadable documents.”²⁴⁹ The very intensity and extensiveness that case study

²⁴⁶ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 10; Mary M. Kennedy, "Generalizing from Single Case Studies," *Evaluation Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1979).

²⁴⁷ Floyd J. Fowler, *Survey Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993).

²⁴⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 10-11, 31-33, 37, 47-51. Yin places an enormous emphasis on the proper distinction between these two kinds of generalization, stating that the perception of statistical generalization as a method of generalizing the results of case study investigation is a “fatal flaw” in doing case studies. He argues that the case study investigators must conceive of their research as “experiments” (and not “samples”), thus using their findings to generalize to theoretical propositions (rather than to populations). Similar argument about theoretical generalization is made by Julius Sim: Julius Sim, "Collecting and Analysing Qualitative Data: Issues Raised by the Focus Group," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 28, no. 2 (1998).

²⁴⁹ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 11.

method is known for, call for considerable expenses of time, money, and energy on the part of investigators, their sponsors, and evaluation agencies.²⁵⁰

The three vulnerabilities of the case study research—the apparent lack of methodological rigor, the problem of generalization, and the requirements of time and expenses involved in investigation—are routinely listed as objections to the use of the case study for the purposes of pure and applied research. Yet, a closer look at these vulnerabilities reveals that most of them represent the “opposite side” of the case study’s positive characteristics. The frequent charges against this research strategy on the basis of the alleged deficiency of its methodological rigor stem from the remarkable ability of the case study to integrate various methods of data collection and analysis in its examination and the resulting requirement of methodological fluency that it places upon the researcher. Similarly, the apparent lack of suitability of case study findings for statistical generalization is closely related to the key objective of this research strategy—an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest in its real-world context—and as such, it is abundantly compensated by the possibilities that case study opens up for analytical generalization. Finally, the high investment of resources is the cost of its “high returns,” i.e., the case study’s ability to lend insight and understanding to complex occurrences that, by definition, cannot be adequately explored through a “snapshot” approach. Hence, it is appropriate to observe that even as the reasons for conventional apprehension about case study research have legitimacy, they are not entirely justified: when inadequately addressed, the aforementioned vulnerabilities have a strong potential to undermine the quality of a given

²⁵⁰ Joe R. Feagin, Anthony M. Orum, and Gideon Sjoberg, *A Case for the Case Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 27-79; Creswell, 75-76.

case study; when attended with intentionality and competence, they have an equally strong potential to become its strongest assets.²⁵¹

It is important to acknowledge that the general vulnerabilities of the case study as a research strategy do not exhaust the list of the methodological vulnerabilities for my dissertation research. Three additional methodological challenges stem from the specific features of my individual case study. Furthermore, whereas the general vulnerabilities of my research stem from the lack of systematic guidance and traditional (if outdated) habits of perception, the case-specific vulnerabilities represent legitimate areas of concern and as such, call for a more detailed description and systematic, in-depth response.

First of all, my case study is a *qualitative case study*, and is therefore liable to the key vulnerability of qualitative research: a charge of subjectivism. In contrast to its quantitative counterpart, the central concern of qualitative research is to learn about the meaning, not the frequency, of the social phenomena.²⁵² Qualitative researchers seek to observe, interpret, and describe how people experience the world and the ways in which they make sense of their experiences.²⁵³ Such a complex goal lends several common

²⁵¹ Indeed, such nuanced understanding of the vulnerabilities of the case study research is shared by all leading case study researchers and is supported by the strong evidence of the numerous contemporary applications of the case study research. Despite their conventional stereotype as “weak,” case studies continue to be used extensively in social science research, in the academic disciplines and in the practice-oriented fields, both in the U.S.A. and abroad. Moreover, in the recent years the case studies have been increasingly used as a research tool, becoming a frequently used template for thesis and dissertation research. Finally, case studies have acquired a distinct position in evaluation research, which was previously the largely dominated by other methods. Reflecting on the striking paradox between the traditional apprehension about case study method and its extensive use in the contemporary social scientific research, Yin concludes that the “stereotype of the case study research may be wrong.” Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, xiii-xiv.

²⁵² John Van Maanen, "Reclaiming Qualitative Methods for Organizational Research: A Preface," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1979).

²⁵³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 14-15; Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 1-29;

characteristics to qualitative studies.²⁵⁴ Their data collection procedures focus on multiple sources and forms of information, take place in the natural setting (rather than controlled conditions of the laboratory), and frequently involve face-to-face interaction over time. The research has emergent and flexible designs (rather than tightly prescribed procedures), calls for inductive, recursive, and interactive analytical strategies, and is fundamentally interpretative in nature. The resulting accounts offer a holistic, complex view of the issue under study (rather than the cause-and-effect relationships among a few selected variables).²⁵⁵ It is easy to see that given the overarching goal and the key characteristics of

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 3; Rossman and Rallis, 11; Creswell, 38-39.

²⁵⁴ I choose to define qualitative research by describing its *major characteristics*, rather than via a *formal definition*, because the diversity of philosophical, disciplinary, and methodological developments in this field makes offering a simple definition in a limited space a next-to-impossible task. I am far from being alone in this choice. In his widely-known text on qualitative research methods, John Creswell remarks on the increasing difficulty of defining the field in recent years, noting that “some extremely useful introductory books to qualitative research...do not contain a definition that can be easily located.” (Creswell, 36. The texts to which he refers are Janice M. Morse and Lyn Richards, *Readme First for a User's Guide to Qualitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002); Lois Weis and Michelle Fine, *Speed Bumps: A Student-Friendly Guide to Qualitative Research* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).) The fundamental overview of the field, *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, too bears the sign of definitional difficulty: a paragraph-long “generic definition” found in its first edition grows to eight-paragraph long section in its most recent fourth edition (Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 2; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011), xii-xiii.) A growing number of individual scholars chose to focus their definitions on the various aspects of qualitative research: the interpretation of social meaning, diversity of its practices, specifics of design and approaches to inquiry, or practical applications of its knowledge. (For example, Van Maanen; Judith Preissle, "Envisioning Qualitative Inquiry: A View across Four Decades," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 19, no. 6 (01/01/ 2006); Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995); J. A. Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

²⁵⁵ Helpful collections of the common characteristics of qualitative research, either by itself or in contrast with the common features of quantitative research, can be found in Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 14-18; Creswell, 36-41; Rossman and Rallis, 8-13; Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006),

qualitative research, construction of an appropriate “instrument” for conducting it would seem to be a next-to-impossible task. Such an instrument would have to be sensitive to the complex (and frequently changing) conditions of research, capable of detecting multiple types of information and processing them on multiple levels of abstraction, able to enter relationships with people who are being studied and become aware of the effects that its presence has on their behaviors and meaning-making practices, capable of learning from previous experiences, responding to the unexpected, growing beyond its existing levels of understanding—and then, writing it all up in an engaging, expressive prose. There is only one possible candidate for such an intricate “job description”: a human being. That’s why in the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher is the primary “instrument of choice.”²⁵⁶ Yet, herein lies the greatest challenge of the qualitative research in general and of my study in particular: how to ensure that the researcher is a valid and reliable instrument?

Secondly, even as I employ a qualitative case study as my primary method, it is not a qualitative study as an end in itself. Rather, the ultimate goal of my qualitative research is to assist the work of *practical theological reflection*. And the task of bringing the two together is not an unproblematic one. Practical theology and qualitative research are two distinct fields, with complex and not easily standardized bodies of knowledge, diverse methodological traditions, and vast differences in vocabulary. Moreover, their ontological

2-3; Margaret Diane LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999), 12.

²⁵⁶ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), 39-40; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 15; Creswell, 38; Rossman and Rallis, 10; Hatch, 23-25.

and epistemological assumptions—the ways in which they define “reality,” understand the sources and processes of generating “knowledge,” and view the nature (or even the possibility!) of “truth”—represent an area of significant dissonance and even apparent contradiction between these two disciplines. The problem of compatibility between practical theology and qualitative research (or social sciences in general) is not merely an abstract, theoretical dilemma, pondered by the few scholars of the fields, but a matter of actual, practical difficulties of relating the two disciplines with integrity, as it is reflected in the ongoing discussion of the issues of interdisciplinary methodology among various practical theologians.²⁵⁷ Historically, the primary ways of understanding human experience in practical theology evolved in continuing dialogue with the social sciences, and there have been precedents of the “uncritical and theologically questionable” usages of the social scientific method for the purposes of practical theological reflection.²⁵⁸ So “tense” has been the relationship between theology and social sciences that some scholars have argued that the two are fundamentally incompatible, and that therefore the social scientific methods are inappropriate for the task of doing theology.²⁵⁹ Thus, for the purposes of this study, two

²⁵⁷ See, for example, Browning; Osmer; Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Kingsley, 2003); Elaine L. Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005); Swinton; Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).

²⁵⁸ Swinton and Mowat, vi. James Loder offers a systematic reflection on the difficulties of creating an interdisciplinary foundation for ministry, identifying two unsatisfactory methods of relating theology with psychology: “semantic connections” and “reductionism.” The former employs systematic reflection on the shared words in both disciplines (e.g., “anxiety”) in order to “bridge” and “cross-fertilize” the two. The latter consists in viewing one discipline as a “subcategory” of another, consequentially “explaining away” its fundamental claims (e.g., Freud’s reductionistic treatment of religion). See *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, s.v. “Theology and Psychology.”

²⁵⁹ See, for example, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2006).

specific questions need to be explicitly addressed: how is practical theology to interact with qualitative research methods in a responsible, non-reductionistic, and mutually illuminating way in theory? And, what is the place of qualitative research methods in the process of practical theological reflection in practice?

Third and finally, the most startling feature of my research is that it is a *case study of my own experience*. That is, for the purposes of this investigation, I propose not only to wear the “hat” of the researcher, but also to step into the “shoes” of the participant. Yet, such methodological intent is in deep conflict with conventional understandings of classical scientific inquiry, which emphasizes impartiality and detachment, seeks to achieve objectivity and maintain perspective, and strongly advises against “going native.” Thus, even though a number of scholars, both in qualitative research and practical theology, acknowledge the presence of the “autobiographical component” in all research,²⁶⁰ an upfront proposition to make one’s personal experience an object of one’s scholarly attention appears either exceptionally naïve or excessively ambitious—and as such, academically suspect. Indeed, the bipolar research design that I seek to implement brings to mind the old medical maxim about the “physician who attempts to treat himself” and who, allegedly, has a “fool for his patient!” While the dry wit of this formulation and the image it evokes are amusing, the concern it raises about the researcher who attempts to study her own experience are no joking matter. If neglected, or inadequately addressed, this vulnerability alone can pose an existential threat to my research project. The problem of “blurring” the roles of the researcher and participant pertains to the three critical aspects of all research:

²⁶⁰ For example, Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*; Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

the practical probability of carrying out the proposed research design, the issue of validity and reliability of its findings, and its usefulness for the wider academic and public audiences. Within the specifics of my study, this tripartite problem can be captured in the following questions. First, could a case study of one's own experience even *be done?*—or, would being both the “primary instrument” and the “primary database” of the study jeopardize my scholarly understanding? Second, could a study of one's own experience be done *with integrity?*—or, would my own study of my own experience collapse on itself, bringing forth nothing but a collection of self-referencing suppositions? Third, even if my own case study could be done and done well, could such an intensely personal exploration be possibly *of any benefit to others?*—or, would this be a thoroughly-done but self-indulgent psychotherapeutic exercise in disguise?²⁶¹

4.4 Towards High-Quality Case Study: Validity, Credibility, and Ethics

To address the general and case-specific vulnerabilities of my research, I divide them into two broad categories. The first category pertains to the issues of proximity and self-focus

²⁶¹ A sociologist and communication scholar, Stacy Holman Jones, echoes these concerns in her reflection on autoethnography, the genre of ethnographic research that involves studying one's personal experience of one's culture. She observes that autoethnographic writing creates a “triple crisis”—of representation, legitimation, and praxis—within the conventional research paradigm, posing a tri-partite question that challenges the seeming stability and coherence of scholarly endeavor: “How much does a scholar know, how does she know it, and what can she do with this knowledge in the world?” (Stacy Holman Jones, “Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.)*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln themselves observe that these crises have a historical parallel within the field of qualitative research at large, as it is moving toward more interpretive, narrative, evocative, explicitly political and emancipatory forms of inquiry in recent years. Their outline of the phases of qualitative research, defines the “fifth moment” as the “crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis,” with the issues of ontology, epistemology, and evaluation of the inevitably interpretative nature of qualitative research coming to the forefront of researchers' attention. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 17.

that arise from the academically startling proposition to study my own case: (1) the sheer probability of carrying out such an intensely personal investigation, (2) the possibility of carrying it out without violation of scholarly integrity, and (3) the potential value of such first-person research for the wider academic and public audience. These issues constitute *first order methodological concerns*, because they have to do with the fundamental plausibility and substantive merit of my investigation; if inadequately addressed, the problem of being a “researcher who is also a participant” alone could pose an existential threat to my study. The second category pertains to the issues of validity, credibility and ethics. These issues constitute *second order methodological concerns*, not because they are less important, but because my ability to address them is logically dependent on the proper resolution of the first. Hence, once the principal concerns about plausibility and scholarly value of the first-person research are addressed, I begin an in-depth discussion of subjectivity. The problem of being a “participant who is also a researcher” demands careful articulation of theoretical and practical measures that I intend to employ in order to counteract the researchers’ bias and ensure that my investigation is conducted in methodologically rigorous, trustworthy, and ethical way.

The Problem of Researcher as Participant: Proximity and Self-Focus

There are several reasons behind my conviction that the unconventional proposition to study my own case can be done in principle, without violation of scholarly integrity, and for the benefits of others. My proposition to study my personal experience *can be carried out in principle* because on the most fundamental level, it is an ordinary human activity, in which everybody, scholars and laity alike, are engaged on a moment-to-moment basis in the actuality of lived experience. As humans, we constantly participate in the twofold

process of living our lives and reflecting on them, taking in the raw data of daily events and activities, pondering “what is going on,” and creating stories to make sense of our lives and to share it with others.²⁶² In a very real sense, we can never retire from this dual occupation: whether we are conscious of it or not, in the laboratory of our human existence, we are the researchers and we are the participants. Thus, by proposing to make my personal experience of recovery from burnout an object of my scholarly attention, I am proposing to do nothing unusual or entirely novel, but only to become more critically conscious and intentional about the activity in which I, as all human beings, have been engaged all along. But as a scholar, I will approach this task with a different degree of intentionality and precision: I use formal research methods and explicit analytical strategies, and identify specific philosophical assumptions and interpretative frameworks that undergird my research, to increase the chances that my reflection on my personal experience is carried out in a disciplined, systematic, and critical manner.

Moreover, in my position of a scholar who studies her own experience I am unusual but not entirely alone. Even though making one’s own lived experience a focus of one’s research is far from being a widely accepted way of doing research, new ways to understand the meaning of good scholarship and new genres of qualitative research—which focus on

²⁶² Psychologist Keith Oatley refers to this distinct human activity as “narratizing consciousness,” an ongoing mode of reflecting on one’s self as a center of agency and experience in the context of one’s life, crucial for one’s integrative understanding of oneself and others. See Keith Oatley, “Narrative Modes of Consciousness and Selfhood,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, ed. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a more comprehensive presentation on the role of inner narration in formation of human consciousness and identity, see Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 1993); Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*, 1st ed., *The Narrative Study of Lives* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2006).

personal, reflexive, biographic, and autobiographic forms of inquiry—are emerging and gaining in scholarly status.²⁶³ The key among them is the aforementioned method of autoethnography.²⁶⁴ Known by many other names, autoethnography signals a shift in the traditional ethnographic focus on the “other culture,” towards the culture of the researcher’s own community. Autoethnographers use personal, autobiographic writing as a way to access and explore their own culture in the most immediate and direct way—by analyzing the experiences of the “self” that was shaped by its “culture.” An activity of looking through the window is a helpful example for understanding the nature of this method: to gain deeper understanding, autoethnographers alternate between zooming-out to look at the “world” of the culture *through* the “glass” of the self, and then zooming-in to look *at* the “glass” itself and, by the way it looks (fogged up, wet, dirty), to make additional judgments about what the outside “world” is like. This is precisely what is going on in my research: my in-depth reflection on my personal experience of recovery from burnout is not an end in itself, but a vehicle for gaining a deeper understanding of the two distinct cultures—the monastery and the seminary—and their formative influence on those who

²⁶³ Patton, 85-91. Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005).

²⁶⁴ Anthropologist David Hayano is usually credited with the formal definition of the term: D. M. Hayano, "Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects," *Human organization* 38, no. 1 (1979). An excellent discussion of the evolving meaning of the term can be found in Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social, Explorations in Anthropology* (New York: Berg, 1997). Helpful overviews of the method include Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography, Ethnographic Alternatives Book Series* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004); Tony E. Adams, Stacy Linn Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014); Stacy Linn Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013).

come under their authority.²⁶⁵ As such, my work is situated in the growing branch of autoethnographic methods of inquiry, and revealed not as a utopian proposition but a legitimate scholarly undertaking in its own right.

To demonstrate that the study of my personal experience *can be done with integrity*, it is necessary to take a closer look at the alleged violation of “objectivity” by the self-involved and therefore inevitably “subjective” nature of my study. Traditionally, the gold standard of objectivity in research was accomplished by means of distance. Early qualitative researchers strove to imitate their quantitative colleagues in their intentional separation from their objects of study and careful differentiation from their personal commitments, judgments, and emotions. They sought to conduct their studies in controlled environments, to develop formal measurements and experimental protocols, and to use statistical programs to collect and analyze their data.²⁶⁶ Yet, in recent decades a greater degree of reflexivity and understanding of the role of the “subjective” in scholarly work marks the field of qualitative research.²⁶⁷ Qualitative researchers are becoming increasingly aware that all knowing has a “personal element” in it, and that by itself, the distance from

²⁶⁵ Heewon Chang argues for a particular suitability of autoethnographic genre for researching the issues of spirituality and religion in academic settings. See Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008); Heewon Chang and Drick Boyd, *Spirituality in Higher Education: Autoethnographies* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011).

²⁶⁶ Denzin and Lincoln identify these initial stages in the history of qualitative research as the “traditional period” (the early 1900s and up to World War II) and “modernist phase” (the postwar years and up to 1970s). During this time, researchers, seeking to make qualitative research as rigorous as its quantitative counterpart, were concerned with offering “valid, reliable and objective interpretations” and “standardized statistical analysis.” Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1-28.

²⁶⁷ Denzin and Lincoln name this phase in the qualitative research history the “fourth moment.” It extended from 1986 to mid-1990s, and was characterized by the crisis of representation: during this time the issues of power, privilege, race, gender and socioeconomic class, and their ability to challenge the traditional standards of “neutrality,” came to the fore of the researchers’ attention. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

the phenomenon being studied “does not guarantee objectivity; it merely guarantees distance.”²⁶⁸ From this point of view, my closeness as a researcher to the object of my research is no longer in direct opposition to my ability to do good, credible study. If by itself, distance does not guarantee methodological rigor, then the loss of distance does not automatically imply its loss. The question about validity and credibility of my research, therefore, needs to be asked in a new way: not in terms of how “close” I am to my case study, but in terms of how “accurate” and “critical” I could be in my examination of it.

It is also important to note that my proximity to the object of my study actually entails a number of practical advantages. First of all, as a researcher who is also a participant, I have unprecedented access to all the materials of the case.²⁶⁹ There is no need to negotiate the conditions of my “entry to the site,” to do the work of establishing “good rapport,” to worry about the “effects of investigator’s presence” and participants’ “misrepresentation” of the material. All the issues that arise from the interpersonal nature of research are significantly reduced.²⁷⁰ Moreover, it could be argued that the first-person

²⁶⁸ Patton, 575. Patton discusses the role of the researcher’s subjective judgments in the construction of the formal research instruments, pointing out that even the study of “isolated variables” is dependent on somebody’s *subjective* definition of them, and even “formal” instruments and “statistical” data are based on somebody’s *subjective* decisions about what to measure and how to measure it. He situates this discussion in a wider methodological and epistemological paradigm debate about the nature of quantitative and qualitative research: *ibid.*, 68-71. A helpful reflection on “objectivity” and subjectivity in research and the errors of associating quantitative methods with “objective” and qualitative methods with “subjective” research can be found in Michael Scriven, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in Educational Research,” in *Philosophical Redirection of Educational Research: The Seventy-First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. L. G. Thomas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

²⁶⁹ In his description of case study research, Bromley states that a particular strength of this approach lies in the researchers’ ability to “get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings and desires)”: Bromley, 23. Being a researcher of my own experience presents me with an opportunity to get as close as to the “subjective factors” of my research as humanly possible.

²⁷⁰ I am intentional about using the word “reduced” rather than “eliminated,” because even as “other persons” are no longer there, gaining access to the realms of my personal knowing does not happen automatically in

research gives the researcher access to the experiential data that is by and large inaccessible to the outsider; as such, the first-person research offers an opportunity to gain unique insights into the nature of the studied phenomena. Secondly, the crucial matters of ethical conduct, informed consent, confidentiality, reciprocity and compensation are more easily settled. I need no permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to study myself.²⁷¹ I have clear understanding about the “intended use” of the materials that I am collecting, awareness of the “potential consequences” of the research, and power to control the “degree of disclosure” about my life that I am willing to sanction. Third, both during data analysis and writing of report, I have ongoing and unlimited opportunities to do “members-checks,” receive immediate feedback from my “participant” about my emerging findings as a “researcher,” and take actions necessary to fine-tune my understanding. Thus, precisely because I am involved in my study as a participant—on every stage of my research process: from data collection, to data analysis, to the writing of the final report—I am in a unique position to have more relevant information and more freedom to work with it than the usual researcher.

practice, but requires its own particular approach and “delivery system.” I will discuss these issues in greater detail, when I describe the actuality of my research practice (*Chapter 6, “Retrospective Description of the Method”*).

²⁷¹ While this is true for my case, given the very specific focus of my narrative on my personal experience with burnout, this is not true for all scholarly use of autoethnographic methods. Personal stories always unfold in relationships with other people, and therefore it is the nature of these relationships and the nature of the information about others that is included in the story, and thus made public, that determines the necessity of the Institutional Review Board approval. This is especially true for the authors whose personal stories include people from “vulnerable” populations (the ill, elderly, children, etc.). An excellent discussion of the IRB involvement in the writing of personal narratives in the context of the university scholarship can be found in Ellis, 256-61.

Yet, I am not an exclusive knower of the object of my research, who has an absolute prerogative on the scholarly conclusions. Even as the personal circumstances of my story of recovery from burnout are unique, my experience of the restorative effects of the Christian contemplative monastic tradition upon my life, and my experience of the demands and stresses of contemporary theological education, are far from being idiosyncratic. There are numerous others, in the seminary and monastery, who can verify—or challenge—the quality of my observation, analysis, and interpretation. Such “interpersonal accountability” permits both my data and my conclusions to be communally tested and, as such, is key to the credibility of my research. Importantly, the fact that some aspects of personal experience utilized in my research can only be known introspectively, does not mean that my first-person research eliminates the possibility of interpersonal validation; it only changes its dynamics: in order to validate or critique my conclusions, the readers would need to examine their own experiences of the monastic and seminary contexts. Thus, even though my scholarly work concerns itself with the seemingly elusive realities of personal experience, it can be protected against the charge of inadvertent bias and unethical conduct by means of consensual validation from others who have access to the phenomena and contexts I describe.

Additionally, because my research is situated in the domain of the autoethnographic genre of qualitative research, the criteria for evaluating such intensely personal work are publicly available.²⁷² Similarly, explicit standards of quality are identified both for the

²⁷² See Holman Jones, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.)*; Carolyn Ellis, "Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (2000); Robert V. Bullough, Jr. and Stefinee Pinnegar, "Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 3 (2001); Richardson and St. Pierre, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*; Norman K. Denzin, "Aesthetics and the Practices of Qualitative Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (2000). Helpful discussion of issues involved in evaluating autoethnographic research projects, can be found in Ellis,

qualitative studies in general²⁷³ and for the case study research in particular.²⁷⁴ The value of having these criteria for my research is twofold. On the one hand, they set forth clear parameters of quality to guide me throughout the entire investigation. On the other hand, they present an explicit framework within which the quality of my work can be judged by others. Thus, if done with careful attention to the issues intersubjective accountability and validation, my position of a researcher who is also a participant need not compromise the methodological rigor and quality of my scholarly conclusions. By attending to the explicit standards of quality for autoethnographic research, by taking advantage of the position of methodological immediacy between my research and my life, and by seeking out opportunities for sharing and assessing my emergent scholarly understanding with those who have access to the similar experiences, I can increase the likelihood that the challenging undertaking of studying my own case is carried out with integrity.

To address the final challenge to studying my own case—the question of whether such an intensely personal work of scholarship *can be of any benefit to others*—I turn to the example of a renowned figure in the field of pastoral care and my long-time hero, Anton Theophilus Boisen. Boisen’s contributions to the life of the wider community could hardly be overestimated. The quiet Congregational minister from a small university town in the Midwest became one of the first chaplains in a psychiatric hospital, the first clergy-theologian to propose that religious knowledge could be gained from the study of deeply

The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography, 252-56; Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, 99-115.

²⁷³ Creswell, 45-47; Rossman and Rallis, 63-69; Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 146-48; Patton, 542-52.

²⁷⁴ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 160-65; Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 131; Creswell, 219.

disturbed persons,²⁷⁵ the “father” of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE),²⁷⁶ and a main inspiration for the 20th century’s definition and development of the field of pastoral theology in Protestant churches in America.²⁷⁷ Yet, the avalanche of his clinical, pastoral, and educational contributions was triggered and sustained not by a dispassionate academic interest, but by a personal struggle to overcome and make sense of his mental illness. His most important insights into the religious dimension of mental illness, the value of clinical training for theological education, and into the need to supplement the study of biblical and classical theological texts with the careful reading of the “living human documents” came from his first-person experience of psychosis so severe that it required hospitalization. In the years following his release from the hospital—years that were punctuated by several more psychotic episodes—he embarked on a life-long journey of learning, writing, teaching, and research, which included an intensive study of other persons with similar psychotic histories, to deepen his understanding of his experience, to share it with others,

²⁷⁵ Boisen wrote extensively about the religious dimensions of human experience, and his *The Exploration of the Inner World* is still considered to be a major contribution to the psychology of religion. Anton T. Boisen and Glenn H. Asquith, *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader* (Decatur: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1991).

²⁷⁶ Fred Eastman, "Father of the Clinical Pastoral Movement," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 5, no. 1 (1951); Ross Snyder, "Boisen Heritage in Theological Education," *Pastoral Psychology* 19, no. 186 (1968); Edward E. Thornton, *Professional Education for Ministry: A History of Clinical Pastoral Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970).

²⁷⁷ Boisen’s thesis about the need to read classical theological and biblical texts in conjunction with the in-depth reflection on human experience served as a chief inspiration for Steward Hiltner’s critical definition of the field: Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958). Hiltner was one of Boisen’s first students at Elgin State Hospital in Illinois, the institution where Boisen developed CPE movement. For current appreciation of Boisen’s work and heritage see LeRoy Aden and J. Harold Ellens, *Turning Points in Pastoral Care: The Legacy of Anton Boisen and Seward Hiltner, Psychology and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990); Boisen and Asquith; Susan E. Myers-Shirk, *Helping the Good Shepherd: Pastoral Counselors in a Psychotherapeutic Culture, 1925-1975* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009).

and to provide the much-needed ministry to the mentally ill.²⁷⁸ As such, Boisen's work was at times criticized as "intensely autobiographical."²⁷⁹ In the foreword to the final written work of his life, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*, even he himself expressed the worry about the "biasing factor" that could have been constituted by the fact that he was working with his own "case record." Yet he pressed on, concluding that the firsthand evidence that such reflection affords is the fundamental basis of his scholarly authority.²⁸⁰ His work of the lifetime is an example of a courageous struggle not merely back to sanity but towards a creative transformation of his tortuous suffering into a powerful contribution to the well-being of others.²⁸¹

The example of Anton T. Boisen, as a pastor and teacher who conducted an in-depth study of his experience as a patient, serves as a powerful illustration that the value of autobiographical scholarship, and the intense self-reflection that it requires, is not

²⁷⁸ In one of the letters written in the aftermath of his first acute episode of psychosis, Boisen describes his desire to use this experience for the benefits of others: "My present purpose is to take as my problem the one with which I am now confronted, the service of these unfortunates with whom I am surrounded. I feel that many forms of insanity are religious rather than medical problems and that they cannot be successfully treated until they are so recognized. The problem seems to me one of great importance not only because of the large number who are now suffering from mental ailments but also because of its religious and psychological and philosophical aspects. I am very sure that if I can make to it any contribution whatsoever it will be worth the cost." Anton T. Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & company, 1936), 7.

²⁷⁹ Paul W. Pruyser, "Anton T. Boisen and the Psychology of Religion," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 21, no. 4 (1967): 209.

²⁸⁰ Anton T. Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (New York: Harper, 1960), 9.

²⁸¹ On August 25, 1921, in his letter to his friend, Fred Eastman, Boisen recounts his response to Percy Ladd, who recommended that in order to regain and preserve his sanity Boisen took up some concrete physical work: "I replied [to Perce]...that sanity in itself is not an end in life. The end of life is to solve important problems and to contribute in some way to human welfare, and if there is even an chance that such an end could best be accomplished by going through Hell for a while, no man worthy of the name would hesitate for an instant." *Ibid.*, 132.

limited to one's personal benefits. When carried out in a disciplined and responsible way, the in-depth reflection on one's own experience forges strong connections with the experience of others, bringing forth gifts for the whole community. While my modest dissertation project cannot be compared to Boisen's work in the magnitude of its scope, there are parallels in its overall dynamics and nature. I too have *a personal cause* for my scholarly work: my research interest in burnout has been triggered by my painful experience with it. My scholarly work too has *a pastoral dimension*: I have undertaken an in-depth study of my personal experience with burnout with the intention to care for the clergy who face such suffering. I too take *an educational approach* to my understanding of the solution: my own experience of burning out and becoming restful in the context of theological education has led me to reflect on the problematic aspects of the seminary training, in order to re-imagine it as an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout. Because the concern for others—be that the active clergy faced with the threat of burnout or current seminary students confronted with the stresses of the learning process—is built into my research from the beginning, it is highly plausible that the unusual scholarly undertaking of studying my own case could benefit others.

The Problem of Participant as Researcher: Subjectivity

The foremost concern about subjectivity in research has to do with the possibility of researcher's bias. The potential charge against the "researcher's finding what she set out to find" is particularly strong for my study, because it comes from the vulnerability traditionally associated with the case study research strategy, from the lingering prejudice against the qualitative methodology in general, and from the fact that the subject of my scholarly attention is my personal experience. In all three instances, the concern about the

credibility and ethics of my research is linked to the notion of my subjectivity intruding upon my conduct of inquiry and interpretation of results. I therefore address this concern on two levels. *On the level of theory*, I discuss the origins of conventional distrust of subjectivity in the “positivist paradigm” of inquiry, showing that the positivist assumptions about the nature of reality and the process of generation of knowledge are no longer generally accepted as unconditionally valid; I then describe an alternative “naturalist paradigm” of inquiry in which a researcher’s subjectivity is viewed not as an impediment but a primary means of knowing. *On the level of practice*, I identify specific measures that I intend to employ in the actuality of my research, in order to use my subjectivity in a disciplined, trustworthy, and ethical manner.

Addressing the Problem of Subjectivity on the Level of Theory

Traditionally, “subjectivity” has been viewed as an antithesis of the *sine qua non* of the scientific method, “objectivity,” and as such, it has been judged as a failure of methodological rigor. To be subjective in one’s scholarly work means to be bound by one’s preconceptions, naïve (or even unethical) in collection and examination of evidence, and essentially unreliable in research conclusions. In contrast, objectivity denotes validity and reliability in two ways. On the one hand, it suggests a strong correspondence between the “data” and the “reality”: to be objective means to know what the world is like. On the other hand, it implies the absence of correspondence between a researcher’s judgments, commitments, and values, and her scholarly findings: to be objective means to be impartial, open-minded, and unencumbered by inherited ideas. Thus, when science is viewed as a fact-based and value-free enterprise, scientists are seen as dispassionate and passive

observers “putting questions directly to Nature,” and knowledge is understood as a continuously growing body of closer and closer approximations of “Truth,” then subjectivity is deeply problematic.²⁸²

However, in recent decades, such a perception of science and scientists has come under scrutiny. Most notably, Thomas Kuhn has challenged the traditional view of scientific progress as a linear, continuous, and inevitable process in which the correction of the old errors and increased nearness to truth are guaranteed by the rigors of the scientific method. Rather, he argued, the key forces in scientific development are the communities of scientists themselves. Offering numerous examples from the history of natural sciences, Kuhn contended that scientific guilds function as ideological communities whose work is dependent not on purely objective criteria but on the “paradigms” of knowledge that are socially constructed and reinforced through the group consensus. Kuhn emphasized that science’s alleged impartiality, open-mindedness, and freedom from inherited ideas are simply impossible, because the learning of the dominant “disciplinary matrix”—the assumptions and values, theories and terminology, instruments, and procedures considered valid in any given disciplinary field—is a part of every scientist’s scholarly training. Moreover, even if these ideals could be achieved, they would be detrimental to scientific progress: a truly “open” mind, bereft of any assumed conceptual and methodological framework, would lack the focusing power to determine the “problems” that deserve scholarly investigation, “approaches” to solving them, and the “criteria” by which to judge the quality of solutions. Scientists therefore both need the agreed-upon constructs and are limited by them. That is why the development of science is not a linear, cumulative process

²⁸² Lincoln and Guba, 9.

towards an ever-improved understanding of reality, but an uneven, revolution-like progression, complete with power struggles between the adherents of different worldviews. Kuhn's account of science reveals that the notion of "scientific truth" is not established solely by objective criteria, but rests upon a deep ocean of values, commitments, and beliefs of specific, historically bounded human communities.²⁸³

On a broader cultural scale, skepticism about the objective, value-free character of scientific truth marks a shift from modernism to postmodernism. Postmodern thinkers deny the possibility of a single "true meaning" of any aspect of human existence. They challenge the presumed neutrality of science by pointing out the language-dependent nature of all

²⁸³ According to Kuhn, a closer look at mature sciences reveals an alternating pattern between the "normal" and "revolutionary" science. Normal science can be likened to the activity of puzzle-solving: even as there is diversity in the *contents* of scientific problems, the assumptions about the *nature* and the *rules* for their solutions remain the same. During this phase, scientists neither seek to test nor confirm the overarching disciplinary paradigm, but simply take it for granted. Moreover, if presented with the instances that contradict the assumptions of the dominant paradigm (Kuhn calls them "anomalies"), no matter how objective are the data, contrary evidence would be ignored or explained away as a mistake of a researcher. Only when the particularly troublesome anomalies accumulate to a degree sufficient to pose a threat to existing disciplinary matrix (Kuhn refers to this as a "crisis") that science enters its revolutionary phase. Revolutionary science is a period when some scientists within the community become aware of the failures of existing paradigm and begin an intentional search for an alternative. Eventually, a rival conceptual framework is generated. In response, the until-now-uniform scientific community splits into the protectors of the old paradigm and the proponents of the new candidate-paradigm. However, the choice between the competing paradigms cannot be made on the purely rational grounds because the standards of assessment themselves are determined by the assumptive knowledge of the paradigm (Kuhn calls this difficulty "incommensurability," i.e., the lack of a common measure by which a comparison could be made). That's why the outcomes of scientific revolutions are not dependent solely on objective factors but open to competition and influenced by other, extra-scientific reasons. (Kuhn mentions the idiosyncrasies of personalities, nationality, or prior reputation of the leading protagonists.) See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), especially 10-42, 52-135, 44-60. It is important to acknowledge that Kuhn's thesis was not unquestioningly accepted: his claims have become a subject of much debate and even heavy critique. (See for example, Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); William R. Shadish, "The Quantitative-Qualitative Debates: "Dekuhnifying" the Conceptual Context," *Evaluation and Program Planning* 18, no. 1 (01/01/ 1995).) Yet, the fundamental point of his argument—that all scientific knowledge is socially constructed—is today widely acknowledged. As such, the scholarly controversy and critique surrounding Kuhn's thesis does not invalidate my claim that knowledge is a human intellectual construct, i.e., that it is, at least in some degree, a product of researchers' subjectivity.

human communication. Because language is socially constructed, it can never provide a “direct window” into reality as such. Rather, any representation of reality is always a movement of interpretation, embedded in the assumptions and worldview of a specific cultural group. Moreover, since creation of language is usually done by those who exercise the most power in a particular society, the prevailing accounts of reality tend to subjugate other knowledge systems, and in so doing preserve the values of the dominant group and perpetuate any conditions of injustice and oppression inherent in their power. This means that all knowledge has a political dimension: it serves the interests of those who have the power to create it. Thus, in contrast to the modernity’s preoccupation with the discovery and verification of truth, the postmodern stance towards truth is that of radical deconstruction: by situating all knowledge claims in the time, space, and ethos of a particular community, it seeks to expose its critical assumptions and ideological interests. From the postmodern point of view, universal, all-encompassing, culturally dis-embedded “objective knowledge” is an impossibility; the very act of knowing is culture-bound, and all knowledge bears the mark of its creators.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ The term “postmodernism” was first used by Jean-François Lyotard, and is best understood not as a uniform perspective or movement based on adherence to certain “substantive doctrines,” but rather as a complex family of theories and perspectives that arose as a reaction against modernity’s naïve and earnest confidence in scientific truth, optimistic view of human progress, and assumption of direct correspondence between language and reality. It is characterized by the common intention to examine the Western accounts of society, evolution, and social improvement, to bring to the surface the presence of concealed hierarchies, issues of power and control, and to unveil the multiple meanings of language. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Important introductory texts to postmodernism include Jim Powell, *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Danbury: For Beginners LLC, 2007); Steven Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004). A collection of essays by the key postmodern writers can be found in Walt Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World* (New York: Putnam, 1995). A helpful discussion of the postmodern influence on the social sciences is offered by Patton, 99-104.

Postmodern awareness of the inherently subjective character of human search for understanding shaped the contemporary discourse in the social sciences in general and in the field of qualitative inquiry in particular. In response to the growing concerns about the conventional “positivist” paradigm that has governed the quantitative research, qualitative researchers proposed an alternative “naturalist” paradigm. This paradigm rests on philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the knower and the known (epistemology), and role of values in research (axiology) that are radically different from the traditional understanding. First of all, in contrast to the positivist representation of reality as single, tangible entity “out there” available for independent discovery, naturalistic researchers assert that reality can only be accessed through the multiple, socially constructed accounts of it. Secondly, in contrast to the positivist view of a dualistic and independent interaction between the “subject” and the “object” of inquiry, naturalistic researchers maintain that the knower and the known enter into a genuine relationship that has a profound impact on both sides of the encounter. Finally, contrary to the positivist perception of scientific inquiry as value-free enterprise, naturalistic researchers argue that all inquiry is value-bound: research is always influenced by the values that the researcher brings to the inquiry (through the choice of the problem to study, and theoretical perspectives and practical procedures to employ throughout investigation), by values that are implicit in the theory (that is used to guide collection, analysis, and interpretation of data), and by values that are inherent in the context of study (in which investigation takes place).²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ The most systematic reflection on the “naturalist paradigm” can be found in the aforementioned text, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba. In marked agreement with Kuhn’s account of the revolutionary dynamics and disruptive nature of paradigm-shifts, the process of adoption of the naturalist paradigm by the scientific community was not smooth. The (frequently heated) discussion about the best way

The change in the key “axioms” of research has enormous implications for the actual process of doing research, its *method*. To begin with, naturalistic researchers’ assumption about the essentially relational way of knowing changes the stance they take towards their phenomena of interest: they try to get as “close” as possible. To minimize the distance, they spend extended time in the “field,” seek to become “insiders,” and whenever possible to gain the firsthand information. Furthermore, naturalistic researchers’ keen awareness of the value-laden nature of all scholarship shapes their understanding of their own inherent and inevitable participation in the process of inquiry. In order to understand and regulate this impact, they step back to reflect on the “self at work” in their research, “position” themselves in their studies, and intentionally attend to their own perspectives and biases about the research problem. Finally, because naturalistic researchers approach reality not with the set of specific hypotheses to be tested but with the broad questions to be explored, the “research design” for their studies is articulated ahead of time but it remains open to the ongoing adjustment in light of the researchers’ actual experience in the field. The procedures for data collection are not set in stone but shaped in response to the opportunities and limitations presented by the study site. The logic of data analysis is inductive: researchers start with a “thick description” of the phenomenon of study and its context, and then work “from the ground up” towards “theory,” allowing the primary

to study the world has been known in the field of qualitative research as a “great paradigm debate.” The language of the debate depends on the perspectives of the arguing scholars, taking the form of “positivism vs. constructivism,” “realism vs. interpretivism,” “qualitative vs. quantitative methods,” “science vs. phenomenology.” And even though some scholars have pronounced that this debate is over, literature that pertains to this debate is extensive. For example, Michael Quinn Patton, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 265-95; Rita Davis, *Proceedings of the Stake Symposium on Educational Evaluation (Champaign, Illinois, May 8-9, 1998)* (1998), 35-49; Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 105-17; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 68-103, 543-77.

themes and categories of analysis to emerge from the accumulated data rather than be superimposed from the researchers' predetermined notions. Even the "research questions" that guide the inquiry may evolve throughout the study, reflecting the researchers' growing knowledge of the topic and the questions needed to better understand it.²⁸⁶

Accordingly, the very *rhetoric* of the naturalistic research reflects its fundamental philosophical assumptions and methodological commitments. To communicate their findings, researchers write in a personal, literary, and engaging language. Their scholarly accounts include rich collections of quotations from the actual words of the people participating in their research. Often, the accounts themselves are crafted as stories, with beginning, middle, and end. Researchers employ metaphors and analogies to enhance understanding and convey meaning on multiple levels of knowing. Their definitions of key terms are usually brief and always tentative, because their primary intent is to learn more about the phenomena of interest. Their research questions and focus statements sections are punctuated by such words as "understanding," "discover," and "meaning," serving as rhetorical markers of the primary purposes of the naturalistic research. Some scholars even advocate for a change in the traditional terminology that is used to describe the parameters of methodological rigor in naturalistic research.²⁸⁷ Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, researchers use the first-person pronoun to refer to themselves in their writing: the "I"-

²⁸⁶ Helpful discussions of the distinct features of qualitative methodology can be found in Lincoln and Guba, 187-249; Rossman and Rallis, 31-60, 134-206; Creswell, 15-52; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 169-208.

²⁸⁷ The four traditional terms used to denote the quality of research—"internal validity," "external validity," "reliability," and "objectivity"—are substituted by "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," "confirmability" (respectively), in order to highlight the fact that "criteria for what counts as significant knowledge vary from paradigm to paradigm." The overall emphasis is not on proving the impartiality of the researcher, but rather on establishing her trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba, 289-331.

language signals researchers' intention to make themselves visible both in the process of doing research and in the process of creating the final narrative.²⁸⁸

Looking at the process of research through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm reveals that the subjectivity of the researcher is an inherent, and therefore inevitable, element of all scholarship. Moreover, from this point of view, subjectivity is revealed to be not merely an unavoidable negative element, an unfortunate impediment to the integrity of scientific investigations, but a primary, even essential way of knowing, a reality that is at the heart of good scholarly work.²⁸⁹ Naturalistic researchers embrace subjectivity as utterly necessary, even "virtuous," because it forms the basis of researcher's distinctive contribution, resulting from the "unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected."²⁹⁰ Such positive appraisal of subjectivity does not automatically remove the concern about the researcher's bias. However, it does create a significant shift in the discourse about the nature of "problem": from the naturalistic perspective, the subjectivity itself is not the problem; unaware and undisciplined subjectivity is. Thus, the discussion about validity and reliability of qualitative research need not center on the measures of reducing or eliminating the researcher's subjectivity,

²⁸⁸ An excellent reflection on how naturalistic patterns of thought and belief affect the language and rhetoric of the naturalistic researchers is offered by John Creswell in Creswell, 16-19.

²⁸⁹ Given the nature of my research I focus on the appreciation of subjectivity in the qualitative and social scientific fields. Yet, the awareness of the subjective element in scholarly work is not limited to this kind of research. In the hard science disciplines, this awareness has been raised most notably by the Hungarian chemist, Michael Polanyi: Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). In the former, Polanyi opposes the "positivist" account of science. In the latter, he argues that "objectivity" is false and misleading ideal, that scientific method does not generate "truth" in a mechanical way, and that all scientific work grows out of scholars' personal commitments, insights, and deep tacit knowing.

²⁹⁰ Alan Peshkin, "In Search of Subjectivity--One's Own," *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 7 (1988): 18.

but on how the inevitably subjectivist studies could be done in a credible and ethical manner.²⁹¹

In agreement with this understanding, I respond to the concern about researcher's bias in my work not by attempting to get rid of my subjectivity (given the postmodern and naturalistic sensitivities, such proposition would be regarded as utterly naïve or outright deceptive), but by making a deliberate effort towards becoming aware of its impact on my inquiry and developing the skills for the ongoing, systematic, and critical monitoring of the researcher's self, the art of "disciplined subjectivity."²⁹²

Addressing the Problem of Subjectivity on the Level of Practice

In this research project, I discipline my subjectivity in three ways: (1) by following a formal research strategy for my inquiry as a whole, (2) by employing individual measures of validation, specific to each stage of research, and (3) by using the explicit criteria for evaluation of my work.

First, my formal adherence to a specific methodological approach, the *case study research strategy*, throughout the entire course of my investigation—from the initial work of problem conceptualization, throughout data collection, analysis and interpretation of

²⁹¹ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 6-7.

²⁹² Until recently, I thought that I had invented the term "disciplined subjectivity." However, during the second round of my literature review, I discovered that this term was used by a professor of anthropology at Michigan State University, Frederick Erickson, as early as 1973. Erickson uses this term to denote the researchers' ability not to suppress but take advantage of their acute inner experiences in the field—e.g., sense of shock, outrage—as indicators of high saliency of the data for gaining insight into the sociocultural context of study: Frederick Erickson, *What Makes School Ethnography "Ethnographic?"* (1973). Since my research combines ethnographic and autoethnographic genres, my ability to practice disciplined subjectivity would involve learning to observe and intentionally explore the disruptive, unconventional, and unpleasant, not only in the external cultural domains of the seminary and monastery but also in the realms of my inner experience.

evidence, and finally, composition of the report—enables me to conduct the study in an organized and consistent, rather than “as-I-please,” manner. The comprehensive research strategy provides me with a “logical model of proof,” a valid sequence for engaging my data, connecting it to my initial research questions, and drawing my conclusions—systematically and without discrimination.²⁹³ In practice, such a systematic approach to investigation is reflected in my creation of the Case Study Protocol, a separate document that identifies the primary objectives, focal questions, procedures, and an evolving outline for the final report of my study.²⁹⁴ It is precisely because the methodological “blueprint” for my investigation is determined by the patterns of conceptualization and action developed and tested by other scholars, rather than by my personal preferences (or avoidances), that the probability of both intentional and unintentional bias in my research is significantly reduced.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 77.

²⁹⁴ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 67-77. Yin views creation of a Case Study Protocol as essential part of the research practice and a major way of increasing its reliability: it forces the case study investigator to articulate and hone the research questions, anticipate logistical and conceptual problems in the argument, and consciously reflect on the intended audience.

²⁹⁵ As evident from my theoretical exposition of the case study as a comprehensive research strategy, I draw on the work of the three leading case study researchers: Robert Stake, Sarah Merriam, and Robert Yin. However, for practical guidance in doing my research, I adhere to the detailed presentation of the case study method in the work of Robert Yin. There are four reasons behind my choice: first, unlike Merriam and Stake, Yin does not limit case study strategy to qualitative research methods and approaches, but insists that the choice of method is dependent on the nature of the case; second, Yin offers the most comprehensive and systematic guidance, complete with numerous examples of specific case study applications from various academic and applied fields for utilizing this approach in practice; third, Yin's exposition has been used both in academic and practical settings, and has started to pass the test of time (it is now in 5th edition); fourth, perhaps given his background in engineering, Yin's language remains specific and concrete (and never woolly), even when he speaks about the most abstract notions and procedures.

The second way of disciplining my subjectivity takes place on the level of specific validation measures for each stage of the research process: research design, data collection, data analysis, and composition of the final report. Throughout the data collection stage, I discipline my subjectivity by means of intentional *triangulation of methods and data*.²⁹⁶ To engage the multiple sources of evidence for my case study, I supplement my in-depth reflection on my personal experience with the following methods: ongoing direct observation and participant-observation in the setting,²⁹⁷ interviews,²⁹⁸ reviews of

²⁹⁶ “Triangulation” is a term borrowed from navigation. It implies that the corroborating evidence from two or more sources increases the validity of the conclusions. An in-depth discussion of triangulation can be found in Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978). Denzin proposes four types of triangulation: by using different methods, different data sources, different theoretical perspectives, and even employing different investigators. A helpful summary of Denzin’s discussion can be found in Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 555-63. Specific guidance for utilizing triangulation strategy for case study research is offered by Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 97-101.

²⁹⁷ This method of data collection is frequently discussed as a part of the larger ethnographic research. Depending on the degree of researcher’s participation in the setting, it can take form of “direct observation” or “participant-observation”: because of my lay Cistercian status in the monastery and my continued involvement in theological education, I would be considered a “committed participant” in both settings. The most comprehensive reflection on this method can be found in Danny L. Jorgensen, *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies, Applied Social Research Methods Series* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989); James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).

²⁹⁸ In-depth interviewing as a means of data collection has been described as “a conversation with a purpose” and long been among the primary methods employed by qualitative researchers. Depending on the purpose of the study, interviewing varies with regards to degree of freedom the interviewer has in stating the questions (standardized or informal) and the interviewee has in responding to them (open-ended or pre-determined response categories): because my research is explanatory and exploratory in nature, I used the informal conversational interviews. Given its prominence in the domain of qualitative inquiry, the literature on interviewing is extensive. Among the classical texts on this method are Robert Louis Kahn and Charles F. Cannell, *The Dynamics of Interviewing: Theory, Technique, and Cases* (New York: Wiley, 1957); Robert King Merton, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956).

documents,²⁹⁹ and questionnaire administration.³⁰⁰ My scholarly conclusions are likely to be more accurate if the data that comes from other lines of inquiry corroborate my personal recollection of my experience. To manage the complex task of triangulation of data, I have established a Case Study Database, a formal collection of my case study documents, research notes, and preliminary narratives that were identified and developed in the course of investigation.³⁰¹ By creating a system for storing, organizing, and managing the incoming data and personal records that reflect my evolving understanding of the case, I make these documents readily available not only for my own ongoing work of research but also, should the need arise, usable for a review by an outside party. This measure further increases the interpersonal accountability of my research. Moreover, the very act of creating the “matrix of categories,” into which the collected data could be sorted, functions as a preliminary but important step towards my data analysis.³⁰² Such a matrix is all the more important given the tremendous variation in the nature (e.g., interview transcripts vs. photographs vs. ethnographic notes) and level of abstraction (e.g., research notes that

²⁹⁹ Review of documents produced by the cultural group is an important method of data collection, because it allows one to discover the values and beliefs of the participants in ways that are non-obtrusive and non-reactive. The materials for review include any form of communication, formal and informal: organizational documents, notes from meetings and conferences, records of daily living, speeches, announcements, letters, etc. A particular strength of this method has to do with its “explicitness” to the reader: because documents are readily available, readers themselves could double-check their content and the care with which they have been analyzed. Helpful discussion of the narrative based data collection can be found in Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 85-90.

³⁰⁰ Questionnaire administration is a supplementary method of data collection: even as they are highly useful for collecting specific information quickly, there are limits to their suitability for understanding the participants’ tacit beliefs and values. *Ibid.*, 95-97.

³⁰¹ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 83, 101-05.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 111.

describe the monastery's physical environment vs. research notes that contain my ongoing reflection about the meaning of clergy burnout) that characterizes my data.

During the data analysis stage, I employ two additional validation procedures. First, I augment my work of triangulating methods and data sources with *triangulation of theoretical perspectives*. Given the nature of my study, the perspectives of theology and psychology are especially germane for my research. I draw especially on the resources of practical theology and monastic theology, psychological studies in clergy burnout and qualitative research methods. Occasionally, I also refer to the work of theorists from the fields of sociology, history, education, and medicine. But these latter perspectives are secondary in their significance: they inform rather than directly shape my research. The second validation measure has to do with the two-fold, paradoxical approach to arriving at my scholarly conclusions. Even as the primary objective of my data analysis is to gain understanding and develop the “primary explanation” of the case (i.e., my evolving conjectures about the “why’s” and the “how’s” of clergy rest and burnout), I also seek to engage in the counter-intuitive work of *identifying “rival explanations,”* that is, my intentional search for potentially plausible interpretations that would not support but challenge my primary conclusions.³⁰³ The posture of enduring skepticism and ongoing questioning of my own developing understanding of the case makes my analytic work iterative in character, forcing me to consider my data repeatedly and from various perspectives. Together with my intentional engagement of different theoretical

³⁰³ Yin emphasizes that deliberate search for rival explanations is an essential part of conducting a high-quality case study. He identifies several kind of rival hypothesis, arguing that genuine rivals to one's hypothesis cannot be merely cited—they must be refuted. *Ibid.*, 112-14, 18-19. See also Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 219; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 553-55.

perspectives, my deliberate search for rival explanations it also markedly increases the likelihood of my fair treatment of evidence and the accuracy of my analysis.³⁰⁴

During the final stages of research, my composition of the formal report, I employ two additional measures of validation. First, I seek to provide a “*thick description*” of my experience. The personal narrative of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition and my journey of becoming restful serves three important purposes. It creates an opportunity for readers to “be there” vicariously, to witness and reflect on the dynamics of my transformation, and to judge for themselves the quality of my insights and conclusions about this experience. The amount of texture and detail of my account serve as additional safeguards of its trustworthiness.³⁰⁵ Second, at various stages of composition, I share and solicit feedback on my emerging narrative with individuals who have had a direct knowledge of the Christian contemplative monastic tradition, its way of life, and its influence upon those who choose to place themselves under its guidance: most importantly, such “*member checks*” involve individual Trappist monks and lay Cistercians and participants in theological education. The “trail” of their written communication and oral

³⁰⁴ While the argument about the value of searching for rival explanations can hardly be contested, a critical question about my ability to carry out this methodological commitment in the actuality of my research can hardly be avoided: even as I promise to look for alternative explanations and negative data, do I really have enough knowledge—or moral fiber—or simply brains—to implement such complex work of self-questioning and bias-control, without overt cheating, and is it effective enough, to make a difference in the final outcome? Indeed, a possibility of the mere lip-service or genuine self-deception can never be ruled out. Yet, in my case, the positive answer to this question seems to be likely: in my staunch determination to examine “discrepant evidence,” I do in fact arrive at, explore, and later adopt the rival explanation in place of my original hypothesis. (I will discuss this shift in greater detail in *Chapter 6, “Retrospective Description of the Method.”*)

³⁰⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 227- 29.

feedback in response to my writing serves as yet another tier of supporting evidence for my research.³⁰⁶

Even as I classify my validation strategies by the individual stage of research at which they occur, I do not view them as the isolated procedures to check off and leave behind on each stage. Rather, they are present “in the back of my mind” all throughout the entire investigation, functioning as an overarching attitude of vigilance and alertness to the issues of validity and reliability, as I move through the ongoing spiral of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the final presentation of evidence. I intentionally cultivate this kind of reflection by keeping a Daily Log, a journal-like narrative in which I ask questions about the content and the process of my inquiry and about myself as both an instrument and participant in my research.³⁰⁷ The log writing is “just for myself”; yet it is a powerful measure of self-accountability and discipline.

The third and final procedural way of disciplining my subjectivity has to do with holding my work accountable to the *explicit criteria of evaluation* established by other scholars. Given the complex nature of my research, I use two sets of formal evaluation criteria. The first pertains to the general assessment of case studies, developed by Robert Yin. Yin argues that the “exemplary case study” must go beyond the proper application of

³⁰⁶ Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 113-14; Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 217.

³⁰⁷ In the qualitative research, the investigator’s ongoing critical reflection on the “self at work” is known as the reflexivity phenomenon. Rossman and Rallis, 35-36, 49-51. A number of researchers uphold such practice functions as an important measure of validity and credibility. See, for example: Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 219-20; Creswell, 178-90; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 64-66; Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 14-19.

methodological procedures but make a lasting contribution to research, identifying five distinctive characteristics of a high-quality case study.³⁰⁸ I summarize them as follows:

1. *The case study must be significant*: the nature of the case should be unusual or rare, with underlying issues that pertain to discovery and/or theory development, all of which taken together, make it of general public interest.
2. *The case study must be “complete”*: the boundaries of the case should be clearly defined, the collection of evidence should reach a point of saturation, and the study should end in the course of its natural progression, rather than as a result artificial interruption.
3. *The case study must consider alternative perspectives*: the collected data for the case study should be examined from different perspectives, and various descriptive interpretations should be entertained in the course of its analysis.
4. *The case study must display sufficient evidence*: the case study report should be rich in detail, self-reflective insight, and critical questioning, and should have power to convince the reader that the researcher has become “steeped” in the issues of the case and “knows” her subject.
5. *The case study must be composed in an engaging manner*: the case study report should be written in a clear writing style that constantly “entices” the reader to continue reading, and makes it evident that the researcher believes in the utter importance of her work and the need to communicate it widely.

The second collection of criteria that I employ has to do with specific parameters for evaluating autoethnographic research articulated by Laurel Richardson, a sociologist who has done substantial work in the autoethnographic genre of research. Richardson asserts that such research should be held to “high and difficult standards; mere novelty does not

³⁰⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 160-65.

suffice,” and offers five sets of questions that bring together the artistic requirements for a good story and the scientific standards for the quality of evidence, interpretation, and argument-building.³⁰⁹

1. *Substantive contribution*: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?
2. *Aesthetic merit*: Does the writing of the case report succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. *Reflexivity*: How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?
4. *Impact*: Does this affect me? Emotionally, intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
5. *Expression of reality*: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem “true”—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real?”

³⁰⁹ Laurel Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*. ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000), 937. Richardson offers slightly different renditions of these criteria in her work throughout the years. In her earlier writing, she sets forth five criteria. In her later work, she reduces the number of criteria to four, conflating criteria four and five: Richardson and St. Pierre, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. For discussion of Richardson’s criteria and the possibility of new “writing formats” of scholarly research that they open, see Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 86-91. Richardson’s interest in both creative and critical aspects of autoethnographic research resulted in creation of the “creative analytic practice (CAP) ethnography.” See Richardson and St. Pierre, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 962-64, 74-75.

It is important to note that this second set of criteria reveals that autoethnographic research does not call for *reduction* of standards, but for *raising* the bar of good scholarship: it adds “aesthetic merit” as another norm to measure its quality (now, good scholarship has to be not only substantive and credible, but beautiful and not boring!), and articulates explicitly the need for researchers to be aware of their subjectivity and be attentive to the transformative potential of their research.³¹⁰

The three ways of disciplining subjectivity that I described—the use of the comprehensive research strategy, specific validation measures for each stage of my research, and the explicit criteria for evaluation of quality—are not separate from each other. My adherence to the comprehensive research strategy requires a careful implementation of the specific validation measures and is in turn linked to the fundamental objective of meeting the criteria of high quality. Yet, becoming aware and learning to practice them in the actuality of individual research procedures enables me to develop the skills of entering and using my subjectivity in service of my research. Together, these practices increase the methodological rigor, validity, and reliability of my work, by

³¹⁰ It might be tempting to dismiss the aesthetic merit as lacking substance and significance for “hard-core” science, related only to appealing presentation of research findings: e.g., an ideal academic report that displays not only solid intellectual conclusions but effective, or even pleasurable, prose. I am convinced, however, that the merit of the aesthetic criterion is not secondary but essential. I see aesthetics as fundamentally related to epistemology, and as such, integral to the work of scholarly inquiry on three levels: first, on the level of initial research interest (there is an inherent connection between “what is beautiful” and “what is interesting,” hence the aesthetic dimension, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, is always present in the researcher’s scholarly fascination and curiosity); second, on the level of research practice (the skills of patient observation, reflective contemplation, and creative integration that good science requires are the same skills that good art spontaneously evokes); third, on the level of final verification (the patterns of regularity and repetition, symmetry and asymmetry, complexity and paradox, that lie at the heart of the artists’ expression of beauty are also deeply relevant for the scientists’ judgement of accuracy: e.g., perception of beauty as an indication for truth in the mathematical pattern tasks). In short, it seems that the inclusion of the often neglected aesthetic criterion in the evaluation of autoethnographic research serves an important reminder that exemplary scholarship is never a matter of pure intellectual inquiry but that of holistic knowing.

allowing me to take my subjective observations and interpretations through at least four degrees of scrutiny: my own, other scholars, other participants of theological education and monastic tradition, and that of my readers.

In this chapter, I have described the qualitative foundations of my method. I have positioned my first-person case study in the broader case study methodology and connected it to the autoethnographic genre of social scientific inquiry. I have discussed the strengths and vulnerabilities of such a positioning, reflecting in particular on the notion of “disciplined subjectivity” and the reasons why the academically startling proposition to study my own case need not jeopardize the possibility, integrity, and scientific value of my research. Having established my ability to understand and employ the qualitative research methods in a valid, credible, and ethical manner, I now turn to the discussion of utilizing these methods for practical theological reflection.

CHAPTER 5

PROSPECTIVE PRESENTATION OF METHOD: NORMATIVE, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ISSUES

At its core, the problem of utilizing qualitative research for doing practical theology is a problem of compatibility. On the level of theory, it is revealed in the apparent contradiction of their ontological and epistemological assumptions: the axioms of the naturalistic paradigms about reality as “socially constructed” and knowledge as “inescapably contextual,” with its inherent skepticism about the possibility of establishing the “objective truth,” rest in uneasy tension with Christian central suppositions about the existence of God, the nature of revelation, and the meaning of truth accessible in Christ. On the level of practice, the problem of compatibility has to do with finding a model for relating the two disciplines in a way that enables their genuine engagement while preserving their disciplinary identity: a proper way for bringing together qualitative research and practical theology must mitigate the danger of conceptual “collapsing” of one discipline into another, reduction of their rich discourses to the commonalities in their vocabularies, and unreflective merging of their resources. The problem of utilizing qualitative research methods for the task of practical theological reflection, thus, could be expressed in two questions: How is practical theology to interact with qualitative research on a conceptual level? And, what are the specific ways in which the qualitative research methods could be used by practical theologians in their work?

My response to these questions is tripartite. First, I situate my study in the work of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, Scottish practical theologians from the University of Aberdeen, who offer a model for integrating qualitative research methods into the process

of practical theological reflection. Second, I reflect on the existing critique of this model and identify two limitations that affect its practical usefulness as a guiding framework for practical theologians' engagement with social sciences. Finally, I propose two specific measures for its further development. This amended Swinton-Mowat model serves as the methodological foundation for my work of bringing together the resources of qualitative research and practical theology with the objective of studying my case of recovering from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition.

5.1 The Swinton-Mowat Model for Integrating Practical Theology and Qualitative Research: Origins and Contributions

The Swinton-Mowat model for using qualitative research methods for practical theological reflection has its roots in the most prominent way of relating theology and social sciences, Paul Tillich's *method of correlation*, and its successive revisions as the *method of mutual critical correlation*, most influentially by Stewart Hiltner and David Tracy, and the *Christological perspective* on mutual critical correlation offered by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger. The method of correlation is one of the most important of Tillich's contributions to the interdisciplinary understanding of theological work. Developed as the foundation for his systematic theology, it is a fundamental generic type of relating social sciences to theological disciplines. For Tillich, there was a deep inner continuity between the social scientific understanding of the human experience and the traditional theological symbols and concepts. According to this mode of interdisciplinary engagement, the chief contribution of social sciences to theological reasoning lies in their ability to discover the deeper issues raised by human experience, and to point to the ontological questions of human existence. The existential questions raised by the social scientific analysis are then

to be “correlated” with theological answers offered by the Christian scripture and tradition.³¹¹ Swinton and Mowat affirm the ability of Tillich’s method to open up a constructive dialogue between theology and social sciences, as well as to increase a degree of relevance of the Christian tradition within the rapidly secularizing social context. However, they note that Tillich’s method was repeatedly critiqued by practical theologians for its “uni-directional” way of reflection and somewhat static nature, which “applies Christian truth to the world without allowing the world to significantly question particular interpretations of that truth,” and therefore seek to pattern their model after its subsequent revisions.³¹²

The method of mutual critical correlation is a reformulation of Tillich’s method that was offered in response to this critique by Stewart Hiltner and David Tracy.³¹³ In order to address the potentially static character of Tillich’ method of correlation, Hiltner developed a “perspectival method,” which views theology and the social sciences as alternating “perspectives” on a phenomenon of interest. The aim of such an interdisciplinary circle is to expand and deepen theological understanding, so that it could become more sensitive and relevant to the concrete human situation.³¹⁴ Tracy, on the other hand, proposed a “revised correlational method,” in which both questions and answers about human

³¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), vol. 1, 63-66.

³¹² Swinton and Mowat, 77-78. Swinton and Mowat connect Tillich’s correlational approach to John Wesley’s quadrilateral, in order to show how practical theologians are to engage the four primary sources of Christian truth in search for holistic view of the Divine revelation: “reason” and “experience” provide questions that are then addressed by the Christian “scripture” and “tradition.” Ibid.

³¹³ Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*; David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order, the New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

³¹⁴ Rodney J. Hunter, "A Perspectival Pastoral Theology," in *Turning Points in Pastoral Care: The Legacy of Anton Boisen and Seward Hiltner* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990).

experience can come from both sides of the theology-social sciences exchange. Tracy sees such “mutually critical correlation” as central to the task of practical theological reflection.³¹⁵ Thus, Hiltner and Tracy added a critical dimension to the vision of engagement between theology and social sciences, insisting on the dialectical nature of correlation between the two. Swinton and Mowat acknowledge the influence and popularity of mutual critical correlation among practical theologians, especially in the development and use of the “pastoral cycle” and “correlational spiral” as a mode of theological reflection.³¹⁶

In their own work, Swinton and Mowat follow a particular model of mutual critical correlation offered by Stephen Pattison, “mutual critical conversation.”³¹⁷ Pattison likens the process of theological reflection to a “conversation between friends”—the Christian tradition, the social sciences, and the particular situation that is being addressed—friends who “have differences, but who also have much in common and much to learn from one

³¹⁵ David W. Tracy, “The Foundations of Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

³¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat, 81, 97. Specific examples of using “pastoral cycle” as a mode of theological reflection could be found in Paul H. Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996); Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology* (London: Mowbray, 2009); Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006); Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*; Fowler; David Willows and John Swinton, *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context* (London: J. Kingsley, 2000). I will speak about the “pastoral cycle” in greater detail, in the forthcoming section on the practical implementation of the Swinton-Mowat model.

³¹⁷ Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” in *Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” *Contact* 99, no. 2 (1989).

another.”³¹⁸ Such conversation is both open-ended and dangerous; it requires commitment to listen and take each other seriously, and offers a tremendous opportunity to learn and be transformed in the process. According to this model, the process of practical theological reflection consists of four stages: (1) identification of the “*situation*” that is “worthy of reflection and exploration”; (2) exploration of the situation using “*other sources of knowledge*”; (3) constructive dialogue between the data gained from the exploration and *scripture and tradition*; (4) development of the “*revised form of practice*” that seeks to bring positive transformation to the original situation. Swinton and Mowat point out that when practical theological reflection is understood as a “mutual critical conversation,” the role of the qualitative research methods in practical theology becomes clearer: they could be used by practical theologians as the means of exploring the situation and uncovering the hidden meaning within it, to provide more accurate data for theological reflection. In this sense, social sciences in general and qualitative research in particular become equal dialogue partners to theology and tradition, and the process of practical theological reflection is assumed to be “emergent and dialectic,” fully open to the possibility of being challenged and changed.³¹⁹

Yet, even as Swinton and Mowat affirm the prophetic responsibility of social sciences to challenge the interpretations of scripture and tradition that “may have become distorted, forgotten or deliberately overlooked,” they also voice their concern about the appropriateness of giving *all* dialogue partners *equal* weight within the research process. They question whether, given the radical mutuality of this method, it is appropriate that the

³¹⁸ Swinton and Mowat, 80.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-82.

normativity of theological perspective within the dialogue is lost, and that the social sciences can assume, at least in principle, “epistemological priority” over theology. Hence, in order to address this challenge of mutuality, Swinton and Mowat incorporate into their model the Christological perspective on mutual critical correlation, offered by Deborah Hunsinger.³²⁰

Hunsinger’s perspective on the dialogue between theology and social sciences deserves special attention because it was developed with the goal of bringing together two not-so-easily compatible conversational partners, the theology of Karl Barth and the depth psychology of Carl Jung. Hunsinger uses the metaphor of “becoming bilingual” to explain how the disciplines of psychology and theology could co-exist and be used advantageously by pastoral counselors in their work. To illuminate the basic methodological issues of such an interdisciplinary engagement, she draws extensively upon Barth’s theological interpretation of the relationship between the divine and the human nature of Jesus Christ, as it was articulated by the Council of Chalcedon. According to Barth, this relationship is defined by three crucial features: the “indissoluble differentiation,” the “inseparable unity,” and the “indestructible order.” Indissoluble differentiation emphasizes the enduring integrity of both natures, the fact that they are related without confusion or change. Inseparable unity means that the two natures coincide in their occurrence, and that there is never separation or division between them. Indestructible order underscores the fact that the two natures are related asymmetrically, with the priority assigned to the divine over the human nature. Transposed to the realities of dialogue between theology and psychology,

³²⁰ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

this pattern reveals that neither systematic *correlation*, nor complete *mutuality* between these two disciplines is possible, because they, much like the two natures of Christ, are “logically diverse, even when existentially connected.”³²¹ Hunsinger observes that the “Chalcedonian pattern” can be identified as a characteristic structure in Barth’s thought, and its “formal” (rather than “material”) definition lends itself to a wide range of doctrinal and substantive questions.³²²

Swinton and Mowat extend Hunsinger’s interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between practical theology and qualitative research, and find the three aspects of the “Chalcedonian pattern” extremely helpful for bringing methodological clarity to both theoretical and practical issues of the interdisciplinary dialogue. The notion of “indissoluble differentiation” serves as a powerful reminder that in order to make their distinctive hermeneutical contributions, practical theology and qualitative research must never collapse into each other on the level of their vocabulary, meaning, and disciplinary identity. At the same time, the notion of “inseparable unity” reveals the knowledge gained by the qualitative research methods to be deeply complementary to the process of practical theological reflection, with a strong potential to enhance and sharpen its understanding. Finally, the notion of “indestructible order” allows practical theologians to assign qualitative research an important yet limited place in a larger context of practical theological work, acknowledging its instrumental value in providing accurate data for theological reflection, but not adopting its overarching ontological and epistemological

³²¹ In making this connection, Hunsinger draws on reflection of Hans Frei on the connection between theology and culture from a Barthian perspective: Hans W. Frei, George Hunsinger, and William C. Placher, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 153; Hunsinger, x.

³²² Hunsinger, 61-65.

framework. Swinton and Mowat have deep appreciation of Hunsinger's perspective on the interdisciplinary dialogue and the commitment of faith that underlies it.

However, now that the basic epistemic priority of theology in the interdisciplinary work is established, they express a concern about the ways in which the divine revelation could be interpreted by the "human beings who are fallen, contextually bound, and have a variety of different personal and denominational agendas."³²³ From their point of view, the normativity given to the theological perspective in the dialogue calls for an intentional movement toward self-awareness, reflexivity, and ongoing self-critique on the part of theology, so that the potentially problematic theological interpretations and practices could be acknowledged and dealt with faithfully. In order to address this final challenge to the interdisciplinary dialogue, Swinton and Mowat propose the final, their own, addition to the method: they identify three biblical practices—hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness—to serve as the "ground rules" for the engagement between practical theology and qualitative research.

Swinton and Mowat present *hospitality*, after Hebrews 13:1-3, as the "Spirit-enabled ability to show kindness, acceptance, and warmth when welcoming guests or strangers." Applied to the realities of the interdisciplinary dialogue, the practice of hospitality means openness "towards other forms of knowledge and alternative approaches to the world" and a willingness to create a "context wherein the voice of the qualitative research can be heard, respected and taken seriously." Swinton and Mowat caution, however, that practicing hospitality does not mean the full acceptance of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative research that leads to the sacrifice of the

³²³ Swinton and Mowat, 89.

disciplinary identity of practical theology: hospitable as it is, the conversation still takes place within the ontological and epistemological boundaries of theological reasoning. The second practice, *conversion*, is patterned after the fundamental Christian notion of “turning to God in a way that decisively changes one’s life from an old way to a new way of life.” According to Swinton and Mowat, the notion of conversion applies to the interdisciplinary dialogue on two levels: conversion of qualitative research and conversion of the practical theologian. Conversion of the qualitative research means that before it can be used for the purposes of practical theological reflection, it needs to undergo an important change in its ontological and epistemological assumptions, most notably away from the relativism of its social construction and its inherent skepticism toward the possibility of truth, and towards the acceptance of the reality of God and the accessibility of truth through revelation. In other words, to be useful for the work of practical theology, qualitative research must be “grafted in to God’s redemptive intentions for the world.” Conversion of the practical theologian implies the possibility of personal transformation that arises in the process of critical engagement with the qualitative research. The key intent of the final practice, *critical faithfulness*, is to hold in creative tension the affirmation of the “divine givenness of scripture and the genuine working of the Holy Spirit” with the acknowledgement of the fallible nature of the human “grasping after divine revelation” in the process of doing theology. Applied to the realities of interdisciplinary dialogue, the practice of critical faithfulness enables the practical theologian to use qualitative research methods for the purposes of ongoing self-reflection and necessary self-critique.³²⁴

³²⁴ Ibid., 91-94.

Swinton and Mowat conclude their theoretical reflection on the fruitful conditions for an interdisciplinary dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research by offering their own model for practical theological reflection. The conceptual map of their model, intended to guide the work of practical theologians, follows the basic outline of the aforementioned “pastoral cycle.”³²⁵ During *Stage 1*, practical theologians articulate their preliminary observations about the current praxis, identify the primary issues and problems that need to be addressed, and formulate the formal research questions to guide their work. During *Stage 2*, practical theologians enter into dialogue with other sources of knowledge in order to carry out the cultural and contextual analysis of the situation. It is on this second stage of practical theological reflection that the qualitative research methods are actively engaged, with the goal of developing a “deep and rich understanding” and “new insights” into the nature and complex dynamics of the situation of interest. Formal theological reflection on the collected data begins during *Stage 3* of the pastoral cycle. While Swinton and Mowat affirm that the theological perspective is not absent from the first two stages, at this time practical theologians seek to draw out the explicit theological dimensions of the situation, searching for the ways in which it could be transformed in accord with “authentic and faithful” understanding of Christian revelation. The final *Stage 4* of their model calls for formulating the pattern of the newly revised practice, which in turn could become a starting point for another cycle of reflection. I summarize the “pastoral cycle” based stages of Swinton-Mowat model for using qualitative research for the work of practical theology in Table 1.

³²⁵ Ibid., 94-97.

Table 1. The Swinton-Mowat Model of Practical Theological Reflection

Stage 1: The Situation	The initial assessment and provisional exploration of the praxis that calls for critical reflection and challenge: <i>what appears to be going on pre-reflectively?</i>
Stage 2: Cultural-Contextual Analysis	Dialogue with other sources of knowledge, asking new questions, conducting disciplined investigation into the various dynamics and complex meanings of the situation: <i>what is actually going on?</i>
Stage 3: Formal Theological Reflection	In-depth reflection on the theological significance of the discoveries made, search for authentic revelation about the situation in light of the Christian scriptures and tradition: <i>how are we to understand this situation from the perspective of critical faithfulness?</i>
Stage 4: Formulating Revised Practice	Dialectical integration of the deepened understanding and insights about the situation into a comprehensive vision for its transformation ³²⁶

In light of my discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects of the Swinton-Mowat model for using qualitative research methods to deepen the work of theological reflection, it is possible to identify three principal contributions of these scholars to the practical theological interdisciplinary methodology. First, by carefully tracing the “genealogy” of their method through the works of the key contributors to the dialogue between theology and social sciences, Swinton and Mowat articulated three most salient

³²⁶ In their conceptual map for the cycle of practical theological reflection, Swinton and Mowat offer individual focusing questions for the *Stages 1 through 3*, but they do not provide such a question for the last *Stage 4*. (ibid., 95.) I will discuss the significance of this omission, and my own corrective for it, in the forthcoming section on my proposed amendment to the Swinton-Mowat model.

methodological challenges to the interdisciplinary engagement. Their critique of Tillich's method of correlation reveals the problem of establishing *correlation that does not stand in the way of genuine mutuality and critical engagement*. Their critique of the proponents of the mutual critical correlation method reveals the problem of establishing a *relationship of genuine mutuality and critical engagement which at the same time preserves the normativity of theological perspective*. Their critique of Hunsinger's Christological perspective on mutual critical correlation reveals the problem of maintaining the *normativity of theological perspective while deepening the awareness of its potential fallibility and the need of ongoing self-critique*. Identification of these key paradoxes of the interdisciplinary work is a very important contribution in its own right.

Secondly, Swinton and Mowat make a contribution on the level of theory. The practices of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness that they propose as foundational for practical theologian's engagement with qualitative research offer a thoughtful and creative way to address the three key paradoxes of interdisciplinary engagement: the practice of "hospitality" seeks to preserve the mutuality of engagement between qualitative research and practical theology; the practice of conversion seeks to establish the normativity of theological perspective; and the practice of critical faithfulness seeks to promote reflexivity and self-evaluation. Together, these three practices enrich practical theologians' understanding of interdisciplinary work as a "mutual critical conversation" in specific, biblically grounded ways. And, the fact that Swinton and Mowat choose the practices that are embedded in the Christian scripture and tradition reveals a strong commitment of faith that underlies their deep methodological competence.

Swinton and Mowat's final contribution is practical. They make a strong case for the tremendous usefulness of the qualitative research for the practical theologians' work. Furthermore, they identify a distinct place for application of individual qualitative research methods in the cycle of practical theological reflection: because of their particular sensitivity to the complexity and meaning of human experience, the contribution of qualitative research method is invaluable for Stage 2, for the purposes of deepened cultural and contextual understanding of the situation. Finally, they affirm the important prophetic role of qualitative research in the "process of ensuring that Christian practice is in correspondence to the event of God's self-communication."³²⁷

My own research is in fundamental continuity with the Swinton and Mowat's method of utilizing qualitative research for practical theology. I am far from being alone in my deep appreciation of their work. Their interdisciplinary model has gained highly positive recognition by students and scholars of practical theology both in Europe and U.S.A.³²⁸ There is, however, an important critique in the otherwise very favorable assessment of their work. It comes from Andrew Root, a Professor of Youth and Family Ministry, in Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. Therefore, in order to establish the Swinton-Mowat model of relating qualitative research and practical theology as a

³²⁷ Ibid., 90-91.

³²⁸ See, for example, Paul H. Ballard, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," *Theology* 111, no. 859 (2008); Stephen Pietsch, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (2010); Nancy G. Eswein, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 2 (2007); Michael W. DeLashmutt, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," *The Expository Times* 120, no. 5 (2009). Whereas scholarly esteem for Swinton and Mowat's work appears in formal reviews and evaluations, the students' appreciation is made clear in their widespread use of the model at the seminary and doctoral levels of studies. Both in North America and United Kingdom, the Amazon webpages of Swinton and Mowat's book feature a number of students' reviews that bear witness to its usefulness.

foundation of my interdisciplinary method, I first reflect on Root's critique of their model and then offer my own methodological proposal, in response to this critique and with an intention to advance Swinton and Mowat's existing work.

5.2 Need for Further Development of the Swinton-Mowat Model: Reflecting on Existing Critique and Identifying Limitations

In his review of the book, Professor Root confesses his dissatisfaction with Swinton and Mowat's lack of discussion of the specific ways to practice the constructive elements of their proposal—the virtues of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness—in the actuality of the practical theologian's work. Says Professor Root,

From this reviewer's perspective, the chapter [on practical theology and qualitative research methods] ends with a disappointing note. While the issues of interdisciplinary work and articulation of possible perspective was rich, the constructive proposal was not. The authors simply assert that hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness should frame the dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research, but they fail to articulate how this would be done.³²⁹

At first glance, Professor Root's accusation of the lack of attention to practice seems to be out of place. Swinton and Mowat open their volume with an extended theoretical exposition of the central role of practice in the discipline of practical theology.³³⁰ Furthermore, they devote over one hundred and fifty pages of their two hundred and sixty page text to the discussion of the "practice of research" with five specific examples of

³²⁹ Andrew Root, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 6, no. 2 (2008).

³³⁰ Swinton and Mowat, 3-27.

utilizing qualitative research for the task of practical theological reflection.³³¹ Finally, in the overall conclusion to their volume, they present practical theology not as an “applied theology” but as a “theology of action” which has its foundations in the ecclesial practices of faith.³³² Thus, Swinton and Mowat’s commitment to action and practice cannot be doubted. Yet at the same time, Root’s critique cannot be just dismissed as a perfunctory, not-careful-enough reading. When examined in its entirety, his review reveals that Root has read and is deeply appreciative of the “very helpful hands-on text that not only takes readers into the significant theoretical issues, but also places them into the challenges and wonders of research itself.”³³³ His critique, therefore, must not be seen as an accusation of the lack of attention to practice in general, but as a concern about the lack of specific guidance for practicing the virtues of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness in the actuality of using qualitative research methods for the purposes of practical theological reflection.

And indeed, a closer look at the Swinton-Mowat model reveals that even as they propose hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness to serve as the “ground rules” for the dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research, they do not incorporate them into their “emerging model” of practical theological reflection. By their own admission, the basic dynamics within their model still follow the familiar movements of the “pastoral cycle”: it starts from the reflection on the current praxis, the experience of the situation as it is (*Stage 1*); then, it progresses through the cultural-contextual (*Stage 2*) and formal theological exploration (*Stage 3*); and finally, it culminates in the formulation of

³³¹ Ibid., 101-253.

³³² Ibid., 254-60.

³³³ Root, 114.

the revised forms of practice (*Stage 4*), which in the future could serve as a starting point for a new round of reflection. In the theoretical presentation of their model Swinton and Mowat identify the place and function of qualitative research methods on the overall spectrum of practical theological reflection, but they do not offer guidance for developing the virtues of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness they claim to be critical for this work. Similarly, when they discuss five specific examples of using qualitative research methods in practical theology, their in-depth examination of the individual cases includes the description of the situation, specific qualitative methods, theological themes that emerged in the process, and the overall results of study; yet, once more, they do not describe how they practiced the virtues of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness in the actuality of their research projects. Hence, there appears to be a strange paradox in the Swinton-Mowat model for integrating qualitative research and practical theology: they raise and address the most salient issues of interdisciplinary dialogue in theory, *and* they offer a careful description of using of qualitative research methods in practice—*but* there is a real gap between two.

How can the failure of these erudite scholars to articulate the connection between the theoretical and practical parts of their central thesis be explained? No easy answer will suffice. The clarity and rigor of their theoretical exposition disallows the accusation of deficiency in learnedness or intellectual prowess. Their in-depth examination of the actual research projects (in which they utilized an impressive array of qualitative research methods for doing practical theological reflection) prohibits the charge of faulty practical expertise. The thoughtfulness and thoroughness of their work all throughout the volume rule out the possibility of simple negligence. What is left then? I believe that the “problem”

of their proposal is not a result of *deficiency in theoretical knowledge* or *failure of practical skill* but of simple *lack of awareness* of the existing disconnect between the way we “see” the interdisciplinary work (theory) and the way we “do” it (practice): if there is no notice of the gap, then there is no perception of the need to address it; and since there is no perception of the need, it remains unattended. This “not-noticing,” however, is not a matter of faulty scholarship but of legitimate oversight that comes from being habituated to seeing both theory and practice of interdisciplinary inquiry in a very specific way, traditionally established in the discipline of practical theology. It is a matter of being caught up in the deeper intellectual assumptions about the nature of interdisciplinary engagement. (And it is precisely the most learned scholars in the field who would be most vulnerable before such an affliction, because they have been indoctrinated into the dominant way of seeing the longest.)

For contemporary practical theologians, the metaphor of “dialogue” has been the traditional way of conceptualizing the interdisciplinary engagement between theology and social sciences.³³⁴ While not always explicitly acknowledged, the interpretative template provided by this metaphor can be seen in all the historical antecedents of the Swinton and Mowat’s model. In Tillich’s correlational method, the questions for the dialogue come from the human situation, and those questions are then “answered” by the gospel. In Tracy’s revision of the method, there is an emphasis on mutuality of exchange: both question and answers “come from” and then “are interpreted by” both sides. In Pattison’s

³³⁴ While my discussion here is focused on conceptualizing interdisciplinary work in the discipline of practical theology, the notion of “dialogue” between theology and the human sciences is as prevalent in the broader field of pastoral theology and pastoral theological methodology. See for example, *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, s.v. “Pastoral Theological Methodology”.

adaptation of this method, the notion of dialogue reaches its most explicit form: he likens the process to the mutual critical “conversation among friends.” Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger’s creative approach to pastoral counseling represents the most radical departure from the traditional emphasis on “communication,” offering an integrative view of the interdisciplinary work as a “relationship” within one person (similar to the union between the divine and human natures of Christ); yet, even as she builds upon the Chalcedonian pattern that describes the “internal” dynamic of the engagement, she still uses the “external” vocabulary of the dialogue to introduce and describe her innovative approach.³³⁵ Hence, when Swinton and Mowat propose the virtues of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness as their contribution to the contemporary methodological discourse, their constructive proposal makes a lot of sense, because it fits seamlessly into the tacit assumptive design created by the metaphor of dialogue. Hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness can be seen as “rules of conduct” that would create conditions for the fruitful dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research.

However, as Swinton and Mowat’s discussion of interdisciplinary work moves from the realm of pure theorizing to the domain of practice, the gap between “how we see it” and “how we do it” begins to widen. When Swinton and Mowat begin to describe their actual research projects, it quickly becomes obvious that they were using the resources of both disciplines as “tools,” rather than conversing with them (or letting them converse with each other) as “dialogue partners.” In this sense, it is the actuality of research experience itself that stood in the way of their continued application of the dialogue metaphor: because Swinton and Mowat offer a careful description of what they actually *did* when they

³³⁵ See especially: Hunsinger, 8, 12, 75, 103, 234.

employed the qualitative research methods for the work of practical theological reflection, they could not continue to use the interpretative template of the traditional (dialogue-based) methodological discourse. They have reached the limits of the metaphor of dialogue, so they have to depart from it.

Yet, in the absence of the dialogue metaphor and the assumptive background that it creates, the notions of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness became no longer as seamlessly fitting as before: while it is only natural to *remember* the importance of these virtues when qualitative research and practical theology are imagined to be “dialogue partners,” it is as natural to *forget* about the importance of these virtues as soon as qualitative research and practical theology are re-imagined as “tools!” Thus, I strongly believe that the discussion about how hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness could be carried out in practice of research is missing from the Swinton and Mowat’s proposal, not because it was consciously considered and deemed unnecessary, but because in the absence of the tacit assumptive milieu created by the metaphor of dialogue it simply could not be considered.

From this point of view, the intriguing disconnect between the theory and practice of the Swinton and Mowat’s proposal for using qualitative research methods for the work of practical theology is revealed not as reflective of a *weakness in their specific model* but as symptomatic of a *deeper crisis in the traditional way of conceptualizing* the relationship between theology and human sciences, within which their model has been developed. Their “mis-take” is of a different kind: it is not logical, but assumptive. As such, the problem of their proposal cannot be addressed from within, by adding yet another stipulation to the existing collection of requirements for a fruitful dialogue. Rather, an effective intervention

must take place from without, on the meta-level of reflection, that is, by engaging in a deliberate work of “re-cognition” and in-depth critique of the taken-for-granted disciplinary assumptions about the nature of the interdisciplinary engagement. In order to address the failure of the Swinton and Mowat’s proposal to connect the theory and practice of their interdisciplinary method, we would need to understand the limitations of the present way of seeing interdisciplinary work in practical theology and to ponder the adjustments could be made in order to enable us to see it better. In short, we would need to take a careful look *at* the “glasses” that we usually look *through*: we would need to reflect on the “metaphors we live by” as practical theologians.³³⁶

Problem of Theoretical Representation: Metaphor of Dialogue as Impediment to Accurate Conceptualization of Interdisciplinary Engagement

In a technical sense of the word, a metaphor is a “literary figure”—an image or a set of images—that allows us to understand one experience in terms of another. Frequently, we use metaphors to understand something abstract and new by comparing it to something concrete and familiar. For example, when saying that “learning is a journey,” we recognize that the word “journey” has a literal meaning but in this case it is also used figuratively, as an interpretative framework for the particulars of the learning process. One activity,

³³⁶ Now a classic in the field of linguistics, *Metaphors We Live By* is a deeply insightful and delightful introduction to understanding the power of metaphors as shapers of human perception: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson argue that far from being “poetic embellishments,” metaphors structure the way we see (and not see) reality. They maintain that all human thought processes and conceptual systems are “metaphorically structured and defined,” and as such, the metaphors we live by have a profound influence on our basic perception, our understanding of our experience, and consequentially, on our action—even as they themselves go unnoticed. Their 2003 “Afterword” delineates not only the vast additional evidence in support of their original thesis that emerged in the interim years, but also the profound influence that their research had on other fields of study.

learning, is understood in terms of another, journeying. Hence, to say that learning is a journey is to bring to mind the memories of the “twists and turns,” “uncertainty,” periodic “joys of discovery” and “frustrating detours,” the need of “maps and guides,” and so on. Yet in the process, more than a simple comparison is taking place: the metaphor of the journey actually *deepens* our understanding of the experience of learning by providing a coherent template within which it can be “re-cognized.” As such, metaphors function as experiential gestalts, linguistic devices that pattern our perception, understanding, and action: the image evoked by a metaphor provides structural and interpretative categories that enable us to make sense of our experience anew.

Because the parallelism between the image and the experience is always partial and never total—learning *is* a journey in a figurative sense, but it is *not* a journey, for which we need to pack clothes and toiletries—all metaphors are both helpful and limiting. Their power to make our experience coherent is a “double-edged sword”: every metaphor not only highlights but also hides the meaning, by keeping out of focus the aspects of our experience that are inconsistent with the image that it provides. Thus, the metaphor of the journey underscores the passage-like aspects of the learning experience, but suppresses the fact that learning is also like “play,” or “eating,” or “gardening,” or “peeling an onion,” or “wrestling,” or “switching on a light bulb,” etc. Like the specialty lenses for a camera, metaphors are selective in their illuminating power: each metaphor enables us to see better some aspects of the experience *while* it puts other aspects of it out of sight. Because of this, it is not possible to come up with a “perfect” metaphor for any given experience. All metaphors offer disservice as a part of their service. Yet, it *is* possible to distinguish between “good enough” and “less adequate” metaphors. The good enough metaphor is like

a good enough teacher who skillfully mediates insight to her students: in her work; she can neither make them have an insight nor have the insight for them, but she can point out the pattern to be recognized, emphasizing what is similar and downplaying what is irrelevant, thus, letting the students arrive at the insight by the path that is pointed out. The selectivity of the less adequate metaphor, on the other hand, hinders the process of understanding: it draws excessive attention to the details of lesser importance, while crowding out the essential. When metaphor is not a good “fit” for the experience, its image cannot help but flag the aspects of experience at random—and as a result, the path to insight is more difficult to follow.

The metaphor of the dialogue that has governed the methodological discourse in practical theology is an “ontological metaphor,” in which the phenomena under consideration are compared to persons. Such movement of personification is helpful because it enables the comprehension of nonhuman entities in human terms: activities, motivations, characteristics.³³⁷ Because ontological metaphors hit so close home, they are particularly powerful in their ability to enhance understanding, influence perception, and guide action. What then does the metaphor of dialogue reveal about the nature of interdisciplinary exchange between practical theology and social sciences?

The most basic dialogue template involves two persons talking to each other with intent of communicating and receiving information. Thus, when we use the metaphor of the dialogue to describe the dynamics of the interdisciplinary work, we see qualitative research methods and practical theology as “conversational partners,” who “take turns” in speaking and listening to each other, “with the overarching intent” of gaining a deeper

³³⁷ Ibid., 25-40.

understanding. In short, the metaphor of the dialogue draws attention to the disciplines themselves. Because we see the disciplines of qualitative research and practical theology as the participants in a discourse intended to contribute to each other's knowledge, we focus on their *differences*: it is their differences, not similarities, that are the potential sources of the new insight. The focus on differences, however, fills us with a sense of unease. Even though the ideal of the constructive, mutually enriching, and transformative conversation is what we desire, we also cannot help but remember those "other" dialogues: the ones that were really "monologues," because one person usurped the right to speak for the whole duration of the conversation; or, the ones in which one party got "converted," accepting the claims of another in an unquestioning, unreflective manner and abandoning its own valid ideas and beliefs; or, the ones which failed to engender new ways of knowing because another party refused to "listen with an open ear" and examine its own established assumptions; and especially, the ones which turned into "arguments," when nobody learned anything, because all were too busy defending their positions. Hence, when we focus on differences, we grow concerned with the potential *difficulties*, circumstances and attitudes that can get in the way of knowing and understanding. And such a concern, in turn, serves as an impetus for action: it sends our minds in search for *conditions and rules* that would support and protect a productive exchange of differing, possibly even conflicting, ideas in service of growth and transformation. In this sense, the very way we conceptualize the main challenges to the interdisciplinary dialogue—our "insights" into the importance of correlation and mutuality, normativity of the theological perspective, and critical self-awareness—could be seen as made possible by looking at it through the "lens" provided by the metaphor of the dialogue.

Yet, as with every metaphor, the notion of dialogue not only reveals but also conceals. When it presents the disciplines as person-like entities, it inadvertently forces the actual person out of view! By drawing our attention to practical theology and the social sciences as “conversational partners,” it conceals the most prominent “participant” in the interdisciplinary work: the practical theologian herself. The work of the practical theologian then is reduced to that of the (by and large invisible) “facilitator” of the exchange between the disciplines.

As long as we stay within the realm of pure theorizing, such an awkward omission is nearly impossible to notice. (After all, we *know* that the practical theologian is the only real, live participant in the whole process.) Yet, while not immediately noticeable, the disappearance of the practical theologian from the conceptual view is nonetheless costly: without the practical theologian in the picture, the simple question “what does the practical theologian do?”—by definition—cannot be asked. And not asked, it cannot be meaningfully answered. What does then happen when the discussion of the actual role and specific responsibilities of practical theologian can no longer be avoided, that is when we move from the discussion of the theoretical issues of interdisciplinary engagement to the conceptualization of its practice?

Problem of Practical Guidance: Limitations of “Pastoral Cycle” as a Framework for Practical Theological Inquiry

As previously noted, the Swinton- Mowat model of utilizing qualitative research methods for practical theological reflection is based on the “pastoral cycle,” one of the most common ways of conceptualizing the practice of interdisciplinary work in the context of theological inquiry. Having already discussed the four stages of the “pastoral cycle” as the

guiding framework for the Swinton-Mowat interdisciplinary method in the previous section, I only offer its schematic summary in Table 2.

Table 2. “Pastoral Cycle”-based Outline of the Swinton-Mowat Model

Stage 1: The Situation	The initial assessment and provisional exploration of the praxis that calls for critical reflection and challenge: <i>what appears to be going on pre-reflectively?</i>
Stage 2: Cultural/Contextual Analysis	Dialogue with other sources of knowledge, asking new questions, conducting disciplined investigation into the various dynamics and complex meanings of the situation: <i>what is actually going on?</i>
Stage 3: Formal Theological Reflection	In-depth reflection on the theological significance of the discoveries made, search for authentic revelation about the situation in light of the Christian scriptures and tradition: <i>how are we to understand this situation from the perspective of critical faithfulness?</i>
Stage 4: Formulating Revised Practice	Dialectical integration of the deepened understanding and insights about the situation into a comprehensive vision for its transformation

“Pastoral cycle,” however, is not a metaphor but an analogy: it does not provide a complex interpretative template for understanding one experience in light of another, but merely highlights the logical similarity between the two. Hence, it is called “pastoral,” because it has been originally envisioned for the purposes of discerning the ministry-related action; and it is named “cycle” because it has been widely accepted that genuine theological reflection is recurring in nature. Therefore, in itself, the simple analogy of “pastoral cycle” does not have the power to deconstruct the complex assumptive background created by the metaphor of dialogue; it merely adds two specifiers with regards to its dynamic and intent.

Moreover, even these specifiers fit readily into the dialogue template: it makes sense that most dialogues pursue certain objectives, as it makes sense that the end of one conversation easily becomes a starting point of another. Hence, continuity and mutual reinforcement is readily established between the way Swinton and Mowat present the nature of interdisciplinary work in theory (“dialogue”) and the way they describe the interdisciplinary work in practice (“pastoral cycle”).

And indeed, a closer look at the Swinton-Mowat model reveals the same emphasis—on the disciplines, and not on the practical theologian—in the outline of its practical theological reflection. Once the starting point, *The Situation (Stage 1)*, and the final destination of the practical theological reflection, *Revised Practice (Stage 4)*, are established, the two key stages of their cycle are defined by the identity of its “conversational partners”: *Cultural-Contextual Analysis (Stage 2)* is designated for engagement with the social scientific sources of knowledge, in this case with the qualitative research methods; and *Formal Theological Reflection (Stage 3)* is characterized by the formal reflection on the implicit and explicit theological dimensions of the situation. Thus, at its core, the Swinton-Mowat model of practical theological reflection presents interdisciplinary work as a stage-like process, in which the engagement with the resources of one discipline is followed by the engagement with the resources of another.

Within the interpretative framework of dialogue inherited from the realm of pure theorizing, such structure makes a lot of sense: the success of any conversation depends on respectful “taking turns” in speaking and listening. Yet, on the level of practice, the presentation of the interdisciplinary work as neatly separated and sequentially ordered stages of engagement with the social scientific and theological resources creates two

unfortunate problems. First, it makes it look as if the practical theologian is to engage the individual disciplines in a strictly ordered, linear fashion. Second, it makes it appear that when the pastoral theologian “converses” with qualitative research, practical theology is “silent”—and vice versa. The seeming disappearance of theology from *Stage 2*, which is defined by engagement with qualitative research methods, is particularly disturbing: it makes it look as if during *Cultural-Contextual Analysis*, the practical theologian is in danger of losing contact with resources of her primary discipline.³³⁸ The overall orderliness and linearity of the process is not nearly as threatening as the stage-dependent separation of disciplinary resources; nonetheless, such presentation does not do justice to the messy and circuitous realities of the actual research. Indeed, Swinton and Mowat themselves seem to be keenly aware of the potential for such misconceptions, because they accompany their graphic four-stage representation of the model with carefully written clarifications, explicitly stating that theology is “not absent” from the cultural-contextual analysis, and that “in reality the circle is not followed through step by step...[but]...there is movement in various directions.”³³⁹

However, even these corrective statements fail to provide satisfactory answers to the real-life questions of using qualitative research methods for theological reflection. If practical theology is not completely absent during the *Stage 2* of the cultural-contextual

³³⁸ Given the history of overreliance on the social scientific perspective (especially, psychology) by pastoral practitioners in the past, such representation is especially problematic, because it seems to mandate such one-way disciplinary focus for the practice of research. For critique, see, for example, Thomas C. Oden, *Contemporary Theology and Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); Paul W. Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

³³⁹ Swinton and Mowat, 97.

analysis, then in which sense is it “present,” and what is its relationship to the primary conversational partner of that stage, qualitative research? Does the same hold true for Stage 3, i.e., that qualitative research methods are also somehow present during the time of formal theological reflection, and if so, what is the role of qualitative research there? Furthermore, given such complexity of the interdisciplinary dynamics within each stage of the process, what specifically is the practical theologian to do in order to facilitate the “movement in various directions?” And, in which way is she to determine the time when there has been enough movement in various directions as to justify the return to the final stage of analysis? Following the theoretical framework laid out by the metaphor of dialogue and the basic outline of pastoral cycle, the discipline-centered organization of the Swinton-Mowat model strongly inhibits reflection on these issues. Because its primary focus is on *what* disciplinary resources are used by the practical theologian, rather than on *how* she uses them, the discussion of the practical theologian’s activity, while no longer omitted, remains figurative and abstract—and as such not fully adequate for the rigors of actual practice. For those who, like me, aspire to follow the Swinton-Mowat model for bringing together qualitative research and practical theology in the actuality of research, the resulting uncertainty of action makes their method remarkably hard to follow.

My in-depth reflection on the limitations of the Swinton-Mowat model for bringing together qualitative research and practical theology, undertaken in response to Professor Root’s critique of this model, offers a strong confirmation of his initial apprehension: even as the theoretical foundations of their constructive proposal are extremely rich and exceedingly helpful for understanding the key paradoxes and difficulties of

interdisciplinary engagement, its weakness lies in its practical applicability. To be useful for the purposes of practical guidance, the Swinton-Mowat model of bringing together qualitative research and practical theology needs to be revised in such a way that makes possible a specific, outcome-based description of the practical theologian's activity, in the order that corresponds to the process of the natural unfolding of practical theological reflection. Such change is conditional upon the radical shift in the model's basic organizational focus: its present *discipline*-centered structure must give way to the *practical theologian*-centered frame of reference. Not only would the theologian-centered organization of the cycle of practical theological reflection allow for greater order and specificity in description of the interdisciplinary work, but it would also correct the problem of separation between the disciplines on its various stages. If the stages of the cycle are defined by "what the practical theologian is seeking to accomplish," rather than by "what discipline is engaged," the resources of both disciplines could be present and readily utilized on each stage of the process.

It must be remembered, however, that no shift in focus can be accomplished by the effort of will—only by the alteration of the "lens" that is used for looking: in order to change the *focus*, it is necessary to find a way to *see* differently. Hence, the prospective presentation of my interdisciplinary method will unfold in four steps. First, I identify an alternative metaphor for conceptualizing the nature of interdisciplinary work, showing how its adoption—in place of the prevalent metaphor of "dialogue"—would allow us to see the practical theologian's engagement with qualitative research anew. Second, I look at the theoretical part of the Swinton-Mowat model for using qualitative research for practical theology through the lens provided by the new metaphor, in order to illuminate the meaning

of the key paradoxes of interdisciplinary work and to envision specific ways for practicing hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness in the actuality of research. Third, I reflect on the possibilities the new metaphor opens for understanding the practice of interdisciplinary inquiry. Finally, in light of the insights gained in the course of that reflection, I will propose specific revisions to the Swinton-Mowat's model, arriving at last at the "new and improved" model of interdisciplinary practical theological reflection.

5.3 Prospective Presentation of Method: Four-part Development of the Swinton-Mowat Model

Before the exposition, a confession: even though I am very excited about my four-part proposal for advancing the Swinton-Mowat interdisciplinary model, I tread with care. My positioning in the field of practical theology is almost of the exact opposite from that of Doctors John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. They are established scholars not only by virtue of their research tenure but also by the fact that they are native speakers of English, one of the main languages of contemporary practical theology. I, on the other hand, am still a student of the discipline, with only a developing expertise in interdisciplinary work, and an international one as such. Given my wet-behind-the-ears status and foreign locale, the audacity of offering an "alternative" to the long-established way of seeing and doing interdisciplinary work is a valid reason to be unnerved. And yet, I believe that my novice-like condition and "resident alien" positioning in the field might offer me a strange but unique advantage: it is precisely because at this time in my career my ignorance far exceeds my learnedness, and because my Russian worldview is consistently and incurably at odds with the Western conceptual paradigms, I am more likely to accidentally stumble into a new way of seeing. And if I am alert to such a possibility, I can take note and explore it

systematically. So, here it goes: drawing on my personal experience of doing interdisciplinary work in the fields of pastoral care and religious education *and* on my fifteen years of learning this art through English as a second language, I propose that we see the practical theologian's interdisciplinary work not as an activity of "conducting a dialogue" but as a process of "learning a new language."

*Metaphor of Learning a Second Language: Alternative Way to Conceptualize
Interdisciplinary Engagement*

To compare the "work of interdisciplinary engagement" with the "work of learning another language" is to point out that, at their core, both activities have to do with the gradual increase in knowledge. Yet, learning another language differs from gaining expertise in other disciplines in two important ways. On the one hand, languages teach much more than their own subject matter: behind the lessons in new vocabulary and grammar there takes place a silent instruction in another way of thinking. For example, in my first year in the U.S.A., when I was learning to write my seminary papers in English, I was repeatedly rebuked by my proofreader: "your single sentence cannot be the length of a paragraph!"; "avoid the Passive Voice, it sounds weak...whenever possible, use the Active Voice"; "too many dependent clauses will confuse your reader"; and so on. I never had the nerve to tell her that some of Tolstoy's sentences run several pages long; instead, I tried my very best to do as she said. As a result, I learned not only to *write* differently, I learned to *think* differently too. In English, I start my sentences with "I," prefer "acting" rather than "being acted upon," and whenever possible, communicate in "short and to the point" sentences. Even when I am processing the same information in my mind, I think and feel quite differently, depending on whether I speak Russian or English. In this sense, learning

another language has changed me—in ways that my degrees in surgical nursing, microbiology, and even theology did not. Because language is so fundamental to human thought processes, it has the power to change the learner.³⁴⁰

On the other hand, languages always point beyond themselves. From the first tutorials to the ever-elusive point of fluency, the study of another language is an invitation to a greater educational encounter: with other people and places. One's repeated forays into the unfamiliar rules and sounds become the steps on the journey of discovering the depth and complexity of the culture that originally appeared so simple and uniform. Hence, when I started learning English, a whole new world has opened before me: the world of nicely dressed, easy-going, confident, successful, and fit people who inhabited the pages of my textbooks and audiovisuals. The topics covered in class revealed the United States of America that looked clean, comfortable, and for the most part devoid of hardship and suffering (except for the "In the Hospital" and "At the pharmacy" lessons; and even they featured problems that were quickly and positively resolved). Yet, as I had ventured deeper into the study of the language, through movies, novels, and eventually traveling to the country itself, America with a different face started coming into my view: the intricate variation in its ethnic and racial identity, the wide range of its political and socio-economic strata, the astonishing disparity in its educational attainment. All this and much more were omitted from my early study guides. Yet the *language itself*—the ever growing array of

³⁴⁰ While I reflect on my own experience of learning English as a second language, my argument about the fundamental role that language plays in the shaping of human cognition matches the in-depth discussion of the connection between word and thought by the Russian psychologist, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, in his famous essay "Мышление и Речь." (Translated as "Thinking and Speech," for English-speaking readers, it can be found in the Volume 1, Problems of General Psychology, of L.S. Vygotsky, *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, ed. Robert W. Rieber and Aaron S. Carton, trans. Norris Minick (New York: Plenum Press, 1987).).

phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics to which I was exposed in my search for fluency—*became the conduit* of cultural diversity, complexity, and depth. Because language is so fundamental to the making of culture, it has the power to reveal it.³⁴¹

These two distinguishing features of learning a language cannot be neatly separated: the language's ability to transform the learner is strongly dependent on its ability to sponsor the process of initiation into the alternative culture. Yet, together they accomplish something more. Learning a foreign language has the power to deepen the learner's knowledge of her native tongue. Prior to the encounter with a foreign grammar, the learner remains a "simple user" of her original speech. The monopoly of the native tongue is all-embracing and as such, too familiar to be consciously known. Yet, in the aftermath of the encounter, the learner cannot help but turn into a "linguistic analyst." The very presence of an alternative system of forming words and sentences, a way of making sounds and meaning, reveals the discrepancy between the first and the second language—begging for comparison. Hence, the more I learned to discern the rules of English grammar, the more conscious I became of the patterns in the Russian one. And, the more I learned to understand the complexities of American expression (*the whole shebang of whatchamacallits and thingamajigs!*), the more attuned I was becoming to the intricacies of my own. Before attempting to learn a foreign language I was, like a proverbial fish, unaware of my linguistic wetness. Now, taken out of the waters of my original language, I

³⁴¹ Similarly, while my argument about the culture-dependent pattern of the second language acquisition grows from my personal experience of learning English in the context of American culture, it is deeply congruent with the "Acculturation theory" of the second language learning by adults proposed by the renowned linguist, John H. Schumann. See Rod Ellis, *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

became more alert to its internal dynamics and meaning. Surprise of all surprises: learning English made me a better knower of Russian.

At the same time, precisely because becoming bilingual requires the experience of genuine connection with another people and place, the development of linguistic skill is in strong correlation with enculturation: the increase of the learner's linguistic competency is mirrored by the mutuality of her cultural learning. On the initial level, the dynamics are very similar. Just as the knowledge of the second language increases the learner's awareness of her native tongue, the encounter with another culture sensitizes her eyes to the peculiarity of her own ethos. The mere presence of the foreign culture makes her see her own culture of origin anew.

Yet, on a deeper level, more than a simple increase in sensitivity is taking place. A genuine encounter with an alternative way of life does not merely raise awareness about the original one: it calls it into question. Before the encounter with another nation, the learner remains a simple adherent to the values and beliefs dominant in her own society. The imperialism of the motherland's mores is complete and therefore next to impossible to notice. In the aftermath of encounter, the learner cannot help but turn into a "cultural agnostic." The very presence of the alternative way of seeing and being in the world tears a hole in the fabric of the familiar—demanding reconsideration. Hence, when I had my first glimpses of understanding American culture, my cultural knowledge grew by way of accretion: my insights into the American culture were simply added to my knowledge of the Russian one. But before long, I became keenly aware of the apparent contradictions, and even conflicts, between the two. Simple addition became no longer possible. My deepening knowledge of the American worldview began to threaten some of my long-held

Russian beliefs and convictions. The sense of certainty about the way things are, which I possessed at the beginning of my immersion experience, gave way to the abiding feeling of doubt. Surrounded by the community that ate different food, abided by a different dress code, and was animated by different values and ideals, I was actively challenged to think again in order to re-validate—or discard—that which previously I had taken for granted. “Just the way things are” became a matter of supposition. In this sense, coming to know American culture also made me a better knower of the Russian one: it made me keenly aware of its biases and limitations.

In this sense, becoming bilingual is never a matter of simple linguistic additions. One plus one still equals two, but the two are being changed in the process. The second language acquisition triggers a complex development of the learner’s proficiency in *both* languages. As such, genuine bilinguality is a paradoxical state. On the one hand, for all practical purposes, the two languages become “equals.” The learner has so grown in her knowledge of the foreign tongue that she can now speak, read, and even think in it as well as she does in the first—“without a thought!” And, she has gained such an in-depth understanding of her first language that she can now speak, read, and even think about it as critically she does about the second—she has become a “reflective practitioner.” In her use of the second language she will never stop learning, but she is no longer a novice. In her use of the first language she will never stop being a native, but she is no longer naïve.

On the other hand, even though the two languages have reached the state of equality in their utilitarian value for the learner, they never become truly equal. No matter how “good” the learner becomes at the second language, she can never reach far beyond merely cognitive understanding. Even at the height of its attainment, the second language retains

its secondary status: it simply does not have that strong of a grip on the learner's emotions and bodily reactions. And at the same time, no matter how "forgetful" the learner becomes of her native tongue, she can never stop standing under its far-reaching command. Even when being strongly influenced, or even rivaled, by the second language, the native tongue never loses its primary status: its fundamental authority over the learner's basic gut reactions stands unchallenged. Hence, after fifteen years in the U.S.A., I find myself praying, dreaming, and even writing poetry in English. Now, when I speak Russian, I use Russian words but (to my linguist mother's ongoing distress) seem to arrange them in the order prescribed by the English syntax, and the number of times when I have to "think" about Russian words is growing with each subsequent year. In a very real sense, English has become my "default" language. And yet, when the scarlet silk of sunset across the Richmond sky stops me in my tracks, or when the six-pound chicken slips out of the freezer and lands on my foot, the first gasps of wonder or curses of pain invariably come out in Russian vocalizations. The utilitarian equality notwithstanding, the first language never ceases being "first."

At the same time, the double-track of language learning becomes an avenue of *twofold* cultural discovery. The learner gains the complex skill not only of reading and speaking another tongue, but the intricate ability to read and participate in another culture. As such, learning another language is always transformative: it makes the learner not merely an "amateur linguist" but a bicultural person, a "citizen of two worlds." And yet, the state of being a citizen of two worlds, too, is laden with paradox. Without a doubt, it is a position of belonging. Having reached the point of fluency, the learner gains the ability to "travel across the borders" without the restrictions that apply to the speakers of a single

language: now, she has access to two distinct traditions of knowledge, she is at ease in two communities, and she knows her way around in two countries. Yet, even her incredible capacity to “fit in” cannot bridge the gap between the country that she moved towards and the native soil that she moved away from, when she decided to learn a foreign language. Being a citizen of two worlds is also a place of undeniable alienation. Having reached the point of fluency, the learner loses the ties of utter certainty and security of her kith and kin, which are only available to the speakers of a single language: now that she has learned to inhabit both worlds, she no longer feels fully “at home” in either. The acquisition of a bigger world comes at the cost of connection.

Hence, there has come a time in my linguistic journey when I suddenly felt that my world and my identity have grown twice as big as before. Nothing has changed *and* everything changed, at once. I have never stopped being Russian, and yet somehow, the Americans themselves have stopped recognizing me as a foreigner. I have never left Russia, *and* yet somehow I have made the journey of coming home to the country that was once so foreign. It was an exhilarating realization. And yet, in a very real sense, I have also left Russia and I have also never completely arrived in the U.S.A. I am no longer able to enter Russia, participate in its ritual and story, and relate to its people, with the same degree of unselfconscious abandon that I knew before. And, I am never able to enter America, participate in its ritual and story, and relate to its people, with the same degree of seamless embeddedness that is known by a “real” American. I have stopped being completely Russian *and* never quite become American. Becoming bilingual is exhilarating *and* heart-wrenching. And yet, I have come to see that right there, between the “rock” of belonging and a “hard place” of alienation, a unique gift is in the making. When I willingly embrace

my life on the margins, with its daily joy and pain, I am able to see the world from more than one point of view and I am able to tell the story of what I see in more ways than one, and then, I can share this story with my people—both of them. The place of tension and contradiction has become a birthplace of knowledge.

Having reflected at length on the meaning of the metaphor of learning a second language, I now turn to look at the practical theologian's interdisciplinary engagement through its lens. What does the intricate pattern of the becoming bilingual reveal about the nature of interdisciplinary work? How does this interpretative template deepen our understanding of the practical theologian's engagement with qualitative research? What is gained and what is lost, when one imagines adopting the language-metaphor in place of the dialogue-metaphor for conceptualization of interdisciplinary practical theological work?³⁴²

The most dramatic change in the conceptualization of interdisciplinary work viewed through the lens of language learning is the re-appearance of the practical theologian as the central agent of the interdisciplinary engagement. The L-metaphor presents the practical theologian not merely as an *invisible facilitator of the dialogue between the two disciplines*, but as an *adult learner of an alternative discourse*. Such shift in perception introduces greater complexity into the understanding of the scholarly posture and action of the practical theologian who seeks to employ qualitative research for theological reflection. To begin with, to see the practical theologian as a second language

³⁴² In this section of the chapter, to protect the integrity of the narrative flow from the cumbersome repetitions of “the metaphor of learning the second language,” I refer in this new metaphor as “L-metaphor.” The dialogue metaphor, to which the L-metaphor is compared, would be identified accordingly as the “D-metaphor.”

learner is to recognize that in her interdisciplinary endeavors she is both learned and ignorant. She is impressively learned, because she possesses the highly specialized knowledge of her own discipline as well as the highly developed skills and habits of general learning that she has acquired in the process of becoming a scholar. And yet, she is also glaringly ignorant: in her study of qualitative research methods, she is an explorer of the new field of knowledge and new ways of knowing—and as such, in need of guidance and instruction. In this sense, the L-metaphor does not negate the prevailing view of interdisciplinary work as something that is done from the position of authority and expertise, but it reveals an important additional dimension of this work. By looking at the practical theologian's interdisciplinary endeavor through the interpretative template of the L-metaphor, we are able to see not only the powerful potential but also the inherent vulnerability of such undertaking.

Additionally, to see the practical theologian as an adult learner of another language is to realize the twofold nature of her learning. In her exploration of the new discipline, she has to be both active and passive. She is active, when she searches for general texts on qualitative inquiry, studies its individual methods, and seeks to gain deeper understanding of its rhetoric, assumptions, and disciplinary values. But there is another side to her learning: her deeper familiarity with this discipline comes not from abstract theoretical reading, but from entering the actual research settings, standing by other qualitative researchers as they go about their craft, and being exposed to the process of fieldwork as a whole. If she is to develop the genuine competency of the qualitative research methods, she must combine the work of active and deliberate learning with the osmosis-like qualities of immersion experience. In this sense, the L-metaphor also confirms the conventional

understanding of interdisciplinary work as something that is carried out by individual practical theologians; yet, it simultaneously reveals an additional, usually obscured, dimension of such undertaking. By looking at the practical theologian's interdisciplinary activity through the interpretative template of the L-metaphor, we are able to see that interdisciplinary work is essentially communal in nature: gaining new scholarly expertise and skill is a matter of being initiated into a new scholarly guild.

Yet importantly, even as the L-metaphor brings the practical theologian back into focus, it does not force the disciplines out of view. What is changed is the way it presents the disciplines: through the lens of language learning the disciplines appear not as *talking pseudo-persons* but as *living cultures*. Such shift in perception is also beneficial, because it allows for greater insight into what is going on when a practical theologian crosses the interdisciplinary divide.

To begin with, to see disciplines as cultures is to be reminded that they have their own distinct ethos and history, founders and heroes, territorial borders and political controversies, customs and rituals, classic texts and artifacts, and a myriad of other cultural attributes, some of which are clearly defined and some of which are understood without saying. Thus, to view disciplines as cultures is to become deeply aware not only of the easily identifiable "tip," but also of the massive "underwater part" of the disciplinary "iceberg": it is to be reminded of the intricate complexity of disciplinary knowledge which includes not only its "explicit" subject matter (e.g., theories, practices, and methods), but its more "implicit" (e.g., assumptions, rhetoric, and values) and even "null" (e.g., biases and limitations) contents. In this sense, the L-metaphor once more confirms the conventional emphasis on the importance of choosing and studying the work of one's

“primary theorists” from the allied discipline for the success of the interdisciplinary work; yet, it also calls attention to the frequently overlooked prerequisite of such learning. By looking at interdisciplinary work through the interpretative template of the L-metaphor, we are able to see that the practical theologian’s ability to gain accurate understanding of her theorists is dependent on the depth of her familiarity with the contours of the new disciplinary terrain as a whole.

Additionally, to see disciplines as cultures is to realize the dual role that they play in the process of interdisciplinary work. On the most obvious level, they function as the “bodies of theoretical and practical knowledge” which the practical theologian seeks to study and employ for the purposes of her research. Such a view draws attention to the somewhat passive quality of the disciplinary makeup. On the less obvious level, the disciplines function as “active cultural environments” that exert remarkable formative influence over their adherents—all the more powerful, because so frequently ignored. Hence, to view disciplines as cultures is to become conscious of the fact that even as the practical theologian seeks to get a better grasp of the contents and canons of the new discipline, she herself is being molded according to the patterns of action, thought, and value established in its scholarly community. In this sense, the L-metaphor once more confirms the conventional understanding of interdisciplinary work as something that is done *by* a practical theologian; yet, it also makes visible the other, usually hidden, dimension of interdisciplinary work, as something that is done *unto* her. By looking at the interdisciplinary work through the lens of language learning, we are able to notice the “infectious” powers of the interdisciplinary endeavor: a continued exposure to another way of looking at reality, in the context of repeated encounters with the alternative community

of scholars, has the potential to leave permanent marks on the practical theologian's identity and practice.

Thus, the power of the L-metaphor to sponsor new insights into the nature of the interdisciplinary practical theological work rests on its ability to create a significant shift in perception. The image of a practical theologian as an *adult learner of an alternative discourse* and disciplines as *living cultures* disrupts our habitual patterns of interpretation, encouraging the process of "re-cognition" of the roles that the practical theologian and the disciplines play in this process, and bringing the previously unnoticed dimensions of the interdisciplinary work into a sharp focus. Yet, even as the L-metaphor sponsors additional insights into the nature of interdisciplinary work, it does so without losing sight of the more conventional understanding, which has been sponsored by the D-metaphor. The expansive interpretative capacity of the L-metaphor can be explained by the fact that the two metaphors are related. The L-metaphor can be seen as a "sister" metaphor for the D-metaphor, because they both identify language as a primary medium of knowledge. Nonetheless, the L-metaphor is unmistakably a "bigger" sister of the two: its interpretative template encompasses not only the complex activity of language usage, but also the intricate process of language acquisition. As the metaphor that affords greater complexity and nuance to the reflection on practical theological methodology, the notion of becoming bilingual has the power to illuminate Swinton and Mowat's theoretical proposal of using qualitative research for the work of practical theology.

Seeing Anew: Using the Language-metaphor to Illuminate the Swinton-Mowat Theoretical Proposal

As I have shown in the earlier section of this chapter, Swinton and Mowat's theoretical proposal features two primary expositions: in-depth reflection on the key issues of the interdisciplinary practical theological methodology, and articulation of the specific guiding principles for practical theologian's engagement with qualitative research. In the course of the former, Swinton and Mowat highlight three paradoxes of interdisciplinary engagement that characterize practical theologian's engagement with the social scientific disciplines. Their overview of the principal models of conceptualizing of the interdisciplinary dialogue is a testimony to the challenges of establishing *correlation* that would not stand in the way of genuine mutuality, *mutuality* which would nonetheless preserve the normativity of the theological perspective, and *normativity* of theological perspective that would at the same time deepen the practical theologian's awareness of the potential fallibility of her perspective and the ongoing movement of *self-critique*. Hence, starting from Tillich's method of correlation, each successive proposal to advance the art of interdisciplinary practical theological reflection suggests new principles to address these challenges. In Hiltner and Tracy's model, correlation is "revised" in order to permit mutuality. In Hunsinger's interpretation of the interdisciplinary method, mutuality is then "curbed" by asserting the normativity of the theological perspective.

In Swinton and Mowat's own constructive contribution to contemporary methodological discourse, normativity of the theological perspective is in turn "reminded" of the need for self-awareness and critique. The guiding principles of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness that they set forth for bringing together qualitative research and practical theology are meant to serve as "ground rules" that ensure the

theological perspective, normative as it is, does not become immune to the movement of ongoing critical reflection. Individually and together, these virtues frame the conversation between the two disciplines, showing how practical theologians could benefit from engagement with the social sciences without sacrificing their own disciplinary identity.

Yet, as Professor Andrew Root pointed out, the chief weakness of the Swinton-Mowat two-part proposal had to do with the absence of reflection on its practical implementation: the richness of their theoretical exposition was undermined by the lack of specific guidance for realizing these virtues in the actuality of research. In response to Professor Root's critique, I have argued that the real problem with their proposal was not logical but assumptive: the intriguing disconnect between Swinton and Mowat's discussion of interdisciplinary work *in theory*, and their model for using qualitative research for practical theology *in practice*, came from being trapped in the unrecognized disciplinary assumptions about the nature of interdisciplinary engagement, which have been created by the long-term application of the metaphor of dialogue for conceptualizing the interdisciplinary work.

What happens then, when we reflect on the general paradoxes of interdisciplinary engagement (correlation, mutuality, normativity, and self-critique) and on the Swinton-Mowat specific virtues for bringing together qualitative research and practical theology (hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness) within the interpretative template of the L-metaphor? What can be seen, when the practical theological methodology is viewed through the lens of becoming bilingual?

By looking at interdisciplinary work against the backdrop of the intricate interpretative template of becoming bilingual, we can make sense of its principal paradoxes

anew. The metaphor of learning a second language provides an underlying model for integrating the challenges of correlation, mutuality, normativity, and self-critique into a coherent whole.

To begin with, within the framework of language learning, *correlation* can be seen as the most elementary level of engagement with the alternative disciplinary discourse. On this level, the practical theologian arrives at the initial, rough approximation of meaning between her “native” discipline of theology and the “foreign” field of the social sciences: here, for example, she might draw parallels between the theological and psychological ways of thinking about the human “problem” and its “solution” (as “sin and salvation” and “disease and health,” respectively). Such approximation of meaning is by definition dreadfully inexact and as such, inherently flawed and insufficient to serve as a final destination of the interdisciplinary engagement. But if seen as a starting point of learning the alternative disciplinary discourse, correlation is revealed as a meaningful and genuinely necessary step: phrasebooks and dictionaries, imprecise as they are, offer the only way to start learning a new language.

Similarly, within the framework of the second language learning, *mutuality* is revealed as the more advanced level of engagement with the alternative disciplinary discourse. At this stage, the learner is no longer bound by the formal textbooks and manuals of grammar, but learns directly from the live flow of conversational speech, literature, and other linguistic repositories of the culture. Hence, on this level of engagement with social scientific discourse, the practical theologian is seen as moving beyond the first approximations of meaning. Having developed the capacity to read both theological and psychological texts within their own scholarly contexts, she knows the vocabulary and

guiding principles of both discourses to the degree sufficient to initiate the two-way process of interpretation: here, for example, she may reflect on the meaning of “salvation” in light of the psychological depictions of “health,” or she may consider the additional nuances in the broader notion of “disease” in relation to her understanding of theology of “sin.” And in so doing, the practical theologian is developing her capacity to enrich both discourses with additional insight and depth of perception.

At the same time, the interpretative pattern of the language-metaphor reveals that, even when the practical theologian reaches the most advanced level of learning as to become “fluent” in the alternative social scientific discourse, she will never know it to the degree that would permit her becoming a “native.” No matter how competent she is in the social scientific theory and practice, her fundamental scholarly instincts would always remain thoroughly theological in nature: for example, she would be always more inclined to think first about the human predicament in terms of “sin and salvation,” rather than “health and disease.” Thus, when we view the interdisciplinary work through the lens of language learning, we begin to recognize that *the normativity of the theological perspective* in the practical theologian’s engagement with qualitative research is not something akin to an external attitude or positioning of thought that can be consciously manipulated. Rather, it is a permanent, largely unconscious, and therefore inevitable aspect of the properly developed practical theologian’s disciplinary identity. As such, it need not be artificially protected, only adequately acknowledged. It is as unlikely for the practical theologian to lose the primary status of her native theological habits of perception and speech, as it is for the speaker of a foreign language to forget her own mother tongue.³⁴³

³⁴³ Here, I intentionally speak of “properly developed” disciplinary identity. My point is not to dismiss the danger of theologians’ overreliance on social scientific knowledge; rather, I seek to underscore the fact that

And yet, what does change is the level of awareness and the degree of self-consciousness with which the practical theologian engages her own theological perspective. Within the framework of the second language learning, the labor of *ongoing self-awareness and self-critique* is revealed not as a matter of deliberate practice but as a natural outcome of learning to see the world from a different point of view. The loss of theological naïveté engendered by the practical theologian's study of the social scientific discourse makes her commitment to critical and constructive self-reflection a logical step in the development of her dual disciplinary competency. She no longer needs to be urged to bear in mind the potential fallibility of theological interpretations. Now that she has acquired new eyes to see and new language to use, she cannot help but notice the existing biases and potential pitfalls of theological discourse: never again, for example, would she be able to condemn something as a "sin" without also thinking about the possibility of "disease"; and, she would always be weary of the accounts of "salvation" that fail to honor the bodily and emotional realities of human "health."

Thus, using the more complex interpretative template of the L-metaphor for conceptualizing the nature of the practical theologian's engagement with the social sciences allows us to understand the inherent paradoxes of interdisciplinary work at a new depth. By providing a unified framework of interpretation, patterned after the intricate process of becoming bilingual, the language-metaphor reveals the requirements of correlation, mutuality, normativity of theological perspective, and self-critique not as a collection of isolated amendments to the practical theological method, but as a meaningful

once truly gained, disciplinary identity cannot be lost. Such observation, however, does raise an important question about the disciplinary formation of practical theologians.

progression of the practical theologian's gradually deepening degree of expertise in the vocabulary, rhetoric, and conceptual paradigms of the social scientific discourse.

At the same time, the application of the L-metaphor generates new insights into the meaning of the Swinton-Mowat's principles of hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness. Through the lens of becoming bilingual, hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness are revealed as "stages" on the practical theologian's learning of, and enculturation into, the alternative disciplinary canons of qualitative research. As such, the more complex interpretative template of the L-metaphor does not alter their core meaning; it simply moves their description beyond the purely allegorical (e.g., that "Practical Theology can welcome and sit comfortably with qualitative research methods," or that "God 'converts' qualitative research," or that social sciences are tools that need to be "sanctified and drafted into the service of God"³⁴⁴), thus, making it possible to describe the practical theologian's interdisciplinary activity with a far greater degree of precision.

Hence, within the framework of language learning, *hospitality* can be seen as the earliest period of interdisciplinary exploration. As a practice of the unconditional "welcome toward guests and strangers," hospitality makes visible two important aspects of the practical theologian's social scientific learning. First, it highlights the strangeness of the interdisciplinary encounter, inviting the practical theologian to notice that qualitative research texts have not merely an unfamiliar but even alien feel. This noticing of the foreign nature of the qualitative literature seems obvious enough, yet in reality it is deeply counterintuitive. Because in the English-speaking academy both theological and qualitative texts are written in English, it is natural for the practical theologian to assume that

³⁴⁴ Swinton and Mowat, 91-94, 258.

theologians and qualitative researchers speak the same language, and that therefore she can easily understand both. Nothing can be further from truth, and the notion of hospitality stands in the way of such misperception. It forces the practical theologian to realize that before she can “facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue,” she must recognize and respond to the “difference in the disciplinary languages.” At the same time, hospitality draws the practical theologian’s attention to the fact that in order to truly learn the new language of the qualitative research, she has to become familiar with its alternative “culture”: its values and underlying assumptions, its rhetorical conventions and rules of research, its dominant paradigms of thoughts and prominent figures.

This change in the practical theologian’s perception about the nature of her engagement with qualitative research—not merely a narrow, method-oriented study but a discipline-wide cultural encounter—has a direct effect on her understanding of what she needs to do. Even as her main activity at this point is still reading, both the subject and the manner in which she reads have shifted. To begin with, there is a distinct broadening in the scope of her reading: as if preparing for a first visit to another country, the practical theologian begins to read in order to understand the history, tradition and customs of the qualitative research, to discern the contours of its disciplinary territory, and to become familiar with its major “subcultures,” principal texts and scholars. Her literary “point of entry” is the Introductions, Anthologies, Companions, and Handbooks of qualitative research. Additionally, the memory of the “otherness” of the qualitative research endows the practical theologian’s reading with a special quality: on the one hand, it makes her more alert to the differences in social scientific views of reality, values, and beliefs; on the other hand, it makes her more willing to consider an alternative perspective and tolerate the

perplexing and possibly even contradictory ideas that she encounters in qualitative texts. Such preparatory reading produces no immediate results and will rarely show in the practical theologian's final published research. Yet, it is far from being pointless: as she reads around, making her first intuitive connections between this new disciplinary culture and the already existing elements of her scholarly and personal experience, she lays foundation for going deeper.

Hence, within the framework of L-metaphor, *conversion* can be seen as the second, more intense stage of the practical theologian's learning of the language and culture of qualitative research. Having become more knowledgeable about the qualitative inquiry in general, she is beginning to understand not only the explicit "content" but also the "code" of its scholarship: the implicit rules about setting out a premise, analyzing data, and presenting conclusions, the acceptable ways to make a compelling argument and judge validity of its claims, the underlying assumptions about the reliable sources of knowledge and acceptable standards of evidence, and the rest of its cultural matrix which dictates not only what should be explicitly stated and what can remain unsaid, but also how what is left unsaid is to be interpreted. At this point of her learning, the work of choosing the particular overarching research strategy, method, and specific theorist for her interdisciplinary inquiry takes place naturally: it simply arises from her in-depth understanding of the field as a whole. Yet, even as the practical theologian's knowledge of qualitative research becomes increasingly specific and thoroughgoing, the ultimate objective of her learning is not to master and stay abreast all the new publications and latest developments in the field of qualitative inquiry. (Such task is challenging even for the "native" scholars of qualitative research.) Rather, the practical theologian's fundamental goal is to develop the ability to

speak, think, and see the world as a qualitative researcher, to “train the instincts” and “get the feel” of the discipline in the ways that are compatible to those of the insider. She does not need to gain the mastery of the entire array of the qualitative research methods—only fluency of understanding and performance.

Yet, in the process, a subtle transformation of the practical theologian’s attitude towards the new knowledge is taking place. If before, she looked at the qualitative research as if from the outside, now she is making her way in. If before, her mere tolerance of the strange ideas, epistemological assumptions, values, and practices was sufficient, now she has to really make sense of them. If before, she was learning to understand, now—as she is beginning to speak the language, to use the tools, and to adopt the perspective of the qualitative researcher—she is beginning to “stand-under”: her own growing fluency in qualitative research is inseparable from the increasing influence of the qualitative research over her. Hence, there comes a point in her encounter with the qualitative research, when she cannot help but to recognize a subtle but significant process of transformation that accompanies her scholarly learning: even as her working objective has been simply to add new knowledge and skills to her scholarly “toolbox,” her own identity and practice are being refashioned in the process. Learning to see the world as a qualitative researcher is making permanent changes to her outlook as a practical theologian.

This recognition of the transformative power of interdisciplinary work raises critical questions about the nature of the practical theologian’s “conversion,” most notably in relation to the social constructivism that is the dominant interpretative paradigm of the qualitative research. Does it mean, then, that as the practical theologian learns the language, methods, and the worldview of the social sciences, she would also learn its epistemological

assumptions, and become “converted” into believing that all theology is simply a matter of social construction? If yes, how such unfortunate a loss of her theological integrity could be prevented? If no, how is it possible that the practical theologian could genuinely adopt the radical suppositions of qualitative research while staying faithful to the beliefs about knowledge, truth, and reality of her native theological discipline?

And indeed, within the interpretative framework provided by the metaphor of dialogue, these questions can only be answered in the “either-or” terms. When we see interdisciplinary work as a verbal exchange of ideas about reality between the two person-like disciplines, reaching consensus could only be imagined in two ways: *either* the practical theology has to “consent” to the interpretative paradigm of the qualitative research, *or* the qualitative research has to be “converted” as to accept the reality of God, the possibility of revelation, and some form of critical realism as part of its metaphysical and epistemological belief system. Understandably, Swinton and Mowat choose the latter. Such solution indeed protects the integrity of the theological disciplines, but, as must be acknowledged, it does not-so-subtle violence to the integrity of the qualitative research.

However, the interpretative template of the more complex metaphor of learning a second language seems to allow for imagining of a third, “both...and” way. Seeing qualitative research and theology not as pseudo-persons but as cultures highlights our awareness of the narrative nature of their disciplinary discourses. Hence, we can see that when we consider “theology” as a specific way of *talking* about God, then we can earnestly agree that the precepts of social constructivism fully apply to it. The best of our attempts to utter the truthful *logoi* about God and interpret the divine revelation of the Scriptures are “socially constructed.” They are brought into being as a result of our ongoing interaction

with other members of the Church, shaped by a vast number of our social, cultural, and interpersonal circumstances, and plagued with partiality and bias. Try as we may, doing theology that “just tells it like it is” is an impossibility.

And yet, more than practitioners of any other discipline, theologians are aware that there is more to doing theology than the production of a spoken or written word about God. As scholars whose “subject matter” is both revealed and mysterious, we are deeply conscious of the dimension of theological reasoning which stretches beyond the most eloquent words and even the act of reasoning itself.³⁴⁵ Theology is a unique discipline in which the suspicion of its own discourse is built into its own disciplinary discourse. It does not hesitate to talk about God at great length, but it always ends up pointing beyond its own words, to the strange and obscure place where God ceases to be a topic of the conversation and is experienced as a Living Presence, as dazzling as dark, that bridges the subject-object divide, and leaves us speechless, and terrified, and hungering for more (Matthew 17). Because sooner or later, we as theologians arrive at the conclusion that all our discussion about God remains incomplete, limited, and incurably inadequate, we come to accept that what we *can* say about God is infinitely less important than what we *cannot* say about God. Thus, because we no longer view our words about God as the ultimate embodiment of our knowing, we no longer perceive the realization of their socially constructed nature as

³⁴⁵ The theological vocabulary itself reflects this awareness in the time-honored distinction between the *kataphatic* (affirmative) theology and *apophatic* (negative) theology. Traditionally, the distinction between the two has been conceptualized as characteristic of Eastern versus Western approach to doing theology. Such, however, is only a crude approximation. There are fine examples of both in the authors from both sides of the divide. For example, two Western classical works, the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* and the *Cloud of Unknowing*, can be seen as perfect examples of kataphatic and apophatic method, respectively. Similarly, there are both apophatic and kataphatic aspects in the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*. For an insightful reflection on how these two approaches to theology relate to the life of faith and prayer, see Frederick McLeod, S.J., “Apophatic or Kataphatic Prayer?,” *Spirituality Today* 38, no. 1 (1986).

threatening. Our underlying awareness of the contemplative—rather than purely discursive—nature of the theological process enables us to *both* embrace *and* transcend the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research.

In this sense, the conversion of the practical theologian who “sets aside” her theological convictions, in order to “turn to” the qualitative research methods, has nothing to do with *abandoning* her belief in God and the possibility of revelation; rather, it has everything to do with *realizing* it on a much deeper level than before. It has to do with the recognition that something genuinely theological—and not merely psychological or sociological—can be learned by applying the qualitative research methods to the study of human experience. It is a position of humble confidence of the theologian who is beginning to see that, different as it is, qualitative inquiry can become an occasion for gaining the new (rather than merely applying the existing) knowledge about God. At this stage, the bar of the practical theologian’s theological reasoning is raised to a new level: as a result of her engagement with the qualitative research, she is challenged to approach the human experience itself as a source of knowledge about God.

The Swinton-Mowat final principle, *critical faithfulness*, can be seen as the concluding stage of the practical theologian’s engagement with qualitative research. Within the interpretative framework of the language-metaphor, this period in the practical theologian’s learning is revealed as a paradoxical state of fluency. Even though she did not “change majors,” her long term exploration of and exposure to the theory and tools of qualitative inquiry has made significant changes to her understanding of research and her own scholarly outlook. She has not stopped being a practical theologian—and yet, she has also become a qualitative researcher. In a very real sense, she is both. Her diligent work of

learning to understand vocabulary and conceptuality of both disciplinary discourses enabled her to develop the ability to see the world from both points of view: even when she is using qualitative research methods, she also sees as a practical theologian; and even when she is doing practical theological reflection, she also sees as a qualitative researcher. It is not something that she is doing on purpose; it is something that she simply cannot help doing. Yet, while not intentional, such duality of perception is the “seedling” of the practice of critical faithfulness.

Now, whether she is working with qualitative data or theological texts, the practical theologian can never forget that there is “another way to look at it.” The additional angle of seeing makes her more sensitive to the problems in both disciplinary discourses: the deficiencies of understanding, gaps in interpretation, and biases and limitations. At the same time, her ability to adopt an alternative disciplinary perspective also enables her to see new possibilities of addressing those problems: by drawing on the resources of the alternative discourse, she can illuminate blind spots in interpretations, correct mistakes in understanding, and expand the limits of conceptualization. Thus, it is precisely because she is now capable of assuming theological *and* qualitative points of view, she is now in the position to criticize and to improve both discourses in light of each other. In this sense, the practice of critical faithfulness has to do with the practical theologian’s ability to remember and honor the alternative way of seeing and speaking—the qualitative way of seeing and speaking while doing practical theology, and the theological way of seeking and speaking when engaged in qualitative study—as a means to clarify, elucidate, and deepen both. Such work is unmistakably “critical,” because it reveals the problematic character of the existing theological or qualitative understanding; yet, it is also

unswervingly “faithful,” because in addressing the limitations, deficiencies, and biases of the present theological or qualitative knowledge, it always seeks to bring it closer to its own disciplinary ideals.

It is important to note, however, that while the disciplinary duality in the practical theologian’s perception is the natural beginning of critical faithfulness, learning to practice it in consistent and mature way is not easy. Two particular obstacles stand in the way of this work. *Internally*, the practical theologian has to struggle with the intense inner “static,” the emotions and resistances that accompany the work of challenging established interpretations. When she is bringing to bear the qualitative perspective on the theological knowledge, she has to be willing to stand back and reflect critically and constructively even on the most time-honored, sacred, and her own personally favorite interpretations of religious experience. She even has to let go of the sense of her professional confidence itself, accepting the fact that doing practical theology is a never-ending ascent (or descent) to truth which she will never fully grasp. At the same time, when she seeks to reflect on the qualitative knowledge theologically, she has to get over the not-so-subtle sense of insecurity about the limitations of her social scientific erudition and muster the courage to speak the truth, as she sees it, in the unfamiliar context. *Externally*, the practical theologian has to come to terms with the loss of the clear sense of professional community. Having spent a substantial amount of time and energy studying the texts and methods of qualitative research, she has become an “insider” to the field. And yet, no matter how good she has become, she could never have the luxury of full belonging to the guild of academically specialized qualitative researchers (her theological “accent” would always set her apart). At the same time, even though she would always remain a “native” in theology, she could

never have the solace of being fully at home back among the purebred theologians (her theological “innocence” is lost forever). Practicing critical faithfulness is a demanding objective not only because it dissolves the boundaries of what she knows, but also because it introduces the abiding tension into the practical theologian’s scholarly identity and unravels the bonds of her scholarly affiliation.

And yet, it is this “diaspora” existence that forces the practical theologian to constantly expand her theoretical knowledge and hone her practical skills in both fields. Every time when seeing as a qualitative researcher interrupts the habitual flow of her theological interpretations, and every time when seeing as a theologian makes her question the meaning of the insights gained by the qualitative inquiry, she has to “dig deeper.” And gradually, in her never-ending search for better understanding, the practical theologian begins to realize that it is the process of learning itself that is the best part of the interdisciplinary scholarship. The act of seeing differently turns out to be its own reward!

But it is a reward that can be shared. The experience of genuine estrangement from the mainstream of both disciplinary discourses affords the interdisciplinary practical theologian a rare perspective on their contents and canons. From the margins she is likely to see what the majority of scholars, in both fields, might miss: the limitations of their traditional terminology and conventional paradigms of knowledge, the subtle inequalities within their scholarly communities, and the unfortunate narrowing of the disciplinary philosophy and ethos. In this way, her very struggle to see the world from both points of view and her ongoing work of mutual disciplinary interpretation becomes a source of her unique scholarly contribution: it is precisely because she is so inherently different, that she alone can make it; and it is precisely because her view is likely to be partially at odds with

her colleagues in both disciplines, that they need it so much. As in Buchner's definition of vocation, her scholarly location on the fringes of both disciplines becomes a place where her own "deep gladness" and the "world's genuine need" can come together.

Thus, the mature practice of critical faithfulness has to do with the practical theologian's capacity first to recognize and consciously embrace her own professional marginality, then to use it intentionally as a unique vantage point for her scholarly work, and finally to share what she learns with her scholarly community—on both sides of the disciplinary divide. In this sense, critical faithfulness is indeed a "concluding stage" in the practical theologian's learning of the foreign disciplinary discourse, but it is not the "last thing" that can happen in the course of her interdisciplinary work. The ultimate event that can happen in the course of the practical theologian's interdisciplinary engagement is the possibility of "conversion" of the disciplines themselves—*when and if* the constructive contribution of the practical theologian becomes substantive enough to draw attention to the limitations of the disciplinary discourses themselves and warrant their revision. Such disciplinary conversion implies neither the acceptance of the theistic interpretative paradigm on the part of qualitative research, nor the surrender of the belief in the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ on the part of practical theology. Rather, it has to do with the gradual modification of the vocabulary and conceptuality of both discourses in light of each other, in the direction of increased clarity, profundity, and enrichment of insight. Such is the fruit of interdisciplinary work at its best.

Having reflected at length on the meaning of the language-metaphor, and its effects on the Swinton and Mowat's theoretical proposal, I pause briefly to point out that adoption of this

metaphor for conceptualization of interdisciplinary work fully addresses Andrew Root's aforementioned critique of their method. By using the more complex interpretative framework of becoming bilingual to understand the process of bringing together qualitative research and practical theology, I have been able to generate new insight into both the historical antecedents and the specific elements of the Swinton-Mowat interdisciplinary model. More specifically, my use of the language-metaphor revealed "correlation," "mutual critical correlation," "Christo-centric mutual critical correlation," and "critical self-awareness" as the gradually deepening levels of the practical theologian's *engagement with the alternative discourse* of the social sciences, thereby making it possible to appreciate the underlying unity and congruence of these methods, rather than to see them as overly categorized and set in sharp opposition to each other. Similarly, my use of the language-metaphor illuminated the meaning of "hospitality," "conversion," and "critical faithfulness" as the phases in the practical theologian's *cultural encounter* with the qualitative research, thereby offering more tangible ways of understanding, and practicing, these principles. As a result, my reconstruction of practical theological methodology within the framework of becoming bilingual has closed the gap between the theory and practice of the Swinton-Mowat interdisciplinary model, showing how the elements of their constructive proposal could be embodied in the practice and person of a real, flesh-n-blood practical theologian.

Yet, the adoption of the language-metaphor, in place of the traditional dialogue-metaphor, for conceptualization of interdisciplinary practical theological scholarship accomplishes far more than merely a constructive response of Root's critique. When we look at interdisciplinary engagement through the lens of the second language learning, the

previously hidden, but crucial, dimension of such work comes into view: *the practical theologian's own becoming as an interdisciplinary scholar*. On the one hand, the interpretative template of becoming bilingual reveals that a properly developed theological identity is a fundamental precondition for effective engagement with the non-theological disciplines, tools, and arts: unless theology has truly been learned and internalized as the practical theologian's "first language," the complex process of the "second language" acquisition is likely to go awry. On the other hand, the interpretative template of becoming bilingual makes it clear that extensive preparatory learning must precede the actuality of interdisciplinary practical theological research: unless the practical theologian has reached a genuine state of "fluency" in her understanding and practice of qualitative research, her ability to return to her "native" theological discipline and know it anew will be severely hampered. From the standpoint of becoming bilingual, the practical theologian's twofold disciplinary formation is a cornerstone of practical theological methodology.

As such, my proposal to adopt the language-metaphor as a theoretical foundation of my interdisciplinary method is highly advantageous not only because it effectively addresses the existing limitations of the Swinton-Mowat theoretical exposition, but because it sponsors a more comprehensive view of what is required for, and what take place in the course of, the actuality of *learning* qualitative research methods by the practical theologian. Yet, unless I am able to reflect on the actuality of interdisciplinary research practice and show that the language-metaphor has the power to illuminate the specifics of *using* qualitative research in the real-life practical theological investigation, my own proposal is liable to the same critique that Professor Root directed at the Swinton and Mowat's work (the disconnect between insightful theorizing and practical

implementation). The real test to my alternative way of conceptualizing interdisciplinary engagement is its ability to enhance the practice of actual interdisciplinary inquiry.

I therefore return to the Swinton-Mowat model one last time in order to reflect on the limitations that it presents to the practice of interdisciplinary research, and to generate insight into the specific possibilities for its improvement within the framework of becoming bilingual.

Doing Anew: Using the Language-metaphor to Illuminate the Practice of Interdisciplinary Inquiry

As discussed earlier, the Swinton-Mowat cycle of practical theological reflection closely resembles the structure of the “pastoral cycle.” Just like the pastoral cycle, the Swinton-Mowat model features the disciplines-centered organization. Qualitative research methods and larger social scientific perspective are explicitly assigned to the *Stage 2 of Cultural-Contextual Analysis*, and theological resources are specifically referred to during *Stage 3 of Formal Theological Reflection*. In Table 3, I offer a schematic summary of the model as a brief reminder.

Table 3. “Pastoral Cycle”-based Outline of the Swinton-Mowat Model

Stage 1: The Situation	The initial assessment and provisional exploration of the praxis that calls for critical reflection and challenge: <i>what appears to be going on pre-reflectively?</i>
Stage 2: Cultural/Contextual Analysis	Dialogue with other sources of knowledge, asking new questions, conducting disciplined investigation into the various dynamics and complex meanings of the situation: <i>what is actually going on?</i>

Stage 3: Formal Theological Reflection	In-depth reflection on the theological significance of the discoveries made, search for authentic revelation about the situation in light of the Christian scriptures and tradition: <i>how are we to understand this situation from the perspective of critical faithfulness?</i>
Stage 4: Formulating Revised Practice	Dialectical integration of the deepened understanding and insights about the situation into a comprehensive vision for its transformation

I have argued that on the level of its theoretical conceptualization (the explicit correlation of disciplinary resources with the stages of theological reflection), the “pastoral cycle” is heavily influenced by the conventional dialogue-based understanding of interdisciplinary engagement. I have further argued that the correlation of the stages of reflection with disciplinary resources is deeply problematic, because it inhibits reflection on the specifics of the practical theologian’s action. Because the primary focus of the Swinton-Mowat model—the focus it has inherited from the “pastoral cycle”—is on *what* disciplinary resources are engaged, rather than on *how* and for *how long* she uses them, the schematic representation of the practical theologian research practice lacks clarity and precision.

As long as we reflect on interdisciplinary work on the level of theory (wherein our perception of research practice is heavily informed by the assumptive design of the dialogue-metaphor), the four-stage progression of the Swinton-Mowat cycle appears to be obvious. We go from the “initial” to the “in-depth” reflection on the situation, by engaging first qualitative research and then theological sources of knowledge, until we gradually arrive at the reformulation of practice. The integration of insight about the situation is “dialectical,” hence there is “movement in various directions” to support such a process, and it is easy to imagine that theology is not really “absent” (only temporarily silent) during

stage 2 of the interdisciplinary dialogue, when the practical theologian “converses” with qualitative research.

Yet, once we try to envision conducting the actual interdisciplinary inquiry, the workings of the Swinton-Mowat cycle become anything but obvious. For example, we do know that the practical theologian must start with the “initial assessment and provisional exploration”; but we do not know what frame of reference—qualitative?, theological?, or simply that of her scholarly and personal experience?—she is to use for it. Similarly, we do know that the practical theologian is to conduct *Cultural-Contextual Analysis* and *Theological Reflection*, by engaging qualitative research methods at *Stage 2* and Christian Scripture and tradition at *Stage 3*; but we do not know what specifically is the nature of such an engagement. Still more, we are explicitly assured that theology is “not absent” during *Stage 2* of the cycle; but we are not at all sure how exactly the practical theologian is to stay connected to the resources of her own discipline during the formal qualitative analysis of the situation; and, we remain uncertain as to whether the same holds true for *Stage 3*, i.e., that qualitative research too is somehow present in the practical theologian’s formal theological reflection. Finally, in order to facilitate the dialectical integration of insight about the situation, we are advised to practice the “movement in various directions” within the cycle; yet we are at loss as to imagine what exactly such a movement should entail—especially, given the complexity of the disciplinary presences and absences during *Stages 2* and *3*. Try as she may, the practical theologian’s following the Swinton-Mowat model in its present form—patterned after the framework of the “pastoral cycle,” with the interpretative template of the dialogue-metaphor deeply embedded in its structure—is exceedingly difficult.

What then happens, when we look at the practice of interdisciplinary inquiry within the framework of the language-metaphor, which forces us to let go of the excessive preoccupation with the disciplinary resources and focus our gaze instead on the action and person of the practical theologian? Interestingly enough, the language-metaphor also presents the work of interdisciplinary inquiry as “talking.” Yet, through the lens of becoming bilingual, we begin to see that such interdisciplinary talking has nothing to do with conducting an “external conversation” between the disciplines, and everything to do with the “inner discourse” that takes place within the practical theologian herself! As a scholar who has truly become “bilingual,” she is in possession of more than one way of talking and thinking about the research situation, and it is this her internal capacity to assume the alternative point of view—now qualitative, now broader social scientific, now theological—is at the core of her movement towards insight and understanding.³⁴⁶

Such a subtle but critical shift in perception of the meaning of interdisciplinary “dialogue,” in turn, allows us to see the practical questions and dilemmas of interdisciplinary research practice anew. To begin with, we immediately see that the practical theologian’s engagement with qualitative research (*Stage 2*) means relating to the research situation in the language of qualitative and broader social scientific discourse. Here, for example, the practical theologian would ask herself: “what kind of ethnographic

³⁴⁶ My argument about the change in reasoning and perception engendered by the shift of language is not a matter of metaphorical exaggeration. In the last two decades, an overwhelming amount of research has been conducted on the functioning of a bilingual mind, showing that bilinguals view the world in different ways and make different decisions about action, depending on the specific language they are operating in. Psychologists and linguists alike agree that language has consistent and powerful effects on cognition. See for example, P. Athanasopoulos et al., “Two Languages, Two Minds: Flexible Cognitive Processing Driven by Language of Operation,” *Psychological Science* 26, no. 4 (2015); Keysar Boaz, L. Hayakawa Sayuri, and An Sun Gyu, “The Foreign-Language Effect: Thinking in a Foreign Tongue Reduces Decision Biases,” *Psychological Science* 23, no. 6 (2012).

‘thick description’ of the monastery retreat could I offer?”; or, “psychologically speaking, what dynamics would be discerned in my journey of recovery from burnout?”; or, “in what sense, the monastic rest is socially constructed?” Likewise, we understand that the practical theologian’s formal theological reflection (*Stage 3*) means thinking about the situation in the language of Christian scripture and tradition. Here, in turn, the practical theologian would ask herself: “what does it mean to think theologically about my experience of resting at the monastery?”; or, “how does my subjective experience of becoming restful relate to the traditional monastic language of ‘resting in God?’”; or, “does my experience conform to (or contradict?) the Gospel paradigm of dying and rising to a new life?”

At the same time, viewing the interdisciplinary practice through the lens of becoming bilingual enables us to see how it is possible for theology not to be absent during *Cultural-Contextual Analysis*, when the practical theologian is formally engaged with qualitative research methods: as the practical theologian’s “native tongue,” theology is always present in the back of her mind, retaining its influence on her thinking process and perception. From the standpoint of the second language learning, it is also clear that qualitative research does not really disappear during *Formal Theological Reflection*, but indeed serves as the principal catalyst for the practice of critical faithfulness: it is precisely because the practical theologian has reached the genuine state of “fluency” in the qualitative research, she can never quell the shrewd voice of an alternative interpretation, calling into question her former theological certainties and challenging her naïveté. This is, therefore, the true meaning of the movement in various directions in service of dialectical integration of insight: the process of alternative perspective-taking, which is a natural characteristic of a bilingual mind, in the “bilingual” practical theologian has been

developed into a deliberate, systematic, and carefully controlled skill of using her two disciplinary competencies in an intentionally alternating manner, in order to deepen her understanding.

But here, at once, the application of the language-metaphor makes us aware of a problem in the Swinton-Mowat current representation of the cycle of interdisciplinary inquiry. For *if* the two disciplinary languages and conceptualities are always present within the practical theologian, and the movement between them is a matter of natural functioning of a bilingual mind, then why depict this internal dynamic as two separate stages? And indeed, a close look at two existing features of the Swinton-Mowat model make it apparent that the schematic split between *Stage 2 (Cultural-Contextual Analysis)* and *Stage 3 (Formal Theological Reflection)* is artificial in nature. First, there is a deep thematic similarity between the questions that guides the practical theologian's reflection during these two stages: even though individually, each stage calls for application of the different disciplinary resources, together they are still trying to answer the same question: "what is really going on?" Second, the narrative description of *Stage 2* explicitly affirms that theology is not absent during the practical theologian's formal engagement with qualitative research: this means that even though *schematically* Swinton and Mowat present the practical theologian's engagement with theological and non-theological resources as a two-stage occurrence, they nullify such a clear-cut separation between the stages *narratively*.

Is there an advantage to such a schematic misrepresentation? Yes. It permits a clear conceptualization of the place for qualitative research in the unfolding of the practical theological reflection. The separation between *Cultural-Contextual Analysis* and *Formal Theological Reflection* of the practical theologian's reflection allows Swinton and Mowat

to point to the former and say, “It is at this stage that qualitative research has an important role.”³⁴⁷ Yet, such artificially gained theoretical clarity comes at the cost of confusion with regards to practice. On the level of understanding, it perpetuates the misperception about the nature of interdisciplinary engagement as external manipulation of diverse disciplinary resources, rather than internal ability to shift between different disciplinary perspectives. On the level of practice, it makes it appear that *Cultural-Contextual Analysis* is the *only* place for application of the qualitative and broader social scientific knowledge in practical theological work.

Yet, the interpretative framework of the language-metaphor exposes such a narrow conceptualization of the place of qualitative research in the practical theological reflection, in itself, as deeply problematic. For *if* it is natural for a bilingual person to have the awareness of another language and conceptuality in the back of her mind at all times and to use that duality of perception in service of in-depth understanding of the situation (*Stages 2-3*), then why would she *not* use her bilingual competence in the initial assessment of the situation (*Stage 1*) and for the formulation of revised practice (*Stage 4*)? More specifically, when the practical theologian begins to make her first tentative, intuitive conjectures about the nature of the situation, it would be natural, indeed instinctive, to fall back on her “native” *theological* language; yet, if she has truly become an interdisciplinary scholar, not before long she would also start relating her understanding of the situation in her “second” language of *qualitative* research. Hence, for example, as she initially reflects on her experience of resting in the monastery, she would ponder the connections between the dynamics of her experience of becoming restful and the periods of Christ’s paschal passage

³⁴⁷ Swinton and Mowat, 96.

(Gethsemani, crucifixion, tomb, resurrection)—yet, almost simultaneously, it would occur to her that there is “another way to look at it,” and she would start generating a list of ethnographic categories for the in-depth analysis of the monastery rest (practices, texts, environmental qualities, values). While not all of these inklings and musings will turn out to be correct, the inherent duality of the practical theologian’s perception would endow her provisional understanding of the situation with much texture, richness, and additional insight.

Similarly, a capacity for differentiated disciplinary reflection and alternative perspective-taking would be invaluable at *Stage 4*, when the practical theologian is formulating her view of revised practice. There, her awareness of the normative frames of reference, such as paradigmatic narratives of the Biblical scriptures and tradition, and the contemporary qualitative, psychological, sociological, and other social scientific theories, would enrich her vision of the newly revised practice and make it possible to judge the quality of her proposal for accomplishing such transformation in practice. Hence, for example, as the practical theologian begins to reflect on ways to teach rest in the seminary, in light of her understanding of the nature of the monastic peace, it would only be natural for her to be more attuned to the theological and spiritual dimensions of the new praxis; therefore, her formulation of the revised practice is likely to start with the vision of recreating the monastery Scriptural world in the context of theological education. Yet, it is precisely her sharp ethnographic awareness of the institutional complexity of the monastery peace that would cause her to have “second thoughts” about the viability of such a vision.

Thus, the use of the language-metaphor as a lens for understanding the practice of interdisciplinary inquiry reveals that the practical theologian’s engagement with *both*

disciplinary discourses *at all stages* of her reflection is not only an inevitable outcome of her interdisciplinary competence (if she is truly an interdisciplinary scholar, this is just how her mind works), but also a highly advantageous one. Yet, the current presentation of the Swinton-Mowat cycle fails to communicate the twofold nature of practical theological reflection; indeed, the emphasis it places on the role of qualitative research during *Cultural-Contextual Analysis* strongly inhibits such a realization. It is still possible that the use of both qualitative and theological resources all throughout the cycle of practical theological reflection is implied in Swinton and Mowat method; after all, they do not explicitly proscribe the use of qualitative research at other stages, and it is highly unlikely that they would approve of the practical theologian's separation from her own theological base at any stage of the cycle. Nonetheless, the lack of clear discussion of the role of qualitative research at *Stages 1, 3, and 4* of the practical theologian's reflection is an omission that significantly increases the difficulty of following their model in the actuality of research.

The final problem of the Swinton-Mowat cycle does not require the application of the language-metaphor in order to be identified. It is easy to see with the unaided eye: in sharp contrast to the other three stages, *Stage 4 (Formulating Revised Practice)*, is missing the explicit question for reflection. The significance of this omission is made more clear, however, when we look at interdisciplinary inquiry through the lens of becoming bilingual. Because the language-metaphor reveals the practical theologian's engagement with qualitative research as not merely a narrow, method-oriented study but a discipline-wide cultural encounter, it makes us keenly aware of the inherent complexity and vastness of the scholarly resources available to her. The practical and theoretical body of knowledge with which she has to work is at least twice the size of her "monolingual" colleagues! In the

absence of a specific means of *focusing* her reflection with regards to the knowledge base available to her, the practical theologian's formulation of revised practice is in danger of being "all over the place" and/or unduly protracted. That's why having the question to guide her reflection is so important: it gives direction to the practical theologian's reflection; and it serves as the logical criterion of completion—we intuitively recognize the need to stop when we have formulated an in-depth answer to a specific question. Without it, the development of a comprehensive vision for transformation of practice, on the basis of what has been learned in the previous three stages, becomes much more difficult.

It is hard to propose a constructive reason for the Swinton and Mowat's omission of the explicit question for reflection during *Stage 4*. To complicate things even further, this omission in the schematic representation of the Swinton-Mowat cycle is mirrored by the paucity of their narrative description of the process of formulating the revised practice: in their presentation of the formal cases of using qualitative research for practical theological reflection, the whole of this stage is condensed into "suggestions" for revised forms of practice (whereas, in contrast, the discussion of the qualitative methods themselves occupies significant space and is discussed in far greater detail).³⁴⁸ On the basis of my reading of Swinton and Mowat's work, I believe that such an imbalance in the treatment of the stages has to do with their concern to do justice to the main part of their thesis, i.e., to understand "the ways in which qualitative research can contribute to the practical theological enterprise,"³⁴⁹ and their assumption that other stages of theological reflection were familiar enough to the practicing practical theologians. If so, their decision

³⁴⁸ The Part 2 of the book, "The Practice of Research."

³⁴⁹ Swinton and Mowat, v-x, 97-98.

to focus their discussion so narrowly is understandable. But its consequences for the practice of research are still unfortunate: those who, like me, aspire to follow the Swinton-Mowat's model are left without guidance at the most climactic point of their interdisciplinary investigation.

By shifting away from the dialogue-based understanding of interdisciplinary work to the interpretative template of becoming bilingual, I have been able to illuminate the meaning of interdisciplinary inquiry, generating in the process much needed insights into the nature and scope of the practical theologian's action and thereby amending the overly abstract or ambiguous elements in Swinton and Mowat description of the interdisciplinary research practice. My reflection, however, has also revealed a number of problematic aspects of the current presentation of the Swinton-Mowat model. I have argued throughout this section that these limitations have to do not so much with overt errors, as with inadvertent omissions and implicit dimensions of the method that have not yet been fully articulated. Furthermore, I have argued that the lack of clarity and precision in Swinton and Mowat's depiction of the practical theologian's interdisciplinary work has to do not with the *inherent* limitations of their model, but with the limitations that they *inherited* from the "pastoral cycle," the framework that is heavily influenced by the conventional "dialogue"-based understanding of interdisciplinary engagement. Thus, fruitful revision of the Swinton-Mowat model, to make possible a more specific and clear description of the practical theologian's interdisciplinary practice of research, would call for finding an alternative to its current "pastoral cycle" based organization. What is necessary is to identify a framework of questions and principles that, on the one hand, would be congruent with

Swinton and Mowat's *overarching methodological intent* of using qualitative (and broader social scientific) perspective for practical theological work, while, on the other hand, would be capable of making explicit the *not fully articulated practical aspects* of their method which have been made visible through the application of the language-metaphor to the process of interdisciplinary inquiry.

Two important observations must be made, however, before the actual candidate for the work of revision can be proposed. First, it must be acknowledged that, the language-metaphor itself cannot become the basis of the final revision of the Swinton-Mowat interdisciplinary model: to attempt deriving the questions and principles for interdisciplinary practical theological reflection from the categories of foreign language learning would be to stretch the metaphor beyond its appropriate limits. Instead, it is necessary to look for cues to the source of such development in the origins of the Swinton-Mowat model itself. Hence, second, it is imperative to note that Swinton and Mowat's use of "pastoral cycle," the framework that originated in the practice of pastoral ministry, as a basis for their model is far from being accidental. Of all theological practitioners, ministers work in the context wherein the interdisciplinary engagement is a daily reality and need. While most frequently ministers are concerned with relating theology to psychological and sociological theories, rather than qualitative research methods, the underlying issues and challenges of such an engagement are similar. Therefore, to identify the matrix of questions and principles for further development of the Swinton-Mowat model, it is necessary to select a framework for interdisciplinary engagement that has been specifically designed for use within the practical context of ministry.

In my own experience of learning and practicing ministry, the framework of “The Three Critical Questions for In-depth Ministry,” developed by my teacher, Professor Rodney Hunter,³⁵⁰ has been most effective for my understanding of the nature and practice of interdisciplinary work. Indeed, this framework displays an astonishing number of similarities to the Swinton-Mowat “pastoral cycle”-based model of theological reflection: it starts from the analysis of the situation, seeking to discover not merely the apparent but the “depth” dimension of the human living; it aims at the salutary renewal of practice in light of the normative paradigms of the Christian Scriptures and tradition; it seeks to utilize both theological and non-theological (most notably social scientific) disciplines and arts for generation of insight; and its verbal formulation is centered on specific analytical questions—the first of which, “what is going on?,” is identical to that of the Swinton-Mowat model. Thus, as the last step in the development of my interdisciplinary method, I will present Professor Hunter’s framework for in-depth ministry, revise the Swinton-Mowat model in relation to its key questions and principles, and show how adoption of the Hunter framework (in place of “pastoral cycle”) enables a more comprehensive and clear articulation of the practical theologian’s interdisciplinary research practice, deeply congruent with the insights into the nature of interdisciplinary engagement made possible by the application of the metaphor of becoming bilingual.

³⁵⁰ The historical origin of this threefold method of reflective practice can be traced back to the official methodology for Candler School of Theology’s original Doctor of Ministry program of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Conceptualized by the Candler faculty, especially Professors William Mallard, Charles Gerkin, and Donald Shriver who comprised the “D.Min Committee,” this method was referred to as “the D.Min. triangle,” and it was used for guiding students in the writing of their D.Min. project proposals. Professor Hunter developed this fundamental tri-partite conceptualization into a theory about teaching and practice of pastoral care and the more general practice of ministry, providing the current terminology of the “three critical questions” and exploring their meaning. (Rodney Hunter, personal communication, June 27, 2014.)

The New Model: Asking “Three Questions of Ministry” to Re-imagine “Pastoral Cycle”

The fundamental methodological intent behind the Hunter framework for in-depth ministry is to enable the pastoral practitioners to resist their natural impulse to action, when confronted with the situation of need.³⁵¹ Such deliberate and temporary suspension of action is undertaken so that ministers might gain a deeper and more significant understanding of the nature and telos of the pastoral situation, in the context of which then a more authentic, spiritually relevant, and life-giving ministry could arise naturally. At its simplest, the framework for in-depth ministry consists of three questions: What is going on here? What should we hope and pray for? And, in light of the deepened understanding of the situation, how might we best proceed?³⁵²

The opening “what is going on?” question of the inquiry is the most reflective and counter-intuitive of the three. Here, ministers are asked to set aside their drive to action and their preoccupation with “getting results.” This question implies that in every situation of ministry there exists a gap between “what it *appears* to be” and “what it *is*.” It is an

³⁵¹ In my presentation of the Hunter framework, I describe it as I have come to learn it from Professor Rodney Hunter directly: by attending his seminars and lectures, participating in directed studies, teaching it together in the Introduction to Pastoral Care class (PC 501), and through the least tangible but perhaps most powerful vehicle of transmission, my long-term relationship with him as my mentor. For a formal discussion of this framework see: Rodney J. Hunter, "Ministry in Depth: Three Critical Questions in the Teaching and Practice of Pastoral Care," in *Secularization Theories, Religious Identity, and Practical Theology* ed. Wilhelm Grab and Lars Charbonnier (Berlin, Germany: LIT, 2009); Rodney J. Hunter, "Ministry in Depth: Three Critical Questions," in *Healing Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

³⁵² Professor Hunter believes that the apparent simplicity of the framework has to do with its strong affinity to the triadic pattern in the basic working of the human mind. The questions mirror the three fundamental “phases” in the mental activity: monitoring our present state of well-being, evaluating the potential desired outcomes, and carrying out the discerned course of action. What distinguishes ministry in depth from the ordinary occasions of daily reasoning, then, is not the content but degree of awareness and expertise with which these questions are engaged. At the same time, in their apparent simplicity, these questions are not naïve. Professor Hunter notes a complex set of philosophical, ethical, theological, social scientific topics and disciplinary resources that informed the scholarly articulation of this framework.

invitation to pay attention to one's initial impressions about the nature of the problem, but also and always to look beyond them, to the social, psychological, cultural, and spiritual factors that play a part in its development. Three "layers" can be distinguished in the process of answering this first question. On the most basic level, ministers are asked to create a specific and straightforward *description* of what is going on, to state the obvious: what happened, where, when, who is affected, etc. On the more advanced level of understanding, ministers begin to develop *explanatory insights* about the nature of the problematic pastoral situation: possible connections between its various elements, underlying relational dynamics, causes, effects, aggravating circumstances, historical and cultural origins and contexts, etc. Finally, on the deepest level of understanding, ministers seek to offer an *interpretation* of the meaning of the situation for its participants, the role that it plays in development and perpetuation of "symptoms," and the possibilities that it may offer for its transformation. Thus, when ministers take time to ask and articulate a detailed answer the first question, it has the potential to sponsor a rich and illuminating unraveling of the knowledge about the situation.

It is important to emphasize, however, that ministers themselves are not the only ones who are to do the work of description, explanation, and interpretation. No matter how astute, a minister's observation of the situation can only detect a part of the picture: what ministers see, and what they fail to see, is affected by their own position, background, implicit interests, commitments, and needs. Therefore, the role of the minister must be understood not as that of the "primary knower" but rather as a "facilitator of learning," a person who invites and empowers others, lay and ordained, professional and non-professional, to share their perceptions of the situation, especially when they expand or

challenge the pastor's own impressions. To sponsor a truly in-depth understanding, the process of inquiry must be shared. Additionally, the process of inquiry is shared in yet another sense: understanding of what is "really" going on calls for relating the personal impressions of the immediate participants in the pastoral situation to the broader frames of reference, such as the paradigmatic and normative narratives of the Biblical scriptures and tradition, as well as contemporary psychological, sociological, and other social scientific theories. A genuine engagement with alternative ways of seeing contained in the theological and non-theological disciplines and cultural arts has the power to widen the ministers' and parishioners' angle of vision and enable them to see what otherwise could be easily missed.³⁵³

Whereas the primary purpose of the first question is to assist the exposition of the present state of the pastoral situation, the second question—"what should we hope and pray for?"—draws attention to its potential future outcomes. This question highlights the normative dimension of pastoral work. It urges ministers to imagine the *telos* of their pastoral work, in these particular circumstances, and in relation to the fundamental ideals, beliefs, and values that animate their ministry. Similar to the first phase of pastoral reflection, answering the second question is also meant to be a shared inquiry. Ministers should invite all participants in the pastoral situation to contribute to the discernment of its fundamental direction: "what should *we* hope for in the unfolding of this situation?" This question also calls for the use of external normative frameworks for evaluating the prospective end results in accord to their specific values and standards: explicitly religious

³⁵³ In his classes, when talking about the importance of the theory for understanding, Professor Hunter frequently highlighted the etymological connection between the words "theory" and "theatre" (from the Greek, *to see*), reminding us that theories function as specialty lenses that enable their users see differently.

(such as offered by one's personal narrative of faith and paradigmatic story of the biblical scriptures), or theological (such as offered by the specific canons of systematic or moral theology), or ethical (such as offered by the ethics of love and justice or virtue ethics), or even secular (such as offered by the various social scientific concepts and theories). The important thing is the realization that the ultimate objectives of a pastoral situation cannot be defined solely "from within" by the immediate participants of the situation, but must be humbly discerned in the context of scriptural witness and in conversation with religious, theological, and non-theological perspectives. Even though these external frameworks are far from being perfect, and they themselves should be subjected to periodic critical examination, the act of systematically relating our "hopes" for the pastoral situation to specific normative ideals expands the pastor's understanding of the possibilities for authentic and spiritually deep ministry.

In contrast to the descriptive and evaluative nature of the first and the second question, the primary orientation of the third "how might we best proceed?" question is prescriptive. At this stage of reflection, ministers are challenged to integrate what they now know into a provisional blueprint for pastoral action. Just as in the exploration of the first and the second questions, ministers are urged to remember that they are not the only one to whom belongs the power and responsibility for discernment of the transformative action. First, the people in need themselves, and when appropriate a larger community, must be invited to participate in discernment of the direction, nature, and the order of priority for transformative action. Secondly, the external normative frameworks are once more brought to bear upon the ministers' evolving understanding of action: at this point of reflection, the time-tested theory of professional and spiritual practice, wider communal knowledge of

Scripture and sacraments, and the personal discipline of prayer become especially important means for imagining faithful action, and as protection from the excessive narrowing of focus. The very tentativeness of the question—“how *might* we best proceed?”—implies that there is no single “right” way to respond, and that the element of uncertainty and risk is an unavoidable part of ministry. Ministers, therefore, are invited to consider a range of possibilities for action, in light of their own abilities and limitations, as well as the broader communal values, norms, and customs. Thus, in their work of answering the third question, ministers come back full circle to action. Yet, in the course of their dialogue with other participants in the situation, their engagement with various traditions of knowledge and practice, and the ongoing movement of self-reflection and critique, their understanding and attitude towards the ministerial action undergoes dramatic enrichment, growing in intentionality, insight, and spiritual significance. They are now capable of “ministry in-depth.”

In this sense, the effectiveness of three questions for in-depth ministry as a framework of pastoral inquiry is dependent upon the distinctive focus of each question and the particular order in which they are asked. The triadic structure of reflection moves from the situational analysis, through envisioning of its normative ends, to a gradual articulating of transformative action. Yet, the ministers’ ability to generate insight and deepen understanding, when following this framework of inquiry, has to do not merely with the *content* of reflection as delineated by each individual question, but with the underlying congruence of its *process*. Four key principles could be identified in the proper way of asking and answering these critical questions.

The first and the already mentioned principle: *on each level of the triadic questioning, the three questions of ministry must be seen not as a solo ministerial undertaking but as a shared inquiry.* Most immediately, the ministers are to involve other participants in the pastoral situation in the reflection on its present and future states, and the possibilities of prospective action. In the less direct but crucial way, ministers are to widen their angle of vision by engaging various external frameworks of reference, the accumulated wisdom of the wider community represented in the social scientific theories, evolving discoveries of the physical and natural sciences, and other cultural arts and disciplines. Such pastoral inquiry culminates in the work of relating the primary personal and scientific insights to the broader religious and theological frames of reference, provided by the paradigmatic narratives of the biblical scripture, tradition, and the minister's practical knowledge of sacraments and prayer. It is important to note that Professor Hunter explicitly warned against the correlation of any of the questions with any particular disciplinary approach, such as, for example, relating the first "what is going on" question with the social scientific perspective, or the second "what do we hope for" question with theological or biblical view of reality. He emphasized repeatedly that that none of the questions should be identified exclusively with the social scientific perspective, and that both theological and non-theological disciplines "can and ought to be employed" in considering each question.

The second principle has to do with the self-understanding of the minister: *at no point in the pastoral inquiry is the minister seen as an external investigator and outside consultant, but rather as a skilled observer who is also fully a participant.* On the most obvious level, this means that ministers need to include themselves in the unfolding of

pastoral reflection: How do my beliefs and values affect my perception of the solution? How is this situation affected by my personality, socio-economic background, gifts, limitations, and even wounds? In which way could my presence enable or hinder positive transformation? On the less obvious but critical level, this means that ministers need to see each pastoral situation as an encounter that holds deep personal significance for their own growth in faith and self-understanding: What is going on with me on a deeper, spiritual level? Where is God calling me in and through this situation? And in light of this, how can I appropriately respond? Seen in this way, every situation of ministry becomes also a unique “means of grace,” a context and vehicle for minister’s own spiritual formation.

At the same time, care should be taken that the egalitarian approach to doing ministry or realization of its potential for becoming a genuine spiritual practice is not romanticized: genuine inquiry into what is going on, what we hope for, and how we can best proceed might lead not only to the delightful aha-moments but also to some unpleasant or even painful discoveries. Hence, the third principle: *serious commitment to asking and answering the three critical questions of ministry has the power to take all involved beyond their comfort zone*. For each of these questions, ministers themselves are encouraged to ponder more specifically: What is going on that I would rather *not*-know, and have been working hard to avoid facing? How does “what we hope for” challenge my own levels of security and contentment, threaten my personal interests, and disrupt the long-term habits of thought and emotion, relationship, values, beliefs, and the comforts of my lifestyle? What do I have at stake in preserving the *status quo*, and what kind of resistance, willingly or unwillingly, am I likely to mount in the way of our “best proceed”-plan?

Such complex understanding of pastoral ministry—as a shared (rather than merely individual) inquiry, as a spiritual (nor merely care-giving) practice, and as an examination of the darker and more dangerous (rather than merely interest-provoking and pleasant) aspects of depth-perception—makes necessary a great flexibility in the ways of asking these three questions. Thus, the final principle of the framework: *whereas the general orientation of the questions (situational analysis, normative objectives, and plan of action) remains the same, their verbal expression is dependent upon the needs and circumstances of the given situation, perspectives of its participants, and disciplinary vocabularies.* For example, the first question of ministry may be posed for the person in need as “What do you see as going on here?” or for the pastor as “What is my role in this situation, and why have they chosen to turn to me as a care-giver?” Or it can be related to some theory about human behavior, such as: “What is going on here from the perspective of the family systems theory: who functions as the ‘identified patient?’ What kind of ‘triangles’ could be identified in this emotional unit? How does ‘generational history’ contribute to the development of this problem?” And ultimately, the question needs to be asked in theological terms: “How is God present in this situation? What biblical themes (e.g., sin, grace, salvation) are evoked by these circumstances? Similarly, even as the evaluative orientation of the second question most readily evokes the theological and ethical frames of reference, it is important not to limit the definition of the normative outcomes of the situation to strictly theological or ethical terms. For example, one may ask about the normative ideals for a given pastoral situation from the point of view of the aforementioned family systems perspective: what kind of transformation could be hoped for in the relational dynamics of the family with an alcoholic father, or in a community shelter for

troubled girls, or in a congregation with a burned out pastor?” Finally, in posing the third question, it is especially important not to reduce the imagining of the prospective action to the abilities and imagination of the immediate participants of the situation but to expand of the angle of vision to the traditions of professional and spiritual practice, ideas about other agents of transformation, and indeed the presence, influence, and power of divine action in the world. Intentionality about employing the vocabulary and conceptuality of different disciplines for articulating individual questions is crucial for arriving at rich, insightful answers and eventually at a truly in-depth understanding.

Thus, a closer look at Hunter’s framework for in-depth ministry reveals that its explicit questions and underlying principles endow it with a truly paradoxical quality. Even though its questions themselves are stated in the most basic way (what is going on?; what should we hope for?; how might we best proceed?), and there is a specific subject matter for each question (situational analysis, discernment of normative objectives, proposal for action), it is expected that ministers ask and answer these questions by drawing on the perspectives of the different participants in the situation, and on the vocabularies, conceptuality, and normative frames of reference from various theological and non-theological bodies of knowledge. The “three critical questions for in-depth ministry” are able to guide their practitioners towards greater insight and understanding because they facilitate the simultaneous narrowing and expansion of focus: they narrow the focus of inquiry with regards to the *topic of examination*, while they widen the focus of inquiry with regards to the theoretical and practical *resources for exploring it*. It is this twofold movement of analysis that enables ministers to attend to two contrasting dimensions of pastoral work simultaneously—careful attention to the existing complexity of the pastoral

situation and equally careful discernment of its full potential for transformation—in creative, fruitful tension.

As such, the Hunter framework of three critical questions for in-depth ministry displays similarity to the Swinton-Mowat cycle of practical theological reflection that goes far beyond merely structural correspondence of their analytical stages. Rather, there is a deeper congruency, with regards to their fundamental methodological intent: both frameworks of inquiry seek to enable their practitioners to gain insight into the human situation as it “really” is, in order to use that understanding for discerning the vision of what it yet can become—in light of God’s creative and redemptive presence in the world. Furthermore, while Professor Hunter does not explicitly advise using qualitative research methods within his framework of reflection (their highly specialized nature would naturally inhibit their use in ordinary pastoral situations), it is clear that his theory of ministry is so broad and rich, and is characterized by such strong intentionality of engagement with non-theological disciplines, cultural tools, and arts, that the application of qualitative research for the in-depth inquiry would be considered exceptionally fitting.³⁵⁴ Finally, the strong emphasis that Professor Hunter places on the importance applying *both* theological and non-theological perspectives on *every* stage of reflection makes the internal dynamics of this framework deeply congruent with the insights into the inherent duality of the practical theologian’s perception generated by the use of the language-metaphor.

³⁵⁴ Indeed, in its strong emphasis on generation of insight and in-depth knowing, its recognition of “learner” as a participant and “learning” as a shared, spiritually significant, and potentially transformative activity, and in its critical intuition of the potential negative dimensions of even positive change, Hunter’s framework shows strong conceptual connections not only with the Swinton-Mowat model, but also with the qualitative research, practical theology, and academic scholarship in general—which makes it all the more suited for guiding my efforts in reconstruction of practical theological research methodology.

At the same time, it is the differences between these two cycles of reflection that hold the key to constructive revision: the explicit questions and underlying principles of the Hunter framework for in-depth ministry provide a blueprint for a more precise and explicit definition of the previously not fully articulated or problematic aspects of Swinton and Mowat's practical representation of interdisciplinary inquiry. Three kinds of differences come into view, when we look at Hunter's framework for in-depth ministry and the Swinton-Mowat cycle of practical theological reflection side by side: the number of stages assigned for each movement of reflection, the presence or absence of a specific question for reflection, and the narrative description of the research process. In Table 4, I present the two frameworks side by side, as a schematic aid for comparison.

Table 4. The Swinton-Mowat Model of Practical Theological Reflection and Hunter's Framework of Three Questions for In-depth Ministry

The SWINTON-MOWAT MODEL	HUNTER's THREE QUESTIONS FOR MINISTRY
<p>Stage 1: The Situation</p> <p>The initial assessment and provisional exploration of the praxis that calls for critical reflection and challenge</p> <p><i>What appears to be going on pre-reflectively?</i></p>	<p>Question 1: What is going on?</p> <p>The in-depth analysis of the pastoral situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description - Explanation - Interpretation <p>Ministers are to explore the perspectives of all the participants in the situation, and employ the resources of theological and non-theological disciplines, practical bodies of knowledge, and cultural tools and arts</p>
<p>Stage 2: Cultural-Contextual Analysis</p> <p>Dialogue with other sources of knowledge, asking new questions, conducting disciplined</p>	<p>Question 2: What should we hope for?</p> <p>The in-depth reflection on normative objectives:</p>

<p>investigation into the various dynamics and complex meanings of the situation:</p> <p><i>What is actually going on?</i></p>	<p>Ministers are to explore the perspectives of all the participants in the situation, and employ the resources of theological and non-theological disciplines, practical bodies of knowledge, and cultural tools and arts</p>
<p>Stage 3: Formal Theological Reflection</p> <p>In-depth reflection on the theological significance of the discoveries made, search for authentic revelation about the situation in light of the Christian scriptures and tradition:</p> <p><i>How are we to understand this situation from the perspective of critical faithfulness?</i></p>	<p>Question 3: How might we best proceed?</p> <p>Formulation of the plan for action:</p> <p>Ministers are to explore the perspectives of all the participants in the situation, and employ the resources of theological and non-theological disciplines, practical bodies of knowledge, and cultural tools and arts</p>
<p>Stage 4: Formulating Revised Practice</p> <p>Dialectical integration of the deepened understanding and insights about the situation into a comprehensive vision for its transformation</p> <p><i>(Question for reflection is missing)</i></p>	

The first difference that comes into view is the variation in the number of stages assigned for the work of *situational analysis*. Whereas Swinton and Mowat present it in three stages (*The Situation*, *Cultural-Contextual Analysis*, and *Formal Theological Reflection*), Hunter assigns only one question (“What is going on?”). I have argued that the Swinton-Mowat’s schematic presentation enables them to assign a specific place for using qualitative research in the practical theological reflection in theory, but that such an exacting placement creates problems for understanding the actuality of research practice: it makes it appear as if stage 2 is the only place for application of the qualitative research methods, and it creates unnecessary confusion with regards to the seeming disappearance of theological resources from stage 2. In its apparent simplicity, Hunter’s presentation

avoids both of these problems: its question focuses the practical theologian's reflection with regards to the *topic* of reflection; its narrative description serves as a reminder that both theological and non-theological *resources* ought to be employed for in-depth analysis. In the revised model of interdisciplinary practice, I therefore elect: to fold Swinton and Mowat's first three stages into one, "Situational Analysis"; to state the question for reflection simply as "what is going on?" and to establish an explicit narrative mandate to use both theological and qualitative perspectives throughout the entire course of inquiry.

There is, however, a feature in the Swinton-Mowat presentation of situational analysis that must not be lost: a distinction between "what appears to be going on pre-reflectively?" (*Stage 1*) and "what is actually going on?" (*Stage 2*). This nuanced perception of the difference that exist between the *initial* and the *in-depth* assessment of the situation is very important. On the one hand, it enables the practical theologian to consciously attend to the tentative, often intuitive, connections that she makes between the research situation and the elements of her scholarly and personal experience relevant to the investigation. On the other hand, it brings to the fore the need to systematically examine and test the credibility of these pre-reflective judgements about the research situation. As such, the practical theologian's conscious awareness of unavoidable naïveté of her perception, becomes a powerful means of not only merely encouraging depth but increasing research validity. Indeed, the attention to the difference between the provisional and verified understanding would be important not just for the work of situational analysis, but for formulation of revised practice. In the revised model of interdisciplinary practice, I therefore stipulate a two-step approach to examination for all stages of inquiry.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Indeed, it is likely that Professor Hunter himself would welcome such an explicit differentiation between the initial "obvious" observations about the pastoral situation and the quest for "deeper" understanding into

Third, the two frameworks differ in their conceptualization of the transformative action. Whereas Swinton and Mowat present such work in one stage (*Formulating Revised Practice*) and their framework is missing a specific question for reflection, Hunter breaks down the process of re-imagining practice into a two-step progression, assigning a specific question for each stage (“what should we hope for?” for discernment of the normative objectives, and “how might we best proceed?” for articulation of the blueprint for action). I have argued that Swinton and Mowat’s lack of nuanced description of the stage 4 of their cycle, and omission of its specific question for reflection is highly unfortunate: it leaves the practical theologians without guidance at the most climactic point of their investigation. Hunter’s questions for in-depth ministry are tremendously helpful in fulfilling these gaps. By breaking down the process of re-imagining practice into two specific steps—*what* should be the nature of transformation, and *how* it could be effectively accomplished—it offers the practical theologian much needed structural support for the process of reflection. Additionally, by requiring the practical theologian to think through the normative vision for transformation *prior* to formulating her proposal for revised practice, it provides an important criterion for evaluating it: it is precisely because now she is clear about the ultimate *telos* of the situation, she can better distinguish between the “plausible” or “good only ‘on paper’” formulations. Finally, by pressing the practical theologian to answer, even if tentatively, the question “how might we effectively proceed?”, Hunter’s framework ensures that the actuality of transformative practice is not overshadowed by the purely

his framework. In the years following the formal publication of his work on in-depth ministry, he expressed a concern that he may have not sufficiently emphasized the importance of the phenomenological stance in his writing, and called attention to the importance of paying careful attention to exactly how things *appear* to be (Professor Rodney Hunter, personal correspondence, June 27, 2014).

theoretical speculations and remains thoroughly grounded in the specifics of action. In the revised model of interdisciplinary practice, I therefore elect to implement Hunter’s two-stage approach to formulation of revised practice, expanding the Swinton-Mowat one stage into two, “Discernment of Normative Objectives” and “Proposal for Transformative Action,” and adopting the second and third questions for in-depth ministry for each respective stage.

Having discussed my specific decisions for modification of the Swinton-Mowat model in light of the Hunter framework of three questions for in-depth ministry, I now present the “new and improved” model for practical theological reflection, as a schematic representation of the interdisciplinary method that I use for conducting my case study of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition in the context of theological education (Table 5).

Table 5. The REVISED Cycle of Interdisciplinary Practical Theological Reflection

<p>Stage 1: Situational Analysis</p> <p>WHAT IS GOING ON?</p>	<p>“Surface” perception: the practical theologian is to articulate her first, often intuitive, sense of the research situation, making connection with what she already knows, consciously and instinctively, as a practicing theologian and qualitative researcher. What do I expect to find? How am I going to look for it?</p> <p>“Depth” perception: based on the realization that she is not starting with a blank slate, the practical theologian is to engage the perspectives of other participants (and/or people who possess personal and professional knowledge of the phenomena under investigation) and to explore the research situation in relation to the various theological, qualitative, broader social scientific, and cultural discourses, as she seeks to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Thick Description:</i> systematic and detailed account of the external aspects of the situation
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i><u>In-depth Explanation</u></i>: thorough analysis of its principal elements, underlying dynamics, and influential factors - <i><u>Insightful Interpretation</u></i>: identification of the not immediately evident, and perhaps even paradoxical, patterns of meaning <p><u>Movement of self-reflection and critique</u>: What is it that I would <i>not</i> want to discover? What deductions would I especially fear to see disproved? What data gained by my qualitative examination of data “do not fit” my theological interpretations? Which of my qualitative conclusions are exposed as “weak” when I look at the situation through the theological lens?</p>
<p>Stage 2: Discernment of Normative Objectives</p> <p>WHAT SHOULD WE HOPE AND PRAY FOR?</p>	<p><u>“Surface” perception</u>: the practical theologian is to articulate her spontaneous, unpremeditated impression of the telos of transformative action, drawing on her scholarly and personal experience as a theologian and qualitative researcher. What, in this particular context and circumstances, would be the ideal outline of revised practice?</p> <p><u>“Depth” perception</u>: based on the realization that she is not starting with a blank slate, the practical theologian is to engage the perspectives of other participants in the research situation (and/or people who possess relevant knowledge) and to explore the normative objectives in light of the various theological, qualitative, broader social scientific, and cultural discourses, in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - describe the “hopes” from the variety of perspectives and in different disciplinary languages - examine them in relation to the various conceptual frames of reference and paradigms of knowledge - evaluate their quality against the values emerging from the paradigmatic narratives of the biblical scriptures and religious tradition <p><u>Movement of self-reflection and critique</u>: What “gut reaction” do I get in response to this vision? Is there any qualitative data that contradict the validity of my proposal? How does this vision challenge of my own professional and spiritual practice?</p>

<p>Stage 3: Proposal for Transformative Action</p> <p>HOW MIGHT WE EFFECTIVELY PROCEED?</p>	<p>“Surface” perception: reviewing her fundamental insights into the nature of the research situation and the direction of its normative change, the practical theologian is to generate as many possibilities for revised practice as she can in a spontaneous and free meditation. What, in this particular context and circumstances, might be a judicious and effective plan of action?</p> <p>“Depth” perception: having identified the broad range of possibilities for transformative action, the practical theologian is to systematically examine their viability, by engaging in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the perspectives of other participants (and/or practitioners with knowledge of the context of transformative action) - Theories of professional action and practical knowledge that pertain to the context of transformative action - Other proposals for transforming praxis in the same setting <p>Movement of self-reflection and critique: What “reservations,” theological or qualitative, do I have about my proposal for action? What problems of practical implementation am I likely to “downplay” in formulating my plan of transformative action?</p>
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While this version of the cycle of practical theological reflection remains in very close relationship to its mother model, offered by Swinton and Mowat, it has five significant advantages over the original. First, it explicitly names and offers guidance for every major point of the interdisciplinary practical theological inquiry: now, not only the first but also the final stages of interdisciplinary inquiry feature a specific question for reflection and an explicit requirement to use both qualitative and theological perspectives for answering it. Second, it outlines a practicable way to draw on the vocabulary, conceptuality, and normative frames of reference from both theological and non-theological disciplines and arts, as a way to generate insight and deepen understanding.

Third, it reveals qualitative research and theology not merely as an “dialogue partners” to be engaged selectively at certain stages but rather as an “internal perspectives” that the practical theologian intentionally uses throughout the entire duration of the investigation. Fourth, it differentiates between the “initial” and the “in-depth” levels of knowing, calling attention to the importance of personal and epistemological reflexivity. Finally, it brings the practical theologian herself into the domain of interdisciplinary inquiry, emphasizing the mutuality of unfolding between her gradually deepening knowledge of the research situation and her self-understanding as a knower.

In conclusion, I point out that my proposal for advancing the Swinton-Mowat model of using qualitative research for practical theological reflection bears important connection to the two aforementioned antecedents of their method: the work of Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Stewart Hiltner. With the interdisciplinary approach of Hunsinger, the connection is very obvious. While Hunsinger never challenges the established way of conceptualizing the interdisciplinary work via the metaphor of dialogue, she introduces another metaphor into her argument, the image of “becoming bilingual.” Such an image is not a poetic embellishment, but rather a pivotal concept for her argument. It reveals Hunsinger’s distinct way of seeing the meaningful relationship between the two disciplines (in her case, very *different* disciplines, the theology of Karl Barth and psychology of Carl Jung). Hunsinger emphasizes the importance of this metaphor on two levels: first, in her own personal account of realizing that the “two opposed universes of discourse” are “existentially connected” (i.e. united within the realm of her own self, given her deep appreciation and knowledge of these two approaches), and second, in her more formal affirmation that this image serves as a governing metaphor for her interdisciplinary

proposal. Thus, Hunsinger suggests that the distinctiveness of pastoral counselors is dependent on their ability to speak, feel, think, and act in conformity with the language of faith and the language of psychology, i.e., on their ability to become bilingual. Such approach questions the possibility of “systematic correlation” of disciplinary discourses or attempts at “integration” of one discourse into another, and it insists on the importance of seeing the disciplines as “logically diverse even when they are existentially connected.” The understanding of disciplinary discourses as languages and the development of interdisciplinary competency as a process of becoming bilingual is what makes Hunsinger’s and my proposals so similar.

My approach, however, is different from Hunsinger’s in one important way. While Hunsinger speaks about bilinguality as the governing metaphor for her argument, when she moves to the subject of formal methodological guidance, she draws on the pattern of thought from Barth’s theology. Both at the theoretical and at the practical levels of her interdisciplinary method, it is the Christ-centric Chalcedonian pattern (rather than a pattern of learning a second language) that is used to delineate the specifics of the relationship between the disciplines: without separation or division, without confusion or change, and with the conceptual priority of theology over psychology. I, on the other hand, continue to use the interpretative template of learning the foreign language for the entire process of re-conceptualizing the interdisciplinary work, drawing the parallels between the process of learning the discourse of the allied discipline and the process of the second language acquisition all along its logical trajectory. As such, Hunsinger’s principle of relating the theological and non-theological disciplines is essentially abstract, while mine is organic, centered on the living person of the practical theologian as becoming bilingual.

The connection between my proposal and the work of Seward Hiltner is much more subtle, yet significant. In his *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, Hiltner offered a challenging vision of pastoral theological method as a disciplined inquiry into the healing, sustaining, and guiding aspects of the “shepherding” perspective that, together with the other perspectives of “communicating” and “organizing,” orients the work of ministers with people in need (which he called “pastoral operations”). Critical reflection and inquiry from within these perspectives, taking place within the context of faith grounded in revelation, can, Hiltner believed, provide valuable insights into the nature of the gospel, deepening, clarifying, and even correcting its meaning. For Hiltner, therefore, the aim of pastoral theology is not to *apply* theological knowledge provided by other theological disciplines to the practical work of ministry, but rather to *obtain* it through its own unique “organizing principle”—by reflecting theologically on empirical data that comes from the pastoral experience itself, within a perspective of faith grounded in revelation. Thus, Hiltner viewed pastoral theology as a true equal to biblical, historical, or doctrinal theology in its ability to illuminate the life of the church and the gospel itself. Such a view of pastoral theological method presents a twofold challenge to the dominant way of seeing and doing theology: on the one hand, it suggests that human experience in itself can be a source of theological insight, if perceived and interrogated from a perspective of faith; and on the other hand, it asserts the fundamental epistemological value of practical knowledge for doing formal theology.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ *Preface to Pastoral Theology* is the classic text for understanding Hiltner’s definition of the field and its methodology. Helpful discussion and critique of Hiltner’s theory could be found in Rodney J. Hunter, “The Future of Pastoral Theology,” *Pastoral Psychology* 29, no. 1 (1980); Rodney J. Hunter, “A Perspectival View of Pastoral Theology: A Critique of Hiltner’s Theory,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 4, no. 4 (1985)

While my interdisciplinary method concerns itself with the work of academic practical theologians who seek to utilize engage the resources of the qualitative research for the task of practical theological reflection, rather than ministers and other Christian practitioners working with people in need, I believe that my work belongs to the Hiltnerian lineage. I too affirm that something genuinely theological (and not merely psychological or sociological) can be learned by engaging in a careful study of the human experience through the use of qualitative methods in a context of faith; and I too suggest that the ongoing, concrete, real life reflection on practice constitutes an occasion not only for applying but gaining of the theological knowledge. If anything, my claim seems to be a little more ambitious than that of Hiltner: I extend the possibility for gaining theological knowledge beyond “pastoral operations” into the formal activity of research.³⁵⁷

I have now come to the end of my presentation of the method I intend to use for conducting the case study of my experience of recovering from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition. In chapter 4, I identified the case study research strategy and autoethnographic inquiry as *specific qualitative research methods* I employ in my

1985); Hunter, "A Perspectival Pastoral Theology," in *Turning Points in Pastoral Care: The Legacy of Anton Boisen and Seward Hiltner*.

³⁵⁷ In so far as I position my practical theological work within the Hiltnerian lineage, I must add an important qualification to my claim: Hiltner himself explicitly rejected the idea of “practical theology” as a single, comprehensive discipline. Rather, he proposed that there were three “operation-centered” disciplines (derived from the aforementioned perspectives of shepherding, organizing, and communicating), and that the three taken together, collectively, could be *called* practical theology, but that the three could not be *melded into* a single discipline of practical theology. (Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 23-24.) Accordingly, within Hiltner’s own nomenclature of theological knowledge and study, my work would be categorized belonging not to pastoral or practical theology, but rather to the “logic-centered” discipline of psychological theology, though done empirically. (ibid., 28.)

investigation. In this chapter, I discussed the widely used Swinton-Mowat model of using qualitative research in practical theological scholarship as a foundation of my *interdisciplinary practical theological method*. I further developed this model on the level of theoretical understanding (by adopting the metaphor of “learning a second language” for conceptualization of the practical theologian’s interdisciplinary engagement) and on the level of its representation of research practice (by revising the “pastoral cycle” of reflection in light of Hunter’s “three questions for in-depth ministry”). Had my manuscript followed the traditional compositional and methodological formats for academic dissertations in practical theology, my work of setting forth the formal methodology for my study would have been finished.

However, given the unconventional methodological claim that I make—to study my own case—the prospective presentation of my method alone cannot be presumed satisfactory. Indeed, my in-depth *theoretical* exposition notwithstanding, a serious reader would be left wondering about how things really worked out in the *actuality of my research*. For example, I have offered a thorough argument about the value of conceptualizing the practical theologian’s interdisciplinary inquiry through the lens of second language learning; but how did my own learning of the “language” and “culture” of the qualitative research actually proceed? Similarly, I have emphasized the importance of applying both theological and qualitative perspectives at all stages of the interdisciplinary practical theological inquiry; but how did I myself manage such “bilingual” perspective-taking in the course of my investigation? Still more, I have made a strong case in favor of making my personal experience an object of my scholarly investigation, and I have demonstrated a thorough grasp of the normative and epistemological issues involved in such an unusual

undertaking; but how was I navigating the intricacies of being both a researcher and participant in the actuality of my research? Finally, and most importantly, I have promised to “discipline” my subjectivity, be alert to “discrepant evidence,” and deliberately search for “rival explanations” in service of my rigorous examination; but how—and above all, how successfully?—was I able to carry out these promises in practice?

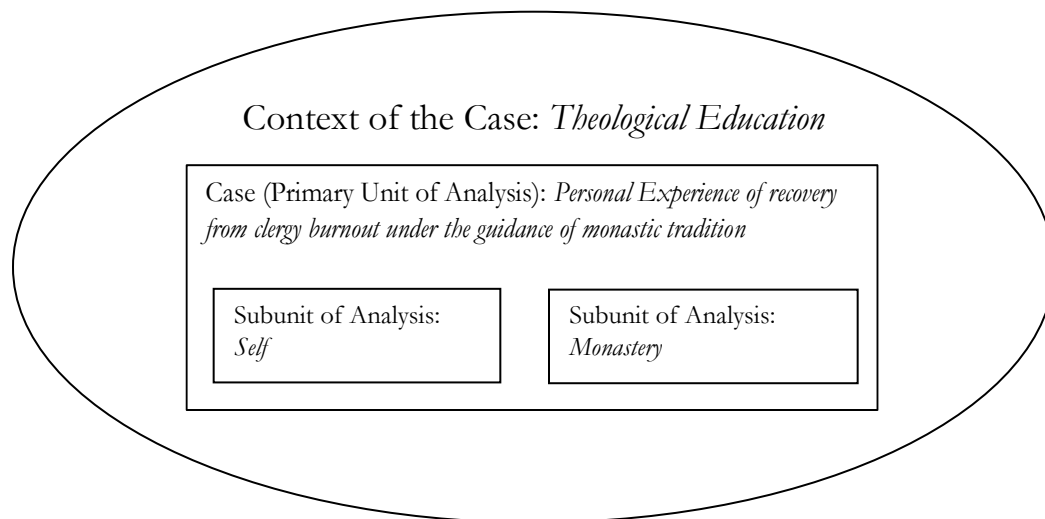
These are not trivial questions. Given the disciplinary, conceptual, and practical complexity of my research situation, I cannot expect the reader to take my case study findings “on faith.” To warrant the hearing of my case study conclusions, I must provide more information about the actuality of my research practice, in the course of which they have been obtained. Therefore, I conclude my methodological exposition with one more chapter, the *retrospective* description of my first-person case-study based interdisciplinary practical theological reflection. In chapter 6, I give an account of specific decisions and research activities that embodied my commitment to “disciplined subjectivity,” and describe difficulties (even blocks!) in my understanding and practice, as well as eventual discoveries that allowed me to carry out the unconventional proposition to study my own case, in practice.

CHAPTER 6

RETROSPECTIVE DESCRIPTION OF METHOD: ACTUALITY OF RESEARCH PRACTICE

As indicated in my thesis statement, the key objective of my research is to offer a case study of my experience of recovery from burnout in the context of theological education under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, in order to imagine how institutions of theological education could become important avenues for addressing ministerial failure. As a brief reminder, I provide the diagram of my case in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Schematic Presentation of the Case Study



In this chapter, I therefore describe my practice of the interdisciplinary method that I set forth in the previous chapters. My description follows the fundamental outline of the research process: from *Research Design*, through *Data Collection*, *Data Analysis and Interpretation*, and finally to the discussion of the unique challenges in the composition of my *Final Report*.

6.1 Research Design

The complex nature of my study, its twofold objectives, and methodological commitments and tools that I have identified as necessary for carrying it out, in turn, presented me with four practical challenges:

1. The task of exploring the *field of qualitative research* in the absence of formal educational training.
2. The task of *identifying case study specific method* as the comprehensive strategy for my investigation, learning its strengths and vulnerabilities in theory, and becoming skilled at using this method in practice—once more, in the absence of formal educational instruction.
3. The more general task of *designing my case study* in such a way that it would sponsor not only the development of rigorous qualitative understanding, but also the systematic unfolding of practical theological reflection.
4. The more specific task of *formulating the line of inquiry* that would allow for creation of methodological structure that would enable me, throughout the entire duration of research, to:
 - a. sustain the twofold analytical focus of my study: on the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition (*focus on the culture*), and on my personal experience of transformation (*focus on the self*)
 - b. facilitate the practice of disciplined subjectivity that lies at the core of my research: to make use of my *subjective experience* as a primary source of my scholarly knowing, and do it in a way that my conclusions could be *communally tested*
 - c. communicate the difference in the order of importance between my reflection on my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition (*the primary unit of study*), and my

reflection on theological education of clergy as the primary context for my case and the environment in which the lessons learned from it could be applied (*the context of study*).

Learning the Language and Culture of Qualitative Research

To explore the field of qualitative research and learn specific qualitative research methods, while lacking access to a formal educational setting, I turned to books as my guides. Among the many sourcebooks on qualitative research, I found the aforementioned Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* (1994), Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias's *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (1996), Patton's *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (2002), Rossman and Rallis's *Learning in the Field* (2003), Marshall and Rossman's *Designing Qualitative Research* (2006), Merriam's *Qualitative Research* (2009), and Yin's *Qualitative Research Start to Finish* (2011) among the most helpful introductions to the field. These texts have provided me with a general understanding of the nature of qualitative inquiry, its fundamental assumptions and values, key theoretical issues, methods, and practices—and not the least, its understanding of the unique role of the researcher in collecting, analyzing, and reporting the social scientific data. Additionally, when I had questions about various aspects of qualitative inquiry, I have repeatedly referred to the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. The four editions of the *Handbook*, in actuality, are not merely improved versions of the same book, but individual anthologies, collections of essays from the leading scholars in the field. As such, the entire series provides a thorough overview of the field from its early tentative beginnings to its present robust state. A detailed bibliography offered after each section in these volumes,

by itself, saved me countless hours of searching for further information on the individual topics of my interest.³⁵⁸ Finally, sensing the importance of going beyond the purely theoretical understanding of qualitative inquiry to the actuality of knowing how to do it in practice, I sought out the texts from the qualitative researchers who describe the day-to-day realities of their craft. Their accounts provided me with much needed detail about the technical, ethical, and political dimensions of their research practice, making me aware of the potential pitfalls for new researchers and the ways to overcome them. Reading these texts helped me to envision specific measures for increasing the validity and rigor of my own scholarly work.³⁵⁹

I read all these texts at first broadly, to identify the principal areas of development in the discipline as a whole, paying special attention to the theoretical issues and practical applications that would be important for my own research, such as the value of subjectivity and the ways to understand and defend the importance of the personal, tacit ways of knowing, the suspicion of the traditional scientific paradigm of research and the emergence of its post-modern alternative, a paradigm of naturalistic inquiry. All throughout my reading, I took extensive notes. While very few of these introductory notes make an appearance in the final draft of my methodology chapters, this preliminary reading laid an

³⁵⁸ Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 330-49; Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*; Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*; Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

³⁵⁹ My favorite reflections on the art of qualitative inquiry come from Robert Stuart Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009); John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Kirin Narayan, *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

important foundation for my general understanding of the field and my grasp of its rhetoric, methodological nomenclature, broad points of agreement and main issues of debate. I continued with such general introductory reading until I reached a certain point of saturation, that is, when I began to recognize the sources cited in the footnotes, encountered repetition of techniques, methods, and key theoretical and practical issues, and became knowledgeable of the operative assumptions of qualitative research and cognizant of the authors whose work bore particular weight in the field. While I cannot claim to have become an expert, I have done substantial work of learning how to understand and use the logic of qualitative research, to adopt the mindset of a qualitative researcher, and I have acquired an in-depth appreciation of its value in the larger context of the social scientific inquiry. In a very real sense, I have gained deep familiarity with the disciplinary culture of qualitative research and acquired fluency in its language. At this point, naturally, my reading took on a narrower focus: I started exploring individual qualitative methods which promised assistance for the specific work of my dissertation research.

Identifying Comprehensive Research Strategy

In my initial attempt to identify an overarching research strategy for my investigation, I considered five formal approaches to qualitative inquiry: narrative method, and its particular variant, autoethnography; ethnography; phenomenological method; and case study. Each of these methods attracted me with its unique potential to contribute to the methodological rigor of my study. For example, I found that *narrative method* offers a variety of tools for eliciting and analyzing stories told by individuals. Its special subset, *autoethnographic research*, delineates practices that facilitate a thorough and disciplined approach to self-reflection. Together, these two approaches to inquiry could be very helpful

in my attempts to record and make sense of my personal experience of recovery from burnout, as well as to elicit the stories of other individuals, in the monastery and theological education, whose experience could be brought to bear on my reflection. *Ethnographic method*, on the other hand, is distinguished by its focus on the shared patterns of behaviors and practices, values and beliefs, artifacts and language that characterize entire cultural groups. As such, this method could be of supreme assistance in my attempt to describe and understand the nature and formative power of the Cistercian monastic culture. *Phenomenological method* attracted me because of its unique objective to understand the “essence” of the lived phenomenon, the most distinctive and typical features reported by the people who have had a direct experience of it. I felt that this approach to inquiry looked most promising for my exploration of rest and burnout because it seeks to focus the researcher’s attention on the most prominent and important features of the studied phenomena. Additionally, the strong philosophical component of the phenomenological research, embodied in the formal methodological commitments of this method—its emphasis on the subjective experience as a source of knowing, its presupposition of “vagueness” as a necessary step in the development of understanding, its refusal of the subject-object dichotomy, its deliberate suspension of judgment about what is “real” until it is rediscovered in the immediacy of experience, and its ultimate objective as a search for wisdom—deeply appealed to me because they indicated that something new (or long forgotten) could be learned about the subject of study by careful attention to people’s personal experience of it.

The final research method, *case study*, promised assistance in an understanding of a particular phenomenon by using its single occurrence as an illustration and a context

within which its true nature could be examined in depth. Its practices of data collection and analysis, its ability to handle multiple sources of evidence, generate rich description, and lend powerful explanatory and exploratory insights made it appear as uniquely suited for the purposes of my study. Nevertheless, while attractive in theory, case study was my least favorite method of research for imagining practice. My initial forays into this approach to qualitative inquiry quickly revealed that out of all the formal methods that I considered, it had the most complicated history, the least secure reputation, enduring disagreements about its true nature, and divergent methodological advice. Hence, while I continued to review the sources that focused on case study research in order to do justice to all individual qualitative methods that looked promising for my work, in my heart of hearts I hoped that I could find a way to do without it.³⁶⁰

However, upon closer examination of these methods, I came to realize that despite the number of their appealing characteristics, the first four methods of qualitative inquiry that I considered could not be used due to the existing conditions and limitations of my research.³⁶¹ For example, while *narrative and autoethnographic methods* of inquiry do offer powerful tools for exploring the meaning of personal experience, both that of the study participants and that of the researcher, the life of an individual is the primary focus

³⁶⁰ An arm-chair fascination with Sherlock Holmes's astonishing ability to separate essential from superfluous, synthesize seemingly random data, and follow the hidden path of logic to its rightful end is one thing, but being personally stuck in the methodological nightmare of studying my own case for the completion of a doctoral dissertation, while lacking Holmesian training and instincts, is altogether another!

³⁶¹ I began my in-depth exploration of these methods with the aforementioned John Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (2007). Creswell, a renowned applied research methodologist, offers a comparative exposition of narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study, focusing especially on the decisions and procedures that are involved in the process of actually doing qualitative research.

of these methods. In contrast, in my research I seek to study my personal experience not as an end in itself but as a window and a pathway for understanding a distinct phenomenon, clergy burnout. Therefore, even though the individual techniques associated with these methods (e.g., writing as a way of inquiry, eliciting and recording of stories, interviews) would be of important use in the work of my research, as a formal research strategy for the entire course of my study, the narrative methods could not provide me with sufficient methodological guidance.³⁶²

Similarly, even though the *ethnographic method* provides detailed guidance for studying the culture of Cistercian monastery, the primary intent of this method is to gain knowledge about the culture itself. Once more, such a focus is too narrow for the purposes of my research: I do not seek to merely offer a “holistic cultural portrait” of the Cistercian monastery; rather the goal of my research is to reflect on a very specific aspect of its living, its formative influence on the monastery’s long-term visitors, in order to better understand the dynamics of personal transformation into a restful person, and do so with an intention to relate the monastic lessons of rest to another culture, that of theological education, for prevention of clergy burnout. Additionally, ethnographers are strongly advised against “going native”: the researcher is to act as a “participant-observer” in the field, and a clear

³⁶² In my work of studying narrative research methods, I was guided in particular by D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000); Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004); Jane Elliott, *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005). For understanding the theory and practice of autoethnography, I drew heavily on the aforementioned works of Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (2011), and Heewon Chang’s *Autoethnography as Method* (2008), and the articles by Stacy Holman Jones, “Autoethnography: Making the Personal,” and Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry.” Later in the process, I greatly benefited from Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis; Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis.

distinction is to be made in the final report of the study between the views of the participants in the culture (*emic*) and the views of the researcher (*etic*). My scholarly posture is strikingly different: I am not a detached observer but a deeply committed participant, an actual (even if lay) member of the Cistercian “cultural group.” In fact, one may argue that an accurate understanding of the monastic tradition, and indeed religious faith itself, is possible only from within. In my research, the insider perspective on the language, behavior, practices, values, and beliefs of the Cistercian community is central to my in-depth knowledge of its culture. Consequently, even though particular ethnographic techniques (e.g., long-time immersion in the site of study, interviewing and participant observation, systematic discernment of cultural elements and themes) would be of tremendous assistance in my research, a formal ethnographic method alone is not fully suitable for my study.³⁶³

Finally, despite the deeply appealing philosophical and methodological commitments of the *phenomenological method* and its core objective of describing the “essence” of the phenomenon as it is being experienced, the formal unit of analysis for this approach to qualitative inquiry is a group of persons, rather than an individual. Phenomenologists conduct in-depth, multiple interviews with five to twenty-five individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. My research, with its focus on a singular occurrence of the recovery from burnout by a United Methodist clergy under

³⁶³ In my study of ethnographic method, I found particularly valuable Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography Lessons: A Primer* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010); Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, and Margaret Diane LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999); Margaret Diane LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010); Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008).

the influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition, simply does not fit the research criteria of the formal phenomenological study.³⁶⁴

Thus, at the end of reviewing narrative, autoethnographic, ethnographic, and phenomenological strategies of inquiry, I was faced with an important methodological choice: to conduct my study using a “mixed methods” approach³⁶⁵ or to take the intimidating route of case study research. Before deciding, and despite my initial apprehension, I decided to give the case study research strategy a closer look.

Careful examination of the case study method revealed that this method presented an almost ideal match for my research. First, case study method offers a multi-dimensional and flexible approach to the work of data collection, analysis, and final reporting. As such, it could meet the conceptual and technical challenges that characterize my case: its dual focus (on the monastic culture and on the process of transformation of the self); the diversity of its research objectives (descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory); and the critical importance of theological education (as a context for understanding the origins of clergy burnout and a potential avenue of its prevention). Second, case study research has an unmatched ability to attend to multiple and diverse sources of evidence and to incorporate into its investigation a wide variety of techniques that are traditionally

³⁶⁴ In my study of phenomenological research, I mainly relied on the aforementioned work of Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994), Robert Sokolowski’s *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000). Other helpful sources included Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany: University of New York, 1990); Natanson.

³⁶⁵ In my exploration of the mixed methods approach, the works of John Creswell and Vicky Plano Clark have been of invaluable assistance: John W. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (2014); John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011). My reading, however, quickly convinced me that using this approach for my very first qualitative study would be decidedly unwise.

associated with other approaches to research. Hence, if I were to choose the case study method as a comprehensive strategy for my research, I then could use individual life stories and other means of *narrative and autoethnographic* research for studying my personal experience, and I could engage in participant-observation, conduct onsite interviews, and use other techniques of the *ethnographic* fieldwork in order to understand the formative influence of the monastic culture—without committing to the full scope of these methods.

Last but not least, some of the methodological commitments of skilled case study investigators are remarkably similar to those of *phenomenological* researchers: they too seek to assume a posture of deliberate not-knowing, set aside preconceived ideas and solutions, and challenge their own interpretations of the case; they too must cultivate tolerance for ambiguity and an attitude of inquisitive respect and in-depth listening; finally, they too seek to attend to the balance between the parts and the whole in their analysis and emphasize the importance of rich descriptive accounts of the case and its context. Thus, the case study approach to research has a unique ability to meet the particular conditions and objectives of my study, to attend to its complex research questions, to engage the wide variety of data necessitated by its dual focus, all the while featuring the methodological sensitivities and commitments particularly important for the unusually subjective nature of my research. In short, the case study research method would offer me the benefits of the “mixed methods” approach, but without having to contend with its massive challenges.

Yet, my misgivings about adopting case study as a comprehensive research strategy for my study persisted. After studying the aforementioned works of the three qualitative researchers who focus on case study—Dennis B. Bromley, Sharan B. Merriam, and Robert E. Stake—I could understand the great promise that this method held for my work. I was

deeply inspired and knew that I could defend the choice of this method for my research and conceptualize it in theory. But I still had significant doubts about my ability to do it in practice. At this point in my research I encountered the work of Robert Yin, the president of an applied research and social science firm, COSMOS Corporation. While not a qualitative researcher by his original training (his Ph.D. from MIT was in brain and cognitive sciences, and his B.A. was in history), Yin has spent many years doing case studies for federal, state, and local agencies and private foundations, and later training individual researchers or research groups in this method. His two books, the abovementioned *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* and *Applications of Case Study Research*, at the time of my initial encounter were in their new editions (forth and third, respectively, and another edition of *Case Study Research* has been released since then³⁶⁶). He has also edited two case study anthologies and written numerous articles on this research strategy.³⁶⁷ He is now a recognized authority, both as a teacher and a practitioner, not only on the subject of case study method but also in the larger field of qualitative research.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013).

³⁶⁷ For example, Yin, *The Case Study Anthology*; Robert K. Yin, *Introducing the World of Education: A Case Study Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005); Robert K. Yin, "Case Study Methods," in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, ed. Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, and Patricia B. Elmore (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 2006); Robert K. Yin, "How to Do Better Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, ed. Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009).

³⁶⁸ Yin has assisted in the training of doctoral students at the University of Copenhagen, held the position of distinguished scholar-in-residence at American University's School of International Service (Washington, D.C.), and served as Visiting Scholar at the U.S. Government Accountability Office's research methodology division. His comprehensive introductory text on qualitative research inquiry is now in its second edition. See Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*.

My first encounter with his work generated genuine feelings of excitement and hope: what until then I had known predominantly in theory had now received a solid practical footing. Yin's faith in the effectiveness of the case study method is contagious, and his work in case study research is remarkably extensive. Four characteristics of Yin's work made me choose his texts on case study as the primary resource for doing my own research. First, Yin provides a detailed, step-by-step approach to the *practical implementation* of this research strategy, from the initial stages of defining one's case to the drafting and presentation of the final report, focusing in particular on the underlying principles and procedures for the method, caveats and concerns for each step of the research process, advice, tips, and criteria for conducting a high-quality case study. Second, Yin's approach puts special emphasis on the role of *theory* in doing case study research: it is an investigator's "theory" about the case, however tentative, that guides the design of the study and the decisions about what kind of evidence is to be sought out. Third, Yin takes special care to provide guidance for the in-depth training of the case study investigators. Finally, Yin's writing style is clear, concise, and free of jargon: even when he speaks about abstract notions and complex procedures, his language remains specific and concrete. Thus, at the end of my first reading through of his companion volumes on case study method, my beginning appreciation of this research strategy began to turn into deep fascination with its nuances and abilities. It was obvious that to become a skilled case study investigator I would have to work really hard. But it was also obvious that I had found a trustworthy guide.

My learning of the case study method, in the absence of formal classroom instruction, unfolded in three steps. I began with Yin's *Case Study Research: Design and*

Methods, in order to delve deeper into the theoretical aspects of this research strategy. I paid particular attention to the issues of case study design (one of the greatest challenges for this method) and to specific case studies from various fields that accompany the main text of the chapters. All along, I sought to “translate” these examples into the conditions and objectives of my own research. After I gained an in-depth theoretical understanding of the method, I moved to its practical applications. I immersed myself in Yin’s companion volume *Applications of Case Study Research* and reviewed his *Case Study Anthology* and *Case Study Reader*, seeking out in particular the individual cases that bore similarities to my research and then applying the insights and tips that I gained to my own scholarly work. Finally, I focused on the development of sensitivities and skills that would allow me to become a good case study investigator. I did all after-chapter practical exercises in Yin’s *Case Study Research*. I also worked through the Boxes, Inside stories, and For class discussion or written assignment exercises in his *Applications of Case Study Research*: the Boxes contain real life examples of the methodological procedure or principle, with reference to Yin’s theoretical texts that explore this issue in greater detail; the Inside Stories raise questions about the real life methodological challenge that was encountered in doing a case study of this kind—and offers advice on how it could be addressed; and the Exercises offer guidance for thinking through the student’s own research situation. At the end of these exercises, I revisited the two sections in Yin’s *Case Study Research* that speak directly to the desired skills for a good case study investigator (ability to ask good questions, listening, adaptiveness and flexibility, solid grasp of theoretical issues that are being studied, lack of bias) and offer suggestions for training case study investigators in a seminar format. In working with these materials, I imagined myself participating in such a seminar, doing the

required assignments for all phases of my case study investigation. As with my learning of the wider field of qualitative research, I cannot claim to have become an expert in the art of case study research, but I have gained an in-depth understanding of its conceptuality and practice, carefully thought through the ways in which this method can be applied to the particulars of my study, and intentionally cultivated the skills and sensitivities that would make me a good case study investigator.

One unforeseen outcome of “taking” this training seminar and engaging in an in-depth reflection on how I can cultivate good case study investigator skills in my own scholarship was my realization of the ways in which my previous educational and personal experiences had prepared me for the general work of case study research and the challenges of studying the relationship between the culture and the self that are unique to my investigation. For instance, my former training as a surgical nurse and clinical pharmacologist has prepared me for using the case study as a general research strategy. In medicine, case study is one of the most used tools, both for the purposes of theoretical instruction and for the actuality of practice. Each patient represents a unique “case”: its data come from multiple sources of evidence, on various levels of abstraction, and are obtained through the use of different methods which in turn are determined by the specifics of the patient’s condition. Thus, in order to become a medical professional, I had to develop keen powers of observation, ability to ask good questions, skills of receiving and synthesizing information that comes through multiple modalities, flexibility and adaptiveness, as well as to cultivate a paradoxical attitude of combining the extremely precise and authoritative knowledge about the human body with the capacity to maintain

an open mind and resist bias—and these are exactly the traits that characterize the skillful case study investigator.

Similarly, my cultural background endowed me with sensitivities and skills that are particularly helpful for the work of studying the relationship between the culture and the self. As a person of Korean descent in Russia, where under the Communist regime racism took subtle but powerful forms, I was forced early on in life to learn the skills of “reading” the culture: my emotional, and at times physical, well-being was dependent on how attuned and responsive I was to the outward standards of behavior and codes of ethics, as well as the underlying beliefs (and fears) of the dominant Slavic population. Later, as an international student at Emory University, I no longer faced the threat of a verbal or physical assault on the basis of my ethnic identity, but flourished under the communal values of diversity and inclusivity; yet, even there I had to hone the skills of observing the surrounding culture: my successful entry into the graduate level of education in the highly competitive academic environment is reflective of my ability to examine the dominant culture of the contemporary academy, correctly identify its most prominent rules, values, and commitments (spoken and unspoken), and effectively incorporate them into my own behavior and speech. In this sense, the elements of minority existence in my life have forced me to develop a strong “ethnographic consciousness,” a strong habit of observing overt and hidden social dynamics and never ceasing to wonder about “formative influences” and “alternative interpretations.”

Thus, my capacity to draw on my medical training in case studies and my ever-vigilant observation of the intricate interplay between culture and the self have prepared me in implicit but effective ways for the undertaking of this research. Reflecting on the

power of these formative experiences in my life, I have come to realize that my work of becoming a good case study investigator has to do not only with mastering new theory and practice but also with learning to intentionally capitalize on the important attitudes, skills, and sensitivities that I already possess.

Designing Case Study

Having explored the field of qualitative research, having learned the case study method as a comprehensive research strategy for my study, and having reflected in depth on my own gifts and liabilities as a case study investigator, I turned to the tasks of designing my research and formulating the actual line of my inquiry. To design my case study in such a way that it would sponsor both the development of rigorous qualitative understanding and in-depth practical theological reflection, I differentiated my central research question—*How could my personal experience of recovering from clergy burnout in the context of theological education, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, inform the praxis of institutional theological education of clergy, so that it could become an important avenue for addressing ministerial failure?*—into the “issue” and “procedure” kinds of research questions.³⁶⁹

The Issue Questions of my research focused on the *content* of study, the actual subject of my investigation. They allowed me to explore my answer to the complex formulation of the central research by dividing it into smaller and therefore more

³⁶⁹ In differentiating the central research question into the Issue and Procedure questions, I follow the guidelines for practice formulated by Robert Stake, John Creswell, and Robert Yin: Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 17-25; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 107-14; Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 103-04.

manageable topics for examination. Hence, following the revised Swinton-Mowat model of practical theological reflection, I formulated three primary Issue Questions for my research:

1. *What is going on* in my personal experience of recovery from burnout under the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition?
2. *What should we hope and pray for* to happen in the seminary, in light of the monastery's ability to teach rest and form peaceful persons, if theological education of clergy is to become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout?
3. *How might we best proceed* in the work of developing theological education of clergy as one important avenue for addressing clergy burnout, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition?

These Issue Questions guided me through the three stages of practical theological reflection: analyzing the situation, discerning its normative objectives, and formulating a plan for transformative action. To support the in-depth reflection sponsored by Issue Question 1, I differentiated it into three subquestions, signifying the movement towards description, analysis, and interpretation: **A**; **B**; and **C**.

Issue Question 1: What is going on in my personal experience of recovery from burnout under the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition? That is:

- A.** How might a retreat at the Trappist monastery be described?
- B.** What kind of explanation could be given for the peace-producing and restorative effect of the monastery upon its lay visitors?
- C.** What deeper patterns of meaning could be discerned in my subjective experience of becoming restful?

Finally, to keep the twofold focus of my case study—on the self and the culture—to the forefront of my investigation, as I engage in description, analysis, and interpretation, I posed each subquestion in two ways, reflecting on my evolving understanding of the monastic way of life and my subjective experience of rest in response to it, side by side: **i.** and **ii.**

- A. How might a retreat at the Trappist monastery be described?
 - i.** What happens during retreats that the monastic community offers to its lay visitors?
 - ii.** What do I do, and don't I do, during retreat? What happens to me, when I willingly submit myself to the Cistercian way of life?

- B. What kind of explanation could be given for the peace-producing and restorative effect of the monastery upon its lay visitors?
 - i.** Is there a pattern to be observed during the retreat at the monastery? What elements of monastic setting and lifestyle can account for the monastery peace? How do they "create" it?
 - ii.** How would I explain the peace-producing and restorative effects of the monastery retreat upon me? What kinds of relationship between the "public" realities of monastic living and the "private" realities of my inner experience have I observed?

- C. What deeper patterns of meaning could be discerned in my subjective experience of becoming restful?
 - i.** How would I describe the effects of my growing relationship with the Cistercian community and place upon my life as a whole? What themes have emerged in my understanding of my journey of becoming restful, during the ten-year-long commuting between the monastery and the world?

- ii. Is there a broader frame of reference within the monastic tradition that enables me to interpret and derive meaning from my subjective experience of becoming restful?

Similarly, I formulated two sets of subquestions to maintain the dual focus of my analysis for Issue Questions 2 and 3. My intent behind the subquestions for Issue Question 2 was to bring to bear the insights about the formative power of the monastic culture and my subjective experience of transformation, gained during the first stage of my investigation, upon my discernment of the normative ideas for theological education of clergy. The purpose of the subquestions for Issue Question 3 was to explore possibilities for transforming the current conceptualization and practices of ministerial preparation, in light of the understanding that I would have been developing during my discernment of the normative objectives for theological education of clergy.

Issue Question 2: What should we hope and pray for to happen in the seminary, in light of the monastery's ability to teach rest and form peaceful persons, if theological education of clergy is to become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout?

- i. What are the normative institutional structures, principles, and values that undergird the tremendous ability of the Trappist monastery to teach rest and form peaceful persons? What paradigmatic story is offered by the Trappist monastic community to account for its commitment to this peculiar way of life and institutional structure? Given this understanding, does the route of *institutional reform* for theological education, as to better imitate the peacefulness of the monastic environment, culture, and community life, represent an appropriate—that is, normatively authoritative—curricular and pedagogical possibility? Is it theoretically convincing? Is it practically plausible? And most fundamentally, is it truly desirable in light of the seminary's own normative institutional structures, practices, and commitments?

- ii. What are the nature and the inner dynamics of becoming a person of peace? Is there a normative theoretical construct in monastic theology that speaks to the human experience of rest that can illuminate my burnout-like journey of transformation into a restful person? Given this understanding, can I imagine a meaningful—that is, normatively authoritative—possibility of relating the monastic paradigm of *personal transformation* to the seminary’s work of ministerial preparation?

Issue Question 3: How might we best proceed in the work of developing theological education of clergy as one important avenue for addressing clergy burnout, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition?

- i. If replication of the unique institutional structure, practices, and values that make the monastery an oasis of peace is not a theoretically convincing or practically plausible option for the contemporary seminary, can I imagine a way in which the restorative and peace-producing power of the monastic institution might still be utilized in seminaries?
- ii. If the monastery, precisely because of its historical separation from contemporary culture, has become a memory-keeper of explicitly religious knowledge about the nature of rest and the process of becoming restful, can I imagine a way to develop curriculum and practices of ministerial preparation that would draw on this earlier historical memory in their own different cultural and institutional environment, so that seminaries too would be able to teach rest and form peaceful persons, and in so doing, become important avenues for addressing the problem of clergy burnout?

Thus, by differentiating the central question of my research into the three Issue Questions, I ensured that I was deeply engaged with the disciplinary tools and concerns of practical theology at every stage of my research. In turn, by explicitly articulating two corresponding sets of subquestions for each Issue Question, I made certain that both units of my case

study (the elements of the monastic *culture* and the subjective experience of the *self*) receive equal attention for the entire duration of my investigation.

In contrast to the Issue Questions that follow the movements of practical theological reasoning, the Procedure Questions ensure that I am deeply engaged with the disciplinary tools and sensitivities of qualitative research. These questions enable me to think through the formal stages in my research practice by anticipating the information that will be needed in the course of my investigation. As such, they serve as a bridge between the Issue Questions of my research and the specific actions required for my discovery of the high-quality answers. Based on the formal stages of qualitative inquiry and case study method, I formulated six main Procedure Questions for my study:

1. What kinds of information do I need to collect in order to produce a “thick description” of my experience of the monastery retreat and my subjective experience of post-retreat transformation?
2. What strategies should I employ for analyzing and interpreting collected data?
3. How will I build trustworthiness and credibility into the work of studying my own case?
4. Does my case study pose any ethical problems?
5. What specific research actions do I need to undertake at each stage of my investigation?
6. What format should I choose for the composition of the final report, my dissertation?³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ As with the Issue Questions for my research, the Procedure Questions also have their own sets of subquestions. Given their technical nature, the procedure subquestions are far greater in number. I therefore present them separately in *Appendix A*.

Thus, by differentiating the central question of my research into the individual Issue Questions and Procedure Questions, I have ensured that at every stage of my research process, from the initial steps towards defining my case and to the composition of the final report, practical theology and qualitative research are brought to bear upon my investigation. Their tools, theoretical resources, methodological sensitivities and commitments actively shape the overall course of my investigation, influencing my specific decisions about design, collection and analysis of the data, and final presentation. One may say (borrowing the terms of the conventional dialogue-metaphor) that in this way practical theology and qualitative research “play into each other’s hands,” supporting, strengthening, and advancing each other’s work. To be more exact (and hence, using the terms of the newly proposed language-metaphor): the practice of my research occurs at the intersection of the two diverse but complementary lines of speaking and reasoning, and it is precisely the difference in their vocabularies, conceptuality, and normative paradigms of knowing that enables me to arrive at a more in-depth and more credible understanding.³⁷¹

6.2 Data Collection

The settings of institutional theological education of clergy, the Cistercian monastery, and my personal experience of transformation during the years of my recovery from burnout comprise the three primary data collection sites for my research. My position in all of these sites is unusual. Both in the seminary and in the monastery, I am not just an “outside researcher” to the setting. From the qualitative point of view, I am a “native,” an

³⁷¹ Together, the Issue and Procedure Questions of my research, and my evolving answers to them, comprised my Case Study Protocol, a document that outlines the conceptual design and actual line of inquiry for my research. Sample pages from this document can be found in *Appendix B*.

acknowledged participant in these cultural groups. Long before I approached the faculty and students of Candler School of Theology with the invitation to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews, they had known me as a student, teaching assistant, research assistant, program leader, and longtime member of the seminary choir. Well before I looked at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit as a formal site for my investigation and approached its abbot with a request to permit me to use their cloistered library and to administer questionnaires to the monks, he had known me as a long-term visitor of the monastery, lay Cistercian, and on two occasions a co-leader of monastery retreats. Such “insider” status in both cultures had complex influence on my research.

Without a doubt, it offered immense benefits for my data collection procedures. First, it allowed me to gain formal access to the sites of study in a timely and uncomplicated manner: being already an authentic participant of these communities, I only needed to seek the recognition of my new functional role as a researcher rather than to start our relationship “from scratch.” Second, it established the relationship of trust with the study participants in both communities from the very onset of my research, which in turn had a critical influence on their willingness to contribute to my study, to do so even when it came at a cost to them, and to allow me to “probe” deeper than a mere outsider would have been allowed to do.³⁷² Third, my long-term immersion in theological education and monastic

³⁷² For example, the cloistered Cistercian monks are rarely receptive to outsiders’ requests to study them. After all, they “left the world” to devote themselves to contemplation, and their cloister, the place in the monastery into which outsiders are not permitted to enter, is both a symbolic and literal space which represents such a commitment. Yet, the abbot granted access to their library and allowed me to address the letter of invitation to the monks asking them to fill out my questionnaires; and, while strictly voluntary, my questionnaires generated a response from the majority of monks in the community. Similarly, both seminary faculty and students were very receptive to my research: for example, the second round of interviews was intentionally scheduled at the busiest time of the semester, the “finals”; yet, without fail, every faculty member and student kept their commitment (and on more than one occasion, the faculty joked at the opening of the interview that they will “make the time” because they want me to finish my dissertation!). Moreover,

tradition *prior* to my formal research allowed me to develop an understanding of these cultures “from the bottom up.” Because I began my observation and reflection on these cultures long before I imagined the possibility of a scholarly study of them, long before I became aware of the need to collect data, and long before my evolving conclusions received the added stakes of my dissertation completion, my current understanding is grounded in the actuality of my experience in the “field,” rather than any theoretical preconceptions. In this sense, my longitudinal engagement with these two cultures prior to formal data collection serves as an assurance that my observations have been minimally contaminated by my subsequent research interests. Finally, being an insider to both seminary and monastery helped me to understand the language, values, and lifestyle of their respective communities, and in turn, enabled me to ask questions that are likely to lend helpful information about their lived experience with my phenomenon of interest in a shorter period of time. Thus, my pre-existing relationship with both sites of investigation endowed my formal work of data collection with breadth and depth which otherwise would have been very difficult to achieve.

At the same time, being an “insider” to both cultures could have a critically important negative drawback: it could produce bias. It is precisely because I had come to the monastery, seeking a respite from the frenetic pace, lack of balance, and violence of overwork that I experienced during my seminary training, I could fall prey to the overly positive perceptions of the former and the excessively negative picture of the latter. Despite the best of my conscious intentions to be neutral in my observation of both cultures,

a number of faculty and students were willing to discuss the experiences that were clearly very private and even painful, yet, they felt that could do it not just because I promised confidentiality, but because they knew me as a “safe person.”

unconsciously I could begin to romanticize the monastic community and its lifestyle and at the same time become less open to the evidence that at least some seminary faculty and students manage their workload well, engage in adequate self-care, and do not experience burnout as a problem. In this sense, the potential impact of my background knowledge of monastic tradition and theological education could be utterly negative, influencing what I went looking for, what I saw, and what I failed to see during my participant-observation. Thus, the dual challenge of my data collection in the monastery and the seminary was to capitalize on the unusual opportunities afforded to me by my insider participant-observer status, while at the same time to be intentional about searching for and attending to the inevitable “blind spots” in the field of my perception throughout the entire investigation.

The third formal site of data collection, the realm of my personal experience, is similar to the monastery and seminary sites in one way. My position there is also that of an “insider,” with the history of “participant-observation” far exceeding the formal scope of my research. The positive outcomes of such positioning, therefore, are also similar: as the main participant in my own case, I can employ the inside perspective on my “subject of study” and have an unprecedented access to data pertaining to my case, especially the data that otherwise might be inaccessible to the external scientific investigation. Yet, my “immersion” in the realm of the self is markedly different from my long-term participation in the culture. The territory of personal experience is at once deeply familiar and strangely foreign—precisely because it is deceptively close. Even though I am the one who by definition “has” the experience, I can also be completely oblivious of its certain aspects or simply too caught up in living it to be able to put it into words. Being in possession of the relevant data does not automatically guarantee making good use of it. Thus, the main

challenge of the data collection procedures for this site of my investigation was not the potential for bias and preconception, but rather a possible lack of awareness and/or ability to make the experience that is known largely introspectively, available for external observation and review. To collect data from my own life, I had to develop a specific delivery system which would enable me first to become conscious of the full spectrum of my lived experience of recovery from burnout and then to transpose the raw experiential quality of my “living human document” into the actual “field notes” to be used as proper scholarly data.

Thus, in this section, I describe the work of my data collection at the three primary sites of my investigation. I start with the seminary, the location that serves as the *context* of my case, then proceed to the monastery and the self, the locations that serve as the *primary subunits* of my study. Prior to initiating data collection at the seminary and the monastery sites, I completed the web-based Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) Program in the Protection of Human Subjects in Research and gained formal approval from the Emory Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection on the Site of Seminary

The Candler School of Theology served as a formal data collection site for deepening of my understanding about theological education as a context for prevention of clergy burnout. Six Master of Divinity students (three male and three female, from each year of M.Div. training and of mixed academic performance) and five members of the faculty (two females and three males, two junior and three senior faculty members) were selected for participation. To ensure diversity of their perspectives on theological education, I selected participants who varied in their racial/ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation,

marital status, age, and length of participation in seminary training. The inclusion criteria for the study pertained to their participation in theological education as students or faculty members, the diversity of their backgrounds, and their interest in issues of pastoral formation and advancement of theological education. Students and faculty members were assured that their participation in this study was strictly voluntary, their identities would be kept confidential and their responses used only anonymously; that there would be no monetary or other compensation for their work; and that their decision to decline to answer specific questions, end an interview, or completely withdraw from participation at any time of data collection would not affect their enrollment, graduation, or employment status.

I administered a questionnaire and conducted a forty-five minute to an hour-long semi-structured interview with each participant at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Creating the protocol for the questionnaire and interviews, I was guided by two exploratory questions:

- What is the nature and meaning of rest, and what kind of educational experiences engender rest?
- What is it that robs people of their rest, and how do the ways in which we think about and do theological education of clergy influence the prospective clergy's abilities to resist "restlessness" and burnout?³⁷³

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part gathered background information of the respondent: faculty or student status, gender, length of participation in theological education, age, marital status, children, and racial/ethnic background. The

³⁷³ I have employed the word "restlessness" to refer not only to the physical fatigue, mental and emotional exhaustion, and ordinary inability to remain still, but also the spiritual overtones of the problem, which St. Augustine described as the "restless heart." The Questionnaire and Interview Questions that I used for collecting data at the seminary site can be found in *Appendix C*.

second part of the questionnaire asked respondents to reflect on the words and images that they use to describe rest and lack thereof, to assess their current state of restfulness, and to name specific activities and resources to which they turn in their search for rest as well as particular sources of unrest in their lives as students and faculty of theology. The primary intent behind these questions was to learn about various ways of understanding rest and restlessness in the context of theological education, to identify important sources of rest and causes of unrest for its participants, and to map out personal and communal resources available to them in their search for restful teaching and learning. In the third part of the questionnaire the students and faculty members were asked to make statements describing the impact that theological education had made on their ability to rest. They were invited to describe the problematic and promising aspects of seminary training in relation to rest and burnout and to name specific changes which would make theological education a more restful environment for them. This final section of the questionnaire sought to encourage a process of playful reimagining of theological education as a “restful place,” in light of the participants’ experience and understanding of the seminary’s life and mission.

The participants were asked to fill out the same tripartite questionnaire twice: once at the beginning and once at the end of the semester. Such twofold arrangement of questionnaires aimed at “capturing” the potential changes in participants’ perception of rest and the evolution of their insight into the role that theological education plays in influencing its students’ and faculty members’ ability to rest, throughout the semester. Both times, the questionnaire served as a precursor to an interview.

Interviewing a diverse population of students and faculty at two different times of the semester meant that the specific questions asked and their sequence varied from person

to person, depending on the natural progression of our verbal engagement. Hence, both interviews were envisioned as semi-structured in nature: I identified the basic exploratory questions about the participants' experience of rest, their perception of obstacles and supporters of restful teaching and learning in theological education, and their understanding of the role that seminaries could play in burnout prevention. These topics, spaced apart on a single sheet of paper, served as my formal Interview Protocol, a form that I took with me to each individual interview, but I allowed the participants' responses and the natural flow of the interview to guide me in the formulation of the specific questions and their sequencing.

While originally I conceived my work with participants as conventional social scientific interviews with open-ended questions, several shifts occurred in the actual interviewing process. Unlike the format of the general qualitative interviews that strongly advises the researcher to "speak little," I found myself being asked by the students and faculty members to share my own story and my own perspective on rest and burnout in the context of theological education. And early on in our conversations, it became obvious that my decision to reveal the self behind the research accomplished significantly more than to satisfy the curiosity of my interviewees. It invited the students and faculty members to adopt the same attitude of wonder, curiosity, and self-reflexivity which I myself had with regards to the formal questions of my inquiry.

Sharing my position as a researcher upfront contradicted the second maxim of good qualitative interviewing, "neutrality": with my story of burnout shared, I could not pretend *not* to have a particular view of theological education, sentiments about its present state, and at least some ideas about how it should be reformed. At first I was worried that such

personal disclosure might “contaminate” my findings. Yet, my worries turned out to be unfounded. Defining my position clearly did not incite a ready agreement on the part of my participants; instead, once more, my candid and careful sharing of my understanding of rest, burnout, and theological education seemed to have encouraged them to articulate their own perspectives with the same degree of care and consideration. As a result, we arrived at a peculiar format of interviewing, wherein the questions and answers, musings and silences, understanding nods or disagreeing grunts, occurred on both sides of the interviewer-interviewee border. This was a verbal exchange at its best, intellectually stimulating, emotionally present, and touching on something that was deeply significant for both dialogue partners, as we explored the experience of rest in the context of the aspirations, concerns, and even dilemmas of contemporary theological education.³⁷⁴

It must be noted, however, that even though such spontaneous partnership in the meaning-making process became a distinctive feature of my work with the seminary students and faculty members, our generative conversations never deteriorated into a full mutuality of “just sharing.” All throughout my data collection at the seminary site, I used

³⁷⁴ Upon reading several transcripts of these interviews, my early dissertation advisor, professor Rodney Hunter, aptly called this way of collecting data “generative conversations”: these interviews are marked by the mutuality that characterizes good social conversations; yet, they differ from the ordinary public encounters in their underlying intent to stay focused and generate insight on a given topic (personal communication, December 29, 2008). It is important to note, however, that such an open-ended and responsive to individual participants manner of interviewing was not purely my personal invention. In the field of qualitative research, such open-ended, collaborative kinds of interviews are referred to as “dialogic interviews” or “informal conversational interviews” or “unstructured ethnographic interviews.” Even though these kinds of interviews may require a greater amount of time to collect data and their effectiveness is strongly dependent on the conversational skills of the interviewer, the unique combination of focus and flexibility that they possess gives them unparalleled power in generating insight and deepening understanding. (See Rossman and Rallis, 181-82; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 342-44; Andrea Fontana and Anastasia H. Prokos, *The Interview: From Formal to Postmodern* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 39-68.)

three measures to ensure that the “balance” of conversation was kept in favor of the participants. First, in my preparation and conduct of generative conversations I carefully studied and adhered to the *formal guidelines for qualitative interviewing*.³⁷⁵ As a researcher, I supplied the theoretical frame of reference, developed the Interview Protocol, ensured that our conversation stayed focused, and kept track of time, functioning of recording devices, and preparation of the necessary documents. Within the logistical and conceptual scaffolding that I created, the participating students and faculty members had greater freedom to reflect on their theoretical knowledge and firsthand experience of rest and burnout in theological education.

Second, in my preparation and conduct of generative conversation I adopted a *systematic approach to listening*.³⁷⁶ I listened “as an end in itself,” in order to communicate to the participants of my research, through my silence, that I was fully present and fully committed to hearing their stories and honoring their perspective on the subject. I listened “in order to give voice,” striving to create conditions that would allow the students and faculty members to reflect and put into words the unique character of their experience of rest in theological education. Then and only then, I listened “in order to speak,” by using

³⁷⁵ A helpful introduction to the practice of qualitative interviewing can be found in Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 339-427; Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 132-42. An in-depth exposition of this method is offered by Robert K. Merton, Marjorie F. Lowenthal, and Patricia L. Kendall, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*, 2nd ed. (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1990); Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012).

³⁷⁶ In my approach to listening, I am deeply influenced by the work of Australian pastoral theologian Graeme M. Griffin. See Graeme M. Griffin, *Coming to Care: An Introduction to Pastoral Care for Ordained Ministers and Lay People* (Parkville: Uniting Church in Australia, Theological Hall, 1995), 50-61.

my own words as vehicles for describing my own perspective and reflecting on the differences in our perceptions of seminary environment and training.

Third, in my preparation and conduct of generative conversations I made an intentional decision to *search for “discrepant evidence,”* i.e., for data that challenged my own conjectures about the anticipated findings of my study.³⁷⁷ By asking the participants to describe the experiences that contradicted my evolving understanding, I signaled my commitment to depict the complex issues of rest and burnout in theological education from their perspective. Thus, by grounding the practice of generative conversations in the formal principles of qualitative interviewing, by adopting a systematic approach to listening, and by deliberately searching for discrepant evidence, I ensured that the perspectives of the participants remained to the forefront of our generative conversations throughout the entire phase of data collection at the seminary site. Because my work as a “conversational partner” never overshadowed my work as a “qualitative researcher,” it was possible for the generative conversations to unfold with the ease of common social engagement but with the focus and depth necessary for scholarly inquiry.

All interviews were recorded and at the end of the interviewing process, I personally transcribed each interview. While the work of transcription was very time-consuming (4-6 hours of transcribing per each hour of interviewing), it gave me another opportunity for an in-depth listening. In that way, the simple recording of the data laid a solid foundation for my upcoming work of its analysis. I edited the transcripts with an eye

³⁷⁷ This paradoxical recommendation comes from Robert Yin, who maintains that quality of the case study descriptions, explanations, and interpretations can be significantly increased by the researcher’s deliberate and vigorous attempts to identify and evaluate the plausibility of their “rivals.” Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 14.

on recognizable features, recurring themes, and emotional overtones of the conversation. Each participant received a copy of his or her transcript, reviewed it, and provided a signed approval of the accuracy of the final draft. This was yet another measure for ensuring that I “heard the data” correctly.

Looking at the data collection procedures that I employed at my seminary site reveals that I have been able to capitalize on the unusual opportunities afforded to me by my longtime participation in theological education, and at the same time reduce the likelihood of impartiality and bias. My preexisting knowledge of the seminary context helped me to establish good rapport with the students and faculty and endowed me with the basic knowledge of language and structure of ministerial preparation. As a result, our generative conversations became the occasions for in-depth reflection that did not shy away from asking “difficult questions” and pondering “sensitive issues”—thus, lending rich, detailed data for my research. Similarly, my intentionality about practicing intersubjective accountability allowed me to establish specific measures for testing my own understanding all throughout the data collection. The mere presence of other participants in theological education made me weigh my words and opinions about it more carefully. My commitment to genuine listening and deliberate search for discrepant evidence ensured that the potential “blind spots” in my perception were carefully monitored. And the selection criteria for participants that sought to assemble a diverse group of students and faculty members increased the chances that their perspectives would differ from mine and therefore introduce new ways of seeing the issues of rest and burnout in theological education. It was as if I had been in dialogue with a team of intelligent and articulate co-researchers, sharing

with me the results of their own long-term participant-observation of theological education: the insights that we generated together enriched and challenged my subjective understanding. During these generative conversations, groping towards greater understanding and insight, we became the co-creators of meaning.³⁷⁸

Data Collection on the Site of Monastery

In contrast to the seminary site that represents the “context” of my case study, the monastery site is one of its primary “subunits of analysis.” As such, it called for more extensive and in-depth data collection. I distinguish several primary procedures for data collection on this site: direct and participant observation, document review and questionnaire administration, review of films, videos, photographs, and reflection on monastic proxemics, chronemics, kinesics, and liturgy.

³⁷⁸ Two examples from the actual interviews illustrate their effectiveness as “generative conversations.” In his interview, a third-year male student of Korean origin spoke at length about the tremendous pressure, stress, and general lack of rest in his experience of theological education. I nodded in agreement and then asked about the changes that he would have liked to see in the seminary training, anticipating a no-less lengthy proposal. To my utter surprise, he responded emphatically, “NO, NO, NO!!! *Nothing* should change.... It is great, as it is...just great! We need all this...CPE, classes, papers...exams...It is *supposed* to be difficult, learning *is* difficult...(pausing)...actually...how do I say this?...hmm...we only need conversations like this...so that you can make sense of it...you know, all of it...like this.” Similarly, during an interview a senior theology faculty member described with great care the “systemic nature” of the problem of unrest for both students and faculty in theological education, connecting it to the ever increasing curricular requirements. I mused out loud (*half anticipating a burst of exasperated venting*), “If you [faculty members] are caught in this cycle...and students are caught in this cycle...then, who benefits?” But my teacher grew silent and remained deep in thought for a long time. Then, he said slowly: “the *very best* students benefit...because they are put into challenging situations with the material which is very interesting to them...(smiling)...I have students in my course who are really turned on by that material...their eyes are opened...ideas that they have never even thought about before.” On both of these occasions I felt that my conversational partners responded in ways that I did not anticipate. And, in both instances the unexpected data that they provided played a crucial role in the development of my understanding.

The beginning point of my data collection was *direct observation*.³⁷⁹ Thanks to my formal “registered retreatant” position at the monastery, I could enter the monastery settings as an unobtrusive observer, free to watch the unfolding of the monastery life in real time and its natural social setting. Additionally, the particularities of the monastic lifestyle themselves created nearly ideal conditions for direct observation: since monks and visitors alike are invited to attend to their own inner experience and avoid unnecessary interaction with others, and since the physical separation between monastery inhabitants is deepened by the monks’ cloistered status and traditional Cistercian emphasis on silence, it was easy for me to remain on the sidelines and quietly take note of the various elements of the monastic culture and everyday existence. After countless “field visits” and hours of intentional watching and detailed recording of what I saw, my voluminous notes began to coalesce into a rich holistic description of my experience of the events, behaviors, and practices that characterize the monastery retreat.

Participant observation was the natural extension of direct observation in my data collection process. As my own fascination with the Cistercian way of life and my personal relationship with the monks, lay monastery workers, and other regular retreatants began to grow, I found myself becoming ever more deeply immersed in the community life and monastery culture.³⁸⁰ Between the years of 2005 and 2009, visiting the monastery every

³⁷⁹ A brief introduction to direct observation as a method of data collection is offered by Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 143-47. An in-depth discussion of direct observation not merely as a specific method of data collection, but as an overall approach to inquiry can be found in C. Evertson and J. Green, “Observation as Inquiry and Method,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. M. C. Wittrock (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

³⁸⁰ This deepening of interest and relationship culminated in my making a formal commitment to become a Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani in September, 2008. The reason I became a lay associate at Gethsemani Abbey (Trappist, KY) rather than at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit (Conyers, GA), was the lack of ecumenical openness of the lay Cistercian community associated with the monastery at the time of my application. (Right

one to three months, I began to “help out” in a variety of roles: in the kitchen of the retreat house and monks’ refectory, at the monastery bookstore and retreat’s house registration office, at the bonsai garden and mailing department. Such intimate involvement in the life and work of the monastic community’s work brought even greater opportunity for my data collection: first, it allowed me to witness areas and aspects of the monastery life that usually remain unknown to the lay visitors; second, it created favorable conditions for my informal interaction with the monastic community; third, it forced me to gain firsthand knowledge of the value of monastic practices (e.g., the importance of manual labor for spiritual growth). Together, these experiences provided me with new, more detailed and at times unexpected data. The challenge of this data collection procedure was the opposite of its strength: my increased access to the members of the monastic community also meant their increased access to me. No longer having the luxury of standing back in the hiddenness and passivity of direct observation, I had to ensure that my role of the participant did not take the energy and time that was necessary for my work as a researcher. Yet, the outcome of this longitudinal work was a tremendous enrichment and deepening of my understanding of the monastic culture and ethos: whereas the *direct* observation provided me with ample amounts of the outer, descriptive data about the monastic setting, practices, and behaviors,

now, however, there are both Roman Catholic and ecumenical groups in Conyers.) Without a doubt, such a long-distance relationship created a number of logistical and financial difficulties for my personal spiritual journeying; yet, for the purposes of my scholarly data collection it presented a tremendous increase in opportunity: now, I had the chance to make observations about the Cistercian monastic culture as it was embodied not in one but two Cistercian foundations! Later, due to my relocation from Atlanta to Richmond, Virginia, and my increased participation in Cistercian monastic conferences, I was able to visit three other foundations: Our Lady of the Angels Monastery (Crozet, Virginia), Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey, and New Mellerey Abbey (Dubuque, Iowa).

the *participant* observation allowed me to comprehend their inner meaning and symbolic importance.

The *review of documents* also evolved as a natural step in the data collection process.³⁸¹ As I continued to come to the monastery for silent and guided retreats, I began to accumulate a number of miscellaneous papers that were produced in the course of everyday events at the monastery: readings from the second Nocturn of Vigils and seasonal liturgical accompaniments, handouts from the retreats and thematic conferences, monks' homilies, memoirs, published and unpublished personal reflections, popular Catholic prayer guides, devotions, saints' prayer cards, and booklets. While seemingly mundane, these documents served as extremely useful windows into the formative practices and events that take place in the interface between the monastic community and lay visitors.³⁸² As my interest in the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition deepened, I began an intentional search for texts on this topic, books and unpublished manuscripts on monastic spirituality, way of life, and specific values and practices written by monks themselves or by the lay people who found the monastery a helpful guide for contemporary living. These texts provided me with a more systematic and in-depth introduction into the nature and

³⁸¹ Robert Yin identifies four specific strengths in using documentation as a source of evidence: stability (documents can be reviewed repeatedly), specificity (documents contain names, references, details), breadth of coverage (documents encompass long span of time, events, and various settings), and unobtrusive nature (formal institutional documents are not created for the purposes of the case study). See Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 85-89. Marshall and Rossman add another important strength to this list: of all data collection procedures, the review of documentation is the most "explicit to the reader," i.e., the reported facts can be checked by the reader directly. See Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 85-86.

³⁸² For example, a small card with a picture of Rublyov's icon of the Holy Trinity with an inscription "Silence is spoken here" set at each table in the retreat house dining room is a rich representation of the values and beliefs of the monastic community itself; yet, it is also an example of how monks teach their lay visitors, by means of an image, word and paradox, a way to understand and honor the Cistercian value of silence.

specific characteristics of the Cistercian monastic tradition.³⁸³ Thus, by adding documentation review to my data collection procedures, I supplemented my individual field notes with already existing records about the monastic tradition. As a result, the insights gained from my direct and participant observation were enriched and deepened by the understanding developed by other independent observers of the monastic culture.

Direct observation, participant observation, and document review that I conducted in the early stages of my data collection allowed me to arrive at a broad overview of the monastic culture. In the later stages of data collection, my procedures became more focused and specific in order to gain a deeper understanding of the categories, themes and patterns of behavior that emerged as a result of this foundational work. In the Fall of 2009 I administered the formal questionnaire to the monks in the community and conducted research at the monastery cloistered library.³⁸⁴

The overall purpose of the *questionnaire* was to explore cultural nuances in the understanding of rest and restlessness by the monastic community by asking individual monks to reflect on the biblical and monastic texts, as well as their own personal beliefs and practices of rest. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. In the first part, I invited

³⁸³ A good example of such learning is my deepened understanding of the Cistercian devotion to Mary. This devotion is manifested in the dedication of all Trappist churches of the Order to “Our Lady” (e.g., Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit or Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani), the inscription “M.” in front of the name of every nun or monk (e.g., sister Mary Marion or brother Mary Louis), the commemorations of Mary included in the Divine Office, and the practice of singing the “Salve Regina” hymn at the end of the day in every Trappist foundation. At first, I thought the Cistercian devotion to Mary was just a “Catholic thing”: all Catholics have a special reverence for Mary. Later, I learned about the particular importance of Marian movement in the eleventh century Roman Catholic Church, the time when the Cistercian Order was born. Still later, I became aware of the deep theological resonance that the Trappists perceive between the mystery of the Virgin Mary’s life with its quiet, hidden, faithful receptivity, and their own vocation.

³⁸⁴ The complete list of documents associated with this phase of data collection can be found in *Appendix D*.

monks to reflect on the nature of human rest and its role in monastic theology, interpret the biblical passages that focus on rest and its correlatives, Sabbath and peace, and describe their personal practices of resting. The second part contained similar questions, but now with regard to the notion of human restlessness and the Sabbath commandment. The third part of the questionnaire sought to elicit the monks' views of the Cistercian practices of formation, monastic understanding of "holy leisure," and the seeming paradox between the "easiness of Jesus' yoke" and the contemporary problem of pastoral burnout. The final section of the questionnaire did not present any questions, but a request to share the passages and texts from the Cistercian classical and contemporary writers that monks found personally meaningful in their own search for rest, Sabbath, and peace. Given the small number of active monks in the monastic community, their contemplative focus, the demanding nature of the monastic lifestyle, and the completely voluntary basis of participation in my study, I hoped to receive positive responses from at least ten participants. I received thirteen fully filled-out questionnaires, two partially filled-out questionnaires, and two personal letters from community elders who wanted to have a conversation in lieu of filling out a questionnaire.

My *research at the monks' cloistered library* took place concurrently with the administration of the questionnaire. Such an arrangement gave monks the opportunity to ask questions about my study, while at the same time allowing me to delve into some of the bibliographical references that they identified in their responses. Even though in essence this step in the data collection process was a continuation of the documentation review that I started in the early stages, it was much more focused in nature. In contrast to my preliminary exploration of the monastic tradition in general, the cloistered library

placed within my reach the treasures of the nine hundred years of explicitly Cistercian writing. I used this time to explore the formal historical, founding, and governing texts of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, the specific documents that pertain to the history of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and Gethsemani Abbey, and the texts that describe the historical phenomenon of “lay brothers” and the recent paradoxical occurrence of “lay Cistercians.” Getting to know these texts allowed me not only to deepen my understanding of the practices and principles that characterize the Trappist way of life, but also to begin to appreciate the tacit organizational structures that undergird its formative power.³⁸⁵

The work with the questionnaires and review of the documents at the monastery library prepared the way for the most focused phase of my data collection, the testing and verification of the categories and themes that emerged in the process of initial reflection on monastery living. Throughout this final stage I engaged in *informal conversational interviews*, reviewed *films, videos, and photographs*, and reflected on the *proxemics, chronemics, kinesics, and liturgy* in the monastic setting. The informal conversational interviews became possible because now the monks and the lay Cistercian associates became aware of and eager to contribute to my research. Hence, during the time that followed my formal data collection phase at the monastery, my casual conversations with

³⁸⁵ For example, my reading of the Charter of Charity and the Constitutions of the OCSO allowed me to gain insight into the institutional values and principles that support the peacefulness of the monastic environment and community living. Similarly, my learning about various events in the history of the two particular monasteries allowed me to better understand how the ideals of the Cistercian founders become embodied in the ethos and setting of the contemporary monastic communities. Finally, my reading of the narratives of other lay people who have experienced the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition and the Order’s attempt to understand and come to terms with the existence of “lay associates” raised critical questions about the benefits and problems of trying to apply the “monastery lessons” to life in the world.

individual monks, monastery retreatants, and lay Cistercians frequently touched on the nuances of meaning in the topics of rest and restlessness, and an incredibly helpful stream of personal notes with “have you thought about...,” suggested reading titles, and photocopied articles, book chapters, and quotes kept coming into my mail. With some of these contributors my research relationship evolved into a deeper bond of accountability: selected monks and lay Cistercian associates at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and Gethsemani Abbey became the “readers” of the evolving draft of my manuscript.³⁸⁶ Viewing broadcasts and movies about monastic life, videos created about the various Cistercian monasteries (either public educational recordings about the Trappist vocation or private recordings of special events, e.g., the Mass of Ordination or Solemn Profession), and photographs of the monastic community and settings offered me an unobtrusive but effective way to reflect on the daily life of the monastery in a pure “researcher mode.”³⁸⁷ Finally, given the great emphasis on silence and solitude in the Cistercian lifestyle, I chose to pay particular attention to the patterns of nonverbal communication and instruction process that take place at the monastery. I spent substantial time studying the monastery’s use of space (proxemics), structure of time (chronemics), people’s body language (kinesics), and monastic liturgy.³⁸⁸ Dedicating time to reflect on the architectural design of

³⁸⁶ Robert Yin strongly views such “participant review and feedback” as an extremely valuable way of increasing the validity of researcher’s findings. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 96-98.

³⁸⁷ For example, when viewing a video I could stop the recording and zoom in on a particular picture frame or a phrase, I could draw a diagram on a copy of the photograph of the Abbey Church in order to discern the underlying “theology” of the architectural arrangement, and I could study the nonverbal behavior and communication, facial expressions and emotions of monks—all without violating the codes of proper social engagement. For an in-depth reflection on the use of visual media in research, see Paul Hockings, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995).

³⁸⁸ While the monastic Liturgy of the Hours does use words in its transmission process, it is a very peculiar use: as a rule, the liturgical speech is scripted and recurring. Thus, the “message” of the monastic liturgy, not

the Abbey Church, the intentionality about the patterns and colors of light created by its stained glass windows throughout the day, the dramatic changes in the allocation of space between the cloister and Monastic Visitors Center at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, the furniture arrangements in the retreat houses at the various Cistercian monasteries, prayer postures and bodily participation in the Liturgy (e.g., “navel-gazing” or kneeling during the meditation, or full prostration during the solemn profession), and a particular way the retreatants conduct themselves lent an additional amount of rich data for reflecting on the meaning of rest and the process of becoming restful.

Looking back at the procedures that I employed at the monastery reveals that the data collection for this primary unit of my case study has been remarkably thorough. I immersed myself in the setting for a long period of time, attended to the numerous and varied sources of evidence, engaged both monastic and lay associate participants of the community, and reflected on data coming from several physical locations. Such a multilayered, longitudinal approach to data collection allowed me to effectively address the dual challenge of capitalizing on the opportunities of my insider status while at the same time reducing the likelihood of impartiality and bias that came from the long-term conditioning of my perception. On the one hand, my preexisting knowledge of the monastery setting and my established relationship with its community endowed me with an access to the full

unlike the data coming from proxemics and kinesics, could be interpreted not only on the level of its individual words but also on the level of its overarching meta-meaning. The term “proxemics” originated in the work of Edward Hall, and the classical reflection on using kinesics in social scientific research was offered by Ray Birdwhistell. See Ray L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*, *University of Pennsylvania Publications in Conduct and Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, 1st ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966).

spectrum of resources of the monastic tradition (including those that rarely come within the reach of outside researchers). On the other hand, my insider status offered me increased opportunities for practicing intersubjective accountability: my personal bond with the monks and the lay Cistercian associates was strong and secure enough that they were willing to engage and at times even challenge the questions and directions of my research.³⁸⁹ Thus, my status as a long-term participant in the monastic culture did not endanger but tremendously enriched my knowing of it as a researcher.

Data Collection on the Site of Self

Similar to the monastery site of my research, the realm of my personal experience constitutes the second primary “subunit of analysis” in my case study. As such, it calls for the equally extensive and in-depth procedures for data collection. At the same time, in

³⁸⁹ My encounters with two elders of the monastic community in Conyers serve as helpful examples of such a challenge. The first encounter took place during my work in the cloistered library: While working near the shelves dedicated to the writings of the Cistercian Fathers, I saw Fr. A.’s stooped figure appear in the opening of the library stalls. He slowly walked to the same shelves, pulled out an old volume and, opening it to a particular page in such a deft manner that it was obvious that he had visited it often, chuckled, “You say that the monastery makes you feel better...cured your burnout—but (*his finger pointing to a heavily underlined passage*) how about this?” Then he turned around and left as silently as he came. The text with which he left me was the opening paragraphs of Meditation 13, by William of St.Thierry, describing such intense and dark suffering of faith that they rival the most severe accounts of burnout. The second encounter took place at the end of my administration of the questionnaire to the monastic community: I received a personal letter from Fr. M., praising me for the creation of a good questionnaire but indicating that he comes to the question of rest and burnout “from a different place” and therefore would like to have a “talk” about it. During our talk, he pointed out that the effectiveness of my questionnaire was dependent on one crucial assumption, i.e., that monks’ knowledge of rest and the process of becoming restful is a matter of their conscious awareness. “Yet,” he looked at me thoughtfully, “a truly restful monk can no longer wax eloquently about what he *thinks* about rest or what he *does* in order to rest...because he no longer thinks of himself all that much...you see (*winking at me*): he is absorbed in GOD.” Encounters with the monastery elders such as these could not have been planned or orchestrated in my data collection process; they arose from the spontaneous interaction between me, members of the monastic community, and the questions of my research. Yet, the discrepant evidence that they provided played a crucial role in the ongoing refinement and even radical changes in the direction of my research.

contrast to the monastery site, the realm of the self is a deeply unusual site of data collection—not only because it has traditionally been excluded from the area of academic research, but also because it is so deceptively close. Because nothing in my former scholarly training prepared me for approaching my own life as a subject of my investigation, initially I had tremendous difficulty with data collection on this site. In retrospect, I can identify three specific problems that got in the way of my progress: first, my failure to recognize the fact that the study of my personal experience lies at the center of my scholarly work; second, my failure to differentiate the work of my “researcher”-self from the work of my “participant”-self; third, the absence of practical knowledge about how to do “fieldwork” in the domain of my own existence. These problems were not a result of an overt error on my part; rather, they stemmed from my early lack of recognition, awareness, and skill. Thus, learning to collect data on the site of my personal experience involved the slow and painstaking work of realizing and accepting the unconventionally personal character of my study, becoming cognizant of the differences between my research activities as a researcher and as a participant, and discovering specific practices that enabled me to be a scholar of my own experience.

At the beginning of the research process, however, I had no way to understand the unique challenges of collecting personal data for my research. Instead, the problems with data collection at the site of my personal experience manifested themselves as a vague yet pervasive inability to write. This inability was all the more startling because until then I considered myself a good academic writer: as a “straight A-student” throughout medical school, seminary in Russia, a school of theology and a doctoral program in the U.S.A., I took pride in my ability to write well and fast, was accustomed to frequent praise from my

teachers and peers, and had already proved my ability to produce high-quality scholarly documents in three graduation theses. Yet, my attempts to capture and unpack my experience of becoming restless in the course of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition left me stalled, lost for words, slowly typing a few sentences, only to erase them again. At first, ashamed of my affliction, I struggled with my writing alone. Growing increasingly distressed, I admitted my problems and sought advice from selected fellow students and later my teachers. While all of them were very generous with their time, encouragement, and practical advice, their help fell short of its goal. They themselves were only too perplexed at my sudden loss of writing competence.

My next destination in search of answers to my writing problems was books. I started with monographs that dealt with the problems specific to dissertation writing. Later, my reading list expanded to include books on productivity in academic writing in general. Still later, increasingly desperate, I turned to volumes about the psychology of writing and blocking as well as the memoirs of famous writers delineating the patterns and discoveries that allowed them to overcome their difficulties. I did the exercises, studied the texts, gained enormous insight into my own writing habits, needs, and wounds, and eventually reached the point when I felt I could *teach* writing. All for naught. My own writing remained painful, laborious, and ridden with anxiety. The sentences and pages accumulated agonizingly slowly—and even what I did manage to write offered little consolation, for I could not recognize it as proper dissertation prose. The first-person perspective, personal disclosure, frequent use of poetry, image, and story, and the confessional character of the emerging narrative violated the dicta of the academic writing I knew.

Finally, after more than three years of struggling, having lost all pride about my writing capabilities and entering the phase of sheer panic about the prospects of not finishing my degree, I sought out the help of two formal dissertation coaches, first, a local free-lance writer in Richmond and, later, a senior consultant at a reputable dissertation training firm in California. While both parties confirmed that my messy manuscript “showed tremendous promise” and lauded my ability to write such “engaging” and “powerful” prose, both were equally at loss as to how to “turn it into a dissertation.”

What enabled me to go on throughout these trying years was the reaction of my dissertation advisors to my repeated attempts to understand the monastery’s “magic” of peace. Although their insistence on seeing my manuscript in its “as is” state made me cringe every time I hit the send-button of my email program, it was the twofold character of their response to my writing that allowed me to keep faith and effort. On the one hand, their written comments communicated genuine interest, excitement, and an enduring conviction that I was discovering something deeply valuable not merely about the peculiarities of the monastic lifestyle, but about its significance for the conceptualization and practice of theological education of clergy. On the other hand, the written comments constantly challenged me to reflect on the epistemology and method that could substantiate such an unusual, personally and existentially invested, research project. While unswervingly affirming the value of my unconventional writing and even encouraging me to “redefine the dissertation genre,” they were also relentless in demanding that I carefully articulate and defend my methodological principles, practices, and stylistic choices. Hence, after I exhausted all avenues for “fixing” myself and gave up the hope of becoming once again a fast, efficient, and pain-free writer, there came a moment when a strange, cold curiosity

came upon me: “What is *really* going on here? These accomplished scholars would not be saying these things just to make me feel good. So, if *they* can see the great promise of this work amid its glaring imperfections, maybe indeed it can be academically valid and defensible. I will figure it out—with or without a degree.”

Three turning points marked the road to the recovery of my writing—each endowing me with a greater level of awareness, appreciation, and skill at using my personal experience as a source of scholarly data. The first turning point corresponded with my discovery of autoethnography during my exploration of qualitative research.³⁹⁰ This genre of social scientific inquiry caught my immediate attention because it not only acknowledged but capitalized on the experience of the researcher as a principal source of data. Autoethnographers offered me a new vocabulary to talk about my dissertation study, a theoretical framework to conceptualize its validity and credibility, standards of quality, and criteria for its evaluation. In their writings I have found a candid and in-depth reflection on the practical aspects and possible downsides of doing research that hits so closely home: vulnerability and risk involved in self-disclosure, concerns about memory and accuracy of recall, issues of ethics and authenticity, as well as the personal paradoxes and dilemmas that arise at the intersection of autoethnographic research and life. But most of all, these

³⁹⁰ In my earlier discussions of autoethnography, I focused primarily on the scholarly texts that describe autoethnographic method for the social scientific audience. Yet, in order to be fully understood, autoethnography has to be experienced. Some of the best examples of autoethnography are not merely discussing the genre but writing it. See, for example, Michael Quinn Patton, *Grand Canyon Celebration: A Father-Son Journey of Discovery* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999); Carolyn Ellis, *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness, Health, Society, and Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum, *Cancer in Two Voices* (San Francisco: Spinsters Book, 1991). The aforementioned Carolyn Ellis’s *The Ethnographic I* is unique in its ability to bridge the genre: it is a methodological text that is written as a novel about her teaching a course on autoethnography at South Florida University. I benefitted tremendously from eavesdropping on her class.

texts infused me with a profound sense of belonging. Now, I had a name for the kind of (apparently, academic!) writing upon which I had stumbled in the solitude of my study. The deep consolation of reading autoethnographic texts came from realizing that I had found my “tribe”—a group of fine and dedicated scholars committed to exploring the possibilities of bringing the whole self to research practice.

Helpful as autoethnography was for making me realize that my personal experience is a principal source of data for my research, it did not provide me with clear step-by-step instructions for how to improve my writing in practice. In delving into the autoethnographic texts, I had hoped to come across specific guidance for making my writing more efficient and pain-free. What I found instead was the assertion that the pain and hardship involved in doing research through the lens of personal experience are normal,³⁹¹ that the guidelines for doing autoethnography come only in the form of general formats, practices, and metaphors,³⁹² and that the best thing that the autoethnographer can

³⁹¹ Writes Carolyn Ellis: “[Autoethnography] is amazingly difficult. It’s certainly not something that most people can do well. Most social scientists don’t write well enough to carry it off. Or, they’re not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives or the contradictions they experience. Ironically, many aren’t observant enough of the world around them. The self-questioning autoethnography demands, is extremely difficult. So is confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering...honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well, that’s when the real work has only begun.” (Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2000), 738.) Michael Patton, a qualitative researcher renown not only for his knowledge of the field but also for his artful storytelling of it, echoes the concern about the difficulty of doing autoethnographic inquiry: “In my own major effort at autoethnographic inquiry, the struggle to find an authentic voice...turned what I thought would be a one-year effort into seven years of often painful, discouraging writing.” (Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 89.)

³⁹² For example: Richardson and St. Pierre, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 973-76; Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*, 365-70; Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing, Ethnographic Alternatives Book Series* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996).

do for herself is to become a better writer.³⁹³ One of the pioneers of autoethnography, Laurel Richardson, and her student Elisabeth St. Pierre, point out that since each researcher and each study is different, and since the experience of the self is so central to this research, a standardized model for writing autoethnography is simply impossible.³⁹⁴ Thus, the next two turning points of my journey had to do with searching for a way of writing that would be appropriate for the unique nature of my research and compatible with my idiosyncrasies as a researcher.

Having realized that my writing difficulties were not a sign of my personal inadequacy but the attribute of this writing genre, I once more delved into the expansive and exotic literature on writing. The focus of my exploration, however, had shifted: I was no longer looking for remedial measures but for ways to grow as a writer. Among the many books I encountered, the monograph by Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer*, quickly captured my attention because of its unconventional thesis. Brande maintains that the difficulties of an average writer are anterior to any technical or organizational issues in writing; rather, they stem from a common misunderstanding of the distinct personality of the writer (or any other artist), the attitudes and habits of the character itself. Learning to write productively and well, therefore, has to do with learning what writers are like, how they function, and then learning to act in the same way, i.e., cultivating one's own "writer's temperament."

³⁹³ Carolyn Ellis advises all her doctoral students with autoethnographic projects to take a writing course and join a writing group. In doing her own autoethnographic work, she speaks about "thinking like an ethnographer [while] writing like a novelist" Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*, 330-49.

³⁹⁴ Richardson and St. Pierre, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 971.

Brande describes the personality of the writer as twofold. The one side of the writer is instinctive, emotional and childlike, an infinite source of sensitivity and spontaneity, unguarded openness and curiosity towards the world. This is the person who sees everything as if for the first time, a contemplative whose creativity and imagination are directly responsible for the birth of a story. The other side of the writer is more prosaic, practical and discriminating. This is the person that sets objectives, scrutinizes the quality of work and life, and generally is concerned with getting things done. Brande is not dogmatic in the terminology that she applies to describe these paradoxical aspects of the writer's personality. At times, she speaks of them in developmental terms, as a "child" and an "adult." At other times, she calls the child the "artist" and the adult the "artisan, critic and workman." Still at other times, borrowing on psychoanalytic vocabulary, she speaks of them as the "unconscious" and the "conscious" parts of the writer's self. What she is emphatic about it is the notion that fruitfulness in writing depends on the writer's innate or learned ability to bring these two parts into a happy and working balance: "If either element of the artist's character gets too far out of hand, the result will be bad work or no work at all." And the best way to reach such balance, says Brande, is to consider and educate oneself not as one but as two separate persons: to teach the adult artisan self to protect, nourish, and care for the childlike artist self, creating optimal conditions for its work and living; and at the same time, to train the talented but impulsive and prone to reverie and distraction childlike artist self to write regularly and on demand.³⁹⁵

While Brande's work is addressed to the writers of fiction, I found her account of writing problems and their solutions strikingly true to my own experience. She offered me

³⁹⁵ Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer* (New York: Harcourt, 1934), 19-23, 35-59, 69-79, 89-97.

with a non-blaming explanation of the ways in which I continued to endanger my own writing, by following the approaches to writing that were more focused on the conscious side of the process but unwittingly quite hostile to the work of the unconscious, childlike side. Furthermore, her exercises in “effortless writing” had an immediate positive impact on my writing ability. For the first time in a long while, I was able to produce three-to-four pages of written text in an hour of writing. (Granted, it was not manuscript text; but just to be able to write *anything* this fast again was exhilarating!) Finally and most importantly, Brande’s emphasis on the “advantages of duplicity” made me think anew about my struggle with my dissertation writing: “If a writer is two-persons-in-one, and if the lack of awareness of the writer’s dual personality and skill in working with both aspects can get in the way of one’s most earnest intentions to write, then could it also be that I as an autoethnographer am two-persons-in-one, and my difficulties in dissertation writing at least in part have been due to my ignorance and lack of ability to bring on board my other partner in writing?!” I realized that even though *in theory* I had talked about myself as both a researcher and participant in my own case study, when it came to writing, it was the researcher who sought to control the whole process. I had been doing too much at once and in the wrong order: I had been trying to write as a researcher without fully allowing myself to write as a participant!

The insight into the dual nature of my scholarly identity gave me the key to understanding the strange and irregular character of my manuscript. The messy “patchwork” of my early drafts revealed my researcher-self and participant-self at work in writing: here and there, especially in the introductory and concluding sections, attempts at theory building and literature review, I could discern the voice of the researcher-self, clear,

careful, and orderly, so familiar and comforting in its adherence to the canons of dissertation writing in my graduate school and the field of practical theology; yet in the cracks of those texts, arose another voice—now meditative and introspective, now spiritually confessing, now boldly evaluative—almost always challenging (and at times deconstructing) the established patterns of the academic writing genre in its style, syntax, and presentation on the page. It all made sense now! I felt like I was present at the reading of the book of Genesis in an introductory Old Testament course, beginning to identify the presence of the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), and Priestly (P) literary sources in the text. Yet, unlike the graceful arrangement of Genesis, my manuscript bore the evidence of fierce editorial wars at its internal compositional seams. The participant wrote when the researcher was not looking. The researcher was trying to force the participant's writing into the previously known formats and structures. When the lack of fit was becoming apparent, the researcher grew increasingly desperate and forceful. When the lack of fit became absurd, the participant turned adamant about telling her story uncensored. The “zero,” first, and second drafts of my manuscript revealed the palpable presence of the two selves, working extremely hard on the page—side by side but not together—losing energy and faith in endless struggle.

Thus, the final turning point in the journey of my recovery as a dissertation writer and the intentional beginning of data collection on the site of my personal experience had to do with learning to discern and put into practice specific actions that would enable *me as a researcher* to enter into a fruitful collaboration with *me as a participant*, not competing for space and the right to speak but listening, inciting, and supporting each other in such a way that the resulting personality, the integral character of *me as an autoethnographic*

scholar, would be more capable of bringing to full realization the unusual work of my research. In order to accomplish this goal, I took the following actions. I started by reading through the entire collection of writing that I had accomplished up to date on my manuscript, identifying the sections that were written by the researcher and the sections that were composed by the participant and placing them into the two separate documents: the “R file” and the “P file.” Then, I reviewed each of these files again, individually, this time sorting them into the basic categories of interest, themes, and recurring questions. At the end of this two-stage review, it became obvious that the researcher and the participant were both very consistent in their inclination and skill.

The passion of the participant-self lay in telling the story of burnout and healing; she was very good at descriptive accounts of the monastery and theological education, and possessed superb skills of introspective observation. In contrast, the researcher-self was more concerned about the proper introduction and positioning of the study in relation to the relevant literature and especially about the issues of epistemology and methodology. At the same time, the researcher-self revealed both interest and skill for in-depth reflection upon the experiences described by the participant-self. Looking at this naturally emerging “division of labor,” I realized that it would be helpful for me to see my dissertation as a two-author monograph, with the work on the individual chapters distributed between the researcher and participant according to their best inclination and ability. A quick look at the dissertation outline revealed that the first three chapters allowed a clear-cut distribution of the writing task: the participant could craft the *Personal Narrative* of the first chapter, while the researcher could work on the following chapters in *Literature Review* and *Methodology*. Once the researcher and the participant were separated by the chapter

borders, their warring ceased naturally as each delved into their own respective work. (It also did not hurt, that the usually overfunctioning researcher had a much bigger assignment, therefore leaving her no time or energy to attempt the habitual “lording over” of the work of the participant.)

The successful completion of these chapters and their wholehearted approval by my dissertation advisor marked a new era in the relationship between my researcher and participant selves. Now, the researcher could see that the participant took on and accomplished a whole chapter of a very good quality on her own. Now, the participant could see that the researcher took on and succeeded in the work of defending the unconventionally personal character of their study within the existing paradigms of academic research. Both grew in understanding and appreciation of each other’s perspective and expertise. Both became more trusting and eager to act as a team. Most importantly, however, I myself as the primary investigator of this case study realized that the inner split of my scholarly identity into the researcher and participant selves is not merely a matter of metaphorical expression, but a methodological actuality. The difference between the two personas involved in my investigation therefore had to be reflected in the formal differentiation of my research practices: I as a researcher had to collect data from me as a participant.

While theoretically sound, such a proposition posed obvious practical challenges. As a researcher, I was getting overwhelmed at the thought of the vast and potentially limitless data that I could collect, given my full access to the life of the participant. As a participant, I was alarmed at the prospects of having no escape from the relentless gaze of the self-conscious researcher. When the researcher wears the same shoes as the participant,

then life-becomes-work-becomes-life and nobody can know any rest! In a movement of sheer desperation and desire to establish some distance, the participant proposed that the researcher treat her as a “*real* participant,” a genuine outsider to the experience of the researcher who therefore has to “interview” her, at specifically designated times. After the initial snort (“that’s ridiculous!”), it dawned on the researcher self that such an unconventional approach could in fact provide much needed focus and boundaries for her work of data collection. It was then left up to me, as a primary investigator, to devise a specific plan of action and a delivery system that would facilitate the peculiar procedure of internal interviewing in practice.

I began by reviewing the “P-file” one more time. For this review, however, I adopted the perspective of the researcher, seeking to identify the significant themes, patterns, and the underlying structure of my experience of recovery from burnout, as it had been explored and recorded during the times when I wrote in the participant-mode. Then, on the basis of this preliminary analysis, I began “clustering” the emerging participant’s ideas around the three primary Issue Questions of my research: *What is going on* in my experience of recovery from burnout under the formative influence of the Cistercian monastic tradition? *What should we hope and pray for* to happen in the seminary, in light of the monastery’s ability to teach rest and form peaceful persons? *How might we best proceed* in the work of developing theological education as an important avenue for addressing clergy burnout, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition? The resulting “conceptual outline” of answers revealed that the participant’s report, written from unassisted memory, was thickly descriptive, specific, and insightful in some areas, yet sparse, incomplete, and rather vague in others. At this point both the content and the

direction of my internal data collection plan became apparent. With regards to its content, my internal interviewing process needed to focus on filling in the gaps of my answers to the primary Issue Questions and Subquestions of the case study. With regards to its direction, the internal interview had to aim at the articulation of the previously un verbalized dimensions of my experience and increase the range, specificity, and depth of my overall reflection.

The actuality of the interviewing process took place by means of “interior dialogue” on the page. The researcher, equipped with the Issue Questions of the case study, initiated the stage-by-stage inquiry, seeking to elicit as complete as possible a report of the transformative experience from the participant’s point of view. The participant, following the lead of the researcher’s questions, sought to *reenter* and to *recognize* her journey of recovering from burnout, literally recording her responses as they occurred in the process of remembering. It is important to note, however, that the work of the researcher involved much more than being a passive supplier of blank sheets of paper with research questions printed atop. Rather, it is precisely because the researcher herself shared in the experience of transformation, that she was in a particularly advantageous position to assist the participant in an in-depth exploration of it.

First, given her deep familiarity with the participant, the researcher did not lose any time or energy in personal introductions and establishing of relational trust: from the beginning the “interviewer” and “interviewee” enjoyed a degree of rapport rarely achieved in the regular interviewing process. Second, because of her foreknowledge of the “research situation,” the researcher was free to go for the jugular, by delving into the significant aspects of the experience at once rather than making extensive preliminary explorations of

the topic. Third, the researcher's awareness of the objective elements of my transformative encounter with the monastic tradition allowed her to play a significantly more active role in the process of eliciting of the participant's response. For example, as a researcher, I routinely introduced explicit verbal and nonverbal "cues" for the reinstatement of the original experience for myself as a participant: it may sound silly, but looking at the monastery photographs, stills from the movies, printed excerpts from monks' letters, stories, and various spiritual artifacts (icons, paintings, rosary beads, etc.) and listening to the monastic chants at the beginning of my writing session, I achieved a more intense and vivid recall throughout the entire writing. More importantly, familiarity with the experience allowed the researcher to challenge the participant when her responses were becoming too general or vague, either by pressing for progressive specificity of description ("It is not enough to say that the monastery environment was 'restorative and peaceful'...what exactly do these words denote in this context? What kinds of bodily sensations or feelings or thoughts did you have, when you were on retreat? What specific aspects of the monastery environment—time, space, light, etc.—elicited such a response in you?"), or by ferreting out the observations that the participant would rather not share ("When you think back on the Catholic practice of the closed Communion, which is upheld in the monastery, how does it go together with your saying that you feel 'at home' there? ...what impact did this experience have on your restfulness?"). Finally, throughout the interviewing process, the researcher engaged in the parallel review of other documents produced by the participant (e.g., journal entries, personal correspondence, reflections on psychotherapy and spiritual direction, poems, logs, creative essays, and other miscellaneous writing) in search for supporting or contradicting evidence to the participant's formal responses on the page.

Thus, by engaging in the practice of deliberate alternation between the researcher's and participant's perspectives on my recovery from burnout under the guidance of the monastic tradition, I gradually filled in the gaps in my initial reflection. Such "assisted" remembering enabled me to arrive at new insight and deepened understanding of that experience, bringing forth a richer, more detailed and more disciplined, account. Each "interview" lasted at least thirty minutes and up to an hour, if I was generating good, on-topic material. When I obtained complex and nuanced answers to all primary Issue Questions and Subquestions of the case study, and achieved a substantial symmetry between my account of the subjective experience of transformation into a restful person and my description of the specific elements of the monastic tradition that engendered it, I considered the interviewing process complete.

Looking back at the unusual procedures that I employed in order to collect data on the self-site for my case study reveals that my initial struggle with writing was reflective of the unique challenges of doing research that taps into the experience of the researcher as a primary source of evidence: the appreciation of the subjective nature of one's research, the realization of the researcher-participant split in one's academic identity, and the search for practicable methods of being a scholar of one's own experience. Yet, far from being merely a problem, writing became a peculiar solution to all these challenges: my gradual growth in awareness, recognition, and skill of doing the "fieldwork" in the domain of my own existence all came through the willingness to stay faithful to the practice of putting pen to paper. Writing as a researcher, I came from the place of knowing, bringing with me the habits of critical thinking, systematic inquiry, and abiding concern for conceptual clarity.

Writing as a participant, I stepped into the place of intentional naïveté, letting the familiar experience become strange and as such, be known anew. And at the end, it is the act of writing itself that allowed me to overcome the key difficulty of data collection in the realm of personal experience: it enabled me to gain access to the full spectrum of my lived experience of recovery from burnout; and in its aftermath, it left a residue of records that transposed the raw qualities of my “living human document” into the actual “field notes” that could be used as scholarly data.

6.3 Data Analysis

To make sense of the diverse and extensive evidence accumulated during the data collection stage of my research, I created a formal Case Study Database. This stage of my research took the form of reviewing and physically sorting through all my original data into three individual piles: Seminary, Monastery, and Self. The Seminary and the Monastery collections were further divided into the *primary data* (questionnaires, interview transcripts, and related documentation) and the *research notes about the data* (my observations, insights, and questions that the collected data raised for the further work of my research).³⁹⁶ Within the Self-collection, the materials were divided into the *participant’s* and the *researcher’s* writing, appended with a list of relevant documents and physical artifacts. Given that the Monastery and the Self are the “primary units” of my case study, their respective collections were very large in volume. Congruent with its status as

³⁹⁶ Separating the *actual* raw data from what I as a researcher *thought* about the data increased the credibility of my findings, by keeping me alert to the distinction between the data and my interpretation of data, and by safeguarding the possibility of my future re-inspection of these records. Robert Yin views the differentiation of the Case Study Database in two distinct collections as one critical way to establish construct validity and reliability of the case study evidence. See Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 101-05.

a “context” for my case study, the Seminary-collection, while substantial, was considerably smaller.³⁹⁷ I created an electronic “annotated bibliography” file that listed and briefly identified all sources of evidence. Such a document made it possible to view all sources at a glance and enabled easy cross-referencing between the individual collections.

While this compilation of data was not intended as a formal analytical procedure, it was extremely helpful. Since I was no longer in the rapidly moving phase of data collection, I had the luxury of approaching evidence at a pace that favored assimilation. The work of careful re-reading and re-listening took me back to my initial field observations; yet this time around I had the benefit of seeing them in close proximity to the observations that took place on other sites. Such spontaneous juxtapositions of evidence invited me to ponder correlations between various data, ask questions about their relationship to the central questions of my research, and note my repeated use of certain words that would later need to be defined as “key terms” for the study. Thus, by the end of my careful and methodical organizing, I gained not only a thorough familiarity with my original field notes and materials but also an awareness of new connections and insights into its meaning. The unassuming process of creating an efficient system for storage and retrieval of data became not merely a matter of *preparation* for analysis but a powerful means of *entering* it (all the more valuable because it started before the anxiety about doing the “formal examination of evidence” kicked in).

Following compilation of my data in the Case Study Database, the formal work of data analysis began. In retrospect, I discern several distinct stages in the unfolding of my

³⁹⁷ Fully assembled, my Case Study Database occupies two rows in a full sized cabinet, seven two-inch “Avery” binders, and four large shoeboxes.

analytical process. To begin with, I concerned myself with identifying my “general analytic strategy,” an overarching understanding about what data need to be analyzed and in which order.³⁹⁸ Since the central element of my research is my experience of recovering from burnout and becoming restful under the guidance of the monastic tradition, I made the interface between the monastery and the self a focal point of my analysis. The primary purpose of my data analysis therefore would be to understand what is going on in my encounter with the monastic tradition. To focus my analysis further, I made a decision to start data analysis with an examination of evidence that pertains to elements of the monastic culture, rather than the self. Not only is the former more tangible and as such easier to reflect on than the latter, it also has a status of higher causality in their relationships: it is the “acting” of the monastic culture upon the self that produced the experience of personal transformation. Following the inner differentiation of the *what is going on* question of practical theological reflection, I chose three specific outcomes for my analytical work: description, explanation, and interpretation of my experience. Only after developing a thorough understanding of my experience of becoming restful could I engage in generalizing the lessons learned from my case to the normative objectives and practices of theological education. Two final “issue questions” of my research—*what should we hope and pray for to happen in the seminary in light of the monastery’s ability to teach rest and form peaceful persons?* and *how might we best proceed in the work of envisioning the*

³⁹⁸ Robert Yin emphasizes that data analysis is the most difficult aspect of doing case studies: in the absence of fixed formulas and standardized procedures, the extensive and diverse nature of case study evidence can easily overwhelm the researcher. Hence, more than in any other qualitative research method, the success in analyzing the case study data “depends on an investigator’s own style of rigorous thinking.” To address this problem, Yin strongly recommends giving a high priority to identifying a general analytic strategy from the very beginning. See Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 109-11.

seminary as an important avenue for addressing clergy burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition?—would provide guidance for relating the insights derived from the study of my personal experience to the praxis of theological education.

Thinking through the specifics of my formal analytic strategy gave me a strong sense of direction for working with the voluminous and diverse materials collected during my fieldwork. While, by itself, the analytic strategy did not guarantee ease of examination, it did provide additional safeguards for its quality: by following the naturally evolving movement of description, explanation, and interpretation, I created conditions for systematic (rather than arbitrary) and thorough (rather than cursory) review of evidence.³⁹⁹ My intentional attending to each “layer” of data—from the observations about the external characteristics of transformative events to their innermost meaning—became the path towards the progressive deepening of understanding and insight.

Thick Description

The problem of developing a good narrative description is not unlike that of creating a good watercolor painting: the difficulty lay not so much in training of the hand, but in disciplining of the eye. A high-quality picture emerges from the struggle to depict what I actually see, rather than what I think I see. Thus, as an exercise in fresh seeing of my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the monastic tradition, I decided to create a “study” of a typical day during my retreat at the monastery. Making my

³⁹⁹ It is important to note that while my initial analytical decisions were based on my adherence to the revised cycle of practical theological reflection, these objectives closely parallel Robert Yin’s account of analytic strategies and techniques that characterize high-quality case studies: developing description, building explanation, interpreting, and concluding. See for example Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 208-26; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 111-22. Such strong methodological convergence between the qualitative and practical theological counterparts of my research is another sign of its rigor.

experience of *retreat* a focal point of my attention was important because individual retreats constituted the fundamental units in my interaction with the monastic tradition. Zooming in on a *single day* was helpful because it provided me with a wide-ranging but finite window into my experience of the monastery culture. Since one of the main characteristics of monastery living is the regularity of its day-to-day existence, I could be certain that setting “one day at the Abbey” as a primary organizing motif for developing my description would allow me to capture the primary elements of the monastic ethos and provide sufficient depth and detail for understanding its rest-producing effects.

And indeed, developing a thorough description of my one-day experience of retreat provided me with a remarkably effective framework for exploration of the monastic culture in a naturally unfolding order. Because the timetable is the basic constituent of the day, it allowed me to speak right away about the strikingly unconventional arrangements of the monastery time. As I followed the clock, I was prompted to explore the various physical locations of the monastery space—the retreatant’s personal accommodations, the Abbey church, kitchen and dining rooms, Bonsai garden and bookstore, and the woods—all that I visited according to the unique rhythms of the monastery day. Reflecting on the individual places led me to sketch out the details of the monastic setting in general, bringing forth the “thick description” of what I saw, smelled, heard, touched, tasted—and, as the case would be, of the startling lack of stimuli for my senses. Having described the physicality of the monastic setting, I naturally began to reflect on the primary “events” of the day: the Mass and the Liturgy, meals, as well as the opportunities for private prayer, spiritual direction, manual labor, and even shopping. And in turn, the reflection on the basic events of the day brought to the fore the final and most crucial “ingredient” of monastic living, the unique

relational dynamics and rules of conduct that characterize the life of the monastic community.

Similarly, exploring my experience of the monastic tradition through the lens of one day allowed me to discern a parallel relationship between my main narrative and a corresponding account of my personal reactions to the monastic community and culture. As I described the alternative arrangements of the monastery time and space, events of the day and patterns of communal interactions, I carefully noted their effect upon me: e.g., the quiet tingling of joy at turning off my phone, the nervousness I felt in anticipation of spiritual direction, the peaceful alertness of the Vigils meditation. In choosing to describe the monastery retreat not as an independent observer, but as a person who is actually making a retreat, I created space for making observations about the self being “under-the-influence” of the monastic culture: capturing the feelings, thoughts, doubts, mistakes, and foibles that arose within me in response to its various elements.

While seemingly straightforward, developing this description proved to be a challenging task: the narrative record of the simultaneous unfolding of my external portrait of the monastery and my introspective observations about my self was as much an exercise in remembering my experience as it was a work of re-creating it. In remembering my experience, I had to take a series of careful retrospectives of my years of monastic retreats, squinting hard to see the essential and distill it into the pattern of one paradigmatic day. In re-creating my experience, I had to struggle to put into words what originally was tacit and for the most part nonverbal, and in so doing to see it on the page anew: similar to a good watercolor study, my attempt at a high-quality cultural portrait of the monastery through the eyes of the participant made me aware of the previously unseen dimensions of that

experience. A seemingly straightforward exercise in description became a powerful way of gaining new understanding and insight.

Analysis and Interpretation

My description of one day during the retreat at the Abbey laid a solid foundation for the work of building explanation and interpretation, because it facilitated an experience of deep immersion in the data. As I sought to create an accurate picture of what was going on in the monastery, I had to go over my evidence again and again, meticulously sifting through my field notes, rereading the logs, questionnaires, and transcripts, repeatedly watching videos and movies about the monastery, listening to the recordings of music, and at the same time examining the journals, letters, essays, and poems that I wrote during monastic conferences and retreats. Such in-depth and extensive re-entry into my experience of the monastic tradition created an occasion for my intense saturation with data: during the drafting of the description I breathed, ate, slept, and dreamed monastery.

The heightened awareness of the monastic culture and my personal response to its various elements, in turn, put me in an advantageous position for beginning to see the patterns of regularity within my diverse data. For example, I saw that the card “Silence is spoken here” on a dining table, the printed recommendations for the limited use of technology left in retreatants’ rooms, the monks’ pre-dawn rising time, the intentional patterns of light in the Abbey Church, and the religious art displayed throughout the retreat house—different as they are—belonged to the same “class of things,” the data that pertained to the alternative arrangements of the monastery *environment*. Similarly, I realized that the hinge of the monastic day, the Liturgy of the Hours, the private prayer of *lectio*, the volunteer work in the kitchen, and spiritual direction, and my outdoor walks—

again, despite their dissimilarity—belong to the same “class of *practices*.” While I chose not to use the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS),⁴⁰⁰ I worked systematically and carefully through my whole monastery database, noting the similarities and differences among the various kinds of data and clustering them into the appropriate groupings. As a result of this extensive process of “disassembling” and “reassembling” of data, I arrived at four salient categories: I began to see that the monastery’s restfulness and peace had something to do with the alternative patterning of its *Environment*, *Practices*, *Community Life*, and *Texts*.

It is important to note that I arrived at these categories gradually, and only through a messy and iterant process of discernment, testing, and ongoing revision. For example, the more explicit categories of *Practices* and *Texts* emerged relatively quickly in the analytic process, but the more tacit categories of *Environment* and *Community Life* took a while to emerge. Some of the original categories that I first identified and later discarded were, for example, “values,” “arrangements of the monastic space,” “architecture of the monastic time.” My key criterion for ascertaining the validity of each category was whether or not it could support the increasing complexity of all the data that I collected. For example, if I could identify an element of the monastic culture that could not be incorporated into any one of the initially identified categories, then this fourfold skeletal frame was obviously missing a category. In contrast, if I could discern the aspects of my personal response that could be placed into more than one category, then the individual

⁴⁰⁰ For a helpful reflection on the benefits and disadvantages of using CAQDAS, see Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 179-81; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 164-74. (Creswell’s reflection also includes a brief assessment of the four most popular programs: Atlas.ti, NVivo, Maxqda, and HyperRESEARCH.)

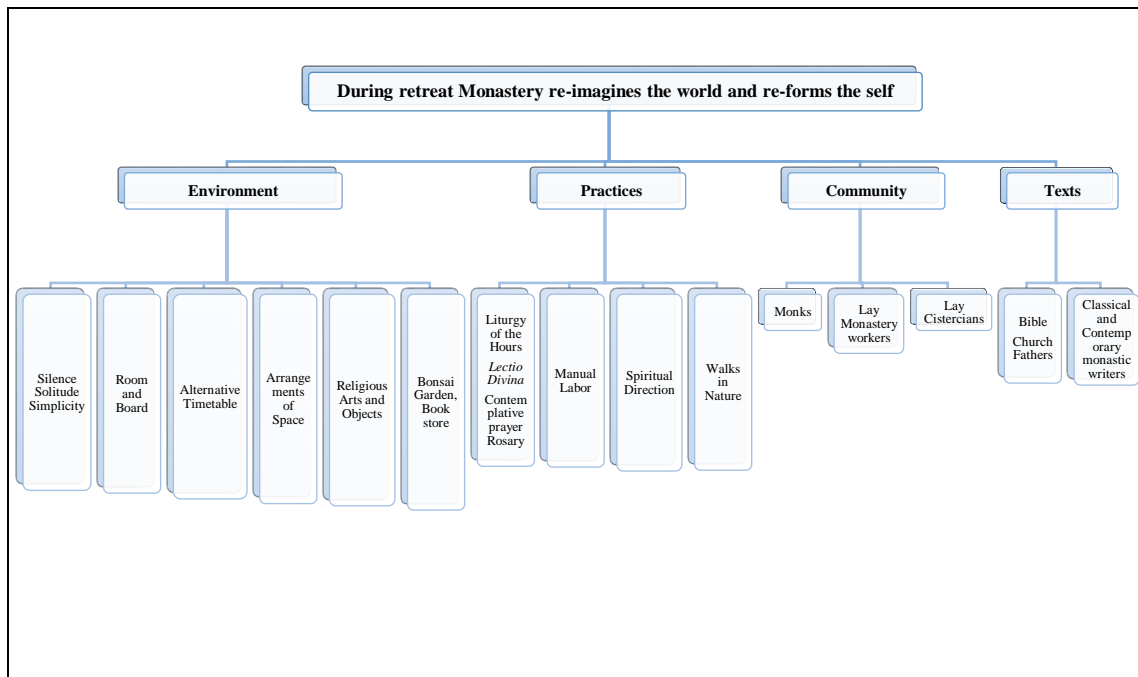
categories themselves were in need of further refinement. The high number of “misfits,” “overlaps” and other “glitches” between my data and my analytic categories warranted the revision of the whole scheme. Once tested and proved reliable, these categories served as the foundation for development of my explanatory and interpretive narrative about how the alternative arrangements of the monastery environment, practices, texts, and community create rest and peace for the monastery visitors.

I started my narrative account by zooming in on each of these four categories individually, trying to explain what specifically about these facets of the monastic living made them so restful for me. I concluded my story by stepping back and looking at these categories together, trying to discern the larger pattern of meaning that I could use to interpret what was going on in the monastery “gift of peace.” This latter part of my analysis revealed a twofold underlying theme that captured the more powerful, if hidden, reasons behind the restorative and peace-producing effect of the monastery on me during the short duration of retreat: the alternative arrangements of the monastery environment, community, practices, and texts *re-imagined the world* for me as a more peaceful place, and they *re-formed my (usually restive) self* into a more peaceful being.

Thus, by answering the “what is going on” question on the level of formal description, explanation, and interpretation, I was able to attend to my data in a systematic and logical manner. Each round of reflection built on the other, leading to a gradual distillation of meaning: the voluminous stacks of raw data were gradually reduced to the smaller set of 3x5 substantive notes, which in turn were gradually converted into the visual matrix of the basic analytic categories and the central theme that depict my insight into the nature of the monastery peace. Figure 3 presents an excerpt from one of my final analytical

diagrams: the lowest tier represents the collection of my initial *descriptive observations* about the monastery culture; the middle tier identifies four key *explanatory categories*; and the single box of the highest tier states the main *interpretive theme* that emerged from my analysis.

Figure 3. Schematic Presentation of Analytic Categories



Analytic Generalization

Having gained insight into the monastery's remarkable ability to offer an experience of profound restfulness to its short-term visitors, I moved on to the subsequent level of analysis: an in-depth reflection on how the lessons learned from the monastery could inform the praxis of theological education of clergy. The remaining two questions of practical theological reflection—*what should we hope for?* and *how might we best proceed?*—offered guidance for this stage.

To relate the lessons learned from my experience of the monastic culture to the normative objectives of seminary training, it was necessary to understand the monastery's effectiveness in educational terms. To do so, I brought to bear Elliot Eisner's conceptual framework of the "three curricula that all schools teach"⁴⁰¹ upon my newly gained knowledge of the monastery environment, practices, community, and texts.⁴⁰² His reflection on the "explicit," "implicit," and "null" curricula that are taught by all educational institutions (whether they are consciously aware of this fact or not) helped me understand that the monastery's remarkable ability to teach rest and form peaceful persons can be attributed to the astonishing intentionality of its teaching. The contents of the monastic texts, the message conveyed by the monastery's arrangements of environment, practices, and arrangements of its community life, and the deliberate limits that monastic culture imposes on the use of technology, social interaction and pace of life could be seen as the monastery's unique avenues of teaching, its unusually well synchronized "curricula": explicit, implicit, and null. Thus, educationally, the monastery can be seen as a particularly effective institution, a peculiar "school of peace."

Correspondingly, if the monastery's gift of peace is not a matter of "monastery magic" but an outcome of the objectively discernible scaffolding of its institutional values,

⁴⁰¹ Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 87-107.

⁴⁰² It is important to note that in seeking to conceptualize monastic living in educational terms, I shifted both the direction and the logic of my analysis. Whereas in my initial round of analysis, I focused identification of similarities and differences among the data, sorting them into the appropriate categories (*categorical analysis*) and I allowed those categories to emerge naturally from the data itself (*inductive logic*), during this second round of analysis I intentionally sought to establish connections across all existing categories (*holistic analysis*) and I relied on the categories provided by the external theoretical model (*deductive logic of analysis*). The intentional combination of the two analytical approaches further increased the rigor of my investigation.

structures, and practices, then it can be re-created in another context, via imitating such values, structures, and practices. It appeared, therefore, that my constructive proposal for sharing the monastery peace with the seminary students should be programmatic in nature: I would need to delineate the patterns of institutional reform for theological education of clergy so as to match the monastery's effectiveness in teaching rest and forming restful persons. Hence, a tripartite hypothesis about the broader significance of my first-person case study seemed to suggest itself:

- A. *The Monastery helped me to recover from burnout, because in the peculiar arrangement of its environment, practices, community life, and texts, it functions not unlike a particularly effective school, teaching rest and forming restful persons.*
- B. *If the Seminary becomes more like the Monastery school of peace, then it too can teach rest and form restful persons more effectively, and in so doing become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout.*
- C. *Therefore, my constructive proposal should be programmatic in nature, imagining specific patterns of institutional reform for theological education of clergy, so as to replicate the qualities of monastic environment, practices, community life, and texts in the seminary teaching.*

This was a deeply compelling hypothesis for several reasons. First, the notion of the monastery as an educational institution, central to my theoretical suppositions, had strong connection to the theme that is long-honored within the monastic tradition itself: throughout their history, monks themselves speak of the monastery as a school (e.g., School of Love (*Schola Caritas*) or School of Lord's Service (*Dominici Schola Servitii*)). Second, the direction of my argument had strong affinity with contemporary developments in theological education: a growing number of theological educators speak about the need for seminary's institutional reform, not infrequently describing it in terms of recovery of

spiritual formation and religious practices. Third, the shared connection to the Christian religious heritage makes a proposal for replicating monastery peace in the context of seminary training appear as a theoretically believable option: both institutions deal with the explicitly religious meaning, uphold the importance of individual and communal religious practices (e.g., liturgy, communal worship, personal spiritual disciplines), and rely on the central Christian religious texts (e.g., the Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, and classical and contemporary theological tradition). Thus, it seemed reasonable that discovering the effective “institutional recipe” for the monastery’s gift of peace would merit the effort of creating similar conditions in the seminary with the intention of attaining similar positive results.

Yet, I was hesitant. For one, the belief that I am right does not come naturally to me; I feel more at home in the realm of self-doubt, prolonged discernment, and careful deliberation even over already established conclusions. These personal tendencies were further exacerbated by my diligent adherence to Robert Yin’s repeated reminders to assume one’s biases, monitor one’s blind spots, and make it a habit to earnestly challenge one’s own interpretations. According to Yin, good case study investigators must work hard not to prove but to *disprove* their own hypotheses: if an initial hypothesis fails, it was erroneous all along; if it stands, it will be all the stronger for having been considered against the possible rivals.⁴⁰³ Additionally, I had abiding reservations about the practical challenges of

⁴⁰³ For Robert Yin, the practice of attending to the rival explanations in qualitative inquiry in general and case study method in particular is a crucial determinant of quality. In his work he discusses various kinds of rivals that can threaten the primary hypothesis, and develops a detailed typology of rival explanations. See Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 112-14, 18-19; Robert K. Yin, "Rival Explanations as an Alternative to "Reforms as Experiments", in *Validity & Social Experimentation: Donald Campbell's Legacy*, ed. Leonard Bickman (Thousand Oaks: Sage publications, 2000).

adopting the institutional values, structures, and practices characteristic of the monastery living in the seminary context: while in theory such a proposition was deeply attractive to me personally (who in theological education would *not* desire at least a less frenzied pace of living and teaching?), I had a hard time imagining how the traditional monastic ideals of silence, solitude, and obligatory prayer seven times a day, and manual labor (to name just a few) could be embodied in the contemporary seminary context.

Finally, there was something about the data themselves. While I was working hard on putting into words the details of my recovery from burnout under the guidance of the monastic tradition (an inherently positive transformation!), I was becoming increasingly aware of the darker side of the monastery story: my journal entries and poems, my personal correspondence with the monks and fellow lay Cistercians, especially in the later years, revealed an emerging array of negative emotions, spiritual difficulties, intellectual confusion, and numerous physical ailments. So it appeared that even as the monastery made me feel better, in some very real ways it also made me worse! At the same time, I had gradually begun to accumulate data that bore witness to the redemptive characteristics of seminary teaching: some of my later diary and log entries also showed that theological education endowed me with relationships, resources, and skills that helped to sustain me during the darkest parts of my journey. So it appeared that even as the seminary was responsible for my burnout, it also in some very real ways contributed to my recovery!⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁴ Interestingly, during the years of my research I also received some confirmation of the value of mainline Protestant theological education from a place least anticipated—the monks themselves. For example, shortly after I completed the work of my data collection at the monastery site, I was contacted by the monastery librarian, Br. G., asking me if I could help facilitate a formal connection between the monastery library and the University's Woodruff Library. I thought he made a mistake and informed him that it was the Pitts Theology Library that housed the theology collection and that I would be happy to contact them on behalf of the monastery. He smiled and insisted that while connection with the theology library would be beneficial, what the monks really wanted was access to the University library. Similarly, several years later I was

I resented these discrepant data. They messed up my orderly suppositions and introduced unsettling complexity and convolution into my thinking. In their presence, I could no longer argue that the seminary went completely astray and that the monastery had all the answers. I corralled these data and my extensive research notes on them into a separate shoebox and labeled it “for later”; yet, in my heart of hearts I was beginning to suspect that these data belonged to “now.” Confusing as they were, they too spoke truth about my transformation into a restful person. Listening to my disquiet and unease about the freshly minted hypothesis, I had a burning realization: the case of my recovery from clergy burnout under the guidance of the monastic tradition had to be reopened. Hence, once more I went back to my data: with fear and trembling (*what am I going to do, if I kill the only hypothesis I have?!*), I opened the box that contained the evidence that could deeply challenge or even potentially destroy the proposition which I had labored so hard to birth.

Development of the Rival Hypothesis

For the work of developing the rival hypothesis my analytical process remained the same. I used the same dual approach to examination of data (categorical and holistic), applied the same twofold logic (inductive and deductive), and followed the same overarching strategy (moving from thick description, to explanation, interpretation, and finally analytical

contacted by the novice teacher, Br. C., asking my help in identifying and connecting with “good teachers” for the monks, professors or doctoral students who could come to the monastery and give a presentation on spirituality, or scripture, or Fathers of the Church, etc. While my work of facilitating connections between the monastery and Emory’s Woodruff and Pitts libraries, the Graduate Division of Religion and Candler School of Theology could be seen as a mere sign of “effectual reciprocity” between me as a researcher and the monks who participated in my research, I interpret these events also as important indicators of the monks’ own awareness and appreciation of the character of the contemporary seminary with its intimate embeddedness in the wider university context of education, scientific research, and social consciousness.

generalization). What did change was the focus of my inquiry. This time around I concentrated my attention not on the *external elements of the monastic culture* and my immediate reaction to them, but on the *inner dimensions of my subjective experience* of recovery from burnout in response to the long-term engagement with the monastic tradition. Such focus, in turn, necessitated a more “panoramic” view of the experience: instead of reflecting on the specific characteristics of the retreat day, I endeavored to trace the major dynamics of my recovery over time.

To develop a descriptive account of my inner experience of transformation, I shifted my attention from my experience of becoming restful during the monastery retreats to the more ordinary times, my work of cultivating the qualities of monastic peace in my life upon return to the world. As a way to explore my nascent awareness of the unexpected *negative* dimensions of the monastic path to peace and the equally surprising *positive* aspects of the seminary training in relation to my recovery from burnout, I formulated two paradoxical questions: “What are the specific ways in which my search for rest under the monastic guidance had an undeniably negative impact on my immediate subjective well-being?” and “What are the specific ways in which my seminary training had enabled me not only to persevere in this journey but also to respond to its negative dimensions constructively?” The challenge of developing such a description lay not only in going against the grain of my initial impression (that it was the theological education that was largely responsible for my burnout, and that it was the Cistercian monastic tradition that helped me to recover from it), but in the very nature of those experiences. It is hard to stay long enough with the negative experiences in order to explore them in depth; harder still is the work of dealing with the feelings of vulnerability and disgrace that come with making such experiences a

focus of public research. Yet, looking at the paradoxes of my experience with curiosity and care brought me to a new level of insight: it appeared that my recovery from burnout, as it were, took place not in the monastery's hideaway from the seminary but at the crossroads between the two.

Building on the rich narrative material (the "thick description") generated during the descriptive stage of my analysis, I initiated the familiar work of sorting, grouping and regrouping the data (as before, first manually on 3x5 cards, then by sketching various arrays of emerging categories on my drafting board, and finally creating a more formal diagram on computer), trying to discern the underlying themes that could help me organize the negative elements of my journeying to rest into a meaningful pattern. As a result of this work, I arrived at four categories, each giving a name to the most salient negative dimension of my transformation into a restful person: *Exhaustion*, *Loneliness*, *Confusion*, and *Fear*.

By reflecting on the evidence that fell under each category, I came to see that the existence of these negative dimensions of my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the monastic tradition could be explained by the clash between the two very different worldviews and patterns of self-understanding: the monastic and the secular. Because the monastery's environment, practices, community, and texts were so effective in the re-imagining of the world and re-forming of the self during the retreat, the time of my return from the monastery brought my new self and worldview into an intense conflict with the worldview and the self that were powerfully imagined by the environment, practices, communities, and various texts of the outside culture. Since the nature of this conflict was not merely external but existential, meeting halfway was not an option. If I

were to experience the restfulness of the new (monastery) worldview, I had to leave behind the familiar restlessness of the old (secular) mentality. If I were to live as a new peaceful self, I had to die as a person of unrest. The vulnerability, strain, loneliness, and deep dread that accompanied my journey of transformation were the outcomes of my commitment to resist the habitual (secular) images of the world and definitions of the self. Such was the paradox of the monastic remedy from burnout: to recover, I had to go through a similar—dark and burnout-like—process, to suffer the *end of the world* as I had known it and to live through the *death of the self* that I had long believed myself to be.

In light of this understanding, the unexpectedly positive influence of theological education on my recovery from burnout began to make a lot of sense. Even though on the whole the contemporary mainline Protestant seminary lives and teaches largely in accord with the precepts and paces of the secular culture (hence, frequently putting its participants at risk of busyness, anxiety, and fatigue), it is also rooted in the Christian religious tradition whose images of the world and notions of selfhood are not unlike the ones that animate the monastic ethos. Hence, during the vulnerable time when I returned from the monastery retreat and was trying to remember the “new world” and to live as a “new creation,” theological education provided me with an environment that was non-hostile and even welcoming of the worldview and the self that I brought from the monastery. Additionally, in the community of theological educators I met individuals who (like my mentor from the *Politics of Knowing* course) were deeply aware of the inherent tensions and even overt contradictions between the secular and religious “creeds” in seminary teaching and life. Such people affirmed my search for an undivided selfhood and worldview as a deeply valid undertaking, providing much needed intellectual, emotional, and relational support for my

rebellion. Still more, theological education endowed me with extensive knowledge of various theological and social scientific paradigms, access to pastoral counseling, and the skills of detailed observation, critical thinking, and independent research. These resources were simply indispensable for helping me make sense of the intangible and deeply ambiguous experience of alteration in my worldview and self-understanding. Yet most importantly, theological education enabled me to respond constructively to the negative dimensions of the monastic transformation by forcing me to understand, on a deep experiential level, that truly significant learning experiences are also and inexorably occasions of real loss and grieving. It was the memory of the many experiences of deconstruction—the “little deaths” that I lived through during my seminary training—that kindled within me a hope of “dying onto life,” giving the courage to persevere and maintain forward momentum amid the exhaustion, loneliness, confusion, and fear of my monastic journeying.

Thus, at the end of the second round of my analysis, I had reached a truly startling conclusion: *it appeared that while without the monastery my journey of recovery from burnout could never have been started, without the seminary it would have likely been left unfinished!* Such realization in turn created a dramatic shift in my perception of the normative objectives for envisioning theological education as an avenue for addressing ministerial failure. If both the monastery and the seminary are responsible for my recovery from burnout, then “what we should hope for” cannot be defined as *institutional imitation* but rather as the work of intentional *institutional partnership*. Such partnership, however, cannot be established on the basis of external commonalities between the two. Not only are the monastery and the seminary stunningly different in their institutional praxis,

educational outcomes, and denominational identity, but it is also precisely their fundamental differences that account for the remarkable effectiveness of their joint contribution to addressing burnout. Therefore, imagining a fruitful connection between theological education and the monastic tradition calls for a careful discernment, amid their vast external dissimilarity, of a deeper correlation with regard to the internal processes they seek to sponsor. The principal normative objective for developing the seminary-monastery connections in relation to addressing the problem of clergy burnout should be an increase in the seminary's ability to engender a holistic process of spiritual formation that supports the inner dynamics of learning and unlearning that lie at the core of genuine transformation of its clergy students into more restful persons.

This new insight into “what we should hope for” in imagining theological education as an avenue for addressing clergy burnout in turn called for a radical revision of my understanding of “how we might best proceed.” Back when I believed that the desired outcome was external institutional reform, it was easy to conceptualize my constructive proposal in programmatic terms: since the focus of attention was on what needed to be “transferred” from the monastery to the seminary, it was important that I discerned specific elements of the monastic Environment, Practices, Community, and Texts that could be meaningfully related to the general curriculum and pedagogical practices of theological education. However, now that I realized that the seminary's potential for addressing burnout is closely related to its ability to sponsor the inner process of transformation for its clergy students, not via imitation but via partnering with the monastery, variations in the contextual characteristics of individual institutions of theological education became vitally important. Under such circumstances, an offer of a specific program was neither possible

nor desirable: because my knowledge of the seminary context in relation to the monastery context had been generated on two very specific locations (Candler School of Theology and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit), no matter how careful I would be in articulating a proposal for partnership, its very specificity would get in the way of its relevance for other seminaries. What was necessary then was not the development of a specific *program for action* but a deliberate work of creating a *shift in perception*. I would need to articulate a new perspective on “what is going on in the seminary” in light of the monastic understanding of the paradoxical nature of rest and the process of becoming restful. I would need to identify alternative possibilities for teaching rest in the seminary’s fast-paced and frequently rest-deficient context, and to imagine the relationship of partnership between the seminary and the monastery that does not downplay but capitalizes on their institutional and denominational differences. My constructive proposal, therefore, should be not programmatic, but paradigmatic in nature.

Hence, on the basis of the extensive second round of my data analysis, I arrived at the alternative, an expanded and more complex version of my hypothesis:

- A. *My recovery from burnout and gradual transformation into a restful person can be attributed to the dual influence of the monastic tradition and theological education upon my life:*
 - a. *During my repeated retreats at the monastery, the deep congruency between the monastic environment, practices, texts, and community life created for me an experience of rest of such intensity that it temporarily turned me into a more restful person and generated profound doubts about my existing (secular) worldview and self-understanding;*
 - b. *Outside of the retreat time, when the influence of the monastery’s “school of peace” over me was diminished, it was the tremendous resources of my seminary training that enabled me to analyze and derive meaning from my*

encounter with the monastic tradition, and to make a repeated commitment to believe and practice the monastery's alternative (religious) view of the world and my personal identity—allowing it to transform me, slowly but now more permanently, into a restful person.

- B. If the seminary can partner with the monastery and enhance its ability to sponsor and support a similar process of personal transformation for its clergy in training, then it would be able to teach rest and form peaceful persons more effectively, and in so doing it will become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout;*
- C. My constructive proposal needs to be paradigmatic in nature, offering a new way of “seeing” how, in partnership with the monastery, the seminary could teach rest not by renouncing but by taking full advantage of its existing conditions, resources, and even limitations.*

Upon a series of subsequent testing, this “rival explanation” took the place of my original hypothesis, becoming a formal theoretical supposition that guided the composing of my case study’s final report.

6.4 Composition of Final Report

According to Robert Yin, reporting case study results is one of the most challenging aspects of doing case studies. The compositional phase puts great demands on the case study investigator because no stereotypic pattern for the final report can be identified in advance; it has to be discerned in relation to the nature of the case, preferred audience, and available reporting formats.⁴⁰⁵ Given the nature of my research, I did not have to make the choice about the preferred audience and reporting format: the results of my case study had to

⁴⁰⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 141.

appear in the form of a dissertation manuscript, and my principle audience was my dissertation committee. Such lack of choice, however, did not reduce the challenge—only nuanced it. The difficulty of composing a high-quality report for my case study lay not merely in informing my readers of my findings and conclusions, but in persuading them that the deeply unconventional undertaking of studying my own case was carried out within the exacting genre of academic dissertation writing, and with the integrity, rigor, and aesthetic appeal that merit their credence.

Establishing Trustworthiness and Enhancing Communication

To meet the dual challenge of establishing a relationship of trustworthiness with my readers and to compose my dissertation as an effective “final report” of my investigation, I used the following measures. First, in my manuscript I allotted a significant space for description. The very richness, complexity, and level of specific detail in my exposition bears an indirect but substantial testimony to its accuracy: such an account could have hardly been “made up.”⁴⁰⁶ Additionally, sharing my experience by means of story allows readers to enter vicariously into my situation and relate to it from the realm of their own pre-existing knowledge and personal experience; such intersubjective testing too serves as an important means of building trust and credibility for my work. Finally, for my case study method, a careful reflection on my personal experience serves as a fundamental basis of analysis and interpretation. Hence, if I have succeeded in arriving (and enabling the reader to arrive with me) at significant analytical and interpretive insights through the movement

⁴⁰⁶ I indicate two specific locations, Candler School of Theology and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, as the primary sites for my case. Whenever possible, I use the actual names of people who were influential in my journey (with their permission). On some level, such lack of confidentiality is jarring; yet, precisely because my account is so explicit to the reader, the information it contains is more easily verifiable.

of description itself, then my manuscript did not merely “tell” what I discovered, but “showed”—in the moment of its reading—the effectiveness of the method that I purported to be using.

Second, in my manuscript I balanced the assertions of my “declarative self” with the account provided by my “reflective self.” The writing of the declarative self has to do with devising a strong compositional structure to present my empirical evidence and research conclusions. The writing of the reflective self, on the other hand, is focused on revealing how I had come to know what I claim to know.⁴⁰⁷ By sharing with the reader both sides of my research practice, I increased the transparency of my scholarship. The resulting “layered account” attained a higher quality with regards to communication and trustworthiness precisely because it was explicit not only about the conclusions of my case study but also the process whereby they had been reached.

Third, I wrote my manuscript in the first-person voice. While on the surface, using the first-person grammatical pronoun in the dissertation narrative seems to weaken its credibility (because it made my writing appear “subjective” and therefore suspect), a closer look revealed that the practice of making my subjectivity explicit did not threaten but rather increased the credibility of my scholarship. Using the first-person perspective in my writing left me no place to hide: I could not pretend to have the omniscient point of view or claim the neutrality of my conclusions. By choosing to make myself present within the text of my report, I communicated to the readers my commitment to be constantly aware of, and consciously monitoring, the influence that my unique personal perspective had upon the

⁴⁰⁷ For a helpful discussion about the importance of differentiating between the researcher’s declarative and reflective selves in qualitative inquiry, and how to strengthen such twofold presentation in writing, see Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 264-73.

practice of my research. While by itself such self-awareness did not guarantee the complete elimination of “blind spots” in my perception, the lack of it would have almost certainly indicated my failure to do so.⁴⁰⁸

Fourth, I designated a significant space in my dissertation for relating the unconventional nature of my study to an established body of theory and research, including extensive literature review and methodology sections into my manuscript. My literature review sections offer substantiation for the normative assumptions of my study (Chapter 1) and position my research in relation to other proposals for addressing the problem of clergy burnout (Chapter 3). Similarly, my methodology sections include a discussion of the qualitative component of my method (Chapter 4), an in-depth reflection of the practical theological foundation of my method (Chapter 5), and a detailed account of my research practice (Chapter 6). In doing this work, I have demonstrated not only my deep awareness of the normative, epistemological, and interdisciplinary issues raised by the unconventional nature of my research, but also my strong commitment to address them with intentionality, rigor, and ongoing accountability to the reader.

Fifth, in writing my manuscript I used the explicit criteria of quality: Robert Yin’s five “general characteristics of an exemplary case study” and Laurel Richardson’s five “standards of quality for autoethnographic research.” Following Yin, I aspired to offer a

⁴⁰⁸ In the aforementioned *Tales of the Field*, John Van Maanen presents three genres for the composition of the final report in relation to the author’s intention and voice. The “realist tales” are told from a third-person perspective, connoting dispassionate observation and impartiality in one’s conclusions. The “confessional tales” are told from a first-person perspective, making the reader keenly aware of the author’s role in perceiving and interpreting the events in the field. The “impressionist tales” offer dramatic representations of the fieldwork itself, seeking to create for the readers a sense of “being there.” (Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, 45-124.) Within Van Maanen’s typology of tales, my narrative would be classified as a combination of the “confessional” and “impressionist” accounts.

case study that is significant, complete, grounded in ample evidence, mindful of alternative interpretations, and composed in an engaging manner. Following Richardson, I sought to write in such a way as to convey a strong sense of lived experience, demonstrate adequate self-awareness, make substantive contribution to both theory and method, generate questions for future research and encourage change in praxis, and create an aesthetically appealing final report. Even if I came short of full realization of any one of these criteria, my active effort of applying them in the practice of my research communicates to the readers the level of care and discipline with which I approach the work of studying my own case and as a constant reminder for myself to produce the best study I am capable of at this point of my scholarly development.

Whereas the first five measures for establishing trustworthiness and enhancing communication had to do with my own systematic effort, the last two measures make use of the external sources of validation. Since the most novel and unique part of my research pertains to my encounter with the monastic tradition, the sixth procedure for increasing credibility of my study consists in sharing the evolving drafts of my manuscript with those who know the monastic tradition best, monks and lay Cistercians. It was important to share my findings with the monks, because they are the actual bearers of the monastic culture, who have not only an in-depth theoretical understanding but also an intimate practical knowledge of the Cistercian way. Because of their experience of living it, they have fundamental authority to substantiate, or disprove, my conclusions.⁴⁰⁹ It was also important

⁴⁰⁹ A good example of such validation was a response from Brother C., following his reading of the sections of my draft that described my experience of retreat (Chapter 7, “One day at the Abbey”) and analyzed the impact the monastery environment had upon retreatants (Chapter 8, “The Making of Retreat”). He said: “Your account helped me better understand what happens to our novices” (Brother C., personal communication, April 20, 2011). If my reflection on my monastic experience found deep resonance with the

to share my findings with the lay Cistercians. While these people are not as steeped in the monastic lore as the monks themselves, they are the best “outside” experts on the Cistercian monastic tradition. Their experience is a perfect match to the one that I seek to understand in my case study: the joy and the struggle of seeking to live in accord with the monastic values and principles in the culture that abides by very different (secular) canons. The nature of their vocational experience puts them in the strong position to authenticate, or challenge, my findings.⁴¹⁰ Incorporating feedback from the actual monks and lay Cistercians as a validating procedure produced two important benefits: not only did it serve as an important “check” for the accuracy of my perceptions, but not infrequently it also produced additional valuable evidence for my research.

The final testimony to the accuracy of my understanding of the monastic tradition came not from the people whom I met in the monastery but from the teachers, still living or long passed, whose written word guided my own search throughout these years: the vast body of classical and contemporary monastic literature. To strengthen the reliability of my case study conclusions, I sought to establish connections between the themes that emerged in the course of my analysis and the prominent themes within the monastic theology, spirituality, and practice. The specific instances of convergence between the two—e.g., the

monk’s existing understanding of a particular facet of their own experience, then, it seems to me, the credibility of my interpretations is considerably increased.

⁴¹⁰ Thanks to the significant relationships that I have with Monastery of the Holy Spirit (Conyers, Georgia) and Gethsemani Abbey (Trappist, Kentucky), I was able to share my drafts with Lay Cistercians associated with both monastic communities. These people found deep resonance and connection with my depiction of the monastery life and its impact on its visitors, saw glimpses of their own experience in my narrative (importantly, both in its positive and the negative aspects!), and repeatedly commented on the depth of my understanding of the monastic culture (Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey, *Spiritus* community, and Lay Cistercians of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, personal communication, April - July, 2013; January, 2016).

strong parallels between my own perception of the monastery as a “school” and the traditional monastic theme of monastery as *Schola*, and between my perception of the dark burnout-like dynamics in my own journey of becoming restful and the classical monastic conviction that the true rest is a result of an intense, costly, and often terrifying struggle (a kind of death of the self)—served as an indirect but significant corroboration for my evolving understanding.⁴¹¹ Together, the approval by the monks and lay Cistercians and the validation by the traditional monastic literature strengthened my case considerably, by providing external “objective” evidences to support my “subjective” observations.

The seventh and last measure that I employed to meet the dual challenge of effective communication and credibility had to do with the readers themselves. The final chapter of my manuscript, which seeks to draw out key lessons from my case study and apply them to the context of theological education of clergy, follows the unfolding of the three questions of my practical theological reflection: *What is going on? What should we hope for?* and *How might we best proceed?* By making explicit to the readers the actual unfolding of my analytical process (including the “dead end” of the proposed institutional reform that was a part of my initial hypothesis!), I provided them with ample information

⁴¹¹ For example, upon reading my preliminary description of the negative dimensions of my transformation (Chapter 9, “Return to the World”), Brother C. handed me an article by Douglas Burton-Christie, *Simplicity, or Terror of Belief: The Making and Unmaking of the Self in Early Christian Monasticism*, describing an incident of severe defeat in the life of St. Antony the Great as a paradigmatic example of the cost and complexity involved in genuine ascetic journeying. (Brother C., personal communication, December 18, 2012.) Not only did this article provide me with one of the key references for this section of the manuscript, but his very remembrance of it served as an indirect evidence that my discernment of the parallels between my personal experience and the monastic understanding of transformation was accurate: the description of the negative dynamics of my experience had to have enough similarity with the experience described in this article in order to trigger his memory of it.

for judging whether or not the results of my case study and the ensuing recommendations of my constructive proposal are consistent with the data that I presented.

The measures that I employed in the composition of my final report—building thick description, balancing the presentation of my declarative and reflective selves, using the first-person grammatical voice, grounding my research in the larger contemporary theory and research methodology, adhering to explicit criteria of quality, sharing the sections of my manuscript with living members of the Cistercian monastic tradition, and making my case analytically transparent for my readers—do not, of course, by themselves, guarantee the integrity of my research. The possibility of honest self-delusion can never be fully ruled out in my (or any) scholarly investigation. These seven procedures, however, supply my readers with a substantial amount of information for judging not merely the quality of my case study conclusions, but the degree of self-awareness, rigor, and care that I bring to my practice of “disciplined subjectivity.”

Yet, I would argue that the aspect of this study’s method to be the most convincing for the critical reader would be not my *intellectual argument* for the soundness of my analytic procedures and the consistency of my findings, but the reader’s *subjective resonance* with the experiences and insights that I have sought to describe. In the last analysis, the credibility of my unconventionally subjective inquiry would be established not solely by any amount of external “objective” evidence, but precisely because the insights and observations that I offered were recognized by the readers as “ringing true” within the realm of their own subjective knowing. Hence, *if* in reading my narrative account of becoming restful, readers find themselves spontaneously relating the results of my case study to their personal contexts of living and working, noting the similarities between my

experience and their own experiences, and pondering the applicability of the lessons learned to other settings and populations, *then* I will have truly succeeded not only in informing the readers of my findings but in persuading them in their trustworthiness. My readers' greatest validation of my work as a researcher would be the occasion when they stop being "passive reviewers" of my case and become "active participants" in the work of generalizing its findings to other contexts and populations.⁴¹²

Challenges Presented by my Manuscript to the Dissertation Genre

It must be acknowledged upfront that my work of enhancing communication and establishing trustworthiness did not come without a cost. In order to establish my manuscript as an effective "final report" for my first-person based case study, I pushed the traditional boundaries of the narrative representation associated with an academic dissertation genre. Most noticeably, I included my *personal story*, describing the onset of my burnout in the context of theological education and my gradual recovery from it under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, as a part of the dissertation text itself (Chapters 1, 7, 8, and 9). In contrast to the conventional compositional pattern, I used my subjective experience not merely as a brief, illustrative "vignette" to my research but rather

⁴¹² One occurrence of such validation was a response from my early dissertation advisor, Professor Theodore Brelsford, following his reading of the sections of my preliminary draft that described my understanding of the monastery as a "school of peace." He wrote: "I found myself constantly relating your descriptions of retreatants' experiences to experiences of seminary students. There seem to be very clear parallels. Such that the schema you develop here of the stages and dynamics of retreatants' processes of learning could be quite clarifying and illuminating for seminary faculties (including the insight that only a fraction of the learning is conducted explicitly)." (Theodore Brelsford, personal communication, August 29, 2011.) His spontaneous response to my account is deeply validating, not only because he extended the significance of my findings beyond the immediate circumstances of my study (i.e., making an independent "analytic generalization"), but also because he related the lessons from my case to theological education, the setting that I explicitly identify as the context for implementing my constructive proposal for addressing clergy burnout.

as a front and center part of the inquiry itself. Additionally, in order to create for the readers a strong sense of my firsthand monastic encounter (the experience of “being there”) in my narrative, I employed an *authorial voice, style, rhetoric, and even presentation on the page* that are rarely associated with academic writing. My descriptive chapters include “text boxes” alongside the main body of the text containing excerpts from my conversations with the monks, poetry, and diary entries that were written during my encounter with the monastic culture; and the text as a whole is shaped by my ongoing attempt at writing creative, compelling prose. Finally, I have altered the *lengths and proportions of the traditional elements of the academic dissertation* in relation to other parts of the text. Given the unconventionally subjective nature of my inquiry, I found it necessary to provide an extensive chapter relating my research to the contemporary academic literature on clergy burnout and three chapters for the exposition of my method instead of the traditional concise Literature Review Chapter and a single Methodology Chapter. Thus, while it is clear that my manuscript contains the recognizable *elements* of dissertation writing, it is also undeniable that *as a whole* it is at odds with the traditional compositional formats for an academic dissertation.⁴¹³

What kind of response can I offer in defense of the stark differences between the style and content of my manuscript and the more traditional dissertation genre?

⁴¹³ For a helpful comparison of traditional compositional formats for academic dissertation in the social sciences and humanities, see Peg Boyle Single, *Demystifying Dissertation Writing: A Streamlined Process from Choice of Topic to Final Text* (Sterling: Stylus, 2009), 99-101. Single discusses the three most popular dissertation formats (thematic, data analytic, and journal article), identifying the universal elements that are included in each format and generic templates that guide the researcher’s decisions about reviewing literature, citing sources, presenting analysis, writing and revision.

On the most immediate *pragmatic* level, I am concerned with making my unusual manuscript so rigorous and thorough, that it could fulfill or exceed the general standards of the dissertation genre and specific requirements for an advanced degree. Therefore, in my writing I seek to balance “thick description” with an in-depth scholarly analysis and interpretation. To avoid a misleading impression of overwhelmingly inappropriate subjectivity for academic writing, I provide a careful foreshadowing of the more “personal” sections of my manuscript. I acknowledge the vulnerabilities of my method upfront, develop a different kind of scholarly accountability distinctively appropriate to the nature of my unconventional inquiry, and ground it in the larger qualitative and practical theological research methodology. Finally, I relate my case study conclusions to the existing theoretical constructs in the areas of clergy burnout, monastic theology, and theological education. In every one of these steps, I strive to show that the unconventional content and writing style of my dissertation manuscript make it not a case of the unfortunate lowering of academic standards but rather an example of the uncommonly high-quality achievement of scholarship.

On a deeper level, however, I cannot help but wonder if the stark deviation of my final report from the prevalent compositional norms for academic dissertation writing is in fact a tangible outcome of my genuine attempt to draw on the resources of both qualitative research and practical theology in my research. As I showed in the theoretical discussion of my method, in-depth interdisciplinary engagement is a dangerous undertaking, because it brings genuine changes to the identity and practice of the scholar who aspires to become an interdisciplinarian. As a “native” to the field of practical theology, who for the purposes of deepening her inquiry sought to become “naturalized” in the field of qualitative research,

I have produced a dissertation that goes against the grain in both: a hard-nosed social scientist might be skeptical (if not scolding) at the appearance of my personal religious experience in the narrative; and the stream of subjective autoethnographic consciousness that permeates my “exercise in practical theology” might be equally offensive to the sensitivities of a conventional practical theologian. Caught in the middle, between qualitative research and practical theology, my manuscript looks troublesome from either point of view.

Yet, the middle is an interesting place to be. It could be a position of strength, if, by acknowledging its own limitations, it exposes the weaknesses of its surrounding positions. The unconventional nature of my narrative could be seen as a litmus strip that makes visible the problematic nature of the narrative conventions in both disciplines. As such, a contribution of my manuscript could lie precisely in the disruption that it causes to the traditional ways of writing qualitative and practical theological research. The key question about my proper responding to the deviations of my final report from the established academic conventions then should not be “how could I better comply with the compositional formats of the dissertation genre?” but “what kinds of questions does my unconventional manuscript raise about the tacit rules that govern written discourse in qualitative research and practical theology?” Two questions come instantly to mind. *For a qualitative researcher*: if the qualitative research methods, despite their diversity, are characterized by their principal objective to understand the complexity of human experience under real-world conditions, how can it be that its narrative attempts at interpretation and meaning-making ignore such a significant dimension as the researcher’s own religious experience and spiritual sensitivities? *For a practical theologian*: if human

experience is the fundamental beginning point of practical theological reflection, how can practical theologians be so distrustful of the inclusion into their scholarly narrative accounts of the experience that is “closest” to them—their own?

Written texts are the main repositories of knowledge in any discipline. Hence if some things—such as a researcher’s religious experience in qualitative research or the autoethnographic dimension of practical theological reflection—are repeatedly excluded from their written manuscripts, then those very omissions become the agenda for future generations of scholars. In this way, the formal compositional norms in any discipline affect not only what is (and is not) being said in the final report, but what is (and is not) being seen and done in the field. Writing that challenges established narrative conventions in a given discipline is a bearer of a peculiar gift: a plea to reconsider the established disciplinary norms for writing in light of the discipline’s fundamental theoretical objectives and standards of good practice. Seen in this way, the deeply personal and existential character of my manuscript is not to be viewed as an occasion of failing to meet the requirements of academic dissertation writing, but an attempt to be faithful to the deeper canons of practical theology and qualitative research. Such deviation does not negate the dissertation genre. It seeks to enrich it.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ Here, once more my heart quickens at the memory of the work and life of Anton T. Boisen. His vision from the “little known country” broke an opening in the wall separating medicine and religion with an outrageous assertion: that “certain forms of mental disorder and certain forms of religious experience are closely interrelated.” Yet, at first, the resulting puncture was appreciated by neither. Disagreeing with physicians about the purely physical interpretation of mental illness and challenging theologians to find religious meaning in mental illness, Boisen remained caught in the middle—a thorn in both sides. Yet, it is precisely his refusal to surrender either side of his paradoxical thesis, and his willingness to study and share with others, *in writing*, the painful and delicately personal details of his own “case record” that allowed him to make a lasting contribution not only to medicine and religion, but also to the theological education of clergy, the people who would come to continue his work of bridging the two worlds.

In this final methodology chapter, I described the actual research practices that I employed in conducting the case study of my own experience. I have detailed the challenges which I sought to address during the stages of research design, data collection and analysis, and the composition of my final report. In the remaining chapters of this manuscript, I transition to the presentation of the case study itself (Chapters 7-9) and my in-depth reflection on the ways in which the lessons learned in the course of my investigation could inform the practice of ministerial preparation (Chapter 10).

To signal the shift from the preparatory stage of my research to the actuality of my case study, I share an excerpt from the writings of the contemporary Trappist monk, Father Mathew Kelty of Gethsemani.⁴¹⁵ His short homily, serving as an “Interlude” between the first and the second halves of my dissertation, offers a glimpse of the monks’ own awareness and understanding of what is going on in the laity’s growing attraction to the monastery. Not only it is proper to have one of my elders speak first, but it is also helpful: Fr. Matthew seems to capture, as he always did, in just few simple words, something crucial about the nature of the monastery gift of rest—which will take me many more pages to unpack.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Matthew Kelty and William O. Paulsell, *The Call of Wild Geese: More Sermons in a Monastery, Cistercian Studies Series* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 12-15.

⁴¹⁶ Father Matthew was well known and loved by many retreatants for his wry sense of humor, deep devotion, and his post-Compline talks filled with poetry and keen reflections on the life of faith. He passed away on February 18, 2011, having not seen his small homily appear in this dissertation. I am very grateful to the Liturgical Press for granting permission to use this text in my work *gratis*.

INTERLUDE: FATHER MATTHEW KELTY, O.C.S.O.

“Come Away by Yourselves to a Lonely Place and Rest”

Some years ago, when one of the monks of the community began to articulate the hermit life in word and deed, a cartoon appeared in a popular magazine, perhaps with reference to that well-known monk. The drawing featured a bearded hermit before his cave and on either side a number of signboards with bold lettering announced, “Fresh Baked Hermits a Dollar a Dozen.” Another said, “Tours of the Hermitage Every Afternoon at Three.” Said a third, “Cassettes Available on Aspects of the Hermit Life.” Another advertised, “New paperback: *The World I Loved and Left, My Life as a Hermit.*” The amusing thing about this, of course, was how close to truth was the wit.

There is one thing certain. If you go off by yourself as a person or as a community, you can count on it: a path will be beaten to your door by people coming to see what you are up to. As in the Gospel, as here, and like Jesus, you will receive who comes. Saint Benedict says in his rule that guests are never wanting in a monastery. So, on the one hand you have people who see themselves solitary yet Christian, and therefore bound to give love and hospitality for the very people they seek to escape. Monks and monasteries catch themselves in this strange bind of being warm and friendly while acting cool and remote...

What is the point of this stand-off? Indeed, what is the point, when you come to realize, as people do, that the monks are warm and friendly, hospitable people-lovers. Like the bean in biology class, we are dicotyledonous, two-sided. So there are mysteries here. For one thing, why do monks do the solitude thing? And for another, why is there such interest in what they do, for if it is odd to go off by oneself, it is just as odd to follow someone doing that. The one happens, so does the other.

One thing ought to be clear from the outset. This has nothing to do with a lack of feeling for women. Women have been excluded from monasteries and from much traffic with monks since the monastic movement began. Then you could get away with it because there was a lot of such segregation in civil society, like the men’s bar in the Biltmore in New York where Dan Walsh first talked to Thomas Merton about Gethsemani. That

society changes is society's privilege and monks can go along with such changes because they are part of society. That does not mean that they are suddenly not misogynists. They never were that, any more than cloistered nuns are man haters because men have not been and still are not permitted in their enclosures. But, when we kept women out that was at least half of humankind, and monks have wanted to keep all humankind at a distance. The game was already half won.

It is a matter of cutting down the input, of controlling what you are subjected to, of creating a context. We desire minimal input, a quiet context, a controlled environment. That is the idea. Cut out the outer to increase the inner. More quiet than most want, less input than many can abide. More control of the environment than many opt for. Why? Because by nature, by temperament, by character, by grace, we feel called to this. Maybe we are introverts.

Perhaps we are more heart than head, more cooperative than competitive, maybe more feminine than most men or more male than most women, more integrated. Not all of us are poets or dreamers or prophets or priests or writers or dramatists or artists or dancers, but many of us are the kind of persons who could be, might be, sometimes are. That sort. Without quiet such people perish. They go mad. They wilt. They languish and die.

It is hard to have quiet in the midst of bustle and noise, even good bustle and beautiful noise. Beethoven is noise when you get too much of him—not to mention rock. When you are in touch with your heart, when you live with your soul, when you know your own depths, you become in the process more wholly human, more nearly real, with it. When that happens, even to a modest degree, something splendid takes place. Everything changes around you. The world is a different world. You do not know what it is, but you do know that it cannot be doubted. It does not have much to do with virtue, though virtue helps. It is not intelligence, or prowess in technique, though they help too.

It is more a matter of allowing oneself to be human. When this happens, signals go out. Influence is created. Aura is born. Spirit becomes manifest. You cannot possibly hide it or explain it, but you will radiate it. The place will revel in it. And people will come from miles around, not knowing what they are really looking for, but certain when they get there that they have found it. They think it is the monks and give no one any peace until they have met one, only to discover that it is not the monks after all. They are just

like everyone else. What then? I know not. God knows. Whatever it is, it is released from the depths of the human when humans are willing to let it be released.

The joy of the monk is no less than the joy of those who share what he has, for the monk knows that it is a gift and gifts do not last unless shared. The monk is no capitalist who stakes out a claim in order to sell at a profit. No, he freely spends all he has as prodigally as the God who gave it all to him. The people he flees from are the people he carries in his heart, sings for, prays for, lives for, loves, and is glad to meet.

Knowing all the while that the spring will go dry, the fire will flicker out, the vine will wither, he is beholden to grace. Without it, the world shrivels, becomes a waste, old, bitter, angry, violent, and doomed. So people come like sheep without a shepherd, a flock searching for green grass, for bread in the wilderness. Jesus feeds them, then off with them all, and he goes into the night and the hills alone to pray.

So they come to the monk, look him in the eyes and speak to him of God and ask, 'Is God?'

The monk replies, 'God is.'

And of God's love, 'Is it?'

And the monk replies, 'It is.'

'Me?'

'You.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, I am sure.'

'How sure are you?'

'So sure I lay my life on it.'

And the heart breaks in the person who cannot be contained for joy, for tears. What was known all along is known now. What was believed all along is believed now. What was too good to be true is true.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷ *The Call of Wild Geese* by Father Matthew Kelty. Number 136 in the Cistercian Studies Series. Copyright 1996 by Cistercian Publications, 2008 by Order of Saint Benedict. A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. Reprinted with permission.

PART III

CHANGING HABITS:

A CASE STUDY OF RECOVERY FROM BURNOUT UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE CISTERCIAN MONASTIC TRADITION

CHAPTER 7

ONE DAY AT THE ABBEY: COMING ASIDE AWHILE

A.M.	
3:45	Rising
4:00	Vigils
5:00	<i>Lectio Divina</i> and private prayer
7:00	Lauds (Morning Prayer), <i>Grand Silence ends, Breakfast follows</i>
8:45-11:45	Work/Study
10:00	Terce (Midmorning prayer)
P.M.	
12:00	Sext (Midday prayer), <i>Dinner and rest follows</i>
2:00	None (Midafternoon prayer)
2:15 – 4:45	Work/Study
5:20	Vespers (Evening prayer)
5:45	Meditation, <i>Supper follows</i>
7:30	Compline, <i>Grand Silence begins</i>
8:00	Retiring

In this chapter, I describe my one-day retreat at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia, inviting the reader to see through my eyes the particularities of the Trappist living and their impact on me and the sense of restfulness that I feel during that time. As such, my description is both idiosyncratic and general. It is idiosyncratic, as it comes through the lens of my individual seeing of a particular place, during the six years of my frequent visits. It is general, because my account is enriched by my encounters with other Cistercian monasteries and other lay accounts of monastic living, and also because

this particular monastery in Georgia shares in the foundational values and principles that govern the lives of the monks of the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance.⁴¹⁸ In my description, I also include a selection of excerpts from my conversations with monks and fellow retreatants and relevant records of the monastery living, as well as some of the poems I wrote during those years. To share these diverse materials, without interrupting the flow of the main narrative, I separate them from the rest of the text in designated “text boxes.” (I use the authors’ initials, unless the writing is my own.)

Because this chapter, together with the forthcoming chapters 8 and 9, is a part of the case study of my recovery from burnout and becoming restful, it has a dual orientation and purpose: the “thick description” of my monastic experience is not as an end of itself, but in service of my in-depth scholarly reflection. Hence, I first seek to take a closer look at my experience, and then step back in order to reflect on its meaning. To realize such a dual intent compositionally, I use the *main body of the text* for offering a description of my experience of the monastery gift of peace, and the *concluding section*, “Looking Back,” for making sense of this experience and gaining insight into its nature. (I employ the same compositional format in chapters 8 and 9 as well.)

⁴¹⁸ The general sense of the “daily life of a Cistercian monk” from the monk’s perspective can be found in the writings of Father Louis Merton of Gethsemani and Father Abbot of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont Andre Louf. A reflection on the daily life inside the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, from a lay perspective is offered by a journalist, Dianne Aprile. An example of the wider Benedictine pattern of the day and liturgical year can be found in the popular writings of Kathleen Norris, an oblate at St. John Abbey (Collegeville, Minnesota) and a journalist, Judith Valente. See Thomas Merton, *The Waters of Siloe* (New York: Harcourt, 1949); André Louf, *The Cistercian Way* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983); Norris; Dianne Aprile, *Making a Heart for God: A Week inside a Catholic Monastery* (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2000); Dianne Aprile, *The Abbey of Gethsemani: Place of Peace and Paradox* (Louisville: Trout Lily Press, 1998); Judith Valente, *Atchison Blue: A Search for Silence, a Spiritual Home, and a Living Faith* (Notre Dame: Sorin, 2013).

7.1 Night onto Morning: Grand Silence and Vigils

First thing I notice upon my arrival at the monastery is an almost palpable quiet.⁴¹⁹ As my friend drops me off at the monastery gate, the tranquil sounds of the land replace the busy humming of the highway. I slowly walk down Magnolia Alley, around the patch with Chinese Chestnut trees, by the Abbey Church and the hidden door to the Crypt Chapel, taking in the space and serenity of the place and almost physical sensation of inner expansion (like that of a very dry sponge when it is placed in water). I have come to cherish the walking in: as I look for deer in the woods, listen to birds (or cicadas), check how tall the grasses have grown since my last visit, and breathe in deeply the air that smells so differently at the different seasons and times of day (by that smell alone I can tell what time of year it is!), I feel as if my body and soul are transitioning to another world.

The retreat house is quiet as well: there is no radio or TV, no access to computer or phone, other goods of civilization are limited, and simple laminated cards with Rublyov's Trinity remind gently, "Silence is spoken here," setting the tone and marking "silent" and "speaking" areas of the house. And, as if placed into a strange magnetic field, my heart too begins to settle down, and my thoughts, like the excited Narnia kids who stepped into the silence of the wardrobe, grow hushed. In that quiet, the ear begins to catch other things: the gentle rustle of grass moving in the wind, a single-note song of a cricket, a dream almost forgotten.

⁴¹⁹ I start my description of the monastery day in the evening: more often than not, my "day at the monastery" started in the evening due to my late arrival; but also because the ancient Cistercian practice of rising before dawn cannot be understood, or entered properly, apart from the other equally ancient Cistercian practice of retiring with the sun.

The Grand Silence

Immediately following the last prayer of the day, the habitual quiet of the monastery grows thicker. The time of *Grand Silence* begins. It will last throughout the night and until about 8 a.m., the end of the Morning Prayer. During this time even somewhat noisier activities—like taking a shower or using an electric toothbrush—are avoided, and no word is spoken, “unless for charity.” Enwrapped in the natural calm of the evening, the monastery is settling down, and the monks and monastery guests like me are called to get ready for bed. It is hardly past 8 p.m. But tomorrow is a long day: there will be seven prayers with many activities and “inactivities” in between. To my Protestant ear, the nomenclature of the monastic daily office (*Vigils, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline*) and their various parts (antiphons, canticles, responsories) sound unfamiliar. No dictionaries or encyclopedias in view, I will just have to learn by doing.

Vigils and Choir Stalls

It is a little before 3:45 a.m. I am awake but lying in bed, in anticipation of my alarm’s confirmation that it is in fact time to get up. And, silencing its soft buzz as it is starting, I start as well: sweatshirt and skirt over pajamas, water over my face, comb through my hair, and off I skedaddle out of my room, down the corridor, and into the church. In accord with the old Cistercian tradition, the Abbey Church is at the heart of the Monastery living quarters—directly connected to the retreat house on the one side and to the monks’ cells on the other—so, one need not go outside to come to the church.

The church is dark and quiet. Its darkness is punctuated only by the light of the tabernacle and by the lamp of the reader reviewing the text at the pulpit; its quiet is highlighted by the steady creaking of the doors as people silently stream in, by the sounds

of the pages as they arrange (and at times drop) books for the liturgy, and by occasional shuffling of older feet, coughing or blowing of noses. The whole atmosphere is that of quiet, purposeful—and very ordinary—activity. It is a powerful experience to be in the dark silent church at 4 a.m., surrounded by the people who act as if it were something mundane and normal: not an event, but a habit. I briefly kneel at “my place” in the stalls, set books in order, and, together with monks and fellow retreatants, stand up and turn in stalls to face the altar. At 4 a.m. the bell issues a deep sound, and with the earliest invocation of the day “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise,” the office of *Vigils* begins. There will be three “acts” in this office: first and second Nocturnes with a thirty-minute silent meditation tucked in-between. Each Nocturn consists of three psalms and a reading, first from the Bible and second from the Church Fathers or some spiritual writer. We turn in choir stalls one more time and begin chanting psalms, alternating sides with people in the choir stalls on the opposite side of the church. Choir stalls look unusual to my Protestant eye: body-tall dividers mark individual sitting spaces along the row and conveniently hinged seats accommodate frequent sitting and standing during prayer. The thirty-minute meditation follows immediately after the first Nocturn reading. During this time the lights go off. The prospect of sitting in silence in the dark church for a thirty-minute stretch around 4 a.m. seems daunting, yet, in reality I rarely feel sleepy during that time—there seems to be some strange and strong energy coming from forty some people meditating together. So, I pull my hood over my head and settle into the dark silence of the church.

Vigils is my favorite office of the day—and at times, the most dangerous one. The silent calm of the night bespeaks a rest that only the undivided heart can know: prayer is the sole reason for me to be up at this hour. And as I pray, insulated from the concerns, anxieties, and desires of the day, some of that same dark silence of the church seeps into my heart, and it tastes passivity that is intensely and unmistakably active, and for once in the whole day I am able to avoid the confusion of being alive and being active, and to know *by experience* that my being does not depend on my doing. Still, *Vigils* keep me honest: when the weekend visit extends to a week-long (or beyond) stay, the nightly watch with its nocturnal endeavors quickly begins to lose some of its charm: I am given a chance to face the wavering of my fidelity. Even more, I can misuse the power of *Vigils*: there is enough driven willfulness in me to keep rising for *Vigils*, even when my body cannot support such “devotion.”

<p>– Father, I have pretty much slept through the whole retreat...could not even read any of my spiritual books... – (<i>smiles</i>) ...well, sometimes, sleep is the most spiritual thing you can do...</p>

With some variations, depending on the day and season of liturgical calendar, the entire office takes about an hour. And around 5 a.m. everybody is free for the time of personal prayer and *Lectio Divina*—or, for falling dressed back into bed to catch some sleep before the next office comes around. Today I stay up. I get my mug and come to the kitchen to make myself a cup of tea with milk. Now I am ready to go back into my room and pray “in secret.”

Lectio and Room

Sometimes translated as “divine reading,” *lectio divina* lies at the core of monastic living. Such translation is as helpful as it is misleading. That, perhaps, is the real reason why monks continue to use the Latin term for this practice: not in order to hold onto the “old

ways,” but to allow the unfamiliarity of the Latin to stop us in our tracks of habitual ways of reading, which emphasize speed, volume, and mastery of material. The reading of *lectio* is not reading “about divine matters,” much less reading “from the divine perspective,” but letting the divine mystery confront, comfort, and at times heal us, in the process of our intentionally unguarded opening of ourselves to the word.

I open the *Song of Songs*, the book that has been regarded as “Cistercian territory” in the Bible—and the one that makes me most uncomfortable. I might as well, for the whole

– Brother, I have run into a problem with my *Lectio* practice...I used to read the entire bible every year, and now two years have passed and I am hardly moving...
 – (*smiles silently*)...I came to the monastery nine years ago...I started doing *Lectio* on New Testament...I have just started First Corinthians...
 – But how do you read the whole Bible?!.
 – (*smiles*) I have not read the whole Bible yet...
 – ???
 – (*laughs heartily*) yea, I have not read the whole bible yet...(*grows serious*)...you don’t *need* to read the whole Bible...(with hesitation) you have to live...it has to be lived...you start living before you finish reading... (*smiles again*) it goes hand in hand.

process of *lectio* makes me uncomfortable as well. This “reading” is done at deliberately, crawlingly slow speed—less of a snail, and more of a vine tendril: in November 2008, at the recommendation of my spiritual

director I started this book in *lectio*; today, June 2, 2010, I have arrived at the third verse of chapter 3. This is *not* how I usually read. But there is more to be uncomfortable about: in *lectio*, I am not to go after the critical grasp of the text; rather, I am to stay quiet and docile to allow myself to be grasped by the words of the text. It is not the text that is being studied (through the lens of my experience and training (as at times of very necessary formal exegesis); it is my life that is being looked at, reflected upon and interpreted in light of the text. Such encounter feels inherently unsafe. But there is still more. The four-fold movement of *lectio*—simple reading of the passage (*lectio*), meditation on the text (*meditatio*), responding in prayer (*oratio*), and final resting in God’s presence

(*contemplatio*)—centers on one question: what is Jesus saying to me today? Just like that. Not a hypothetical “what would Jesus do?” or a humble “what do we discern to be God’s will in this situation?” but bold and unapologetic and extremely suspicious conjecture (complete with unpleasant ecclesiastical memories of “God told me” encounters) that brings to the fore the level of immediacy and intimacy that I would much rather stay away from.

These feelings of insecurity and discomfort are real—so real that my *lectio* is best done when my usually dominant mind is still a bit sleepy. The *Grand Silence* of the house stands in the way of my running after some “pastoral care emergency,” the simplicity of the room ensures that I have no email to check, no bathroom to clean, no dishes to do, no commentary to consult, and my travelling state renders the luxury of not having to choose with which pen and in what notebook to write in (there is only one piece of each). Otherwise—I know this from experience—in my desperate desire to ease my discomfort, I become shrewdly, stunningly creative.

But the monastery room is indeed too bare as far as good distractions go: one bed, one reading chair, one desk with a stool, two lamps, the Bible, the Rule of St. Benedict, and guidelines for retreat, in English and Spanish, that emphasize quiet listening to God—and not smoking. And in that narrow space of utter simplicity and silence I am given a chance to experience the respite of surrendering my right to speak (and responsibility to have impressive ideas that are communicated in remarkable ways), to observe how sharp this slow reading can be, and to discover a Presence that listens and understands—and usually has more patience and compassion and love for me than I have for myself—and then speaks the word that in the depths of my heart I recognize as true. And I can chew on

this word, like on a good piece of beef jerky, for the whole day. (And yes, there are days when the text remains quizzically silent: sometimes, it is due to something that I do to hush it; at times, because of something that I do to “grow deaf”; and still at other times, it is just the way it is, the mystery of the living word that remains free to speak—or not.) I spend the last minutes of *lectio* resting silently in God. The bell is ringing again: *Lauds* will start in less than 10 minutes.

Lauds and Mass

The Morning Prayer of *Lauds* marks a brighter beginning of the day. The name of this prayer means “praise” and thus conveys its main emphasis: in contrast to *Vigils*’ watching and waiting in the darkness, *Lauds* is dedicated to worshipful adoration as the first lights of the day stream through the stained glass windows of the church. “O God, come to my assistance... O Lord make haste to help me” opens the office, and we turn in stalls and bow: “Praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, the God who is, who was and is to come at the end of the ages.” The remaining offices of the day will start with this simple invocation, which John Cassian thought to be a perfect prayer for all circumstances. By itself, the office of *Lauds* consists of three psalms, reading from the Epistles and the Gospels, a short homily, the *Benedictus* (the song of Zechariah from Luke 1:68-79), petitions, a beautiful sung commendation to Mary, the Lord’s Prayer, and a short concluding prayer followed by request of God’s ongoing blessing: “May the Divine assistance remain with us always—And with our brothers who are away. May the souls of the departed through the mercy of God rest in peace—Amen. Let us bless the Lord—Thanks be to God.” In this monastery, *Lauds* is integrated with the Mass: the celebration of the daily Eucharist is placed at its center.

And here arises the greatest tension for the non-Roman Catholic visitors of the monastic house: “Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those Churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion” (*CCEO* Canon 671, § 3 and *CIC* Canon 844, § 3). There are different opinions on this issue, even among monks, but the reality of the Canon law remains—and governs the life of the church. Early on in my relationships with the house, torn between my desire to respect the law and my aspiration to receive Communion, I turned to my spiritual director for guidance, and he responded with a gentle if mysterious, “I think it would be better for you not to partake.” With one exception, I have not.

Over the years, the content of this tension has evolved—from deep emotional pain of being invited to come to the house yet denied the meal (in response to which I chose the very last seat on the outer row in choir stalls, wherein I stood and prayed, and at times cried, for Christian unity during every Eucharist, the most earnest prayer I’ve ever uttered on this subject, to a deeper recognition and reconciliation of being a part of the truly risen *and* even now truly wounded (with “his hands and his side” to prove it), active *and* aching, body of Christ—but its basic character remained the same. It is still a tension. Some days its strain wears on me to a greater degree than others; but overall, I have come to see and appreciate the stabilizing role that this tension has on my life with God and relationship with my Roman Catholic siblings, on my understanding and longing to receive, and be, in Communion, and consequentially on my work as a pastor and theologian—I have come to see that it *has been* better for me.

So, when the Eucharist comes, I get up and go with everybody else to the priest, praying especially for the person who happens to be receiving the host in front of me—we are one body—and I cross my arms over my chest and ask for a blessing. And that light touch of the priest on my forehead does something to my ears, and maybe to my heart, and I hear anew the old words of the Benedictus: “Because of the compassionate kindness of our God...the Orient from on high will visit us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

*Abbot's hand drew a cross
on my forehead
Our skins touched,
parched pieces of rice paper
Our lives touched—in shared longing
for the Living Bread:
“Will you give me a Blessing?”*

*...of Remembering
—that even as the unity of our
fullness is not realized, the unity of
our hunger
is already here—
That is enough for me.*

7.2 Day: Lauds, Little Hours, and Work

Breakfast and Cistercian Eating Traditions

With four hours of prayer under my belt, I am ready to eat. The kitchen is set up buffet style—hard boiled eggs, bread and butter, oatmeal and different kinds of cereal, fresh fruit and an impressive array of pastries. Father the Guestmaster offers a blessing, turns on a recording, and the room fills with tranquil sounds of Gregorian chant. While a “speaking

“It is amazing how deeply you get to know people, when you spend enough time with them in silence!...” ~ M-E.V.

dining room” is available, traditionally meals are taken in silence. The steady rhythm of monks chanting gets in the way of my habitual “eat-n-run” attitude and takes the edge off the strange, at first even unnerving and awkward, experience of sitting with three other persons at the table, bereft of the ordinary hum of

social niceties. By now, however, I no longer feel the strain, only tremendous relief, of being with, and getting to know others, in silence.

Cistercian eating habits are simple—and as different from the dominant culture today as they were in the twelfth century. They emphasize moderation, practice fasting, and don't eat meat, unless ill or on Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and the fourth of July (a unique feast for the American Trappists). Traditionally, mid-day dinner is the largest meal of the day, and it is supplemented with a simple breakfast and frugal supper. The nourishment that meals offer is twofold: while the community is eating, an assigned brother reads a passage from some spiritual writer.

For us retreatants, eating accommodations are not as abstemious. While vegetarian fare is available upon request, meat and fish are served regularly, and coffee and tea, fruit, peanut butter, bread, jelly and more than a generous collection of sweets are available throughout the day—and kind ladies in the kitchen are often trying to “upbuild” my frame with some tasty morsel. Still, it is an adjustment. I have never gone hungry in this place. But I have never failed to realize how much freedom I have “out in the world” with respect to food—and how little of it is left after I give into my cravings, moods, and exaggerated notions of my need for nourishment. And I discover, at the end of my stay, the pacifying effect of this intentionally limited, slow and somewhat repetitive way of eating on my spirit—and digestion.

The Workday

Following breakfast, the activities of the day begin. For monks, the upcoming hours will be filled with work, especially manual labor. I too will work some with my hands, in the kitchen or bonsai garden or wherever else extra help may be needed, in my attempt to

supplement my meager monetary donation and to stay faithful to the charism: there is nothing like the dirt under my fingernails to ensure that I don't attempt to "climb up to heaven" but walk my spiritual journey with both feet planted on the ground. I will also work on my dissertation—laptop on a plastic dinner tray on my lap, papers on my bed, and a cup of green tea on the floor—and be surprised, once again, by how easily writing comes to me in a simple monastery room that lacks my special ergonomic chair, keyboard and mouse, collection of books, and a stash of Triscuits and cheese, by the respectable quality and volume of the manuscript, and by the fact that my wrists rarely hurt afterwards. Yet, another type of work is in store for me: facing the feelings and thoughts that have been denied hearing for days, and months, and maybe even years, which begin to surface and speak when my tongue grows silent—and coming to terms with the tremendous and terrifying prospect of being loved for real and of being called to love back. Retreat, I quickly discover, does not remain peaceful for long. There are seeds of unrest, and even war, that I carry within me, and they begin to sprout on the clearer soil of the monastery ground.

So, I go back to my room. I listen and write—and try to write the unrest out of me. I stay put (the hardest of tasks!) and let all those things, unpleasant and painful and downright scary, come and work on me. Or, I take my flute and go into the Pine Sanctuary across from the old Monastery Bakery and take solace in playing—with numerous start-overs and wild shrills of unskilled blowing—when nobody is listening. These hours, much like the discipline of *lectio*, are vulnerable times. Even as I came here to stay, there is enough in me that wants to run away—not literally *out of* the monastery (that would be too obvious and correctable), but in more subtle ways, *within* its boundaries—to spend my

entire day in the kitchen and earn the praise of being a “good girl,” or head for the bookstore to “collect bibliography” for my dissertation research. There is a reason why I chose not to listen to those feelings and thoughts in the first place, as there is a reason why I avoided taking seriously my longing for, and my dread of, love. I am not stupid, just scared stupid. Fortunately, the challenging hours of the day are interrupted by the *Little Hours*.

Little Hours: Terce, Sext and None

The offices of *Terce*, *Sext*, and *None* are called “little” because they are short and changeable. Not all of them are held in the church: monks pray them in their work places, and the guest master leads the prayer for visitors in the parlor of the retreat house. Each

“...when bell rings, you just have to get up and go... Benedict says, “Don’t cross the ‘t’, nor dot the ‘i.’ ...*(smiles)* it is easier said than done, but it is not impossible. Once I was working on a manuscript for a publisher and was up to the deadline...hours...*(smiles)* I left it...at the end, they gave me an extension, but if they didn’t I would have had to take consequences...*(silent for a while)*...this way...gradually...over time...your sense of how important you and your project—that your project is more important than everybody else’s!—is broken...you get to realize that you are like others...this way, I think, we can learn humility...”

~
Br E.

office consists of three gradual psalms, a short reading and a prayer. The whole thing takes 10-15 minutes. Short as they are, these times offer me an opportunity to stop in my

tracks, to remember that I am no longer *completely* scared, and to check in with myself: do I really need to be standing in the bookstore right now, scanning several books at the same time, looking at pewter crosses and monks’ fudge? Do I really need to be talking about life and monks and my dissertation to this, undoubtedly very nice, lady in the welcome center? Sometimes I do. More often, I don’t. It takes a lot of practice to discern between the work that needs to be done and the one that must be left undone, or even to remember to stop to discern—and then, there is the actual work of stopping: of releasing myself from the grip of activity (and loosening mine), of peeling off my being from my doing and walking away

without turning back. This does not come naturally to me. But once the arduous task of letting go is accomplished, I taste the rest of having my hands and heart empty for a little while.

I like being in the church after *Terce*. Empty of people, it is filled with light. Now, that I don't have to tend to the liturgy—making sure that my books are opened on the right page, that I am chanting with the correct side and in the same cadence with monks, and bowing to the “Praise the Father”-s—I can take an unrushed look at the church. It is breathtakingly spacious and beautiful with that austere beauty which is created by light and cement and unoccupied space rather than by any signs of human décor. In fact, it is precisely the stark lack of decoration that speaks to me in full volume. The blue and rose colors of the stained glass windows infuse the nave with a soft blue light, while the golden windows of the sanctuary gently point towards the “center stage” of the church: a large rectangular altar table cut out of stone with a simple cloth on its surface, a curtained tabernacle, hiding the Blessed Sacrament in its womb, is behind the altar and lit at all times, a simple metal crucifix hangs above the altar. A row of simple chairs encircles the space. The softness of colors, the symmetry of the objects in the sanctuary, and the beautiful symmetry of the church's pointed arches too, are deeply calming. High above on the main (East) wall of the church is the stained-glass icon of the Virgin Mary, a beloved patron of Cistercians, almost dazzlingly bright as the rising sun looks into the church. The stained glass windows around the church “talk back” to Mary in various shades and colors which change throughout the hours of the day and seasons of the year, as if a ceaseless liturgy of light is going on—solemn, splendid, silent—into which human worship is “plugged in” seven times a day. Being in that light pacifies me, makes me and whatever troubles or joys

I have feel, not smaller but somehow more transparent, not as solid and all-engrossing. Sometimes I write here too, but it is a different kind of writing: I am just writing down little poems that come if I sit quietly long enough.

Light

Strong and gentle,

Radiance

not blinding but blessing,

Why have you come to me?

Why are you touching me ever so lovingly?

Pouring your gold over my head?

Streaming, streaming over my clothes,

my hands, holding this diary and pen,

Covering even my feet and the floor around.

Until all is transformed,

and silence itself turns into light

and time is no more

and my being becomes your temple

Is this why you've come?

So that I could become more like

the "Woman clothed with the Sun..."

I see a monk enter the church from the side of the cloister. He slowly comes before the sanctuary, kneels, and his body folds in a deep bow toward the altar. He does not see me; but the fact that I see him—already beginning to spin, and get caught in, the web of thoughts about why he is in the sanctuary at this hour and what is he going to do and whether my help might be needed—reminds me of

another type of work I am called to do throughout the day, regardless of my external activities: the work of returning to my heart. I am called to return to my heart even as it “goes out” to a woman crying in the back of the church, to keep the “custody of eyes” even as my curiosity gets the best of me, and to mind my own business even as somebody else’s is being discussed and savored at the table nearby. After a while the monk gets up and walks toward the retreat house door. Even if I failed to not-see him, I have caught a glimpse of how the perpetual return to one’s heart and custody of one’s eyes might look like in the flesh and blood of a real person, and the kind of peace that flows from that habitual drawing

inwards, letting the world and the burden of self-consciousness be—and I have been stirred to follow in his steps.

This is the way monks teach: more by silences than by words, more by example than by persuasion: by who they are. Some of them I have been graced to meet in person, and to learn from their wise and simple words. Some of them will never know how much their silent kindness—a gentle smile, a nod, a waving of hand—spoke to me and engendered some little (yet immensely big) healing. Still there are some, like that monk, who will probably forever remain in my memory as deeply familiar black-and-white silhouettes against the light from the altar, quiet embodiments of peace—teaching me, without uttering a single word, how to bow before God, not just with my body, but with my whole being.

As far as formal teaching goes, few among them are “born to teach.” But others offer their teaching—despite natural shyness and anxieties of public speaking—with a humble resolve to witness to the truth as they love and know it. The monks’ teaching is utterly simple, at times disturbingly and deceptively so: once and again, I attend their talks

“...So, this was when I was invited to be on the panel with Dalai Lama. I’d worked on my address for a whole month...put a lot of thought in it...polished all my sentences...and nobody is impressed (*laughs heartily, shakes his head*) ...and then Dalai Lama comes up, waves his hand, and says, “we need to be kind to each other” and everybody is like: (*imitates astonishment*) “**WOW!!!!** We need to be **KIND** to each other!” ...(*smiles*) see, *that’s* the difference in teaching...”

~ Fr D.

during thematic retreats, thinking that this—e.g., having over thirty highly educated people sit in a circle and take turns reading out loud sentences from the simple book—won’t fly. And it does. Something happens in the bare simplicity

of those talks. I see people leave the retreat changed. This change is neither dramatic nor loud (though here, as everywhere else, I meet those who see an angel behind every coffee

pot): just a tiny speck of light re-appears in the eyes of a woman who had just lost her son to a car accident, or the quiet resolve of a burned out priest who says that he will “go back one more time,” or the tingling of joy in the voice of a twelve-year-old autistic boy with mismatched gloves and a cactus, who whispers loudly into my ear during the Mass (despite increasingly desperate admonitions of the group leader to “keep quiet”), “I will become a monk when I grow up...just like them.” The bell startles me out of my thoughts: it’s time for *Sext*.

After Midday prayer and dinner, things slow down a bit. Monks get the meridian, a break until *None* marks the beginning of the second half of work. I return to my room to prepare for spiritual direction: I am full of anticipation, yet a bit nervous too. Spiritual direction is not a “light” business. In contrast to the safety of

<p>“...<i>(smiles)</i> if there is something that you really <i>don't</i> want to talk about, <i>that</i> usually is something that <i>really</i> needs to be aired...” ~ Fr G.</p>
--

communal talks, wherein I sit among fifteen or more other retreatants, listening to various topics, essentially free to take or leave what is being offered, my one-on-one conversations with the Father are more focused, and he does not hesitate to place me “on the spot”—and then turn the heat up. Grace indeed meets me where I am, but as Anne Lamott shrewdly observes, is rarely willing to leave me where it has found me. But there is more than the legitimate pain of transformation. Spiritual direction, like a scalpel in skillful hands, is a life-giving tool of unmatched power: some of the deepest healing came into my life through spiritual direction; but even in skillful hands, a scalpel never ceases being dangerous—nor does spiritual direction: much deeper worries and wounds are tended to, and the cost of even a well-intended mistake is very high. So, I spend some time in centering prayer, letting thoughts and feelings come and wash over me and at (rare) times leave, as I hang onto my

prayer word, drawing closer to the truth that lies at the core of my existence: the essential poverty of my being that is so poor that it has really nothing to defend. “Here I am, my Love, nothing is mine, all is yours.” Now, I am ready.

I meet Father in the parlor and we go into one of the rooms that are assigned for Confessions. Like most individual spiritual direction in the monastery, my relationship with my spiritual director grew naturally out of retreat talks: something spoke to me during this monk’s talk, I talked to him afterward, and the bond

<p>“The purpose of spiritual direction is not to tell you, ‘do this...don’t do this’ but to help you discern the real meaning of your life...nobody can do it alone...” ~ Fr L.</p>

began to be formed. These silent monks who vowed to live for “God alone” are extremely generous with their time and energy, tending to the joys and sorrows of monastery visitors. As to the process itself, this conversation is akin to an “audition” more than a “direction”: there is very little explicit “what to do” in directing, but rather an ongoing dialoguing and “dia-listening” to the movements of Divine Mystery in my life and ways to render myself more available to its influence. Just two human beings, imperfect but offering their best, struggle to discern and respond to the calling of the Spirit, together—but one has done it for much longer, and so he leads. Now, after almost six years of listening, some lessons seem to be recurring: “less activity and more receptivity,” “less driving forward on my own and more surrendering to divine Providence,” and in everything “less me more You.” The bell lets us know that only thirty minutes are left before the evening prayer of *Vespers*. Father blesses me and asks me to bless him, and we head to the church. I stop by the kitchen on my way, for a peanut butter and honey snack: all this work has made me hungry.

7.3 Evening: Vespers and Compline

Vespers and Outdoors

It is barely past 5 p.m., but there are people in the church. Here and there, monks and retreatants are tucked away in the nooks of their choice, for meditation: in chairs facing the sanctuary, in and behind the choir stalls, on the benches in the back of the church. I go to one of the benches. From there I can see the vast expanse of the church with its exposed beams and radiant windows, taking in the unadorned simplicity of the cross, the silence of Mary and the still quiet of people.

At this hour, our quiet has a touch of weariness from the day of work. There is something special about being tired before God: of facing and resting in the reality of my limits, of being glad that it is the end of the day, of remembering that even as the work is unfinished, I am not in charge, and of knowing that I can leave it as it is and come back to it tomorrow, and even when I cannot, I have done my best, and it is enough. It is a strange experience: feeling empty and spent, yet, finding rest precisely in that emptiness. I am also surprised to discover that fatigue can have different effects on me: in contrast to the deeply familiar (and utterly unpleasant) sensation of being “at the end of my wits,” accompanied by the angry refusal to “put up with fools,” today’s fatigue brings about a certain meekness, patience, “not-minding,” a strange willingness to accept the imperfect and incomplete within myself and others and even in the “day’s own trouble.” Go figure. But I like being tired in such a restful way, I hope it sticks.

On a regular day, we sit like this for about twenty minutes. This is not “assigned” meditation. But people seem to gravitate to the church at this hour. Maybe, they too enjoy resting in their fatigue, finding this emptiness somehow “filling.” On Sunday, there will be

a change: a special time is reserved before *Vespers* for Adoration. Around 4:45 p.m. a priest will place the host, nested at the center of the monstrance, on the altar, and the entire community will gather around the sanctuary—like spokes on a bicycle wheel radiating from the hub—to view it with deep reverence and affection. That’s *it*: reverent and loving looking at the host *is* the entire affair of this event. This is an unfamiliar way of devotion for me: just sitting and looking in silence. (Could we not be singing praises, at least?) In fact, the very act of silent adoring used to feel foreign and awkward—until I had the experience of falling in love.

Now, several years later, this still action of Adoration no longer feels alien, but cherished as an encounter: this silent, loving looking—struggling to see Christ behind the unfamiliarity of liturgical expression? ...struggling to let myself be seen behind the familiarity of my roles?—

again and again. So, I make Sundays, snuggle into my corner of the sanctuary and

“You see, it’s like a circle. God is in the center and humans are travelling toward God from the periphery...and the closer you become to God, the closer you become to people...”
~ Fr T. F.

just look, with love (at times, quietly wondering what my Protestant friends would say if they could see me just now).

The bell announces the beginning of *Vespers*: “O God, come to my assistance...O Lord, make haste to help me,” and we follow the familiar pattern of three psalms, reading, the *Magnificat* (the song of Mary from Luke 1:46-55), petitions, commendation to Mary, the Lord’s Prayer, and a short concluding prayer. The work day, bookended by *Lauds* and *Vespers*, is now over. Together with monks and some retreatants, I stay in the church for another 15 minutes of meditation before adjourning for supper. But I won’t make it to

supper today: fortified by my peanut butter sandwich, I skip it altogether to take a longer walk outside.

I go to my favorite places: the old log in the corner of the lake where turtles sunbathe themselves in summer and a blue heron measures water (and fish) with his long skinny legs, the winding path by

the Stations of the Cross, the big oak by the old bakery, blackberry bushes with the tiniest but most fragrant berries, a dirt road around

*By the dirty stream
on a pile of old leaves
in the middle of an afternoon
and everything else that is going on in the world
a large grey cat slumbers peacefully...*

She must know You better than I do.

the woods, and tall grass on the cloistered side of the Magnolia Alley with all kinds of birds roaming inside. Being outside pacifies me (except in summer). This peace is neither a result of the conscious work of letting go of everything and clinging to God alone (as in centering prayer), nor a by-product of the restful fatigue (like after a day of good work), but a fruit of effortless and non-violent forgetting myself and my joys and troubles—just because there is so much to see and smell, touch and hear. The woods do something to me, to my

*Purple eyes of periwinkle
looked into my heart and asked:
- Are you at peace?*

*...What can stand in the face of such simplicity?
Not the lie of "I am fine,"
nor the hide-n-seek of "How 'bout ya'self?"*

*Silence is the answer.
Silence is beginning of peace.*

attitude and “size”: if I want to see a rabbit, I have to become small; if I want to hear a red cardinal sing, I have to become quiet; if I want to feel the wind move, I have to become still. And in everything, the lands quietly teach me

the posture of patient waiting, listening, of safeguarding the space for a very timid other to show up.

This patience is not strained: it comes as a natural pause of curiosity and wonder, rather than as obedience to the “ought-s” and “should-s” of social convention and professional etiquette. Woods call me out of myself, without forcing me out of myself: there, I can simply *be*—trees cannot care less whether my hair is messed up or my life is in order—freed from the deeply engraved, and exhausting, tyranny of “being *fine*” and “being *nice*,” freed to learn “being with” in a different, and more restful, way. This restfulness is neither sleepy, nor sluggish. It must be. “Being with” nature calls for alertness and respect, as much as the admiration of its beauty: the most ferocious chiggers live in the pine straw under the fragrant blackberry bushes, ticks follow deer, and a copperhead likes to hunt on the path through the Stations of the Cross at the fall of dusk. Speaking of which, it is almost 7 p.m., around the time when deer usually cross Magnolia Alley, and I’d like to be there for that. And on the way back to the church for Compline, I wonder about the quiet irony of getting outside myself as a surest way to get to the place wherein I can be at home with myself again.

*Leaves do not mind being scattered.
My mind does.*

*Perhaps, it is because they are being
carried by Your Spirit,
and I allow different winds
to blow at my heart.*

Compline and Mary

The bell, announcing that the last prayer of the day starts in five minutes, finds me already in the church. I rest in the last light of the day, as the settling sun hits the blue of the balcony window. There is no need to set books in order, this short “nighty-night” office will be sung from memory, in the dark. Like many monks, I stand and face the altar, offering a simple wordless prayer of being before God as I am. Often, I look at Mary. I find this icon deeply moving. It is full of gentle, radiant presence that evokes in me something deeply

familiar, yet ...lost? ...neglected? ...unrealized? ...and, therefore, deeply missed and longed for, for a really long time...something so deep that I have a hard time putting it in words—peace fortified by suffering? ...love that fears no pain? ...incombustible security of poverty? ...renouncing all liberties to become truly free? ...utter fulfillment in abandoning

Salve, Regina,
Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo, et spes
nostra, salve.

Ad te clamamus,
exules filii E vae,

Ad te suspiramus,
gementes et flentes in
hac lacrimarum valle.

E ia, ergo,
advocata nostra,
illos tuos
misericordes oculos
ad nos converte;

et Jesum,
benedictum fructum
ventris tui, nobis post
hoc exilium ostende.

O clemens,
 O pia,
 O dulcis
Virgo Maria.

everything, even to the deepest voids of selfhood?—well, it *is* beyond words. But this does not stop me from talking to her.

The bell rings the second time, and the cantor calls out: “O God, come to my assistance”—we turn in stalls to face each other: “Oh Lord, make haste to help me.” After the hymn, we chant Psalms 4 and 91, the same every night, in every Cistercian house. Then there is a short reading, versicle and response, the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32), and litany followed by a short prayer. With darkness filling the church, *Compline* is the office when we remember the utter vulnerability of human life and God’s merciful might, and plea for God’s ongoing care and protection. As the Abbot intones the final blessing—“May the almighty and all-merciful God, grant us a restful night and a peaceful death”—the icon of Mary is lit. We turn to face the image and commend ourselves and the world to Mary’s care, singing *a capella* an ancient Marian hymn, *Salve Regina*. At the end of the hymn, a brother invites retreatants to line up behind the monks in the

middle of the choir stalls. In two rows we walk slowly toward the Abbot, bow, and he

blessees us with holy water. Now, the *Grand Silence* begins. I stay in the church for a little longer, for some personal petitions and prayers, and then slowly walk to my room, marveling yet again at how things work here: having stopped for prayer seven times, I had so much time and got much done. I get ready for bed and then journal about the happenings of the day or read a few lines from the Rule. Soon, I begin to feel sleepy. It is hardly past 8 p.m.

7.4 Looking Back at One Day at the Abbey

In this chapter, I offered a first-person account of my one-day visit at the monastery. As I moved through the twenty-four hour span of my retreat, I described not only the alternative rhythms, activities and accommodations of the monastic living, but also their effect upon me, my thoughts and emotions. I also shared excerpts from my diaries, records from the conferences and personal conversations with monks and other retreatants to illustrate my gradual transition to a more restful, peaceful place in just a span of one day.

This closer look at the one-day retreat at the Abbey reveals rest with an “unfamiliar face.” On the one hand, it does not conform to the common stereotypes about the monastic “flight from the world” or purely psychological benefits of the contemplative practice or spiritual power of making everything right through prayer. On the other hand, it is also very different

Hail,
Holy Queen,
Mother of Mercy,
our life,
our sweetness and
our hope.

To you do we cry,
poor banished
children of Eve;

To you
do we send up
our sighs, mourning
and weeping in this
vale of tears

Turn then,
most gracious
advocate, your
eyes of mercy
toward us;

and after this
our exile, show
unto us the blessed
fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.

O clement,
O loving,
O sweet
Virgin Mary

from the ordinary ways that we think about rest. While the original premise of searching for rest by withdrawing from the daily flow of activities and demands is deeply familiar and comparable to the claims of contemporary hospitality services, the similarities between the monastery retreat and specialized vacation destinations come to an abrupt end at the moment when the monastery visitors arrive at their location. In place of luxurious accommodations, rich food and nice clothes are unadorned rooms, simple fare and a request for modest attire. Instead of the many and varied options for amusement and entertainment, spa-based passive relaxation and party-until-morning offers, there is rising before dawn, silence, solitude, long hours of prayer and an occasional soul-searching with a spiritual director. My one-day visit to the monastery may indeed be called a “retreat,” but it is definitely not a private escape into the sunny afternoon of unfettered leisure.

Behind the dramatic differences in the external settings of the monastic retreat are no less striking dissimilarities in its internal dynamics. The stark simplicity of the monastery’s physical surroundings and the barrenness of its social terrain set its visitors up for an unavoidable confrontation with their deepest fears, longings, and aggravations—the very things that contribute to their unrest! And perhaps the most startling contrast between the monastery retreat and the contemporary resort facility is not even the lack of personal pampering but the unapologetic refusal on the part of the monastery hosts to shield their guests from their negative emotions, problems and stressors. All throughout retreat, I get a strong sense that, in order to experience genuine rest, a certain amount of work needs to be done: the work of becoming consciously aware and intentionally responsive to the sources of my restlessness. The monastery supports such work by providing ample space and time, silence and solitude, and the possibilities for private conversations with the monastery

elders about the challenges of engaging in such a process of discovery and exploration. The restfulness I experience on my one-day retreat therefore is not a matter of finding a “perfect getaway” from the turbulent, demanding, frustrating, confusing, painful dimensions of my existence, but an environment in which I feel safe enough and supported enough to face and explore them.

As such, the Cistercian monastic institution can be seen as an embodiment and repository of a truly alternative tradition of resting. The differences in the external settings and internal dynamics of the monastic retreat betray the fundamental dissimilarity of its operative assumptions. The monks’ beliefs about the problem of restlessness, the nature of rest, and the process of becoming restful are vastly different from the ones that prevail in contemporary society. To begin with, the monks maintain that the real sources of human unrest are not external but innermost. It therefore follows that people’s many and varied ways of searching for rest by trying to forget or distance themselves from their “trials and tribulations” are doomed to fall short of their goal. Finally, and perhaps most outrageously, the monks view rest not merely as an ordinary good, a necessary counterpoint to the life of driven achievement, but as something that lies at the core of being human and is connected to the mystery of God’s own being: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Thus, in stark contrast to the shiny promises of the luxury industry, the gift of peace that the monastery offers to its visitors is not a commodity presented for buying but an outcome of a delicate formative process, a fruit of personal becoming.

The one-day retreat, of course, is too short a visit to become consciously aware of the radically different assumptions and suppositions undergirding the monastic gift of

peace. My mind and senses have been busy, keeping track of the other, more obvious differences. Yet, I don't need to understand the monastic formative process consciously in order to experience its effects. Even in the absence of formal definitions and explicit explanations, I cannot fail to notice the differences in the way I have been led to rest throughout the retreat and the differences in the degree of restfulness I feel afterwards. I know something has been "done onto" me, even if I cannot say what it is. This deep restfulness at the end of my one-day retreat at the monastery is the result of my initial encounter with the formative process of the monastic alternative tradition of resting.

For me, as for numerous other lay monastery visitors, this radically different experience of resting will lead to many more and longer retreats at the monastery.

CHAPTER 8

THE MAKING OF RETREAT: ENTERING PEACE

In this chapter, I draw on my experience of extended monastery retreats, seeking to delve below the surface and reflect in depth on the ways in which the monastery “creates” rest for its visitors. I seek to discern specific elements of the monastic lifestyle that can account for its ability to have such a pronounced restorative and peace-producing effect upon the retreatants. Once more, the writing of this chapter is both idiosyncratic and general. It is idiosyncratic because my perception of the retreat is colored by my personal experience of being at the monastery. It is general, because my account is enriched by my observations about the experience of other retreatants: those whose retreats coincided with mine, those who share with me the lay associate bond with the Cistercian Order, and those whom I never met in person but who put in writing their own experience of finding peace at the monastery.⁴²⁰

It must be acknowledged forthrightly that not all lay visitors of the Cistercian monasteries are “so taken” by the monastic experience, as I and the retreatants described in this chapter. During the years of my monastic retreats, I encountered retreatants who

⁴²⁰ At least three American lay Cistercians have written extensively about their experiences of the Cistercian monastic tradition: Mark Plaiss and Trisha Day of New Melleray Abbey and Our Lady of The Mississippi Abbey, and Carl McColman of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. See Plaiss; Trisha Day, *Inside the School of Charity: Lessons from the Monastery* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009); Carl McColman, *Answering the Contemplative Call: First Steps on the Mystical Path* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Pub., 2013); Carl McColman, *Befriending Silence: Discovering the Gifts of Cistercian Spirituality* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2015). As I was finalizing the manuscript, I discovered Henri Nouwen’s account of his six-month stay at the Abbey of Genesee, in New York: Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976). His writing about his monastic experience displays remarkable parallels with my reflections in this chapter.

were much less involved in the external activities of the monastery life and affected by its inner dynamics. I also met people who merely used the monastic facilities as an affordable “get-away” for a few simple days of relaxation or uninterrupted work on their personal or professional projects. While they often spent several days at a time at the monastery and came for repeated visits, these people chose to stay on the outside of the monastic culture, as passive observers and beneficiaries of its restfulness rather than active participants in its way of life. The reflections of this chapter do not stand in judgement of the choice made by these retreatants: St. Benedict himself speaks of the monastery as a place that is “never lacking in guests,” underscoring the fact that it is not only the monastery guests, but also the monks themselves, who benefit from the practice of radical hospitality.⁴²¹

At the same time, the existence of these less involved retreatants is not a disproof of my observations about the impact of the monastery retreat on me and those lay visitors who have been drawn to a deeper and more thorough involvement in the monastic way of life. The burgeoning movement of the Lay Cistercians and Benedictine oblates, as well as the rapidly growing collection of the contemporary literature dedicated to the explicitly lay experience of monastic living is a strong evidence that a significant portion of the monastery visitors are indeed very “taken” by their monastic experience and that for them, the retreat is a time of a deep encounter with the monastic tradition. While one may speculate about the exact reasons that account for their intense attraction to the monastic

⁴²¹ For the monks, the reception of guests, especially the needy and the poor, is an opportunity to welcome and adore Christ himself (RB 53.1: “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Matt. 25: 35).”) Kathleen Norris, a Benedictine oblate and a best-selling writer, speaks with humor and humility about St. Benedict’s emphasis on hospitality: Kathleen Norris, “Hospitality,” in *The Benedictine Handbook*, ed. Anthony Marret-Crosby (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).

way of life and their readiness to submit to the monastic disciplines, it cannot be denied that for these people, the monastery retreat becomes a time of genuine religious experience. Thus, when I speak about “retreatants” in this chapter, I speak about this portion of the monastery’s visitors, who enter the monastic environment and approach its community, practices, and texts in the spirit of reverent receptivity—people who listen, as it were, to what the monastery has to say with “the ear of the heart”⁴²²—and for whom the monastic encounter becomes an event of profound transformative power.

I organize my reflection on the underlying structure of monastic living in four large categories—*Environment*, *Community*, *Practices*, and *Texts*—which I have come to see as crucial for understanding how the monastery sponsors the process of becoming restful for its lay visitors. I have chosen to call them the “contexts” of monastic living, to underscore the fact that during their retreat, the retreatants are not merely “looking at” these elements of the monastery living, but are rather surrounded and actively influenced by them.⁴²³

In the text, the sections that describe these four contexts are not equal in length: *Environment* takes up the largest portion of the chapter, *Community*—the smallest, with *Practices* and *Texts* falling in between. The significant variation in length of these sections is not a result of my oversight as a writer. Rather, it is a reflection of the legitimate differences in the nature and extensiveness of the retreatants’ encounter with each of these

⁴²² RB, Prol.1

⁴²³ I find it helpful to think about the relationship between these contexts as similar to the design of the traditional Russian nesting doll, *Matryoshka*. *Matryoshka* contains several dolls of decreasing sizes that nest inside each other. The relationship between the sizes is “reciprocal”: without the larger ones, the smaller dolls are “dis-embodied”; without the smaller ones, the larger ones are empty. Together, different sizes make a single doll. This image is a call to remember that distinctions between the categories are never divisions, and are singled out for the purposes of analysis only. *Matryoshka* can indeed be taken apart; left apart, it is no longer one.

contexts. Their encounter with the monastic Environment is the longest and most intensive: they are enveloped in it for the entire duration of retreat. In contrast, their contact with the monastic Community, albeit most exciting, is also the scarcest: due to the purely contemplative nature of the Cistercian order, the monks and the retreatants spend very little time interacting in person. Finally, the retreatants' encounter with the monastic Practices and Texts is fairly extensive, because these two comprise the primary objects of the retreatants' occupation during their stay.

I start my exposition from the most implicit context of the monastery living, *Environment*, and proceed, through *Community* and *Practices*, towards the most explicit context, *Texts*. Such direction of reflection corresponds, roughly, to the retreatants' own experience. Externally, it parallels the order of their "exposure" to the monastic living: their first experience is that of the monastic Environment; soon thereafter, they rush to meet the monks; later, they try following the monastic Practices, and finally they delve into the Texts. Internally, it corresponds to the process of their gradual realization of the nature of the monastery gift of peace: the retreatants are the least conscious of it when they first enter the monastic Environment, and the most aware of it after their encounter with the monastic Texts.

8.1 Environment

Environment is what the monastery visitors encounter first upon their arrival at the monastery, *and* what they take in last before going to bed, during their stay. It is precisely the all-embracing and all-permeating presence of this context that makes it extremely important to notice and understand. The pronounced restorative effect of the monastic Environment upon retreatants is a result of the alternative patterning of its Space and Time,

and its unique ability to reveal a distinct symbolic reality, an “alternative world,” through such spatial and temporal re-patterning.

Arrangements of Monastery Space

Three distinct individual domains can be identified in the spatial realm of the monastery: living space, worship space, and work space.⁴²⁴ The monastery *living space* is the first space that I enter upon arrival. The primary way by which living space offers rest is the *experience of lack*. Much of the “expected” is missing in the retreat house: most notably, there is no television or radio, and access to phone and computer is rare. Furniture and food are starkly simple. Possessions and attire are few: what for monks is limited by their choice of a habit, for me—by the living accommodations and necessity of travel. How is this experience of lack restful?

⁴²⁴ I have not encountered such tripartite division of monastery space, with regards to its peacefulness, in the contemporary monastic literature. However, my personal observations about the deep connection between the material and imagined space, between physical and symbolic topography, are well confirmed by the scholars of the Cistercian architecture. Even more importantly, my overarching argument about the impact of place upon the formation of character is deeply congruent with Cistercian approach to architecture and space. Cistercians, who from the early days of their Order were known as “lovers of the place,” were acutely aware and deeply intentional about building monasteries that proclaimed—and impressed upon their inhabitants—the fundamental values of their reform: a return to poverty, humility, the desire to be “poor with the poor Christ.” It is perhaps something of an irony that in their uncompromising intent to sacrifice all that was secondary, their emphasis on the simple functionality of form, and their resolve to refrain from artistic decoration, Cistercians gave birth to a new style of architectural art: the art whose stark beauty lies precisely in the clean austerity of materials, harmonious composition, and proportion. For an insightful reflection on the qualities of the Cistercian architecture and its deep-laden connection to Cistercian liturgy and theology, see Merton, *The Waters of Siloe*. For a more scholarly discussion of the Cistercian architectural style, see Megan Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and Their Meanings: Thirteenth-Century English Cistercian Monasteries* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001); Anselme Dimier, *Stones Laid before the Lord: A History of Monastic Architecture* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999). So important is the notion of space in the monastic imagination that the late abbot of Mepkin Abbey, Father Francis Kline, uses the “Church as communion in a vast building of great architecture” as a governing image for his reflection on the place and the gifts of monasticism in the church and world at large. Francis Kline, *Lovers of the Place: Monasticism Loose in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997).

In the short run, this lack creates conditions of tremendous under-stimulation, drastically reduces the work of making decisions and battling distractions, and offers an opportunity to taste rest born of subtraction. On a very basic level, enormous amounts of stress are avoided, when my access to technological advances of civilization is externally restricted. Similarly, having my meals prepared saves not only the obvious energy expenditure of obtaining, cooking, and cleaning, but the less visible, yet substantial, mental energy used for a complex process of negotiating my cravings, dietary concerns, budget limitations, and the mouth-watering store displays, enticing to “buy one and get one free.” And then, there is a physical sensation of digestive rest that comes from simply eating less—because the refrigerator is on another floor. In the same way, having only a few items of clothing in my wardrobe makes getting ready a snap, as having only a bed, reading lamp, a chair, and a desk in my room gently curbs my occupations, suggesting reading or writing as most likely endeavor. And during those time when I dare to bring my work to the monastery (or, dare not to leave it behind!), there is a pleasant surprise: I *can* just sit down and write—there are no dishes to clean, no furniture to rearrange, no email to check, so the distance between not-writing and writing is as long as it takes to lower myself into the chair. These are the ways in which this lack of things creates plenty: plenty of time to discover alternative ways to have satisfying nourishment or appearance, plenty of mental and emotional energy to devote to reflecting on the problem that has been wearing down on my mind, plenty of space to ponder the deeper longings of my heart. Tremendous rest comes from such profusion of emptiness—and comes quickly.

Yet, truth be told, some experiences of lack, while undoubtedly restful, are not always pleasant. At times, they are highly disagreeable and laborious: the raging of an

unsatisfied craving can be extremely difficult to endure; the surprise of being able to “just sit and write” is as unnerving as it is nice; getting stuck with my writing and not being able to turn to email in order to “get something done” can be an overwhelmingly frustrating experience; and, not having a bag of chips to open when I am upset can be an extremely agitating occasion. And then, there is a peculiar restlessness of being locked up in the four walls of my room with no habitual distractions and routes of escape when disturbing, painful or downright scary thoughts and memories begin their haunt—and a peculiar war must be fought against them by refusing to fight *and* refusing to flee *and* refusing to get caught in following them. Staying still and staying calm and looking in the enemy’s eye with curiosity, compassion and care, in all of my fear, vulnerability and pain, is a “helluva” work. Yet, the end of each attack of such war, and the completion of each shift of such work, marks the beginning of my exodus from the land of habitual entanglement between being and having. These are the fiery furnaces of the monastery living space wherein the experience of lack burns off the external “add-on”-s and attachments of my tired self, forging a deeper, more profound experience of rest.

Once settled in my room, I head to the Abbey Church, the central *worship space* of the monastery. The primary way by which worship space offers rest to its visitors is the *experience of being alone*. Apart from the celebration of Eucharist, the daily Liturgy of the Hours, and some seasonal events, the church is open and empty during the day, offering plenty of time for solitary prayer. How is this experience of being alone restful?

In the short run, the experience of being alone in the worship space gently calms my senses, provides a relief from the exertion of interacting with others, and offers an opportunity to come home to myself. The vast breathing space that fills the empty church

is extremely soothing, especially in contrast to the louder and more crowded worlds I usually inhabit: being enveloped in the still sunlit quiet, I savor the rare treat of being alone. Physically enclosed, I can have an honest cry, an angry confession, a quiet basking in the light—and simply be—without worrying about my appearances and impressions. At the same time, the bare simplicity of the church décor does not merely encourage solitude; it sponsors recollection. In stark contrast to my habitual state of attention violently scattered and senses held at the highest pitch of tension, the feeling of becoming “all-one” is enormously refreshing. Yet, by virtue of being in the worship space, I am reminded to disengage not only from immediacy of my physical and social surroundings but also from my enduring anxiety about the wider circle of my relationships with others. After all, I am here to pray. So, for once in a long while, I leave behind my habitual preoccupation with other peoples’ needs, demands, and expectations for my life and enter into the restfulness of being with God. It is nice to be able to let go of the burden of constant worrying about what others might say about me, or ask of me, or do to me: the memory of “God alone” as a source and summit of my existence sets me free from the ever-fatiguing “tyranny of they.” Tremendous rest comes from such protected being alone—and comes quickly.

Yet, truth be told, the experience of solitude does not remain peace-filled for long. Even though I came here guided by a wholehearted desire to pray, the experience of praying proves to be a challenge. The very lack of external distractions reveals that there are plenty on the inside. My heart and mind are plagued by the multitude of extemporaneous thoughts: memories of past injuries, anxieties about future problems, unruly pull of present desires. Sitting in the most prayerful of places, in the most prayerful of poses, I discover that my prayer is comprised mostly of distractions. But there is more. The protection that the

monastery worship space offers for being alone only underscores that I am not really ready to leave behind the burden of “others.” The cacophony of relational concerns and questions intrude upon my earnest attempts to be with God: “How are the recipients of my care going to manage without me? Can they reach me if something happens, since I turned off my phone and am not checking my email? Will the work that I delegated get done? Will it be done *well*? What will so-and-so think of me for leaving like this, for a retreat, in the middle of the semester?” Behind these burning questions are more pressing queries: “Who am I apart from what people think and say about me?...when I am no longer tending to their needs?...when I am no longer needed?” The idea of standing apart from peoples’ expectations, projections, judgments of my life, is terrifying—because it implies the existence of my personal responsibility for my own becoming. And soon, being left alone begins to lose its charms: I start missing the certainties and comforts of the old bondage.

This is when the sunlit quiet of the monastery worship space is no longer soothing, but irksome, exasperating. The silence that only moments ago was deeply consoling, now lends my inner questions vociferous power. The vast breathing space that brought relief is now pressing hard on my shoulders, making the inner turmoil and confusion of self-definition all the more obvious. This is when the real work and war of prayer begins: for attacks of this kind cannot be warded off or worked through by not-fighting, not-fleeing, and not-following these thoughts; they can only be finished by embracing that what scares me most and then laying it all on the altar of the living God. So, in the absence of the prayer proper, I make my prayer of my problems. I offer the litany of likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions. I confess my inability to say “no,” my need to control, please,

and when all else fails, manipulate. I pull covers off the deeper wounds: my fear of abandonment, my rage at smothering behaviors, the dark memory of abuse.

And when I stay in that “one hot mess” long enough, I discover in the depths of my own heart a Presence that breaks up the vicious I-they dualities of my life, the Third One who has somehow been there all along, caring and loving and suffering with us all. The forming of such a triangle—with God as an ultimate accountability partner and a higher power in every relationship of my life—marks a new stage of being with myself and others. No longer caught in deeply painful and deeply exhausting opposition between “me” and “them,” I become a witness to the healing work of God in my life—a person who, all things considered, *can* be at peace. The end of each such war and each shift of such work, no matter how small, marks another step in my exodus from the land of codependent living and serving. This is the crucible of the monastery worship space, wherein the experience of being alone forges within my tired self the patterns of proper relating, bringing forth a deeper and more profound experience of rest.

The last space I enter during retreat is the monastery *work space*. The primary way by which work space offers rest is the *experience of not-working*. Precisely because I come to the monastery for a retreat, what happens to me here bears very little resemblance to what happens to me in my own work spaces back in the world. The work space is the largest of monastery spaces and includes different locations in the retreat house, bonsai garden, bookstore, and their outdoor surroundings. On all those sites, monks work to support retreatants’ not-working. How is this experience of not-working restful?

In the short run, such sponsored not-working offers me the opportunity to have a real retreat, experiencing authentic leisure and re-discovering work as a joyful and deeply

gratifying activity. On the most basic level, it is nice not to have to work: to get up without being preoccupied with the “to do” list, to go through the day feeling no obligation to occupy myself with answering emails and making phone calls, doing chores and running errands, and to take a long nap in the middle of the afternoon on a weekday. A simple pleasure of doing nothing is a cherished gift in itself. Similarly, it is exquisitely relaxing to give myself to activities of other kinds: to go for a slow walk in the woods, to sit by the lake and watch water and trees and turtles go about their day (slowly!), to look unhurriedly through books at the library and then retreat into the shade of the cedar tree with only one, to read and savor, and to talk about the things that really matter to somebody who is really listening. Having the freedom to simply be present to the world and the stirrings of my inner self takes me on a new level of awareness, at once gently disengaged yet ever more attentive and mindful. At the end of the day of such purposeful not-working, I discover that in the depths of my heart a lot has been done—the furniture got quietly rearranged and new spaciousness was created—making it a more peaceful, restful place.

This experience of not-working, of course, is not a prohibition against work. In response to my eagerness to contribute to the life of the monastery, simple jobs are made readily available: household tasks and kitchen chores, office work and seasonal garden duties. Yet, even then, it is an experience of not-working: not in a sense of abstaining from work, but in a sense of not-working in my habitual—and habitually fatiguing—ways. Regardless of what I do, my work in the monastery is volunteering, a willing sharing of my gifts and abilities, made in the restfulness of knowing that I don’t have to. Such work harks back to childhood, when doing dishes or sorting silverware have not yet become “chores.” Trimming plants in the bonsai garden, peeling potatoes, transcribing the recipe

for the monastery fruitcake, packing goods in the back of the monastery bookstore, I begin to remember that work and play could be synonyms. But the greatest surprise awaits, when I finally muster enough courage to put on hold, for the whole duration of retreat, my dissertation writing: I discover that writing itself does not stop! Scribbling down the snippets of poems that arise—effortlessly, spontaneously, abundantly—in the silence of my heart, I once more experience writing not as a pressure-filled, painful, and laborious occupation, but something of an inner necessity, joyful, nourishing, and of all things, energizing. These are the ways in which the experience of not-working in the monastery work space restores “rest” as an extremely fruitful and productive activity *and* re-creates “work” as a deeply restorative and peace-producing occasion. Tremendous rest comes from such supported not-working—and comes quickly.

Yet, in truth, this not-working entails its own working and warring. Doing nothing is a rather unsettling activity—hard work!—for those who come from the worlds that operate under the motto “Don’t just sit there. Do something!” and measure personal worth by a person’s utilitarian usefulness. So, soon, I grow alarmed at the apparent wastefulness of retreat and the nagging feeling of the squandered time and opportunity: not-working poses a real threat to my prospects of “getting things done” and “making it” in my life and career. Scarier still are the qualms about the implications of my rest for my ideals of ministry: considering the overwhelming needs of the world, a personal withdrawal into the place of quiet, with all meals provided, seems to be fragrantly inconsiderate, if not unethical. (“Your Russian grandmother never had a retreat...neither did your mother...Since when have you developed such ‘need?’...have you become infected with the ways of the West?!”—a relentless inner commentary cuts jarringly through the external

peacefulness of chanting the Psalms). Yet, the most frightening thing of all is my dawning awareness of the subtle but significant changes in my identity. During the slow unfolding of retreat, my most familiar (and most treasured) names—“the Russia United Methodist pastor,” “the A-student,” “Emory scholar,” “practical theologian”—begin to lose their solidity. The “I” that I have known for so long becomes fluid and vulnerable, dissipating as easily as the morning fog over the monastery lake: “Who am I apart from my professional responsibilities and duties?...when I no longer can define myself by reciting educational achievements and added lines to the CV?...when silence renders me unnamable?” This silent query is scary and painful on a different, more profound, level: the erosion of my external identities, which I worked so hard to build, exposes a fundamental emptiness within, which I worked equally hard to avoid.

This is when the charms of the monastery not-working quickly begin to fade. Surrounded by the leisurely delights of its work space, I begin to see the goal of the monastic “R and R” in its true light: a pretext devised to isolate me from my habitual and honed-to-perfection busyness, in order to search my soul and confront me with questions and doubts and longings which cannot be faced any other way. This is the time when I begin to realize that I am very afraid of rest, and that there is a very good reason why—despite every genuine intention and earnest effort to “keep the Sabbath” and “balance” my schedule—my workload continues to stay heavy. The space that disallows any pretense about my ability to build myself up and slaps me in the face with the realization of the ultimate poverty of my being is not a nice place to be. That is why, sooner or later, all the joys of not-working notwithstanding, I become dreadfully restless and consumed with the desire to find something to do. And the monastery work space is the most vulnerable of

monastery spaces, because it is most open and similar to the outside culture. So, when the “need” arises, retreat house, bonsai garden, and bookstore *can* provide a number of routes to escape through fervent volunteering, spiritual talk, and good old retail therapy.

But when I choose to stay and endure this stern discipline of resting and the arduous labors of not-working, I move—like tired, angry, and scared to death Jonah—by being still, on my long exodus from the land of restive working and fruitless resting. This is the workshop of the monastery work space, wherein the experience of not-working severs the tyrannizing equation between my being and my doing. And after a while, I become aware of the most surprising and marvelous occurrence: having risked the dissolution of my credentials, roles, and other work-based identity markers, and having risked revealing myself to the monks, lay workers, and fellow retreatants without the customary armor of my accomplishments, I catch a glimpse of a person who continues in existence, and is loved and cared for by others, all the same! It is this inner discovery of rest as not-deadly, sponsored by the monastery work space, that brings my experience of retreat on a deeper, more profound level.

Something critical happens in the partitions of monastery Space. By sponsoring the experiences of lack, being alone and not-working, monastery Space leads its guests through the process of experiential discovery of something critically important about the nature of human rest and restlessness. The experiences that monastery Space sponsors are rare and hard to come by outside of the monastery. Individually and as a society, we seek to avoid lack, aloneness, and not-working, because in most spaces that we visit and inhabit, these experiences signal dangerous, vulnerable occasions: to be found lacking, alone, and

without work can bring costly consequences. The society values “fullness” over “lack,” “work” over “not-working,” “socializing and networking” over “being alone.” Monastery Space, however, challenges the societal perception of lack, being alone, and not-working as restive occasions and reveals these experiences not merely as normal and legitimate but indeed foundational for genuine rest. Being in monastery Space normalizes these experiences for the retreatants, because they see that the simplicity of accommodations and fare, silence, solitude, and intentional inaction characterizes monks’ own living. Being in monastery Space legitimizes these experiences of the retreatants, because they receive an explicit invitation to imitate monks in these experiences. Most importantly, being in monastery Space reveals these experiences as foundational for genuine rest, because as the retreatants become more restful in the course of their stay, they discover for themselves that these experiences “work.” By guiding retreatants to deep and genuine rest by such an unfamiliar and ever paradoxical route, monastery Space teaches its guests that the alternative monastic way of resting can be trusted. This realization, while not fully conscious, enables the retreatants to persevere when things begin to go sour.

While the short-term encounter with externally induced lack, aloneness and not-working is remarkably restful, the longer exposure quickly reveals that the secular society is not dim-witted in its avoidance. Monastery Space reveals these experiences as embodying the fundamental—and fundamentally inescapable—tensions at the core of human existence: the essential “lack” of human having, the intrinsic “aloneness” of human being, and the ultimate “not-working” of human doing. Having eliminated external distractions and disturbances, monastery Space brings its guests to a profound realization: the deepest sources of human restlessness are located within.

The realities of lack, aloneness and not-working in human existence are difficult to face and hard to stomach; yet, unless these fundamental tensions and the deep restlessness they engender are addressed, true rest is an impossibility. This realization lies at the core of the paradoxical and unnerving discovery that the monastery guests are invited to make: while helpful and necessary, external arrangements are ultimately insufficient to engender lasting peace; genuine rest requires certain inner work and even war—of coming to terms with the inherent vulnerabilities and tensions of human life—to be carried out. Individual monastery spaces support retreatants in carrying out such work and war, by bringing these hard truths of human existence to the fore and by standing in the way of their habitual yet misguided ways of coping with them.

For me, like for many committed retreatants, this first attempt at “stability” in the face of the restive realities of human existence, laborious and warlike as it is, is positive: an experience of deep restfulness that is caused not by a sudden cancellation, the absence of the tension, but by the discovery of the Presence in its midst. At this moment, the reality of God—the divine Mystery of inexhaustible Bounty, everlasting Love, and infinite Creativity, which breathes life into my lacking, alone, and not-working self—ceases to be an article of faith and becomes a reality of my own personal experience. Having tasted the restfulness of encountering the One in whom we “live and move and have our being,” I can finally rest in the face of the inescapable tensions of my own existence. This is the second profound revelation of monastery Space: the deepest source of human rest is located without.

Architecture of Monastery Time

The monastic Time creates a “space” of its own. Its realm is invisible, but not easily overlooked: the sheer difference of the monastery’s rhythms from the paces of the secular timetable—I am not sure what is more daunting for an outside visitor, rising at 4 a.m. or retiring at 8 p.m.—ensures that it is promptly noticed. Here, however, a significant shift happens. In contrast to the territory of Space, not everybody can enter the palace of Time. Monastery Time is more aggressive in its demands and asks from its guests more than monastery Space does: commitment. It works only on those who are willing to place themselves under its rule. The primary way by which the monastic time offers rest to its visitors therefore is the experience of obedience.⁴²⁵

While the monastery shares the overarching cycles of time—the day, the week, and the year—with the surrounding society, the similarity of the structure only underscores dramatic alterations in their content. The alternative patterning of the *monastic day* is the first and most striking sign of entering a “different time zone” for the retreatants. Three large divisions of time can be identified within the contours of the monastic timetable:

⁴²⁵ I first encountered the terms “architecture of time” and “palace in time” in Abraham Heschel’s poetic work on the Sabbath: Heschel, 2. Heschel’s rabbinic insights into the spatial dimensions of time are echoed by the more scholarly writings of Eviatar Zerubavel, an American sociologist who argues that the architecture of time has the power to form us as deeply as the architecture of space: Zerubavel. While Heschel’s and Zerubavel’s reflections are rooted in the long history of Jewish culture and tradition, the connection they observe between one’s experience of rest and one’s genuine adherence to specific temporal regulations is remarkably similar to the Benedictine-Cistercian understanding and practice: the monastic regulations for daily, weekly and yearly living offer a path of using time as the means of moral and spiritual formation. For an insightful reflection on the qualities of monastery time and the different “time zones” that its residents inhabit, see Brendan Freeman, *Come and See: The Monastic Way for Today* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 175-202. For observations about the connection between the formative impact of time and the disposition of obedience, see Louf, 109-14; Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2005), 174-78. For the Protestant appreciation of the monastic lessons for “opening the gift of time,” see Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*.

Grand Silence, Prayer, and Work.⁴²⁶ Grand Silence stretches its soft embrace from eight o'clock in the evening to eight o'clock in the morning. The remaining time is punctuated by the seven hours of the Divine office and other, less structured time dedicated to private prayer and the practice of sacred reading. The hours of work are tucked in between. Together with the difference in hours of rising and retiring, this tripartite template of daily life presents a sharp contrast to the outside world. Similarly, the *monastery week*, just like the secular one, features a perceptible shift between the quicker pace of the weekdays and the spaciousness of the weekend. Yet, unlike the movement of the secular week, in which the busy overworking of the weekdays gives way to the temporary escape of the weekend, the monastic Saturdays and Sundays stand in much less contrast to the remainder of the week. The lure of the monastic weekend is not a private withdrawal into the opposite side of the work-rest duality, but an invitation to enter more deeply into the restfulness of what was there, even if to a lesser degree, all week long. Finally, even though the path of the *monastery year* traces the familiar steps of the twelve months, it is the seasons of the liturgy rather than the general calendar that set the tone for monastery living. Starting with Advent, the flow of the monastic year moves through the rush of Christmas, the pool of Lent, the

⁴²⁶ In seeming contrast to the three temporal categories that I identify, both professed and lay participants in the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition would name the regimen of prayer, work, and *lectio* as a distinguishing “tripod” of Benedictine daily balance. See, for example Brian C. Taylor, *Spirituality for Everyday Living* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989); Rembert G. Weakland, “The Role of Monasticism in the Life of the Church,” *American Benedictine Review*, no. 32:1 (1981); Esther De Waal, *The Way of Simplicity: The Cistercian Way, Monastic Wisdom Series* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010). Indeed, a close study of St. Benedict’s Rule reveals a three-part structure of the monk’s day: about three hours are to be spent in the church at the Divine Office, about five hours are to be devoted to manual labor, and two to three hours are to be set aside for *lectio* (RB 48). However, from the standpoint of the external monastery visitor, the temporal division of the day that I identify—public prayer of the monastic liturgy, work, and Grand Silence—is still valid. It is Grand Silence, not *lectio*, that is found as an explicit temporal category on the monastery timetable.

swell of Easter, and the white waters of Pentecost, until it finally settles into the steady ebb and flow of Ordinary Time. The monastery patterns its year not on events that are related to human life and performance but on the periods in Christ's life on earth. What sets the monastery year apart from the surrounding society is not the celebrations of the liturgical seasons themselves (after all, many churches do that too) but the seriousness with which they are taken. The seasons of the year are not merely isolated ceremonial occasions, complete with liturgical paraphernalia that offer a rereading and re-enactment of the old story; rather, they are seen and lived through in time as events that are taking place here and now. For the retreatants, even when they are familiar with the Christian grand narrative, such intentional immersion in the life of Christ is arresting.⁴²⁷

How is this experience of obeying the alternative arrangements of monastery Time restful? On the level of the *monastery day*, the established regimen of silence, prayer, and work eliminates the exhausting responsibility to create a daily "action plan." It is refreshing to fall back on the external routine and just follow along. Similarly, since both starting *and* stopping are built into the fabric of the day, the tension between different activities pitted against each other is dramatically reduced. Under obedience to the monastery bell—which, oblivious to individual projects and aspirations, orders the entire community to move in

⁴²⁷ Between the years 2005 and 2010, I spent every pre-Easter week at the Monastery in order to attend the Easter Triduum retreat and have an "immersion experience" in the Event of life and death and resurrection of Christ. Each year it was a deeply involved process, feeling real agony and pain of the last days and the joy of Easter. Admittedly, this is a somewhat unusual occupation for an ordained United Methodist elder. Yet I found these times deeply meaningful and could not help but notice that these five weeks brought me closer to knowing (even if still not fully "understanding") the mystery of Christ's life and death than the years of formation in my church. Such observation is not a critique of the United Methodist ministry but a testimony to the tremendous formative momentum of the immersion experiences. I will return to this issue in greater depth, reflecting on the institutional structures and principles that endow the Monastery with such formative power, in Chapter 10.

accord with the preordained schedule—I am set free from the anxious counting of hours and a merciless evaluation of my activity, to inhabit each moment of the day in an undivided manner. A deeper rest still comes from the particular nature of the individual segments of the day.

Honoring the twelve hours of Grand Silence builds a soft cushion around my sleep, protecting early mornings and late evenings from the perils of my personal curiosity or forced social engagement. It is amazing just how much more restful I feel, when my mornings and evenings are insulated from checking email, reading news, placing online orders, and engaging people in conversations. Similarly, having the hours of communal prayer formally established frees me from the arduous work of deciding when, where, and how long to pray. The public prayer in turn deepens motivation and commitment of its private counterpart: the psalms and readings heard during the communal Liturgy of the Hours weave themselves with the strands of my personal *lectio*, creating an invisible but powerful web of meaning, as I make sense of my daily joys and sorrows. Finally, the observance of the work hours is “nice and easy,” precisely because they are so few! Benedict’s admonition to work no more than five hours a day makes me smile in delight every time I think about it.⁴²⁸ Not only such explicit prohibition against the long hours of working makes the work more attractive to me, but it also makes me more prudent about doing it. On the days when I choose to work on my dissertation during retreat, the memory

⁴²⁸ RB 48. The limitation on the duration of work however is not an indication of its unimportance. In the same chapter of the Rule, St. Benedict advises monks that “when they live by the labor of their hands...then they are really monks” (RB 48:8). Yet, his philosophy of work rest on deeper intentionality: work is not only a necessary means of livelihood, but a valuable help to prayer. For an insightful reflection on the meaning and value of work in the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition, see Terrence Kardong, “Work Is Prayer: Not!,” *Assumption Abbey Newsletter* 23, no. 4 (1995); Louf, 112-17.

of the limits makes me wise: no longer intimidated by the perceived duty of working on my manuscript for at least eight hours, I am less prone to spend them in perfectionism and indecision. And having plunged right into writing at the beginning of the work shift, I am delighted to discover, once and again, that the five monastery hours yielded a respectable “harvest” and left me with sufficient energy to get through the rest of the day.

On the level of the *monastery week*, the Sunday observance secures an entire day for rest—away from the errands, catching up on email, and doing household chores—not only without any guilt attached, but with a relief of knowing that I am engaged in a good and godly thing, regardless of what was and was not accomplished during the week. Additionally, precisely because in the monastery Sunday is not set in opposition to but in continuation of the weekdays, the transition between the weekdays and the weekend is much less jarring: my Mondays at the monastery are never quite as overwhelming, and my Fridays are never quite as reckless, as when I am in the world. Lastly, on the level of the *monastery year*, measuring the time by the succession of liturgical seasons is restful not only because it offers a variation in the otherwise monotonous string of the church-going weeks, but because the religious calendar, unlike the secular one, makes room for the painful realities of human suffering. The typical, and seemingly innocent, societal omission—who would want to celebrate pain?—comes at a high cost: the public “forgetting” of the darker parts of life and self. By insisting on celebrating Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as calendar “equals” to Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, monastery Time challenges the culturally induced ignorance of the negative and mends the lopsidedly sunny secular depictions of human life. And in so doing, it redeems the darker side of human existence, offering monastery guests an opportunity to discover that

suffering, too, is marked by God's presence. Entering the dark and painful hours in the life of Christ and the Church, I can make peace with darkness and pain in my own life, remember myself as whole, and eventually rest, not in the exclusion but in recognition of my anguished self as normal.⁴²⁹

Thus, be it the unconventional timetable of the day, the uncommon orientation of the week, or the unusual framework of the year, monastery Time offers almost an immediate taste of restfulness and peace to those who are willing to surrender to its command. Yet, truth be told, similar to the experience of being in the partitions of the monastic Space, my staying in the palace of Time does not remain peaceful for long. Soon, I find one bitter fly in the fragrant oil of obedience: the actual labors of obeying.

Following the monastery timetable is difficult not because it is physically demanding, but because it places ruthless limitations upon my freedom. While undeniably peaceful, the twelve hours of Grand Silence are also terribly inconvenient: they interfere not only with my ability to speak at will, but also with my access to the familiar networks of social media, commerce, and entertainment. The undertaking of two to three hours of prayer daily (and more on Sunday) begins like a very special element of the day, but eventually becomes bothersome: apart from fatigue generated by the sheer amount of time spent in the church and its unfamiliar ritual, the hours of prayer further reduce the amount of time left to spend as I please. And, even though undeniably restful, the reduction of work to only five hours a day and only six days a week is an exasperating constraint in the face of my numerous deadlines and the nagging feeling of "being left behind" in the outside

⁴²⁹ While I use Christian examples, this dynamic is arguably true for other religious calendars. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in Judaism comes to mind, Tibetan week of mourning for the well-being of the world, or other religiously legislated variations in dying and grief.

world of fierce competition. The patterning of the monastery year has, perhaps, the least confining effect upon my personal liberty; yet even then, there are times when my choice to abide by the liturgical (rather than academic or secular) calendar loses a good deal of its attraction.⁴³⁰

The restrictions about what I can and cannot do, and at which intervals of time, are so irksome because they bring into focus a deeper problem that I have with time: my acute awareness of its limitations. Twelve hours without speech and internet, and three hours of prayer would not be such a problem, if days were longer. Limiting work to five hours a day and setting one whole day out of seven for rest, too, would be more bearable, if a week had more days. Immersion in the flow of the liturgical year would be utterly gratifying if I had an unlimited number of years at my disposal. But there are only twenty-four hours in a day, seven days in a week, and who knows how many years left in my life—a great number of which I have spent as a student! Surrounded by the rigid boundaries of monastery Time, I begin to brood over a deeper and much scarier limitation to my freedom: the brevity of my own life. Try as I may, I cannot add a single hour to my span of life. So sooner or later, despite all the niceties of my time at the monastery, I start counting my days and have serious reservations about the wisdom of making a retreat. There is just not enough time to go through the acrobatics of the monastery timetable *and* get done everything else I need to accomplish! The softest but most persistent of questions starts buzzing in my head: “*why bother?*” Getting up before 4 a.m., attending the Roman Catholic Mass, participating in the seven hours of the Liturgy, battling sleepiness and apprehension (“I am wasting my best

⁴³⁰ Such as the occasion when I learned that, while I would be using my spring break to enter deeper into the mystery of Christ’s death and rising during the Easter Triduum retreat at the monastery, my seminary friends would be vacationing in France for theirs.

writing hours!”) to grapple with Scripture in the wee hours of the morning, spending four days to participate in Christ’s passion and resurrection—all these formerly enchanting features of monastic living suddenly appear as utterly naïve, outdated, and outrageously out of touch with reality.

It is in wrestling with this question that I begin to see that the seemingly innocuous invitation to follow the monastery timetable for the duration of retreat in its true light: a pretext devised to bring to a halt my habitual race against the clock and confront me with the questions and terrors that I work so very hard to avoid. This is the time when I begin to realize, not merely that I am afraid of rest, but that my fear of rest has something to do with my fear of death. This is the time when the monastery is anything but a “nice place” to be. Yet, monastic Time is more than a means of confrontation; it is a messenger of hope. Its unsettling slowness and spaciousness embody an utterly different approach to inhabiting time and understanding death, beckoning me to try the monks’ way of silence, prayer, and work as an answer to my angst.

And with this realization, the real work and war of staying in the palace of monastery Time begins. Much within me recoils from the seeming pointlessness and fruitlessness of the monks’ existence. Much within me rebels against the apparent foolishness of my imitation of it. Much within me is quick to name the numerous losses to my various life projects that such an experiment, even when undertaken only temporarily, would engender. But when I dare to take a leap of faith, against every “voice of reason” shouting in my head, and enter the flow of monastery Time as if the monks *were* right in their ridiculously different way of understanding time and the true meaning and scope of human existence, I begin to discover Grand Silence, prayer, work, weekdays, weekends,

and the liturgical seasons of the year anew. No longer merely the “tasks” on the monastery agenda, they become “tastes” of a different kind of time: the pulse of Eternity throbbing through the veins of my own limited being. During those moments, I can rest in the face of all that can and cannot be done, for I know, on a deep experiential level, that I *have* time.

Something critical happens in the realm of monastery Time as well. Whereas monastery Space offers its visitors experiential knowledge of the fundamental reality of unrest in human life and the initial taste of restfulness that comes from an unmediated encounter with God, monastery Time supplies an alternative pattern for daily, weekly, and yearly living that is shaped in response to such knowing. Given the retreatants’ willingness to follow, Time takes them on a journey of deepening their understanding about the nature of human restlessness and the path to rest.

The dynamics of the retreatants’ journey in Time parallel their pilgrimage in Space: Starting with an almost immediate experience of peacefulness, it gives way to a laborious and warlike inner struggle, until finally, should retreatants persevere, it generates a deeper and more profound experience of rest. As in Space, rest is revealed to be an outcome of the religious experience, the instances when retreatants become aware of God as the ultimate source of their security, sustenance, and delight. Yet, monastery Time does not merely reiterate the revelations of monastery Space; it builds upon them, adding specificity and nuance. While retreatants’ experiences of lack, aloneness, and not-working in the partitions of monastery Space taught them that the greatest source of their unrest is internal, their experience of living under obedience to the monastery schedule offers a more explicit

lesson about its nature: monastery Time points towards finitude as the fundamental source of human restlessness.

Though not immediately obvious, the remembrance of death permeates every temporal dimension of monastic living.⁴³¹ On the level of the *monastery day*, the office of Compline with its plea for help and protection (expressed in the Psalms and the final invocation “May the Almighty and merciful Lord, grant us a restful night and a peaceful death!”), the nightly Benediction from the Abbot (offered every night, to monks and visitors alike, in case somebody dies that night), and the soft embrace of the Grand Silence underscore the utmost vulnerability and fleeting character of human life. On the level of the *monastery week*, the Sunday celebration of the resurrection, no matter how glorious, is never detached from the deep awareness of the Lord’s burial and time in the tomb on Friday. Finally, even though the most dramatic remembrance of death on the level of the *monastery year* takes place during the Easter Triduum, every retreat is situated in the invisible but palpable tapestry of this liturgical living, intimately connected to the passion and death of Christ on earth. By inviting retreatants to follow a peculiar monastic pattern of rising and retiring, work and prayer, speech and silence—a pattern that comes into a profound collision with retreatants’ habitual ways of organizing their calendars and agendas!—monastery Time breaks through the culturally sponsored “denial of death” and

⁴³¹ The importance of this notion to the Cistercians of the Strict Observance is reflected in the persistent but false belief that Trappists use the Latin phrase *memento mori* (“remember that you must die”) as their salutation expression and dig a part of their own grave each day. The monks’ usual greetings consist of a smile and a slight nod of head, and their graves are dug only following the reception of the body. For Dom Edmond M. Obrecht’s reflection on the Trappist observances and refutation of this belief, see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Trappists.”

forces its guests to meet, head-on, the gnawing awareness of the fleeting nature of their existence.

Such realization is inherently restive, not only because it confronts retreatants with the inescapability of death, but also because it raises critical questions about the meaning of their life. That's why, despite the initial restfulness of their encounter with the monastic timetable, the retreatants invariably have a harder time following it during the later stages of their visit. There is nothing on the monastery schedule to camouflage the threat of personal non-being that comes with remembrance of death: yet, everything on the monastery schedule challenges the validity of the most prevalent ways of making life meaningful in the surrounding society. Standing in the way of the retreatants' habit of filling their days with activities and tasks, monastery Time draws their attention to the utmost impermanence of things, relationships, and individual achievements. Ruthlessly stripping its guests of their usual daily, weekly, and yearly occupations, monastery Time exposes the most admired secular avenues of meaning-making as lacking: toil and play, wisdom and folly, pleasures and possessions are no more than a "chasing after the wind." In this sense, staying in the spacious palace of monastery Time is indeed a trying experience.

Yet, the alternative arrangements of monastery Time accomplish more than inflicting considerable damage on the retreatants' forgetfulness of death and their self-made sources of security and meaning. The peculiar patterns of the monastery day, week, and year serve not merely as tools of demolition but as embodiments of an alternative way to face the inexorable reality of death and respond to the deep ambiguity of life's meaning. Monastery Time reveals the *religious* answer to the most persistent questions of human

existence. Even as the monastery's temporal arrangements declare the stark reality of death to be indeed an inevitable part of life, they simultaneously assert that its nature is far greater than the short interval from birth to death of an individual person. The intriguing proposition to live for a few days of retreat according the movements of the monastery timetable is therefore to experience a far more radical provocation—all the more powerful because so hidden. It is an invitation to act as if the ultimate reality of life were not death and decay but the reality of God. It is a challenge to live as if the stark finality of death were not something to be feared but reverently embraced as a threshold into an entirely new way of being more fully and eternally alive. When the monastery visitors choose to follow the movements of the monks' schedule, they agree (even if without consciously realizing it) to act and live as "religious persons," people who have the courage to affirm life as meaningful and to be at peace in the face of death.

For me, as for many committed retreatants, this first attempt at "obedience," laborious and warlike as it is, is positive: the experience of deep restfulness engendered not by the assurances of immortality, but by the experience of dying into life. Having embraced the "death" of surrendering my own plans and agendas for the time of retreat, I am rewarded with the first fruits of "resurrection," the ability to see my personal commitments, work responsibilities, belongings, and even the inescapable limitations of my existence in a new, more restful and life-giving, way. This is the second and most surprising revelation of monastery Time: the verdict of finitude is not final.

Environment as a Whole

A closer look at monastery Space and Time reveals that their deep restfulness is dependent on their ability to sponsor for their visitors a process of firsthand discovery of the inherent

restlessness of human existence *and* experiential knowledge of God as the ultimate source of human rest. The genius of the monastic Environment, however, consists in embodying and reconfirming these personal discoveries on the level of the whole. While individually the living, worship, and work partitions of monastery Space, and the daily, weekly, and yearly patterns of monastery Time offer rest to their visitors by creating conditions for their firsthand encounter with God, together they “re-imagine” the world in light of such experience.

For the duration of a retreat, the contours of the monastic Environment as a whole become a symbolic representation of the “world” for its visitors. The representation is all the more appealing (even if not fully conscious), as individual spaces and times of the monastery parallel those of the world. The monastery schedule utilizes common experiences of time—day, week, year—the same on both sides of the monastery wall. The living and work spaces of the monastery are matched by “home” and “work,” and the monastery worship space corresponds to what may be loosely called the “third place” in the world.⁴³² The subtle substitution of the “recreation” peace with the “worship” space is even less noticeable given the reality of how unusual the monastic worship experience is for an outsider’s eyes, thus at least initially fitting the bill of “entertainment.” Yet, the

⁴³² The concept of the “third place” comes from the field of urban sociology, popularized in the work of Edward Soja and Ray Oldenburg: Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe, 1999). The “third place” is a “place to hang out,” a collective term that delineates the social setting that is outside the domestic (“first place”) and work (“second place”) realms. I find the parallel between “worship space” and “third space”—i.e., between “spending time in the worshipping community” and “hanging out with one’s friends”—both fascinating and revealing. In both cases, a powerful process of *formation* is taking place, and in both cases it is a matter of communal and environmental influence which is *chosen* by its participant. Such personal formation is in turn crucial for the formation of authentic community.

similarity of the *types* of individual times and spaces only highlights the difference in the quality of their *relationship* and *positioning*. By taking the same “building blocks” and arranging them in a different relational and structural pattern, the monastic Environment creates an *alternative way of seeing* the habitual realms of space and time, thus, re-imagining the world for its guests.

Re-Imagining World via Relationship

Relationally, the monastic Environment imagines the world that is no longer fragmented. Within monastery Space, its living, worship, and work domains form a unified whole. While distinct, they are never separated. They interpenetrate, “bleed” into each other. The living space of the retreat house hides in its belly the worship spaces of Our Lady of Guadeloupe and Crypt Chapels, and is directly adjacent to the Abbey Church; and the worship space of the Church is literally around the corner from the work space of bonsai garden and bookstore. Moreover, the spaces are not only connected with each other, but actually convertible into each other. Even as the Abbey Church and small chapels are among formal worship spaces of the monastery, converting the work and living space of the lands into the worship space is as easy as placing a chair by the woods. Those plentiful meditative settings (simple chairs in the garden, benches by the lakeside, gazebo by Magnolia Alley) throughout the land create favorable conditions for spontaneous turning to God, thus, extending the worship space to the farthest boundaries of the monastery property. Similarly, even though individual rooms in the retreat house technically belong to the living space, they are turned into the worship space at the time of private prayer. Finally, all individual spaces are characterized by the same direction of influence, supporting and extending each other’s effect on their guests. Somewhat paradoxically,

monastery Space leads its visitors past the “things of space,” beyond their habitual preoccupation with the material. The living, worship and work spaces of the monastery work together to exert gentle, yet firm, pressure that turns and guides the visitors’ attention from the externals—things, words, activities—to the inward realities and events, deeper happenings, taking them into the space beyond Space itself.

Such qualities of “relationship” between the monastery living, worship, and work spaces are deeply restful because they translate into the non-opposition, non-isolation, and fundamental continuity between their individual locations, creating a harmonious and remarkably effective “community” of spaces. It is this underlying unity on monastery Space as a whole that makes it so restful for its visitor: since there is no opposition, I need not undergo any changes in identity or behavior, when moving between the living, worship, and work spaces; since there is no isolation, I need not work hard on commuting between the spaces; and fundamental continuity of spaces creates an immersion experience of unmatched power. Such non-opposing, non-segregated, harmonious continuum of spaces “imagines” the world for its visitors as no longer fragmented but whole, and therefore inherently restful for those who come from the worlds, wherein at times they are asked to be and behave as different persons in different spaces.

The daily, weekly and yearly rhythms of monastery Time, too, forms a unified ensemble. While on retreat, I am encouraged to “cultivate silence at all times,” to “pray without ceasing,” and to “never be idle.” This does not mean that all three activities get thrown together—after all they are divided in time—but that on a basic level some deep, non-conflicted simultaneity is possible. The alternative patterning of the day, therefore, not only involves doing the same things at different hours, but calls for entering into them in a

different way: no longer merely external activities but inner attitudes. During *the day*, it calls for quiet cultivation of silent receptivity that deepens, rather than disrupts, my work and prayer, for fostering a prayer-full dimension both in work and silence, and for growing more skilled in the extremely active and demanding work of real prayer and silence. During *the week*, it invites the preservation of Sunday restfulness during the work days. Throughout *the year*, it encourages the keeping of Lenten or Adventine attitude throughout the various seasons. Finally, as in Space, all individual times share the direction of influence, deepening their overall effect on the monastery guests. Somewhat paradoxically, monastery Time steers its visitors' attention past their "transient occupations," and even beyond the ordinary flow of time itself. The recurring rhythms of monastic living imbue ordinary days, weeks and years existence with the timeless, endless quality, altering the visitors' subjective experience of time as linear.

Such qualities of relationship are restful because they make possible non-conflicted, single-minded, and fully present living. The repetitious discipline of monastic day, week and year eradicates the ever-present concern about "having no time": thanks to the pre-established commitment to engage in certain activities at the fixed times of the day, my work never comes in conflict with my prayer or my need for rest; during the week, I one can rest assured that the strain of the weekdays will give way to the serenity of Sunday; and, the seasons of Liturgy are in harmony with the flow of the ordinary weeks and days. The externally regulated patterns of action not only reduce the amount of outer distractions, but the degree of inner dividedness, making possible a single-minded involvement in the duty at hand, full immersion in the present moment. The absence of opposition between various activities on a deeper level of intention ensures that my change of action—when

alternating between silence, work, and prayer throughout the day, or going from the workdays to Sunday of the week, or moving through the seasons of liturgical year—need not involve changes in my identity and attitude. Such non-opposing, non-segregated, harmonious relationships between the monastery’s individual times “re-imagines” the temporal universe as no longer disjointed but intact, and therefore inherently restful for those who come from the worlds, wherein, inwardly divided, they are forced to perform clashing external obligations in the never ending race against the clock.

Yet, the harmonious, deep congruency of the individual monastery spaces and times is not accidental. The difference in the quality of *relationship* between the individual domains of monastery Space and Time is inseparable from their *structural* reorganization. By assembling the same “building blocks” into a new configuration—that signals redistribution of weight and order of importance—the monastic Environment re-imagines the habitual realms of space and time as the bearers of the new order.

Re-Imagining World via Structure

Structurally, the monastic Environment imagines the world that has a different center. The Abbey Church, the principal embodiment of the worship space, is the topographical center of the monastery’s spatial realm. It is surrounded by the living space, embodied in monks’ living quarters and the retreat house facilities. The work spaces of bonsai garden, bookstore, welcome center, bakery, and surrounding lands form the most outer context. Such concentric arrangement of individual spaces is restful, because it is practically sound. It makes sense to have the church at the center, so that people from different places in the monastery can easily get to it seven times a day. It is convenient to have work areas at the outskirts of the monastery, so that contacts with the outside world that work necessitates

could offer least interference to the life of the cloistered monks. Finally, having living quarters positioned in between the work and the worship spaces places the monastery inhabitants equidistant from their two main occupations: prayer and work.

Yet, more than pragmatic convenience is at work in monastery Space. Carved in the stone and brick of the monastic Environment is a peculiar worldview: monastery Space imagines a theocentric world. The monastery physical settings serve as a framing device, designed to focus visitors' attention on the otherwise hidden and easily overlooked—because it lacks material expression—Mystery at the heart of the world. It is this singularity of intention, to make known the invisible God in space, expressed structurally, that enables the harmonious relationship between the individual locations. The concentric arrangement of the monastery's physical spaces is a symbolic representation of the origin, order, and direction of the monastery world: from center to periphery. By identifying “worship”—and not “work” or “living”—space as its structural center, monastery Space imagines the world in which living and working are significant, yet secondary: they originate at the center of one's being with God. Such *de-centralization of work and home* is inherently restful for those who come from other “worlds,” wherein their existence is routinely defined by their work performance and or the size of their house.

Mirroring the topographic testimony of Space, Time makes a temporal proclamation of God's Presence in the world, fashioning the “God-centered” world by the movements of the monastery timetable. Time re-imagines the world by prescribing the different hours of onset and conclusion, order and duration to the various monastery activities: the twelve hours of Grand Silence start and conclude the day—unusually early; seven times throughout the day, the community is gathered to pray the Liturgy of the Hours;

and, no longer than five hours for daily work are assigned by the Cistercian Constitutions.⁴³³ These hours, much like the 1:6 ratio of the week and the seasons of liturgical year, are fixed, not open to computation or bargaining. With an exception of Sundays and special celebrations, the flow of Grand Silence, Prayer and Work is the same, day in and day out. Weeks begin and culminate in Sunday. And year after year, the Liturgy comes full circle, from Advent to Advent. There is also an instance of peculiar passivity at the center, the hinge upon each level turns: each day begins and ends in the watchful listening of silence; the weekly rhythms of work and not-working begin and end in the placid restfulness of Sunday; and each year starts and ends in the longing and awaiting of Advent.⁴³⁴ Such circular arrangement with the pause at the center is restful, because it is practically sound. The five-hour workday, with endorsed time for silence and prayer, is remarkably reasonable. A whole day each week externally maintained as the Sabbath seems almost exuberantly luxurious. The fixed order of the liturgical seasons offers the comfort of predictability and order all year around.

Yet, as in Space, more than pragmatic convenience is at work. Recorded in the monastery calendar and timetable is a peculiar worldview: monastery Time, too, imagines a theocentric world. The Grand Silence that it orders is a testimony to the existence of the Word that is spoken outside of the human mouth: if there is no other voice to be heard, the twelve hours of silence everyday make no sense. Seven prayers a day is a witness to the

⁴³³ Perhaps the most striking feature of these daily divisions is that they are not equal in length. That much for the Benedictine “tripod”—it has uneven legs!—pointing to a very different way in which “balance” is defined in the monastery.

⁴³⁴ One may also notice “rest” at the heart of each significant Liturgical event: Advent before Christmas, tomb-time before Easter, waiting in Jerusalem before Pentecost.

Presence that is more than a figment of the human imagination: if there is no Higher Reality than human beings themselves, prayer is ultimately meaningless. The daily and weekly rhythms of not-working are an affirmation that there is somebody or something else at work in the world: if there is nobody else to keep things going, stopping is a costly mistake. Measuring the years by the seasons of Liturgy (rather than by succession of term papers or Macy's sales calendars) only makes sense insofar as it captures something closer to real life. Without God at the center, the peculiar architecture of monastery Time is anything but restful!

But with God in the picture, the ordinary events and activities of the day, week and year become revelatory. Like the contours of monastery Space, the temporal structure of the monastic environment serves as a set of lenses that reveals what otherwise is likely to go unnoticed: the Mystery that does not fit the chronological passage of time. It is this singularity of intention—to make known the everlasting God in time—expressed structurally, that makes itself manifest in the harmonious relationship between the individual times. Then, the *daily cycle* of silence, work, and prayer can be seen as an embodiment of the human search for the Divine. The *weekly rhythm* of work and not-working become a representation of the partnership between humans and God, as co-workers and co-resters of creation. And the liturgical *seasons of the year* become symbolic of the comingling of the human and Divine in the life of Christ and the Church.

Thus, by ordaining the unconventionally early rising and retiring, unusually long hours of silence and prayer, unnervingly short hours of work, and ongoing liturgical enactment of something that happened centuries ago, Time imagines an alternative temporal universe that is restful—because it is not of *human* making. The theocentric world

imagined by monastery Time is the world at the center of which Somebody else, besides humans, is at work, and at rest, creating. That's why "rest" is at the center of the daily, weekly and yearly cycles of monastery Time! By asking its guests *to rest*, Time asks them to remember that they are not in charge. By inviting them to rest *with God*, Time reminds them that their work, at its best, is only participation, and their fruitfulness is dependent on their ability to discern and cooperate with the movements of the Divine hand. What monastery Time accomplishes is more than a radical reversal of priorities in the daily, weekly and yearly order of work and worship—but *de-centralization of the activity itself*. Time imagines the world in which the unavoidable, even valuable, movement of action stems from the essential repose of contemplation. The discovery of action as important but secondary is deeply restful for those who come from other worlds, wherein "self-made" persons are viewed with admiration, the passive voice is judged "weak," and rest itself is perceived as a matter of ultimate defeat, a necessary sacrifice for the enhancement of work, or yet another activity in the course of life oriented to leisure.

Re-Imagined World as a Mold for Re-Formation of Self

It is precisely because the world that the monastic Environment imagines is not written down and offered to the retreatants as an abstract treatise on paper, but is inscribed in the brick and stone of its Space and the contours and seasons of its Time, that the retreatants cannot make it into a subject of intellectual reflection held at a safe distance. Rather, they become subjected to its direct, immediate influence: the re-imagined world becomes a mold for fashioning of the "restful self." The contours of its physical and temporal realms form an external structure—like a cast into which a fractured limb is placed—which offers not only substantial support and protection, but also superior guidance for the limb's growth

in a very particular direction. Fashioning the restful self, therefore, involves not merely pausing for restoration but the work of re-patterning. The re-imagined world provides a setting that invites, and at times, gently forces, the re-formation of self in three ways.

First, the re-imagined world offers a mold for inner and outer unification of the self: since the world that the monastic Environment imagines is no longer fragmented, the self needs not be. The initial restfulness and peace that I experience during monastic retreat, therefore, is the fruit of becoming whole. Yet, being environmentally induced, my wholeness is incomplete, for my budding restfulness is threatened by my life-long habits of divided living and working. While no longer necessary, the restive dividedness of self still has to be unlearned: this is the “work and war” that I enter in the aftermath of my initial restfulness.

The re-imagined world assists the work and war of unlearning in two ways. On the one hand, it inhibits the old habits of living by no longer supporting them from without: both the rewards of living divided and the punishments it entails are removed. Without external reinforcement, I am less likely to start out on the slippery slopes of separation. On the other hand, the re-imagined world bespeaks of the “one thing necessary,” inviting me to seek God, at all times and in all spaces. It is the singularity of intention that makes the singularity of self possible. Being concerned with the “one thing necessary” frees me from being “worried and distracted by many things.” Now, I can see and enter all my activities and occupations with the same underlying attitude: as a means to union with God. The re-formed self is restful—because it is no longer divided.

Second, the re-imagined world provides a mold for a *being*-centered living. By making “being with God” definitive for the identity and occupations of its inhabitants, the

monastic Environment redefines the workings of the self's inner universe, shifting the center of gravity away from *having* and *doing*—and toward *being*. A theocentric world encourages an ontocentric self-understanding! While not fully conscious of the nature of the shift, I quickly sense the freedom that it affords: the initial restfulness and peace that I experience in the monastery is a result of feeling no longer judged by the results of my activity, ownership, and status. Yet, being environmentally induced, my liberation is only partial, for my nascent restfulness is endangered by my habitual over-identification with my work or reputation. While no longer externally supported, the strong inner connection between the “who I am” and “what I do, what I have, and what people say about me” still has to be severed: this is the “work and war” that await me in the later stages of retreat.

The re-imagined world supports the work and war of breaking my habits of *doing*- and *having*-centered living by reducing the visibility and importance of *having* and *doing* while at the same time creating a space for the discovery of *being*. While in the monastery these modes of living are very similar to those in the world—e.g., volunteering in the kitchen propels me into the *doing* mode; shopping at the monastery bookstore offers familiar joys of *having*; and, walking the monastery woods and wetlands gifts me with a simple taste of *being*—the balance between the three is altered. By emphasizing the simplicity of physical surroundings, silence, and not-working, the monastic Environment trims down the externals that make the achievements of *having* and *doing* visible: clothed in the “casual, but no shorts” attire and enveloped in silence, I walk the monastery lands, with the “Ph.Ds.” and the plumbers, the well-off and the broke, as equal. At the same time, by giving me rest despite the utter simplicity of my surroundings and my own not-working, the monastery Environment exposes *having* and *doing* as nonessential for resting. Limited

in my preferences for room, board, and entertainment, I can rest in the realization that I don't need to have or do much in order to rest. Finally, by offering me the taste of deep restfulness not only in the face of, but precisely *through* the conditions of lack and not-working, the re-imagined world calls their attention to the fact that *having* and *doing* can be problematic, even perilous for genuine rest. It reveals that, while not inherently restless, created things and the movement of activity can get in the way of resting. By disconnecting me from the goods and gadgets of civilization, the re-imagined world helps me recognize the dangers of "more," and not to look for rest where it cannot be found.

On the other hand, the re-imagined world reveals *being*. When, following the nudging of the monastery Environment, I willingly embrace the simplicity, solitude, and not-working of my monastic retreat, I discover that my existence is anchored in something deeper than the palpable movement of *doing* and the tangible reality of *having*. Enormous relief comes from realizing that I still am, even when my work is brought to a halt, my possessions are absent, and my name is unknown. The monastery Environment reveals that *being*, unlike *having* and *doing*, poses no threat to rest and indeed is essential for the experience of genuine restfulness. Removed from the solace of social engagement, the comfort of things and commotion of work, I wander around slightly bewildered, not knowing what to do with myself—until I stumble into rest by discovering *within* my restive self a peculiar opening into the Reality that is bigger and calmer than my individual self. In this encounter, I come to know myself as "rest-full."

But the re-imagined world does not leave this discovery to chance. I experience the restfulness of *being* and myself as "rest-full" during the monastery retreat repeatedly, because I am asked to stop—all throughout retreat—with unnerving regularity. Seven

times a day, one day a week, and in every season of the year, I am summoned to step aside, empty my hands, and untether myself from whatever I am involved at the moment—in order to wait, in the poverty of my being, for God. Thus, by placing a pause at the center of its daily, weekly and yearly living, the monastic Environment brings its guests to a profound realization: the restfulness of *being* can only be known by being at rest. The theocentric world imagined by the monastery Environment promotes an ontocentric self-understanding, by endorsing the way of life that is centered on rest! And slowly, in response to the frequent interruptions to action and acquisition built into the monastery schedule, my habitual fixation on *having* and *doing* begins to wear down, and I begin to relish this emptiness, this loosening of bonds, this silent solitary wait that brings me home to myself. The reformed self is restful indeed—not only because it is no longer threatened by the inherent inadequacy of its *doing* and *having*, but also because it is now familiar with the restfulness of its own *being*. But more is happening as a result. My growing awareness of Infinite Being at the roots of my own limited *being* marks the beginning of my seeing of “things unseen” as real. In this encounter, I begin to know the reality of the Incorporeal and Eternal—no longer merely as a tenet of faith, preached from the pulpit or discussed in the seminary paper, but as a matter of my own personal experience.

This is the last, and possibly the greatest, impression that the mold of the monastic Environment makes upon its guests. For by creating a space wherein they can catch a glimpse of the invisible and the infinite, the re-imagined world corrects their existential myopia and addresses the deepest source of their restlessness. As beings keenly aware of the unstoppable passage of time and the incurable impermanence of matter, humans are besieged not only with the deep disquietude about their finitude, but also with the great

vexation over the meaning of their fleeting existence. Taking its guests, by means of space and time, to the place of rest that lies beyond the boundaries of space and time—into the domain of eternity and incorporeality—the monastic Environment helps them see, for themselves, that their lives are rooted in something greater and more lasting than “things and schedules,” that both in life and in death they belong to God. No longer a complete prisoner to the world of space and time, the reformed self has the courage to rest in the face of the apparent emptiness of its life and inevitability of its death.

My encounter with the first context of monastery living, the monastic Environment constitutes the earliest and most fundamental stage in my reception of the monastery “gift of peace.” The restfulness that I come to know here is still too deep for conscious articulation, or even full comprehension, but something critical *has* happened. Everything else that will take place thereafter—as I encounter the monastic Community, begin to explore the monastery Practices, and immerse myself in the monastic Texts—will be built upon the foundation that was laid in the monastery Environment. As such, the monastery Environment “contains” the whole of the monastery peace in the same way that a zygote, an initial cell of an organism, does: just like all other organs and systems are “hidden” in the first living cell, three other contexts of the monastery living are *already present* in the monastery Environment. Merely by spending several days at the monastery site, I have encountered its Community, Practices, and Texts, and therefore come to know something of the monastic gift of peace. At the same time, the restfulness of the monastery Environment has the *not yet*-quality to it. For the most part, what happens to me and other committed retreatants in monastery Space and Time is a matter of passive, willing

receptivity and acquiescence, rather than fully conscious and active participation. My coming into possession of the monastery gift peace would unfold in two primary directions: from by and large tacit knowing to conscious realization, and from instinctive and unthinking compliance to the intentionally chosen and deliberate preferring.⁴³⁵

8.2 Community

Whereas in the monastic environment retreatants encounter the most hidden dimension of the monastery peace, the monastery community presents them with its most visible and vivid representation. Monks are undoubtedly the most cherished “landmark” and the most desired “sight-to-see” during one’s monastery visit. The black-and-white robed men are secretly watched in stalls during prayer hours, eagerly listened to during retreat talks, and at times shyly approached in the bookstore or bonsai garden. On some basic level, the numerous visitors come to the monastery because of the monks. They come to see the men who live their lives in a way that is radically different from the rest of the society, and the men who are said to have peace that the rest of society so radically lacks. They come to verify, with their own eyes, whether the monks’ peace is “for real,” and if so, whether they too can partake of it. The peace-producing effect of the monastic community, therefore, is dependent on its ability to introduce retreatants to a “person of peace,” to give voice (and

⁴³⁵ On the level of the chapter narrative, this in turn means that in the later sections of this chapter, I will write less and less about the *retreatants*’, and more and more about *my* experience of the monastery retreat. There are indeed strong parallels between my personal experience of restfulness of the three other contexts of monastic living (Community, Practices, and Texts) and the experience of those retreatants who chose to participate in the monastic regimen with the same degree of reverence and receptivity; yet, it is precisely because with each context of monastic living, I enter deeper and deeper into the realms of personal discernment and commitment-making, “generalizing” from my own experience to other retreatants becomes less and less appropriate or possible.

body) to the alternative way of life, worldview, and self-understanding that were silently declared by the monastic environment, and to invite and sponsor their participation.

In the monk, retreatants meet a man of peace.⁴³⁶ This statement is most routinely misinterpreted, so it is necessary first to name what it does *not* mean. The peacefulness of the monk is not of a miraculous origin; it is not a matter of a particular placid “disposition” or “personality type” (even if there were such a thing) that is attracted to the monastic way of life; and, it is not the outcome of his “fleeing the world with all its restlessness.” At the same time, it is not a matter of purely romantic idealizing on the part of the retreatants who are already favorably disposed toward the existence of monks and monasteries.

Rather, the at times physically palpable peacefulness of monks is a fruit of environmental influence, intentional discipline, and the fundamental orientation of their life. As retreatants experienced in their own encounter with the monastic environment, the peacefulness of the monastery inhabitants is, at least to some extent, is a part of the peacefulness of the monastery itself. While life at the monastery offers no protection from the toil and trouble and the ordinary suffering of the human life (and faith itself implies a certain degree of anguish, of staying put in the face of despair—without running away and without consenting), it *does* shield its inhabitants from much of the self-imposed and socially-promoted bustle as well as the customary noise of technological society. When it comes to environmental pollution, monks *are* better off: the monastery is a place of quiet,

⁴³⁶ While the specifics of my argument about the monks’ identity and peacefulness arise from the particularities of my own encounter with the monastic community, they have important parallels in the monks’ own writing on this subject of monastic identity and monastic peace. See, for example, Thomas Merton and Patrick Hart, *The Monastic Journey* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 3-84; Anthony Delisi, *What Makes a Cistercian Monk?: Chapter Talks on the Charisms of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance* (Conyers: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2003); Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, 1957), vii-xiv, 1-57.

built by the “lovers of silence.” So, it is only natural that a monk who lives in the peaceful environment of the monastery, day and day out, sometimes for decades, regardless of his personality, gradually grows more peaceful himself.

The monk’s peacefulness is, however, further aided by his intentional discipline of prayer. Starting from the very first day of his discernment process, and every day of his life at the monastery, he will interrupt the flow of his external activities and inner occupations repeatedly, in order to tend to the monastic Liturgy of the Hours. The liturgical prayer is supplemented with the morning and evening “meditation” periods and the practice of *lectio divina*. These “official” prayers are common for every monk. To those prayers, individual monks usually add other spiritual disciplines that they find helpful: e.g., psalmody, ejaculatory prayers, Rosary, the Stations of the Cross. During certain liturgical seasons, the duration of the office, *lectio*, meditation, and individual prayer is lengthened. Finally, these practices are deepened by the monastic general orientation and basic attitudes: e.g., of primary asceticism, discretion, keeping custody of one’s eyes, and controlling of one’s tongue. These disciplines of deliberate simplification and intentional slowing down, of ongoing discernment of speech and action, of repeated letting go of the daily toil and trouble in order to enter the state of awake attentive listening are inherently peace-producing and restful. So, it is only natural that a monk who uses his words sparingly, returns to his heart frequently, shows up at church seven times a day to pray, and meditates for extended periods of times—day in and day out, sometimes for decades—gradually grows peaceful. *Anybody* who would care to set everything else aside and sit quietly in the morning and in the evening, mind his business and restrain his speech during the day, would be more peaceful—even if God did not have anything to do with it.

But, of course, God does. The monk stakes his whole life on this strange, radically counter-cultural supposition—that the human heart is made for God and it remains restless until it rests in God—making his search for resting in God the focal point and the ultimate goal of his existence. His decision to come to the monastery is a decision to love God *above* all things. And as such, it results in crystal-clear priorities. His willingness to “sell all he has in order to gain the pearl of great price,” takes away his need to worry about other, smaller pearls. His focus on the “one thing necessary” relieves him from tending to and being distracted by the “many things.” The purity of his heart—trained to “will one thing”—re-collects the work of his heart, head, and hand, making him one. The restfulness of the monk, therefore, is the restfulness of the one who passes “from multiplicity to unity”⁴³⁷: because he has dared to rest in God alone, he alone can really afford to rest.

Still, the monk is restful not only because all his faculties and aspirations are brought together in the simple singularity of his intention, but also because the one “thing” he seeks is God. Unlike any other thing—always in danger of scarcity or at risk of disintegration—the monk’s object of desire is infinite and eternal, by definition belonging to the realm “where neither moth or rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Mat 6:19). As such, it gives him not only the satisfaction of *having* it, but also the peace of mind about *not-losing* it. The monk can be assured that there is always enough to go around, and that his treasure is immune before the passage of time and the impermanence of matter. The restfulness of the monk, therefore, is the restfulness of the one who has experienced a shift in “ultimate concern,” from the transient to the more

⁴³⁷ The poetic and insightful reflection on passing from “multiplicity to unity” and other paradoxes of a monk’s journey of becoming restful can be found in the aforementioned text, *Passing from Self to God: A Cistercian Retreat*, by Father Robert Thomas (Thomas, 62-77.).

durable kind: of all people, he can rest, for what gives his life meaning is greater than his life itself.

Yet, the monk's love for God is not a damnation of everything else. His detachment is not to be confused with derision. The monk does not look *down* on the "things of the world"; he looks *through* them. Ironically, it is the search for God *above* all things that enables him to find God *in* all things. Since he strives to discern the hand of the Giver behind the gifts, he can enjoy the world's goodness without trying to turn it into his possession (and, in turn, becoming possessed by it). At the same time, since he seeks the will of God above his own, he can endure the world's evil without becoming overwhelmed by it. Liberated from bondage to both pleasure and pain by his longing to see the face of Christ in all, he can embrace everything and everyone coming his way. As such, the monk's way of life, set apart to be in communion with God, sets him free to be in communion with all. And his search for "God alone" is consummated in his "love of neighbor." The restfulness of the monk, in this sense, is the restfulness of the one for whom the world ceases to be an obstacle to his search for God and becomes revelatory: of all people, he can rest, for his eyes no longer separate between the "holy" and "unholy" but see the whole world as an icon of the Divine Mystery.

Perfection so dazzling, of course, is hard to find in the actuality of monastery living, for an average monk on an average day. The monastic quest for resting in God alone is lived out on a rich tapestry of personality types, particularities of character, and degrees of personal woundedness. Despite their saintly appearance—when viewed from the distance against the backdrop of the sanctuary—monks do not dwell peacefully in the high heavens above the trials and tribulations of mere mortals. It only takes me two retreats in the

monastery to realize that it is possible to see an anxious, upset, or in one way or the other “worked up” monk on the monastery property. My temptation to romanticize, therefore, is short-lived and self-liquidating. Soon, I begin to see the utmost humanity of the men of peace.

These glimpses of reality, however, far from being contradictory to the depiction of the monk as a “man of peace,” are in fact crucial for understanding it. They reveal that at the core of the monk’s restfulness is not the absence of tension, discord, and occasional rubbing of shoulders with his brothers and superiors, but his ceaseless search (and at times, a mighty struggle!) for resting in God *in the course* of it. The monk is a man of peace not because he “has it all,” resting even now on the laurels of his final perfection, but because he is laying his all, including his very real unrest on the altar, as he enters the sacrificial fires of perfecting. It is this act of radical and enduring surrender that sets the monk aside from other people. As such, he is not a member of a different “race,” but a representative of another “profession”: the one that makes the art of entering God’s Sabbath rest its sole and solemn occupation. It is only natural that he who “in all things has sought rest”—day in and day out, sometimes for decades—should find it in the measure that visibly distinguishes him from the people of other professions.

Yet, my temptation to idealize monks, while indeed short-lived and self-liquidating, is far from being pointless. In its honeymoon stage, it points to the ideal of the monastic peace: as I form my first romanticized impressions of the monastic way of life, I see the dazzling glories of the “product,” the men of peace who have been under the formative influence of the monastery for a while. And when the honeymoon ends, it points out the nature of journeying toward the monastery peace: as my first romanticized notions

collapse, I get a chance to peek into the daily grind of the “process,” the work and war that these peace-wanting men have to undergo on day-to-day basis, as a part of their transformation. Being around monks, I can see for myself that their search for resting in God takes shape in the very ordinary circumstances of daily life, that it is being carried out by real flesh-and-bone persons (rather than standing-on-pedestal saints) who stick it out, amid each other’s imperfections, wounds, and annoyances, and that in due time such commitment bears the fruit of peace. Thus, when the fires of disillusionment die off, the ideal withstands—all the clearer for being through the purifying fire, but the illusions about getting there, wither.

But something else is revealed, when the curtain of idealization is torn in two. As I come to encounter both the restfulness *and* the restlessness of the monastic community, I begin to catch a glimpse of something with which I myself can identify: the ordinarily hidden reality of my own deep longing, and my own intense struggle, for peace. I begin to see that that I, too, have something of the “man of peace” within! I begin to realize that underneath the vast external differences of our paths of life is profound similarity of our hearts’ desire—and our hearts’ difficulty with fulfilling it. Moreover, as I observe the connection between the monks’ imperfect yet very real peacefulness and their imperfect yet very real prayer, I begin to see my retreat at the monastery anew. I begin to realize that my monastic stay, albeit on a much smaller scale, has something in common with the monks’ calling to the monastic life: that at their core, the questions “why did the monks come to this place?” and “why have *I myself* come here?” have the same answer: the deep intuition of God as the ultimate source and object of human desire. It is this change of perspective on myself and my monastic retreat that makes me recognize that the deep

restfulness that I come to know in the silence of the monastic environment is my own (even if only embryonic) experience of “resting in God.” I begin to see that the work and war that I have undergone to enter that rest is, in however limited a sense, the same work and war that the monks go through on their way to peace. I begin to realize that I, too, had a small taste of the monastic “process”—and that it works. Thus, the end of my idealization *of* the monks marks the birth of my identification *with* the monks!

These stunning realizations—of the commonality of the human desire for peace and God as its ultimate source and its object, of the same starting point of restlessness, and of the shared path of working and warring that connects the two—change the way in which I relate to the monks. Until then, I looked at the life of the monastic community as if from the outside, an object of natural curiosity and marvel. Now, my curiosity gains a sense of urgency. I begin to watch actively, in the same way that I watch my respected elders and mentors, trying to make out what it means to be a person of peace, speaking, eating, singing, bowing, praying, moving through the ordinary situations of daily living. Until then, my engagement with the monks’ talks about God was somewhat partial, I listened “half-ear”—because “this is what monks do, they talk about God!”—now, my ears are wide open and eager to soak their words in. Until then, I examined and speculated, somewhat leisurely, why anybody would choose such a peculiar way of life. Now, I long to imitate it. As I become aware of the relevance of the monastic way for satisfying my own desire for peace, and my perception of monks as “men of peace” begins to give way to my turning to them as my guides and teachers. I begin to see that I have much to learn from them about the work and war of becoming restful.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ At first glance, my spontaneous act of turning to the monks as guides and teachers on the path to peace seems far-fetched: after all their search for peace takes place in the context of their radical decision to leave

Something critical happens in the second context of the monastery living, the monastic Community. Whereas the monastic Environment imagined the world that was vastly different from the world that the retreatants inhabit outside the monastery, the monastic Community furnishes it with residents. Without the monks to fill the partitions of monastery Space and to move according to the rhythms of monastery Time, the imagining of the monastic Environment would lose much of its power. It would only be a relic of the times passed, no matter how glorious. With monks in the picture, however, the world imagined by the monastic Environment comes to life. Like the presence of a Russian in a room makes Russia the country somehow more real to other people occupying the same space, so does the presence of the monks makes the “different country,” of which they are “citizens,” all the more vivid and real. The fact that there are actual men who choose to live in the world as if God were the source and summit of human existence makes the alternative world imagined by the monastic Environment incredibly credible.

behind the outside world, in favor of entering the highly ascetical, highly structured, and counter-cultural environment of the contemplative monastery—the very world in which my own journey and struggle for peace takes place. Can a contemplative “man of peace” really teach a contemporary person in the world anything valid about finding peace? Yet, it could be argued that it is precisely because the journey of a monk takes place under such stripped-down-to-essentials conditions, it offers an unprecedented window into the fundamental sources of human restlessness and the primary dynamics of becoming restful. Moreover, because a monk’s journey of resting in God represents a gradual realization of his desire to discover the ultimate meaning of human life, the monastic lessons of peace are valuable for people from all religious and cultural horizons. Thus, in so far as every person’s ultimate quest in life is to find its meaning and learn to live in accord with it, it is possible to say that every person has something of a “monk” within; theologically, such understanding is expressed in the affirmation of a “contemplative dimension” innate in every human being. I am far from being alone in this understanding: see, for example, Edward C. Sellner, *Finding the Monk Within: Great Monastic Values for Today* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2008); Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982). In the in the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, “The Monk Within” is one of the most popular yearly retreats, offered yearly by Brother Michael.

Yet, monks do more than bear testimony to the theocentric world revealed by monastery Space and Time. They perform the work of imagining that is uniquely their own. The monastic Community imagines the world in which the busy, restive existence is not a norm but an aberration, the world in which the restful, spacious way of life is not a luxury of a few “well-off” individuals but a genuine possibility for all. Such alternative images of human life are deeply significant for my transformation into a restful person. In the world outside the monastery, where everybody around me was busy, hurried, stressed, it was easy to believe that such is the nature of contemporary life, the price that we pay for technological progress, enhanced communication, and increased economic and educational possibilities. It was natural to assume that this is “just the way things are,” that in my restlessness I was “just like everybody else.” No matter how much I longed for a more spacious restful existence, it was hard for me not to think that I simply could not afford such a life. The peacefulness of the monastic community—as poor as many of the poor, yet more restful than many of the rich—turns tables on my earlier assumptions and suppositions. The presence of the real men who live like persons of peace amid the tensions and pressures of contemporary society tells me (louder than words) that restlessness is not an inevitable state of life, and that restfulness can be obtained without money and without price. In this sense, the alternative world imagined by the monastic Community becomes for me a birthplace of hope: now, I see that I too can become a “person of peace,” despite the business of my work and the slim size of my wallet.

But not without a cost. Even as the presence of the monks is an embodied testimony to the restfulness as a gift available to all, it is simultaneously a declaration that the reception of this gift is not an automatic process. Individually and together, monks serve

as the living symbols of religious commitment who cannot fail to reveal that their restfulness is nothing more and nothing less than a fruit of their hungering and thirsting for God. As such, they present me not only with the much welcomed hope about the possibility of peace, but also with an inconvenient truth about its nature. The presence of the monastic community tells me (also louder than words) that if I want to have the “peace that passeth all understanding,” I have to learn to want “God alone.”⁴³⁹ My becoming restful is conditional upon my becoming religious.

And in the world of secular culture, from which I come to the monastery, that is tough “goods” to sell: increasingly aware of the many ills and injustices done in the name of religion, the contemporary mind feels uneasy about the prospects of loving *God*, much more so about the proposition of loving God *alone*. Being religious is not infrequently associated with being irrational, anti-progress, out of touch with reality, obsessive-compulsive, even fanatical. At best, the notion of becoming religious is freighted with ambivalence. At worst, it is an object of ridicule and rejection. Why in the world then do I buy into it?

Because I have no (conscious) idea of doing so! It is precisely because the suggestion to become religious in order to become restful is not written down and offered to me as an abstract proposition on paper, but as an embodied possibility personified in the

⁴³⁹ To a sensitive modern ear, such a radical uncompromising expression as seeking “God alone” is jarring, if not downright offensive. I hasten to clarify that the true meaning of the Cistercian traditional motto is not an endorsement of excluding the love of the neighbor, and indeed of the whole world, from the monks’ abiding concern, but rather a deeply held belief that it is only by loving God *above* all else that we become free to love anybody and anything with the affection that is healed from our own egotistic wounds and agendas: there is no compromising of the supremacy of God in the hierarchy of objects of love. Yet, stated in its historical (and outrageously exclusive-sounding) form, this traditional phrase offers a glimpse into the radical nature of the Cistercian renunciation.

lives of actual monks, I cannot make it into a subject of intellectual speculation that is held at a safe distance, but rather, myself become subjected to its direct, immediate influence. So, all I know is that members of the monastic community are “extremely nice” to be around: their lucid eyes, gentle voices, surprisingly quick smiles, and their unapologetic refusal to be impressed by status and achievements are deeply comforting for my mind and body that have been held at a constant pitch of high tension by the enormous expectations to do, have, and be from my primary communities. It is the monks’ restfulness itself that makes them so attractive to me, as a daughter of far more restive worlds. Like a kid in the candy store, I begin to covet such restfulness—before I really have a chance to think about how much it would cost me. I am seduced, as it were, into wanting to become just like the monastery persons of peace.

And this intense desire, far from being a “mere wishful thinking,” is a beginning of my actual transformation. Their very act of imagining myself as a restful person—“remembering the future”⁴⁴⁰—changes things in the present: the anticipation of the rest to come produces actual rest! But there is more. Like the small taste of good chocolate that generates an intense longing for more, my initial taste of monastery rest fuels my identification with the monks and my willingness to do anything to come into the possession of their “pearl of great price.” The restfulness of anticipation prepares the way

⁴⁴⁰ Contemporary cognitive scientific and psychological research confirms a strong connection between the imagination, memory, and subjective experience. Imagining the future, for example, involves many of the same brain areas as remembering the past: the hippocampus and medial temporal lobe are activated in the brain for all “mental time travel,” both when the person remembers the past and imagines the future. See, for example, Kourken Michaelian, Stanley B. Klein, and Karl K. Szpunar, *Seeing the Future: Theoretical Perspectives on Future-Oriented Mental Time Travel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

for the restfulness of identification: I am now eager to participate in the monastic way of life, and to speak and act as if I too were a part of the monastic community.⁴⁴¹

And with this adjustment in posture—from a curious onlooker to an eager participant—I am made ready to enter the monastery retreat *for real*. I am now "set up" for my encounter with the monastic Practices.

8.3 Practices

The monastic practices present monastery visitors with the most explicit and readily accessible route of imitation of the monastic way of life: so much of who monks are is closely tied up with what they do, the practices that they engage on daily basis.⁴⁴² Yet, my attraction to the monastic practices is fueled not only by my desire to imitate monks, but also by something about the practices themselves. Practices give me something to do, thus offering a welcome respite from the strong feelings of discombobulation and unease, induced by the intense quiet of monastery Space and the unnerving slowness of monastery

⁴⁴¹ In the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, several years ago, the monks made a somewhat unusual decision about their practice of the Liturgy of the Hours: the community invited the registered retreatants to sit in stalls with the monks, rather than stay behind the borders of the porch that opens for the lay people only during the celebration of the mass and special liturgical occasions. While different practical and theological reasons underlay such a decision on the part of this monastic community, from the perspective of the registered retreatants, such "radical inclusion" has a powerful effect on their perception of being a part of the monastic community. Not only do they have a benefit of using the actual books and texts used by the monks for their Liturgy of the Hours, and therefore being able to understand and follow one of the most fundamental practices of the monastic community; but the very physicality of being and praying together—seven times every day for the duration of a retreat!—becomes both a sign and a means of their deepened participation.

⁴⁴² Writes Charles Cumming, the monk of the Holy Trinity Abbey (Huntsville, Utah): "The external practices of the monastic life are directly connected with our search for God. These practices...are concrete means by which we in monasteries seek God. In and through these practices we express our spiritual values and ideals, and daily live out our vowed commitment to God." Charles Cummings, *Monastic Practices, Cistercian Studies Series* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 3. See also Mary Margaret Funk, *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Jane Tomaine, *St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2005); M. Basil Pennington, *A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).

Time.⁴⁴³ In this sense, practices give me rest even *before* I start performing them!—precisely because they promise the familiar comforts of “doing.” Hence, to gain insight the restorative and peace-producing effect of the monastic Practices, it is important to understand the different shades of doing that they provide: the experiences of “doing,” “not-doing,” and “un-doing.”

The monastic practices of *doing*—such as the Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina*, manual labor, spiritual direction, confession, special prayers and devotions—invite retreatants to learn and perform particular new activities. For example, in order to participate in the communal prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, I have to learn the order and general layout of the monastic hymnal, Psalter, the changing pieces in the Liturgy (Propers of Saints, Commons and seasonal prayers), the skills of chanting (on pitch and in sync with the monks), as well as the various customs of bowing, crossing, and other physical movements that accompany the performance of the Divine Office;⁴⁴⁴ to do *lectio*

⁴⁴³ Interestingly, a similar attraction to the monastery practices could be observed in the texts that seek to relate the gifts of the monastic tradition to the life “in the world”: for example, the number of references that accompany the Practices section of my manuscript far outweigh the number of references for the monastery the Environment, Community, and Texts sections taken all together! One may wonder if such intensely practical orientation of the contemporary texts not only points to the fundamental importance of the monastic practices for the monastic way of life, but also betrays a strong focus of the contemporary mind on action: monastic practices present the most tangible, portable, and controllable element of the monastic culture.

⁴⁴⁴ It is a recognition to the intricacy and difficulty of this practice that there are volumes dedicated to its observance. The formal Roman Catholic Liturgy of the Hours comes in four standard volumes, which are supplemented with a yearly Guide: Catholic Church, *The Divine Office: The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, 4 vols. (New York: Catholic Book Pub. Co., 1975). Several guides for laity are also available, ranging from the scholarly introductions to instructions “for dummies.” A growing number of shorter versions of the liturgical prayer, often coming from various religious orders, utilize the general format of liturgical prayer but vary in selection of psalms, Scriptural readings, and supplementary texts. See, for example, Maxwell E. Johnson, *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015); Carmelites of Indianapolis, *People's Companion to the Breviary*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Psalter Carmelite Monastery, 1997); Daria Sockey, *The Everyday Catholic's Guide to the Liturgy of the Hours* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2013); Catholic Church, *Christian Prayer, The Divine Office, Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul Vi* (New York: Catholic Book Pub. Co., 1976); John Brook, *The School of Prayer: An Introduction to the Divine Office for All*

divina, I have to gain practical skills for a very different pace and manner of reading;⁴⁴⁵ to practice the Stations of the Cross or Rosary or *Examen*, I must memorize specific prayer phrasing and remember specific Scriptural passages that lay a foundation for the reflection that accompanies these prayers.⁴⁴⁶ The overarching intent of these practices is to develop new theoretical and practical competencies which would create enhanced conditions for deepening of prayer and relationship with God.

In contrast to these “positive” (kataphatic) monastic tools, the monastic practices of *not-doing*—such as fasting, silence, solitude, vigil-keeping, custody of the eyes, and other ascetic exercises—invite retreatants to cultivate the “negative” (apophatic) skills. For example, I experiment with eating less, abstaining from talking at certain times of the day and in certain areas of the monastery, rising early, and honoring solitude. These practices seek to transform not merely the shape of an individual action (e.g., limiting one’s food intake or refraining from speech) but the deeper level of attitude (e.g., abandonment of

Christians (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992). A creative appropriation of the practice of “praying the hours,” with a distinctly Trappist flavor, comes from Kathleen Deignan: she arranged the selected passages from Thomas Merton’s writings for the prayers at Dawn, Day, Dusk, and Dark (Thomas Merton and Kathleen Deignan, *A Book of Hours* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2007).).

⁴⁴⁵ Important introductory texts for the practice of *lectio divina* include Enzo Bianchi and Rowan Williams, *Lectio Divina: From God's Word to Our Lives* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2015); M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroads, 1998); Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). For an in-depth treatment of *lectio* from within the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition, which discusses *lectio* not merely as a “technique” of prayer but preparation for contemplation, see Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Triumph Books, 1996).

⁴⁴⁶ Among the books that I used to learn these practices are Timothy Radcliffe, *Stations of the Cross* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014); M. Basil Pennington, *Praying by Hand: Rediscovering the Rosary as a Way of Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2006); Mark E. Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2015). However, my most helpful and memorable lesson about praying the rosary came not from reading, but from being led into this prayer, in a childlike “repeat-after-me” way, by the late Brother René of Gethsemani.

one's control over one's life or desire to understand).⁴⁴⁷ The primary goal of these practices is also the deepening of prayer and relationship with God, but the route by which they accomplish this goal is different: the focus is not on creating something new, but on removing the obstacles, so that something more valuable, yet gentle and less assertive, could emerge and receive attention and nurture. Hence, to engage in these practices, I have to develop a complex skill of not merely turning away from potentially problematic actions, but of exercising restraint even in the ordinary, good and enjoyable human desires and behaviors.⁴⁴⁸

In contrast to the learned asceticism of not-doing, the monastic practices that sponsor the paradoxical process of *undoing*—key examples of which can be found in the varieties of contemplative prayer—invite retreatants to develop resistance not merely to the habitual pull of action, but to the much more powerful (precisely because so hidden) momentum of perception. The instructions for the practice of contemplation are deceptively simple: “sit in a comfortable position, become quiet, and be present to God.” Such objective becomes anything but simple in the fact of the thoughts, feelings, and bodily

⁴⁴⁷ In contrast to other elements of monastic culture and tradition, asceticism is not a popular monastic transplant into the world: the very notion brings to mind rigid legalism of mindless renunciation or (worse still) veiled masochistic tendencies. Yet, contrary to the contemporary (rather dim) perception, the writing of the monastic writers reveals a more constructive goal of ascetic behavior and practice. For example, Father Michael Casey, a monk of Tarrawara Abbey (Australia), speaks of ascetic disciplines as the movement of “giving priority to interiority.” Father Andre Louf, a deceased abbot of the Mont des Cats Abbey (Northern France) compares it to the disciplines for athletic training. (Casey, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict*, 14-25; Louf, 81-96.) In this sense, the renowned stature of the Russian ballerinas or American football players, too, is a result of an well-practiced asceticism.

⁴⁴⁸ Being in the monastery on retreat offers opportunities for basic disciplining of desire. The more advanced practices of the monastic asceticism find expression in such spiritual disciplines as “the practice of emptiness” (William Johnston, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling* (Garden City: Image Books, 1973).), “The Little Way” (Thérèse and John Beevers, *The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul* (Garden City: Image Books, 1957).), the “practice of self-abandonment to the Divine Providence” (Jean Pierre de Caussade, *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence* (London: Burns, 1933).).

sensations begin to rise to the surface of one's attention the moment one decides to sit quietly and do nothing. The monastic answer to these intruders, however, takes a peculiar form: neither a strenuous opposition, nor open combat, but active yet detached awareness. The retreatants are advised *not* to follow their natural inclination to rid themselves of internal distractions so that they could be present to God, but to observe and let them be, cultivating the ability to be present to God in the midst of them. Paying attention to breath and quiet recitation of a "prayer word" serve as traditional aids in this process: these simple acts give the mind something to do, thus slowing down its natural propensity towards endless generation of new thoughts.⁴⁴⁹ The "un-doing" that takes place during these practices goes in the same direction but reaches much deeper than the ordinary disciplines of asceticism: it reverses the retreatants' habitual identification with the inner flow of their thoughts and emotions. All varieties of contemplative prayer cultivate the skills of quiet, non-violent receptivity and intentional passivity, which make their practitioners increasingly able to perceive and be acted upon by God.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ The Jesus Prayer—*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have Mercy on me*—of the Eastern church is one important example of such contemplative anchoring. Even though the in-depth teaching of this prayer comes from the Eastern church, the art of *hesychasm* is widely recognized and appreciated by Cistercian monks. The traditional teachings on the "prayer of the heart" are contained in the *Philokalia* collection, an excellent English translation of which can be found in Nicodemus et al., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, 4 vols. (London: Faber and Faber, 1979). Helpful contemporary introductions include Makarios et al., *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951); Igumen Khariton, E. Kadloubovsky, and E. M. Palmer, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London: Faber, 1966). Hesychastic prayer was very important for Thomas Merton: see Bernadette Dieker and Jonathan Montaldo, *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2003).

⁴⁵⁰ Contemplative prayer is a highly visible topic in contemporary monastic writings. Starting with Thomas Merton's vivid reflections on the meaning and experience of this practice, it has become increasingly important not only in the work of the Benedictine and Cistercian monastics, but wider Roman Catholic and even Protestant practitioners. See, for example, Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969); Thomas Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life* (New York: Continuum, 2002); John Main, *Word into Silence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 2003); M. Basil

These three kinds of the monastic practices offer three distinct ways of deepening relationship with God: the practices that invite new *doing* provide an active path; the practices that encourage *not-doing* provide an ascetic path; and the practices that sponsor *undoing* begin to open up a “mystical” path.⁴⁵¹ The distinction between these paths is far from unambiguous or absolute. In fact, a genuine commitment to the performance of any one kind of monastic practice usually brings changes to the modes of doing that are sponsored by the other two kinds. For example, in order to *do* the Liturgy of the Hours, I have to *not-do* activities that usually eat up my day, such as working in the wee hours or surfing Internet in diversion; and my deeper immersion in this practice, in turn, begins to expose and demand *undoing* of the deeper habits animating my proneness to workaholism and online distraction. Similarly, if I am to undertake the *not-doing* of fasting, I have to identify and *do* something new in lieu of my ordinarily extensive cooking; and my deeper immersion in this practice, in turn, begins to expose my secret habits of using food for

Pennington, M. Basil Pennington, and Luke Dysinger, *An Invitation to Centering Prayer* (Liguori: Liguori, 2001); Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2004).

⁴⁵¹ “Mystical” is a word that has acquired a problematic quality in contemporary English. Frequently, it is connected to the highly advanced quality of prayer available only to great visionaries and saints, or (worse still) associated with secret teachings and parapsychological (if not pathological) experiences. Yet, in its classical meaning it simply denotes the quality of a person’s unmediated experience of God—available to little children as well as adults, to those with or without advanced spiritual training. For Benedictines and Cistercians, the mystical dimension of life and prayer has an added importance: it points to the ultimate culmination of their vocational existence, the purification of heart that makes the monk deeply aware of, and available for, union with God. Carl McColman, a Lay Cistercian of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, offers a rich and deeply accessible reflection on Christianity’s mystical tradition. Father Michael Casey reflects on the importance of the mystical experience for the monks and all Christians. The numerous works of Professor Bernard McGinn are considered as definitive scholarly interpretation of Christian mysticism. (Carl McColman, *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism: The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Pub. Co., 2010); Michael Casey, *Fully Human, Fully Divine: An Interactive Christology* (Liguori: Triumph books, 2004), 201-19; Casey, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict*, 155-68. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

emotional comfort and stress relief, calling for their *undoing*. Finally, if I am to experience the flowering of the contemplative *undoing*, I have to commit to the arduous work of *doing* and *not-doing* involved in sitting still.

Yet, even though not absolute, the distinction between the three paths of monastic practices is helpful. It reveals the variation in the process by which these practices create rest. Because the retreatants' experience of rest is a "side effect" of their commitment to follow the three distinct paths of prayer, the differences in their nature determines the character of their unique contribution to the retreatants' restfulness.

The restfulness of the practices of *doing* stems from their ability to ritualize the retreatants' experience. While individually these practices vary in the degree to which they can be identified as formal rituals—e.g., the practice of the Liturgy of the Hours is instantly recognizable as an expression of the "formal religious observance," but the ceremonial nature of the practices of *lectio divina*, spiritual direction, and manual labor is not immediately evident—they all function in the way similar to that of the ritual performance. Each of these practices calls for a "prescribed code of behavior," an established procedure of acting and speaking that carries a recognized meaning for the insiders to the monastic culture. In the practice of the Liturgy of the Hours such patterning of behavior is the most explicit and defined; but it is also present in the practices of *lectio divina*, private disciplines of prayer, spiritual direction, and manual labor: these practices too are "small ceremonies" regulated by the specific (if not always spoken) rules about the appropriate patterns of personal conduct and social interaction.

It is precisely because the individual activities involved in these practices—e.g., "reading" for *lectio divina*, "praying" for the Liturgy of the Hours and other private

devotions, “having a conversation” for spiritual direction, and walking, cleaning, weeding the garden, working on computer, doing dishes, packing mail-orders, and whatever else is needed on a given day for manual labor—are the same activities that I routinely do in the world, but the manner in which they are performed in the monastery is altered, such re-patterning of action begins to generate questions: “Why read the Bible at such a ridiculously slow speed for *lectio divina*? And on the other hand, why go to church seven times a day for the Liturgy of the Hours? What is the point of talking about my personal difficulties to a monk, who does not even have a counseling degree? Why work with my hands, when there are quicker and more productive ways of doing dishes and weeding the garden?” The re-patterning of action demands the work of re-interpretation, the re-construction of meaning associated with these activities.

In the Trappist monastery, the answer to all these questions is the same: God alone. These practices are performed in these specific ways so that “we who search for God, and God who searches for us, could meet more easily.”⁴⁵² Simple and obvious enough; yet, it is precisely because the new meaning is not being discussed in abstraction, but is being acted out, with unyielding regularity, in the daily patterns of living, it makes the difference not merely in understanding but experience. Hence, when I try to enter the practices of manual labor *as if* they were places of encounter between the human and the Divine, I discover that “doing” can be restful: the issues of failure and success, perfectionism and competition (the very things that make doing so restive in the world!) become not merely null but nonsensical. When I dare to join the Liturgy of the Hours and enter the private disciplines of prayer *as if* these were not interruptions to my work, but the most important

⁴⁵² The late Father Malachy, personal conversation, The Monastery Welcome Center, May 2007.

“work” of all (the *opus Dei*), I realize that prayer too can be restful: no longer a matter of my personal responsibility and performance (the very perception that makes my prayer so laborious in the world), it becomes something of a powerful flow, the ever present reality of life that keeps on going, independent of my personal effort yet ever open to my participation. And, when I begin to read Scripture and enter spiritual direction *as if* there were a Holy Third, addressing me personally through the strange words of the Bible and the simple words of the monk, I begin to see my very life in a more restful light: its imperfections, weaknesses, and wounds (the very things that make life so trying in the world) become the places of encounter with God’s love, grace, and of all things, peace. Thus, in each of these activities—so similar and so unlike the ones that I do outside the monastery retreat—the difference in the enacted meaning produces a profound shift on the level of living. Slowly but surely, the monastic practices of *doing* refashion my world, making it a more habitable and hospitable, and therefore more restful, place.⁴⁵³

If the monastic practices of *doing* can be likened to the positive action of stepping on the gas pedal in the automobile that can take me to a new, more restful place, the practices of *not-doing* can be likened to the negative action of putting on the brakes that blocks my habitual movement towards the old state of restlessness. On the most basic level, the monastic practices of asceticism give me rest by creating a “vacation” for my usually overworked faculties and senses. They sooth, calm, and slow me down, lessening the

⁴⁵³ Professors Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley argue that rituals have the power to “fashion the world as a habitable and hospitable place.” Their work, a rare coming together of pastoral and liturgical theology, offers an invaluable reflection on the power of ritual for meaning-making and social construction of reality. In the broader field of psychology, Erik Erikson explored the importance of ritualization for communal and individual well-being. See Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998); Erik H. Erikson, *Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1977).

tension of chronic over-excitation. On the deeper level of engagement, the monastic practices of not-doing challenging my habitual preoccupation with action. During retreat, I let go of some activities not merely because they are proscribed, but because the radical change to my patterns of eating, sleeping, and talking patterns, and the resultant fatigue, make all action feel far less urgent. Yet, the void of not-doing does not remain empty for long. In the intentional space of inaction, I become keenly aware of the secular mentality and myth that fuel my passion for action and drive me down the path of mindless eating, talking, shopping, and entertainment in search for rest. The ultimate restfulness of the ascetic disciplines, therefore, has to do with their ability to expose the hidden assumptions and suppositions of my secular conditioning, and create an opportunity to reflect on them: it is precisely because I have been able to experience rest *apart* from the dominant definitions and avenues of rest promoted by the surrounding society that now I cannot help but wonder about their validity.

At the same time, the monastery culture and way of life makes me alert to the possibility of a viable alternative, the religious understanding of the problem of human restlessness and the path to rest—all the more credible because its effectiveness has been discovered within the realities of my own firsthand experience. Hence, when I make a retreat-long commitment to the intentional discipline of my desires in accord with the Cistercian values of silence and solitude, of temperate eating and reduced use of media, of rising early for prayer and minding my own business, I taste the restfulness that I never suspected could be born of mere inactivity and subtraction. My refusal to chase after the wind of my appetites—so unlike my ordinary behavior outside the monastery—blocks my descent down the slippery slopes of instant gratification long enough to come in touch with

the deeper hungers of my heart and begin making intentional choices about satisfying them. Slowly but surely, the difference in what I choose *not* to do, and *not* to have, and *not* to say, creates a profound shift on the level of my living. The very act of stopping becomes the first step on the path of searching for genuine rest.

If the monastic practices of *doing* could be seen as stepping on the accelerator, and the monastic practices of *not-doing* could be compared to putting on the brakes, the monastic practices of *un-doing* can be likened to the paradoxical action of disengaging the clutch: their restfulness is dependent not on a positive movement of action or negative resistance to it, but on their ability to interrupt the flow of mental energy and direction that drives action in the first place. (The engine is turning, but no power is being transmitted to the wheels!) What makes contemplative prayer therefore so restorative and peace-producing is its ability not to teach retreatants the skills of stopping their minds from generating unpleasant or painful thoughts, images, and emotions, but to sponsor an effective “disconnect” between the creations of their minds and their own knee-jerk reaction in response.

Three fundamental shifts in inner experience characterize the progression of contemplative practice, each corresponding to a new, deeper degree of restfulness and peace: first, the dawning of awareness about the dynamics and contents of one’s thinking; second, the discovery of oneself not only as the person who is having the experience but also as the person who is observing the person who is having an experience; and finally, the experience of the periodic incidents of self-forgetfulness.⁴⁵⁴ My initial experience of

⁴⁵⁴ Making theoretical assertions about progression of the contemplative experience is a tricky business, because by its very nature, contemplation is meant to take its practitioner beyond the realms of conceptual reasoning and abstract observation. I offer these statements therefore with an important caveat, as a person who is only starting out on the contemplative path. The three shifts that I describe are the ones that I observed

contemplative prayer bear little semblance to the “inner peace” that is usually attributed to this spiritual practice. As I settle on the meditation mat and close my eyes in eager anticipation of peace, I am confronted instead with the deafening cacophony of voices: observing, interpreting, guiding, wondering, worrying, coveting, reminding, admonishing, cajoling, blaming, scolding, crying—as if some pipe in the inner recesses of my mind (which I never suspected even existed) broke, flooding my whole mental basement. My first inclination is to get up and go. (“This cannot possibly be true. I must have missed some important piece of instruction about contemplation. I gotta go and ask about it RIGHT NOW!”) Sitting like this is anything *but* restful. A thirty-minute long prospect of sitting like this feels like a terrible mistake, all the more maddening because I have so much to do (as several of the voices are quick to point out). I stay put, only because I was explicitly instructed to sit “no matter what,” meeting these voices with stillness and silence. I hang onto my “prayer word” as to a teddy bear, my only token of sanity in this strange place.

But gradually, similar to the way my eyes adjust to seeing in the dark, my ears begin to distinguish the varying “inhabitants” of my mind. Where until then there seemed to be only I, there is now a whole company of characters! Their speech varies in vocabulary and cadence, dominant emotion, sometimes even gender and age: some voices sound young,

in my own experience with the contemplative practice. For all I know, there could be hundreds more of them, but my knowledge is limited by the immaturity of my practice. Nonetheless, the dynamics that I describe are not all so private that they become completely idiosyncratic or could not be related to the experience of others. I take heart in knowing that the dynamics and difficulties I describe find deep correspondence in the writings of the classical and contemporary teachers of contemplation. See, for example, Cassian’s Conferences 9 and 10 (John Cassian and Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian, the Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 323-87.), chapters 7 and 29 in the Cloud of Unknowing (Johnston, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling*, 47-48, 76.), Martin S. Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Martin S. Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

some—old; some male, some—female, and there is obviously a child or two; a whole bunch of them sounds scared, anxious, and upset, others are frustrated or downright angry, the happy and content ones are definitely few and far in between; the vast majority speaks Russian, although some sound Korean and English. Many of these voices bear an uncanny likeness to my parents, teachers, relatives, while others remind me of distant friends, strangers, and even heroes from the books and movies. But more is happening than the mere act of recognition and growth in familiarity with my inner “persons.” It is precisely because I was asked to stay still that I discover how astonishingly obedient I am to their commands.⁴⁵⁵ I feel what they feel, I think what they think, I am pulled to get up and do whatever they think must be done: I see their “wants” and “hates,” “do’s” and “don’t-forgets” as *mine!* Sitting on my meditation blanket, I begin to realize just how much of my restlessness comes from my direct and unquestioning identification with those voices. Yet, the very realization of my bondage is a path to breaking free: my growing familiarity with these mighty “counselors” removes the patina of truth from their pronouncements and gives me the courage to start taking them with more than one grain of salt. Thus, hard as it is, contemplative prayer gives me rest because it teaches me to recognize the difference between me and all the “noise” generated by my mind. I can now rest in ways much deeper than before, not because the afflicting voices go away (they don’t), but because I am no longer caught up in their stories and dialogues so utterly and naively.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Interestingly, the Latin roots of the word “obedient”—*ab-audire*—point to the act of listening.

⁴⁵⁶ My personal observations of the initial psychological benefits of contemplative prayer are best captured by Martin Laird: “Contemplation is the way out of the great self-centered psychodrama.” (Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*, 115.)

Nonetheless, the realization that I am not my thoughts does something to me. As I practice calm detached observation, the flow of images and emotions passing through my mind, I become aware of the shift in the way I experience myself in this practice: I move from being a fretful, frightened, or frustrated “victim” to the creations of my own mind, to being their silent “witness.” It is as if a different, previously unknown part of me comes into view: a Natalia who is capable of being fully aware of her own woundedness, fear, and pain, while remaining genuinely neutral, assigning no blame or praise and refusing to waste time in reactive chatter. This shift in the sense of self engendered by the contemplative practice marks my transition to a yet deeper experience of restfulness: my discovery of the hidden inner stability, irrespective of the outer circumstances of my life. I can be at peace now, not because the afflicting thoughts, images and emotions go away (they still don’t), but because I know, by firsthand experience, that there is a place within me that the turmoil does not reach.

Yet, no matter how faithfully practiced, contemplative prayer is not a cure-all. There are times when my emotions are so strong, my thoughts—so convincing, and my memories—so intrusive, that no amount of stillness and silence can bring me to the shores of patient and peaceful detachment. When such storms begin to gain their power, I am no longer capable of differentiating myself from the “voices”; I cannot even remember the difference between the “victim” and the “witness.” All within becomes awash with the intense feelings of powerlessness and panic. Fighting is impossible: the opponent is too strong. Fleeing is futile: the enemy is within. It takes all I’ve got to simply stay, nailed to the meditation mat and clinging to my prayer word, letting the inner chaos run its course, taking me down into its dark abyss. It feels like dying, and it is indeed a death of sorts,

because for once—precisely due to the intensity of the affliction itself—I forget about *my* self. There is no longer “I”: all is pain, punctuated only by the steady repetition of the prayer word. But staying in that strange place of pain mingled with prayer gives birth to something else: the welling up of awareness and deep love for all people who live, and struggle, and are overcome by their afflictions. When I come back to myself, I am usually both completely exhausted and profoundly peaceful. Paradoxically, contemplative prayer gives me rest even when it fails to give me rest: by forcing me to face the pain in such immediate and non-medicated way, it breaks open the illusory confines of my private self, the primary “experiencer” of suffering. I can be at peace then, not because the pain is gone (in truth, it never fully is), but because the realization of being one with others transforms the restlessness of my solitary suffering into experience of solidarity and compassion.

Something critical happens in the third context of monastery living, the monastic Practices. Whereas the monastic Environment imagined the alternative world, and the monastic Community furnished it with the live residents, the monastic Practices is what makes the work of the Environment’s and Community’s imagining possible in the first place. Because Practices are directly responsible for the *physical shaping* of the monastic Space and Time, they exercise strong influence upon the world that the monastic Environment imagines: for example, the monastic Welcome Center and retreat house bear testimony to the importance of the monastic practice of hospitality; the arrangement of choir stalls in the Abbey church reflects the particularities of the monastic practice of the Liturgy of the Hours; the bonsai garden and bakery bespeak of the value that the monks place on the practice of manual labor. Without the ongoing re-fashioning of the monastic Practices, the alternative world

imagined by the monastic Environment would not last long. Similarly, the monastic Practices are crucial for the *spiritual formation* of the members of the monastic Community. The identity of the monastery “men of peace” is dependent upon their commitment to the daily performance of the individual and communal monastic disciplines. Finally, the monastic Practices are quintessential for the *social construction* of the monastery world. It is precisely because the alternative way of living and searching for rest is being enacted by monks, day in and day out, in the steady repetition of the monastic Practices that the alternative world of peace imagined by the monastic Community and Environment not only continues in its existence, but appears natural.

Yet, the monastic Practices do more than provide the ongoing and active fortification of the alternative world revealed by monastic Environment and Community. They make their own unique contribution to the work of re-imagining. The monastic Practices imagine the world in which the division between the sacred and secular activities ceases to exist, but all human action—not just that of praying—becomes expressive of the commitment to seek God. The hours of sleep and the character of meals, the attitudes to desire and rules of social engagement, and even the most hidden activity of all, the inner flow of thoughts and emotions, begin to be ordered to the *telos* of resting in God alone.

The reimagining of the human activity accomplished by the monastic Practices is deeply significant for my transformation into a restful person, because it presents me with a real-life alternative to my habitual way of organizing daily agendas, personal habits, and patterns of inner experience. Yet, unlike the monastic Environment and Community, the monastic Practices are much more aggressive in their imagining: they do not merely *introduce* me to the alternative possibilities of the human action and inaction but *actively*

involve me in the work of putting them in practice. In contrast to the other contexts of the monastery living, the world re-imagined by the monastic Practices is more than a mold for the passive re-formation of my self, it is something of a “training ground” upon which I can take part in my own becoming.

But not without some hard work. Indeed, as I travel along the spectrum of *doing*, *not-doing*, and *undoing* during my monastery stay, my engagement with the monastic Practices is characterized by the gradual but substantial escalation of difficulty. The active practices of *doing* are challenging because they bring radical changes to the primary occupations of my day. In sharp contrast with my life in the world, my hours of work at the monastery are significantly reduced, but there is a dramatic increase in the duration and variety of prayer: instead of going to church once every seven days, as I have been accustomed in the world, I now go to church seven times a day! The ascetic practices of *not-doing* cut even deeper, demanding alterations not only in my daily activities but in my most basic personal behaviors. Now, I have to change not merely how I work and pray, but even the ways I eat, sleep, interact with others, and use my personal gadgets. The contemplative practices of *undoing* are among the hardest, because they seek to create a radical shift in my habits of thought, memory, and emotion. When these extensive challenges of practicing the monastic disciplines of *doing*, *not-doing* and *undoing* are combined with the sheer amount of new learning, disruption of sleep patterns and eating routines, and difficulties of resisting the pull of old desires (only intensified by their temporary suspension!), the training ground created by the monastic Practices quickly begins to feel not as an ordinary “hands-on instruction” but as something of a “boot camp!”

Yet, the real difficulty of monastic Practices has to do not with the potential requirements that they place upon my external *behaviors*, but with the implicit threat that they pose to my innermost *beliefs*. The dramatic adjustments to daily work and prayer, rules of personal conduct, and shifts in the inner awareness that take place during my monastery retreat signal the dawning of the deeper, more profound modification: on the level of implicit values and operative assumptions. In the world of human activity imagined by the monastic Practices, prayer is more important than work, listening is more valuable than talking, the posture of surrender is seen as more advantageous than “being in control.” Individually and together, the monastic Practices declare that I am not a captain of my own fate but a humble recipient of God’s mercy, and that my ultimate restfulness and lasting peace come not from the skillful avoidance of suffering and unrest but from the genuine turning toward God in the face of them. The fundamental supposition that animate monastic Practices clash mightily with the dominant assumptions and values of the secular culture, the world which I inhabit outside the monastery retreat.

Hence, cultivation of silence and solitude is difficult for me, because I put a strong emphasis on “networking” and “enhanced communication.” The intentional disciplining of desire feels deeply foreign, because I have been raised by the communities that prize their instant gratification. Practicing the daily inaction of contemplative prayer becomes an extremely costly commitment, because I attach supreme value to “getting things done.” And, preferring nothing to prayer is a genuinely alarming proposition, because I know that, after all been done and said, my good reputations and respectable employment are likely to depend upon my faithful “worshiping” of work. Thus, it is *not* surprising that my engagement with the monastic Practices is an inherently de-stabilizing and unnerving

experience. As I make a decision to join the monks in the seemingly innocuous practices of prayer, the values and suppositions declared (louder than words) by the various monastic Practices go against the grain of everything that I have believed and practiced—for the most part with an abiding success—in my life back in the world. What *is* surprising, therefore, is my ability to initiate and stay faithful to the monastic Practices in the face of such formidable a challenge. Why do I continue to engage in behaviors that undermine the beliefs directly responsible for my success back in the world?

Because such a contrary course of action has never become an object of my sustained intellectual reflection and deliberate decision-making! It is precisely because the alternative system of monastic values and beliefs is not written down and presented to me as a collection of suppositions to be formally considered, but only as a set of behaviors to be sampled, the glaring conflict between the assumptions proclaimed by the monastic Practices and the “creed” of my own secular upbringing does not enter into the realm of my conscious awareness. By their very nature, monastic Practices keep me focused on doing rather than thinking. So all I know is that I have been invited to “just follow along” for the duration of their retreat. All I see is that the monastic Practices seem to promise rest: they offer protection from noise, meaningless social engagement, and endless to-do lists; they provide an excuse to untie the cords that tether me to phone and email; they give permission to slow down and make room for leisure; and above all, they reveal life not as a source of restlessness that needs to be fixed or at least periodically escaped, but as an opportunity to become aware and enter God’s own restfulness. It is precisely the promise of renewal, joy, and delight made possible by the values and suppositions that underlie monastic Practices that makes them so attractive to me, a daughter of the worlds animated

by the other, far more restive, values and suppositions. Like a tourist on vacation in the country I long admired, I become very excited and very eager to join in the restful lifestyle of the monastery persons of peace. I am *seduced*, as it were, into performing the actions, manners, and behaviors that I would have never dared to carry out on my own, at home.

And this nominal participation, far from being a “mere going through the motions” produces actual rest! The very act of imitating the practices of the monastery persons of peace—acting *as if* I too were resting in God alone—engenders genuine rest, not only because it makes me instantly less vulnerable before the actual pressures and demands that characterize my life outside the monastery, but also because it makes me more vulnerable before the alternative values and suppositions which give the monastic life its meaning. As I commit to the monastic disciplines of *doing*, *not-doing*, and *undoing* for the duration of their retreat, I cannot help but get “contaminated” with the radical monastic suppositions about work and rest, action and inaction, which underlie their performance. The alternative behaviors function as the “carriers” of the alternative beliefs. A shift in doing engenders modification in knowing. To be sure, it is not a conscious knowing, but the fact that I begin to feel differently—I breathe easier and discover within myself a sense of spaciousness and generosity and patience that was by and large inaccessible to me in the world—reveals that I am beginning to “get it.” I may not be able to consciously understand what those new beliefs are, but I cannot fail to notice that I am standing under a wholly different scale of judging and valuing.

But more is happening as a result: my make-believe participation becomes a bedrock of my actual transformation. My very act of imitating the practices of the monastery persons of peace brings changes into my identity and self-understanding. As I

join the monks in their communal prayer and individual spiritual disciplines, as I begin to adopt monastic attitudes to sleep, food, and speech, as I become intentional about honoring silence and cultivating solitude, I transition from being a mere observer of the alternative world imagined by the monastic Practices to being its active co-imaginer. I act myself into a new way of being—this is where faking it is a part of making it!—becoming in the process, in however an embryonic way, a person of peace. Such is the paradox of the monastic Practices: even as I do the monastic Practices, the monastic Practices do something to me.

Thus, in my encounter with the monastic Practices, I cross the Rubicon: unbeknownst to myself, I have been transformed from being merely a “visitor” of the world that the monastery imagines into its active, even if not fully conscious of this fact, “resident.” Yet, the conscious realization *is* important. If I am to fully receive the monastery gift of peace, I have to understand its nature and make a willing ascent to the values and suppositions that make it possible. My transformation into a restful person would be complete only when I come to see and affirm the world of peace that the monastery imagines as a *true* world. This crucial step of my becoming takes place in the final formative context of the monastery living, the monastic Texts.

8.4 Texts

In the final context of the monastery living the restorative power of the monastery retreat reaches its climax. Through their encounter with the texts, retreatants have an opportunity to develop conscious awareness of the monastery gift of peace, which now they have known only on a tacit, non-verbal level. Four broad categories can be identified as

principally important in the diverse collection of the monastic literature. First and the most important category is comprised by a single book, the Bible, the source and the gold standard for all other monastic texts. Scripture has been the focal point for the monastic experience of sacred reading throughout the centuries—the Word *par excellence*—in communal proclamation and personal exercises of devotion. Indeed, the phenomenon of monasticism as a whole and its particular manifestation in the life of the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic orders can be seen both as a response to and a particular embodiment of the truth of the Gospel.⁴⁵⁷

The second category features the texts that come from the Desert Abbas and Ammas, the leaders of the ascetic movements that took place in the fourth century Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Asia Minor. While by their nature these writings—the records of their “lives” and the “sayings” (*Vitae Patrum* and *Apophtegmata Patrum*)—are fragmented, unstructured and peculiar, their real importance stems from their ability to set forth a vision of the way of life that inspired and animated monasticism throughout the centuries. Individually and together, the portraits of the elders that emerge from those writings reveal the fundamental monastic ideal of the life of radical conversion and single-minded dedication to God. For the members of the Cistercian order, the desert spirituality bears additional significance due to its emphasis on *quies*, “rest” (preserved in the Greek

⁴⁵⁷ The statements about centrality of Scripture to the monastic tradition hardly need additional endorsement and validation. I highlight one text here, the work of Professor Douglas Burton-Christi, because it offers penetrating insights into the period in the history of Christian monasticism that set the stage for what would become a characteristically monastic way of engaging Scripture: Douglas E. Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

monastic tradition as *hesychia*, “sweet repose”), which in the later times would become strongly linked with the notion and practice of contemplation.⁴⁵⁸

In contrast to the utmost simplicity and laconicism of the “word” that comes from the Desert Elders stands the third category of monastic texts, the writings of the Church Fathers and Mothers. These writers offer a sustained theological reflection and more systematic guidance on the matters of authentic Christian living. Their works are distinguished by great erudition and strong pastoral sensitivities. For Cistercians, three groups of classical authors are of special importance: the ecclesiastical writers whose authority on doctrinal matters bears special weight due to their proximity to apostolic times (especially those who, like St Athanasius, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. John Cassian, St. Gregory the Great, were closely associated with various forms of monastic living), the renowned Cistercian authors (such

⁴⁵⁸ The literature about the Desert Fathers and Mothers abounds. Critically acclaimed scholarly translation of the sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers into English has been done by an Anglican nun: Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (London: Mowbrays, 1975). Among the brief and slightly modernized selections of the Desert Fathers for contemporary readers are particularly noteworthy the small collections translated by Thomas Merton, translated and visually interpreted with Japanese brush and ink by Yushi Nomura, and the collections that focus on the previously neglected voices of the Desert Mothers: Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* (New York: New Directions, 1961); Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001); Mary Forman, *Praying with the Desert Mothers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005); Yushi Nomura, *Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). The most systematic presentation of the Eastern Desert tradition for the Western audience was accomplished by John Cassian: John Cassian and Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian, the Institutes* (New York: Newman Press, 2000); Cassian and Ramsey, *John Cassian, the Conferences*. In-depth scholarly expositions of the desert spirituality are offered by: Roberta C. Bondi, *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers: With a Translation of Abba Zosimas' Reflections* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008). A helpful contemporary reflection on the importance of the ancient desert tradition for the monastic ethos (including the paradoxical reality that the roots of the Western monasticism lie in the East) can be found in Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 89-111.

as William of St. Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux, Beatrice of Nazareth, Gueric of Igny, Aelred of Rievaulx, Gilbert of Swineshead, Gertrude of Helfta), and the eminent mystics of the Church (such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Julian of Norwich, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, St. Therese of Lisieux).⁴⁵⁹ The Rule of St. Benedict itself can be seen as a patristic document: not only does St. Benedict draw heavily on the prominent patristic texts in his composition, but he also sees his work as a pragmatic program of spiritual practices and administrative regulations that is directed towards creating optimal conditions for living what the Fathers wrote about. Inasmuch as the Rule of St. Benedict has become a foundational document for Western monasticism, it has established and helped to develop a monastic culture which is distinctly patristic in its spirit.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁹ Limitations of space disallow the full referencing of writings that come from the classical Christian writers, Cistercian authors, and the Doctors of the Church. Instead I name the series that have included the important translations and studies of this literature: *The Fathers of the Church*, *Ancient Christian Writers*, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, *The Library of Christian Classics*, *Penguin Classics*, *Cistercian Fathers*, *Cistercian Studies*, and *Monastic Wisdom*. A helpful reflection on the spirituality of the Fathers and a “quick tour” of patristic texts particularly suitable for the practice of *lectio divina* is offered by Michael Casey: Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, 103-31. An excellent selection of Cistercian classical texts can be found in Pauline M. Matarasso, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

⁴⁶⁰ The most widely used scholarly translation of the Rule in English has been done in 1980: St. Benedict and Timothy Fry, *Rb 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981). It contains Latin and English parallel text and is accompanied by the in-depth exposition of the historical context, the language and content of the Rule of St. Benedict, and its relationship to the previous monastic rules. Other contemporary translations of the Rule as well as the commentaries are growing in number. For example, Benet Tvedten and St. Benedict, *A Share in the Kingdom: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict for Oblates* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989); Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2010); Terrence Kardong, *Day by Day with Saint Benedict* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005); Norvene Vest, *Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary and Workbook on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Pub., 2004); St. Benedict and Patrick Barry, *Saint Benedict's Rule* (Mahwah: HiddenSpring, 2004).

The final category of monastic texts is comprised of the works by contemporary monastic writers. Here an important shift occurs: the contemporary monastic authors no longer speak the unaffected language of the tradition. They perceive the political incorrectness of its certain assumptions. They are keenly aware of its frequently dated imagery. They cannot gloss over its “hard sayings.” And that is precisely their gift: they serve as intermediaries between the contemporary reader and the strange (and at times offensive!) discourse of the Bible and early Christian writers. They struggle to reclaim and reinterpret the traditional themes, values, and ideas so that they could speak to the truth of contemporary living. In this sense, these contemporary monastic writers have formed their own unique culture: they are tending to the ancient spiritual tradition, established by the classical Christian and monastic sources, to reveal its capacity to enlighten and nourish today’s readers.⁴⁶¹

These four broad categories of the monastic texts—the Bible, the sayings of the Desert Abbas and Ammas, the classical texts of Christianity, and the contemporary monastic writings—assume critical importance in the monastic tradition, and are therefore

⁴⁶¹ Different monastic houses vary in their selection of the contemporary monastic texts; yet several groups of writers are common to most: the writings of influential contemporary Cistercians (such as Thomas Merton, Eugene Boylan, Andre Louf, Robert Thomas, Godfrey Belorgey, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, Charles Cummings, Michael Casey) as well as the writers specific to each monastery (such as Anthony Delisi, James Behrens and Thomas Francis of The Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery in Georgia; Matthew Kelty and Paul Quenon of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky; Gail Fitzpatrick of Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey and Brendan Freeman of the New Melleray Abbey in Iowa); the writings of the widely known contemporary Benedictines (such as John Main, Terence Kardong, Benet Tvedten, Mary Forman, Joan Chittister, Mary Margaret Funk, Lawrence Freeman); the writings by the contemporary Benedictine Oblates and Lay Cistercians (such as Kathleen Norris, Norvene Vest, Mark Plaiss, Wil Derkse, Trisha Day, and Carl McColman); and broader Christian and interreligious literature on the topics of spirituality and religious living. Once again, the limitations of the space disallow reference to individual sources. Two publishers, Liturgical Press and Cistercian Publications, focus in particular on the Cistercian and Benedictine titles, and an important series, *A Voice from the Monastery*, is offered by Paraclete Press.

encountered most often by the monastery visitors on retreat. Yet, the retreatants' attraction to these texts cannot be attributed only to their inherent literary merit. When they peruse the monastery brochures left in their rooms, scour the monastery library, and rush to the monastery bookstore, they do so because the books hold the promise of "words" in the place that can at times feel so disconcertingly silent. Thus, to gain insight into the restfulness of the monastic texts, it is important to take a closer look at the three "verbal gifts" that they offer to the retreatants: the gift of language, the gift of story, and the most unusual of all, the gift of spiritual counsel and companionship.

To be sure, the majority of monks and lay workers at the monastery speak English as their primary language. Yet, underneath the overt similarities of the native tongue lay the subtle differences setting the monastic "dialect" apart from that of the secular mainstream. Most immediately noticeable are the differences in the monastic *manner of speaking*: cadence, volume, and style of expression; the implicit rules about the duration of conversation, authority to speak and to listen; and intricate interplay between words and silences of the ordinary encounters. A closer listening to the conversations taking place at the monastery reveals an additional level of difference in its *explicit content*. While people in the monastery, like people in the world, speak much about their health, jobs, groceries, the rising prices of gas and political uncertainties, in the monastery these ordinary topics are accompanied by a gentle flow of theological reflection. Irrespective of their education, the monastery inhabitants interpret Scriptural passages and homilies heard at the Mass, share personal spiritual insights, and speak about biblical heroes and Christianity's classical figures as if they were members of the same household. Spiritual journeying is a context for speaking about even the most mundane events and encounters. The final, and

perhaps most remarkable, level of difference has to do with *the assumed*. Another type of the conversation—prayer—features prominently in the monastic culture of speaking: not only is praying seen by the monastic speakers as a normal and ordinary part of life, but God is understood as the most important “conversational partner,” and the notion of human-divine dialogue serves as a backdrop and measure for all human talk.

The small and big ways in which the monastic lexicon and conventions of speech deviate from the dialect of the mainstream is a testimony to a more fundamental difference: that between the monastic and secular cultures of reading. It is precisely because the diverse community of monks and monastery lay workers is characterized by its long-term devotion and fidelity to this distinct literary corpus, that its explicit subject matter, rhetoric, and assumptions have seeped into their ordinary ways of speaking. Few communities in the world demonstrate a similar degree of attachment and willingness to stay engaged with any body of literature so long as to experience its formative effect upon their speech. Yet, it is this crucial difference in the way the monastic community engages its literature that enables the retreatants to receive from the monastic texts a genuine gift of rest.

The culture of speaking that the retreatants encounter at the monastery is very restful on a basic level. Its fundamental respect for silence protects its speakers from information overload and forced social engagement. Its selectiveness in the choice of words and the explicit ideal of using speech for the upbuilding of the community lessen the occurrences of its misuse: rushed remarks, gossip, bad-mouthing, and profanity. For those who come from a world that is louder, chattier, and less careful with words, the monastery culture of speaking offers a welcome respite. Being at the monastery at times feels like coming to an older part of town, where people use fewer words and speak in a slower, more

reverential and less hurried manner. Not all of it is “rosy,” of course; certain words, turns of phrase, and values can be seen as old fashioned or even politically incorrect—as, for example, the widespread use of masculine pronouns for God or assumption of men as priests—yet, even then, the flow of the monastery words and silences feels kinder, safer, less violent and as such, significantly less stressful and fatiguing. Coming in contact with the community of those who are admonished to “keep your tongue from evil, your lips of speaking deceit...seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34) and “outdo each other in showing respect” (RB 72:4, building on Rom.12:10) in itself is a source of rest.

Yet more than the external pleasantness of the monastic oral ethos is at work in my growing peacefulness. As a result of my encounter with the monastic culture of speaking, my own language begins to change. In the course of formal retreat conferences, spiritual direction, and ordinary conversations with the monks and monastery lay workers, my vocabulary of rest undergoes expansion. “Getting away from it all” is now being connected to “dwelling with God in love.” Leisure is linked up to “contemplation.” Successful dealing with life’s challenges and dilemmas is defined as conditional upon “listening to the voice of the Spirit.” These additions to my lexicon are not merely a matter of spiritually flavored linguistic embellishment. They accomplish something far more important: the new words enable me to speak about the profound restfulness that I feel during retreat. The gaining of ability to put my monastic experience—which until then has been intensely known but remained unnamed—into words marks a new and crucial point in my reception of the monastery gift of peace, the dawning of conscious awareness about its nature. Having experienced rest as intricately connected with the experience of God during my retreat, I

can now understand the monastery vocabulary of rest. Having learned the words to name it, I am now able to enter this experience much more deeply than before.

Yet, something additional happens as a result of this naming process: the notion of rest itself and the process of becoming restful are being redefined. Talking differently triggers thinking differently. The new way of speaking detaches rest from the images of passive relaxation or action-packed entertainment, to which it is predominantly linked in the popular secular imagination, and situates it instead in the context of religious experience. No longer merely as a product for purchase, rest is now revealed as an outcome of spiritual journeying and becoming. Indirectly, but powerfully, the monastic language communicates that for my search for rest to be truly and fully satisfied, I must seek not rest—but God.

Importantly, beyond the alteration of the vocabulary itself, the assertion that the human search for rest has something to do with God is rarely made explicit in the daily speech of the monastic populace. The monks and lay members of the monastic community take it too much for granted to make it into an object of deliberate propaganda. Yet, it is precisely because this assertion is not elevated to a status of an explicitly taught formal principle, but simply assumed, without explanation or apology, as something that “goes without saying,” its persuasive power becomes even stronger. In the absence of explicit argumentation, the connection between rest and religious experience begins to look not like a supposition that needs to be defended, but as a truthful depiction of reality. The language itself acts as a transmitter of belief.

But not on its own. The members of the monastic community *can* leave these things unsaid because their speech is taking place in the context of the broader linguistic event,

the communication of the story of faith, the second “verbal gift” of the monastic texts. What is left unsaid in the daily speech of the monastery inhabitants is spelled out extensively in its daily liturgy.

From their first hours at the monastery, the retreatants are immersed in the sea of Scripture. The strong current of the Psalms runs through all seven hours of the divine office: depending on their length, one to three psalms are prayed at every hour of prayer. Inspired by the Rule of St. Benedict, they are arranged in such a way that the entire book of Psalms is being prayed through every two weeks. Other Scriptural readings—from the Old Testament during Vigils, Gospels at Mass, and Epistles during Lauds, Vespers, and the Little Hours—weave in and out of the steady flow of the Psalms, adding volume and insight to the daily recitation of the Biblical text. Even though other, more variable and spontaneous, elements of the Liturgy are present—hymns at the beginning of each office, readings from the Church Fathers at Vigils, monastic homilies at Mass, and remembrances of the special days commemorating the events in the life of the Church—the primary focus of attention is undoubtedly the Scriptures: their passages are large; they are read slowly; and deliberate pauses held after each reading ensure that there is time for both personal hearing and responding to the word. In just a few days of retreat, even the regular “churchgoers” among the monastery visitors would have heard more of the Bible, and heard it on a deeper, more meaningful level, than they did throughout the years of their regular Sunday worship attendance.

Important as it is, the event of the monastic Liturgy of the Hours, however, must not be seen as merely a religious practice, something that monks and monastic associates simply do as a part of their lifestyle. The divine office *is* indeed a crucial part of their way

of life; but it is also yet another testimony to their distinct habits of reading. In contrast to the reading practices that characterize the majority of communities in the surrounding society, monks place supreme importance on gathering together for the daily experience of public reading and listening.⁴⁶² What they read (and reread) together is different too: the monastic practice of communal reading and listening centers on a collection of texts which are seen as foundational for their way of life and identity. Once more, it is the pronounced difference in the way the monastic community engages its literature that is responsible for the restfulness of monastic texts.

The liturgical re-telling of the monastic story of faith is restful on a very basic level. The beauty of the monastic chant, punctuated by the slow, meditative reading of the Scriptural passages and prayers, gently lifts its listeners from their preoccupations with the daily and imbues the recited story with an enchanting, timeless quality. The peacefulness of the monastic performance of the story only underscores the restful qualities of the narrative itself. The Biblical story bears testimony to both the positive and the negative dimensions of life. It speaks of mountaintop experiences and victories, resurrections and rebirths, but it also describes the shades of the human experience which are frequently omitted from the secular narratives of faith: the situations of injustice and oppression, the occasions of physical illness and emotional distress, fears, disappointments, warfare, violence, suffering, and ultimately death itself. While not always “nice,” such accounts are restful, because they tell the whole story of human life.

⁴⁶² For the monks, the tradition of public reading in the monastery is not limited to the liturgical reading of Scripture. It also includes reading during meals and a special period of reading at the end of the day, before Compline. The retreatants, however, do not have access to those experiences.

Yet, the Biblical narrative does not merely restore the silenced experiences to communal hearing; it ultimately situates them in the context of healing and hope. “The orphan, the alien, and the widow” are not merely given a voice, but promised joyful restitution, assured that the last shall be first, and the lowly—exalted. Such fundamental shift in perspective and tone is made possible due to the radical change in the story’s chief protagonists. In contrast to the many secular myths, humans are not the only characters in the plot. They are important—“little lower than angels...crowned with glory and honor”—but they are neither the only, nor the most important ones. The hero in the biblical story is God, the creator, healer, and savior of the world from the “powers that be” of destruction. Such relativization of the human status, too, is a paradoxical source of rest: while no longer as powerful as depicted by the secular myth, we can be at peace now, for a hand at work in the universe is far kinder and wiser than our own. Thus, even from a purely literary point of view, the scriptural story of faith is far more peaceful and rest-producing than the majority of the “gospels” that the retreatants encounter in the world: its narrative theme and tone, its imagery and plot, its protagonists and its setting make it indeed a “good news.”

Yet more than the enchanting nature of the monastic liturgy and the literary features of the Biblical story are at work in my growing restfulness. The deeper gift of peace comes not merely from my hearing the paradigmatic story of faith upheld by the monastic community, but from embracing its good news as containing the truth about my own living.

In the monastery, I begin to relate to the Biblical story differently, because I experience it differently through the unique medium of the monastic liturgy. Besides instituting the frequent, extensive, and slow reading of the biblical text, the monastic liturgy is characterized by several features that disallow holding what is being read at arm’s length.

The liturgical reading of Scripture at the monastery is an oral event: in contrast to the predominant contemporary way of interacting with the text, via printed or electronic media, the congregation has to actually listen in order to comprehend. While such shift is more demanding logistically—monks differ in their powers of enunciation, as retreatants differ in their physical powers of hearing, the auditory (rather than visual) mode engagement with the text accomplishes something subtle but powerful with regards to the hearing of the word: the text, no longer confined to the limits of the page, comes to life, envelops its listeners, and addresses them with the new authority. Additionally, only a small portion of the daily Scripture is read by an individual lector. The remaining, much larger part of the Biblical text read during the liturgy—the Psalms—is being chanted by the entire congregation of monks and retreatants, alternating in the call-and-response fashion between the two sides of the choirstalls. This traditional format of liturgical proclamation engenders another subtle but crucial shift: now, Scripture is not being read *to* but recited, out loud and for extended periods of time, *by* the retreatants themselves. Having started as part of the “audience,” I end up as an “active participant” in the Scriptural reading.

Yet, more than a formal recitation of the text is taking place. I find it hard to remain formal and detached during Psalmody because of the nature of the text itself. As a book of prayer, the Psalms cover a tremendous range of human emotions and situations, from the most sorrowful to the most sublime. As a result, it is impossible to recite these prayers for any extensive period of time and remain unaffected. Like prongs of a tuning fork, the lines of the psalms begin to resonate with my inner moods, circumstances, and daily problems. What begins as reading soon turns into prayer. My connection to the narrative of the Psalms comes all the more naturally because of the language that the Psalms employ. Written from

the first person’s perspective and in the Present Tense, their voice is always contemporary. The psalmists address God “today”—rejoicing, grieving, repenting, whining, being overcome with envy, anger, vindictiveness—and mouthing their words, I soon find myself performing a subtle exercise of substitution: it is now *my own* joys and afflictions are included into the prayer of the Psalms and lifted up to God, with boldness and the harrowing emotional intensity that I often feel but rarely dare to express. Yet, the psalmists are not the only ones to speak during the recitation of the Psalms. God’s own voice speaks back to them, urgently and directly, through the text. And suddenly, as I read and as I listen, I stop being merely a person who happens to make a private retreat at the monastery at this particular time, but become instead part of the “people of God” addressing and being addressed by the “living and active” Word. The biblical story of faith has now become my own story.⁴⁶³

Experiencing the Scriptural story of faith in this way, as intricately related to my own life, in the event of the liturgical reading, is deeply restful, because it offers me a radically different “story to live by.”⁴⁶⁴ Its normative claims and suppositions come in sharp contrast with the principles of free-market economy and “social Darwinism” that characterize the dominant narratives of the surrounding society. Its powerful affirmations about the nature of the world, the creative and salvific presence of God in its midst, and

⁴⁶³ For an in-depth reflection on the power of psalms in shaping of personal imagination and faith, see Kathleen A. Harmon, *Becoming the Psalms: A Spirituality of Singing and Praying the Psalms* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015); William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2002); Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁴⁶⁴ The book by a similar title, which offers an in-depth psychological exposition of the importance of personal narrative in formation of person’s identity and action, comes from the renowned narrative psychologist Dan McAdams: McAdams.

the vision of a realized human life invite me to see my life anew. My fears and longings, my triumphs and failures, my joys and even my suffering are now imbued with an alternative—and more restful—meaning. At this moment, my experience of the peace reaches a qualitatively different level: the profound restfulness that I associate with the monastic retreat begins to “spill” into my life in the world. The Biblical meta-narrative gives me the means to re-author my personal story in the direction of increased freedom, healing and hope.

And as a result of this re-storying process, the meaning of rest and the process of becoming restful are once again being redefined. Because in the context of the monastic reading, I have been able to make peace with my life as it *is*—with its problems, afflictions, and the unrest itself transformed in light of the Divine revelation of love—I begin to see that genuine restfulness has to do not with the skillful avoidance or elimination of the difficult, painful, and otherwise restive aspects of human existence, but with a discovery of a new way to see and inhabit them. The restfulness of the Christian story challenges the narrow association of rest with the negative notions of “not-working” and “escaping,” which characterize the popular secular ways of conceptualizing it, connecting it instead with the radical alteration of the personal worldview and self-understanding.⁴⁶⁵ No longer merely a matter of periodic and by definition temporary withdrawal from work or negative dimensions of life, rest is now revealed as an outcome of seeing the world and the self through the lens of faith. Indirectly, but powerfully, the monastic texts make me realize that in order to become restful, I must become religious.

⁴⁶⁵ See, for example, Tilden Edwards’s reflection on the secular rhythm of life that “oscillates between driven achievement...and private escape”: Edwards, *Sabbath Time*.

My reception of the second verbal gift brings a radical alteration into my stance and mode of engagement with the monastic texts. Until now, I have been a passive recipient of the monastic communication. On the level of the monastic culture of speaking, my contact with the texts was sparse and indirect: I simply experienced the vocabulary and oral conventions of the monastery inhabitants that had been created in response to the influence of the monastic texts. On the level of the monastic liturgy, the contact was direct and plentiful, but I still had no control over the texts that were read: the excerpts from Scripture and the passages from the Church Fathers washed over me in accord with the liturgical season, Cistercian lectionary, and the general calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, now, as I have realized the intricate connection between rest and religious experience, between my search for rest and my desire for God, my attitude towards the monastic texts changes: it is now tinged with deep interest, even urgency. While my choice of the books is influenced by my experience of liturgy and informal encounters with the monastic community—e.g., my encounter with St. Augustine during Vigils leads to a more thorough reading of his sermons, and my spiritual director's reflection on the story written by Michael Casey, a contemporary Cistercian monk from Australia, prompts my search for his books—one more element is now brought into consideration: my own questions and personal circumstances of searching. The act of reading becomes not merely a public occurrence but a personally meaningful event.

Yet, it is important to note that when retreatants rush to the bookstore or scour the monastic library, they are not merely acting on an internal impulse. They are also responding to the powerful environmental cues, the pronounced "reading climate" that characterizes monastery living. For Benedictine-Cistercian monastics, reading is

considered an essential practice in living a spiritual life, matching prayer and work in its importance.⁴⁶⁶ Not just any reading, however. The monastic reading differs sharply from its secular counterpart in two aspects: its purpose and its mode. In the monastery, the texts are being read not for professional development or pleasure, much less for entertainment, but in search of guidance for spiritual becoming. In a very real sense, reading is done with an expectation of discovery in what is being read the word and the will of God for the reader's life. Such existential, life-related reading, by necessity, demands a different mode of engagement with the text. The practice of *lectio divina*, the chief paradigm of monastic reading, is distinguished by an attitude of openness, patience, and readiness to be challenged and changed. The reader approaches the text as a disciple that comes to a revered teacher, with a keen awareness that he or she is being instructed by the one who is far wiser and more learned. In the age of digitalized media, the monks' reverence before the printed word, their commitment to spend substantial time on a daily basis in slow meditative reading, and their obedience to the text may seem outdated, even archaic. Yet, once more, it is the distinct difference in the monks' reading practice that is responsible for the restfulness of monastic texts.

The personal encounter with the monastic texts is very restful on a basic level. Getting "in the nook with the book" offers a relief from the domination of technology and the multitude of external agendas that accompany most of the reading that I do in the world. Such reading is easier on the senses: there are no blinking screens, no other "pages" to click on, and the speed of information delivery is automatically calibrated to the speed of my

⁴⁶⁶ In a book by the same title, a famous Benedictine scholar Jean Leclercq speaks of "the love of learning and the desire for God" as linked together throughout the history of monastic existence.

information intake. Such reading is also easier on the mind: since the whole point of the reading is an encounter with the Word (with no third party involved), there is no need to search for the “bullet points,” get to the bottom line, or memorize the argument. Indeed, because the chief goal of reading is to receive guidance, my reading posture becomes astonishingly restful: what is called for is not doing, but a quiet, patient receptivity. Additionally, because the books that I read are the ones that I myself chose, and because I chose them not for study or entertainment, but in response to the deeper hungers of my heart, my reading is inherently more satisfying. The monastic writers deepen my understanding of the vocabulary and story of faith, offering theoretical knowledge, practical wisdom, and inspiration for spiritual living.

Yet, in my individual encounter with the monastic texts, I find much more than mere repositories of spiritual advice, insight and inspiration. In the monastery, I discover texts as companions. There are three reasons for such a dramatic elevation in status. First, the traditional character of the monastic reading ensures that during retreat I spend substantial time with the author of my choice.⁴⁶⁷ While I do not do *lectio* on all books that I read in the monastery, my reading nonetheless retains some of its slow and meditative quality. As a result, I not only learn the contents of the book, but also get to know its author. Prayerful reading of the text becomes a way of building relationship; and, as with regular friendships, spending time together deepens it. Second, the genre of monastic writing itself contributes to such personal knowing. In the broad sense of the word, all monastic writing

⁴⁶⁷ Father Michael Casey advises to spend as much time as necessary choosing of the book for *lectio*, but once the choice is made, to stay with it, even if the reading becomes hard: Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, 5. Indeed, St Benedict himself, when he advises the monks about a Lenten book, emphasizes that the selected books are to be read in their entirety, *per ordinem ex integro* (RB 48.5).

has a distinctive confessional quality. Even when they are not explicitly identified as such (as, for example St. Augustine's *Confessions* are) these books offer glimpses into the inner spiritual experience of their authors. Regardless of the explicit topic of their attention, the monastic writers confess their faith, both as the starting place and the objective of their intellectual exploration. Such level of openness and intimacy (which in my ordinary interactions, even with my good friends, is rare) creates conditions for the deeper knowing of the person behind the text. Finally, the renowned status of many the writers in the monastic culture in itself contributes to the quick raising of awareness about their works and their lives. Having encountered their names again and again on the shelves of the monastery library and bookstore, in daily conversations with monks and lay workers, I soon begin to feel that I know these people. (In the monastery, there is an additional unique dimension to this familiarity: thanks to the Catholic tradition of venerating saints, the authors from times long past are experienced as alive even today.) Thus, in the course of my reading, I begin to see the monastic texts not merely as objects of my study but as places of encounter with distinct personalities of the monastic authors. The text itself becomes a mediator of relationship.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁸ The awareness of texts not merely as a valuable collection of literature, but as living presence of companions permeates monastic lore. Phillip Schaff cites the writings of a medieval monk, left alone in the convent when the other monks had gone off for recreation: "Our house is empty save only myself and the rats and mice who nibble in solitary hunger. There is no voice in the hall, no footstep on the on the stairs....I sit here with no company but books, dipping into dainty honeycombs of literature. All minds in the world's literature are concentrated in a library. This is the pinnacle of the temple from which we may see all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. I keep Egypt and the Holy Land in the closet next to the window. On the side of them are Athens and the empire of Rome. Never was such an army mustered as I have here. No general ever had such soldiers as I have. No kingdom ever had such illustrious subjects as mine of subjects half as well disciplined. I can put my haughtiest subjects up or down as it pleases me.... I call to Plato and he answers 'here,'— a noble and sturdy soldier; 'Aristotle,' 'here,'— a host in himself. Demosthenes, Pliny, Cicero, Tacitus, Caesar. 'Here,' they answer, and they smile at me in the immortality of youth. Modest all, they never speak unless spoken to. Bountiful all, they never refuse to answer. And they

The restfulness of such literary companionship offered by monastic texts has to do not merely with their capacity to provide “conversational partners” in the place where silence and solitude reigns supreme, but with the *kind* of the “conversation” and “partnership” that they offer. The attention of monastic writers is directed to the practice of religious life: they speak about the nature of the human search for God and the tangible aids to this process. Their teaching, however, bears little resemblance to formal academic study and instruction. What the monastic authors offer instead is the practical, concrete, and personal knowledge about the art of spiritual living, something akin to “wisdom” that is passed from one person to another—a parent to a child, or a mentor to a student—in the course of the long-term association. My commitment to spend a significant time with an individual monastic writer becomes therefore a way of entering an “apprenticeship” to a spiritual “master.” In reading these texts, I learn not only what my teachers *thought* about the life of faith, but how they *lived* it in the particularity of their personal makeup, circumstances, and surrounding culture. Their doubts and breakthroughs, fears and courage, sins and virtues, their deep longing and equally deep reservations about seeking God in the daily experience of their lives form a rich tapestry of knowledge about what a person of God is like and how to become one.

Thus, reading the monastic writers I begin to gain insight into the dynamics of my own inner experience and understand the hungers of my own heart better. Witnessing the monastic writers speak to God in a direct, unguarded way, I start developing their own alphabet of prayer. Imitating their way of life and practices of devotion, I begin to learn the

are all at peace together.” See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. V, The Middle Ages, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 550-51.

attitudes, values, and habits of seeing and acting that teach me to approach life from a standpoint of faith. And in the course of this literary apprenticeship, the notion of rest is being redefined one final time. Having become my cherished companions and revered teachers, the monastic texts challenge the individualistic way of thinking about rest that I inherited from the popular culture, and set forth instead a thoroughly communal model. No longer a matter of “private pursuit” of pleasure, entertainment, or passive relaxation, rest is now revealed as a way of life learned from the elders.

My encounter with monastic texts as companions for my spiritual journeying completes the radical processes of re-definition and re-direction of my search for rest, initiated by the monastic language and story of faith. Yet, neither of these processes take place in abstraction. My engagement with monastic texts and the resulting shift in my understanding of rest and the process of becoming restful take place in the context of my changing relationship with the monks, the very people who read and uphold these texts as foundational for their identity and self-understanding. The vocabulary of rest, story of faith, and companionship provided by the monastic texts re-position me in relation to the monastic community, creating the final and most profound layer of the monastery gift of peace: the restfulness of belonging.

Not too long into my retreat, I notice that my speech begins to undergo a subtle transformation. I speak more quietly, more slowly, and generally less. Yet the change affects more than the tone, volume, and the manner of my speaking. The familiarity of my daily language is now peppered with new terms and expressions: *cloister ...Grand Silence ...contemplation; Little Hours ...Lauds ...Mass; Lectio divina ...Benedictus ...Ora et Labora*. My Protestant tongue shyly tries on the Roman Catholic lexicon. My Russian-

Korean-English ears perk up at the sound of Latin. At first I merely mouth the unfamiliar words in the context of liturgy, spiritual direction, monks' conferences, or in the privacy of my room, whispering as I read. Later, I try using these words on my own. I don't fully understand, but I actively seek comprehension, "reading up" on unfamiliar pronouncements, checking the dictionaries for foreign terms. And gradually, as vagueness gives way to clarity, the words start rolling off my tongue as if they were mine: I begin to understand and mean what I say.

I relish this linguistic adventure. With my love of languages, it is fun and playful and rewarding in itself—a genuine rest. But there is more. Each word, turn of phrase, Latin expression—heard, repeated, and finally spoken as my very own—begets a deeper sense of belonging. Somehow, speaking the language of the monks makes me feel more like one of them. I am not fooling anybody of course: they are the professed religious and I am a lay visitor, and a Protestant one as such; and yet, and yet. As speaking American English at the grocery store "makes" me more American (without negating my Russian identity), so does speaking in the monastic dialect bring me to the inside of the monastic culture. We now speak the same language.

But of course, as with learning of any foreign language, more is acquired than a collection of rules and words. Underneath the expansion of vocabulary and grammar is the alteration in the myth, the paradigmatic story that gives meaning to the monastery way of life and its language. For me, the story of course is *not* so new. The biblical narrative of faith has been at the center of my personal and professional identity for the last two decades of my life: I have read the Bible at home with the zeal and dedication of a late convert; I have studied the Bible at the seminary as an eager student; I have preached and taught the

Bible in the church as a diligent minister. What *is* new, however, is the way this story feels at the monastery.

For once, I am enveloped in the culture where the language and the story of faith are a part of the dominant body of belief. The assertions of the secular mentality, so overwhelmingly present and therefore so hard to resist only a few hours before the retreat, begin to fade and rapidly lose their convincing power. The claims of the religious worldview on the other hand, which outside the monastery have been always confined to the realm of supposition, now cross into the domain of the obvious. With the people around me to share and affirm what “the Bible tells me” as valid and true, I don’t have to work so hard to maintain my faith. This harmony between my innermost convictions and the explicit creed of the monastery living is immensely restful. But there is more. Surrounded by the people who seek to live the Biblical story to the degree that I have not experienced before in any other community of faith (including my own), I begin to feel deeply at home. I am not fooling anybody of course: they are Roman Catholics and I am a United Methodist, and an ordained one as such—with these two traits only underscoring the vast body of differences in doctrine and church practice that separates us; and yet, and yet. Like reciting the Pledge of Alliance in the presence of other citizens “makes” me more American (without negating my Russian background), so does the realization of our common story of faith bring me to the inside of the monastic ethos. All the practical disparities notwithstanding, we are a people of one Book.

But there are other books, I quickly learn. Being on retreat introduces me to the whole body of literature that I have only perfunctory touched before: traditional Roman Catholic writers, classical and ancient Christian writers, and even, ironically, the deeply

familiar but long neglected Eastern Orthodox writers. The monks have roots that run deep into the soil of the Church, reaching over the ancient schisms and across the more recent ecclesiastical borders. Always a sucker for a new book, I delve into the sea of the unexplored in delight—only to be surprised by the difference in encounter. During my graduate schooling many books were read but only a few are put into practice; yet monks insist on being the “doers of the word, and not merely hearers.” Many books were questioned and critiqued but only few invited to critique and put questions to my life; yet monks advise “vulnerability before the text.” Many books were checked, skimmed, and abandoned half way through the reading; yet monks demand “stability in the material.” The startling difference of the monastic way of reading becomes epitomized in my encounter with Gregory of Nyssa.

Back during my course work I spent substantial time studying Gregory of Nyssa’s theology and even focused one of my qualifying exams on his anthropology, comparing it to that of John Wesley, especially with reference to the role of “passions” in the realization of the ultimate human destiny. I thought I *knew* Gregory of Nyssa (my head still swollen with the diagrams of deification, aspects of the soul, and stages of its ascent to God). And yet, during the Vigils’ meditations, I discovered a Gregory of Nyssa I did not know: addressing me through excerpts from his homilies on Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, the Beatitudes, the Resurrection of Christ, and his treatises on Christian formation and Christian perfection was an unfamiliar voice, that of a pastor whom I so longed for, and lacked, during my years of ministerial preparation. Inspired by this new acquaintance, I undertook *The Life of Moses* for my practice of *lectio*—the same book that I studied and diagrammed during my exams!—and throughout the months of meditating on this text,

have come to know and love Gregory, not merely as one of the “Cappadocian Fathers,” but as my dear teacher, patron, and guide in the art of spiritual living and practice of contemplation. Did my graduate school knowledge of Gregory of Nyssa aid my *lectio*? Undeniably so. It introduced me to the layout of the land, furnishing the much needed “maps” and “travel guides” for the complex territory of his thought. But the actual travelling took place in the pre-dawn darkness of my *lectio*: reading Gregory with an eye on what he is saying to me, rather than what I can say about him, brought my knowing to an entirely new level.

While unnervingly different, encounters like this are immensely restful, because they provide me with the company of “elders”: the wise and compassionate counselors whose experience of life, human nature, and journeying with God far surpasses my own. Thomas Merton, Michael Casey, Martin Laird, Antony of Sourozh, Teresa of Avila, Gueric of Igny, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, John Cassian...able to speak without violating the silence and available at a moment’s notice at any hour of day or night, they are my guides on the path to peace, enemies of doubt and despair, comrades of hope. They stand ready and eager to give me solace, encouragement, and instruction as many times as I choose to read the appropriate section. But there is more. Each new teacher and friend from the monastic literary collection, yet again, deepens my nascent experience of belonging. Somehow, reading the texts that the monks themselves read make me feel more like one of them. I am not fooling anybody of course: they are the cloistered monks, and I am, incurably, a person of the world; and yet, and yet. Just as reading Twain, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and O’Connor makes me not only more appreciative of what it means to be American, but of what it means to be human (complementing, not competing with, the

insights I owe to Russia's Prishvin, Nekrasov, Tyutchev, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy), so does my coming into the fuller knowledge of the spiritual masters of the Church make me deeply aware of my fundamental relatedness to the monastic mores. Now, there can be no doubt about it: we are members of the same "household of faith."

Something critical happens in the last context of the monastery living: the alternative world that the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices imagined non-verbally finds its explicit articulation in the alternative discourse of the monastic Texts. Three critical advantages are gained in this transition from non-verbal to verbal means of re-imagining the world. First, the monastic Texts *give voice and visibility* to the alternative reality imagined by the three other contexts of monastic living. Because the theocentric world embodied in the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices is put into the actual words, its existence and nature can no longer be overlooked. What was previously known only tacitly, now moves into the realm of conscious recognition. Second, the Texts *validate* the alternative world imagined by the Environment, Community, and Practices. The liturgical proclamation of the Biblical story and voluminous works of the monastic authors is a declaration (in writing!) that the theocentric world embodied in the monastery living is the true world. What was previously confined to the realm of largely subjective knowing, now gains weight and credibility of communal affirmation. Third, precisely due to their verbal nature, the monastic Texts are able to *significantly enrich* the imagining accomplished by the other contexts of the monastery living. In the writings of the individual monastic authors, the alternative reality revealed by the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices receives not only a more detailed description but an in-depth analysis and interpretation. What was previously shown as "dim reflections in a mirror,"

indistinctly, is now communicated with specificity and nuance. Thus, in the last context of monastic living, the Texts, the monastic intricate process of re-imagining the world for its visitors reaches its climax.

But not independently, of course. The verbal message of the monastic Texts is inseparable and deeply contingent upon the silent imagining of the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices. Indeed, there is an intense dialectic between the Texts and other three contexts of monastic living with regards to their effect upon retreatants. Until retreatants read the monastic Texts, the alternative world imagined by the monastic Environment, Community and Practices remains outside their conscious awareness, by and large inaccessible. Yet, until retreatants have the actual experience of the alternative world—the experience that is made possible by the powerful imagining of the monastic Environment, Community and Practices—the verbal frame provided by the monastic Texts remains empty, and as such incomprehensible: their image and metaphor are too outdated and strange to be readily appreciated by the contemporary mind. Hence, it is only when retreatants experience the alternative reality that the Texts seek to inaugurate that their message could be properly heard and understood.

And yet, once the connection between the silent and the verbal co-imagining of the alternative world has been established, the Texts take the work of imagining on an entirely new, and qualitatively different, level: they extend the alternative world imagined by monastery living far beyond the monastery property! Because the monastic authors come from different historical periods, the world of peace that they describe stands outside the limitations of monastery time. Because they come from different continents and cultures, the world of peace that they describe reaches much farther than the monastery physical

space. Finally, because the monastery writers themselves form a living community that inhabits the very world that they describe, they reveal that the population of the “people of peace” is not limited to the local monks. Thus, the monastic Texts enable retreatants to see that the alternative world imagined by the monastery is the same world that has been imagined by Scripture and inhabited by the Church all throughout the ages.⁴⁶⁹

The radical expansion of the monastery world of peace is deeply significant for my continued transformation into a restful person. Until now, I have strongly associated rest with the time of the monastery retreat, and restlessness—with my life in the world. As a result, no matter how much I enjoyed the restfulness of my monastic stay, the anticipation of my departure from the world of peace and my return to the ordinary world “with all its restlessness” has always been present and eating away at the fullness of my experience. The ineradicably restive part of the monastery rest had to do with the fact that it was seen, by definition, as temporary. But the monastic Texts expose the neat separation between the restfulness of my being at the monastery and the restlessness of my living “in the world” as null, urging me to see that the world of peace that Scripture imagines and the monastery

⁴⁶⁹ For the notion of the “world that Scripture imagines” and the paradoxical insight into Scripture’s ability not primarily to describe an alternative world but to bring it into being, I am indebted to my teacher, Professor Luke T. Johnson. He points out that Scripture offers to its reader not a “source of suppositions but a vast collection of interwoven images” that reveal to its readers an alternative symbolic reality; therefore, he argues, to correctly understand the text, the readers must concern themselves not only with the intellectual and historical world that produced Scriptures, but with the world that the Scripture itself creates. For his reflection on how such a shift in perspective would influence the process of doing theology, see Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (1998). For his application of this way of reading to a specific Biblical composition, Hebrews, see Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Scriptural World of Hebrews,” *Interpretation* 57, no. 3 (2003). Professor Johnson’s reflection on the importance of Scriptural imagination for reading Biblical texts and doing theology has been extremely generative for the development of my insight not only into the ability of the *monastic Texts* to imagine the world that Scripture imagines, but also into the ability of the *monastery as a whole* to bring such a profoundly Scriptural world into being.

embodies is valid and accessible even outside of my retreat. As such, the monastic Texts are indeed the bearers of the “good news”: they promise that I could enter and dwell in the Kingdom of Peace—no longer as its periodic visitor, but a lawful citizen—irrespective of my physical location.

But not without a cost of naturalization. The very explicitness of the monastic Texts presents me with no trifling a problem. The Texts describe the qualities, values, and aspirations of the “people of peace” with an uncomfortable precision, making known (in writing!) not only the tremendous benefits of being a citizen of the alternative world that Scripture imagines, but also its undeniable duties. Turning another cheek, walking another mile, giving away not only a shift but a coat as well, loving enemies, accepting the blessedness of the poor, the mourning and the meek, the hungry and the persecuted, learning to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s—reading such writings, I cannot possibly fail to notice that becoming a citizen of the Kingdom of Peace would pose definite challenges to my personal and professional well-being, by putting me in stark opposition to the sovereignty of the “Powers That Be” of my present motherland. Why then do I respond with the resounding “yes” to the formidable summons of the monastic Texts?

Because it is too late to change my mind! To begin with, the explicit claims of the monastic Texts represent the last link in the chain of persuasion carried out by the three other contexts of monastery living. The imagining of the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices has already convinced me of the ultimate reality and truthfulness of the alternative world of peace. By the time I get to reading, the monastic Texts are only stating the obvious: I have come to know—in the actuality of my own firsthand

experience—that the alternative way of life and self-understanding that the Texts describe have the power to give me rest and re-fashion me into a restful person. It is therefore no surprise that I feel so emboldened to continue. Additionally, the explicit demands of the monastic Texts also represent the last step in the Texts' own gradual, but significant, increase in power over me: at first, merely a source of the vocabulary to be “used”—later, the story to be “lived by”—in the end, Texts become teachers, to whom I “listen” with reverent receptivity. Having grown so much in size and authority, the claims of the monastic Texts are very hard to shrug off. It is only natural that I feel the urge to obey. Finally, the explicit summons of the monastic Texts become the means for conscious realization and expression of my growing commitment to the monastic way of life and its ethos. All throughout my stay, I have been making decisions about the degree of my involvement in the disciplines of monastic living. Lured by the restfulness of the monastic Environment, Community, and Practices, I have embraced greater and greater alterations to my daily action and attitude. Taken individually, each alternation was too small and imperceptibly gradual to become an object of my conscious reflection. Yet, one led to another, until at last the cumulative change to my behavior and attitude had reached the scope impossible to ignore. Suddenly, I become aware of the tremendous tension between my former way of life and my present retreat performance—and I become conscious of the need to explain and justify such profound an aberration. Accepting the challenging propositions of the monastic Texts, becomes a way not only to resolve my behavioral tension but also to consciously acknowledge the marked escalation of my commitment. It is precisely the dimension of sacrifice, made explicit in the monastic Texts that reveals and further intensifies my loyalty and devotion. I am now *eager* to surrender.

And this movement of conscious decision-making, of accepting the mandates of the monastic Texts as my own, completes the intricate process of my retreat-based transformation into a “person of peace.” No longer merely a passive recipient of the monastery formative influence (as I was in my encounter with the monastic Environment), or a curious onlooker (as I was in my encounter with the monastic Community), or even an excited goer-through-the-motions (as I was in my encounter with the monastic Practices), I am now, in some very real if limited way, a newly naturalized “citizen” in the alternative world that the monastery imagines. Coming to the end of my monastery retreat, I make peace even with my impending return to the world with all its restlessness—because now I have another one to inhabit.

8.4 Looking Back at the Monastery Retreat

In this chapter, I drew on my personal experience of the extended monastery retreats to reflect in depth on the ways in which the monastery “creates” rest for its visitors. I identified four specific “contexts” in monastic living—Environment, Community, Practices, and Texts—as principally responsible for the dramatic increase in my sense of peace and well-being during the monastery stay. To gain insight into the restorative and peace-producing effect of each of these contexts, I adopted a two-step process of reflection. First, I “zoomed in” on the specific dynamics of my encounter with the particular context, seeking to offer a thick description of how I *felt* in the course of this encounter. Second, I “zoomed out” to adopt a bird-eye view of this encounter, seeking to offer an analysis and interpretation of what *happens* in each context of monastic living, and how the events and dynamics of my encounter with the monastic culture and way of life contribute to the profound restfulness of my monastery retreat.

This twofold reflection on my experience of the extended monastic stay reveals that the monastery's ability to transform me into a "restful person" just in the course of a few days of my visit has to do with its ability to embody and imagine a particular reality—the "alternative world"—that is dramatically different from the one that I inhabit in my regular life in the world. Externally, it is a world of an alternative patterning of space and time, daily activities and occupations, rules of social engagement and a distinct collection of texts. Internally, it is a world of alternative meaning: the values, beliefs, and convictions that underlie monastic living present me with the radically different views about the origins and purpose of human existence. It is this profound alteration in my inner and outer realities that is responsible for the rapid change of my subjective experience. The deep restfulness I feel shortly upon arriving upon the monastery grounds is result of the dramatic reduction in the sources of stress and unrest. On the one hand, I have entered a highly protective setting: my physical environment is very low in sensory stimulation; my to-do lists are pared down to minimum, or eliminated altogether; my social obligations are greatly diminished; and the only available leisure activities (reading, walking, sleeping) are of a deliberately slower and disengaging nature. At the same time, the distinctly religious outlook of the monastic culture drastically lessens the inner burdens that I usually carry: my worth is no longer judged by my looks, accomplishments, and possessions; my goals and fundamental aspirations in life are scaled down to simply loving God and neighbor; and even the negative experiences of life, my very troubles and tribulations, are affirmed not as places of ignominy and defeat but as openings of grace. Having thus been freed from the tremendous tensions both from within and from without, I quickly begin to feel deep, genuine rest.

But not for long. Perhaps the most surprising discovery of my in-depth reflection on the monastery retreat is that my initial experience of deep restfulness soon gives way to an even more intense and profound feeling of restlessness. With my ordinary sources of unrest significantly reduced, a different kind of anxiety comes onto the front stage. Left face to face with myself—in the absence of the secularly promoted ways to understand my identity, gauge my worth, and assure me of my future—I am besieged by the deeper questions of the human existence: Who am I? Where am I going? What is the meaning of my life in the face of impending death? It is the deep-seated insecurity about my fate, the fundamental disquiet about the potential meaninglessness of my life, and the intense doubt about the foundations of my identity and value, that drive this overwhelming, all-encompassing feeling of restlessness. I would try to “get away” if I could, but the conventional avenues of distraction—via mindless eating, shopping, watching TV, browsing the Internet, excessive socializing and the like—are no longer easily available. The same environment that protected me, now stands in the way of my escape. If I am to rest again in the silence and solitude of my retreat, I have to find answers.

Yet, I am not left unaided in my search. Embodied in the particularities of monastic living is a very specific answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. The alternative world that the monastery imagines reveals God as the source and summit of the human life, and the ultimate ground of its identity, meaning, and value. The monastic retreat, therefore, is a standing invitation to try out a distinctly religious way of addressing the problem of human restlessness: by learning to rest in God. This, of course, is not a completely unfamiliar proposition for me. I have preached and taught and even wrote papers on this topic, as a minister and a long-time theology student. Yet, during my

monastery stay I am compelled to respond to this invitation anew, not merely because the other, secular, alternatives are muted, but because the religious answer is undergirded by such overwhelmingly strong evidence: it is “set in stone” in the monastic Environment, powerfully “enacted” in the monastic Practices, convincingly “described” by the monastic Texts, and “brought to life” in the personalities of the actual monks. And when I do respond, moving from merely observing the monastic way of life to participating in it for real, my restfulness reaches an entirely new level. It has to do, however, not with the inherent comfort and ease of the monastic lifestyle (for in its actuality, the monastic way of life is quite laborious and demanding), but with its ability to make me more susceptible to genuine religious experience. As it turns out, the monastic answer to the fundamental tensions of human existence comes not as a collection of theoretical propositions, but as a living Presence, addressing me in the depth of my own being: “...my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

As such, the Cistercian monastic institution is once more revealed as an embodiment and repository of a truly alternative tradition of resting. It introduces three radical “alterations” into my search for rest. First, the monastic tradition makes dramatic changes in my existing understanding of rest and restlessness. It is precisely because I experience genuine rest in the monastery, I cannot help but realize that rest is not quite what I thought it to be: being genuinely at rest is a really difficult occupation because it makes it impossible not to notice my inner restlessness. Making me keenly aware of the negative dimension of rest, the monastic tradition helps me recognize that the real sources of my unrest are related not merely to the faster pace and busyness of the contemporary

life, but to the deeper uncertainties and tensions inherent in human existence. Second, the monastic tradition radically redirects my practical efforts of searching for rest. Instead of teaching me the seemingly more appropriate practices of self-care, the monastic retreat is focused on developing the disciplines of self-transcendence: the monastic solution for the problem of the human restlessness is learning the skills of entering the Divine rest. Third, to teach me the skills of resting in God, the monastic tradition employs an educational process that is very different from that of conventional schooling. In place of explicit explanation about the nature of rest or formal instruction in the skills of resting, there is simply a direct, unmediated guidance in the alternative way of life. The monastery teaches me to rest in the same way my mother taught me to write—by putting a pencil into my hand, taking my hand into her own, and beginning to move it. My journey of entering peace, in reality, is an intricate event of “being entered.”

Thus, the gift of peace that I receive during my extended retreat is not a matter of a temporary withdrawal from the challenges, difficulties, and problems of my ordinary existence, but a fruit of my deepened encounter and genuine, if temporary, entry into the monastic alternative tradition of resting. While I myself am not yet fully aware of what has been done “onto me,” I cannot miss the results of the monastic formative process. By the end of my retreat, having participated authentically in the monastery’s world, my trust in its ability to give me rest increases a hundredfold. It is therefore not surprising that, like many other committed retreatants, I make a firm decision not merely return to the monastery for subsequent visits, but to embark on a journey of transferring the monastic way of life onto the soil of my “real-world” living.

CHAPTER 9

RETURN TO THE WORLD: BECOMING RESTFUL

In this chapter, I reflect on the final stage of my recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, my “return to the world.” I speak of returning in two senses: as a recurring event of going back home at the end of the monastic retreat, and also as a slow and cumulative process of coming back, after burnout, to my vocation and identity as a minister. While the final fruit of my journey of returning to the world has been truly life-giving, the dynamics of its unfolding has caught me by an utmost surprise. At the onset of my intention to “transplant” the monastery gift of peace onto the soil of my living in the world, I envisioned a quick and relatively easy course of adopting the monastic values, practices, and texts to the realm of my personal existence and then, sharing it with people around me (most notably, the Christian clergy in need). Yet, the years that followed my decision have been exceedingly arduous, demanding and dark. In part, this was because the challenges of this time were amplified by a serious illness. In another, greater part, this was because—as I now know—the intensification of the struggle is inherent to the process of genuine transformation: during these years, I discovered that in order to become a person of peace, I had to die as a person of unrest and war.

Because the dynamics of transformation that I seek to describe are so intimately woven into the particular circumstances of my life, the narrative of this chapter is the most idiosyncratic of all. In contrast to Chapter 7, “One Day at the Abbey,” and Chapter 8, “The Making of Retreat,” which focused on the *public occurrences* of the retreat at the monastery, this chapter focuses on the *personal events* that took place in my life as I sought

to preserve and cultivate the monastic gift of peace in the world. Furthermore, such reflection does not have ready parallels in the contemporary literature on the monastic living: for obvious reasons, the monks themselves are not in the position to write about the experience of living the monastic way of life in the world; and for understandable reasons, the lay descriptions of the encounter with the monastic tradition tend to focus on the actuality of the encounter itself, rarely including anything more than a short “postscript” about the experience of returning to the world. Finally, the pronounced idiosyncrasy of this chapter has to do with the very nature of the events that I seek to describe: much of my narrative is concerned with the “inner experience” which, by definition, is least available for communal observation.

Nevertheless, there are two sources that enrich and validate my in-depth reflection on my personal experience of returning to the world: the lived experience of the Lay Cistercians and the living tradition of the classical monastic writing. Lay Cistercians represent a unique segment of the population coming to the monastery for retreats. Because they make a formal commitment to embody the Cistercian charism in their lives in the world, they attend to the work of adapting the monastic way of life to the challenges of outside living in the most diligent and sustained manner. They are therefore some of the most important “retreatants” to watch in order to discern the dynamics of the personal transformation that takes place when lay persons make a genuine commitment to live out the monastic values and lifestyle way of life amid the complexity of their active lives in the world. My direct observations and personal conversations with the senior Lay Cistercians—the persons who have persevered in living the Cistercian charism in the world for a long period of time—reveal that the passage into the difficulty, darkness, and

obscurity is not an uncommon experience for the progressive stages of following the monastic discipline. As such, they confirm and deepen the exposition of this chapter.

Similarly, there can be discerned a strong spontaneous agreement between the dynamics I seek to describe in my narrative and the accounts of transformation that can be found in the traditional Benedictine-Cistercian and wider monastic writings.⁴⁷⁰ While these texts rarely concern themselves with articulation of a specific “monastic paradigm of transformation,” they bear a powerful witness to the unfolding of such a process. For example, in the writing of Thomas Merton and Basil Pennington, this dynamic is described in ontological terms, via a distinction between the “false self” and the “true self”: in order to become oneself (one’s true self), one must die (as one’s false self).⁴⁷¹ In the work of Robert Thomas, this process is revealed as an ever-deepening movement of self-transcendence: as one is “passing from self to God,” a very real dying must take place.⁴⁷² In his reflection on the life of St. Anthony, Douglas Burton-Christi calls attention to the fact that such a journey of transformation is accompanied by a tremendous, and terrifying,

⁴⁷⁰ It must be acknowledged that my work of citing the monastic texts to corroborate my personal experience of becoming restful is both necessary and awkward. It is necessary, because the credibility of my comparative statements depends on my ability to provide the readers with specific examples of the people in the monastic tradition who underwent similar experiences. It is awkward, because by doing so I end up comparing my “toddler’s” religious experience with the religious experience of the true giants of the Benedictine-Cistercian and larger Western monasticism (since it is their lives that are the most frequent object of the monastic writers’ attention). The main reason for such boldness on my part is the fact that a number of these writings have been pointed out to me by the actual monks and lay Cistercians in response to the preliminary drafts of my manuscript.

⁴⁷¹ For example, Thomas Merton, *Love and Living* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979); Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968); Thomas Merton and William Henry Shannon, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003); M. Basil Pennington, *True Self/False Self* (New York: Crossroad, 2000).

⁴⁷² Thomas.

psychological unraveling.⁴⁷³ Michael Casey, together with numerous other monastic writers, traces the monastic understanding of transformation back to its biblical roots, the Gospel imperative of dying and rising to a new life, rooted in Christ's own paschal passage from death to life.⁴⁷⁴

Thus, while the particularities of my description of my post-retreat stage of my becoming a restful person are exactly that, *particularities*, their underlying dynamic is deeply congruent with the general pattern of transformation as found in the ancient and contemporary monastic writing and as discernible in the actuality of the lay Cistercian experience. While indeed idiosyncratic, my account is anything but original.

I organize my reflection on the dynamics of my returning to the world in four subsections—*The Dilemma*, *The Solution*, *The Cost of Transformation*, and *Becoming Restful*—which I have come to see as the distinct phases in my journeying. In the text, these four sections are not equal in length. Similar to my description of the four contexts of the monastic living in Chapter 8, “The Making of Retreat,” the length of these sections is determined by the actuality of my experience of these stages. To ground the purely descriptive nature of the chapter's narrative in the tangible textual evidence, I include a selection of excerpts from my diaries, poems, and personal correspondence with the monks and lay Cistercians at the beginning of each of its four sections. These selected writings pertain to the dynamics of change that are being described in each of the sections. It must be noted that in the case of the monks and lay Cistercians, I have drawn upon my

⁴⁷³ Douglas Burton-Christie, "Simplicity, or the Terror of Belief: The Making and Unmaking of the Self in Early Christian Monasticism," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2005).

⁴⁷⁴ Casey, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict*.

correspondence with the members of the communities that belong not only to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Georgia but also to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. I have removed all identifiers, with the exception of the distinction between a “monk” and a “lay Cistercian.”

9.1 Dilemma: Caught Between Two Worlds

August 24, 2005 (Conyers, GA):

Poem “At the Monastery: My soul is overflowing with you”
(originally written in Russian, translated here into English)

*My soul is overflowing with You
Much like these pines, by Sun lit golden
Through lake's repose, sky's quietude
Your name is being uttered by the world*

*This silence speaks much louder than words
into my ears by anxiety long deafened
Its brightness
—vision of blind eyes restores,
Its healing touch
—to crippled feet brings wellness*

*Come, pour Your peace upon my soul
Caress me with Your breath reviving
The heart created in Your mold,
In knowing You, to knowledge of itself is coming*

October 12, 2005 (Atlanta, GA): Poem “In the City: My heart is too tired to care”

*My heart is too tired to care,
too dry to cry
too weak to speak
too scared—
somebody's pain to share...*

*My heart is too tired to care,
feeling too vile to smile
spread-too-thin to see joy within
too bare—
a loving look to spare...*

*My heart is too tired to care
trying to hide its void,
behind the flow of words,
its angst—buried in busy acts...*

*...STOP!!
Do you dare?*

*Come, Lord,
let me not
die in despair.*

Pentecost, 29 June 2010: Letter from a Lay Cistercian

Natalya,

I hope this note finds you well and adjusting to the real world without too much discomfort and disgruntledness. It is always difficult for me, but I know that I need to return to the playing field of my daily life, to work out all those ideals put forth for us in the silence of the monastery.

I do hope, and now pray, that writing continues to flow for you. In my opinion, writing and the spiritual life of following Jesus have this in common – every future success and accomplishment is built on the present and immediate steps of obedience, no matter how seemingly infinitesimal or insignificant to us. Please pray for me, that I would follow my own advice, as I too am trying to write (and follow Jesus!). Peace to you, your husband, and family ~ M.F.

When I leave the monastery after retreat, I am at a very high point. On the most basic level, there is a sense of a profound wellness. My senses are particularly heightened. My mind, calmed and invigorated by the monastic quiet, is no longer overwhelmed but joyous and even eager to work. My soul is nourished, and I feel deeply attuned to the natural world around me. Even more remarkably, the “peace that passes all understanding,” solid and unperturbable, seems to reign in my heart. The numerous sources of my pre-retreat restlessness, while still present in actuality, lack their former convincing power, and there is a feeling of a peculiar and exhilarating rightness to all of my life. Work and leisure,

words and silence, being alone and being with others—all facets of my existence seem to be properly ordered and flowing in astonishing harmony with one another. I begin to feel that I have really become a “person of peace,” completely immune before my old anxieties and fears, or any future problems for that matter. In that elevated state, I consider how I would share the “monastery gift of peace” with others. I am certain that my work would help other clergy to recover, or better yet, avoid, burnout in ministry. The thoughts of transforming the church and academy are dancing in my head.

The disintegration begins only a few minutes after leaving the monastery gate behind. At first, I become aware of the growing bodily unease and agitation, in response to the dramatic increase in stimuli. Blinking neon signs and large billboards, busy noises of the highway, loud music and conversation rising from the open windows of the surrounding cars assault my senses and make me feel dazed and deeply discombobulated. On the heels of my bodily discomfort come internal doubts: I start to wonder how I ever managed to live like that before—and whether I could again. From my newly gained monastic viewpoint, the outside life seems cluttered, overly indulgent, physically and psychologically unhealthy. My arrival at home heralds more challenges. As I collect my mail, check my email (so conveniently neglected for the whole duration of retreat), and open my planner to review the weekly agenda and upcoming deadlines, I feel my stomach turning into a hard ball of acid. The numerous to-do lists, projects, and obligations begin to crowd my head, clamor for energy and attention, and threaten to rob me of balance and perspective that I found at the monastery. Finally, my re-entry into my primary communities completes the manifold tiers of tension-building. As I come in contact with people in my church and academic settings, I become keenly aware of the heavy toll exerted

on me by the sheer increase in talking, subtle realities of comparison and competition, expectations, and the unruly tug of my own desires and aversions. And, it takes only one phone call back to my family in Russia to realize that, whatever peaceful saintliness I may have thought I have attained at the monastery, all my “hot buttons” are still perfectly operational.

I try to fight for my peace. I hang desperately onto rising at 4 a.m. for Vigils, *lectio*, and centering prayer. I stoically interrupt my academic studies to pray the Divine Office. I try to be intentional about carving the oases of silence, simplicity, and solitude throughout the day. But sooner or later, the monastery peace starts to lose its solidity, while my old anxieties creep in, assume the center stage, and gradually take on more weight and substance. On average, in about three to four weeks, when my lack of sleep reaches its critical threshold, I once more fall prey to the old restlessness and fatigue. That’s when I start planning another retreat.

Arrival at the monastery for a new retreat is always magical. It is as if the moment I step out of the car and my feet touch the monastery ground, I come under the influence of a subtle but powerful force. I instantly remember who I am, and that my identity and worth and life itself are given and sustained by God. I remember that I am loved and accepted as I am, that I don’t have to work so hard to earn it. I remember that I *can* be at peace. Once more—in the simplicity of my room, enveloped in the praying community of monks and other retreatants, shielded from the excessive interaction with technology, and surrounded by the woods—I recover from fatigue, taste the familiar restfulness, and begin to see my

old anxieties and fear in a true perspective. In just a few days of retreat, I watch myself, once again, being transformed into a person of peace.

The end of retreat, therefore, marks the time of increased resolve. I swear to God and myself that this time it will be different. I ask monks and fellow retreatants for prayer support, and I plunge back into the world. Yet, time and again, despite my ardent desire and dogged determination, I fail to transplant the monastery gift peace onto the soil of my daily living. I get upset, then frustrated. Now, on top of my old restlessness, I have an added aggravation: I have finally found peace—but keeping it seems to be a problem. What can possibly be wrong? Where do I err? My decision is firm. My commitment is wholehearted. My conscious understanding is crystal-clear: I long to live as a person of peace not only in the monastery, but in my regular life in the world. And yet, in the aftermath of each monastery visit, despite the best of my intentions and the greatest of efforts, I am swept off my feet by the strong current of habitual restlessness. With alarming regularity, the retreat magic is followed by the post-retreat disenchantment.

After several more retreats, comes the moment of illumination: *I, Natalia*, am the same both inside and outside the monastery, it is the *surrounding culture* that is different. If my peace is a fruit of the monastic way of life and its ethos, i.e., of being enveloped in the “alternative world” that the monastery so powerfully imagines, then my inability to keep peace has to do with the absence of this world, rather than with any deficiency in my commitment and understanding. The outer society to which I return in the aftermath of my retreat makes it hard to keep my peace, not merely because it is higher in external stimulation, but because it too imagines a world—a world dramatically different from the

one imagined by the monastery! Whereas the monastery imagines a theocentric world, secular society imagines a world revolving around human need and desire. Whereas the monastery reveals a being-centered world, secular society is infatuated with doing. Whereas the monastery places rest at the center of human life, the secular society worships work. As such, the secular world is not only inherently more fatiguing, but it is also antithetical to the very sources of the peace that I am trying to transplant. Moreover, it is precisely because I have lived under the formative influence of the surrounding society most of my life, I am deeply habituated to its imagining. Like a round peg into a round hole, I slide, readily and seamlessly, into the secular way of acting, thinking, and valuing.

This therefore is my dilemma: my possession of the monastery peace is conditional upon my inhabiting of the monastery world, which is no longer imagined (but actively deconstructed) by the environment, communities, and dominant practices and texts of the surrounding society. As such, the solution to my dilemma must extend beyond my personal internal resolutions to the external changes in my life as a whole: my ability to live as a restful person outside the monastic retreat depends upon my ability to renounce the ways of the world and make a journey of entering the alternative reality imagined by the monastery. Like Israel suffering in Egyptian bondage, my well-being and future of peace seems to depend upon my ability to leave.

9.2 Solution: Remembering the World that the Monastery Imagines

April 23, 2006: Application for the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

I am applying for membership in the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey (LCG) because I believe that God is calling me to a secular contemplative vocation. I hope to find spiritual guidance, especially in cultivating the attitudes of simplicity, hospitality and humility, developing the elements of silence and solitude, and growing in contemplative

prayer and continuous engagement with God's word. I am seeking assistance as I strive to introduce and promote these ideals not only in my personal life and that of my family, but in the contemporary world, communities and places, where God leads me to live and serve. I am also looking for a community, a gathering of spiritual friends who themselves seek to know God and who could journey with me, sharing in my daily joys and struggles to remain faithful. It is my hope that such a community will be for me a source of both accountability and support, and that I can offer these gifts to my brothers and sisters in return. I view membership in the LCG as entering into covenantal relationship with the Cistercian community of Gethsemani Abbey, as well as strengthening my bond with the Cistercian Order as a whole.

March 21, 2008, Easter Triduum: Poem "Good Friday"
(meditation on Hans Holbein's painting "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb")

*Silent night, Holy night
My Lord is laid to rest*

*His body—young and strong
His body—tortured and torn
is finally laid to rest*

*Anger and fear are gone
I wept and can do no more
Silence and stillness have come
with pain I knew not before*

*So sleep, my Love, in peace
I will pray for your weary heart,
I will pray that your tortured limbs
would find repose tonight*

*I will pray for your head that bore
the crown of thorn and spittle,
May this silent night restore
Smile on face which by love was lit*

*Sleep, my Lord, I will be here
Recalling your life through this night
from the time when the angel appeared
to announce God's mercy and might*

*Holy night, how silent you are,
guarding previous load in the tomb:
To the womb of the earth has come
One who rested in virgin's womb*

*Rest, my Lord, may your blessed wounds
be soothed by cold darkness of night
I will wait, just wait at your tomb,
I have found my rest—by your side.*

January 1, 2010: Letter from the monk

Dear Natalia, Peace be with you.

You touched me deeply with this word. I would like to share my experience of it in the now moment, as I go through something of the same struggle as a monk.

Life must be lived for me at a pace whereby I can be present to God in each moment. This means concretely letting go of many very good things that I would like to do and others want me to do. I need to be clear on what I am really called to do through obedience and all the extra voices, invading me from the wants of others and my own dreams as well. This means careful planning of priorities... I need to give people quality time in spiritual direction, but limit the time. More really happens for them that way, for then I am sensitive to the one little thing they need to work on, that flows deeply from their hearts where Jesus lives. If I try to fix everything, or encourage them to fix everything that needs fixing in their lives, nothing gets fixed, they fall down from exhaustion back into their old sins and addictions and make no real progress!

But the core is that I must give Jesus prime time in my life...Most of all, lectio must be real, listening to what He is saying today! ...Yes, as you have so edifyingly said, falling totally into God's hands of love, surrendering to His love and truth. As you said, this seems so utterly a slow process, yet...as I move at my faster pace that I like [sic], I can easily wound others.

I asked you to be brief, but in my flood of words, the little word is "listen in quiet and live what He speaks through lectio." Then, and only then we bear fruit in Jesus. Mary Seat of Wisdom, pray for us. Shalom, Fr_____.

P.S. Your last email, I forgot to mention, needs to be saved and eventually printed in your book of poetry and writing that you surely must publish someday to help others in their darkness, to grasp and walk with Jesus into the fullness of life and love!!! ~ Shalom, Fr_____.

July 13, 2015: Letter from a Lay Cistercian

...And dear Natalia—my memory turns to that wonderful evening at Gethsemani [June 25, 2011] when you made your presentation to the monks, the presentation which was so beautiful and essential to inspire the conventional community to recognize LCG. We owe you so much. You are in my prayers for your health of body and soul. ~ Blessings, R. J.

Having realized that my survival as a peaceful person depends on my ability to leave behind the ways “of the world” and to learn to inhabit the alternative reality of the monastic living outside the monastery retreat, I begin to look for ways to stay connected and remember the monastery world in my life outside retreat. As always, books are the first objects of my attention. The monastic writers who became my companions and mentors during retreat, begin to accompany me back home. First, they are borrowed, then bought. Thomas Merton’s *No Man Is an Island* takes up a prominent place among the contents of my daily bag (I even take it with me when I travel to Russia during the summer), and I inflict the passages from his writings upon anybody who would listen (my then-boyfriend Mark still remembers the occasions when our dates were turned into the extended readings of Merton). I discover in delight that the slender monastic volumes have a powerful effect on my ability to stay connected to the monastery world. They are able to transport me back into the monastery world, irrespective of my physical location, momentarily superimposing the monastic system of valuing and believing on the ordinary situations of my life. In this sense, reading becomes an avenue of resting, because it enables me “re-member” the symbolic reality of the monastery living and its peacefulness right amid the trials and tribulations of my day-to-day existence.

Books are helpful, but I also long for something tangible. Soon, I begin to return from my shopping expeditions to the monastery bookstore laden with other goods: crucifixes and icons, oil lamps and candles, prayer ropes and rosaries, calendars and postcards, together with the great variety of religious art and the monks’ own merchandise. I smile, recognizing these purchases as my experiment with transitional objects, but I need all the “teddy bears” I can get to ease my separation anxiety and provide a sense of

continuity and comfort as I learn to commute between the monastery and the world. Silly as they may seem, these objects, too, serve as the means of constructing the new reality: they allow me to “take” the monastery back home with me, when I return from retreat; and their very physicality enables me to use them as building blocks in my attempts to re-fashion my life. Wearing the monastery sweatshirt and baseball cap on the walk in the park, or Bonsai Garden apron while cooking my meals at home, supply me with the sensory reminders to “put on Christ,” the attitude and conviction that undergird my action and mindset at the monastery. Using the monk-made rosary at home makes me feel that my prayer outside retreat too is an extension of the monastic *opus Dei*. Making the products of the monastery industries—cheese, coffee, fudge, fruitcake, and the famous Br. Gueric’s biscotti—the focus of my Christmas gift-giving serve as the public expressions of my new commitment: they give me not only the satisfaction of forming an additional bond of financial support with the monastic community, but also the way to communicate to my friends in the world where my “good store of treasure” now is.

Yet, it is not only what I bring home from the monastery, but how my home changes in response to my monastic escapades that signals my shifting loyalties. The physical environment of my living space begins to reflect the thoroughness of my attempts at making my ordinary life an extension of the monastery world. My room, no longer ordered solely to writing and study, begins to take on a new outlook. First, I set up an altar, decorating it with a candle, cross and the photographs of the monastery’s sanctuary. A few months later, I feel the need to create a distinct prayer space. So, I pull out a set of bookshelves away from the wall to create a nook. Because the bookshelves occupy the longest wall of my room, my prayer space turns out to be rather narrow and long, so much

so that it begins to resemble a gothic cathedral corridor. All the better. I move my altar to the farthest wall in that space, hanging an icon of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit and crucifix above it and “upgrading” my simple candle to a genuine oil lamp. I set a meditation mat at the entry into the prayer space (admittedly an Eastern touch, but a necessary one: I know from experience that I can sit much longer on meditation cushion than in a regular chair). Now, I have my own “room to pray in secret.”

As the physical space in which I live begin to reflect the growing priority of the monastic prayer, so does the temporal layout of my daily existence. I set alarms on my phone to the same seven hours when the Liturgy is prayed at the monastery, and I pause for prayer at those times throughout the day. I put a prayer rope bracelet on my wrist and begin to pray the Jesus Prayer under my breath throughout the day. I commit to memory the last office of the day, Compline, and supplement the general text of the Divine Office⁴⁷⁵ with the copies of the specific hymns, antiphons, and canticles as they are prayed at the monastery. I introduce two periods of thirty-minute long meditation at the beginning and the end of my day and set aside a specific time for *lectio*. I even institute the tripartite division in my daily schedule—for prayer, work, and manual labor—and begin imitating the monks’ hours of Grand Silence at night by shutting down internet and phone after Compline. I am all too aware how much these new additions clash with the established flow of my day, my availability to my friends, and even my studies. Yet, I welcome them wholeheartedly and do my best to carry them out to perfection: they are my first tokens of liberation, my acts of rebellion against the ways of the dominant culture, my first steps on the path of “fleeing the world.” I try to be shrewd about it, of course. After all, I still need

⁴⁷⁵ Church, *The Divine Office: The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*.

to finish my dissertation and get a job in the same world that I seek to leave behind. So, early on I begin to obsess with developing a new daily routine—my own “Rule”—which would enable me to replicate the calmness and order of the monastery living while at the same time allowing me to meet the responsibilities of my worldly existence.

My intentional work of leaving behind the dominant culture and learning to inhabit the monastery world reaches its climax in my search for a lay monastic community. Early in my encounter with the monastic tradition I became aware of the existence of the Lay Cistercians, the group of ordinary people associated with the monastery in Conyers, people who seek to integrate the Cistercian charisms and values into their lives in the world. As I begin to develop closer ties with the monastery, I get to know many of them in person and, observing their way of life and relationship with the monastic community, become convinced that becoming a part of this community is a missing link in my individual attempts at living “in, but not of, the world.” At the time of my formal inquiry, however, I learn that the community is not yet open to non-Catholic laity. I ask to become a silent attendee, a mere visitor in their meetings, but despite all the informal kindness and care and even development of genuine individual friendships, the official answer is still negative. I grow desperate and begin to broaden my search: first, to other Cistercian monasteries, then to the lay associate programs of other Catholic monasteries, and finally to other neo-monastic organizations. My persistence is rooted in my growing realization that the alternative world that the monastery imagines derives its convincing power not merely from the differences in its environment, practices and texts, but from the presence of the living community, the actual people who live and speak and act *as if* the world that the monastery imagines is the *true* world.

So my joy knows no bounds when I finally I connect with the mother-house of the monastery in Conyers (and Merton's own monastery!), the Abbey of Gethsemani, that nurtures the community of the lay associates that is remarkably open—not only ecumenically but also geographically. After the three years in candidacy, I make a formal commitment to become a Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani. My entry into the community of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani gives me everything that I hoped for—and much more: now, my monastic community includes the monks and the lay Cistercians of not one but two monasteries and a considerably deeper level of encounter with the monastic tradition. There are now common retreats and informal gatherings to attend, more frequent personal interaction with the monks and spiritual guidance, and even sharing in the monk's own resources for readings, prayer, and the Abbot's weekly chapter talks! I have now moved from being merely a visitor and beneficiary of the monastery gifts of peace, to being a genuine participant in its way of life and its culture. From this point on, I also begin to divide my financial tithe equally, between the United Methodist Church and the Cistercian monastery.

The change in my identity creates a distinct shift in my perception of the monastic retreat. Now, my chief purpose in going to the monastery for a visit is no longer pure rest and relaxation, but training. I become deeply intentional about observing and reflecting on the simple ordinary choices that I, under the guidance of the monks, make all throughout the monastery day—the choices that results in my experience of the monastic restfulness and peace. I also become intentional about working at the monastery, now not merely to supplement my small donation, but to learn the ways of restful working. This includes

bringing my dissertation to the retreat, and experimenting with the rhythms and the duration of working that are very different from my usual pace of studies. My goal is not so much the added production (although such goal is never too far from my mind!), but a discovery of a new, more restful, way of writing. Thus, even though externally nothing has changed, my entry into the Lay Cistercian community changes everything on the level of my inner experience and intention: now, I treat the monastery retreat not as a perfect “get away” place, but as a “matrix” for learning the restful patterns of working and resting, qualities of environment and social engagement, in order to understand their deeper meaning and envision the ways to imitate them in my life back the world.

And indeed, as weeks and months go by, and my life begins to change, I begin to see the glimpses of the peace that I have originally known only at the monastery, in my daily existence in the world. There is less clutter and more space, less work and more prayer, less socializing and more solitude. No longer do I jump to my computer at 5 a.m. first thing in the morning, powered by coffee and cream, or stay up late, going from desk to bed; now, my early mornings are devoted to meditation and *lectio*, and my evenings end with the time of *Examen* and quiet reading. My life as a whole seems to move at a more forgiving and soul-honoring pace. Even the ordinary and the most challenging events of my days seem to be touched by the comforting awareness of God’s presence. And, I am surprised and delighted by the steady bubbling up of the small creative acts: poems and songs seem to arise spontaneously and abundantly in the mental space that has been intentionally left unoccupied. I would have never dared to speak about it in public, but deeply inside I begin to feel that, in a very real sense, my life in the world is becoming an extension of my monastery stay. (And the thing is, I seem to need fewer retreats!)

Yet, my public existence *is* affected by these private changes. Like the physical environment of my personal space and the temporal pattern of my daily living, the two primary domains of my public existence—the academy and the church—begin to be affected by the course of my monastery journeying. My dissertation takes a pronounced monastic turn. My beginning teaching experience, whether co-teaching the RE-501 class for the formal “teaching assistantship” requirement in my doctoral program or offering the less formal presentations at Candler School of Theology, begins to focus on the ways in which the Christian contemplative monastic tradition can deepen pastoral ministry and well-being. The learning opportunities that I seek out, too, reflect my attempts to bridge the academy and the monastery. In spring of 2008, I travel to Collegeville, Minnesota, for the *Practical Theology and Spirituality* conference: I am as excited to meet the renowned scholars in my field, as I am to visit the Abbey Church and the Liturgical Press publishing house (a lot of my monastic books come from there!); and the dual institutional identity of the place itself—St. John’s is both an Abbey and a University—feels like an embodied symbol of my own vocation. In spring of 2009, I attend the *Called to Unite Knowledge and Vital Piety* conference in Indiana, exploring the educational aspirations and contemporary challenges of the higher education in the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition: I am deeply gratified to hear the keynote speaker, Paul Chilcotte, a distinguished Wesleyan scholar and himself a Benedictine oblate, speak about Wesleyan spirituality as fundamentally Benedictine in nature.⁴⁷⁶ I leave the conference with renewed conviction that my monastic journey is not a departure from but a paradoxical home-coming trip to my United Methodist

⁴⁷⁶ Paul W. Chilcotte, "Knowledge and Vital Piety: A Wesleyan Vision of Holistic Formation" (paper presented at the *Called to Unite Knowledge and Vital Piety: Exploring Indiana's Places of Christian Higher Education in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions*, The University of Indianapolis, March 27-28, 2009).

heritage, and that disciplined scholarship and genuine religious experience can not only co-exist but enrich and deepen each other. Finally, in fall of 2011, I travel to two Cistercian monasteries, the New Melleray Abbey and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey, in Iowa to attend the leader formation retreat. The retreat—centered on a program filmed for broadcast by The Learning Channel, *The Monastery*—is aimed at training the persons responsible for adult spiritual formation. This conference further affirms the direction of my vocational becoming, not only by reinforcing my desire to share the rich resources of the contemplative monastic tradition with the world, but also by providing me with specific resources for such work.

What I receive on the level of my learning and budding integration of the monastery and the academy, I seek to immediately “give back” on the level of church ministry. I volunteer to teach Contemplative Prayer during the Sunday school time in my local United Methodist congregation, and give a workshop on meditation for International students at Candler School of Theology. I begin to work on a supplemental “spiritual formation” module for the Pastoral Care Curriculum, developed by the Russia Mission Initiative. And I envision and begin collecting the materials, ideas, and bibliography for the “Contemplative Minister” course for the clergy and lay leaders of the Russia United Methodist Church.

But perhaps the greatest joy of giving back comes in the context of the monastery itself. In 2008, I am invited to co-lead a retreat in the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, which in the course of its development becomes two retreats: *Spirituality of Active Life* is offered in January of 2009, and *Stewardship of Self as Spiritual Discipline* is offered in September of 2009. The focus of the first retreat—helping the retreatants to meet the challenge of

reconciling the values and aspirations experienced during their time at the monastery with the demands of their active lives in the world—is a direct outgrowth of my own, still in-progress, journey of returning to the world. The offering of the second retreat is my attempt to bringing to bear the wisdom of the monastic tradition upon the increasingly popular, if misleading, topic of self-care. Finally, in June of 2011, I travel to Kentucky to make a formal presentation to the monks of Gethsemani Abbey, about the impact of the Cistercian charism on my life and the meaning of the lay association with the monastery. My presentation is a contribution to the work of the lay Cistercian community towards its formal recognition by the conventional monastic community.

Seeing my private attempts at cultivating the monastery peace “spill out” into my academic and ecclesiastical work, the two primary domains of my public existence, as well as my growing ability to share some of my professional gifts back at the monastery, makes me feel as if I have finally “got it,” that I have mastered the monastery teaching of peace and am nearing my “graduation” from its school of resting in God alone. Yet, even as I delight in the positive indications of deepening in my understanding and experience of the monastic tradition, I can no longer deny the appearance of some of the more troubling signs. With the expiration of the Graduate School stipend at the end of the fourth year in the doctoral program, I begin to apply for external fellowships—only to realize that I will have hard time competing with other doctoral students: the monastic retreats and conferences may have contributed much to my own growth, but did little for that of my resume. Several months later, I also miss the window of opportunity to apply for the *Religious Practices and Practical Theology Concentration*, an Initiative developed in the Graduate Division of Religion; this failure will cost me not only the additional financial

support but important opportunities for my development as a practical theologian. While neither of these failures presents a deadly threat to my continued academic progress or finances—I still hold a scholarship from the church and have access to other avenues of professional growth—for the first time, I become aware that the deepening of my involvement with the monastery is accompanied by the very real erosion of the bonds that connect me to the institutions back in the world. It is becoming obvious that I am having hard time “serving two masters,” and that my passionate devotion to the one has in fact led to my neglect of the other.

There is a part of me that says I should welcome such weakening of the bonds, because they are the true signs of my unfolding liberation from my bondage to the “ways of the world.” Yet there is another part too, the one who is keenly conscious of the other side of this equation: the benefits that come with such bondage. The tangible consequences of my monastic journeying upon my studies and finances make me realize that my attempts to remember the monastery world in my life in the world is not as innocuous an undertaking as it once appeared. What looked like a mere improvement in the spiritual department of my life begins to send the tangible (and alarming!) reverberations through the whole fabric of my existence. Until then, I have been growing in awareness of how much I value the monastery peace. Now, I am offered the first intimations of the cost I will have to pay for it. Like Israel, struggling to leave Egyptian bondage, my initial resolve begins to waver at my realization of the impending hardship.

9.3 Cost of Transformation: Dying as a Person of Unrest

May 22, 2011 (Richmond, VA): Journal Entry

Feel so scattered and scared and cold. I've just learned about A.'s award for scholarship and teaching at _____ Seminary and B.'s adventures at the conference in _____. And I started feeling so small, so insignificant, so worthless – like (excuse me) a home-stay mom, in the small far-away Siberian village...started feeling that my life has no meaning, no value, no spark. While others go places, do things, change the world, live active, important, deeply meaningful and extremely fun lives: appreciated, visible, lauded...and I? Who am I? unknown, unaccomplished, and sick. All these years—and so little to show. Pain. Smallness. Actually, not so much envy per se. More like a feeling of deep inadequacy and smallness. So, here I am, Lord: I wanted to be hidden in the secret of Your Face, but I am less than prepared to disappear from the face of the earth, especially from the face of all those important societies and institutions.

December 12, 2011: Poem “Kenosis”

*Falling
Falling
Falling again*

*Spilling everything
from the bowl that I thought I had finally filled*

October 30, 2012 (Richmond, VA): Journal Entry

Something has been hanging out, for a while now, at the edges of my consciousness. Not a pleasant realization. ...Here it is: that I am a fool. What I have done—and failed to do!—for my career in academia, reputation in the church and so on, in the name of following God into this contemplative vocation is foolish. FOOLISH: lost opportunities, missed deadlines, numerous failures. I feel a lot of pain about it.

But here is the thing: I no longer really have a choice about being or not-being a fool. I am one, and there is no doubt about it. The only question that remains is this: can I be a “fool for the sake of Christ,” а юродивый?⁴⁷⁷

I mean, I'd have to really switch my loyalties here. This is the only choice I have left: a decision, backed up by a commitment, under which banner to play. This is what it all boils down to. Where is my heart's resting place? ...And this, I am afraid, might be even a greater act of foolishness. St. Paul, pray for me: is the foolishness of God really wiser than human wisdom?

⁴⁷⁷ The *yurodivi* (Russian, *юродивый*), is a long tradition of “holy madmen” in the Russian Orthodox and larger Oriental Church.

April 24, 2013 (Richmond, VA): Poem “Theodicaea”

*What kind of God are you?
Leaving cancer untreated,
innocents martyred,
little children vanish
in the wake of tsunami*

*What kind of God are you?
What are you going to do,
as the wine of suffering and terror
runneth over the cup of the world?*

*Spelling slowly: the-o-di-cae-a
What kind of God are you out there?*

*—Are you loving but lacking power,
strong in desire but weak in capacity?
(Like an alcoholic father who loves and loves—just can’t stop drinking)*

*—Or, God almighty, Mover of mountains,
rich in miracles, but poor in mercy?
(Like a frightened mother who threatens to kill—over an imperfection)*

*I stay in stillness
I hide in silence
'Tis been dark for so long
I forgot the right answers.*

January 12, 2014 (Richmond, VA): Journal Entry
(originally written in Russian, translated here into English)

God, I feel deeply inside—how can I say this?—done. With You. I feel like I’ve followed you as best as I could: All. These. Years. And You, You have left me in the ditch. I want to scream after Teresa of Avila: “if this is how you treat your friends...[then no wonder you have so few!].” So I have decided (might as well be honest about it) to step back from our relationship a bit. To take a break. To just go on, on my own—without all the trappings of the Cistercian, or for that matter Christian, lifestyle. This sounds terrible. But if I am honest, it has been happening for a while now: I have been pulling back, drifting off, withdrawing. I am just SO damn tired. My heart – like a petrified wood: cold, hard, and heavy: prayers turn into ashes before I am able to finish. All that is left is this anger and bitterness. Gall and vinegar.

I know, it is both presumptuous and preposterous, but how can I not ask: Why? WHY have you forsaken me?!?!!!!!!!

So, I am leaving. Forgive me—if You are there, wherever that “there” is. These days, I find it even hard to believe...I mean, believe even in Your existence. ARE You there?—or, is this one big fat joke? (Alas, on us.)

I am now entering the most challenging stage of my journey. For the next four years, increasingly, I will battle extreme fatigue, loneliness, confusion, and intense anxiety. It is tempting to attribute this struggle to the personal circumstances of my life: an auto-immune illness, family situation, and even the inherent challenges of the Ph.D. program. Yet, as I realize now, these personal circumstances have been inseparable from the fundamental dynamics of my spiritual transformation—there is a deep beholdenness of the personal to the spiritual, and the spiritual to the personal. The darker stage in my becoming a restful person is beginning to unfold on the canvas of my daily existence.

Fatigue

The initial sign that something is off come from my realization that I have been continuously and uncharacteristically tired. At first, I notice the pronounced physical fatigue. I feel exhausted and have hard time recovering even after a good night's sleep. Later comes the feeling of deep emotional weariness. I feel like I am “running out of steam.” Friends joke, “Don't get burnout before you finish your dissertation on burnout.” I smile, but inwardly only half-amused by the pun. I am beginning to wonder.

For one thing, it is harder and harder to get my schoolwork done, while carrying out all of my spiritual exercises. The world does not care that the monks only work five hours a day. And, try as I may, I cannot get everything I have to do accomplished in that stretch of time. So, even as I continue to rise early and bookend my day with prayer, the hours in between begin to extend into a longer and longer interval. For another thing, the prayer itself has become difficult. Now, the first years of my monastic honeymoon having passed, it is harder to sustain the fervor and momentum. As the bulk of my prayer is done

alone at home, in the absence of the tangible support from the monastic community, my praying is always done from the position of resistance to the myriad of competing commitments, distractions, and ordinary house chores. Finally, after several years of praying, I begin to see that, somehow, away from the monastery, I frequently manage to make even my “resting in God” laborious. Like Midas whose touch turned everything into gold, I seem to turn everything, including prayer, into work, by going about it in the same rigid, driven, and perfectionistic way.

The fatigue gets worse in subsequent years, when I get married. No longer in full control of my schedule, lacking the habitual stretches of solitude, and with an increased load of housework, I have even harder time arriving at the prized balance of *ora et labora*. And—although I won’t know it for another year—my fatigue would get *much* worse before I learn that I have an auto-immune condition and enter into a long stretch of recovery. But soon, something else begins to bother me: the rapid erosion of my community.

Loneliness and Isolation

Strongly introverted by nature, I have never been able to earn the title of the “social butterfly.” Yet, I have always been genuinely engaged with people and enjoyed a fair number of real friends and good acquaintances. Not anymore. At first, it is simply a matter of being at odds with the rhythms of social convention. Rising early for prayer and ending my day in quiet make me fall out of sync with the friends’ evening parties and get-togethers. There is also a difference in decorum. It is hard to socialize when, following the monastic way, I am seeking after silence and solitude. There are also clashing priorities for the subjects of conversation. My affection for the things monastic finds little understanding or appreciation outside of my monastic circle of friends (“You go *where*? For *how* long?”

Why?!?”). The opposite is also true: I find myself less and less able to contribute to the conventional mix of chat topics about politics, the economy, or fashion. This is the first time, since my arrival in America in 2002, that I begin to feel like a real outsider again. Finally, spending a lot of time in the place of silence and intentional listening makes me more aware of the problematic dynamics within some of my existing relationships. My efforts to behave differently do not go unnoticed by the other participants of the interpersonal dance: some pull away in response; from some, I try to pull away myself, observing the toll that such interactions extract from my psyche.

I also find myself drifting away from my two primary communities—academy and church—albeit for different reasons. My Methodist church starts to feel “too active” for me. I long for a style of worship, not surprisingly, more monastic in its outlook and atmosphere, finding myself once and again jarred by the amount of socializing, action, and sheer noise that accompanies the regular Sunday services. I do remember enjoying these things in the past, and I continue to recognize them as good and necessary, while at the same time being keenly aware that the monastic solemnity would likely feel heavy and intimidating, if not boring or downright offensive to the majority of people in the contemporary Protestant church, especially its youth and children. And yet, I can no longer deny that the impact of such worship on me is far from salutary: Sundays become difficult, and I return home exhausted and much less worshipful than before. In search for solution, I try to supplement my United Methodist Sunday worship with the mid-week mass at the nearby Roman Catholic cathedral, alas, finding it as active and busy as my own Protestant congregation. So my church attendance becomes spotty, and I am ridden with guilt.

In contrast to the church, the distance between me and my academic community is somewhat self-imposed. It stems from my desire to renounce the old habits and attitudes of my academic performance: the violence of overwork, the subtle realities of comparison and competition, the fine art of networking, the ever-present and prized drivenness and ambition. While I myself have sworn to renounce these things, it does not preclude me from seeing them in others. (If anything, it seems to sharpen my observational powers!) And I really get upset, when I see others “get ahead” of me, practicing these habits and attitudes to their advantage, while my pure intentions seem to only make me lose my “competitive edge.” It is the bubbling of negative emotions of anxiety and anger, and inner resentment and judgmentalism that begin to get in the way of the formerly amicable co-existence with my peers. Unable to handle these sentiments constructively, and noting their pronounced agitating influence on my peace, I begin to withdraw.

It is unlikely that my growing withdrawal from my church and academic community would have gone unnoticed for long, but the change in my personal circumstances—relocation to Richmond, Virginia—begins to legitimize the distance. Physically removed from the activities in my university and church, I am less affected by their negative dynamics and more able to exercise freedom in choosing what relationships to nurture and what relationships to put to rest. Yet, soon the distance itself begins to affect my ability to stay in touch, even in the relationships of my choice.

It is perhaps because of my introverted nature and the ongoing challenge to find solitude in the context of marriage, that I don’t recognize my lack of social interaction as a problem for a long while. Additionally, I am still very involved in my new monastic community, the people who are associated with the monasteries in Conyers and

Gethsemani. But as years go by, I suddenly become aware of how painfully isolated I have become. I lost regular contact with most of my Russian friends when I came to America to study. And now, the first American community that I have formed with people in Atlanta, too, is suffering dissolution. Yet, soon, something else begins to happen, that takes my mind off of “how come, I don’t have any friends anymore.”

Confusion

I become aware that something is really not right with me. For years, I have been conscious of the gradual decline in well-being; and for years I, together with a number of doctors who saw me, have shrugged it off to stress, habitual patterns of overwork and, as of late, aging. My labs continue to stay normal. Yet vague but insidious and seemingly unrelated symptoms persist: digestive troubles, extremely dry skin and eyes, mysterious rashes, and constantly falling out hair (my eye brows have become half their usual length!). There is also intermittent stiffness and pain in the joints, muscular weakness, the feeling of being perpetually cold, and a peculiar absence of sweat. And slowly but steadily I continue to lose weight. But now, other alarming symptoms are coming to the fore.

The familiar fatigue reaches debilitating intensity. I feel so tired that I find it hard to get out of bed and attend to the simplest of tasks. Everything—every movement, every word—is an effort: loading a dishwasher is an intimidating task, taking a shower takes over an hour and takes so much out of me that I stop showering daily, and occasionally I sleep in the same clothes that I had worn during the day because I am too exhausted to undress. The feelings of bone-weariness and lethargy become my daily companions. Fatigue makes working on my dissertation a trying of mettle: just getting to the desk and getting my books

and papers organized leave me breathless and drained, and I doubt completely my ability to get any writing done.

Such doubts are not entirely unjustified. On top of the physical weakening brought by fatigue, I seem to be suffering a substantial mental degradation. My ability to concentrate, the powers of rapid comprehension and easy recall, swift conceptualization and speedy writing, which I took for granted for all my life, are suddenly no longer there. I read and reread the same lines and paragraphs of the text, stunned by my inability to grasp their meaning and my repeated failure to remember what I have just read. I spend entire mornings laboring over few sentences, only to pause in agony, unable to determine whether they make sense or not. On one occasion I am reduced to tears, trying to assemble my bibliography, because I cannot figure out how to use *Endnote*, the program in which I used to tutor my fellow international students. My head does not merely feel “in a fog”; it feels like it is stuffed with cotton balls—and nothing else. During the years of my course work, I was used to reading three to four books a week and took pride in my ability to produce a rough draft of an entire paper in a twenty-four hour stretch; now, those fits of academic performance feel painfully beyond my grasp.

Yet, even as my physical energy and intellectual powers are in obvious decline, my emotions run amok. Profound melancholy takes over my heart and mind. Nothing seems to be working. No amount of encouragement is enough. Relentless negativity, sadness, and all-permeating feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt begin to envelop me. I do recognize these signs as depression, but can muster neither willpower nor wherewithal to do anything about it. It simply feels hopeless. On more and more days, coming from work, my husband

finds me in a chair in an unlit bedroom, crying in confusion about my lack of progress on my dissertation and conviction that there is something really wrong with me.

Indeed, there is. In February of 2012, after a seven-year pilgrimage through medical doctors, naturopathic physicians, and practitioners of alternative medicine, and when my body, having reached the limits in its ability to compensate, manifests a host of other symptoms and a critical loss of weight, I am offered a formal explanation: an auto-immune illness. This disorder is known for its fickle and lackadaisical onset, as for its usually late and complicated diagnosis. My test results point towards existing Celiac disease and Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and a strong likelihood of developing lupus and/or rheumatoid arthritis in the future. I am alarmed but also relieved: the official diagnosis means that the focused treatment can finally begin.

It will take me over three years of fine-tuning the dose and the type of the medication, radical changes in diet and lifestyle, and extensive Eastern medical treatments to arrive at a genuinely stable state, but the initial shift in my well-being following the hormonal supplementation is dramatic. Within a week of starting on thyroid hormone, my fatigue, brain fog, and depression lift to the degree that I feel that I want to—and can!—do something again. I feel like a thick layer of wool has been peeled away from me. The sights and sounds and smells of the outside world are so much clearer and so much more intense. The long-forgotten energy and aliveness are beginning to stir within, like the flowing of tree sap in early spring. And, most strikingly and thrillingly, I am able to read and think and remember again! Relief and elation fill my heart, as I sense, for the first time in many years, a return of my former self.

Yet, the treatment has also brought a huge disappointment. The stunning betterment of my mental capacities brings no improvement in the speed of my dissertation progress. It is true that I can once again read three or four books a week without effort, think clearly and retain large blocks of information, but my ability to write swiftly and easily has not returned. Despite the genuine effort and extensive time commitment to writing on daily basis, my manuscript work continues to be laborious and challenging and at all times agonizingly slow. After six months of hard, active, mentally engaged work, it becomes obvious that my pace has not “picked up” in the manner that I had so hoped for, and that graduating at the end of this academic year, as I, emboldened by the initial effects of my treatment, so confidently promised in my extension request letter to the Graduate School is, once again, in jeopardy.

Furthermore, now, back in my clear mind, I become aware that something really bothers me about my dissertation itself. I begin to see that my writing difficulty has to do not merely with in the challenges of the specific chapters, but on the level of the manuscript as a whole. My original idea of simply describing the characteristics of the monastic living that are responsible for the peacefulness of the monastery retreat and then applying the lessons learned to theological education of clergy seems to be not working. I begin to see that in order to say what I need to say about the monastery, with any semblance of authority, I cannot speak from the position of an independent observer, but need to acknowledge and utilize the only viewpoint that is available to me: that of a deeply involved participant. *But what kind of dissertation would that be?!*

I have used my personal experience in writing previously, in faith testimonies and at times sermons. I even intended to use it in my dissertation, indirectly, by writing an

“opening vignette” for the Introduction as a vivid illustration of the importance of attending to the problem of clergy burnout in the context of the seminary training. But everything within me recoils from the prospect of making my personal experience the focal point of my dissertation research. I have good reasons, personal and professional, to view such a proposition with abiding suspicion. For one thing, there is an embarrassment about personal detail: in order to show how remarkably effective my encounter with the monastic tradition has been in giving me rest, I would also have to make the many sources of my unrest—some of which are painful and delicately personal—publicly known. Apart from a legitimate concern for privacy, I feel deep unease about the effects that an explicit and extensive delving into my personal experience might have on people’s perception of my scholarly work: there is a thin line between what is considered unconventional and what is deemed inappropriate. Finally, there is the issue of the subjective knowing itself—and the threat that it seems to pose to the time-honored notions of scientific credibility and rigor. While I am keenly aware of the mythic subtext behind the “cloak of academic objectivity,” taking it off with dignity spells methodological nightmare that I am utterly unprepared to face.

Yet, even as I am painfully confused about the nature and direction of my dissertation, my mind is acutely aware of the serious consequences of yet another delay for its completion. I have now moved beyond the formal time-to-degree period in my program, and requesting an additional extension from the Graduate School poses a challenge. I have also run out of both the university stipend and my earlier church scholarships, and, while I am tremendously grateful that my university still covers the bulk of my tuition and enrollment, the school-related expenses begin to exert a heavy toll on my family’s budget.

Worse still is the mounting of internal pressure: I feel terribly shattered in my self-esteem and humiliated by the thought of being seen as a “straggler” or “incapable” by my academic peers, teachers, and the school authorities. So, I throw my all into work, trying to write this dissertation as I originally conceived it, carefully tracing my way around the quicksand of subjective knowing and safeguarding my claims with a copious amount of the secondary supportive data. Yet, despite all my efforts, I am unable to make any progress. In fact, even the fundamental law of cause and effect upon which I relied all throughout my long career as a student—work hard, get results; work harder, get faster results—appears to have lost its power. It seems that the harder I try, the more I stand still. So, I stop, amid the roaring of internal voices and the slowly rising drumbeat of panic, in order to review everything that I produced up to date.

A week later, I am confirmed in my worst suspicions: the objective methodology that I propose for my dissertation research does not fit the nature of the study. My writing is a testimony to this methodological “catch 22.” In order to make my argument about the fundamental nature of the monastic peacefulness meaningful, I make observations that could only be made by the insider; yet, my claims upon the viewpoint of an external observer make these very observations epistemologically implausible! Now, there can be no more doubt about it. My old way of working on the dissertation is no longer working.

This is when I begin to enter a different kind of confusion: no longer a brain fog that comes from the untreated medical condition, but a profound doubt about the nature and direction of my journey. For the most of my life, excellence in academic performance has been at the core of my existence. Going to America to study at the invitation of the Bishop of the Russia UMC made it even more so, because then my personal and

professional aspirations received an added weight of ecclesiastical responsibility and the sense of following God's call. It was not always easy, and at times it demanded genuine sacrifices, but the fundamental conviction about following the right path always stayed with me. Even during the critical stages of my illness, the task of completing my dissertation and returning to Russia was my foremost concern. Yet now, as I watch my work of the many years come into a methodological dead end—while the only alternative seems to portend a sure downfall—I become deeply bewildered. *What is going on with me? If God has called me to this, then how could it be so excruciatingly impossible? Have I taken a wrong turn somewhere? And above all, what can I do to return to the solid ground on which I stood before?*

I have no answers to these questions. And, this painful not-knowing, in the face of the seemingly overwhelming evidence that my educational journey is taking a turn for the worse, pushes me into an acute state of loneliness. At this point, both my academic and local church communities have reached the state of almost complete disintegration, and only a handful of people from Russia and America, who have stood at the beginning of my journey and continued to support me throughout the years, remains in my orbit. But now, this community begins to shrink too. Faithful supporters from the scholarship committee, after contacting me in May for several years in a row and learning that I would not be graduating yet again, become silent. Co-workers from the various Russia UMC-related projects stop sending me emails. Individual persons who used to send encouraging cards and letters (and at times monetary checks “for books”) gradually disappear. They are nice, caring people. I never hear a word of accusation, judgment, or complaint. Some—I later learn—withdraw to protect me, having heard about my illness. But I don't know it for a

while. And in my confusion, I assume that they are as disappointed in me as I am in myself. So, I participate in my own isolation: I withdraw in humiliation and guilt for my apparent struggle to follow through on my promises to bring to completion the very task that I have been sent to accomplish. Avoiding contact becomes a way to avoid making public my deep inner disquiet: *What if “Natasha one of the prospective leaders of the Russia Methodism,” “Natasha the family pride,” “Natasha the A-student” turns out to be nothing but a “failure?”*

To complicate things further, the lay Cistercian way of life that I have so carefully crafted in the previous years, too, seem to be going on the rocks. With the onset of my illness, I was too sick to continue with the elaborate pattern of my spiritual exercises that I practiced when I was healthy. Now, even despite the dramatic betterment in my symptoms, I am unable to reinstate it: the demanding regimen of my medical recovery and critical delays in my academic progress have imposed severe limitations on my time and energy, making the old way of living and praying—or even travelling to the monastery for a retreat—a genuine impossibility. Try as I may, I cannot work myself back up to being a “perfect lay Cistercian” that I thought I was before.

I spend several agonizing weeks of pondering the direction of my dissertation research and the dynamics of my monastic journey. Then, I come back to my senses. I remember that I have been called to faithfulness, not success. I think back to the lessons that I learned during the first years of my work of transplanting the monastery peace onto the soil of my daily living: about loving “God alone,” about seeking to live “in but not of the world,” about “the pearl of great price” that is worth the cost of one’s entire possessions. I make my decision: to embrace this extremely poor and humiliating way of being a lay

Cistercian and to move in the new frightening direction of my dissertation journey. I step out on faith. Yet, this movement of faithfulness feels anything but good; what I feel instead is a deep, blood-chilling fear. Like Israel in its struggle to break out from the Egyptian bondage, I seem to have lost everything in the name of going to worship the living God—only to realize that the passage into the Promised Land of peace apparently goes through...the desert.

Fear

At first, while exceedingly intense, my fear is fairly localized. It is centered around my ability to figure out an alternative methodological framework for my dissertation. More specifically: Can I identify a theoretical framework that would enable me to conceptualize—and defend—my proposition to use the researcher’s personal experience for the scientific generation of knowledge? Can I come up with a methodological strategy that would enable me to take full advantage of my “researcher-participant” status, while addressing the all too obvious dangers that such dual identity presents to the validity and reliability of my findings? Can I design such an unconventional case study and envision specific procedures for data collection, analysis, and composing my final report? I have a strong inkling that in my search for answers, I will need to delve into the field of the qualitative inquiry. Yet, such a proposition comes with its own set of problems. For one thing, I have no previous training in qualitative research: apart from a brief introduction to the social sciences during my medical and theological studies, I have no experience with this branch of scholarly inquiry. For another, the reality of my relocation to Richmond means that I am in no position to take advantage of the tremendous bibliographical, scholarly, and human resources of my own university: taking a Qualitative Research

Methods seminar is no longer an option. The more fundamental difficulty still has to do not with the lack of my personal proximity to the sources of training for qualitative inquiry, but the vast distance in the fundamental normative assumptions that exists between the field of qualitative research and my home discipline, practical theology. Even if I manage to carry out a gigantic task of learning qualitative research methods well enough in order to conduct an actual study, can I find a way to disentangle the host of philosophical, epistemological, and interdisciplinary issues that characterize the theory and practice of using qualitative research for practical theological reflection? Day in and day out, I show up at my desk with the same question burning in my heart: *can I pull it off?!*

Yet, there is nothing else left but to keep on pulling. To gain access to the classical and most recent literature on qualitative research, I work with two libraries, Morton Library of the Union Presbyterian Seminary and Richmond Public Library. Their collections are not nearly as extensive as the glorious holdings of Emory's Pitts Theology and Woodruff libraries, but the local librarians, moved by my voracious reading appetite and staunch commitment, help me in any way they can, checking out books onto their personal accounts, ordering new titles, and expediting interlibrary loans. What I cannot borrow, I buy. The unexpected expense for the qualitative research textbooks is considerable, but I have no other choice: gaining access to the information is vital. After several months of intense engagement with the primary sources, when the qualitative research shelf in my study becomes almost as long as my practical theology shelf, I begin to see that there *is* a way. I find an alternative theoretical framework for thinking about the issues of validity, reliability, and ethics in relation to the subjective knowing, but I am heartened to discover the works of actual academic scholars in various fields who practice "disciplined

subjectivity.” I conceive of the way to design, defend, and conduct my personal case study in a disciplined and systematic manner, and begin to develop my own theory about the process of bringing together practical theology and qualitative research.

My relief is enormous. I hear myself humming under my breath, as I begin my first draft of my “Methodology” chapter. Yet, enormous as it is, the relief is not lasting. Very soon I realize that there is a big difference between knowing that my unconventional methodological approach *can* be done and the actuality of *doing* it. Now, my preliminary exploration of the field must give way to a thorough theoretical and practical learning of the specific qualitative research methods, then to the careful crafting of my argument about using these methods for the general task of practical theological reflection, and finally to the work of applying this knowledge to the particularities of my study. The composition of each sentence about my method is preceded by the countless hours of reading and thinking. Thus, even when I finally complete the entire methodology section—which in the time of my working on it grows from one into three chapters—and share it with my dissertation advisors, receiving very positive feedback, I can neither rejoice, nor relax fully. While a part of me recognizes this work as a considerable achievement, there is another part that knows that it is not enough. Without the strong methodology section, there could be no dissertation; but methodology alone does not amount to it. My personal case study, the scholarly legitimacy of which I have finally defended, is yet to be written.

And, here I run into a peculiar problem: of working out the alternative nature of my methodological approach in the actuality of my writing. The issue is not merely about re-writing of the extensive draft of the dissertation manuscript produced up to date and ensuring proper substitution of the neutral and detached “retreatants” with the first voice

of personal representation, the “I.” The shift in the point of view that such a swap of agents creates demands a whole new kind of writing. Inserting myself into the story as a participant, without departing from it as a researcher, requires a writing style, structure, and even pacing of the narrative that until now I have never encountered in the dissertations from the field of practical theology. This sets me up against three paradoxical difficulties. First, I have to write a dissertation that paints a vivid picture of my encounter with the monastic tradition, re-creating my personal experience for the reader in the same way that a good memoir does; yet, I can never stay in the realm of a pure memoir, but must press on to the rigorous analysis, thorough grounding in relevant literature, and solid theoretical conclusions. Second, to accomplish such an innovation, I will have to depart from the accepted template for the dissertation-writing in practical theology; yet, even in my departure I must honor the standards of my discipline for the high-quality scholarship. Finally, to write like that, in the new and deeply unknown to me way, I must go against the grain of my oldest habits of writing, override my deepest instincts about the nature of good academic writing—and then, cultivate courage, stamina, and faith for showing up and writing amid the shouting of the terrified internal editor who refuses to recognize the emerging prose as a “dissertation proper.”

While deeply challenging, this work *can* be done. And, judging by the positive feedback from my dissertation advisor on the completed sections, I am indeed beginning to succeed at doing it. But it requires one ingredient I do not have: time. Even though I am steadily moving forward, I do so at a crawling speed, and a bigger fear begins to consume my waking and working hours: *Can I pull it off, before my Graduate School, fatigued by the long succession of my failed promises to graduate, cuts me off?*

This fear is bigger, because it signals the dawning of my awareness of the enormous costs of my potential incompleteness. I am beginning to seriously worry about my future. To leave the program without the degree, in the proverbial “ABD” (all-but-dissertation) status, after tremendous work that went into being accepted into a doctoral program, completing coursework, passing qualifying exams, and spending all these years, writing, would be deeply painful in its own right. But the circumstances of my life that preceded my doctoral studies make these losses even more problematic. My doctoral studies in theology was a continuation of the seminary training, first in Russia and then in America, in response to my call to ministry—the call which took me away not only from my home country, but also from my original career in medicine. Now, after almost two decades of being a theology student, I have lost all chances of restoring my medical credentials, have fallen out of the Russian retirement benefits system, and I have not started my participation in an American retirement plan. Leaving the doctoral program without a degree would significantly diminish my ability to secure a job, recover financially from this extremely long-drawn-out time as a student, and provide for myself and my family in the future. But of course I have a future job laid out for me! I was sent to the U.S. to get a doctoral degree, so that I could return to Russia and contribute to the theological education of the Russia United Methodist clergy. And herein lies the deepest cause of my fear: leaving Emory without a degree would shatter not only my personal dreams and professional aspirations, it would also destroy the hopes and expectations of the people who sent and supported me in this endeavor. Leaving Emory without a degree spells “FAILURE,” all the more painful because so utterly and inescapably public—*people in Russia, and people in America, people in academy and people in the church, all would know that I failed to accomplish*

what I was sent to accomplish!—and as such, it fuels the intense feelings of inferiority and shame, which I would do anything to ward off.

So, I throw myself back into work with the maddening fervor, cutting out everything I can and, in my fierce determination to finish, beginning to forget my newly learned lessons in Sabbath rest and monastery peace, and ignoring even the changes to diet and lifestyle that came with an onset of my illness. Yet, no matter how hard I work, no matter what section or chapter I finish on any given day or week, I always come up short. Much must be done, and what I have done is never enough. My acute awareness of the rapidly approaching deadline renders all accomplishment insubstantial: *I am just a “worthless slave,” I have done only what I ought to have done—long ago!* The feeling of inner pressure never lets up, and I drive myself mercilessly, staying up late, skipping meals, and forcing myself to remain at my desk, even when my tired body and brain can no longer produce much or well. And even at night, I have hard time resting. I lay awake, listening to the never-ending litany of “should-have-done”-s, “must-have-done”-s, “could-have-done”-s, and even when fatigue wins over insomnia, my fitful sleep is poisoned by the recurring dream of being late for the plane that is about to depart. Consumed by the threat of impending failure, I seem to be simply unable to stop.

But very soon, I don't have to. My body does it for me. It starts as a period of unexplained fever, followed by the quickly escalating joint pain and muscle weakness. The most ordinary and taken-for-granted tasks become challenging: writing longhand, opening a jar, turning a door-knob, walking. The throbbing tenderness and discomfort become my daily companions. The unexpectedness and intensity of the pain itself is frightening: it feels like I am suddenly thrust into the physical infirmity of a very old age. An urgent visit to

my rheumatologist gives me the answer that I would rather not have. He thinks that it is a beginning of lupus “that we have been waiting for” and starts me on Plaquenil, a traditional antimalarial drug that is also used for rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Early treatment is important, even though I don’t yet have a formal diagnosis: not only will this medication help with joint pain and inflammation, but in patients with lupus, it is known to protect against cumulative organ damage.

My first internal reaction to this news is that of some strangely perverse hopefulness: *If I succumb to the disease, I would no longer have to worry about the public disgrace of not-finishing my dissertation. I would have a perfect excuse....*

But I don’t want an excuse! I long for life, wellness, fruition. I yearn to share my gifts and my work with others. The voice of sanity comes in second, but quickly reestablishes its dominance: *I want to live*. Granted, lupus is not cancer, and I am not given an estimation of the years left. Yet, this is the first time in my life that I become keenly aware of my own mortality. Never before, not even during the years of my extensive medical training, have I been so certain that I—this person, in this body and mind—will cease to be. Death becomes immensely and overwhelmingly real: no longer a distant, and therefore largely abstract, possibility but a personal actuality, experienced all the more acutely because it is thrust into my attention much sooner than expected. It is this first genuine glimpse of my own impermanence that loosens the grip of my fear of failure.

For the first time in many weeks I stop completely. I walk in the woods, do qigong, make green smoothies, journal, or just stare out of the window. It is not that I no longer care about my dissertation. It is just that I am afraid to die more than I am afraid to fail. When I do return to my desk, it is only under the restricted hours and only after I re-

establish the exacting regimen of diet and self-care practices that I have implemented at the time of the diagnosis. The newly gained fear of death has made my life-long fear of failure pale in comparison. It did not give me an excuse to fail, but it did give me permission (indeed, an order!) to take care of myself—the one that I dared not to take, faced with the threat of failure.

Yet, whatever gains in self-care it has brought, the realization of my mortality comes with its own exacting payment. By putting my slow progress to degree in perspective, relative to death, it presses me to examine and render an account of my life: *If I were to die sooner than later, what do I have to show for my existence? What have I made of myself during the years that I lived on this earth?* Confronted with the reality of my own finitude, I begin to take stock.

As always, I start with the professional. I am not applying for any jobs, but if I were, I would be hard pressed to produce a CV that would “sell.” After an impressive list of educational institutions, my resume is glaringly empty: virtually no publications; no other academic achievements; no special distinctions in community service. Putting focus on the personal life now: no children; no house; no job; complete financial dependency on my husband and utter inability to provide for my aging mother. It is not too long before my mind turns to the game of comparison—with others in the academy, with others of my age in Russia and in America. The consequences are devastating. My former Emory peers (and even several generations of students that came after them!) are now long finished with their dissertations, entered in the institutions of higher education, published, and are not infrequently lauded for their accomplishments. The friends in Russia have rapidly growing children, professional careers, and have now assumed the honorable responsibility of

caring for their parents. Even my friends in America are beginning to settle into their families, have children, and mow lawns in front of their own houses.

There is a part of me that understands that comparison is never a good thing, that the distinction between success and failure is never absolute, and that the seemingly flourishing lives of others too have their own share of suffering and deficiency. There is a part of me that tries to remind me that they don't "have it all," as it may appear; that I am under an influence of the powerful "social scripts," measuring myself by the ways of the secular culture that I so worked so hard to shed. But it is a very tiny part, and its whispers are quickly drowned by the shrieking chorus of humiliation, inadequacy, and woe. It is not even envy that I feel. Rather, it is a feeling of a profound inward implosion. It is as if a dark abyss is opening up beneath me, and I am hanging on—by my nails, by the skin of my teeth, by all I've got—not to tumble down, under the flood of anxiety that threatens to consume me completely. Suddenly, it seems that I am terminally and irredeemably "behind," not only in the work of my dissertation, but in my life as a whole.

It was I who made all these choices: to switch from the respected (and vastly more profitable) medical profession to the work of ministry, to leave my mother in Russia in order to go abroad to study, to delay pregnancy until the dissertation manuscript is finished, and to not put roots down in America because of the ever-urgent intention to return to Russia. It was I who chose to put life "on hold" in order to carry out the work of my studies. Yet now, confronted with the acute awareness of the shortness of time, I begin to reconsider: *Have these progressively irreversible choices been all wrong? Will I have time to become, to mature, to bear fruit—or, it this IT?! Will I die as a failure? Without a place*

to call home? Having never had a chance to become a mother, a scholar, a minister, a productive member of society?

It feels like dying. The failure that I have dreaded and worked so hard to prevent, all my life, suddenly feels imminent in every department of my existence. All whom I imagined myself to be, the many and varied images of my becoming, my ideas about my vocation, life, and my contribution to the world, seem to erode and crumble before my very eyes—and I feel powerless to do anything to halt this terrifying progression. My initial response to that frightening experience is that of feverish action, of trying to regain some control, to salvage something. First, I become obsessed with savings, at times trying to cut down even on food and living expenses, so as to set aside something for the future. Later, despite the admonitions of reason and financial constraints, I initiate a series of fertility treatments, hoping to outrun the ticking of my “biological clock” in a maddening dash for pregnancy. Yet, slowly, as one month after another begins to bring disappointing results, the hard reality begins to set in: some choices are indeed irreversible.

The feelings of profound sadness wash over me. Week in and week out, I watch the shadows of my former self dance in my heart. I bid goodbyes. It feels like I am wandering in the ruins of the once glorious city, haunted by the memories of a future that never came to be. I sift through the past decisions and opportunities, struggling to put together the pieces of my life in a new pattern, struggling to reconcile the earlier images of myself as a “person of great promise” with the tired, fragile, and deeply unhappy woman I have become. I wade through the never-ending stream of regrets and wonderings, the dreary refrain of “what if”-s and “if only”-s. I work hard, trying keep at bay the waves of growing

apprehension: if disease progresses rapidly, I would have to face a descent into the physical decrepitude and complete professional oblivion.

Yet, there is a deeper angst behind my overt grieving. There are questions which, for a while, I don't dare to voice even to myself: *Can I accept my life—in the face of all these losses? Far away from my family of origin and caught in between two countries, neither of which now feels fully home, in the face of the unfinished dissertation, largely unpaid debts of filial piety, and the likelihood of not being able to have children of my own, can I still affirm my life as meaningful? Can I see myself as valid and valuable, despite the overwhelming fruitlessness of my existence?*

This is what it all boils down to: *Can I accept myself as a “failure?”*

The truth is, I am not sure I can. In the span of the next months and years, I begin to descend into the dark valley of shame. I become deeply preoccupied with my responsibility not only for what has and has not happened in my life, but with the difficulties that I feel I have inflicted upon others. I am convinced that I have let down the Bishops of the Russia UMC, the head of the Moscow Theological Seminary, the scholarship committees, and even the prospective clergy and lay leaders of the Russia UMC who have been patiently awaiting my graduation. I brood over the personal, financial and professional sacrifices that my husband has had to make to support me throughout all the years of illness and doctoral studies. I agonize over my inability to attend to my mother's health and housing problems. I obsess about having become a burden to my university teachers, wondering in pain, what they are “really” thinking about me, if they deeply regret taking me as their student. Each event—the threat to my husband's job, a succession of my mother's illnesses, a patch of marital turbulence, my fortieth birthday,

the failure of the very last fertility treatment we had the money for, and every request of extension that I have to write to the Graduate School—confirms the feelings of guilt and plunges me deeper into the sea of blame and self-accusation. And after a while, these judgments begin to loom so large that, as I look back on my life, all I can see is a succession of failures. I feel I have disappointed all those who matter to me most and that my future holds nothing more but impending pain, further demise and dishonor.

In transient moments of clarity, it occurs to me that these harsh blanket judgments are not fully reasonable. It is unfair to measure life and my dissertation progress with the same measuring stick, because I have had to contend with a serious illness. It is also wrong to grieve as if my life is already over: I am forty, not eighty, so I have some time; and even though there is no cure for an auto-immune illness, in the past it responded well to the gentle, patient care and alternative diet and lifestyle. My present is full of challenges, and my future is full of uncertainty—but neither is a complete catastrophe. Yet these rational moments are rare and fleeting. I am beginning to see that something deep within the emotional core of my being has been touched and awakened by the difficulties in my external circumstances and the internal threat of failure. This leviathan of emotions plays havoc with my senses and will, and its force far surpasses the ordinary powers of my intellect. The inner turmoil created in its wake cannot be rationally refuted.

It feels like an existential confrontation with my very self. I stand against myself—“knife to throat”—demanding an answer to the apparent barrenness and futility of my existence. But I have no answer. Everything within me strains to find a way to fend off these charges, only to collapse upon itself and recoil in a mute desperation. It is as if I have been placed before an aberrant nightmarish court, with the ever-growing panel of judges

and not a single advocate. Day and night, they torment me with the long list of my inadequacies and shortcomings. Day and night, they slander and scorn. This too feels like dying, but a different kind of death: not merely the sorrowful loss of my former identities and dreams, but the terrible and terrifying wounding that comes from the vicious attacks of my own self. Even my auto-immune disease seems like an embodied metaphor for the hidden patterns of self-directed hostility and aggression. I feel I am dissolving, cell by cell, thought by thought, in an acid bath of self-scrutiny and condemnation.

Gradually growing desperate, I begin to question if I need help. I long to talk to someone—a teacher, a therapist, a trusted friend—to gain perspective, to ask for support and assistance. But my cautious deliberations over the potential candidate are always extinguished by a nauseating wave of humiliation: I just cannot bear to risk adding public exposure to the strangling intensity of the private denunciation.

So, I learn to navigate the discrepancy between the inner realms of my personal experience and its outward expression. I present a face that does not betray the anguish of mind. I do not really need to resort to lying, but I train myself to talk to others only about external events, the “facts” of my life, and not the emotional storms that they trigger within. But now my social isolation reaches its deepest, most acute state: it is not only that I don’t have many people to talk to, it is that I cannot talk to anybody about what really goes on in the darker corners of my psyche. Soon, even the Sunday visits to church and just being around others becomes extremely difficult. There are moments when I feel so raw and vulnerable and exposed that I just want to crawl through a hole and disappear from the face of the earth. It is excruciatingly painful to be around people, to let myself be seen, asked about my dissertation, my mother in Russia, and my plans for the future. “How are you?”

becomes a perilous question. Even during calmer times, I am inundated by the recurring thoughts of running away, going to another place, a country, where nobody knows me, learning another trade, starting my life anew, from scratch. After a while, I stop going to church, withdraw from all social occasions, and reduce my email and phone communication to the absolutely unavoidable minimum.

The official reason for establishing my absence is of course the work of writing the dissertation and nursing myself back to health. Yet, both are difficult. Writing, as any genuine creative act, involves taking risk, tolerating ambiguity, and acceptance of detours and dead ends as the inevitable (and even profitable) part of practice. As such, it calls for courage, self-confidence, and faith that create an important counterpoint to the necessary loss of control and chaos of the creative process. Yet, this is precisely what I have lost: the capacity to see that that things would sort themselves out, the fundamental trust in my ability to hear the voice of the manuscript, the sense of safety and relationship of trust with myself. My self-worth is at its lowest, I have deep doubts about my ability to do anything well, and, thanks to the mortifying gaze of my inner observer and the never-ending stream of its demands and reproaches, even the short sessions at my desk become deeply exhausting.

Self-care is difficult for a different reason. I keep on writing out new patterns for my daily routine, setting a more humane working schedules, printing out a list of reminders for food, sleep and exercise. I make a time-budget, start timers at the beginning of my work period, and set alarms on my phone to remind myself to go to bed at a decent hour. Yet, once and again, as soon as I emerge from the critical state of pain and fatigue, I watch myself violating my own orders and throwing my own advice to the wind. I genuinely want

to care. I need to. But it seems that in the whole army of inner accusers and despisers, there is not a single person who really cares. There is no compassion, no appreciation, no real love. Now I see why, again and again, an illness becomes my gateway into self-care: only a direct threat to my physical existence seems to constitute a strong enough reason for doing something for myself.

It is the intensity of this suffering itself—of trying to walk forward in the face of illness and the mounting sense of impossibility, of showing up and fighting the seemingly unbeatable opponent, and the gnawing feeling that I am beginning to lose this never-ending uphill battle—that awakens in me the past memory of burnout, with its symptoms of physical and emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, relational disruption, and a host of psychosomatic ailments. It feels like I am going through burnout again—except worse. This time around, it feels deeper, scarier, and more impossible to overcome. With this, comes a stupefying realization: *So, the monastery did not really cure me from burnout?!*

This thought stops me dead in my tracks. For a moment, I feel I am going to choke. My mouth turns completely dry and I find myself gasping for air. A fierce tension begins to creep up my neck and shoulders, and my whole body becomes rigid and stiff. For the next several moments, all I am aware of is a thunder-like hammering of the heart in my ears. After that comes the conscious processing of the information. As if from a great distance, I hear myself say: *Now, I have really lost it.* If the monastery did not cure me from burnout, then studying my own case—with an intention of learning lessons for addressing burnout in the context of theological education of clergy, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition—is a meaningless exercise. This difficulty is radically

different from the earlier challenge of establishing a proper methodology. It does not merely contest my procedure and scholarly stance; it simply obliterates the fundamental premise of my entire scholarly undertaking. If the monastery did not help me to unlearn my burnout, there is no point in writing this dissertation.

For a while, all I feel is a great weariness. Then, rebellion: *This just cannot be...All these years, I just could not have been so utterly and completely mistaken!* Yet, as I go over and over the events of the recent years, I always come back to the same conclusion: the tremendous disruptions in the patterns of my daily living, relational dynamics, habits of working and praying, and now, in the most-cherished tenets of my self-understanding, are deeply connected to the gradual unfolding of my monastic journey, to my unswerving commitment to follow the monastery's path to peace. Yet, this observation explodes my argument from within. It can hardly be doubted that, to me, the monastery brought not peace, but a sword.

This last blow to my already all-consuming feeling of failure brings the process of the utter dissolution of my inner self into its final and most terrifying stage. All these years, despite the growing number of losses, there was one thing that was always there: the work of my studies. It was an altar upon which all other things were sacrificed, a rock against which I have found myself bruised and broken, and as such, it was an undeniable source of much suffering and grief. Yet, at the same time, as it has indeed been throughout my whole life, my studies constituted the most fundamental source of my identity and personhood. During these increasingly difficult years of my monastic journeying, when I was going through the painful disintegration of all my other identities and ways of self-understanding, my dissertation-writing remained the base, the proof that I was an actually

existing, real person. On the worst of days, when I no longer could be certain of anything, I could still say “I am a doctoral student at Emory University, and I am working on the dissertation on clergy burnout, theological education, and contemplative monastic spirituality” and know that I really existed, that I was still “somebody.” It was the last link that connected me to the faith that my church had in me, to the dignity of my family, to the deep affirmation that I always received from my teachers. Yet now, as I face the threat to the last bastion of my life’s surety and meaning, I feel that I am losing the final and most significant vestiges of my self.

This is when, after all these years of tenacity and perseverance, something breaks within me. It is as if the anchor that held me secure amid the storms of life suddenly detaches, and the ground is going from under my feet completely. My old self that found itself and knew itself through work is slipping into oblivion. I look in the mirror, but the woman in an old T-shirt and ever-present sweatpants that I see, looks nothing like the Natasha I knew. She looks like...“nobody.”

Yet, it is not merely what I have lost, but what is being uncovered in the process of this painful dissolution. It is as if together with my former identities, the boundary that surrounded the neat and orderly parts of my self has eroded, and I am brought headlong into the wastelands of my own being—into a terrifying encounter with its demons, monsters, and unclean spirits. The memories of trauma and abuse, on which I worked with my therapist for years and therefore assumed to have been put safely to rest, are coming back at me with full force, as if no time at all has passed in between. The addictions, violence, and untimely deaths, which until now belonged to the orderly realm of my family genogram, suddenly become personally meaningful. The acute realization of my own

propensity to self-destructiveness and my capacity to hurt others—out of ignorance, error, or sheer habituation, and despite the best of my intentions—comes crashing into my conscious awareness. But the worst part of this is emotions, the profound sway of which I can neither control nor fully comprehend. Usually a decorous and deeply considerate of the feelings of others, I become prone to the spells of intense moodiness and explosive anger that fly in the face of every ideal of the gentle, quiet-spoken, restrained woman I had been brought up to be. The restless, fiery and dangerously volatile energy seems to course through my veins, defying rationality and taunting the conventional codes of conduct. Yet, it is only a matter of time when the boiling-over rage gives way to tears: the profound, unshakable sense of hopelessness and heart-wrenching regret begin to set in, and I am being sucked into the black hole of sorrow.

The intensity of this suffering is immeasurable—all the more so, because it is deeply internal. I look at people around me, at the library, in the grocery store, on the streets: they seem so “normal.” And I at times feel like I am fighting at the borderlines of my sanity, struggling with the ability to discern between the real and the unreal. It seems that I am not only losing what I once was so certain about myself, but also gaining the knowledge of the self that I did not know even existed (and frankly, would have preferred not to know). As the most welcome and cherished parts of me are receding into nothingness, the unwelcome, the dark, and the scary parts of me are asserting and making themselves visible. *Who am I?! And what in the world is happening to me?!!*

And it seems that at the very least, as I walk through this darkest valley, God should be with me, on my side—“*Save me, O God, for the waters have risen to my neck, I have sunk*

into the mud of the deep and there is no foothold. I have entered the waters of the deep and the waves overwhelm me...—but, conspicuously, in some paradoxical fit of divine peekaboo, God seems to be silent and distant and utterly inaccessible. The sense of God’s presence that I have so palpably felt throughout the initial years of my monastic journey has been absent for a long while. The stream of religious poems and songs, which once so bountifully poured out of me, has come to a complete halt. The words of the Divine Office liturgy, which previously comforted and inspired, bring aggravation and fluster. Private prayer offers no consolation, and my *lectio* is as dry as a bone. This acute perception of God’s absence and my own spiritual deadening is perhaps worse than any other fear I have felt up to date. It threatens the foundations that are deeper than even those of my personal life and selfhood. It makes me feel as if my very world is coming to an end.

At first, I habitually blame myself. I feel I have done much to earn the divine displeasure: *“My offenses truly I know them, my sin is always before me.”* I seem to have utterly failed at the mission that the church, God’s own community, has assigned to me. I have also failed miserably in my own spiritual practice, in the emotional turmoil and sheer busyness of the last years frequently neglecting the “work of God”—the spiritual disciplines and practices that I once deemed so important. So, I confess. I ask for pardon. I plead for help and consolation. But no matter what I do, it feels like I am knocking at the door that has been shut into my face and double-bolted.

I keep on knocking for a long while, but eventually grow perplexed, then lose patience, and finally become downright angry. With God, for abandoning me in the ditch. With the monks, for luring me in with the promises of peace. Now, the monastery retreats and conferences begin to look very different. I remember monks’ words about trusting God

and having faith that God would always see us through, and I am filled with bitterness and cynicism: “Easy for you to say! You are *in the monastery!* You don’t have to worry about time-to-degree, medical insurance, having no savings for the future, place to live, getting a job in a bad job market, or caring for your aging parents. Yes, the individual monastery may close, but as long as there is the Order (and this Order has lasted a long time!), an individual monk is assured of sustenance and care. You *can* pray and make God a priority, and invite personal transformation—whatever that means!—in this protected, regimented, self-contained environment!!!” With each day, I sink deeper and deeper into the feelings of resentment and indignation. All the humiliation of the past months and years seems to bubble up on a bitter anger, which, for once, has found an external object. And, since I have never been good at handling my anger, especially the anger at the persons whom I once so deeply admired, I begin to quietly withdraw.

It is not so difficult a task to withdraw from the monks. The men who have vowed to contemplation are highly unlikely to crowd my email box with messages. Furthermore, my own medical condition of the past years has already greatly reduced the scope of my personal contact with the monastery: for a long time, I have not been able to travel to the Abbey for the retreat due to fatigue and dietary restrictions; now, not-going there is a convenient way not to deal with my anger. But I also tell myself that I “have no time” to write letters.

With God things are different: obviously, I cannot hide. Yet, soon, I don’t have to. Under the tremendous strain of these months, I begin to question everything, and my atheistic background begins to assert itself with a redoubtable force. I know all too well that I am not the only one who is suffering, nor am I the one who suffers the most. Yet, as

I look around, there seems to be so much pain and senselessness in the human experience that all the religious affirmations about the loving and caring Creator and Redeemer of the universe begin to sound so false and shallow. The faith that I acquired only as an adult begins to shake, and my anger at God quickly gives way to a profound doubt about God's existence. And after a while, my withdrawal is complete. I write a "letter of vituperation" and propose to go on my own.

"Friend and neighbor you have taken away. My one companion is darkness."

9.4 Becoming Restful: To the Other Side of Death

Oct 6, 2014: Letter from the monk

Natalia,

Overall, I just pray you are finding peace in your life. God's peace does not necessarily exclude challenges and hardships. It is something that endures underneath it all. But your journey is sometimes about God himself. Who is He really in your life? Where is He leading you? Perhaps you doubt if He really loves you. I have even thought sometimes that your relationship with your earthly father (however short and sketchy it may have been) does affect your relationship with God. This is true for most of us at one level or another. It has been true for me – I have had to sort through it at times.

But I don't want to get too psychological. I really don't have any quick ready made answers for you. Perhaps someone holier, wiser, more spiritual than me could advise you better. I just know you are on a unique journey. A journey which I hope and believe is actually deepening your faith. Deepening your humility.

On some level you have a journey which, despite its pain, is one of courage upheld by grace, I believe. I believe God is strongly with you. Keeping you safe in many ways. Yet at the same time you feel the Cross. You simply do. And if it is the Cross of Jesus – you are safe.

You are a woman with much depth. A strong intellect. And of course, a good heart. A heart that may be wounded. But a good heart. A heart that is restless but desires rest. Keep praying. As hard as it may be, keep praying. But try to pray without strain. It's really hard, Natalia, to measure the quality of our prayer. It may feel to you as if it is dry and useless. On many occasions about 90% of my prayer time is fighting distractions. "Keep going," as this sermon by St. Augustine extols us.

I could write more but I feel I should stop with this. Perhaps we can talk sometime over the phone even. Just know you are in my prayers, in our prayers here. We love you. You can be angry with us at times, for feeling "duped" by us. For in fact you have been duped

in the good sense of the word, in the good sense of the outcome which is still in prayers. Jeremiah felt duped too (chapter 20). Peace, Fr _____.

October 28, 2014 (Richmond, VA): Poem “Stability”

*dear one, do not run. Stay
let's face Fear steadily
let's look
lovingly, into its eyes—“Welcome...”—let us stay*

*dear one, do not run. Stay
let's feel Pain all the way
let's step into its strong embrace
with fists unquenched—let us stay*

*dear one, do not run. Stay
let Darkness come and put
its soft wrap around our eyes and
with blind mind—let us stay*

*dear one, do not run. Stay
let's see how Death comes
let's watch where it takes us
together, we can make the crossing—if we stay.*

May 21, 2014: Letter from the monk

Dear Natalia,

In my reading of St. John of the Cross, what I kept coming up against was his insistence that we live our lives with ever purer faith and come to realize that when God seems most absent is just when he/she is closest to our lives, lives that are indeed a mystery until we begin to see what God has in store for us. God seeks to make us her/his very own daughters and sons, filled with God's own Spirit, if we let ourselves die to ourselves as to live to God.

When you say in your letter, “And yet, when I am really-really quiet within, it seems that even this illness is a part of some deeper process, some strange purgation or deliberate loss...as if all my acquisitions and accomplishments, anything and everything that I have worked so hard to collect and build and protect in my life is being taken away from me....Like things that I've come to believe about myself, my reputation and status, my identity itself...has become fluid and uncertain,” you [are] touching on, it seems to me, a deep process of transformation. Though ongoing discernment needs to take place and I will say more of this later on, you are dealing with the loss of your very identity which you are rediscovering. “Who are we?” is an important question to be asking ourselves. We all too easy [sic] begin to answer this out of the expectations of our culture or our early training whereas in fact we are most truly ourselves when rooted and grounded in the image and likeness of God in which we have been created.

Living our Christian life, living the Cistercian charism will inevitably lead to a breakdown of all merely human status or self-defined identity to where we discover our true or authentic identity in God. We are persons made in God's image and destined for divine life in Christ to where we no longer live but it is Christ who lives in us, as St Paul says. This inner transformation is often very painful since it means coming apart, having our carefully planned design and efforts being undone, so that God may bring about what it is to live in direct and continual relationship with the life of the Trinity. This is a lot like coming apart, when not only our images of ourselves are remade but how we conceived God's work in our lives has to be rethought and discovered anew. You asked "what will be left when this process of strange dissolution of self runs its course?" What is left is the True Self, one whose horizons have been greatly expanded to where there takes place what Merton liked to call, a "transformation of consciousness." We become new creations in Christ.

How then to deal with this darkness, this emptiness, this death to self where the above will happen? The key to me again is faith, letting God be God, letting God work on us, as painful as it may be. I have had my own struggles.... A final word I would give at this point is simply to work at realizing God is infinitely close to you in the midst of all you are feeling and suffering, understands you far better than you can begin to understand yourself. So I encourage you to pray right out of the middle of all you experience, whether this be feelings of fatigue, brain fog, inability to travel, difficulty working on your manuscript, worrying about your husband's job, etc. Sharing all this in prayer with a God who deeply loves you will allow you to see and surrender to what God wishes to accomplish in you. Another helpful tool can also be having a spiritual advisor, someone who can listen to your deeper aspirations and assist you in discerning the subtle workings of the Spirit. You may already have someone but if communicating by phone, I can be of any use, I will be glad to make time. This is what I meant earlier in saying that ongoing discernment will be useful in knowing what feeds that false self, what feeds the True Self. Your brother in Christ, Fr _____.

December 4, 2014: Letter to a monk

...You ask me about my spiritual life. I am not sure how to describe it. Instead, an image: I am doing dishes in the late afternoon, and the house is a mess, and I am terribly behind in my manuscript, and a myriad of logistical and life issues (job, career, my mother's health, people's opinions of me, finances, housing, future) are all like large shabby dogs sleeping on the rug, tired of chasing me all the day long, and there is this moment of quiet, which I know will be interrupted very, very soon, but I lean into that quiet and whisper—"I am Yours"—that's just about sums up all of my spiritual life.

January 28, 2015 (Richmond, VA): Poem "No Longer"

*I no longer pine for profound poems
I no longer beg for beautiful songs
I just wait in the silent cell of my being
—For your single Word.*

March 2, 2015 (Richmond, VA): Journal Entry

Last night I permitted myself to paint: with watercolour, pale petals of a flower—Spring on paper. Several weeks ago, I went to my first ballet class (right, a 40 y.o. ballerina!). Earlier this year, I returned to playing a piano (trying to remember how to play, that is). I am not good at any of these, but what JOY comes at those times!

Is it so wrong to enjoy myself so much? What would my dissertation advisors say? What would people in the church say? (Although come think of it, _____ is an accomplished pianist himself.) But I feel Fear. REAL FEAR. As if I am stealing and hiding something, afraid to be caught.

And yet, and yet, this morning writing gushes forth from me like a river. Go figure.

October 30, 2014 (Richmond, VA): Poem “Brush and Pen”

I was given a pen too early, a mere child of 4,
with the fine motor skills still underdeveloped
I picked up a brush close to 40, a blocked writer longing
to face the page unafraid

So.

Pen is an enemy
Brush is a friend

Pen is Executioner
Brush—Wet Nurse

Pen demands perfection, production, poise
Brush beckons to play

Pen is pulling my hair out
Brush laughs so hard, color splatters all over the table

But at the end of the day
when darkness seeps through the window cracks
when dreams, like shy rabbits, stir in the cool grass
(and doubts, like hungry mosquitoes, begin to buzz)

Brush moves, with broad strokes, closer
takes me by the hand
and whispers:

Write.

Pen is my sister.

Page is only a place where you do the looking.

*And, I would have never learned to love,
hadn't You loved me in my stead—
day, after day, after day...*

June 7, 2015 (Richmond, VA): Ginter Park UMC bulletin

CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY COMMUNION

Rev. Natalia Shulgina

In the aftermath of my departure from God, I become extremely pragmatic. Regardless of what I have lost—my dreams, identities, my ideas about myself and my ministry, and seemingly even my faith—I am not actually dead yet. I still have bills to pay and the need to find a way to support myself and my family (if anything, with each day, such a need is becoming more urgent). So everything becomes reduced to an elemental need to survive. In my case, it means two things: recovering my emotional stability and attending to my manuscript. It is imperative that I break free from the dangerous undertow of my unraveled feelings: I am beginning to seriously worry that I am headed for a pathological mental state. It is also pressingly urgent that I find a way to salvage something defensible of my dissertation manuscript: I understand it all too well that completing my dissertation and earning a degree is my best chance for personal and professional recovery.

My bookshelves bear witness to my desperate psychological exploration: books on shame, guilt, and grief sit alongside with the volumes on abuse, trauma, and PTSD, followed by texts on co-dependence, perfectionism, mother-daughter relationships, addiction, mental illness, suicide, and a fair sampling of literature on self-compassion and creative recovery. This collection includes serious scientific and clinical works by authors from the classical psychological and psychoanalytic fields, but it also veers into the

territory of the embarrassingly “pop”—and at times even the unnervingly “new age”—psychology. I leave no leaf unturned. It bothers me that this literature is not monastic in origin, and a majority of it is not even Christian or religious, but I cannot be picky now. I’ve got to get back to a steadier emotional ground.

On some level, these books are of great help. They offer me the safety of looking at my emotions from the detached perspective afforded by reading. They normalize my seemingly “crazy” reactions. They give me the familiar solace of learning, of beginning to understand the deepest and least acknowledged parts of my pain and humiliation. I gain enormous psychological insight into the origins and nature of my restlessness. And I begin to see that it is these deeper issues that have been at the root of my vulnerability before burnout—while a heavy work load, relational pressures and expectations are only external (and at times, even sought after) triggers. I begin to see that the real seeds of my burnout lie within. Yet, while elucidating and in many ways liberating, my reading fails to engender the return of the psychological equilibrium I so hope for. Equipped with knowledge and new insight into my woundedness, I discover that I am nevertheless still powerless in the face of my emotions. Once anxiety, anger, or shame begin to run high, my intellectual knowing goes out of the window. And even in the calmer moments of my existence, I struggle with the persistent question: “why now?” *After all these years of seemingly successful coping, a high level of functioning, and with my repressions working smoothly, why is this unexpected psychological undoing?* Finally, I am at pains as to comprehend what the genuine resolution to this crisis could be. If all these books about the lasting effects of childhood experiences, trauma, and generational history are correct, then the only “solution” seems to be a lifetime of therapy.

Similarly, try as I may, my ardent attempts to shoehorn my manuscript into something defensible prove to be ineffective. I try to reason things through. I divide all the dissertation materials into two piles: the data that testifies to the positive influence of the monastery on my peacefulness and ability to rest, and the alarming evidence to the contrary. I decide to focus on the positive only, telling myself that the negative evidence must be attributed to the misfortune of my unanticipated illness and personal aggravating circumstances. I file the negative notes away, into a separate box, “for later,” and I carry the box to the lower stairway of our apartment. Yet, the very thoroughness of my attempts to eliminate these negative data betrays a deeper apprehension. As I go about, pulling out the pages that contradict my clean and orderly argument about the monastery gift of peace for seminary students and trying to re-stitch my manuscript anew, I have a nagging feeling of overlooking something small but crucially important. I rather dislike the sensation. (It is reminiscent of the strong visceral unease that I once got during my years in surgical nursing, when after a long and complicated caesarean birth we left a piece of gauze inside the patient!) In the heart of hearts, in my gut, in the deeper layers of my awareness, I seem to sense that these negative data *are* related, and that something is really amiss in my field of vision. But on the level of conscious reasoning, such inkling is a pure contradiction. *How can I say that the monastery cured me from burnout and made me a restful person, if I am battling the overwhelmingly restive effects of trying to follow the monastic path?*

Return to God

I struggle mightily to make sense of my emotions and to find a way to complete my manuscript in the solitude of my study, yet, I am not alone in my struggle. While my formal spiritual withdrawal appears to elicit no reaction from God, after a few months of my

silence, the monks themselves begin to reach out to me. (The “lovers of silence” are not to be fooled by its misuse.) My spiritual director, knowing of my emotional difficulties, sends me a guided imagery CD which he himself recorded for the people affected by trauma. Other monks begin to “check on” me through hand-written letters, emails, and at times phone calls. Finally, unable to resist the basic courtesy of social engagement and the deep feeling of indebtedness (I am all too aware of the fact that they are bending the rules of the monastic enclosure to do such things), I muster the courage to write back. After a careful deliberation, I choose one monk to whom to address my letter. But now, I write back honestly: about my doubts, questions, my emotional turmoil and desperation, and even about my anger at them. The monk takes time to respond, and during that time I become convinced that my honesty has cost me the last connection I had. (*I knew it, I just knew it! Anger always leads to abandonment.*) When I finally do get his hand-written letter, I am taken aback by its content. There are no admonitions, assurances, or arguments about the existence of God. I detect no attempts to set me back on the “path of righteousness.” The monk simply acknowledges my anger, seeming not only to accept but actually encourage my in-breaking emotional honesty. Yet, he remains unswerving in his affirmation of their care and love for me—and, of all things, he does not make a big deal about my apparent “loss of faith.”

This has a peculiar effect on me. Suddenly, there is nothing to push against: my rebellion receives no resistance and, like in an unskilled novice in the practice of tai chi, I topple over myself, carried by the momentum of my own propulsion. All that is left is my naked decision to leave religious belief and the void created by God’s absence.

Yet, it is not a place of emptiness and rejection any more. It is now a place of refuge and consolation, because it is created by the realization that there exist people in my life who are not going to abandon me, even when I am angry, psychologically unstitched, or unable to believe the very thing that they affirm with their lives. And in that space, I gain courage to notice things that I previously denied.

Peculiarly, I catch myself talking to God, again and again, even as I have declared that we were no longer “on speaking terms.” I observe that my habit of “practicing God’s presence”⁴⁷⁸ remained, even though I have not had the sense of that Presence for so long. More importantly, now that I concluded that God does not exist, I become intensely curious about the faith of others, be that the contemporary monks of my acquaintance or the countless believers of the past. These feelings are particularly poignant in the case of the people whose writings nourished me in the earlier years of my monastic journey, the Benedictine-Cistercian and the Russian Orthodox monks. It is clear to me that they were well aware of, and in many cases personally acquainted with, deep suffering, but they went on believing: *What did they know about the world and about God that I don’t?* The pressure to know is high: these writers are more than merely literary figures for me, however renowned; since my early monastery retreats, they have been my companions, teaching and guiding me not only on the path of faith but also in the way of living. At times, unable to contain myself anymore, I run into my study and address myself out loud to my “monastic” shelves: “How *could* you believe in the face of all this?!” The books remain silent, their very silence fueling my disquiet.

⁴⁷⁸ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1982).

Yet, given the space to be, without the pressure to believe, and the assurance of love, without the threat of abandonment, I gradually become aware of the deeper reasons behind my atheistic regression. I see that my decision to cut myself off from God had to do less with the disciplined and intellectual deduction of God's absence, and more with a desperate attempt to address a far greater fear: I would rather accept that there was no God at all, than that there was God who, not unlike a wounded parent, could not be trusted. Confronted with the God whom I could not recognize, I was too afraid to find out.

But I am not so sure any more: I am beginning to be haunted by my memories of the monastic experience. Yet, it is not so much the monastery itself that I miss, although the memory of its long stretches of silence and solitude continue to fill me with unspeakable longing. What I really miss is myself, the way I *was* when I was truly connected to the monastery, its community and culture. I miss the times when, inhabiting the alternative monastery world, I felt most deeply and most fully alive. I miss the feelings of love and compassion, the joyous self-forgetfulness and genuine connection with others, the sheer expansiveness of my world. In contrast, my recent "godless existence" strikes me as a much more truncated experience of life. In just a few weeks since I "dropped" God and proposed to go on my own, I have been increasingly aware of how shrunk my world and my self are rapidly becoming. The inner suffering of anger, shame, fear, and depression is still there, but compassion, kindness, and joy have been rapidly disappearing into the vortex of intense self-preoccupation and obsession with the societal images of fulfilled living.

So, I try to look for alternatives. I stop to examine the simple philosophy of life propounded by the celebrity culture for becoming a good and happy person, and then, the possibilities for meaning-making offered by the purely psychological paradigms of self-

realization. Yet, I remain dissatisfied. The stories they tell about the world and human existence do capture some aspects of human nature and desire supremely well, but overall, their description feels “thin” and not fully adequate in capturing the complexity and density of life as I have come to know it. Next, I delve into the Buddhist writings, especially the texts coming from Tibetan and Zen monasticism: they attract me with their acute awareness of the darker side of the living, their sharp insights into the inner workings of the mind, and their willingness to face and engage even the most painful and overwhelming experiences constructively. Their guidance for the practice of meditation becomes extremely valuable in my daily dealings with afflictive thoughts and emotions. They also speak to me on a deeper level of asceticism and their ethical and aesthetic sensitivities (and the irony of going from the Christian to the Eastern monasticism is not lost on me). Yet, even as I develop a deep and lasting appreciation of the Oriental wisdom, and even gain a greater understanding and healing acceptance of the Korean part of my heritage with which I struggled for so long, I continue to hunger for more.

It could be that I have missed some other, better paradigms for the “big picture” of life or misunderstood the ones that I have considered, but I watch my mind returning again and again to the images and perceptions of the Christian myth. I marvel at its capacity to bear witness to both the negative and the positive aspects of the human existence, to make sense of the world in general and of the human nature in particular. I begin to see that my attraction to the Christian faith, not unlike my attraction to good literature, has to do with its ability to offer a more plausible account of life and a more enchanting vision for its fulfillment. And indeed, the books that I love, that strike a deeper cord within me, are written by religious people. They don’t always write about explicitly religious topics, nor

do they agree on everything (at times, quite the contrary!), but there is one thing they have in common: they have affirmed with their very lives the religious, rather than secular, path to meaning. They have placed their hope “in the Lord.” I find myself therefore in a real (if deeply ironic) predicament: longing for the Christian story to be true, yet having major reservations and fears about trusting its main Hero. But this much I know: I am still afraid of the fiery and dangerous God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who could demand the sacrifice of one’s only child or render a person lame for life; I am still put off by the paper-thin and sweet Jesus of the Sunday school; and I turn away in boredom from the abstract Trinity I mastered during my seminary years; but I can no longer deny my desire to know the living God of Merton, Berdyaev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chesterton, and Bloom.

So, my “godless existence” does not last long. And in the end, I owe my return to God not to some profound confirmation of the divine existence, but to the acute deepening of my doubt. It is no longer the doubt about whether or not *God* exists. It is a doubt about whether or not *I* can find meaning for my life in the world without God. My yearning overrides my fear, and I throw caution to the wind. This is my first real prayer in many months: not in the sense that I have suddenly feel the Presence of God, but in the sense that I myself am more present than ever. “Who *are* you? *Where* are You? How can you be so cruel?!!” The person who utters these questions is no longer trying to pray as the perfect Lay Cistercian, or as a theologian with clear-cut answers, or as a minister burning with faith. It is a person who has become aware of the urgency and intensity of her own desire for God: I have to find—or die.

While the moment of making my religious commitment anew was distinctive and strong, my subjective religious experience in the aftermath of it hardly changes. If anything, what I experience after declaring to God my intention to return is the feeling of extreme spiritual poverty. I don't really know where to begin. I try to read Scripture again, looking at the words that I myself underlined in the past, but the Bible feels like a completely unfamiliar text, and a bundle of contradictions as such. I pick up my old volumes of the Liturgy of the Hours, yet the thought of doing its seven daily offices, with all the antiphons and canticles, readings, and "Glory be"-s, simply overwhelms me. I try to read devotional literature, and the stack of books that I start and abandon grows by my bedside table. I try to whip myself into shape: *Come on! You just said you wanted to be a Christian. You used to love this. You even led workshops and gave retreats on how to pray.* But the words feel dangerous. They tangle me. They resound with confidence. They presume understanding. But when I utter them now, I feel like a child who has duly memorized the words of an ancient play, the meaning of which is far beyond her level of understanding.

Difficulties abound in my attempts at communal prayer as well. I feel that my private decision to return to God must be reflected in my public weekly routine, that is, in my return to regular church attendance. So I force myself to go to the local United Methodist community on Sunday mornings. The experience of being there, however, is overwhelmingly difficult and discombobulating. It feels as if I am coming back to my own native country, after many years away, only to discover that I don't really know the people and the culture I thought I knew so well. But the problem is deeper still. The people in the congregation know that I am a minister, and they treat me as such; and I too find myself slipping into the old pattern of talking with authority, looking for things to do, and

springing into action—all along feeling like a six-year-old little boy who is forced to don the six-foot-tall man’s tuxedo, with weighed tails, and give a performance. The whole experience is so utterly fatiguing and anxiety-provoking that after a while I stop going to church again. And even in the context of ordinary socializing, I worry that people would learn that I am a minister and would approach me with questions about God and Bible and religious life—and all I have to share is this intense longing and equally intense not-knowing.

So, I fall back into my solitary existence and my prayer becomes primitive and childlike. I make a sign of the cross—*O Lord, open my lips, and the mouth shall declare your praise*—as I rise from my bed. At my desk, before commencing my writing session, I ring the bell and hold the lay Cistercian commitment cross in the palm of my hand for few moments. The cross is cold and heavy, much like my own heart: *O God come to my assistance, O Lord, make haste to help me*. I pause in silence three times a day, even though I am unable to pray the Office: *Господи Иисусе Христе Сыне Божие, помилуй мя.*⁴⁷⁹ Before leaving my study at the end of the day, I press my forehead against the small pewter crucifix and bow before the icons. Night finds me sitting on the meditation mat, fingering the knots of the prayer rope, without saying a word. And on Sunday mornings I disappear into one of the quiet corners of the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, clutching my writing pad and a pen, and staring into space: *You love truth in the heart, then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom*. I feel like I am clinging to the objects and phrases that grounded and fed my prayer in the past, as if trying to impress upon my body the meaning my mind

⁴⁷⁹ The classical Hesychastic prayer, “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me,*” in Russian.

is no longer able to grasp. Most of the time, all this acts feel utterly poor and hopelessly inadequate and at times even ridiculous (and I recoil at the thought of my lay Cistercian and more learned friends finding out about the real scope of my spiritual practice). I am beginning to see why icons are said to be “Scriptures for the illiterate.” For all practical purposes, I can count myself among them.

Similarly, my return to God has accomplished little for the relief of my immediate psychological suffering. I still struggle with the all-permeating feeling of failure, shame, and the utmost desperation. I am still subject to the frightening sways of emotions. If anything, with regards to my psychological unraveling, my return to God presents me with a new problem: with God back in the picture, I need to make sense of my dark experiences anew. In the past, I assumed that the succession of negative experiences that characterized the later years of my monastic journeying was a sign that my journey had taken a wrong turn, and that in order to recover I needed to come back to my senses and “play monastery” (or religion, for that matter!) no more. But now, in the context of my renewed religious commitment, I must find an alternative way to interpret the negative dynamics of my journeying. Could it be that my intense agony about taking a wrong turn was, in itself, wrong? Could it be that my undeniably negative experiences have a positive meaning? Is there a framework of interpretation that would permit such a paradox, such seemingly an absurd proposition: that the exhausting, lonely, confusing, and frightening process of unraveling of my work, life, and the very self was normal and even salutary?

Indeed, there is such a framework. It comes from the monastic tradition itself. The notion of the “darkening” of the personal subjective experience and the painful progression of the “unmaking of the self” in the course of genuine transformation is at the heart of the

monastic lore. The monks insist that passage through the darkness is not only normal but necessary part of becoming a “true,” and therefore restful, self. The genuine Resurrection comes only after the real death. The agony of the Cross and the desolation of the Tomb time must precede the glories of Easter. From this point of view, the very difficulties and hardships of life and even the aridity of prayer itself (provided they are accompanied by serious effort, self-discipline, and careful discernment of spirits) could be taken as the signs of genuine progress in the right direction. Within this framework of interpretation, the monastery’s ability to really cure me from burnout would have to do, not with its gift of a quiet and peaceful place to “get away from it all,” but with its capacity to initiate the process of the burning out and dying of my “false self”—the very seat of restlessness and war—so that I could become alive on another, deeper and more peaceful, level of being. According to the monastic view of growth and transformation, accepting the necessity of such death and entering the crucible of the negative experiences that accompany it, would be, in truth, my one and only real shot at becoming a restful person.

I gasp at a sudden realization. If my journey, with its gradually intensifying fatigue, disruption of relationships, confusion, and fear really follows the monastic outline of becoming, then my negative symptoms are not the signs that my life and vocation are going on the rocks, but pointers toward a larger trajectory of transformation: its utterly painful yet absolutely necessary “purgative” part. Then, despite the barrenness, desolation and the apparent ruin of my present state, I still have hope—if I remember that, for the time being, I am in the crucible of becoming. Furthermore, if the monastic framework of transformation is a correct matrix for my journeying, then the fundamental premise of my dissertation argument—that the monastery has cured my burnout—is not lost! What *is* lost

is my original, and limited, understanding of the process by which such an outcome is being accomplished. This emerging, more complete understanding of my transformation would allow me not merely to “salvage” something of my dissertation, but to bring its whole argument to an entirely new, much deeper and much more internally coherent, level. I begin to feel as if a small but crucially important inkling has been finally uncovered, and all the pieces of the puzzle that have vexed me for so long, unexpectedly and swiftly, begin to arrange themselves in a deeply meaningful and satisfying pattern.

Recovery of Manuscript and Deepening of Method

I pause to consider this sudden breakthrough in greater detail: illumination is nice, but it is nothing unless carefully verified. Like a pregnant woman eager to ascertain the exact moment of conception, I begin to count backward, screening the years of my acquaintance with the monastic paradigm of transformation, in an effort to trace the stages of its appearance and evolution in my dissertation argument. I recall that I became captivated by the monastic paradoxical view of personal realization almost from the beginning of my monastic journey, after my initial private retreats and conferences at the monastery of the Holy Spirit in 2005. My understanding of this process deepened significantly during my formal dissertation fieldwork at the monastery in September 2009, when, thanks to the access to the riches of the monastery library granted by the Abbot and the personal guidance from the monks, I was able to delve into some of the primary texts bearing witness to this process.

Later that fall, when I completed my review of all data collected at the monastery and written the first sketch of my dissertation argument, I placed this paradoxical understanding at the core of my thesis, arguing that “burnout must happen”: that is, in order

to address the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education, it is necessary, in the course of the seminary training, to guide the ministerial students through a similar, burnout-like process of discovering and unlearning their problematic (“false”) ways of self-understanding and ministry. Finally, and perhaps most ironically, my decision to embrace the unconventionally subjective methodology for my research, in 2012, was based on my belief that I myself have gone through such a process of purification and the dying of my false self—the “work and war” of becoming restful—as a part of my in-depth experiences of the monastery retreat, and therefore was in the position to write about it with the authority of the firsthand experience. Yet, nothing has prepared me for the shocking blow of the astonishing realization: I have missed the fact that, out in the world, I have been going through the same process that I have experienced during the monastery retreat and sought so diligently to describe in my dissertation manuscript! I feel as if the cumulative argument that I have been carefully crafting in the entire course of my writing, like a heavy swinging gate that has been pushed hard and long in one direction, has suddenly pivoted back on its hinges, rapping me cruelly on the shins and sending me flying to the ground.

And from that lowly place I begin to see anew. I begin to see that my claims to the passage through the painful and frightening “dissolution of the false self” were not a matter of overt lying, but an occasion of limited knowing. I did go through the experience of psychological “undoing” and ascetic “dying” during my monastery stay—that’s why the monastic way of understanding the process of becoming restful made so much sense and resonated so deeply with me. It was my keen awareness of the “darker side” of the monastery retreat that enabled me to grasp the deep paradoxical meaning of the monastic

paradigm of transformation. Yet, while genuine, my firsthand experience of dying and rising as a new, more restful self, was incomplete. It was only a taste of the things to come. If I were to become permanently restful, the process of unmaking and remaking of my self, which began in the safety of the monastic enclosure, has to reach the farthest corners of my worldly existence; it has to penetrate my life as a whole. To become truly restful, I must experience existentially the very truths that I have understood intellectually.

I also begin to see that my initial dissertation argument about the “necessity of burnout” in the course of ministerial preparation was accurate but only half-finished. The proposal to address the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education, by guiding the seminarians through a burnout-like process of unlearning the problematic habits of pastoral ministry and self-understanding, on the basis of the monastic paradigm of transformation, as I experienced it during the monastery retreat, would have presented a fascinating theoretical possibility—but it would be only remotely persuasive with regards to the actuality of the seminary praxis. Indeed, why should anybody in theological education take such a proposal seriously? The monastic view of transformation presented in my thesis comes from one of the most remote and obscure orders of the Roman Catholic monks, who (their centuries of experience in the work of formation notwithstanding) could hardly be any more dissimilar to the people who come to study in the mainline Protestant seminary. And even my account of the monastery retreat (though it testifies to the utmost effectiveness of the monastic process) is by definition a far stretch from the high-pressured and hard-working realities of seminary living and learning. The gap between the monastery and the seminary, between the experience of retreat and the realities of the ministerial training remains wide—too wide to bridge effectively—no matter how strong the theory.

But *if*, on the other hand, I can demonstrate that the monastic insights in to the nature of human rest and restlessness and the process of becoming restful has worked even for such a compulsive overachiever and workaholic as myself, in the context of liberal, mainline Protestant theological training, in one of the most competitive doctoral programs, offered by one of the leading American universities, *then* my proposal carries weight and relevance that cannot be easily dismissed. To ensure the persuasive power of my dissertation argument for addressing clergy burnout in theological education, I must be able to show that the ancient monastic truths are not only hypothetically applicable, but vitally and urgently pertinent to our contemporary experience of working and resting.

Finally, I begin to see that more is at stake than my personal journey of becoming restful or even the successful completion of my dissertation manuscript. The fundamental objective of my research, the core motivation that made me choose this topic for the doctoral study in the first place, was my deep yearning to contribute to the work of addressing the painful problem of clergy burnout. I was convinced that to be effective, the work of prevention needs to take place during the seminary years of ministerial preparation, and my dissertation was to be the first step in that direction. It was the theoretical foundation upon which I had hoped to build my future contribution as a theological educator and a minister. Yet, it suddenly becomes very clear to me that in order to be of genuine practical assistance to the seminarians on their journey of becoming restful ministers, it would not be enough for me to simply reaffirm the basic religious avowal of the positive value of the negative experiences and argue that the burnout-like process of unmaking and remaking of the self must be a part of ministerial preparation. Unless I risk to undergo this process—not in the quiet seclusion of the monastery retreat, but in the busy,

harried, and achievement-driven context of seminary training—where the prospective ministers themselves would be expected to undergo it—I cannot really know what it is, and I cannot really guide and support them through it. If I am to become a trustworthy co-journeyer and guide, I must enter and map out the dark and obscure terrain of transformation, the complex factors that influence the onset of this process, its internal dynamics and outer symptoms, and the conditions that determine its positive outcome, in the actuality of the “real world” experience. Only then, I could truly share the monastery gift of peace with the seminary students.

Suddenly, I feel as if a sharp ray of sun pierces through the heavy clouds. Maybe I can still *become* a restful person. Maybe I *can* have my dissertation back. Maybe this *is* a return of my vocation. Except that this time my sense of calling feels different. This time, it is no longer imposed upon me, for however good and noble reasons, from without. This time, it is welling up from within, from the deeper realms of my own being. I feel as if a flicker of hope is coming my way after a long, long time of “always winter and never Christmas.” I feel as if a dawn is about to break.

There is only one unnerving snag in this day-breaking experience: the making of my comeback is conditional on my going onward. *If* I am to accept the monastic paradigm of transformation as a map for my own journeying, I would have to cease my desperate attempt to stop the painful and frightening process of my undoing, surrender my acute desire to swim back to the solid ground that I had known before, and just head out into the wide-open sea. I would have to submit to the experience of dying. If my journey is indeed

not unlike that of Israel to the Promised Land, then, just like Israel, I have to suffer the passing away of the very generation that was all aflame about leaving Egypt.

But more is on the line than merely a subjective prolongation of pain. If I accept the monastic paradigm of transformation as an accurate map for my journey of becoming restful, then my dissertation research is far from being finished. The ambitious methodology of being both a researcher and a participant in my own case study would have to move beyond the safety of my reminiscence about the monastery retreat, and be worked out in the dangerous immediacy of my present experience. To bring my case study of recovering from clergy burnout in the context of theological education under the guidance of the monastic tradition to its proper completion, I would have to conduct my research from the epicenter of my current existence. I would have to find out, for myself, whether the monastic paradigm of transformation holds any water.

I have good reasons to be unnerved by these prospects. I feel that in the recent years I have suffered more “dying” than I can possibly stomach, and I am not looking forward to any more. And besides, what if, in interpreting the inner realities of my life in light of the monastic religious experience, I am making a mistake? After all, I am going off of nothing more than a testimony of the people, who come from a dramatically different walk of life, ecclesiastical context, and in some case, centuries away from my own time! A mistake would most certainly cost me a dissertation: I am in the eleventh hour in my program, and embarking on an additional leg of research is truly dangerous; embarking on a *wrong* leg of research would be deadly. I also sense a threat to my psychological well-being. I have already seen how destabilizing my emotions and subjective states could become, and I am deeply alarmed by the possible mental consequences of making a decision to journey

further down the road of the “unmaking of the self.” Frankly, I am afraid to lose command of myself.

Why do I accept? On some level, this is not really a choice. I am not sure I could stop this strange and frightening process even if I tried (and God knows, I did try in the earnest!). I am beginning to see that I don’t really have control over this journey. Much like going into labor, the way forward may be terrifying, but the way back is simply impossible. Yet, there is a choice: it is a choice between going down, kicking, screaming and wallowing in self-pity, and a willing and active surrender to the unknown reality of self-sacrifice. I think of the phrase that leaped at me from the page of a dusty volume, years ago, in the dark corner of a used bookstore: *que muero porque no muero* (“I die, because I don’t die”).⁴⁸⁰ Who knows, maybe losing my life *is* a way to find it. So, even though a part of me wonders if I am quietly going round the bend, I make a decision to go in the direction that the monks and my own manuscript seem to beckon me.

But now, my life and my research become truly linked. My dissertation is no longer a purely an academic document, completed as a “partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University,” or merely an entry-pass to my future ministry and professional career, and just a first step towards the long-intended contribution to the work of addressing clergy burnout, but a matter of crucial significance for the actuality of my own daily living. Now, the quality of my inquiry and research conclusions has to meet not only the stringent criteria of “defensibility” of my thesis before the academic

⁴⁸⁰ This phrase is a refrain in St. John of the Cross’s famous poem “Not living in myself I live” (*Vivo Sin Vivir En Mi*). A beautiful bilingual translation, with the sensitivity to the Castilian Spanish, is found in St John of the Cross and Antonio T. de Nicolás, *St. John of the Cross (San Juan De La Cruz): Alchemist of the Soul: His Life, His Poetry, His Prose* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 138-43.

dissertation committee, but also the exacting demands of the experience that has the likelihood of becoming a crucial passage of my existence. I have to make sure that I “die onto life,” and not just “die.”

As such, the ambitious subjective methodology I have proposed for my case study comes around a full circle. Because I have made a decision to subject my Participant to an additional, and potentially dangerous, experiment, the work of my Researcher becomes formidably amplified. She is now challenged to apply the skills of disciplined, thorough, and bias-resistant inquiry—the very skills that she claimed to be crucial for the high-quality case study—to the pool of data that includes not only the safely contained memories of past retreats, but also the unruly immediacy of the present day experience. Both the successful completion of my dissertation manuscript and my personal well-being are now dependent upon my ability to deliver what I had promised in my methodology chapters. My “disciplined subjectivity” is about to get its real test drive.

The initial challenge I face to implementing my decision to surrender to the death of my false self is gaining a greater specificity with regards to the meaning of the “dying of the false self.” This challenge is bigger than it may appear. It is precisely because theoretically I have been swimming in the monastic paradigm of transformation for several years, it is easy to assume that I know what it means. I have folders of notes, collection of books, and an ever-expanding list of bibliographical references. (I am writing a dissertation on it!). Yet, when it comes to the actuality of the lived experience, the terrain that is so familiar becomes strangely foreign. *What does it really mean to surrender to the “death of the false self?” Who is the false self in me? Where is she, when I am sitting at my desk carving*

sentences (or sitting at my desk not-carving sentences, crushed by the overwhelming sense of failure), when I am cleaning, cooking, talking to my husband, or worrying about my mother in the wee hours of the night?—and how do I go about facilitating her dying in the ordinariness of my daily life? The metaphor of dying that utilizes the imagery of the basic human experience, and the language of self that builds on the discourse of the contemporary psychological art, *are* helpful: they link the elusive experience of transformation to something more common and, as such, more comprehensible. Yet, for the purposes of my work, a greater precision is necessary: I must move beyond the symbolism of metaphor, to the specifics of method.

A letter and a phone call from another monk, a man who has had many years of experience with the formation of the monastic novices and who has been a generous guiding presence in my life since the beginning of my lay Cistercian commitment at Gethsemani Abbey, offers a providential assistance. A few weeks prior to my decision to accept the monastic paradigm of transformation as a map for my own journeying, emboldened by the results of my new, emotionally honest way of corresponding with the monks, I wrote him a letter, describing my difficulties with the dissertation writing, my inability to properly follow the lay Cistercian path, the pain of infertility, the dissolution of my identities and dreams, and a general sense of coming apart. His response feels like a deep confirmation: he speaks about my suffering in the same language of dying as a false self and rising as a true self that I am now trying to apply to the actuality of my daily living. But he is being far more specific about the “action plan”: he helps me understand that my surrender to death and darkness means finding a way to face and enter the very experiences that frighten me most.

Following the conversation with the Father, I begin to think about a practice that would allow me to deliberately enter and explore the places that scare me.⁴⁸¹ I realize also that, for the purposes of my research, I need to find a practice that would enable me only to undergo, but also systematically map out and explore my experience of being there. I need to carefully observe and chronicle my journey of dying as the false self.

My first candidate for this practice is the basic seated meditation, informed by my knowledge of the Christian contemplative prayer and my deepening appreciation of the Buddhist discipline of *zazen*. From my previous experience with meditation, I know that the simple practice of sitting provides the most perfect means for bringing me face to face with the negative dynamics of my experience. At all other times of the day, I can (and frequently do) find many and varied ways of avoiding emotional pain and distress. But when I set aside every other occupation in order to “just sit,” the events and voices, previously hushed by the constant clatter of activity, grow loud. Meditation works so well, because it offers no place to hide and no path to run away. Additionally, both Christian and Buddhist teachers of meditation emphasize the importance of staying with the immediacy of one’s subjective experience while suspending all judgment. As such, meditation has a strong potential for becoming a part of both entering and observing my inner experience of “dying.” It would help me to discover what is really going on. And, it does not hurt that I have already established this practice as a part of my daily life: my habit is to sit for 30 min in the morning and evening. So it seems that in order to conduct my research on my

⁴⁸¹ A delightful and deeply honest book by a similar title is written by Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun: Pema Chödrön, *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).

experience of dying as a false self, I only need to start paying closer attention to my thoughts and inner happenings during that time.

Soon, however, I discover that, while perfect in theory, that this approach is not fully adequate for practice. While I can sit and observe the *milder* experiences of pain and displeasure, the *bigger* threats, such as intense shame, feeling of failure, anger or desperation—that is, precisely the times when I really feel like I am dying!—make me overwhelmingly, impossibly restless. And, because I am trying to pay close attention to these states, rather than “see through” them as in the traditional meditation practice, and the simplicity of detached returning to breath is now superseded with the complex intention of research, these emotions and thoughts become dangerously amplified. I will do *anything* to escape. So, I observe an appearance of new eagerness in myself for doing dishes, scrubbing bathroom floors, and a sudden realization that it is imperative for the health of my marriage that I spend more time with my husband—all *instead* of meditating. It is the very intensity of my afflictive states and the loss of usual meditation “anchors” that make my newly launched practice of research a constant—and for the most part lost—battle of determination.

Yet, practicing the disciplined study of my personal experience is already beginning to pay off. By carefully observing the multitude of small and big ways in which I orchestrate my shrewd avoidance of my consciously embraced course of action, I begin to better understand the strengths and limitations of my current practice and the ways to improve it. The part of meditation that “works” has to do with its ability to bring me into the immediacy of my inner experience: at no other time during day or night, am I able to sneak such an up-close and extensive peek at what is happening within. The part of the

meditation that “does not work” has to do with my attempts to both die *and* conduct research on my own dying at the same time. I am beginning to see that I am trying to do (*surprise!*) too much. Thus, what I need to change in order to endure the experiences that feel inherently unendurable is to lighten up my load. I need to find a way to separate my experience of dying from my examination of my experience of dying. Moreover, I need to find a new “anchor”: since returning to breath or prayer word is no longer an option, I need to establish a practice within a practice that would allow me to enter and remain in the eye of the storm, without being tossed away by its power.

In part by accident, in part due to my thorough acquaintance with the literature on writing problems, I add writing to my practice of meditation.⁴⁸² Everything remains the same: one hour of sitting, daily, whether I feel like it or not—except now, I *write* all throughout that time. Writing furnishes for me a very strong anchor: I now have an actual physical object, a pen, to hold on to, during the time of inner confusion and turmoil. It enables me to sit through the experiences that before were too powerful to endure. Putting words on paper, no matter what, becomes a way to stay put in the midst of the torrent of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. If my inner experience becomes so overwhelming as to halt even my ability to form words, I switch to drawing, trying to “translate” its rawness into an image on the page. If my right hand begins cramping in tension, I switch to the left one, allowing its very unskillfulness to steady and slow me

⁴⁸² In retrospect, I connect the origins of this practice to Julia Cameron’s “morning pages,” Natalie Goldberg’s “writing as a Zen practice,” and “morning writing” advised by Dorothea Brande. (Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* (New York: Shambhala, 1986); Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life* (New York: Putnam, 1998); Brande.)

down. Under all circumstances, I stay connected to the pen: through shaking, through crying, through cursing, I remain seated and writing.

Additionally, writing affords a premium way to support my research. Having first lived through dying as a Participant, I can later return to this experience as a Researcher, because there now exists a tangible trail of evidence. The very words that help me to stay put and present all throughout my meditation time become “field notes,” a formal record of my entry into darkness and death, which can be subjected to a systematic analysis and in-depth reflection.

I quickly discover however, that even though I set out to study my experiences of dying, not all of what comes up during my writing meditation is directly related to the experience of dying. Plenty of extemporaneous thoughts seem to arise alongside the currents of darkness: grocery lists, to-do lists, people-to-call lists, fantasies, musings, last night dreams, next meal plans, memories of past events and my current occupations. I marvel at my mind’s capacity for lateral thinking, its propensity to leap from subject to subject and connect the seemingly disjoint pieces of information. But I write it all down. For one, it is easier to just record everything, than to try to sort, in the midst of the meditation, what is pertinent from what is not. For two, I never lose sight of the overarching goal of my research: I want to throw my net wide and to avoid the possibility of the subtle “picking and choosing” influencing the quality of my findings. Lastly, my previous experience with meditation has taught me that non-resistance is the quickest way of dealing with the intruders. My new rule: whatever comes up gets written down.

I write with a fountain pen, Noodler’s “eel” ink, on the top-wire “Xtreme White” notepads. The tools are not accidental: they emphasize velocity. The swiftness of the

fountain pen, coupled with the fast-flowing, lubricating ink and smooth-surface notepads enable me to stay ahead of the Censor. Even though I have made a commitment to be as accurate and faithful as possible in documenting of my experience (this *is* a work of research!), and I reconfirm this commitment every time I sit down to write, in the actuality of writing I become aware just how powerful my inner editing faculty is. It can override the best of my intentions, in its search for order, respectability, and decorum. To be fair, the Censor's anxiety is not entirely unfounded. Much of what comes up is a far cry from the societal norms of propriety, political correctness, good logic, and linguistic elegance. Some of it is painfully private, pertaining not only to my personal experience, but to the long veiled family secrets. Still some is just banal, petty, or downright offensive in its callousness or malevolence, and at times sexually explicit content. *What if somebody finds and reads these pages?* (There is still enough vanity in me to think that, if one day I may become famous, these "diaries" might become public—clearly, irrespective of all the dying that I *think* have gone through, my false self is still positively and vibrantly alive!) So, I strike up a compromise: I give my Censor a promise to burn these pages at the end of my dissertation writing (backing it up with a similar agreement from my husband, should I die unexpectedly); but at the same time, knowing that she herself is not full in control over the compulsion to perfect and beautify, I write as fast as I can in order to stay ahead of her amending powers.

This is not how I usually write. My preferred way of composition is with the pencil and on a paper that can withstand repeated erasing. I like to proceed in a neat and orderly fashion, taking great care that one sentence leads into another, with no apparent contradictions or gaps in the argument. I avoid all profanity, inappropriate or indecorous

language—and, heavens forbid, any sexual connotations. Whenever I can help it, I seek to follow the rules of proper grammar and “elements of style,” and I am partial to correct spelling. Admittedly, such writing generally proceeds at a painstakingly slow pace; yet, I feel the end result is worth it. It makes me feel secure in sharing it with others. It makes me feel proud of my work (eventually). Writing in this new way—ignoring misspelled words and wrong word order, breaking of the rules of proper grammar, common sense, and good manners, switching back and forth between English and Russian languages, and not shunning inappropriate thoughts, emotions or juicy expressions—cannot be more different. Not only does it alarm my Censor, it leaves a good part of me confused, discombobulated, and dizzy. That part screams, in distress, all throughout the one-hour session: “This is awful! Just awful. Stop!! How can you write things like that?!!—you are not supposed to! It is improper, arrogant, just plain embarrassing. You are *killing* me!!!” Indeed, writing like this, even apart from my intended research on the subject of “dying as the false self,” in itself feels like dying.

Yet, I persevere. I remind myself that I am doing this for the sake for the scholarly study. And, during one hour, every day, I side with all the other parts and voices who relish this strange liberation movement.

Dawning of Restfulness

Writing like this I begin to amass pages very quickly. My 120-page notebooks last me less than a month. I am thrilled: all this is my “data.” I look forward to subjecting these pages to systematic and in-depth examination in order to discover what is really going on in my “dying as a false self.” My key objective is to gain insight into the tangible meaning and nature of this process. Then, I will know what I what it means to be a restful person and

what should I do to become one. Yet, paradoxically, as I continue with my daily writing meditation, I also become aware of a deeper shift that begins to take place in my inner experience: the glimpses of restfulness that come into being here and now, not as a result of my intended scholarly reflection and renewed action, but as an unexpected outcome of the practice itself.

To begin with, I discover that the act of writing about the painful experiences and emotions seem to dramatically lessen their intensity. Such lessening is different from the subjective feelings of relief that comes from writing in a journal. In contrast to my ordinary journal-keeping, in the practice of writing meditation, personal as it is, I can never forget about my responsibilities as a researcher. And the Researcher wants no interpretation from the Participant: she wants to see it for herself, so she insists for on “reporting only.” Thus, the activity of careful description begins to assume tremendous importance, while the work of interpretation is being actively discouraged. I discover that enormous relief comes from such a reduction of activity: by staying with the experience itself, and repeatedly interrupting my habit of spinning (for the most part, catastrophic) interpretations, or at least recognizing and labeling them as such—*this is not the experience; this is my interpretation of my experience*—I watch myself writing through some of the most difficult psychological states and emotions. It is as if by adopting the role of a faithful “minute-keeper,” I become far less caught in the “proceedings.” The experience is still there, and I am fully open and present to it; yet, paradoxically, precisely because I am focused on getting it down as accurately as possible—how my body feels, what kind of emotions wash over me, what kind of thoughts I hear, what kinds of actions I feel urgently pressed to do—I am no longer

completely engulfed by it. By entering more fully into the observational part of my “participant-observation,” I move onto a radically new level of emotional stability.

Yet, restfulness of this writing practice has to do not merely with gaining some distance from my painful experiences and emotions, but also with my gradually deepening knowledge of them. In contrast to the dominant inclination of the Participant to flee from these inner offenders, the Researcher wants to go after them! She wants to watch them, to gain better understanding of their nature, defining characteristics, and even their “relationship” with the Participant. Her driving force is curiosity, not fear. Thus, writing meditation becomes a place for doing “detective work” and, as my criminal “dossier” grows thicker, I become less scared. For one thing, these violators of peace look much less scary when they are “captured” on the page: by putting the rawness of shame or my intense fear of failure into words and taking a closer look at them, I step from under their direct influence, and their power to overwhelm me diminishes dramatically. For another, on the page, these inner events and occurrences become something external to (rather inextricably fused with) my subjective experience. I discover that such written movement of “externalizing the problem” is deeply empowering, because it creates space for the emergence of new perspective on the situation. The very slowness of handwriting, in comparison to the lightning speed of thinking, triggers an additional and often novel round of interpretation: my mind, getting bored and ever-so-slightly frustrated by having to wait for the hand to pen all the letters, begins to generate contrary points of view, remember “unique outcomes,” and point out the possibility of alternative responses. Once and again, thinking that I am sitting down only to vent, I discover that I gained a new insight or caught

a glimpse of solution. At the completion of the appointed hour, I have written myself to the other, more restful, side.

The deepest feeling of restfulness that is engendered by the writing meditation practice, however, comes not from the change in my relationship with the darker dynamics of my inner experience, but an alteration in the way I relate to my self. In contrast to the all-knowing attitude of the Participant, who has thought about and arrived at her conclusions about my life a long time ago, the Researcher demands a new, fresh hearing. She seeks to be unbiased, dispassionate, objective, and she insists on making her own judgments. Thus, writing meditation becomes the time when I narrate my experience in such a way as to present all evidence—the good, the bad, and the ugly—in service of a fair assessment. I discover that tremendous relief comes simply from asking myself, for once, to speak not only on the part of “prosecution” but also on behalf of “defense.” But there is more. As I watch the simple record of my life experience appear unadulterated on the page, I feel the innate sense of reason and justice stir up within. I begin to see how devious, imbalanced, excessive, and above all, false, my mounting accusations about my not-working hard enough, not-achieving enough, not-being enough are. And as the sound of the inner “judge’s” gentle but firm verdict—*she has not done anything wrong: let the girl go*—begins to reverberate through my whole being, defying the life-long barrage of relentless self-accusation, I feel deep restfulness flooding within, all the way down even into my bones.

The three shifts in the way I experience and relate to the immediacy of my subjective experience, engendered by my practice of writing meditation, are deeply restful in their

own right. It is a tremendous relief to gain the skill of staying within the sensory realm of my experience while suspending the habitual work of interpretation. It is deeply liberating to relate to the painful emotions in a new way, no longer as their longsuffering victim but as an independent observer and detective. It is deeply healing to experience myself being seen not through the lens of relentless betterment and criticism but with the eyes of kind impartiality. Yet, with the passage of time, I become mindful of the deeper changes taking place as an outcome of my writing meditation. They go beyond the immediacy of my inner experience, to my life as a whole. Three shifts in particular arrest my attention—a new way of understanding my past, a new way of relating to my afflictive emotions, and the most surprising of all, a new habit in my dissertation writing—each contributing in its unique way to my dawning restfulness.

First, I notice that the thoughts of my past—terrorizing flashbacks of trauma, memories of abuse, intense attacks of shame about my failure of becoming—are no longer as vivid and haunting. It is a paradox: after all, I have worked extensively on these very experiences with my therapist; yet, writing about them in such a direct way, with a degree of openness and exposure that I dared not to reach even in therapy, creates a shift in the way I understand and relate to them. It is as if, for the first time, my past is not merely being deeply and profoundly understood but actually “digested.” No longer does it stand as a monolith block that I can only look at, gain insight into its origins, and speculate about the prognosis for recovery. Rather, like a tangled ball of soft yarn, my past begins to unravel in the course of my writing about it. As I show up at the page, day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, to record my memories, I gradually reach the end of the familiar life story. But since I don’t stop writing, I gradually begin to uncover the

snippets of memory and images that until now have remained buried deep in the recesses of my mind, largely not seen and unnoticed. And the writer within, delighted at a sudden profusion of the new “narrative material,” cannot resist the urge to take a closer look and start the work of revision. Before long, the “this-is-my-story-and-I-am-sticking-to-it” attitude becomes hard to maintain: long-forgotten voices and characters make themselves heard and visible, new themes—of courage and resilience, perseverance and strength, gratitude and even hope—become manifest, and the overall tone and imagery of my story begins to change. A new, richer, more textured and sane account begins to emerge on the pages on my research notebooks. It is not a “made-up” story: the past is past, and it cannot be changed. Yet, as I remember and begin to make sense of it anew, in light of the previously neglected experiences, my revised “personal myth” becomes truer to life—truer to how things really were and truer to how they still can become. I am becoming a more restful person, not only because I am beginning to make peace with my past, but because in the process I see myself arrive at a different “story to live by.”

Second, I observe that my afflictive emotions—fear, shame, despair, terrifying rage, and overwhelming sadness that previously shook me to the core—begin to diminish in intensity. It is also a paradox: after all, I read many books and spent many hours, in my frantic attempts to get rid of them; and yet, it is the decision of unconditional hospitality, expressed in my commitment to listen, that gradually changes the way I relate to these offenders. At first, I simply listen “as an end in itself,” trying to hear out and record all the voices within, no matter how unpleasant the language, pitch, or volume. The voices have much to say, but as their individual narratives took form on the page, I cannot help but notice that they start losing much of their spitefulness and ferocity. Emboldened by the first

positive results of my listening, I then attempt to listen “in order to give voice,” discovering, to my utmost surprise, that their opinions—once decoded of the external bad manners and profanity (not unlike those of kids from the bad neighborhood)—are far from being meaningless. I began to see that in however clumsy, belligerent, and at times shockingly unsociable ways, these inner monsters are trying to care for me: they are willing to transgress, insult, and even go on the offense, in order to protect the needs of self that I myself sacrifice all too readily to the codes of propriety, social convention, and the interests of others. Finally, several months into my practice, when I begin to feel that my listening earned me the “right to speak,” I start talking back to them—in writing. A strange acquaintance and even bonding begins to take place between me and the darker, previously unwelcomed and scary, parts of my own being: when approached with an attitude of respect and benevolent curiosity, my offending emotions and other psychological trouble-makers provide much guidance and energy for the journey. I am becoming a more restful person because, having abandoned the tremendously difficult (and futile) work of trying to slaughter or silence my dragons, I am learning to ride them.

But perhaps the greatest paradox of unexpected restfulness awaits me in the realms of dissertation writing, the work that for many years has been not merely slow-going but intensely laborious and painstaking. I suddenly become aware that the skills that I have been practicing in my daily practice of writing meditation, begins to spill into the realities of my formal academic writing. I watch myself just sitting down and writing—in the middle of life, instead of waiting for the conditions to be “just so,” sidestepping excessive preparation and delay—in one-hour intervals throughout the day. I begin to dare to use pen, instead of pencil, to write fast without correcting, erasing, and pausing to check for spelling

and punctuation. Strange patience and non-aggression begin to sip into my writing process: a willingness to start where I am, to admit (in writing!) my not-knowing, to tolerate ambiguity and lose control, to allow even the seemingly illogical and paradoxical ideas come out on the page. Surprisingly, even the ever-vigilant Censor, possibly worn out by her daily struggle with my writing meditation, seem to be more willing to suspend the immediate judgment and sit back, to “wait and see,” and delay editing—and I myself begin to dare to take her pronouncements with more than one grain of salt. At rare moments, I even catch myself being led by curiosity about the unfolding of the manuscript itself, rather than driven by my long-standing fear of failure. Admittedly, this is a rather wasteful way to write: I generate countless pages in service of one paragraph and many more drafts before I arrive at the one to be shared. Yet, surprisingly, even though I write more, I seem to write faster. No longer so overwhelmed by my towering expectations, no longer so frightened by my Censor, no longer so complete a slave to my outline and a miser with my words and sentences, no longer as spasmodically perfectionistic in delivery, I actually become more effective in generation of insight and deepening of understanding. My nascent restfulness grows deeper still, not just because I am now making greater progress to degree, but because the writing itself, so long a source of anxiety, conflict, and consternation, becomes a wellspring of joy, guidance, and delight.

I feel deeply encouraged by this unexpected yet pronounced experience of restfulness. It makes me feel, for the first time in many months and years, that I am on the right path. Yet, I note that, despite the new multifaceted experience restfulness that I have experienced as a result of my daily practice of writing meditation, the practice itself has not become any

easier. It is still deeply unnerving in its intention: to enter and take an unflinching look at the experiences that frighten me most. It is still extremely demanding in the actuality of my practice: this new way of writing runs against the grain of my life-long habits. On the level of the content and on the level of the process, it is still an experiment in “dying.” This, however, serves not as a deterrent but as a paradoxical validation for my work: I have now had my first intentional experience of dying—and verified it as an effective path to becoming restful. In the context of my life, I have observed that facing and entering the experiences that feel death-like enabled me to start making peace with them. In the context of my writing, I have discovered that letting my “perfectionistic self” die on the page creates a space for a new, more restful creation of prose.

Methodologically, this dual confirmation is of paramount importance. Not only does it show that the monastic paradigm of transformation can be trusted, but it also reveals that I (as the Participant) can trust myself (as the Researcher) in understanding and applying this paradigm to the practical realities of my living. Hence, my dawning experience of restfulness is a turning point in my case study: even as I continue to show up at the page and record of my experience as the Participant, I begin to see that it is time for me to start reading the produced pages in the cooler mind of the Researcher. This transition from the pure mode of “data collection,” to the concurrent work of in-depth “analysis and interpretation” marks the beginning of the final stage of my journey of becoming restful: learning to rest.

Learning to Rest

The first thing I notice, when I commence my reading, is the sheer amount of extraneous material. Even though originally I intended these pages to be a record of my experiences

of “dying,” thanks to my commitment to not censor anything, I netted data on everything else that happened to take place in my life at the time of writing: things I did, things I intended to do, things that were weighing on my mind undone, sadness at my inability to say “no” to an untimely request, intense regret after a rare night out, exasperation after losing a whole day of writing to help my husband pack for his mountain-biking trip, surprising eagerness to help my pregnant friend with cooking and cleaning (even though I am having extremely hard time accomplishing these very tasks in my own life!), and so on. As I look at the dazzling array of tasks and intentions, worries and wishes, joys and frustrations that populate my pages, I begin to realize that unfolding before me is a detailed chronicle of my daily existence. My initial reaction is a near-panic anxiety: *I am going to be buried under these pages! How on earth am I going to make sense of this nothing-barred narration?* Yet, as I continue my reading, I begin to see that an unexpected but significant benefit lay embedded in these countless pages. It is precisely because my writing contains the uncensored records of everything that concerned me at the time, they have become an extraordinarily clear window into my daily action: the very exhaustiveness of my writing allows me to see, for the first time in my life, the real scope of my working and resting—as it *is*, not as I *think* it is. By reflecting in depth on the material contained in these pages, I have an unprecedented opportunity to understand what is really going on in my vulnerability before burnout.

So, I return eagerly to my notebooks for a second, more focused round of reading. My key objective is to trace the outlines of my daily action: *What do I do on daily basis? Do I waste a lot of time? Where does my energy really go?*

Contrary to the dreaded expectation, I discover that I waste very little time. Indeed, I am pleased to observe that I routinely accomplish an impressive amount of work on any given day: my schedule is packed to the brim, and almost all my waking hours are “purpose-driven.” Yet, the feelings of smug gratification quickly give way to a sense of alarm, as I become conscious of the existence of strange variation in the scope of my daily action. Prior to my reading of these pages, I was convinced that my days were devoted to dissertation writing, house-cleaning, and the time-consuming work of cooking meals that comply with my strict dietary requirements; and I assumed that my struggle to meet these admittedly high demands had to do with the illness-related lack of energy. Yet, my reading reveals another kind of work taking place alongside the legitimate labors of dissertation-writing, cooking, and cleaning: the work that is “nice” but strictly speaking unnecessary: nursing abandoned plants, rescuing kittens left by the doors of the public library, knitting socks and hats for a women’s shelter, getting groceries for a homeless man, cooking meals for neighbors in crisis, helping a fellow graduate student with a writing problem, making cards from scratch for friends and family.... I am astonished at the sheer level of hyperactivity—the “violence of overwork” in which I continue to engage even in the context of chronic illness—that characterizes my days. Before long, I begin to see that my difficulty meeting the challenges of dissertation writing and house-keeping, has to do less with the inherently low energy, and more with the virtual absence of rest! I begin to see that I fail to accomplish what *truly* needs to be done, not because of not-working through procrastination or laziness, but because the maddening succession of projects, tasks, and preoccupations that I undertake *on top of* my legitimate work eats up the time when I could and should be resting!

The pages reveal that I am not entirely unaware of this problem. I read angry complaints about feeling overwhelmed, recurring fatigue, and chronic sleep deprivation. I note the succession of self-cautions and reprimands, the desperate resolution to “pay my debts,” and the oath to “drop things off my plate” that follows. And I nod appreciatively, as I observe the lull in activity and the long-needed rest being engendered by my discernment and decision-making. This is just what any reasonable person would do. Yet, this is where my rationality seems to have suddenly reached its limit: I am alarmed to observe, only a few pages later, a frenzy of action reassert itself, as I begin to fill up my plate again, not infrequently with the very things that I have just renounced. A great sense of bewilderment comes upon me, as I watch—in black and white of the page which leaves no room for arguing—the cycle of overwork, exhaustion, remorse, and swearing off the new projects take place over and over again. *Why do I keep doing this to myself?!*

The Participant quickly grows uncomfortable, then embarrassed, then ashamed of herself, and rushes to intervene: *I really don't understand how I have never noticed this before. I will get my act together! ...just snap right out of it!!* The Researcher is slower and much more forgiving: *Why...this is interesting. We don't really know: just what it is it exactly that we are trying to do at those times?* The subsequent review of problematic actions reveals that despite their rich variation, they could be abridged into the recurring patterns: “not wasting,” “saving,” “re-using and recycling,” “making things from scratch,” “growing my own food,” “being a good neighbor,” “expressing gratitude,” and always and everywhere, regardless of my personal state of well-being, “caring for others.”

And strangely, the simple act of looking at my daily doings from the position of not-knowing and classifying them into an explicit patterns of action begins to trigger

memories of my past experiences that involved similar actions: my Korean grandmother collecting odds and ends, making old clothes into new clothes and quilts, inventing new dishes to utilize the tougher parts of vegetables and stretch out the very rare cuts of meat; my Korean grandfather who raised chickens and rabbits and could, according to neighbors, “grow anything but toilet paper in his garden”; my mother and three aunts staying up all night on a weekday, canning seventy jars of pickles—an unexpected gift of surplus cucumbers from the mother’s co-worker; the apartment neighbor returning our bowl, filled to the brim with fresh big blackberries from her garden, the same bowl that two days prior my grandmother sent over with some rice pilaf; a school ceremony of honors for me in the fifth grade, after I formed a “help-patrol” for the elderly citizens of our town. The stream of memories grows, as I continue to identify the recurring patterns in my action and, even though I am unable to find an exact match for every specific behavior I observe, I am struck by the obvious parallels between my current behaviors and the characteristic activities of the primary communities of my childhood: my family of origin and the number of cultural and ethnic groups that I have been a part of, growing up within a larger Korean and Middle Asian population of the former USSR.

The meaning behind the action of my “ancestors” is of course, very clear: their behavior worked to maximize the chances of their survival. Saving, reusing, making things from scratch, gardening, and farming were necessary to supplement the more expensive groceries, clothes, and household items that came from the store and the market. Prizing food and shelter ensured that the most basic needs of our family were met throughout the year. Being a good neighbor, proper expression of gratitude, and excessive reciprocity was crucial for sharing the resources. Emphasizing “caring for others” over “caring for the self”

formed a cornerstone of the community-centered life ethics. The consequences would be dire indeed, if my family did not participate in these practices. Yet, when I look at my life, which now unfolds in a very different set of socio-economic and political circumstances, these actions just don't make sense! I am no longer in the conditions of food deficit. The time that I spend on knitting my own sweaters or making powerbars from scratch for my husband is more valuable than the money we would spend on them in the store. And, no matter how good a neighbor I become to others, the code of neighborly honor never seems to take root among my fellow Americans: no matter what I send over, ninety percent of the time the bowl returns empty (*if it returns at all*).

It seems that I should “get it” by now and stop doing those things. Yet, the longer I read and reflect on my deeply puzzling yet enduring commitment to this “nice but unnecessary work,” the more I realize that it stems from a deeper place than the domain of cool rationality. Something much more powerful, if hidden, is at work. My pages reveal that the actions that I undertake carry a strong sense of urgency and emotional charge. I do in fact understand that there is no need for me to perform them now, and that these nice but not truly necessary actions subtly, but really, harm the legitimate work of my dissertation writing and even my medical recovery, and yet, I feel “hooked,” when I perform them. They are accompanied by the feeling of formidable, hot-blooded inevitability, a matter of life and death: they “must” be done—or else!!

Else what?—quietly whispers the Researcher. After several moments of stunned silence, in a strange childish voice, the squirming Participant begins to produce a set of confessions: “If I don't save, re-use, make things from scratch and grow my own food, and we keep on buying all those things, Mark and I will run out of money...and then...we will

die—this is even more important now that I have not had a paying job for so long!” “If I don’t share my food and good fortune when I have it with people around me...and if I don’t express gratitude excessively, then they won’t want to do anything for me...so...when hard times fall, I will die—all the more so now, that I have been cut off nearly completely from my family and friends!” “Focusing on others, monitoring their moods and desires, anticipating their needs, making sure they like me...keeps me safe...if I don’t do that, they will abandon...or attack...me...and then, I will die.” “I *HAVE* to take care of my family...even when it harms me...because if I don’t, they won’t be able to make it...and then, well, it will just be the end of the world.”

I sit quietly for a long time. Caught off guard like this, I begin see that my failure to rest is not merely a matter of unsuccessful inaction, but an active and extremely diligent investment of energy into the alternative action. It is a matter of a “competing commitment.” I feel as if the curtains that separate my action and my intention have suddenly parted, and I have caught a glimpse of the invisible puppeteer who is really responsible for the frenzied dance of my daily doing. The conscious mind quickly tries to protest: *I can’t possibly believe THAT. That’s just ridiculous!* Yet, its feeble protestations are drowned by the resounding conviction from the far deeper layers of awareness, the gut: extreme as they may seem, the beliefs that I have just spelled out ring true. And in their light, my seemingly senseless behavior is revealed as anything but foolish. Within the universe of my assumptive designs, I *had* to work hard, no matter the cost: survival must take precedence over rest.

It is something of a paradox that becoming conscious of the assumptions that animate my restless action generates such a profound sense of relief. The suppositions I voiced are decidedly not of the glorious kind, and I would be mortified to acknowledge them as my own in public. And yet, discomfiting as they are, they enable me to know and understand myself in a way that I have never been able before. And it is this movement of self-understanding—of putting into words, for the first time in my life, that what I have known so deeply, and that what I been equally deeply unaware of—floods me with an intense and until-now-unknown feeling of wholeness, of coming home to the parts of my self that I have never seen before. Thus, even though what I have uncovered is rather painful, the pain itself marks the birth of a new, and more restful, self—because it is no longer so completely alienated from itself. Beginning to understand the hidden sources of my restlessness becomes a peculiar path to rest.

But there is more. In the wake of new understanding comes a heartfelt recognition of how hard it has been for me to live like this all these years: not only to work so much and rest so little, but also to suffer in that fatigued state from my misguided attempts at forced resting, and subsequent self-scolding for their inevitable failure. And in response, the attitude of a clear-eyed kindness towards myself—the “self-compassion” about which I have read so much in books, and which I have tried so earnestly, and with so little success, to cultivate—suddenly wells up, spontaneously and effortlessly, from within. It is this shift from the ignorance-bred hostility, to the kindness born of insight, that brings my budding restfulness onto an entirely new level: no longer is it limited to the side-effects of learning to be a dispassionate observer of my experience, made possible by my practice of writing meditation, it is now blooming into an attitude of a genuine unconditional friendliness

towards myself, rooted in the deeply felt realization that my restless behavior—no matter how confusing, illogical, or even harmful—*is* deeply meaningful, and that finding its meaning is key to my restoration, healing, and peace. Thus, even though I am still faced with the challenge of finding a way to respond constructively to the problematic assumptions that drive my restless action, the new way of relating to myself is yet another milestone on my path of becoming restful.

The challenge of how to respond constructively to the problematic assumptions underlying the restlessness of my behavior, however, is the next crucial step of my investigation. As I look back over the assumptive statements I made, trying to discern a way to interrupt my seemingly overwhelming compulsion to action, I wonder how many more assumptions I have that stand in the way of my resting (if I can judge by just how impossibly hard it is for me to rest, there must be dozens, if not hundreds, more!) Trying to uncover and respond to them one by one, therefore, is definitely *not* the way to proceed: it would take years of uncovering and reflecting—certainly not in time for completing my dissertation. Yet, it strikes me that, extreme as they are, these assumptions are far from being random. There is an unmistakable sense of internal coherence and connection between them. I feel as if they point towards a greater, even if invisible, whole, in the same way as the massive surface buildup of ice and snow betrays the presence of the underlying, and much bigger, body of the iceberg. What these assumptions reveal is my “gut” perception of reality, the lived sense of the world: what it is like, how it works, and what I must do to survive in it. They say that the world is a place of scarcity and danger, where resources are few and threats are many, and the ones who make it are not necessarily “the fittest” but those who

are willing to work exceedingly hard, make do without rest, and stick together against the work of resisting external oppression and the common challenges of securing food and shelter.

Becoming conscious of the fundamental outlines in my existential perception of the world triggers a new wave of memories. The stream of proverbs and aphorisms that adorned my family life, running alongside the neighborhood philosophy of living, begin to come back to me in the sudden reminiscence: *Сделай дело, гуляй смело!* (“you may only muster courage to go for a walk, when your work is accomplished!”; cf. business before pleasure); *Умри—но сделай!* (“die—but do!”); *Не расслабляться, товарищи!* (“you cannot relax just yet, comrades!”); *Выспишься в гробу!* (“you can always catch up on sleep, when you are in the casket!”); *Сам погибай, а товарища выручай!* (“even if you yourself are perishing, you must come to the aid of your friend!”); and the oft sounded summons at the unexpected communal distribution of goods: *Надо брать!!!* (“must stock up!!!—whether [you] need it or not”). These snippets of wit and wisdom are followed by the longer morals and admonitions, memories of repeated instruction from the family and community elders: “Conduct yourself well: we all will be judged on account of your behavior;” “Never lose vigilance, you just can’t be too careful (with special emphasis on physical and sexual safety);” “Seize *every* opportunity, and maximize—always and everywhere—you may *never* get another chance”; “Study hard and be the best student you can be: education is one thing they cannot take away from you”; “If someone shows you an act of kindness, go above and beyond to reciprocate, or better still, ‘pay it forward,’ that way you will always have good will awaiting for you in the future”; “Don’t throw away anything, you never know when you may need it”; and the greatest compliment I could

ever earn from my grandmother, “легкая на подъем!” (she is “easy on the ascent,” always ready and willing to do something).

As I record these memories, I notice that these ordinary expressions—with their insistence on the importance of assiduous work, habits of frugality and ingenuity, values of self-sacrifice and lack of rest (seen not merely as a necessity, but a virtue!), and the overwhelming sense of responsibility for others—communicate, indirectly yet powerfully, the lived sense of the reality that is profoundly similar to the one that is revealed by my personal problematic assumptions. The stories that people in my community told, the very language that they used, together with the customs, practices, and relational patterns they upheld—not unlike the monastery’s Community, Practices, and Texts—imagined the world. The “world” that the minority group imagined in one of the republics of the USSR under the Communist rule was indeed a place of scarcity and danger.

And I begin to see that this worldview, embodied and embedded in the life of my community of origin, in turn, creates a distinct sense of self. Natasha the “good girl,” the “pride of the family,” the “straight A-student” is not necessarily a bad Natasha, but a very restless and a very tired one. She is restless because she has to work exceedingly hard, trying to provide for herself—by searching and securing the meager resources, by building networks of support with other people, by taking care of her kin. For her, work is the only path to stability, security, and hope for the future. She is restless also, not merely because she works until the sinews ache, but because she perceives rest itself as a perilous, terrifying occasion: to rest is to be left behind, to never rise above the poverty one is born into, to jeopardize all that has been earned by the hard labor of those who came before. She can only concede to rest when the harm of not-resting begins to exceed the hazards of resting.

And above all, she is restless because no matter how hard she works and how little she rests, she can never reach the state of “enough.” Tired as she is, she can never rest “in peace”: in the world of scarcity and danger, keeping oneself in existence is an unremitting occupation.

Yet, what I am most surprised to discover is not merely that my deep fatigue and struggle with rest could be traced back to the hard life of Korean diaspora in Tajikistan before the collapse of the USSR (the fact that I am a restless child of a restless people seems obvious enough), but that all throughout my life my perception of the world has changed so little. As I moved from Tajikistan, to Central Russia, to Moscow, and finally to the U.S.A., I encountered and have become a part of other people. Yet, strikingly different as they are, the significant communities of my life—the rural farmers of Central Russia, the old Russian *intelligentsia*, the deeply inspired but also torn society of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the increasingly diverse (and increasingly racist) public of Moscow at the dawn of free-market economy, and the brilliant, highly sophisticated, and highly accomplished community of Emory university, have one thing in common: they too imagine the world as a place of scarcity and danger. Even though my life unfolded on the wide spectrum of geographical, socio-economic, political, and ethnic locale, my lived sense of the world has never been challenged.

Hence, all the difficulties of enculturation notwithstanding, Natasha the Restless felt profoundly “at home” with all these people, and her original habits of seeing and being in the world fit seamlessly into their communal praxis, receiving only greater refinement, cross-fertilization, and reinforcement. Thus, her hard-working Russian Korean mentality became amplified in her encounter with the Protestant work ethic. Her Korean “waste not-

want not” disposition readily embraced the ecological sensitivities of progressive America. Her skills and ingenuity in cooking, born of extreme shortage of resources in the former USSR, formed a ready bridge to the epicurean sensitivities of the American “foodie” culture. And the profound perfectionism that she inherited from the shame-driven Oriental culture and from the sweat-and-blood commitment of the Russian performing artists assumed even greater weight, when set against the backdrop of the dazzling narratives of success that define Emory’s “premier research university” culture. To be sure, the specifics of my working and reasons for not-resting as a child growing up in Tajikistan are very different from the scope of my working and reasons for not-resting as an adult living in America; yet, my underlying feelings of anxiety, disquiet, and the never-lifting fatigue betray the sense of identity that is profoundly similar in outlook.

The only community and place that challenged such perception of the world was the church. From the first moments of meeting the Russia Methodists, at the time when I was a hard-working medical student, I was astounded by their radically different logic of living and complete reversal of the law of punishments and rewards. They said God loves and is caring for everybody alike. They spoke of loving enemies, caring for the alien, protecting the widow and the orphan. They proclaimed the world not as a place of scarcity, competition, and “dog-eat-dog” danger, but as a dwelling place of Divine Mystery. It was a world in which love and good will were not to be earned, but came every day as a pure gift of God “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” It was a world where God created and is creating, the Source of life and well-being independent of what we do or whom we are friends with. Difficulties and hardships, pain and at times even genuine tragedy were not excluded from such a world; but they were placed in the presence

of the One who chose to enter and share, and in so doing redeem, the suffering. I sensed it right away: it was a world in which rest was possible. It promised freedom, liberation, healing. On a fundamental level, my adult conversion into Christianity rested on this single premise: the glimpses of peace, kindness, and goodwill that I caught in my first encounter with the religious community became for me a profound source of hope. I returned to the church, again and again, and eventually went to the seminary, because I longed to know, and inhabit, the world that the religious community imagined.

Yet, articulate as it was, the church's imagining of the new world was at best incomplete. While it spoke clearly, its testimony to God's world of bounty and beauty and unconditional love was always in competition with the alternative, and much louder, "preaching" of the secular culture. While it enacted the alternative meaning through story and ritual with much enthusiasm and dedication, its alternative praxis was always put in perspective by that of the surrounding society. Returning from Sunday worship service on the Moscow metro, shopping for groceries at the local supermarket, or filling out an application for graduate school in America, I could never forget that the world was still a place of scarcity and danger. Set against the backdrop of a far more powerful imaginer, the religious community could not imagine God's world holistically, and therefore, convincingly.

Intellectually, of course, this was validated by nothing less than the Bible itself: we see imperfectly, as through a dark glass; we live by faith, stretching towards the realities hoped for, not seen. Existentially, however, it created an unfortunate situation: it meant that the core identity of Natasha the Restless and her complex habits of doing, valuing, and relating were never reached by religious *metanoia*. Her habits of overworking and lack of

rest, her drivenness and perfectionism, and all the people-pleasing, compulsively care-taking patterns of interpersonal relationship and codependent behaviors simply got transferred onto the soil of religious living. If anything, they now received a new, and far more powerful, impetus: hard work, not-resting, and self-sacrifice were now a matter of “faithful ministry.” They were done “for God.” I went from the medical university to the seminary and then to the school of theology, from Russia to America, but the vision of the world in which rest was a possibility, promised by the religious community, remained exactly that—a “vision”—an object of intense longing, a source of undying hope—but never an actuality of lived experience.

That’s why I was so taken by the monastery! Because the church only inadequately imagined the vision of which it spoke so well, my longing grew all the more intense. Because the church helped me study the vision of God’s world so thoroughly, it prepared me to understand the language of the monastery imagining. Like the key and the lock, the church’s verbal proclamation and the monastery’s embodied imagining came together, opening for me a door into a new reality. The monastery breathed life into the frozen religious symbols, dressed the thin skeleton of the doctrine in flesh of daily practices, relationships, and behaviors, and surrounded me with a community whose very life was a witness to the utmost validity of the church’s vision. In the intense quiet of the monastery retreat, what was long a subject of my innermost belief became a matter of embodied actuality; what was inwardly hoped for became publicly validated. The monastic Environment, Community, Practices, and Texts made the religious world tangibly manifest—and as such, revealed as *true*.

And it is precisely because in the monastery, the religious world was not merely a matter of intellectual supposition but a place to inhabit, that it had the power to bring a new self into being. Natalia that comes into existence in the quiet seclusion of the monastery retreat rests so well, not because she has found a facility with dramatically reduced external stimulation, limited social engagement, and with all meals provided, but because there she inhabits a radically different place. Natalia is restful, because in the monastery she knows work not as a sole means of keeping herself in existence but as simple participation in the eternal creativity of the Holy. Natalia is restful, because in the monastery she knows rest not merely as a matter of concession to her bodily weakness but as an epitome of human existence, the perfect point of entry into communion with the Divine. And above all, Natalia is restful, because in the monastery her somber mentality of scarcity and danger is replaced with the profound awareness of God-given beauty, bounty, care, protection, and unconditional love. All her troubles and tensions notwithstanding, Natalia the monastery child *can* rest in peace: for she knows that in life, in death, in life beyond death, she is not alone.

But of course something is amiss with her knowing. For soon after returning home from retreat, she begins to doubt and forget that what in the monastery, only a few days ago, seemed so obvious and self-evident. As Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* (the Snow Maiden) melts in the rays of the approaching Sun, so Natalia the Peaceful quickly vanishes when she comes in contact with the surrounding society.

It is this painful, and recurring, reverse transformation in my identity—a “strange case of Natalia and Natasha”—that alerts me to the fact that the monastery, powerful as it is in its imagining, did not fully succeed in making me restful. Going to the monastery for

retreats had indeed accomplished something crucial for my becoming: because the monastery re-imagined the world holistically, it provided me with the immediate, firsthand experience of the religious beliefs, which until then I knew only on the level of “theory.” It made my rest a genuine possibility. Yet, it is precisely because my religious experience of the world was confined only to the temporary seclusion of retreat, my transformation into a restful person was real, yet impermanent. My budding *new* knowledge of the world, brought to life by the monastery, had not yet had time to come to terms with the vast body of my *old* knowledge of the world, inherited from the primary communities of belonging. When brought back under the influence of these familiar imaginers, I could not help but revert to my earlier habits of imagining: the newly discovered tenets of religious understanding, however life-giving, could not override the life-long truths of the secular conditioning. A passage from many years ago, read in the dark hours of Vigils, suddenly arises in my mind: “*Christ is on their lips but the world is in their hearts.*” For the first time it occurs to me that what the second-century unknown Christian writer lamented might have been not an occasion of an overt hypocrisy but a painful reality of incomplete knowing.

I step back from my voluminous pages, like from a painting, to allow the many fragments of insight coalesce into a “big picture.” I begin to see that my struggle with rest takes place at the intersection of the two worldviews of my life. The postulations of religious belief are my pride and my trophy: I have studied them for many years and can shout them from the housetops. This is the *worldview that I officially hold*. Yet, beneath the shiny armor of religious doctrine lies a deeper layer of perception, the quiet whispers of the heart that echo

the secular mentality of the surrounding culture. These are *the assumptions that hold me*: while by and large hidden from my conscious awareness, they are thoroughly embodied in my practices, relationships and behaviors; while never formally acknowledged, they are the ones that truly run the show. Because they were received not through the medium of explicit schooling, but directly, via lived experience, the tenets of my secular worldview acquired the status of profound existential truths, which I accept and obey without thinking.

The only reversal of power between the religious and secular sides of my creed that ever happened in my life, took place in the monastery, because for the duration of retreat, the patterns of the monastic Environment, Community, Practices, Texts became a robust “plausibility structure” for religious belief, thus, making up for the inherent weakness of my religious knowing. At the same time, the monastic way of life brought validity of my secular worldview into question: an invitation to retreat with monks was not only a merely an offer to leave “the world” temporarily behind, but a much more subversive proposition—to deviate from the habits of action and perception that until then I have been so unquestioningly accepting. It was a call to active doubt and disobedience.

Thus, I begin to see that the lasting transformation of my identity depends on one condition: my ability to make this change in the balance of authority between the religious and the secular counterparts of my personal belief system permanent. In order to truly recover from burnout and become a restful person, I need to let the religious faith that I explicitly profess trickle all the way down into the deeper recesses of my heart, replacing the tacit-yet-operative assumptions of my secular knowing. My transformation into a restful person is contingent upon my ability to change my worldview.

Impossible!—cuts through the all-knowing and hardnosed voice of reason. A *psychological and existential impossibility*: *How could you change something of which you are not even fully conscious? How do you go about altering that what permeates every aspect of your existence?!* Yet, the intuition lingers: it occurs to me that rest itself, in its arduous activity of inaction, not unlike the work and war of monastic retreat, may provide an effective if paradoxical pathway. It is precisely because the proposition to integrate rest into the flow of my daily living would demand going against the grain of my life-long habits of busyness and overwork, that it has the power to *expose* the secular assumptions that undergird these habits. And, it is precisely because the requirement of inaction would cut into the existing body of my practices and behaviors that it has the power to *deconstruct* the praxis that embodies and actively maintains these tacit-yet-operative assumptions. At the same time, the introduction of so novel an occurrence as resting into my work-centered and achievement-driven lifestyle would offer me an unprecedented opportunity not only to *gain* existential knowledge of the radically alternative religious affirmations, but to *develop* a body of practices and behaviors that can serve as foundation for new praxis. If actualized, my resting would become both an act of resistance to the old precepts of my secular mentality and the opportunity to deepen the authority of my religious knowing.

Yet in the end, my courage to rest comes not merely from considerations of my reason or intuition but from the intensity of my hunger for rest itself. I think back to my monastic retreat, to the mid-term breaks and summer vacations that interspersed the demanding pace of school years, to the occasional hours of reading a novel, playing guitar, sitting in the sun. It occurs to me that, for various reasons, the years of writing my dissertation on rest have become the most rest-deprived patch of my existence. So, as much

for the sake of getting to the bottom of my dissertation argument, as for the sake my own deeply exhausted self, I make a decision to introduce rest into the busy contours of my living.

And I have just the thing to try! For the last several years, plowing through the literature on writing problems, creative recovery, and broader psychology of creativity, I kept coming across a fascinating observation made by artists and researchers alike: rest is essential to the dynamics of creative process. Coming by many names—Artist’s Date, caring for the Inner Child, Waiting—it seeks to convey that, for creative individuals, honoring their times of leisure is as important as staying faithful to their work. My mind rushes to the pool of possibilities: my enduring, and almost physical, longing to play piano (something I have not done for almost two decades of my life!), to the painting studio several blocks from our apartment (on which I have been spying for the last two years, pouring over its class offerings and peering through its windows—but only on the weekends, when nobody is there to see me), and to the recent suggestion of my rheumatologist to try Pilates or ballet as a way to address my musculoskeletal instability (and I wonder about the hours of my childhood spent mesmerized, watching black-and-white reruns of *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *La Bayadère*, and *Giselle* from Kirov and Bolshoy).

As I contemplate these memories and ideas, I feel a surge of pure, childlike joy welling up within—something, I suddenly realize, I have not felt in years. Behind it, however, hides a less noble attraction. Play offers a safer way to rest: my intention of sponsoring a shift in my worldview and the work of caring for the Artist aside, I secretly

hope for a work-related “payback”: *could a little bit of leisure increase my writing productivity?*

In the span of next several months, I sign up for a Watercolor class at the local painting studio, purchase an adult ballet beginner DVD set, and (*pinch me!*) receive an electronic *Yamaha* piano from my family in lieu of “Christmas gifts for the rest of my life!” Yet, as time passes by, I begin to see that, to rest, I need something more than creative outlets for leisure. Fun and refreshing as they are, these activities are still *activities*, and my life on the whole is already exceedingly active. Moreover, I see how all too easily I transfer my achievement-driven, perfectionistic, production-oriented habits of action even onto the action that is meant to be play: I watch my watercolor lessons, originally meant to be done just for the fun of it, turn into the “masterpiece” production (each taking many months to complete!); I observe my piano playing, originally meant just to touch the keys, become infected with the same perfectionistic, controlling attitude to performance; and, I shake my head in disbelief, when I injure myself doing ballet, in a stubborn attempt to strengthen my feet quickly. It is becoming obvious that, to rest, I have to balance the activities of resting with the non-activities of resting.

I spend next several months, trying to direct my efforts towards getting enough sleep, meditative stretching and movement, being in nature, and having some “downtime.” My intention is to bring balance into the overwhelming busyness of my days, reducing the scope and level of intensity that characterizes my action. Yet, even as the focus of my attention is the proper ordering of *my* days, I cannot fail to notice how adversely my concern for the needs of *others* affects my ongoing efforts. I watch myself sacrifice my watercolor class in order to bake gluten-free, low-glycemic cookies for my husband (so

that he would not succumb to the temptation for far less healthy sweets). I boil in silent rage as I interrupt my best writing hours with a long Skype conference, when my mother ignores my request to send an email instead (although outwardly, of course, I am all roses). I see myself forgo sleep to talk to a friend about her love troubles, and I ride my bicycle to the library in the midday heat to deliver a spare laptop cord to a fellow doctoral student with computer difficulties.

Much of this care is merited, but much is not. I am struck by the imbalance not merely in the direction of my action, but in the very intensity of my awareness of the needs of others: it is as if I have billions of invisible receptors that, without my conscious intention and at times even contrary to it, are constantly engaged in the work of “reading” the needs of those who surround me—while for my own needs, I have only a single receptor, and even that so withered that it takes a special vigilance and ongoing conscious attention to keep in operation. I am all too aware of the tremendous value of such a capacity for care: it is this very ability that had earned me high esteem in CPE (“uncommonly developed empathy and responsiveness to the needs of others”) and, in some instances, it made a tangible positive difference. Yet, for the purposes of my own rest, it poses no small a problem: it makes it much harder not merely to reserve time and energy for my needs, but to become cognizant of them in the first place!

So I begin the arduous, and in many ways so wrong-feeling, work of fashioning a third layer of support for my rest, by seeking to understand and reshape the long-established patterns of my relationship with others. At first, much of it is internal. Once more, I write countless pages, detailing the “sacrifices” I make, their effect on my ability to rest, and the scope of actual benefits delivered to other people. I also note the darker side of my care-

taking: the attitude of “fixing” that creeps into some of my friendships, the heavy toll that my ongoing “monitoring of needs” takes on my husband, the disturbing posture of infantile helplessness that my mother (usually a strong, authoritative, and highly capable personality) begins to assume in my presence. I try to identify patterns, note the “triggers”, and draw out lessons. Later on, I attempt to act differently: to focus on my own needs, to reign in my care-taking impulse, to acknowledge the limitations of my time, energy, knowledge, and resources. I try to set boundaries, say “no,” claim my feelings, and even ask for help. I tackle again the problem of my disproportionate concern for neighbors-in-need.

Building this multi-tiered support does pay off: for the first time in many years, my days and weeks begin to bear signs of rest. I look forward to Wednesdays for my watercolor class—and am surprised, again and again, by its powerful impact on my writing. I delight in the movement and aesthetics of ballet. I relish the slow return of my ability to play piano, read for pleasure, and an occasional movie. I feel more empowered in my relationships. And every time I get seven hours a night of uninterrupted sleep or some downtime, I marvel at the profound change in my productivity and sense of well-being.

Yet, truth be told, for the vast investment of effort I am putting in to make rest possible, I am definitely not getting enough in return. I stop painting as soon as my (paid-for) watercolor class ends. After the weeks of initial excitement, my expensive piano is no longer played: I obsessively clean and check it weekly, but the actuality of practicing seems to be forever delayed, as I am besieged by vague but intense anxiety every time I think of playing it. The ballet DVDs and books for pleasure begin to collect dust. The same lack of progress characterizes my attempts to create a healthier relational equilibrium: the

boundaries I set get easily violated, “no”-s—ignored, my timid requests for help go unheeded; and more often than not, the needs of neighbors still take precedence over my own. Yet, the greatest failure befalls my attempts to introduce the times of quiet and inactivity into my life: sleep and self-care are the first to drop out, when things get busy; and my planned “downtime” usually turns into the “catch up”-time for cleaning, cooking, and paying bills. Despite the best of intentions and most dedicated of efforts, my resting remains highly erratic.

This time, however, I am far from being discouraged by failure. Rather, I approach it with an attitude of clear-eyed curiosity and curiosity. Both the Researcher and the Participant stand on the ready: they *expected* it. My failure to act in accord with my conscious intention to rest signals the presence of a powerful-yet-hidden body of assumptive knowledge: the tacit yet operative suppositions of my secular worldview. My ability to unearth, consciously examine, and make an informed decision regarding their validity is the “work” that needs to be done, if my rest is to become a genuine, and lasting, possibility. Without it, my recovery from burnout and my transformation into a restful person will never be a matter of permanent change.

So we set out to do that work. By now, the Researcher knows that the way to force the tacit assumptions into the clear view of consciousness is to imagine the dreaded action come to its full and natural end. By now, the Participant is more willing not only to imagine “the worst,” but to spell out what “goes without saying.”

The next several days are passed in what feels like an ongoing game of “hide and seek” with myself: I get to meet Natasha I always knew but never had a chance to consciously recognize. She is deeply ambivalent about play and pleasure: even at best, play

is “irresponsible and stupid and just a waste of time”; at worst, play is “the most inexcusable ingratitude for all the hard work that others do to provide for me”; and pleasure is “immoral!” She is appalled by her desire of good things “all for myself”—piano, brushes, *Arches* watercolor paper, and she fears that something really bad will happen to “balance out” the gifts she does not deserve. She prefers to take care of others, rather than make her own needs (or even feelings) known: this is what “good daughter, good wife, good *whatever*” would do; setting boundaries, saying no, asking for help is “next to impossible”, because “people really cannot handle it”; and she says she herself would not have any peace, if she denies the request, because she feels so deeply responsible for “...just about everybody.” Deep, deep down, she is terrified that if she does not “give, give, give,” she would lose peoples’ esteem, affection, the relationship itself. It is very difficult for her to care for the body, because body is “bad, dangerous, and...it was violated”; she therefore prefers the life of the mind, because it is “pure, orderly, and safe”—and she always gets rewarded for her smarts. She is torn between her deep desire for rest and the equally deep feelings of derision that it evokes: rest is “for losers!” Much as she complains about her violence of overwork and perfectionism, she also wears them as a “badge of honor”: they are *positive* flaws of her character. So much of who she is, is tied up with what she does, that the very idea of stopping and downtime is inherently terrifying. It comes too close to the ever-dreaded prospect of failure. Hard work and no rest is her “ticket to making it in life”—so, not surprisingly, she “just cannot afford to rest.”

As I complete these deductions, I am confronted with a potent mix of emotions. One part of me feels deeply embarrassed by the tacit truths I have lived by. Another—is simply astounded by my adherence to such primitive notions. Still another part is

overwhelmed by immeasurable sadness and grief: how much suffering has been generated by my rigid, absolutist, and above all, unthinking obedience to the storylines operating just below the surface of my conscious awareness. I take it all in. I am beginning to see that the hidden suppositions of secular worldview not merely robbed me of rest in my personal life, but infected the very way I understood and performed the work of ministry. It is these radical notions that put me on a fast track to burnout. *What do I do now?*

The first impulse is that of outright rejection: the Participant, ever fond of dramatic action, proposes to “ditch the whole thing!” Second thoughts come from the Researcher: she wants to get a “more nuanced” understanding. In the upcoming days, I compose a list of statements that capture my tacit-yet-operative secular assumptions and subject it to a full-scale examination of evidence. The research algorithm is simple: *Is the statement sound (rationally, psychologically, ethically, etc.)?—if YES, under which circumstances?—if NO, why?, and what alternative proposition could be suggested?*

The resulting catalogue of statements, circumstances, and counter-statements is long and unruly. Yet, seeing that list—my implicit assumptions laid side by side with my now deliberately chosen set of beliefs—marks the beginning of real hope. To my surprise, I discover that some of my tacit suppositions do have genuine if limited validity: there *are* times, when play and pleasure are indeed irresponsible, hard work and not-resting become an inevitable or even necessary course of action, and self-sacrifice—a truly called-for part of good ministry; there *is* a place for intelligent disciplining of desire, pursuit of excellence, and putting to good use my formidably developed capacity for care. At the same time, my other operative assumptions—such as the ones related to my intense fear of abandonment, deeply scarred notions of the body, and the not so subtle vein of self-abasement—are

deeply problematic: they are rationally, psychologically, and ethically unsound, and genuinely harmful. I also note that most of my counter-statements for these assumptions are of religious kind. This, too, is not unexpected: it is the tangible proof that in my assessment of religious worldview as foundational for my restfulness I was not mistaken. The promise that the religious view of reality held for my healing and liberation, which I intuited in my very first encounter with the church, and then again during my times at the monastery, is now confirmed in the quiet of my study.

Equipped with the new understanding of my deep-laden habits of perception that undergird my habits of excessive action, I recommence my efforts of introducing rest into my daily living with renewed enthusiasm. Surely, now that I have discovered, analyzed, and made an informed decision about what I really believe in, I would be more successful. Yet, the reality does not live up to my expectations. Day after day, week after week brings disappointing results. I watch myself, once more recoiling from play, dodging downtime, being afraid of pleasure. I am filled with helpless rage and resentment, as I see myself conforming to the familiar mold of being “nice” and being “good,” of hiding my feelings, glossing over my needs, and selling myself into the slavery of compulsive care-taking. Profound sadness comes upon me as I observe myself betraying my body yet again. I do understand the language of my painful actions. I see their meaning clearly all the way through to their assumptive source. Yet, if anything, my understanding makes my inability to change them is all the more bitter. Slowly but surely it is becoming clear to me that the movement of insight (no matter how in depth) and the effort of will (even as strong as mine) alone are not sufficient to overcome the momentum of life-long conditioning.

This is when, for the first time for the duration of my monastic encounter, I begin to understand why monks speak of “dying as the false self.” It is not a metaphor or dramatic embellishment but a literal, unadorned truth. If I am to conduct myself differently in my work, rest, and relationships, changing my *mind* is not enough; it is my whole “*self*”—the entire corpus of rational, affective, volitional, imagination- and memory-related habits, the intricate patterns of behavior and attitude, valuing and relating, and the myriad of biochemical, neurological, physical and psychological reactions that have evolved in conjunction to these habits and patterns, which come together to form my distinct personality—that needs to be altered. This self is “*false*,” not because it is duplicitous, but because it is fundamentally mistaken about who it is and what keeps it in existence. It is a captive to its habit of defining itself by the external conventions of the surrounding society, and to its belief that its life, honor, and ultimate satisfaction is a fruit of its own effort. It is precisely because its habit is so deeply ingrained, and its belief—so earnest (they are the foundational structures of its identity!), that intellectual persuasion or effort of will are insufficient agents of transformation. “*Dying*” is the only way: because the false self is convinced that its own work is the bedrock of its identity, and that its relentless exertion is what keeps it in existence, it will *only* be convinced otherwise, if it dares to stop its fretful labors, its terrified flight from perceived oblivion and the threat of nonbeing, in order to enter the dark terrain of failure—where it can watch itself, in the indubitable truth of firsthand experience...survive its own death. The journey of becoming a “*true self*” is travelled by the repeated living through the experiences that are perceived by the false self as deadly.

I sit awhile, dumbfounded by the divine irony: in order to become restful, I will have to not merely recognize failure as the greatest fear of my life, but make it my primary path to restfulness. It is precisely because my false self, developed in response to the secular truths of my upbringing, has truly become my “second nature,” I need to be placed under the conditions of witnessing, again and again, its much-dreaded death, in order to become aware of the ultimate reality and veracity of my “first,” and true, nature. The movement of insight, intellectual commitment, and volitional power will regain their power only when they are placed in the context of existential discovery.

Two things follow from this. First, the realization of the nature and the painful predicament of the false self explain why my resting is such an impossible undertaking: in essence, for me, to rest is to condone the death of my only known (even if false) self. Confronted by such terrifying a prospect, I do *anything* I can to avert it. Therefore, to make my resting possible, I need to approach rest, not merely as a self-evident good, not as a cornerstone of sustainable productivity, not even as a foundation of self-care and relational healing, but as a movement of “religious observance”: the time when I stop in order to consider and experience the fundamental (even if not immediately evident) truths of my existence. Moreover, I need to remember that, by definition, my acts of resting (just as my attempts at changing my computer-bent posture!) are going to feel wrong and seem unbearable. So, when I am planning an occasion of resting, I must recalibrate my expectations: it is not going to be something “nice and wonderful”; it is going to be an occasion of warfare—and I must be prepared to die.

Second, to be effective, my attempts to die as the false self must be matched by the work of keeping alive the memory of my true self. This means that I need to engage in an

intelligent and genuine rebuilding of my spiritual practice, which for a long time now has been confined to the domain of mute longing. I need to do the work of reminding myself of the religious assumptions that I hold, while I engage in the work of deliberate forgetting of the secular assumptions that hold me. I need to create a large enough context for failure so that when I practice my resting and my dying “for God,” I can rest, and die, in peace.

This seems like an enormous proposition, too big and too intricate to carry out. *Goodness gracious, I am just trying to get a little rest here! That’s all. Does it have to be so complicated?* It does not—if I remember that it is rest itself that lies at the heart of my desire to change the fundamental habits of my perception and action. To be effective, my work must restful. To be restful, my work of changing habits must be the work of changing *mini*-habits: I need to break down the enormity of my “dying as the false self”-undertaking into a less threatening succession of the little “d”-deaths.

So once more I enter the ordinary, obscure, and laborious work of learning to rest. But this time, I make no plans for special Artist’s Dates, daily ballet practice, three-times-a-week piano sessions, or weekly painting. I forgo a serious conversation with my husband about a more fair distribution of house-keeping chores; and I spare my mother a lecture on boundaries and importance of honoring my “no.” I waste no time trying to create the “ideal routine” that would provide me with some downtime and eight hours of sleep daily, even as it would also ensure that I get my writing done, house—clean, food—prepared, and friends and family—not deprived of my presence. Instead, keenly aware of the immensity of change that I am asking myself to undertake, I begin with the tiniest of baby steps. I will focus on creating conditions for deliberately unraveling the seemingly monolithic nature of my secular suppositions.

I set my painting treasures near my writing desk, just to look at them: *will Mark and I really go broke, because I bought the artist-grade pigments and a dozen brushes?* I uncover my piano and sit quietly, taking in the black and white expanse of its keys: *what kind of catastrophe do I expect as a punishment for my desire?* I stop doing dishes and cooking on the weekends (and remove myself to the library to avoid temptation): *will Mark really not be able to get by without me?* With time, I get more daring: *Will a thirty-minute morning walk or ten-minute ballet breaks from writing really endanger my dissertation progress? Will I obliterate my chances to graduate, if just for two hours on the weekend, I let myself lie in bed, reading a novel and eating cherries? Will my mother really suffer irreparable ruin if I don't pick up the phone?* Still later, life itself seems to be eager to gift me with opportunities for practice. New neighbors move in and, though dying of embarrassment every time I see them, I let the imperative of “welcome cookies” slowly burn out of me. An old friend asks to meet, and under the threat of dissertation deadline, I get the courage to say that I will not be able to; the ensuing silence becomes a perfect setting for dying to my fear of abandonment: many a night, I agonize over the “no” that has ended our friendship—but I do not call back.

Whereas my small experiments with rest become a context for intentional testing of my tacit secular assumptions, my spiritual practice becomes a time for the purposeful naïve listening to familiar suppositions of my religious belief. This does not mean, however, a creation of anything elaborate. On the contrary, my spiritual practice remains poor and permeated with keen awareness that I am not very good at praying. I try out several newly published breviaries, but end up returning to the old Grail psalter that I brought from Gethsemani Abbey. For Trappists, the psalms for the *Little Hours* and

Compline never change, so I use the rest for *Vigils*, *Lauds*, and *Vespers*. I see myself being attracted to the primitive texts of the church: Desert Fathers and Mothers, Hesychastic writers, early mystics and contemplatives. Many of them speak the language of spiritual warfare—terrifying confrontations with self, demons, and with the seeming absence of God that take place in the desert—such language, though not infrequently obscure, rings for me deeply true. Later, I start adding short passages from the Gospels and Epistles to some of my offices. And even with those simple texts, I am far from making any extraordinary progress: rarely do I get to recite the entire assemblage of two *Nocturnes* assigned for *Vigils*; more often, I take one psalm per office; and occasionally, when the words strike me, I can stay with a single psalm for weeks at a time.

Yet, even though the contents of my prayer remain poor, my commitment to the liturgical hours themselves becomes critically important. I begin to see that just showing up, staying with the text, and being present to God—*Who is this God I am praying to? and, who is this “me” that prays, even as the war-drums of fear never cease playing the background?*—becomes a way of building faith. As I shuffle my ordinary activities of the day in order to fit ten-minute long “offices” in, as I strain to disengage myself from the soothing bustle of action in order to enter into the frightening passivity of contemplation, as I resist the temptation to get up and get busy with getting things done, as I feel anxiety, a sense of utmost impossibility, and dread of failure wash over me, again and again, for the entire duration of my meditation, I train myself in the art of believing that the Scriptural world that church and monastery imagine *is* the true world. After one such office—*“do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?”*—in a sudden stroke on insight, I link the established intervals of prayer with the small acts of body-care (simple

stretching, brief rubbing of neck or back, silent scanning of overall tension). A commitment of time becomes not only the means of wearing down my life-long habit of unthinking obedience to the precepts of secular mentality, but also the path of developing a habit of intentional hearing the newly embraced truths of my religious worldview.

After several months of such real-life experimentation with the secular and religious sides of my creed, I am struck by a paradoxical discovery. On the one hand, my struggle with rest has not changed much: it is *still* a mighty struggle. Yet, on the other hand, much has changed indeed: it is now a *fruitful* struggle. What I discover is that people don't die when I set boundaries. New neighbors become friendly even in the absence of welcome cookies. My mother remains in good health and mood—apparently unscathed by her inability to get hold of me in the most instantaneous manner. Mark is getting by “just fine, thank you very much” without my vigilant care-taking, and such a change even seems to be improving the dynamics of our marriage. Small snippets of painting and piano-playing are beginning to make their way into my days (and my tolerance for the feelings of impending doom in the aftermath of pleasure is increasing). Last but not the least, I rediscover in my body a source of much support, joy, and consolation: whether relishing the precision of ballet on a mini-break from writing or ending my day with a mindful body-scan, the physical movement is becoming for me a non-violent way of slowing down, entering a different, less rigid and driven, state of mind, and making my prayer genuinely embodied (and I delight in discovering a simple hip stretch that makes my sitting meditation a completely pain-free occasion).

But the most significant change takes place in the context of my prayer. While the realities of busyness, double-mindedness, and distraction always remain, the practice itself

is maturing. It is becoming softer, more flexible, less work-like. It is becoming restful. At times, the lines of Scripture pierce deeply through my heart—*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust your strength lies... My Father removes every branch that bears no fruit...Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss...Apart from me you can do nothing*—I have never heard anything more true in my whole life! What once was an object of theoretical reflection has become a matter of existential knowing. But above all, my prayer is becoming a place of my gradual awakening to the reality of the unknown God who nonetheless seems to be “nearer to me than I am to myself.” And from the place, I work and play, cook and clean, write and do ministry, and even inhabit the wounded complexity of my relationships anew: my labors of working and resting “for God” are transformed into a simple repose of discovering myself as the one who is working and resting *in* God.

Are these occasions glimpses of my true self? I will never know: for the ever-watching, ever-vigilant “I” is not there to see. All that remains in memory are the patches of “a sunlit absence.”

Yet almost imperceptibly gradually, new peacefulness and calm are beginning to seep into my life, my mind is becoming less ridden with stress, my posture feels more supple. This restfulness comes not through elimination or healing of the many and varied sources of my restlessness, but rather as an outcome of my intimate and ever-deepening familiarity with their nature and my ability to form new, more restful and life-giving, ways of responding to them—by continuing to test the limits of my secular knowing and by entering, deeper and deeper, into the dark vastness of my religious belief. This, perhaps, is the greatest source of my rest: getting to know my very unrest as tinged with God’s

Presence. And after a while, I begin to see that, for me, resting will always be a kenotic event, a time of trial and a call to radical emptying. Yet, my obedience to this call, somehow, is quietly rearranging my day and my week—creating a rhythm that, of all things, resembles monastic horarium and the Sabbath living. I smile: “...*and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*”

9.5 Looking Back at the Journey of Returning to the World

In this chapter, I described the last stage of my journey of recovering from burnout, the years that comprise my gradual “return to the world” as a more restful person and minister, as a result of my encounter with the Cistercian monastic tradition. I discerned several distinct phases in this period of my transformation: my *initial* perception of the problem of transferring the monastery gift of peace onto the soil of my daily living, and its solution, my *interim* (and shocking) realization of the real nature and the costs of such undertaking, and my gradual *final* insight into the inner dynamics of becoming restful and into the way by which I could participate in my own transformation.

This in-depth reflection on my experience brings forth a paradoxical discovery: the monastic remedy for my burnout is a process that bears profound similarity to the burnout itself. The intense but short occasions of the “work and war” of resting, which characterized the times of my retreat, in the post-retreat experience turn into the extended and gradually escalating process of undoing that affects not only the contours of my religious praxis, but indeed every area of my life. My post-retreats years of becoming restful under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition are marked by severe mental and emotional exhaustion, disruption of work habits, reduced personal accomplishment, significant unraveling of my

relationships, and a host of physical ailments—the very symptoms that burnout theorists from many fields identify as characteristic of the burnout syndrome.

This, perhaps, is the most dramatic testimony to the truly alternative nature of the Cistercian monasticism as a tradition of resting. In sharp contrast to other schools and traditions (psychological, sociological, human resource management, etc.), which focus their efforts on “saving” individuals and organizations from burnout, the monastic tradition seeks to “sponsor” a similar—dark and burnout-like—process, directed at the intentional uncovering and deconstruction of the habits of perception and action that are responsible for people’s unrest and vulnerability before burnout in the first place. In the monastic formative process, the very dynamics of disillusionment and breakdown of action that are responsible for the destructive effects of burnout are utilized in service of a constructive goal: the clearing of space for the discovery of more meaningful and valid ideals for working and living, and the formation of new, more sound and salutary patterns of self-understanding, interpersonal relationship, and behavior. The Cistercian monastic institution is a keeper of religious memory about rest: its paradigm of personal transformation is an embodiment of a radically alternative way to understand the nature and dynamics of becoming restful.

At the same time, it is precisely because the manner by which the monastery leads me “besides the still waters of rest” is so radically different, it is exceedingly hard to follow. The early sections of my narrative bear witness to my apparent confusion about the nature of this process and my repeated misunderstanding of how I can participate in it—all the more dangerous because so diligently enacted! Later, when by the sheer grace of God and my own dogged determination I finally arrive at the right destination, I am appalled by

what I find: having expected “green pastures,” and encountered instead the “valley of the shadow of death,” I begin to despair in conclusion that the return of familiar symptoms means that the monastery has failed to cure my burnout. Thus, just when it is reaching its most effective state, the monastic solution to my burnout is also most utterly distrusted. Finally, when at last I comprehend the nature of the Cistercian remedy for human restlessness, it takes me a long time to discover a practicable and effective way of responding constructively to its negative dimensions. The acute breakdown of my personal, professional, and relational patterns of behavior, and the cumulative fatigue make my “walk through the darkest valley” excruciatingly difficult. Even when I am fully convinced that my new life as a restful self is dependent on my dying as my old restless self, I doubt completely my ability to find a way to die as my old self—while still carrying on with its external responsibilities and duties.

Yet, it is not merely the counter-intuitive complexity of the monastic path to rest, profound disruption in my habits of action, and disorder in the very functioning of my faculties that makes my continued progress an extremely difficult undertaking. Rather, it is a pronounced lack of support that I experience during that time. My narrative reveals that at this, most critical juncture of my journey, I have the least amounts of guidance, care, and protection.

Such a statement is *not* meant to minimize the extent of personal support that I have received from the monastery. I remain keenly aware and deeply grateful for the unparalleled levels of love, wisdom, encouragement, and not the least prayer, that I continue to receive from the individual monks and lay Cistercians—at not one, but two (!) Cistercian foundations. Indeed, it is safe to assert that, in the divine economy of things and

due to the idiosyncratic circumstances of my journeying, the degree of presence and personal assistance that I have been given by the conventional monastic and lay Cistercian community goes far beyond those that are usually offered to monastery visitors.

At the same time, this statement *is* meant as a frank and clear-eyed observation of the logistical, institutional, and vocational realities that limit the extent of support that monastery can provide for its lay disciples. To begin with, the monastic formative process calls for not merely active participation in, but passive receptivity to the work of “being formed”—yet, by nature of the lay engagement with the Cistercian monastic tradition, the time that the monastery visitors spend in contact with the monastery’s *formative influence* is much less than the time that they away from it. Second, the inherent complexity of the monastic transformative process requires tremendous investment of experience, wisdom, and personal involvement on the part of senior members of the community (there is a reason why monastic formation of novices is understood as “pastoral care”); yet, the very nature of contemplative vocation stands in the way of allotting substantial *human resources* for the guidance of laity. Third, even though the fundamental meaning of the monastic paradigm of becoming restful is as true for people outside the monastery, as it is for the monks, the *vocational circumstances* of responding to this meaning in the complexity of daily living are, by definition, vastly different. Therefore, no matter how generous the monks are in giving their alternative lessons of rest to their lay co-journeyers, they cannot teach them how to apply those lessons outside the monastic enclosure. Fourth, it is the *institutional embodiment* of the radical nature of Cistercian commitment and renunciation that offers unmatched environmental support for the inevitable vicissitudes of personal becoming. A monk can go through the trial and tribulations of dying as the false self in the

safety and protection of the monastic enclosure; but for me, having to weather it out in the world and, therefore, lacking the logistical and financial support of the monastic institution and the profound legitimizing effect of the monastic community, such a journey was beset with additional difficulties and dangers.

Such is the last and less obvious testimony to the truly alternative nature of the Cistercian monasticism as a tradition of resting: it is not meant for laity. Even though my narrative (as well as the growing number of lay Cistercians worldwide) reveals that lay monastery visitors could, and do, become deeply affected and changed in the course of their monastic encounter, the Cistercian monastic tradition itself does not recognize laity as the primary object of its formative influence.

There comes then a point in my narrative when the positive outcome of my transformation is hanging by a very thin thread. My resolve to follow the monastic path to rest—not by running away, but going head into the many and varied causes of my restlessness—has brought me to the state of utter incapacitation. My old habits of action have suffered genuine disintegration. My physical, rational, and affective faculties have reached the condition of utmost confusion and nearly debilitating fatigue. I have suffered the loss of many significant relationships. My journey of becoming restful has brought me to the brink of personal and professional disaster. What then permitted me to make it? What made the difference, when the line between burning out in a constructive or injurious way became deeply obscure and dangerously blurred? What enabled me to cross “to the other side of death”—rather than to simply get lost in the middle of the struggle?

My in-depth reflection on my post-retreat experience brings forth a second, and least expected, discovery: it was my long-term involvement and training in another

tradition—that of theological education—that made crucial difference in the final outcome of my journeying. Four specific gifts that I received from the seminary were of decisive importance for my ability to “die onto life,” and in so doing, to pay the extraordinary price for the gift of peace offered to me by the monastery.

First, it was the tremendous amount of theoretical and practical knowledge that I received as a theology student in one of the leading institutions of the mainline, liberal Protestant theological education, which enabled me not only to make sense of the monastic lessons in becoming restful, but also to figure out how to effectively apply them in my own, very different from the monastery, context of personal and professional existence. My *theoretical familiarity* with diverse collection of academic subjects, disciplinary fields, theories of practice, religious and theological traditions, and broader cultural arts and resources—as well as my *practical expertise* in using their vocabularies, texts, and distinct frameworks of interpretation—gave me the tools and resources necessary for my in-depth understanding of “what was going on” in my dying as the false self, my active discernment of “what I should pray and hope for” as an outcome of this frightening process, and my gradual realization of “how I could best proceed.”

Second, it was the formidable *meta-competencies* that the seminary training left deeply ingrained in my psyche, that formed the core block of skills that I used for developing the ability to become both the participant and the researcher of my experience of dying. The capacity for detailed observation of my personal experience, the habit of critical thinking, the intense preoccupation with gaining “in-depth” understanding and passion for “thinking things through,” became a bedrock of my ongoing and much needed interrogation—“what do I need to do as a Participant, if I am right as a Researcher?”—that,

in due time, allowed me to develop a constructive response to the negative dimensions of my monastic experience and, therefore, die well. (And I can only guess the extent to which the countless verbatims, written in the course of my pastoral care and CPE training, affected my ability to create a truly “thick” description of my experience.)

Third, it was significant *mentoring relationships* that I formed during the years of my ministerial preparation that provided me with a small but critically important community of care. These people affirmed the validity of my scholarly work and the authenticity of my spiritual becoming, even when, by the looks of it, both suffered irreparable damage. Still more, these persons carried out the work of advocacy in the broader context of my academic performance, thus, providing for me the degree of institutional support and protection that was imperative for the successful completion of my journey. They shouldered the cost of my transformation, keeping faith while mine was “under construction.”

Finally, and perhaps most paradoxically, it was the *darker side of theological education* itself that gave me strength for the last leg of the journey. Whether becoming aware about the human origins of Scripture, politics of knowing, or incidents of abuse and injustice in the church, it is those experiences of “deconstruction”—the little “d”-deaths in which my seminary years abounded—that trained my courage, my stamina, my ability to process massive amounts of information in short periods of time, and, not the least, my capacity for continued functioning even when pushed to the utmost extreme of rational, emotional, and physical limits. They gave me the audacity to risk my life on one, ridiculously unbelievable, supposition: that I *could* survive my own death!

Thus, in the end of my in-depth exploration of my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, I reach a truly startling conclusion: *my ability to make good use of the monastic teaching of rest can be traced back to my professional training as a minister.* While without the monastery my journey of becoming restful could have never been started, without the seminary it would have likely been left unfinished! My transformation into a restful person and clergywoman took place at the crossroads between the Cistercian cloister and the seminary marketplace.

And this realization, in turn, gains fundamental significance, as I transition to the final chapter of my dissertation, seeking to imagine how theological education can become an important avenue for teaching rest and preventing burnout.

CHAPTER 10

CASE STUDY LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS: MONASTERY PEACE FOR SEMINARY STUDENTS

In this chapter the argument of my dissertation reaches its climax. I have reflected on the possibility, relevance, scholarly legitimacy, and validity of looking at the problem of ministerial rest and burnout through the lens of personal experience (chapters 1 through 6). I have presented a report of my case study of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition (chapters 7 through 9). In this final chapter, I transition to the overarching aim of my entire study, the formulation of a constructive proposal for addressing the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education, in light of insights and observations that have emerged in the course of my investigation.⁴⁸³

Two issues assume particular importance for the work of formulating a constructive proposal: the issue of generalization and the issue of normativity. As I discussed in my in-depth reflection of case study method (Chapter 4), it is erroneous to treat results of a case study investigation as the basis for *statistical generalization*, as if they were data collected from a survey sample to be used for making inferences about a larger population; rather,

⁴⁸³ In the “Introduction” to my dissertation (Chapter 1), as I described the delimitations of my study, I identified Candler School of Theology as the primary context for my research. It is therefore important to emphasize that when I refer to the “seminary” in the narrative of this chapter, I have in mind the institutions of theological education that are not unlike Candler: first and foremost, Methodist, but also the ones that belong to the so-called “liberal, mainline Protestant” heritage: Presbyterian, UCC, Disciples of Christ, moderate or liberal Baptist, and (with some qualifications) Episcopal and Lutheran. This is not to ignore the seminaries that belong to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but to acknowledge that these latter institutions are already in greater connection and continuity with the monastic world, and as such, they fall outside the scope of the normative relationship between the seminary and the monastery that I seek to envision.

the results of a case study should be seen as the findings from a specifically selected empirical experiment, used as a basis for drawing broader theoretical conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation, i.e., the work of *analytic generalization*. This means that, for the purposes of formulating my constructive proposal for addressing the problem of burnout in the context of theological education, it would be methodologically faulty to relate the findings from my personal case study to the population of seminarians who are studying to become ministers directly: the highly idiosyncratic nature of my personal circumstances, psychological makeup, and life experiences stand in the way of making any meaningful *statistical prediction* about the outcome of sending seminarians to the monastery for a retreat with an intention to help them to unlearn burnout. Rather, a valid generalization from my case study requires an indirect analytical approach: I must use the insights and observations that emerged in the course of my case study as a basis for developing broader theoretical suppositions about the process of becoming restful, and then use them as a heuristic template for drawing possible or hypothesized parallels between my experience of recovery from burnout and the seminarians' experience of ministerial preparation. It is the accomplishment of such *logical comparability* between the two contexts that will enable me to discern the ways of proposing a similar process of unlearning burnout in the context of theological education.

Since the overarching aim of my constructive proposal has to do with the praxis of seminary training of ministers, the normative theoretical suppositions that I seek to develop and use as a basis for relating my experience to that of the seminarians must be educational in nature. This means my case study findings must be re-conceptualized in educational terms: the insights and observations that emerged as a result of my reflection on my journey

of becoming restful under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition now need to be seen and re-interpreted within the framework of transformational learning. Given the two-fold focus of my case study and its two primary “subunits of analysis” (the monastery and the self), two distinct lines in the direction of re-conceptualization are possible: (1) I could draw theoretical conclusions on the level of the monastery as an *institution*, with an intention to understand the process through which it teaches rest to its visitors; or, (2) I could draw theoretical suppositions on the level of what was happening to me as a *person* in response to the monastery teaching, with an intention to understand the process of transformational learning.

At first glance, the first line of re-conceptualization appears to offer a more natural and desirable an approach. Because I seek to envision constructive changes for the institutional theological education of clergy, it seems highly plausible that drawing theoretical conclusions about *institutional* settings, practices, and conditions responsible for transformational learning would present a significant advantage over theorizing about the dynamics of my *individual* experience of transformation. And indeed, when I initially began my research, I conceptualized the normative vision for change in theological education precisely in those terms. I believed that if we could understand the particularities of the monastic educational process and reproduce it in the context of ministerial preparation, then the seminary, like the monastery, could teach rest and form restful persons, and in so doing become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout. Yet, in the course of my investigation, as I discovered greater complexity in the monastery’s “gift of peace” and became aware of the seminary’s intriguing contribution not only to my burnout but also to my recovery from it in the context of my monastic

encounter, I began to wonder and seriously doubt whether the institutional “imitation” of the monastery by the seminary is a practicable—or even desirable—vision for normative change.

The presence of doubts, of course, cannot serve as a sufficient basis for rejecting my initial sense of normative direction (no more than the presence of my earlier positive impressions could be considered a valid basis for its acceptance). What is necessary is a disciplined and in-depth reflection on both sides of the transformational process—the institutional realities that undergird the monastery’s transformational teaching of rest *and* the inner dynamics of my personal transformation into a restful person—with the intention to systematically examine my initial sense of normative direction, evaluate its strengths and limitations, and if necessary, offer a viable alternative. The first (“institutional”) round of reflection must address the three following questions: What promise does the normative vision of institutional imitation hold for the seminary’s teaching of rest? What problems or limitations arise in the course of imagining a replication of the qualities of monastic environment, practices and community life in the context of theological education? And, if the normative vision of institutional reform is found unsatisfactory, what potential alternative could be considered? The function of the subsequent (“individual”) round of reflection is to double-check the validity and deepen the meaning of the alternative vision for normative change, and it calls for careful consideration of the following questions: Does a systematic and in-depth reflection on the inner dynamics of my personal transformation into a restful person support or contradict the alternative vision for normative change? What positive outcomes could be identified as a result of such a vision coming to life in the context of theological education? At the same time, are there any potential constraints

that could be expected to interfere with the effectiveness of implementing such a normative proposal—and if so, could a constructive way of addressing them be imagined?

The layout of this chapter follows these fundamental rounds of reflection. In the first section, *Lesson 1: Pondering the Promise of Institutional Reform*, I re-conceptualize the insights and observations about the monastic retreat that emerged in the course of my case study within the explicitly educational framework, pondering the promising and problematic aspects of the proposal to replicate the monastery “school of peace” in the context of theological education, with an intention of teaching rest to its ministerial students. Upon determining the fundamental flaws in my initial understanding of normative change, I reject the proposal for “institutional imitation” and name an alternative—the “relationship of partnership”—that seems to suggest itself, even though I also immediately acknowledge the apparent practical difficulties of implementing such normative vision, given the challenges that arise from the vast differences in the institutional character and daily realities of the seminary and the monastery. In the second section, *Lesson 2: Reflecting on the Inner Dynamics of Transformation*, I once more bring the explicitly educational perspective to my case study findings, now to bear upon the insights and observations about my personal experience of transformation into a restful person. I verify the feasibility of the relationship of partnership between the seminary and the monastery as a normative vision for constructive change, discern its nature and scope with an intention to address the previously identified obstacles to such unusual an affiliation, and suggest a way to proceed that would enhance the chances of its practical implementation. In the third section of the chapter, *Lesson 3: Three Shifts in Perception for Teaching Rest in the Seminary*, building on the theoretical conclusions reached in the previous two sections, I

offer my constructive proposal for addressing the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education of clergy, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition. I conclude this chapter with a section, *Looking Forward: Possibilities, Problems and Promises of Practical Implementation*, naming and briefly reflecting on the issues of realizing my constructive proposal in the context of seminary training.

10.1 Lesson 1: Reflecting on the Monastery's Way of Teaching Rest

To re-conceptualize the insights and observations about the restfulness of the monastic retreat in educational terms, it is necessary to think of the monastery no longer merely as a “retreat facility” but as an educational institution, something like a “school of rest.” It is important to see that such a way of viewing the monastery is not antithetical, but deeply congruent with the principal themes in the monastic self-understanding. The notion of the monastery as a school is a monastic theme with a long pedigree. It is one of the principal images that St. Benedict uses to characterize the monastery in his rule, and it holds a prominent place among classical and contemporary monastic writers.⁴⁸⁴ What is new in my proposition, however, is that the monastery also functions as a school for laity, the outside visitors who come to the monastery only for periodic retreats. This realization is of fundamental importance: if the monastery is able to teach rest and trigger the process of genuine personal transformation, not only for the members of its own household, people who stay there for a *long* time, but also for those who come only for *short-term* visits, then

⁴⁸⁴ For St. Benedict, following the Latin of this period, the monastery is a *schola*, a place where training is given or a group receiving instruction: the image of the monastery as a school for the Lord's service (*dominici scholar servitii*) is central for Prologue, and the vocabulary of teaching and learning permeates the entire Rule. For an in-depth discussion of the importance of educational language for St. Benedict, his indebtedness to Cassian and the tradition of Egypt, and the nuances of monastic use of the term, see St. Benedict and Fry.

the monastic educational process must be extraordinarily effective. Thus, if we could understand and transfer the monastery “teaching of rest” into the context of theological education of clergy, then the seminary, like the monastery, could form restful persons, and in so doing become an important avenue for prevention of ministerial failure. How then did the monastery “teach” me rest during my retreats?

Promise: Monastery as a School of Rest

My case study reveals that during the time of my retreat at the monastery, I was not offered formal instruction on the topic of rest, reflection on its necessity, or suggestions of restful practices to incorporate into my life. Instead, the monastery taught me rest by bringing me into a brief but intense encounter with my own idiosyncratic sources of unrest and the fundamental restlessness of human existence. Because it also successfully excluded the vast majority of my habitual (even if not fully effective, and even injurious) ways of resting, it made me far more vulnerable before choosing the only available alternative: the monks’ own way of resting—in God. When I committed, for the duration of my retreat, to the monastic way of life and religious practice, I discovered, in the immediate realities of my subjective experience, the effectiveness of the religious way of resting. The “religious experience,” on however small a scale, became an answer to my personal restlessness. As such, the monastery teaches rest indirectly: not by teaching *rest*, but by teaching *religion*. Educationally speaking, the monastic retreat can be seen as a short but extremely convincing “event of religious education.”⁴⁸⁵ The question of the monastery’s teaching of

⁴⁸⁵ I use this term in the manner that was articulated by Professor Charles Foster. In his reflection on the crisis of the religious education programs in the mainline, liberal Protestant congregations, Foster critiques their dependence on the public school model, proposing instead an “event-centered education,” the stories and practices that seek to prepare Christian communities for personally meaningful participation in the central

rest therefore must be reformulated: what accounts for such an extraordinary effectiveness of the monastery's religious education?

To answer this question, it is not sufficient simply to reflect on the monastery as a school. Evocative as it is, a metaphor is not exacting enough as an analytical tool. What is necessary is a system of explicitly educational categories that would permit systematic and disciplined building of a hypothesis about the nature of the monastic "educational process." I use Eliot Eisner's "three curricula that all schools teach" as the basis for this work.⁴⁸⁶ Eisner proposes that all schools teach "much more—and much less—than they intend to teach," by offering not one, but three operational curricula: explicit, implicit, and null. The *explicit curriculum*, an "educational menu of sorts," is the formal and the most obvious one. It consists of general educational goals (e.g., reading, writing, figuring, history, etc.) as well as school-specific objectives (e.g., law, medicine, arts and sciences, foreign languages, etc.). It is officially stated in the school's documentation, advertised, and made available to public. Teachers and students alike are consciously aware of its existence: it is

events of the gospel. (Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).) While Foster situates his reflection in the context of congregational living, his description of "eventful" education fits remarkably well into the educational dynamics and transformative outcomes of the monastery retreat.

⁴⁸⁶ The late Professor Eisner was one of the most prominent figures in the field of education widely known for his contribution to the studies of curriculum, connection between imagination and critical thinking, aesthetic intelligence, and qualitative research methods. His insightful reflection of the three curricula that all schools teach appears in Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 87-107. It is precisely because Eisner's curricular categories reveal that schools' teaching extends beyond the subjects explicitly claimed and consciously comprehended that they hold particular promise for elucidating the remarkable teaching effectiveness of the institution that does not even claim teaching as a part of its formal occupation.

at the center of the school's program development and in-class instruction. This explicit curriculum is what makes one school alike or distinct from another—at least on paper.⁴⁸⁷

In contrast, the *implicit curriculum* consists of the lessons that lie below the level of critical consciousness. It is created by the school's "tradition" and passed to its students primarily by means of socialization, "in the fashion that the culture itself teaches": through the choice of language and symbols, dominant stories and the ways of interpreting them, rules and rituals of the classroom, distribution of students from particular social classes, favored approaches to teaching and ways of learning, timetables, furniture and dress code, and the like. Implicitly, schools teach their students social skills and values, intellectual attitudes and patterns of behavior, expectations about levels of achievement and aspiration, habits of perception and choices of food—just because of the "kinds of places they are." Yet, even though the contents of this curriculum are "seldom publicly announced," they are not completely unnoticed. People's attraction to prestigious universities is a sign of their intuitive recognition that more than "subjects" are taught in schools, and that the lessons of the implicit curriculum are more powerful and lasting than what is taught intentionally and explicitly. While there are many positive effects of such silent enculturation, Eisner warns that it could become problematic: the lack of conscious awareness and intentionality about the teaching of the implicit curriculum may have negative, or at least negating, effects on the school's formal educational objectives. For example, while most schools seek to foster in their students an important skill of taking initiative, more often than not they teach compliant behavior; while most schools desire to foster collegiality, their grading and scholarship systems encourage competitiveness; while

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 87-88.

most schools include the value of human equality among their general educational goals, the established practice of “ability groups” and “honor classes” communicates a different set of ideals and principles. Without critical awareness and conscious reflection on their implicit curriculum, schools may end up teaching the very opposite of what they aim to teach.⁴⁸⁸

While the contents of schools’ official instruction form their explicit curriculum, and the “culture of schooling” forms their implicit curriculum, the last curriculum that all schools teach is the one that...does not exist. The *null curriculum* is what students do not learn, and what they do not know that they do not learn, because it was *not* included, explicitly or implicitly. Eisner insists that “what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach,” for such taught and learned ignorance has far-reaching consequences. It actively shapes the options, perspectives, alternative subjects, concepts, skills of intellectual, behavioral, and interpersonal repertoire that their students will not be able to consider, much less to use. The null curriculum creates biases. It teaches, for example, that the cognitive mode of knowing is more important than affective or kinesthetic modes, that art is less important than mathematics, or practical theology than biblical studies, that men’s opinions matter more than women’s, or that work is more important than rest. Importantly, Eisner does not advocate for a particular type of the null curriculum that would benefit all students; rather, he emphasizes the need to remember that omissions created as a part of schools’ tradition reinforce the *status quo*, and that good education calls for conscious reflection on the particularities of contexts and students for

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 88-97.

whom it is intended and a careful consideration of alternatives as a part of the curricular decision-making.⁴⁸⁹

When the lens of Eisner's categories is applied to the monastic event of religious education, fascinating details about its teaching process come into focus. To begin with, the monastery's "explicit curriculum" is rather small and unimposing. Such sparsity is understandable, since, the metaphorical self-understanding of the monastic community as a school notwithstanding, institutionally it does not identify itself as such. The closest to the description of its "educational menu" is the notion of preached retreats, which promise a "rich variety of spiritual presentations designed about themes of Scripture, contemplative prayer, or some spiritual writing suited to the needs of individuals who come to God in search of understanding, hope, and clear purpose."⁴⁹⁰ Yet, brief as it is, this description, set in the context of other retreat offerings (invitation to withdraw from ordinary activities for a period of silence, solitude, centering prayer, *lectio divina*, Eucharistic celebration and full participation in the monastic liturgy) and the succinct account of "what can you expect from a retreat at the Monastery?," communicates to the potential monastery visitors clearly, if indirectly, the overarching educational intent of the retreat: the monastery gift of rest is inseparable from its offer of religious experience. It promises to teach its visitors the tools and practices of religious living and offer the conditions under which resting in God becomes easier to accomplish.

At the same time, in contrast to Eisner's observation of the frequent and unfortunate conflict that characterizes the teaching of the regular schools, between what they intend to

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 97-107.

⁴⁹⁰ The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2016 Retreat Schedule: *An Invitation to Retreat with Monks*, p 1.

teach (via their formal educational programs and practices) and what they end up teaching (via the implicit elements of their cultures), the monastery's "implicit curriculum" is thoroughly consistent with the monastery's explicit educational intent. The explicit teaching of the Liturgy of the hours, monks' conferences, spiritual direction and confessions is embodied, supported, and gently reinforced by the temporal, spatial, and symbolic facets of the monastic setting. Each context of retreat—Environment, Community, Practices, and Texts—invites the monastery visitors to rehearse the same lessons of religious living. "Resting in God" becomes easier, because the retreatants are so artfully and skillfully led farther and farther on the path of religious experience—not merely by the monks' formal instruction, but by the silent nudging that comes from the monastic way of life itself. The profound coherence between the monks' laconic speech and the plentiful and multi-layered communication of the monastic culture lends the monastery retreat tremendous teaching power: it is as if in the monastery, not only monks give talks, but even the stones cry out!

Finally, just like in the ordinary schools, the omissions that characterize monastery living in general, and consequently what it does *not* offer to its visitors its retreats, are largely bound by tradition. Yet, in stark contrast to Eisner's reflection on the teaching of ordinary schools, the monastery's "null curriculum" is not merely a product of conventional unawareness, but a result of a centuries-long process of discernment and conscious decision-making. Furthermore, its contents are not something that is entirely unknown to the retreatants. Quite the contrary: What the monastery excludes—the gadgetry of various kinds, the multitude of sources of mass media, electronic communication and entertainment, excessive social interaction and emphasis on the verbal

mode of communication, long hours of work, and plain crude noise prevalent in contemporary society—are the things that its visitors are greatly familiar with and, one may say, to some of which they are in the habit of attending religiously. But by asking them to make the choice, for the duration of a retreat, to abstain from these habitual objects of their attention, the monastery’s null curriculum offers tremendous support to its explicit and implicit teaching. It makes retreatants more vulnerable before the monastic religious education: the very act of exclusion greatly reduces the number of other “teachers,” especially secular teachers, who could lay claim to the retreatants’ attention. But there is more. By asking retreatants to turn off their phones and computers and allow themselves to sink deeply into silence and solitude (that is, to do something that, under the regular circumstances, most of them would consider outrageously impossible), the monastery’s null curriculum accomplishes some potent teaching of its own: it challenges the subtle but persuasive claim to supremacy of the secular mindset upon retreatants’ behavior and teaches them the skills of its purposeful ignoring. Thus, in the monastery, at least the above-named effects of null curriculum are far from being handicapping. They are profoundly enhancing.

Reflecting on the monastery event of religious education within the framework provided by Elliot Eisner’s “three curricula that all schools teach” reveals the remarkable integrity and coherence of the monastery teaching. Its implicit and null curricula—which Eisner identifies as offering the schools’ most important and lasting lessons—are formidably developed, and together, they support, safeguard, and reinforce the teaching of its explicit curriculum. In a sense, the monastery is really “set in its ways”; yet, it appears

that it is precisely the profound intentionality that characterizes the monastic tradition of living that is responsible for the extraordinary effectiveness of its tradition of teaching.

The remarkable integrity of the monastery “curricula” seems to account for the tremendous effectiveness with which the monastery sponsors for its lay visitors an event of religious education. Yet, if I were to extend Eisner’s line of reasoning—that schools’ teaching includes not only that which their teachers do not realize and consciously intend, but also what they neglect teaching, as well—beyond the notion of the curriculum, but to the work of the “teachers” themselves, then the effectiveness of the monastic event of religious education receives even greater elucidation. Mirroring the three “curricula” that the monastery teaches are the three levels in which monks become their visitors’ “teachers”: obvious, less obvious, and hidden.

Most obviously, monks teach with their words. Like ordinary teachers, they serve as experienced instructors and guides, the repositories of theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom. This way of teaching is most readily seen in the context of the formal retreat conferences and individual spiritual direction. During conferences, individual monks give “talks” to the community of visitors gathered for preached retreats: they discuss the vocabulary of faith, explain the values, principles and underlying goals of religious observance, offer instruction for spiritual exercises, as well as counsel about the various shades of religious experience and common pitfalls of spiritual journeying. Individual spiritual direction, on the other hand, provides retreatants with time, place, and the monks’ personal assistance for making the knowledge received during the public conferences personally meaningful. Thus, on the obvious level of teaching, monks offer their visitors something of the “theory and practice of religious living.” Their predominant mode of

teaching is verbal, and monks and retreatants alike are consciously aware of the event and the content of teaching. Much like the teaching of the monastery's "explicit curriculum," while being the most obvious, this way of teaching is also the most modest and unimpressive of all. The formal conferences take no more than one to two hours a day, and individual spiritual direction lasts only about an hour and most likely occurs only once during the retreat; and, as a rule, monks do not employ complex pedagogical techniques and rarely use instructional media and technology.

In less obvious but very effective ways, the monks teach with their actions and attitudes. On this level, in parallel with the monastery's "implicit curriculum," it is the shape of their daily life and the quality of their relationship with retreatants that teach. Even if imperfectly and incompletely, monks do embody in their own behavior, the values, principles and practices of religious living to which they gave voice during their more explicit instruction. As such, their teaching is less like that of the ordinary teachers, giving classes at the appointed times. Rather, having invited their guests to come and stay—and therefore watch them—and the place where they themselves live, the monks' teaching resembles that of ancient artisans for their live-in apprentices. That is why the lack of verbal and explicitly educational interaction between monks and their visitors does not have an adverse effect on their teaching. They become models and co-journeymen who teach more by what they do, than by what they say, showing how to live as persons who seek to love and serve God. Such indirect teaching is powerfully exemplified in the context of the common prayer. During the seven hours of the Liturgy, the monks and retreatants hardly interact at all: the former go on reciting the offices and the latter try to follow as best they can. Even as the "teachers" and their "students" face each other in stalls, it is not for the

purposes of educational engagement but for chanting of psalms. Here, the words and acts with which monks teach are not even their own. Yet, their continuous, unbroken performance of the centuries-old rite of the Church, office after office, day after day, for the duration of retreat, becomes their powerful way of teaching, right in the public space of the sanctuary. At the same time, as with the monastery's null curriculum, the monks teach not only with what they say and do, but also with what they do not say and avoid doing. This lack is not merely a gap in communication, but a movement of deepening the message of their words and actions. For example, the monks' own silence after Compline builds upon their formal talks on the topic of silence, or their interruption of the day seven times for prayer stands in the way of the merely poetic interpretation of St. Benedict's words of "preferring nothing to the work of God." This way of teaching is indirect, less dependent on explicitly verbal communication, and as such is less available for immediate conscious recognition. Yet, in the quiet and stillness created by the intentional withdrawal of words and deliberate non-action, what was explicitly discussed and silently enacted becomes experientially known.

Yet, there is another way monks teach, the most hidden and effective of all: their identity. The words they say and the practices they perform come out of the louder-than-words and more-persuasive-than-action testimony of who they are. The words and acts *are* important—and for some retreatants, as in the old days of desert *abbas and ammas*, one word could become truly life-giving and life-changing an occasion—yet, words and acts are *secondary*. Identity is the source from which they spring, their hidden and deep foundation. The monks teach "with authority," because their words and actions have been "authored" in the silence of their living. In this sense, they have begun to teach long before

they have set their foot in the monastery Upper Room, the official teaching auditorium. They began their teaching years ago, when they planted their feet on the monastery grounds, staking their whole lives on one counter-cultural supposition: that God exists, that communion between God and people is not only possible but is, in itself, a summit of human existence and the only lasting source of rest. That is why they can be sparse with their words and simple in their arsenal of pedagogical techniques—because their most important teaching has been started and accomplished long ago before they and retreatants came together for the official teaching talk. This is the reason why the monks of the order that is “wholly ordered to contemplation,” with its exceedingly strong emphasis on silence and solitude, can teach without violating the precepts of their vocation: the simple act of their faithful living of their vocation *is* their most effective teaching of all. On this level, there is no more separation between “what they teach” and “who they are.” Their religious education requires no external means of communication, because it is mediated directly, through their presence.

Looking back at the monastery’s teaching through the lens of curricular composition and the work of its teachers reveals that it is the remarkable integrity and coherence of its educational process that undergirds its ability to sponsor a remarkably effective event of religious education. Throughout retreat, the monastic Environment, Community, Practices and Texts guide their guests on a journey of discovery of the alternative world that the monastery imagines. The profound changes in the retreatants’ attitude and action is an outcome of a dramatic shift on the level of their perception. In a sense, each facet of the monastery “curriculum” and each dimension of the monks’ “teaching” communicates the same lesson in religious praxis and understanding. Yet, as it

is being taught on each subsequent level, it becomes more and more amplified. And the very restfulness that retreatants feel at the outcome of their retreat becomes an indirect but powerful affirmation of the veracity of the monastery teaching.

Because the monastery's imagining of the religious world is not merely a symbolic act, but an embodied reality, it cannot be easily dismissed. The quiet corridors of the retreat house, the icons and objects of religious art in its rooms, the Gregorian chant played during the meals, the black and white habited monks, the small images of the Trinity icon with an inscription "silence is spoken here," the stations of the cross that wind along the side of the pond, the breath-taking expanses of the Abbey church—every little detail and every characteristic omission—teach retreatants, so silently and so powerfully, that they have indeed entered a different world. In this sense, the monastery teaches in the same way that the culture teaches: holistically. Going to the monastery for a retreat becomes not unlike making a trip to another country.

As such, the monastic event of religious education can be understood as an effective occasion for "immersion learning," in which the work of teaching is being carried out not merely by a group of designated persons but by the whole world of monastery living. The conditions of immersion make the monastery teaching seem all the more convincing and they make the retreatants all the more vulnerable before learning. Four specific advantages characterize such holistic teaching and learning process. To begin with, the retreatants' learning is not limited to the work of conscious cognition. Rather, it involves the entire array of the intellectual processes and senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, affective, psychomotor, etc.). All day long they are under a barrage of various images, sounds, smells, tastes, and minute stimuli, all the more noticeable against the soft background of silence.

“No speech, no word, no voice is heard”—yet the monastery teaching never stops. Additionally, the retreatants’ learning is not limited to any place in the monastery: no matter where they are, as long as they remain on the territory of the monastery, they are under its teaching influence. The conditions of “no escape” are also temporal. The learning continues through all hours of the day, except for the time of sleeping. And even then, precisely because the sleeping schedule is so dramatically shifted, the time of sleep itself (and the 3:45 a.m. ringing of the bell for Vigils!) becomes their teacher. Such all-permeating, never ending, inescapable teaching experience would be unbearable if it were not for its cultural foundation: it is precisely because the monastery does religious education so holistically, it also does it restfully.⁴⁹¹

Since the monastery’s implicit and null “curricula” are characterized by profound intentionality and formidable development, and the monks’ “teaching” is accomplished in such a paradoxical way, it might be tempting to attribute the power of the monastic event of religious education to their influences. In accord with Eisner’s observations about schools’ teaching, what retreatants learn during their retreat tacitly is much greater than what they learn consciously. Yet, a closer look reveals that even the glaring imperfections of the monastery’s explicit “curriculum” (its apparent vagueness and smallness) have a peculiarly enhancing effect on retreatants’ learning. It is precisely because no clear definition of the “learning objectives” of retreat is given, upon their arrival at the monastery

⁴⁹¹ It is important to note, however, that there is nothing inherently virtuous in the holistic character of the monastic educational process: the same dynamics—of separation from the dominant culture and simultaneous initiation into the alternative culture—are at play, for example, in the totalitarian regime of the Soviets, the tragic events of Jonestown, or the variety of the present-day educational or athletic “boot camps.” Psychologically speaking, a wholly controlled environment is a remarkably efficient instrument of social manipulation.

retreatants have to take responsibility for their own learning. Faced with the well-stocked library, great number of liturgical offices and multitude of religious practices to choose from, they have to discern and make decisions about what they would read and write, what offices of prayer throughout the day they would attend, whether they would brave getting up before 4 a.m. to attend Vigils, whether they would request spiritual direction, and so on. In the course of these small and big decisions, their learning becomes personalized and they themselves become more and more interested and invested. Thus, there is something of a paradox in the monastery teaching of its lay visitors: it is precisely because its monastery's "explicit curriculum" is so underdeveloped that retreatants are never merely passive "consumers" of the monastery's "educational menu." They are forced, ever so gently, to become its active co-creators. Like children who enjoy eating the dishes they themselves helped to cook, retreatants, following their active involvement in the shaping of contents and methods of their monastery lessons, begin to "eat up" its teaching all the more.

Similarly, even though the monks offer some explicit teaching and spiritual direction all throughout the retreat, on the whole, their teaching is characterized more by their absence than their presence. This lack, as I have shown above, is plentifully made up for by the work of other contexts of monastic living and the other two ways of the monks' own teaching. Yet, there is more to the absence: just as the limitations of the monastery's explicit "curriculum" accounts for the deepening of the retreatants' learning, so the monk's silence as teachers opens up a peculiarly powerful way for their religious instruction. Had they tried to engage retreatants in a "dialogue" or build an "argument" about the validity of the religious way of life, the retreatants could have had the opportunity to think through,

possibly disagree with, or even find holes in the monks' lines of reasoning; but it is precisely because the monks are just "doing their thing," that their religious praxis itself, and the restfulness it engenders, become powerful tools of persuasion—an argument which, precisely due to its silent way of delivery, is not available for refutation.

Thus, my reflection on the monastic teaching within the explicitly educational framework, made possible by Eisner's insightful description of the three curricula that all schools teach, reveals that the remarkable effectiveness of the monastery event of religious education has to do with the consistency and unique cooperation between its curricula and its teachers. The astonishing integrity and intentionality of the monastery's "implicit curriculum" are responsible for the retreatant's deep immersion in the subject matter. The limitations of the monastery's "explicit curriculum" are responsible for the retreatants' active engagement and investment in learning. And the omissions of the monastery's "null curriculum" ensure that the retreatants' attention is channeled towards very specific teaching tools and resources. Add to this the paradoxical work of the monks as "teachers," and the monastery school of rest begins to look not unlike a Montessori religious class for adults. The indirect approach to learning, with its emphasis on movement and participation, learners' freedom with regards to timing and choice of materials, availability of the specialized tools and resources, intrinsic rewards and motivation, the teachers' gentle guidance and opportunities for quiet cooperation with peers all ensure that the retreatants' learning of religion and rest reaches a profoundly deep level.

While these analytical categories enhance our understanding of the extraordinary effectiveness of the monastery event of religious education, I confess an almost immediate

sense of unease as I think about applying these categories to seminary teaching. The insights and observations about the nature of monastic educational process expose the potential reasons why theological education of clergy has such a hard time not only teaching rest, but also teaching religion!

Problem: Seminary as a School of Rest

Even a brief glance at the seminary through the lens of the “three curricula that all school teach” offers an unsettling insight into the nature of its difficulty with teaching rest. If, as Eisner suggests, what is missing matters, then the frequent absence of rest in the context of theological education, both as an explicit educational objective and as a quality of living embodied in the life of the faculty—the seminary’s “null curriculum”—is in itself a powerful way to teach prospective clergy that learning to rest is not as important to being a minister as, say, learning the skills of pastoral care or biblical exegesis, achieving competence in preaching, and generally getting the work of ministry effectively accomplished. Additionally, given the powerful influence of the seminary’s “implicit curriculum” on its students’ learning, I wonder about the actual effectiveness of the more recent and welcome seminary initiatives for teaching clergy self-care: the topic of clergy rest and practices of self-care are taught well—but are likely to be learned poorly—simply because the very setting, schedule, and pace of theological education teach, implicitly and powerfully, the neglect of the body, preference of action over contemplation, the virtue of overwork and habits of drivenness and competition.

But the problem is deeper still. Reflecting on seminary training in light of the insights and observations about the monastic “educational process” reveals that, in sharp

contrast to the astonishing synchronicity and utmost coherence of the monastery “curricula” and the work of its “teachers,” the seminary is a paragon of diversity and variation. There is an obvious diversity of disciplines, religious practices, texts, and the cultural, denominational, and even religious backgrounds of its participants.⁴⁹² The less obvious level of diversity has to do with the twofold nature of the seminary’s identity and its broader relationship to the university and the church: at the core of its institutional identity is its commitment to be not only a community of faith, but also a community of scholarly and intellectual inquiry that tests, challenges, and reformulates faith.⁴⁹³ Least noticeable (perhaps precisely because it is taken for granted) is the “secular-religious” diversity of the seminary setting: the sheer amount of external stimulation, patterns of social conduct, clothing, buildings, cars, technical devices in the hands of the students and teachers, and the vast network of information technology that underlies the seminary’s pedagogical enterprise bespeak of the all-permeating presence of the secular culture: the

⁴⁹² In highlighting the diversity of theological education, I am not arguing that the monastic community is culturally uniform: indeed, it includes people from a variety of the political, social, economic and other strata of the society. Yet, the overarching point of my argument remains valid: in the monastery, the diversity of the cultural backgrounds is regarded as secondary to the creation of the fundamental monastic ethos, whereas in the seminary, the cultural difference and diversity are upheld and actively celebrated.

⁴⁹³ My keen awareness of the university-related context of seminary training, once more, betrays my own denominational roots: among the mainline seminaries, the university-related divinity school is largely a Methodist phenomenon. (An important text on the history of ministerial formation in American Methodism comes from Professor Russell Richey, the former dean of Candler School of Theology: Russell E. Richey, *Formation for Ministry in American Methodism: Twenty-First Century Challenges and Two Centuries of Problem-Solving* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2014).) However, the larger point of my argument is still valid: for the liberal, mainline Protestant institutions of theological education, even when they are not related to universities, the objective of relating the work of ministerial preparation to the broader academic and scientific community remains highly pertinent.

“world” that was poignantly missing in the monastery is ever present and ruling in theological education!

Thus, *if* the monastery’s ability to sponsor an extremely convincing event of religious education has to do with the remarkable integrity and coherence of its “curricula” and its “teachers,” which have the power to imagine a religious world and enable retreatants to inhabit it for the duration of their monastic retreat, *then* it is reasonable to hypothesize that it is the extreme plurality of the seminary curricula and the work of its teachers that is responsible for its inability to sponsor a convincing event of religious education for its ministerial students—precisely because its diversity and complexity stand in the way of its ability to accomplish a convincing imagining of the religious world. The ubiquitous influence of the surrounding culture on contemporary theological education means that all of the seminary’s attempts at imagining a religious world take place against the backdrop of, and in competition with, a far-more powerful secular imagination. The plurality of the seminary’s institutional identity creates a profound tension between its attempt to imagine the world that Scripture imagines and its commitment to critical reflection and demythologization: what the seminary imagines on the level of religious living, it simultaneously deconstructs on the level of critical inquiry. And the diversity of the denominational and religious backgrounds of its participants raises the difficult question of *whose* religious tradition is the seminary to embody? In this sense, the seminary’s ever-growing plurality is responsible for its inability to sponsor a convincing event of religious education for its ministerial students, and in so doing to teach them a valid religious way of responding to their restlessness.

It may seem, however, that even though the seminary cannot sponsor an event of holistic religious education that could match the monastery teaching in its convincing power, because of the plurality of its “implicit and null curricula,” it might be able make up for this deficiency by means of its formidably developed “explicit curriculum” (which was glaringly underdeveloped in the monastery teaching), the greater presence and availability of its faculty to the students (in the extent that monks could never be present to retreatants), and the excellence in disciplinary scholarship and training (at the level of expertise that most individual monks could never hope to achieve). Yet, here, as with the paradox of monastery teaching that was not inhibited but enhanced by the imperfections of its explicit curriculum and absence of its teachers, we find a peculiar paradox: the strengths afforded by the extensive development of the seminary’s curriculum, the intensity of disciplinary engagement, and the greater availability of the teachers seem to become problematic when seen in relation to religious knowing and living.

It is precisely because the seminary’s explicit M.Div. curriculum is bursting with learning objectives, it leaves less freedom for the students to direct the outline and methods of their learning. The learning becomes less personally meaningful, and the very abundance of theoretical knowledge, practical arts, and clinical or ministry experiences makes it difficult to engage the rich banquet of the seminary teaching with desired thoughtfulness and depth. At the same time, the ever-expanding disciplinary canons make it tempting (if not necessary) to “master” the texts, rather than “listen to” (much less obey) them. Additionally, even the seminary’s commitment to teach its students various forms of worship while at the same time providing them with an avenue for genuine spiritual formation, embodied in the chapel services, is not unproblematic: the dazzling array of

religious practices featured in the chapel, inadvertently, encourages an attitude of sampling and actively *discourages* the formation of a long-term religious commitment; and, the chapel services themselves remain vulnerable before the changing rhythms of the academic year. Even the apparently greater accessibility of the teachers seems to have an unexpected downside. While the students spend many more hours (and hear many more words) in the presence of their theological faculty, the speech and presence of the latter are of a limited variety: it focuses predominantly (and understandably) on the domain of the students' explicit learning. With an exception of individual relationships of mentorship for those who were fortunate to have them, at the end of their studies, the students may be well aware of how their faculty "make a living," but they have seldom had the privilege to be privy to the deeper reality of what their teachers "live for."

Thus, one may wonder if the seminary fails to sponsor for its students a convincing event of religious education, not only because it is unable to imagine the religious world, but also—precisely because it studies it so diligently—it ends up keeping it at arm's length. The overly direct mode of engagement, the progressively narrow disciplinary specialization, the implied passivity of the learner, and the unfortunate separation of learning and living stands in the way of learning religion not merely as a "subject matter" but as a way of life that has the power to form and transform its learner.

My comparative analysis of seminary teaching within the framework of the monastic educational process has yielded a rich collection of generative observations for development of a hypothesis about why the seminary cannot teach and sponsor events of religious education for its ministerial students with the same effectiveness as the

monastery does for its retreatants. While it is very important to use the monastic “educational process” as a framework for discerning the reasons responsible for the difficulty in teaching rest and religion in the context of theological education of clergy, it is equally important not to lose sight of the dramatic dissimilarity between the seminary and the monastery. It is my heartfelt conviction that, despite their potential detrimental effect on the seminary’s ability to teach rest and the fundamentals of religious living, the vast differences that it displays in contrast to the monastery are not a matter of an overt error but a legitimate reality that should be understood, and appreciated, in light of its institutional identity, historical and cultural heritage, and the work of its faculty.

To begin with, the seminary differs from the monastery in the nature of its institutional identity and purpose. The monastic “educational goals” are fairly unambiguous: all its teaching is done for the purpose of enculturation of novices into the monastic way of life and culture. The astonishing integrity of the monastery “curricula” and the work of its “teachers” is, therefore, a function of the self-oriented nature of its vocation. In this sense, the short but extremely convincing event of religious education that the monastery sponsors for its retreatants is simply a side-effect of its centuries-long and honed-to-perfection process of formation for the monks themselves. When monastic education succeeds, its “graduates” make a permanent commitment to stay and become “teachers” in the school of the Lord’s service.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁴ The statement about the meaning and importance of monastic formation does not require additional validation. It is important to point out, however, that the novices (or even fully professed monks) are never pressured to stay. The focus of monastic formation is on discernment: formation is considered successful, even if at the end of it the potential candidate arrived at the conclusion that being a monk is *not* his vocation (Michael Casey, *The Art of Winning Souls: Pastoral Care of Novices* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012).). Yet, my overall argument remains valid: for those who stay, as and for those who leave, the successful outcome of formation is dependent on having an authentic experience of the monastic way of life.

Not so for the seminary: the primary educational objective of the theological education of clergy is unquestionably external. Ministerial students always come to the seminary “in order to leave”: they may not be sure about the exact shape of their future ministry, they may still even be “seekers,” unsure of what they want to do and hoping that the seminary will help them to sort out their vocational questions. Or they may have a goal of continuing their studies on the doctoral level. But they all know that their seminary “stay” has a predetermined end, and that at the conclusion of their training they will have to return to their lives in the world. The seminary is a professional school and its vocational purpose and identity are decidedly not self-oriented but world-oriented. As such, the wide variety of its teaching objectives, practices, and commitments, the diversity of its educational settings, its enthusiastic engagement with the surrounding culture, and its enduring emphasis on teaching the work of ministry is not a matter of an unfortunate mistake, but a reasonable and educationally appropriate response to the pluralism of contemporary society in which the seminary graduates will eventually be ministering.⁴⁹⁵ Even if unfortunate, it is only understandable that such an institution by definition cannot create a uniform religious culture so critical for effective spiritual formation. While it is

⁴⁹⁵ Glenn Miller, church historian at Bangor Theological Seminary, observes in his monumental analysis of American Protestant Theological education, that the “unifying theme” for contemporary theological education is precisely the lack of such a unifying theme, indeed, its “plurality.” See Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education since 1960* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014). The recent branding campaign, undertaken by Candler School of Theology, the “REAL,” is a perfect example of the seminary’s own awareness and celebration of its ability to respond to the opportunities and challenges of contemporary pluralistic society. The campaign’s slogan, “Candler prepares real people to make a real difference in the real world,” is supported by six key messages about what makes Candler so unique: Real People, Real Commitment, Real Dialogue, Real Possibilities, Real Change, and Real International Engagement. The fact that this campaign was awarded the Circle of Excellence Silver Award by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education reveals that the seminary’s engagement with the world is rightly perceived as a sign of strength.

only natural that the contemplative monastery, like Mary, can “worry about”—and therefore teach—only “one thing,” the seminary, responsible for preparing clergy for the complexities of the contemporary world, like Martha, must “worry about many things!”

Additionally, the seminary differs from the monastery in its historical and cultural heritage. The Cistercian monastery was and still is essentially a medieval institution.⁴⁹⁶ A mainline liberal Protestant seminary is a product of many historical, socio-economic and political developments: it is a modern, post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment, post-industrial, (if not post-modern) organization. The seminary’s educational commitments and methods have undergone tremendous changes since its own humble medieval beginnings—in response to the countless social, economic, political, cultural and intellectual developments that define the modern world, including scientific discoveries, the emergence and dissolution of various paradigms of knowing, radical shifts in assumptions about the nature of reality and origins of truth (or even the possibility of the latter), the rise of mass means of communication and vast advances in technology, awareness of the role that language and culture plays in creation of knowledge, emergence of critical consciousness about the ethical and political dimensions of knowing, and the experience of religion-motivated violence. Given the profound influence of these broader

⁴⁹⁶ In asserting that the Cistercian monastery has remained in fundamental continuity with its medieval roots, I am not arguing that the institution itself has become fossilized and immune to change. Indeed, a number of Cistercian writers observe (and at times lament) the degree to which even the Cistercian Order, an institution that is “wholly ordered to contemplation,” has been affected by the changes in the contemporary religious and secular culture. Yet, the main point of my argument still stands: institutional structures, values, and commitments, primary epistemological assumptions, principles of authority and government, and the basic outline of the Cistercian religious praxis are as relevant today, as they were in the days of their founding. An excellent example of the Cistercian paradox of continuity and change is *Exordium, A Program of Reflection and Study on the Values of the Cistercian Reform*, written in 1998, by Fr. Michael Casey for the order-wide effort of formation, in celebration of the ninth centenary of the Order.

historical, scientific, and epistemological developments on the seminary's own formation, it is not surprising that its approach to teaching religion is characterized by the methodologically postulated distance. Even if unfortunate, it is understandable that in the seminary the matters of faith and religious observance, study of the Scriptures and even the encounter with God, are made into a subject of careful and critical examination. It is only natural that the monastic educational method simply affirms and seeks to communicate divine revelation. However, the seminary's educational enterprise, endowed with modern and post-modern epistemological sensitivities, must naturally critique and respond to the inherent limitations (and even dangers) of religious naïveté.

Finally, the seminary differs from the monastery simply in the amount of work and degree of stress that characterizes the lives of its faculty. In so far as the seminary is a part of the surrounding society, it is also subject to its general anxieties and pressures: the fluctuations in the stock market (and its consequences for general prosperity and retirement income), terrorist attacks, increased criminal activity, environmental hazards, political instability, and other societal problems affect seminary faculty in more ways and to a much greater extent than they affect monks' in their cloistered existence.⁴⁹⁷ Additionally, the very character of the seminary as a teaching institution for ministers is endowed with its own restlessness: it stands in complex relationship with three other institutional environments—

⁴⁹⁷ This assertion is not meant to imply that the cloistered existence makes the monks completely immune before the stresses of contemporary existence. Even in the monastery, monks remain human and humanly vulnerable: they have medical issues, family crises and deaths, worries about environment and societal ills. And indeed the stance of faith itself implies a certain anguish, a keen awareness of the nakedness of human existence and a particular way of confronting its suffering and unrest. Yet, once more, my overarching argument still stands: on a certain level, the monks *are* more “protected,” because they do not have to worry about losing their jobs and medical insurance, what to wear and what to eat, and they have a place to live; on the deeper level, of course, it is the religious stance itself that gives them a “competitive edge” in coping.

the church, the university, and the diverse sites for contextual, or field, training (not to count the subtle relationship of competition with other seminaries)—and as such, the work of the faculty always takes place in the context of complex negotiations between the seminary curriculum and the needs and commitments of its broader academic, ecclesiastical and clinical partners. And, on the individual level, the faculty members are subject to enormous stresses, arising in the course of their interaction with the seminary's own complex bureaucratic structures, intricate systems of institutional punishments and rewards, and a culture that places tremendous emphasis on productivity and achievement. Faculty have to balance their professional aspirations to stay abreast of important developments in academic research (and in many ways to *lead* them), and the ordinary realities of their personal existence (pressures of family life, concerns about financial security, career needs and fears, conflicting cultural demands, lack of time, medical emergencies, etc.). It is quite understandable that seminary teachers cannot embody rest in the same way the monks do. All other factors notwithstanding, it is only natural that the monk looks like a “man of peace”: because on a crude bodily level, he has slept seven hours and spent the rest of his day in a quiet environment, equally dividing his time and energy between work and prayer. But the lack of rest among the seminary faculty is perhaps one of the most crucial, and most overlooked, aspects of teaching rest in the context of theological education of clergy.

Thus, a closer look at the seminary and the monastery reveals that the vast differences between their “curricula” and “teachers” are not a matter of the critical failure on the part of the seminary; rather, these differences present a legitimate outcome of the seminary's

distinct history, identity, vocational orientation, and complex institutional realities that characterize the work and life of its faculty. Despite their detrimental effect on the seminary's ability to teach rest and the fundamentals of religious living, they are the signs of its strength. The astonishing plurality of the seminary's practices and program, the scientifically-informed nature of its educational process, and even the hard work and deep involvement of its faculty are important and necessary means for achieving the seminary's core institutional objective: professional preparation for ministry in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society. That is why the seminary not only *cannot* imitate the monastery, it *must not*—because in so doing, it would violate its own historical heritage, become less true to its institutional identity, and as a result become less fit for meeting the unique demands of its vocation.

Hence, having re-conceptualized the insights and observations about monastic retreat that emerged in the course of my case study in explicitly educational terms, and having reflected on the promising and problematic aspects of reproducing the monastic process of teaching rest in the context of theological education of clergy, I reject my initial understanding of a normative vision of “institutional imitation” as genuinely unsatisfactory.

Normative Vision: What Then Should We Hope For?

My conclusion—that the seminary must not imitate the monastery—has far-reaching consequences for discerning a normative vision for theological education of clergy as an avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout. It means that if the seminary is to make use of the monastery's remarkably effective process of teaching rest, it must establish

a relationship of partnership with the monastery. Such an alternative normative vision is deeply congruent with the final paradoxical conclusion of my case study, my discovery that for my personal recovery from burnout, both the contemplative tradition of resting that I learned in the monastery *and* the tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship and rigorous critical inquiry that I have been taught in the seminary have been crucially important.

Right away, however, we can see the problems with such a normative vision. To begin with, the two institutions are distinctively different with regards to their denominational identity, vocational orientation, and their institutional context: one is Roman Catholic and the other one Protestant; one is deeply contemplative and the other is exceedingly active; one is situated in the context of a cloistered religious order and the other—in the market place of the present day academic world. The overarching differences in formal institutional characteristics, in turn, are reflected in the practical challenges of such an engagement. Specifically, on the side of the seminary: what kind of institutional format would such a relationship of partnership take—and at what cost? We could imagine a CPE-like program—say, something like a Spiritual Pastoral Education (SPE) program that takes place in the monastic context. But, while using the monastery as a place for clergy’s spiritual formation may seem deeply attractive in theory, it would be deeply problematic in practice. Both seminary faculty and students are already stretched to such a degree that adding an extra institutional context and an additional set of requirements to meet in the course of ministerial preparation would be at best administratively complex and politically controversial, and at worst unrealistic. At the same time, on the side of the monastery: The Cistercian monastery in which I had my spiritual retreats is a part of a Roman Catholic religious order that is “wholly ordered to contemplation.” It seems highly

improbable that an institution and community that has vowed itself to the “hidden mode of apostolic fruitfulness,” and has managed to maintain this commitment throughout the centuries (even during the French Revolution when their apparent “uselessness” nearly cost them their life), could be open to any form of explicit institutional partnership with the Protestant seminary.

Thus, at this point of relating the results of my case study investigation to the context of theological education of clergy, I find myself in something of a quandary. My initial understanding of normative change as *institutional imitation* has proved to be fundamentally flawed. The emerging alternative understanding of normative change as a *relationship of teaching partnership* seems to be fraught with great difficulties, if not complete impossibilities.

To respond to this difficulty, I now shift the focus of my reflection from the institutional context of teaching rest (the “monastery” subunit of the case study) to the inner dynamics of my transformation into a restful person (the “self” subunit of the case study). The objective of my upcoming analytical reflection is threefold. First, I re-conceptualize my journey of becoming restful in explicitly educational terms, drawing out broader theoretical conclusions about the nature and principal dynamics of this complex process. Second, I reflect on theological education of clergy in light of this understanding, seeking to ascertain whether any parallels could be discerned between my personal experience of transformation and the existing dynamics in the ministerial students’ experience of seminary training. Third, I return to the question of normative change, using the theoretical understanding developed in the course of my analysis to re-assess the feasibility of the

“seminary-monastery partnership” and to gain insight into the ways of overcoming the previously identified obstacles to such an unusual institutional affiliation.⁴⁹⁸

10.2 Lesson 2: Reflecting on the Personal Dynamics of Transformation

To re-conceptualize the insights and observations about my transformation into a restful person in educational terms, it is necessary to think about this experience not merely as an occasion of “profound personal change,” but as a “significant learning experience.” Such a way of seeing the outcomes of my encounter with the monastic tradition is in deep congruence with the reflection of the previous section about the monastery as a “school of rest.” What has shifted is the focal objective of my analysis: whereas earlier I sought to understand the reasons behind the remarkable effectiveness of the monastic educational process, now I seek to examine what happened on the receiving end of it: what happened to me as a result of the monastery’s holistic event of religious education. It stands to reason that if we could understand the nature and inner dynamics of my personal transformation into a restful person and then envision a way to sponsor a similar process for ministerial students, then the seminary might come into possession of its own unique way of teaching rest, and in so doing become an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout. What then does it mean to think about my experience of becoming restful as a “significant learning experience?”

⁴⁹⁸ In the language of qualitative research, my arrival at the same normative vision of the seminary-monastery partnership at the end of my second round of reflection would be considered a “theoretical replication,” a research outcome that significantly increases the validity of my conclusions.

Promise: Becoming Restful as a Complex Educational Experience

My case study reveals my transformation into a restful person as the gradual expansion of my experience of restfulness. In the beginning stages of my encounter with the monastic tradition, it centered on (and was largely confined to) the time of my being on retreat at the monastery. Later, it expanded into the radically new and restful way of being in the world. The stages of my slow “return to the world” mark the emergence of a person who not only rests differently, but also who acts, understands herself, relates to others—and does ministry—very differently. Resting in God has become a bedrock of my personal and professional existence. Yet, this shift on the level of my experience was not a result of an alteration on the level of intellect, emotion, or will, but an outcome of the newly acquired capacity on the level of imagination. My learning to rest had to do with acquiring the ability to imagine and progressively inhabit the world as a religious person. Thus, my becoming restful in response to the monastery’s holistic event of religious education should be seen as the fruit of an extended and challenging process of “faith development.”⁴⁹⁹ As such, the question about my transformation into a restful person as a significant learning experience calls for further expansion and detailing. First, what is the nature of my growing in faith? Second, what inner “dynamics of learning” could be discerned and identified as characteristic of this process? Finally, what are the “learning outcomes” that make restful living and ministry possible?

⁴⁹⁹ The term “faith development” was popularized by the late Professor James Fowler, in his well-known monograph: James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). While I do not adopt his theory of faith development as a formal framework for my study, I use this term to highlight the important connection between the personal dynamics of my transformation into a restful person (i.e., the change in my habits of imagining the world) and Fowler’s understanding of faith as centered on human capacity to imagine the “ultimate environment” in relation to the communally mediated sources of value and power.

My case study reveals that my growth in faith had to do not merely with the development of a separate dimension of life, its “spiritual compartment,” but rather a fundamental re-orientation of the entire plane of my personal existence: the gradual and slow, yet more permanent, change in my habits of thinking and acting, patterns of relating and emotionality, my self-understanding and sense of communal belonging, that followed fundamental changes in my perception of the world. The radical alteration on the level of my experience (i.e., lasting restfulness and peace) was, therefore, an outcome of the profound shift on the level of worldview (i.e., learning to see, and therefore, to be and to act differently) that accompanied the maturation of my religious commitment.⁵⁰⁰ At the same time, the maturation of my religious commitment was not merely a matter of my greater understanding and adherence to the formal set of religious suppositions, but rather a gradual process of becoming aware and learning to relate, consciously and critically, to the two sides of my personal “creed”: the official beliefs I adopted as a result of explicit schooling and religious instruction, and the operative assumptions I formed in response to the formative influence of the secular culture. This process started when I first became aware of inconsistencies and contradictions in my life, ministry, and spiritual practice that arose from the tension between my explicit religious beliefs and my tacit-yet-operative secular assumptions. It deepened when I became willing to subject these assumptive designs and my old habits of living to critical examination, conscious assessment, and

⁵⁰⁰ Even though I am describing the inner dynamics of my personal transformation, the connection between religious commitment and worldview development has been noted and explored in great depth by the worldview theorists. See, for example, Arthur Frank Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984); Paul A. Marshall, S. Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989); James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

experiential testing. And, as I persevered in discernment and forging of the new, more critically conscious and internally consistent, set of personal commitments, way of life, and religious praxis, it gradually culminated in the accomplishment of holistic personal change: I became a more restful person.

Therefore, by its nature, the development of my faith is an outcome of two processes: the gradual deepening and expansion of the religious part of my worldview, and the concurrent deconstruction of the vast substratum of the secular part of my worldview. Educationally speaking, this complex process of worldview-alternation can be seen as an intricate interplay of the two dynamics—*learning and unlearning*—with regards to the two ways of imagining the ultimate environment, the one that is professed by the *religious* tradition and the one that is purported in the *secular* culture.

My journey of growing in faith begins with the massive amount of learning pertaining to religious practices and lifestyle: new practices (broader monastic and specifically Roman Catholic), new texts (in monastic theology, spirituality, and even the new sections of the Bible), the new way of reading, new relationships (with monks, lay monastic associates, and even the saints!), and new ways of patterning space and time. Subjectively, this movement of *initial religious learning* feels very good. It sponsors new discoveries and insights into the art of religious living, offers a rich collection of ideas and texts, makes possible engagement with the religious tradition at a more savoring pace and deeper level. But there is more: such learning feels like home-coming, because the religious beliefs that are explicitly affirmed by the monks and embodied in their way of life are the same ones I consciously claim as my own. Having relished this experience of deep congruency between my action and perception during my retreat, I remain under the

impression that all I need is a “minor upgrade” in the spiritual department of my life in the world: a more faithful religious practice, informed by monastery living, in my life “in the world.”

Troubles begin, however, when I try to transplant the monastic way of life onto the soil of my daily living. Sensitized by my encounter with the alternative patterning of the monastic environment, community, practices, and texts, I begin to realize that the difficulties I experience with my spiritual practice outside the monastery retreat have to do with the tacit but powerful opposition presented by the surrounding society. I become aware that embodied in the environments, communities, practices, and texts “of the world” is another set of assumptions, the affirmations about work, worth, and the “real” sources of power and value that come into a clashing conflict with those that animate the monastery living. Subjectively, this movement of *initial secular learning* also feels very good: on the one hand, it enables me to trace the difficulties I have with the deepening of my religious practice to a specific source—secular culture; on the other hand, it makes me aware that the same values and suppositions that interfere with my prayer also get in the way of my resting. Yet, this initial movement of secular learning is limited. I still regard the secular culture and assumptions that it produces as something external to my action and perception. What I do *not* know yet is that the secular culture extends not only on the outside but also on the inside of me, as a part of my mentality, way of life, and even my perception and performance of religious practices.

Nonetheless, indignant at such a repeated interruption of my plans to deepen my spiritual practice and learn the art of resting in God, and convinced that I know what the real problem is, I begin to re-fashion my environment and timetable, my daily religious

practice and patterns of communal interaction, my work and my rest, in earnest. I make a decision to forge a way of life that is “in but not of the world,” and begin to struggle against the powerful momentum of secular culture in my life and ministry. And gradually, my systemic and persistent attempts at changing my way of life and religious practice begin to pull on the fabric of assumptions that animate my personal existence and reveal the deeper obstacles to my resting and praying: my existing patterns of thinking and feeling, working and resting, relating to people and material possessions, valuing and self-understanding—the operative assumptions that animate my daily living, which I am shocked to recognize as predominantly secular. I begin to see that “the world” that I initially and naïvely perceived to be without, is actually deeply ingrained within. This discovery makes me realize that the problem is much deeper than I originally thought, spurring me to double my efforts at eradicating the secular influence not only on my lifestyle, but also on my mindset. In the course of subsequent years, my dogged determination to implement and preserve the monastic way of life and resting in God in my life, despite the mounting personal costs of such a change, sets in motion a massive breakdown in my habits of working and resting, patterns of my interpersonal relationship and ordinary daily behaviors, and my established perceptions of the world and familiar definitions of self. This is the movement of *initial secular unlearning*, and it feels anything but good.

The most painful and frightening point of my personal transformation, however, comes in the form of breakdown in my understanding of God and religious praxis. As I go through a long period of extreme dryness in prayer and God’s seeming absence, I am confronted by the fact that not only my secular habits, practices, and attitudes, but even my former images, definitions and perceptions of the Divine are no longer working. The God,

whom I used to know, dies. This is the movement of the *initial religious unlearning*, and it feels terrible. It feels like the end of the world, and it plunges me into the darkness of psychological and spiritual undoing—which, in its symptoms of exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, disruption of relationships, and a host of psychosomatic symptoms, bears an uncanny resemblance to burnout.

Painful and frightening as it is, this profound spiritual crisis and collapse in my former patterns of action, perception, and self-understanding accomplishes a crucial goal: it exposes the fundamental duality in my belief system. I become aware that behind the explicit religious beliefs I so confidently claimed as the focus of my ultimate commitment, lies another set of assumptions, the implicit suppositions that, while hidden from my conscious awareness, are the ones that truly “run the show,” determining the patterns of my thinking, feeling, valuing, and acting, and consequentially, the restlessness of my behavior. Subjectively, this critical discovery—a combined movement of *deeper religious and secular learning*—does not feel good; it feels deeply embarrassing and humiliating. Yet, mortifying as it is, becoming consciously aware of the duality of my creed makes a new kind of learning possible: I can now subject both sets of suppositions to critical reflection and conscious examination. I begin to see that, whereas my explicit religious beliefs were formed intellectually, via a rational ascent to the principles of a religious worldview in response to formal religious instruction, my implicit secular assumptions were formed existentially, under the long-term formative influence of my family of origin, my own significant personal experiences in life, and the ever-present teaching of the surrounding secular culture. As such, my religious beliefs are explicit but weak—I know them only “in my head.” But my secular assumptions are powerful, because they have been

formed and continue to operate at a level far below my conscious awareness—I know them “in my gut!” This is the point in my monastic journey, when I first begin to recognize that it is these deeper patterns of secular belief, as well as the patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, valuing, and relating that I have formed in conjunction with these beliefs, that form the rich repository of the real “seeds” of my burnout.

My critical examination of the nature and origins of the two sets of my beliefs, their moral and ethical credibility, and communal value, my extensive observation of the effects of these beliefs on my daily life, and my in-depth discernment of the object that would be worthy of my ultimate commitment leads me to a decision to return to God as the fundamental focal point of my loyalty and devotion, and to re-affirm the Christian community of faith as the primary community of my belonging. Externally, the renewal of my religious commitment seems to make little difference: as before, I claim the worldview that is upheld by the Christian religious tradition as my own. Internally, however, there is a world of difference: now, my religious commitment is made in the context of my lost naïveté about the weakness of my explicit religious beliefs, and in the context of my lost innocence about the existence and power of my implicit and largely secular assumptions. As such, the renewal of my religious commitment marks the beginning of my deliberate work of subjecting both sides of my worldview, my religious beliefs and my secular assumptions, to experiential testing. Having been made deeply aware that I don’t really know God or the true meaning of the religious tradition, I begin to listen to God, read Scriptures, and engage in religious practices anew, from the position of poverty and ignorance. Having been made keenly aware that I am in a strong habit of believing and

obeying the dominant secular narratives of my upbringing, I begin to train myself in noticing, doubting, and deliberately ignoring what was previously accepted on faith.

It is in the course of these “real-life experiments” that I discover that the claims of my secular assumptions are not as absolute as they appear, become aware of the deeper veracity of the religious beliefs, and experience the gradual reversal in the order of power between the two. My religious beliefs begin to attain a genuinely operative status, not when I explicitly claim them as my formal beliefs, but when the “dry bones” of the doctrinal affirmation becomes “clothed in flesh” of the new habits of working and resting, thinking and feeling, valuing and relating, and the host of minute changes to my ordinary behavior and attitude. Similarly, my effective “leaving behind” of the implicit secular assumptions is not a matter of my outright rejection of their claim to authority, but my growth in the subtle capacity for differentiation. I become truly free when I become able to see through my habit of unquestioning obedience to the dominant secular narratives of my upbringing, skilled in going against the grain of the old patterns of acting, thinking, emotional and relational perception, and self-understanding that have been built around these stories, and willing to suffer the pain of their gradual dissolution. This concurrent movement of the *deeper religious learning* and the *deeper secular unlearning* is arduous, obscure, and by definition never-ending: the richness and complexity of the religious tradition is an invitation to ongoing discovery of its fundamental truths in my identity, way of life, and spiritual practice; and the ubiquitous presence of the secular culture is an ongoing call to be sober and watchful in the face of its powerful formative influence. Yet, gradually, I begin to see that it is in this crucible of changing habits that my real and more permanent recovery of burnout is taking place.

In this sense, the “development of faith” that undergirds my personal transformation into a restful person could be seen as a *complex achievement of dual cultural competency*, i.e., an ability to relate consciously and critically to the formal tenets of religious tradition and to the implicit system of values and beliefs created by the secular culture. Educationally speaking, the maturation of my religious commitment is characterized by two distinct “learning outcomes”: my experiential discovery of religious beliefs not merely doctrinally but existentially true, and my experiential realization that secular assumptions have genuine but truly limited validity. Yet, to say that the maturation of my religious commitment involves an achievement of dual cultural competency does not mean to say that the religious and the secular counterparts of my worldview remain the same. As I continue to grow in faith, my secular knowing indeed remains the same (simply because the fundamental teaching of the secular culture never changes), but my religious knowing continues to expand (simply because religious experience is by definition inexhaustible), eventually beginning to transcend—and therefore include, rather than merely oppose—the secular. This is the moment when the separation between the “world of the monastery” and the “world ‘of the world’” ceases to exist. The two worlds become one—drenched with the Holy. And I begin to see that this last paradoxical movement of learning and unlearning is not only my protection from future burnout but an interminable source of rest.

Possibility: Complexity in Seminarians’ Educational Experience

Reflecting on my journey of transformation into a restful person within the explicitly educational categories creates a twofold framework for understanding the complex

dynamics of learning and unlearning that have been crucially important for my recovery from burnout. With regards to the religious worldview, I went through the three distinct stages that culminated in the deepening of my religious learning: first, in response to my encounter with the monastic tradition, I started the work of eager integration of the religious way of life, practices and texts into the context of my life “in the world” (*initial learning*); then I went through the gradual and painful realization of the inadequacy of my religious beliefs (*initial unlearning*); and finally, following the renewal of my personal religious commitment, I have started to arrive at the “second naïveté” of a post-critical faith and newly forged religious practice (*deeper learning*). With regard to the secular worldview, I went through a parallel sequence, culminating in the deepening of my secular unlearning: first, in response to my encounter with the monastic tradition, I became conscious of the problematic influence of the surrounding secular culture on my spiritual life and ability to rest (*initial learning*) and started an earnest and costly attempt to change the secular outlook of my ordinary lifestyle and practices (*initial unlearning*); then I went through a painful discovery of the secular nature of my operative assumptions and their profound influence not merely on my work and rest, relationships and behavior, but even on my images of God, understanding of spiritual practice, and habits of ministry (*deeper learning*); and finally, following the renewal of my personal religious commitment, I gradually arrived at the “second naïveté” of a post-critical disbelief and creative disobedience to the powerful teaching of the secular mindset (*deeper unlearning*).

This twofold framework of interpretation, in turn, offers a lens through which to view the experience of ministerial students during their seminary training, in order to hypothesize about their potential vulnerability to burnout. What, then, stands behind the

complexity of the seminarians' educational experience? Could the similar dynamics of learning and unlearning be discerned in the course of their seminary training? Could the similar learning outcomes of dual cultural competency with regards to the secular and religious worldviews be identified at the point of their graduation?

Even a brief glance at theological education of clergy reveals ample evidence for one aspect of ministerial students' learning and unlearning: their explicit religious knowing. To begin with, the seminary curricula and literature on theological education bear strong witness to the seminary's explicit attention and significant success in the area of *initial learning*: during their seminary years, ministerial students receive a vast amount of knowledge about the Bible, theology, church history, the pastoral arts, and so on. Similarly, while not explicitly stated in the curriculum, there is enough recorded evidence in the scholarly research on theological education of clergy, faculty and seminarians' own writing, as well as in common parlance that regards seminary training, about the tremendous *initial unlearning* with regards to their religious understanding, practice and belief that takes place in the course of their seminary training. Things change sharply, however, at the last point of *deeper learning*: while in theory it is assumed that the work of critical thinking and deconstruction directed at the religious knowing, and the "loss of naïve faith" that accompanies it, is done in service of a more mature religious commitment, there is little evidence about specific pedagogical practices and programs directed at helping ministerial students with the challenging task of developing a post-critical faith, by teaching them the skills of re-engaging the religious tradition anew and enabling them to reach the state of a "second naiveté."

Whereas the seminarians' cycle of learning and unlearning with regard to their explicit religious knowing can be seen as incomplete, their *cycle of learning and unlearning with regard to their implicit secular knowing* seems to be simply absent. Even as the seminarians spend extensive time in "thinking through" theology and the Bible and the practical arts of ministry, they are not guided through a similar voyage of discovery and exploration of the assumptions, values and commitments that, while hidden behind the façade of their formal religious beliefs, powerfully mold not only the daily patterns of their living but even their images of God, perceptions of pastoral identity, and understanding of ministry. And, in the absence of conscious awareness about the profound formative influence of their significant personal experiences, families of origin, primary communities, and the larger secular culture on their operative assumptions, values, and commitments, ministerial students are not in a position to unlearn them.⁵⁰¹

Thus, it appears that at the end of their theological education, unfortunately, many ministerial students are not likely to attain the state of complex dual cultural competency and ability to relate consciously and critically to both the religious and the secular worldviews. Instead, it seems that they are likely to be leaving seminary in the

⁵⁰¹ In hypothesizing that ministerial students have little opportunity to think critically about their tacit secular assumptions during seminary training, I am *not* arguing that it cannot happen. Indeed, the courses in church history, historical theology, religious knowing and pastoral care, if taught well, should challenge them to subject their cultural backgrounds to thorough critical examination, with an intention to uncover the fundamental suppositions of their existential worldviews—as indeed some of my own seminary courses (*Faith Development* with the late Dr. James Fowler, *Politics of Knowing* and *Religious Education as Formation and Transformation* with Dr. Theodore Brelsford) have accomplished for me. What I *am* arguing is that, at present, when critical reflection on the secular side of the seminarians' knowing does happen, it is an outcome of the particular giftedness and dedication on the part of the faculty (and perhaps, a certain readiness on the part of the student), but not a matter of the formally pursued educational objective institutionalized broadly and fundamentally in pedagogy and curriculum. It lacks the explicit curricular emphasis that exists for the deconstruction of the seminarians' religious side of knowing.

problematical state of being “caught in between.” The naïve faith with which they typically enter seminary has perhaps been deconstructed, but often they have not yet made the critically important transition to the second naïveté. They are yet to develop the skills of re-entering the religious world, re-engaging the religious tradition, and relating to God, in a fresh, new, post-critically naïve way. Additionally, even as (and precisely because) their explicit religious beliefs and commitments may have suffered significant losses, their implicit secular assumptions, values, and commitments—having never been discovered, much less challenged—remain powerfully operative.

Becoming aware of the potential imbalance and lack of completion in the cycle of learning and unlearning, with regard to the clergy students’ explicit religious beliefs and implicit secular assumptions, as an inadvertent outcome of their seminary training offers a helpful perspective for understanding the reasons that may account for their future vulnerability to burnout. To begin with, in the absence of a truly internalized religious worldview, strong personal commitment to the values and practices that characterize a genuinely religious way of life, and a pastoral identity that has been forged in the crucible of deliberate discernment and decision-making among the multitude of religious and secular descriptions, ministerial students are more likely to adopt the images, habits, and definitions of ministry (as well as the standards for its evaluation!) from the surrounding secular culture. At the same time, in the absence of conscious awareness of the problematic ways in which the secular culture, their families of origin or other significant relationships and major personal experiences affect their habits of working and resting, patterns of self-understanding and interpersonal relationship, ministerial students cannot subject them to critical assessment and intentional modification. Finally, because in the seminary the

deconstruction of their religious beliefs takes place in the context of training in the performative aspects of ministry, seminarians might be learning a dangerous model of alienated ministry: they are becoming skilled in talking about God, teaching and preaching, even as subjectively their own faith may be going “on the rocks.” Thus, it seems that while they are still in the somewhat protected and regimented seminary environment, they can “pull it off,” delivering strong ministerial performance despite the growing disconnect between their learning and living. But once they get immersed in the church and subjected to tremendous pressures of interpersonal relationship, conflicting expectations, institutional pressures, and their own career needs, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the deficiencies in their religious knowing and their ignorance of the powerful influences of their secular knowing on their perception of pastoral identity and ministerial practice may put them on a fast track to burnout.

Yet, I hasten to note that we must not give into the temptation to blame the seminary and its commitment to critical thinking for the vulnerability of its ministerial students before burnout. Even as the twofold framework of learning and unlearning enables us to understand the aspects of theological education that account for seminarians’ potential vulnerability to future burnout, it also helps us to see that the seminary is in the highly advantageous position to sponsor its own dialectic of learning and unlearning. Looking at seminarians’ experience through the lens of twofold learning and unlearning helps us to see that the lack of their learning and unlearning with regard to the explicit religious and implicit secular aspects of their worldview during ministerial preparation is not a matter of overt error on the part of the seminary, but rather, a situation in which a good and proper process of development simply has not been carried out to its full extent. Because the

seminary is highly successful in teaching its ministerial students the skills of critical thinking and in guiding them through the first round of their application to the explicit religious aspects of their worldview, it is already halfway there. What is necessary then is for the seminary to pursue its existing commitment to critical thinking even further—by extending it beyond its students’ explicit religious knowing, to tacit aspects of their secular knowing.

Specifically, the seminary could offer powerful assistance to its ministerial students in the work of discovery and gradual unlearning of the secular mentality by directing its laser beam of critical thinking to three important areas of awareness:

1. The problematic patterns of thinking and relating, emotionality and action that betray the presence of the tacit secular assumptions in the seminarians’ operative worldview—thus, enabling them to become aware of the existence of their secular mindset and its profound influence on their daily habits of working and resting, their perception of pastoral identity and vocation, and their ministerial performance.
2. The implicit secular assumptions themselves—thus, creating conditions under which the seminarians could “think through” their origin and nature, consciously assess their validity, and, when necessary, envision alternatives, in relation to the fundamental norms, principles and values that characterize their explicit religious knowing.
3. The hidden secular foundations of critical thought itself, as it is practiced and embodied in the very culture, primary methods, and objectives of theological education—thus, enabling ministerial students to come to a fundamental realization that, despite their extensive theological studies, they don’t really know God or the true meaning of religious tradition, and therefore, opening for them the possibility of a new, freshly naïve engagement with both.

By teaching its ministerial students to apply the skills of critical thinking not only to the fundamental aspects of their explicit religious knowing, but also to the tacit assumptive designs of their secular mentality—from the most external layer of the seminarians' behavior, to the deeper layer of their individual operative assumptions, and finally to the innermost layer of recognizing the many and various ways in which theological education itself teaches those secular assumptions—the seminary could correct the imbalance in its students' conscious awareness and ability to relate critically to the explicit religious and secular aspects of their worldview.

Thus, a closer look at ministerial students' experience during their seminary training reveals that, in order to fulfill its aspiration of teaching rest and forming restful ministers, the seminary does not really need to imitate the monastery, but rather pursue its own curricular goals and commitments to their fullness, carrying out its mission of critical thinking more deeply and broadly with respect to the secular assumptions that underlie its students' worldview and self-understanding, toward a post-critical reappropriation of their religious faith. Nonetheless, one cannot fail to observe that if the seminary is to assist its ministerial students in bringing to completion their work of deeper, post-critical learning of the religious worldview and the work of their deeper, post-critical unlearning of the secular worldview, it would benefit greatly from having access to the alternative environment and praxis of the monastery. As going to another culture makes the travelers all the more aware of the outlines of their own, going to the monastery would expose seminarians' implicit secular assumptions, as well as the habits of thinking and relating, emotionality and action that have been formed around those core beliefs, in the way that

abstract theoretical reflection alone cannot. At the same time, going to the monastery would put ministerial students into direct contact with one ancient, powerful, and still vital form of religious tradition—an opportunity that is largely inaccessible in the context of the contemporary mainline liberal Protestant seminary—thus, enabling them to begin the journey of re-entering the religious world and the immediacy of religious experience anew. Finally, these benefits of the monastic encounter for the seminary students would dramatically increase, if they were to take place not under the conditions of a particular “course of study” but in the context of “retreat leisure”: the explicit objective of resting that would bring students face to face with the sources of restlessness, free them to fully participate and experience (rather than observe and reflect on) the restfulness of the religious way of life, and offer an unprecedented (and far less costly) opportunity to practice deliberate doubting and creative disobedience to the powerful teaching of the secular mindset.

Hence, having re-conceptualized the insights and observations about my transformation into a restful person in explicitly educational terms, and having identified not only the problematic but also highly promising aspects of seminary training for teaching rest and forming restful persons, I confirm the notion of “partnership between seminary and monastery” as the valid normative objective for envisioning theological education of clergy as an avenue for prevention of ministerial burnout. My conclusion is that, in order to teach rest and form restful ministers, the seminary does not need to imitate the monastery, but rather to find its own way of embodying the monastic central educational and formational insights, by becoming intentional about sponsoring its own unique cycle of religious and secular learning and unlearning for ministerial students; such

work, in turn, would be significantly enhanced, if the seminary finds a way to utilize the monastery's remarkable power to engender a holistic event of religious education for those who choose to respond to its invitation to "come aside and rest awhile."

Normative Vision: What Then Should We Hope For?

My conclusion about the non-imitative but corroborative nature of relationship between the seminary and the monastery has far-reaching consequences for conceptualizing the normative vision of theological education as an important avenue for prevention of clergy burnout. It reveals an alternative, paradoxical way to understand and embody the notion of institutional partnership: as a relationship between the monastery and the seminary that invites them not to depart from but to deepen their commitment to the fundamental aspects of their institutional identity and praxis. In this scenario, the seminary is asked to continue with the *work* of ministerial preparation, and the monastery is asked to continue with its business of offering *rest* to its visitors! Understood this way—as an affiliation that calls not for shared teaching work between the seminary and the monastery, but for regular interruption of the seminary's teaching work in order to send its clergy students and faculty to the monastery to rest—this normative vision seems to transcend the initial difficulties. It opens up, as it were, a possibility hidden within the *impossibility*.

Specifically, on the side of the Monastery: What ministerial students need from the monastery is what the monastery is already giving to all visitors coming for retreats: a silent but powerful exposure to an alternative environment and community, alternative way of life and spiritual practice, and alternative pace under the conditions of resting, not working. In this sense, sending seminarians to the monastery for a retreat would require no more

“work” from the monastery that it is already doing (and it would also “give back” to the monastery in the form of financial support).

Similarly, on the side of the Seminary: What ministerial students need from the seminary, with regards to the potential inclusion of monastery retreats in the course of their seminary training as a way to deepen the dynamics of their religious and secular learning and unlearning, is something that is already present in the seminary pedagogy and curriculum: critical reflection is already a fundamental part of the seminary’s teaching objectives and pedagogical practices; the emphasis on developing strong pastoral self-awareness is already a part of the seminary’s teaching objectives; and the diversity of religious practices and traditions is already a part of the seminary’s religious life (from which, until relatively recently, the Benedictine-Cistercian monastic tradition has been excluded!). At the same time, the inclusion of the recurring monastery retreats in the seminary curriculum introduces something into the context of theological education that its students, and even its faculty, really need: times of rest, retreats during which they are actually “required” to stop working (and not the “program retreats” that are occasions to work off-site). Thus, it seems that if the seminary utilizes this peculiar possibility of partnering with the monastery, by including the monastery retreats in its ministerial preparation, it would be exemplifying greater faithfulness to its core curricular aims and teaching commitments while at the time fulfilling the long-neglected need of rest for its faculty and students.

But, of course, the realization of such a possibility in practice is at best provisional. The successful inclusion of monastic rest in seminary training is conditional upon the willingness of ministerial students and their faculty to put in some extra work! For the

students, becoming aware of the problematic nature of their operative assumptions and the habits of thinking, acting, relating, and emotionality associated with those assumptions would be a difficult, confusing, and not infrequently painful undertaking. Depending on the specific nature of their restlessness and its intensity, individual seminarians may also need to seek help by route of psychotherapy, spiritual direction, or other healing modality—thus, further increasing the demand. At the same time, utilizing the monastery retreats in order to deepen the dynamics of religious and secular learning and unlearning for seminary students would also create more work for the faculty. It must be remembered that it is entirely possible to just go to the monastery, “veg out,” then come back and just give in to the romanticizing reminiscence or entertaining conversation about the monks’ oddity. In order to be truly helpful, the seminarians’ experiences of retreat—especially the difficult experiences, the occasions that made them feel uncomfortable, distressed, angry, or frightened—must be brought to conscious awareness and deliberately explored. Such in-depth work will not be possible without a significant investment of energy and time on the part of the theological faculty. Thus, on both sides of the seminary training—for the seminarians as for their faculty—the inclusion of monastic retreats into the seminary training would create a significant interference with already tightly packed schedules competing for time, energy, and financial resources. It seems that, if the seminary is to effectively include the monastery retreats in its teaching of rest, it would have to engage in its own “work and war” of resting.

I have no easy answer to these difficulties—except, perhaps, by observing that one way to address these challenges might be to envision not a full-scale “work and war” operation, but something of a “guerilla” movement of resistance. If the undertaking of the

seminary-monastery partnership is imagined not as a *formal requirement* institutionalized in the seminary curriculum for all, but as a *voluntary and selective program* for exceptional ministerial students and theological faculty who are personally in deep sympathy with the concerns that inspire this proposal and compelled by the possibility of having such an opportunity for themselves, then the effort and labor that it requires is more likely to find the necessary support, not only from the participating individuals but also from the various religious grant-making organizations.⁵⁰²

Now, if the normative vision for theological education as an avenue for addressing clergy burnout is a retreat-based relationship of partnership between seminary and monastery, what then should be my constructive proposal? How might we best proceed, if we are to enable such vision to come to life? It is tempting to rush into the work of explicit curriculum reform or to focus on the development of a specific initiative for integrating the monastery retreats into the busy seminary schedule. Yet, I believe that such a course of action would be mistaken.

The proposition to send students and faculty from a mainline liberal Protestant seminary to the houses of the Roman Catholic contemplative monastic order for regular retreats would demand such a radical shift in the existing programming and praxis of

⁵⁰²There is undeniably a certain elitist cast to this proposal. Such elitism, however, is not necessarily a bad thing. While the vision of “elite ministers” lies in bold (and uneasy) relief against the democratic thinking that characterizes the contemporary seminary’s ethos and the egalitarian ideals of the church, in reality, all people of high performance—such as elite athletes, principal ballet dancers, and highly creative scientists and artists—belong to the minority elite. Such elitism is not so much a matter of deliberate exclusion of others, but rather an exceptionally high level of personal commitment and inclination (not infrequently seen as a “calling”) on the part of the individuals themselves. Their schools take pride in providing both considerable resources and tremendous rigors of training that enable these persons to develop the habits of exceptionally high professional functioning.

theological education that it could be easily dismissed as a nice yet utterly unrealistic idea. Even if the gaping distance in the denominational and occupational identities of the two institutions is overlooked, the true significance of including regular monastery retreats in the seminary curriculum can be easily missed: monastery retreats for seminarians and their faculty—not unlike the frequent recommendation to take “time off” for burned out clergy—are all too liable to be misconstrued merely as an outlet for physical relaxation, emotional and spiritual renewal, and a respite from the intellectual rigors of seminary life. Yet, to use the monastery simply as a place for “getting away from it all” is to greatly reduce its value for addressing the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education of clergy.

To grasp the true meaning of sending seminarians for regular retreats to the monastery, gain strong conviction in the validity of such an unconventional undertaking, and to find a workable yet restful way of implementing it in practice, we must first learn to think differently about the fundamental aspects of teaching rest in the seminary. Imagining an effective and lasting change on the level of action demands the experience of a genuine shift in perception. What is necessary therefore is not a proposal of a new program, but a provocation of a new way of seeing.

Thus, my constructive proposal will be not *programmatic*, but *paradigmatic* in nature. In the next section of this chapter, in light of the monastic educational and formational insights gained in the course of my case study, I will suggest three shifts in perception of the contents and methods for teaching rest in the seminary, which I believe would enable its participants to imagine and therefore engage in theological education

anew, and in so doing to re-create it as an effective avenue for prevention of ministerial failure.

10.3 Lesson 3: Three Shifts in Perception for Teaching Rest in Seminary

The three shifts in perception that I seek to invite for teaching rest in the seminary are as follows:

1. A shift in seeing the seemingly familiar phenomena of rest and burnout, from seeing them in simple, positive or negative terms, to seeing them as complex processes, each involving positive and negative aspects.
2. A shift in seeing the seemingly obvious nature of the seminary's educational process, from learning and accumulating knowledge and understanding, to also *unlearning* and purging certain kinds of knowledge and assumptions.
3. A shift in seeing the seemingly self-evident focus of the seminary's ministerial preparation, from developing professional knowledge and competence alone, to developing religious faith, commitment, and a distinctively religious type of pastoral identity together with professional knowledge and competence.

I will discuss each of these shifts within the recurring framework of three questions. First, what is the nature of the shift? Second, how would such a shift in perception affect our understanding of the praxis of theological education? Third, how would the changes in the praxis of theological education that are engendered by this shift enable the seminary to become an active participant in the work of prevention of clergy burnout? It is my hope that my description of these three shifts in perception would invite a new way of seeing the daily realities of seminary learning and living and, in so doing, enable us to re-imagine it anew.

*Regaining Complexity in Understanding Rest and Burnout:
the Positive and the Negative Dimensions*

I propose that in light of the monastic educational and formational insights gained in the course of my case study, we begin to see that contrary to the popular perception of rest and the uniformly positive depiction of it by the hospitality industry, *rest* is not an unambiguous or simple self-evident good, but a phenomenon with both positive and significant negative dimensions. Its negative aspects are closely tied up with its ability to expose the fundamental tensions of human existence and the major personal sources of unrest, which can be easily avoided or denied during times of work and other activity. Similarly, I suggest that, in contrast to the popular perception of *burnout* and its predominantly negative representation in the psychological and pastoral literature as a dangerous outcome that that need to be prevented at all cost, we begin to see burnout as a process—admittedly, a difficult, dark, frequently painful and fraught with dangers process—that is at the same time charged with tremendous possibilities for growth and maturation. Its strong potential for positive transformation is closely linked to its ever-present potential for destruction: it arises precisely from its ability to reveal, call into question, and gradually dissolve inept or even injurious patterns of worldview and self-understanding, and the accompanying habits of thinking, acting, relating, and emotional competency. (One may even wonder if for clergy—precisely because they work in such close proximity to the Ultimate, not just in theory but in the actuality of the personal encounter with the living God who is a “consuming fire”—the purgative dynamics of burnout form an inherent, and even necessary, part of the ministerial vocation.)

If we see both phenomena in this more holistic way, then our understanding of how rest needs to be taught, and how burnout can be prevented, undergoes a radical re-

orientation. With regards to rest, we would no longer assume that it would happen automatically, merely in the absence of work. Hence, we would realize that seminary training for ministers will need to include not only teaching the skills of doing ministry, but also teaching the skills of *not*-doing ministry, i.e., the ability to withdraw—intelligently, prayerfully, and repeatedly—from active pastoral work. Furthermore, the effective teaching of rest would have to include critical reflection on what it means to rest well in the face of the never-ending need and demand that characterize pastoral ministry, as well as intentional development of the capacity to respond constructively to the negative personal emotions and negative interpersonal feedback triggered in the context of such voluntary inaction. Finally, the seminary’s teaching of rest would have to include not merely theoretical reflection on its importance and introduction to the various modalities (e.g., meditation, gym, nature, time alone, healthy eating—important as they are), but also an in-depth exploration of what stands in the way of students’ resting (e.g., societal and ecclesiastical conventions, internalized expectations from families of origins, various aspects of their idiosyncratic woundedness, and personal habits of responding to the ordinary stresses of living as well as ultimate tensions of the human existence) and guidance for developing new, more salutary ways of addressing these invisible but powerful obstacles, in the course of teaching them to rest “in God.”

With regards to burnout, we would no longer teach students only the “causal” view of burnout—that focuses solely on addressing the causes of burnout, but would invite them to consider a broader “purposive” view of burnout—the one that looks not only back, onto causes, but also forward towards the positive opportunities for deeper, more complex

integration.⁵⁰³ Accordingly, we would no longer assume that the ultimate goal of addressing clergy burnout in the context of theological education has to do with the work of prevention; rather, we may recognize the greater value in highlighting burnout-like symptoms and dynamics that characterize seminarians' significant learning experiences, offering them resources and teaching them the skills of discerning and responding to those dynamics constructively. Such paradoxical teaching would help them to learn (powerfully if implicitly) that dark, burnout-like experiences can have positive meaning and effect, begin to develop coping techniques and practices of self-care that can sustain them through the times of "dying," and to experience, albeit on a smaller scale, a burnout that "leads unto life."

Before I can even begin to answer the third question of my reflection—i.e., how a shift in perception of rest and burnout in the context of theological education of clergy would enable seminary to become an active participant in the work of prevention of clergy burnout?—a deeper problem must be addressed. If we are to genuinely recognize and embrace this more holistic view of the burnout phenomenon, then even the language that

⁵⁰³ A keen eye will undoubtedly recognize Anton Boisen's presence once more in my writing: the new burnout terminology that I suggest uses the same terms that he used in his argument regarding the "causal" vs. "purposive" view of mental illness. The terminological similarity points towards the deeper correspondence. Boisen believed that the difference between a valid religious experience and an abnormal mental state has to do not with the presence or absence of the abnormal and erroneous symptoms (those could be present in either case), but the direction of the ultimate change (its "purpose"), which can only be ascertained in the aftermath of the experience: in case of the former, the mental collapse is an attempt at reorganization "from the bottom up" and its effects are deeply unifying and constructive; in case of the latter, the mental collapse is ruinous, because the patient is genuinely losing ground. Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*; Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*. It is my conviction as well that a meaningful distinction between a "good" or "bad" burnout can be made only when the experience has run its course: every experience of burnout holds equal potential for destruction and growth, for dying onto life or simply dying; yet, the direction of the outcome can be influenced, positively and strongly, by the resources that are made available to persons prior to the onset of the burnout experience.

characterizes the present discourse of addressing it as a problem comes into question. At once, we find ourselves in the realm of paradox and apparent contradiction: clergy burnout is a truly destructive and debilitating problem, and my research is an attempt to make a contribution to the work of its prevention in the context of theological education; yet, my very thesis is that a certain kind of burnout is a necessary component of spiritual development and ministerial formation and that in order to prevent burnout, we must guide ministerial students toward it during their seminary years! I do not pretend to have a fully satisfactory answer to this dilemma. It is my belief that change in the language is a function of change in the social imagination: people begin to *speak* differently, when they begin to *see* things differently. On my part, I hope to begin my contribution to such a modification by offering a clear and compelling description of the complexity in the nature and dynamics of this phenomenon. In the meantime, in my writing, I elect to use adjectives and dependent clauses to achieve greater clarity about what exactly I am determined to *prevent* (burning out in a destructive and debilitating way) and what exactly I hope to *sponsor* (burning out in a constructive and spiritually transformative way). With that in mind, I now proceed to name the positive effects that the changes in the seminary training, enabled by the shift to a more complete understanding of rest and burnout, would have on its ministerial students.

Ministerial students who have been made genuinely aware of the negative dimensions of rest would become ministers who are less naïve about their inability to find time for rest and self-care and who are significantly more prepared to recognize the deeper ambivalence about resting itself behind their long-standing habits of overwork. Ministerial students who are made consciously aware of their personal sources of restlessness and their habitual ways of responding to these sources of restlessness, and who have been introduced

to the alternative ways of thinking and acting in the face of their unrest will become more restful ministers simply by virtue of “knowing the enemy.” Those seminarians who choose to enter into an in-depth therapy or spiritual direction in order to work on the “hot buttons” discovered in the course of the seminary’s teaching of rest would be even better prepared.⁵⁰⁴

At the same time, ministerial students who have been introduced to a causal but also a purposeful “theory” of burnout, and have been made conscious of the positive potential for spiritual transformation hidden behind the façade of the negative symptoms, in their active years as clergy might be more alert to the appearance of the negative symptoms, more willing to explore the positive directions of change, and more capable of being proactive in seeking external guidance and support. Ministerial students who have

⁵⁰⁴ The suggestion of benefit coming from supplementing the seminary teaching of rest with a course in psychotherapeutic intervention raises an important question: Could the fundamental objective of becoming restful, which I advocate realizing by the route of the monastic method, be accomplished equally well by means of good psychological assistance—via in-depth psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and similar programs—that also seek to uncover and address the dysfunctional and destructive patterns of thinking, feeling, behavior, and interpersonal relationship that constitute powerful sources of human restlessness? It seems to me that there exists a fine but very important distinction between the two. In my experience, not all human restlessness has a pathological origin; some of it is existential, deeply embedded in the reality of the human condition itself—and as such, normal. In so far as psychological healing is focused on the sources of pathological restlessness, it falls short of addressing its deeper, and far less “curable,” counterpart. Yet, this falling short is not a matter of unfortunate deficiency on the part of the secular therapies, but their legitimate limit, and as such it is a source of its distinctive strength. If we reverse the equation, we see that the opposite is also true: the traditional monastic methods, while extremely effective at making the existential restlessness conscious as well as providing skills and tools for responding to it constructively, are ill-suited (and in some instances, plain dangerous) for dealing with various shades of pathological restlessness. The awareness of this difference can be seen even in monks’ behavior: their abiding suspicion about the overly enthusiastic religious experiences and their general refusal to use prayer for “curing” psychological ailments (although this does not mean that they do not pray for such people, be they in extreme exultation or distress). That’s why my suggestion to supplement the seminarians’ monastic encounter with assistance from the secular psychotherapeutic modalities is meaningful in the first place. A similar argument about a critical distinction between neurotic and existential anxiety, and the corresponding need to distinguish between the medical and theological approaches to it, was made by Paul Tillich (Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 64-85, especially 70-78.).

been assisted in recognizing and responding constructively to the burnout-like dynamics of learning in the context of their seminary experience, and who therefore have had the chance to discover, in the realms of their own personal experience, personal growth and transformation as an outcome of such a journey, would be even better prepared. Their “resilience” in ministry would be twofold. On the one hand, they would be capable of avoiding (or quickly recovering from) the destructive and debilitating aspects of burning out, because they are better able to recognize its patterns at an earlier stage, and because they have established the base of resources, relationship, and personal habits of self-care that can sustain them through such occasions of “dying.” On the other hand, paradoxically, they would be capable of a more resilient ministry because they have greater freedom of discerning their own readiness and need for entering the crucible of burnout, so that they could die and be raised again to a deeper, more life-giving level of ministry.

*Reimagining the Nature of Theological Education of Clergy:
Teaching for Success and Teaching for Failure*

I propose that in light of the monastic educational and formational insights gained in the course of my case study, we begin to see that good theological education is characterized by the presence of the two, seemingly contradictory, dynamics: that of learning and that of unlearning. In this sense, effective teaching requires a keen awareness not only of the “gains” (*the didactic process*) but also of the “losses” (*the purgative process*) that the students need to make in the course of their training. Indeed, there are specific instances in theological education of clergy—e.g., deliberate exposure and purging of pre-critical beliefs about the origins and authority of Scripture in the courses devoted to biblical studies, or intentional uncovering and deconstruction of the compulsive and harmful

patterns of interpersonal relating, in service of learning the habits of a more self-aware and responsive pastoral ministry in the courses on pastoral care—that reveal at least partial awareness on the part of faculty of the importance of the purgative process in the seminary training. Yet, while the gains of the students' learning are made explicit in the seminary's curriculum and formal programming, the losses that have the power to prepare the way and secure the achievements of the students' new learning are not. What is necessary therefore is the work of making the purgative dimension of teaching and its "unlearning outcomes" as explicit as the didactic counterpart, so that the necessary losses could be systematically realized across the entire curriculum.

If we see the nature of seminary training holistically, being mindful of both its didactic and purgative processes, then our understanding of its fundamental objectives undergoes a radical transformation: we begin to realize that good theological education must be intentional about teaching not only *for success*, but also *for failure*. For the purgation of the former knowing, which good theological education can engender for its ministerial students, is not a matter of changing merely (or even primarily) an intellectual understanding, as if it were a fleeting opinion on a superficial subject that one considers today and discards tomorrow. It is a collapse of beliefs, values, commitments and habits of thinking and acting, patterns of relating and emotionality, facets of personal identity and communal ties that have been formed, during the many years prior to their entry into the seminary, around those ways of understanding. It is precisely because the "subjects," which the seminary intends for its ministerial students to learn, cut so close to the fundamental infrastructures of their existence and their "ultimate concerns," that the concurrent work of students' unlearning becomes such an emotionally-charged and

genuinely dangerous undertaking. Faith indeed must be ever seeking understanding, but the occasion of finding it is as much a cause for grieving, as it is for celebrating: the world and self that have long been known are dying in the wake of the new. Thus, if we desire to offer our ministerial students a truly transformative learning experience during their seminary training, we must be mindful of its strong potential for triggering the various degrees of psychological and spiritual undoing, and we must be prepared to accept the tremendous responsibility for offering adequate support for the journey of “burned bridges” that accompanies their glorious voyage of discovery. Such support could take the form of three specific steps:

1. Formal acknowledgement of the dual educational intent of seminary education: this means officially including the purgative process into the seminary curriculum and clearly communicating to the students the potential negative effects of such teaching on their emotional and spiritual equilibrium, thus not only preparing students for the darker (and usually hidden) side of the seminary training, but also removing the underlying feelings of shame and humiliation associated with “losing it.”
2. Offering support for the “grieving” process: honoring the deep psychological and spiritual vulnerability of this state and working with the students through the inevitable negative aspects of their unlearning: heightened fatigue, intellectual confusion, difficult emotions (e.g., fear, sadness, rage, guilt, and, not the least, shame), and disruption of the relational bonds in the context of which the knowledge-that-is-now-being-unlearned has been generated in the first place (e.g., family of origin, church community).
3. Offering training for “losing well”: this means guiding students in becoming more aware of their personal repertoire of defensive motivational dynamics involved in guarding themselves from the feelings of failure (e.g., a tendency to blame themselves or others), and teaching them the skills of seeing and entering failure

from the position of curiosity and compassion, as a context and means of knowing the world and the self, and even God, that cannot be accomplished any other way.

Full realization of the didactic and purgative dimensions of theological education of clergy has far-reaching consequences for the seminary's ability to sponsor the event of burning out in a constructive and spiritually transformative way for its ministerial students, and in so doing to make it capable of forming clergy who are more restful and more resilient before the destructive effects of burnout. On the most obvious level, the seminary's teaching of importance and practices of resting and self-care (exercise, good diet, opportunities for physical relaxation and spiritual renewal, etc.) would be learned much better, if it is augmented with the seminary's explicit guidance for exploration, critical reflection, and when necessary, careful deconstruction of the students' already existing problematic habits of resting and self-care (mindless internet browsing, passive consumption of TV, compulsive overeating, etc.).

On a deeper level, the seminary can build protection for its ministerial students against the debilitating effects of burnout by being intentional about its teaching with regards to failure. Because the experience of failure is an inherent and inescapable aspect of ministerial work (the demands of ministry always exceed the subjective abilities of individual clergy) and because genuine rest requires making peace with failure (to rest, in any significant sense, clergy must admit the inability to be and do everything for everyone), the seminary's ability to lead its ministerial students in theological reflection on the cultural abhorrence of failure and prescriptions of success, and teach them to "fail well" would endow them with crucial skills for responding to one of the most significant causes of

clergy stress.⁵⁰⁵ Ministerial students who are made deeply aware of the inevitability of failure in learning as in ministry, who are intimately acquainted with their personal knee-jerk reactions and emotional trigger-points activated in the context of real or perceived failure, and who have the skills of enduring and exploring the rawness and vulnerability of such experience will become ministers who are not only more resilient before burnout (because they less likely to be all caught up in their work as a habitual way of fighting off the internal threat of failure) but also more capable of in-depth, revelatory ministry (because they have encountered, wrestled with, and come to know God anew on the dark terrain of failure). Finally, if the seminary can endow its ministerial students with conscious awareness and the skills of constructive engagement with both positive *and* negative dimensions of its own educational process, it would also teach them, on the most hidden yet profound level, the knowledge and skills necessary for engaging the positive and negative dimensions of burnout—thus, preparing them for burning out in a fruitful and spiritually transformative way.

*Remembering the Twofold Focus of Ministerial Preparation:
“Learning a Profession” and “Making Profession”*

In light of the key insights gained in the course of my case study, I propose we begin to see that successful ministerial preparation has not one but two fundamental learning objectives: not only a thorough professional preparation but also a maturation of faith and religious commitment. Indeed, the classical understanding of “profession,” which defined priestly

⁵⁰⁵ One example of such critical theological reflection on failure is offered by Jesuit theologian, John Navone: John J. Navone, *A Theology of Failure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974).

office in the Catholic churches prior to the Reformation, designated the avowal of poverty, chastity, and obedience as a way to distinguish itself not by its common occupation, but rather by the nature of the call, and the quality of religious commitment in the context of which the diverse work of ministry was being carried out. It was not until the late sixteenth century, when the church first sought to establish the authority of its clergy on rational grounds and to provide special education that distinguished the minister from the laity, that the contemporary way of understanding ministerial profession, as a vocational group distinguished from others by specialized training, standards of ethical conduct and accreditation, and the kind of service that they offer to the community, was established.⁵⁰⁶ Even though this modern ideal of minister as a “professional” has come under much questioning (and, in America, even under attack),⁵⁰⁷ I am convinced of its profound positive impact, not only on evolution in clergy’s own self-understanding but also on the institutional theological education which sought to equip clergy to realize such a role and

⁵⁰⁶ While the origins of special education for clergy can be traced back to the sixteenth century, the notion of professionalization in clergy education evolved throughout its history, and it took a distinct form of the “professional competence movement” that affected the seminary curricula in the twentieth century. In Protestant seminaries, in response to the general turn of higher education toward professionalism, the widening gap between the classical theological disciplines and practical fields, and the desire for social relevance, theological educators sought to link the key competencies of pastoral training to the various roles in ministry (teaching, preaching, counseling, administration, etc.), building their explicit assessment into the seminary curriculum. The rise of clinical training and contextual education could be counted among the greatest advances of the professional model of preparation. See, for example, Jackson W. Carroll, “The Professional Model of Ministry: Is It Worth Saving?,” *Theological Education* 21, no. 2 (1985); James P. Martin, “Competence Model Education,” *Theological Education* 13, no. 3 (1977). Glenn Miller devotes the entire second volume in his monumental trilogy to this topic: Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

⁵⁰⁷ For a fascinating and thought-provoking account of evolution in American clergy’s understanding and enduring ambivalence about regarding ministry as “profession,” see Holifield. Professor Holifield describes the “populist” disregard and lasting suspicion for specialized clerical education in America and argues that the American clergy themselves, while acknowledging the importance of professional education, remained uncomfortable with the “professional model” of ministry and frequently questioned its adequacy.

to safeguard the status of ministry as a respected “profession.” It is precisely the controversial nature of such definition, its theological ambivalence, and the allegiance with the secular culture of the American workplace that it implies, that became both a trigger and a driving force behind the development of the more in-depth theologies and practices of ministry, as well as the vast advancements in theological education—giving rise, in turn, to the generations of ministers whose theoretical knowledge, practical skills, clinical experience, contextual sensitivity, and social awareness became a bedrock of a deeper, more informed, proficient, self-aware and compassionate ministry.

Yet, even as I am in full and wholehearted support of developing professional competence in ministry, I also believe that when “professional competence” is defined in purely (and therefore narrowly) sociological terms—as, for example, when clergy’s professional competence is compared to the professional competence of doctors or lawyers—and thereby reduced to that of a religious “expert,” it becomes captive to its own definition. It undermines and indeed defeats its very purpose because it loses sight of one fundamental distinction in the clergy’s vocational praxis: despite the undeniable benefits of specialized training for ministerial performance, its fundamental “effectiveness” stems not from what clergy *do*, but from who clergy *are*, their religious commitment and identity that have the power to evoke, and in so doing reveal, the reality of divine grace and the presence of God working through their ministry. From the standpoint of teaching rest and forming restful clergy, failure to understand and instill this true meaning of “professional competence in ministry” in seminary’s ministerial students makes them more vulnerable before the secular, “doing”-centered definitions of ministry and standards for its evaluation, and as such, puts them at dramatically increased risk of burning out in a way that is self-

destructive and injurious to others. The contemporary idea of “minister as a ‘professional’” fails precisely at the point when it fully succeeds.

Thus, my proposal for expanding the focus and scope of ministerial preparation to include the objectives of developing faith, deepening religious commitment, and formation of a distinctively religious type of pastoral identity is not an argument to abandon the rigors of specialized training associated with the contemporary ideal of “professional preparation”; nor is it an argument for returning to the medieval conception of clerical vocation. Rather, it is a proposition to strengthen the contemporary advances of theological education in a paradoxical way—by setting them in the context of, and creative tension with, the older, classical understanding of pastoral ministry. It is a fundamental affirmation that if ministerial students are to become highly skilled *religious professionals* in the truest meaning of this term, they have to become real *religious persons*. And as such, it is a simultaneous invitation to see that, just as with its commitment to critical thinking, the liberal Protestant seminary is yet to carry out its commitment to professional preparation to its fullest extent: it has already fulfilled the requirements of the secular understanding of “profession,” but it is yet to penetrate the deeper meaning of this term in its native religious tradition. The ultimate success of theological education in developing professional ministerial competence is dependent not only on its work of theoretical, practical, and clinical education, but its ability to provide its ministerial students with opportunities for genuine spiritual formation.

The fundamental conviction of the importance of spiritual formation in the course of ministerial preparation is of course not unique to my proposal. Ever since Edward Farley’s *Theologia* (1983), a number of theologians and theological educators have

emphasized the importance of holistic spiritual formation in preparation for ministry.⁵⁰⁸ And indeed such understanding has already started to find expression in current programs, courses, and initiatives offered in various seminaries across the country.⁵⁰⁹ There are four important ways in which the monastic tradition of formation, reflected in the insights and observations gained in the course of my case study, could inform and deepen the already valuable present-day efforts for spiritual formation in the context of seminary training.

First, my case study reveals *a more comprehensive meaning* behind the (potentially misleading) term “spiritual formation”: genuine spiritual formation involves not merely the development of a separate facet of ministerial students’ lives, its “spiritual dimension” as it were, but rather a fundamental shift in the cognitive, affective, volitional and imaginative dynamics of the entire personality accompanied by a radical change in habits of action,

⁵⁰⁸ Farley argued that theological education became “fragmented” because it modeled ministerial training after the canons of scientific study, thereby promoting highly abstract theological knowing and placing undue emphasis on individual clerical functions. To correct these imbalances, he proposed a return to a more practical theological wisdom (*theologia*) and an intentional cultivation of the Christ-centered disposition (*habitus*). See Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). Farley’s emphasis on the importance of ministerial spiritual formation continued in the work of several prominent scholars. See especially, David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What’s Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1992); David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Katie G. Cannon and Mud Flower Collective., *God’s Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985); Richard J. Neuhaus, *Theological Education and Moral Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1995); Joseph C. Hough and John B. Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁵⁰⁹ A good example for the growing relevance of spiritual formation for the practical realities of seminary teaching is the recent focus on spiritual formation in Candler School of Theology: spiritual formation was included in its signature campaign “REAL” (“REAL possibilities: spiritual formation at Candler”) in 2010. In 2012 Candler started teaching the incoming students about “spiritual formation opportunities at Candler” on the first day of their orientation program, and in 2015 a new “spiritual formation room” was opened.

perception, and interpersonal relationship, in response to a radical alteration of worldview and self-understanding. Second, the insights about transformation gained in the course of my case study (monastic tradition of formation) illuminate our understanding of the *primary focus of spiritual formation*: it is not merely an increase in knowledge of religious practices, spiritual exercises and devotional texts, but intentional testing and intensification of religious commitment, accompanied by the deepening of the genuine religious experience. Third, my case study provides a paradoxical insight into the *nature of the process* whereby the work of spiritual formation is accomplished: it has to do less with “active doing” on the part of those who are being formed, and more with the development of their capacity for a “passive receptivity and openness” to the formative influence of the religious culture. Finally, the results of my case study point to the (rather unsettling) *end-results of spiritual formation*: properly done, the work of spiritual formation places prospective clergy in a deeply paradoxical relationship with the world. On the one hand, they are able to discern and affirm the presence of God in the most ordinary events and cultural manifestations, and they can conduct their ministry as persons fully immersed and fully engaged with secular society; yet, on the other hand, a profound shift in their commitments and values, their behavior and posture of living, their identity and lifestyle sets them unmistakably aside from the dominant culture, and their very presence presents something of a scandal and ineradicable offense to the surrounding secular society, because their very “differentness” places its every cultural status quo under judgement. Biblically speaking, they now live “in, but not of, the world.”

If we genuinely embrace the monastic observations and insights into the meaning, focus, nature, and final outcome of spiritual formation, revealed by my case study, then our

understanding of how the work of spiritual formation must be carried out in the seminary would undergo a radical re-orientation. It would demand going beyond the current emphasis on teaching religious practices, spiritual disciplines, and devotional texts, in three important directions:

1. Holistic cultural immersion: to become religious persons, ministerial students would have to be “taken out” from their dominant (primarily secular) culture and “placed under the influence” of the genuinely religious culture.
2. Intentional initiation into the religious community: to become religious persons, ministerial students would have to be guided in a discovery of, and making genuine connection with, the religious community. Such religious community, by definition, cannot be identical with the “church placement” for traditional seminary contextual education, because there the students still function as “seniors” (even if “seniors-in-training”) in relation to the rest of the religious community; for their initiation into the religious community to be successful, ministerial students must be placed in the presence of people who are *their* seniors in understanding and practice of religious living, and who therefore could model, support and assist students in their becoming and their growing identification with the “communion of saints.”
3. Integration of the isolated religious practices into a personal way of life: to more fully become religious persons, ministerial students need to be guided in the development of their own personal “rule,” the fundamental template for their daily existence as clergy. It must cover not only the explicitly religious tasks on their agenda, but attend to all dimensions of living: how they order their day, basic

ascetic awareness, the order of priorities, etc. It need not be elaborate, or rigidly fixed; its primary purpose is, as for serious athletes or ballet dancers, to form an invisible infrastructure that ensures, on a day-to-day basis, that the most important things are given the top priority: i.e., how they can live true to their religious vocation. Such a scaffolding will have to evolve as the students themselves evolve, but in the seminary they must be taught the importance of having such a pattern, the skills of listening to their lives and discerning the shape of the structure that can support their religious living on a day-to-day basis, and they need assistance in making it a “habit.”

The uncomfortable proposition of making seminarians into “religious persons” is in fact the bedrock of their transformation into restful pastors and their salvation from burnout.⁵¹⁰ Ministerial students who in the course of their theological education have been taught to inhabit (not only to “think through”) the religious world will become more restful ministers because they would have greater freedom and ability to doubt and disobey the powerful teachings of the secular mindset about ministry. Ministerial students who have begun to think about the “communion of saints,” the mystical body of the Church and its specific representatives, as their primary community of belonging will become ministers who are less vulnerable before their parishioners’ expectations and pressures—not by any

⁵¹⁰ It may appear that, in my argument about making seminarians into “religious persons,” I overlook the already present aspects of their religious experience, suggesting, as it were, that without the monastic intervention they cannot become religious. This is not my intent. Rather, I am using the term in a classical monastic sense, seeking to underscore the dimensions of intentionality, personal commitment, and consistency of praxis that characterize in-depth religious observance. Together with the monks, I would be the first to acknowledge that human existence is inherently religious: to be human is to be *homo religiosus*, a being with a deep existential drive towards transcendence and meaning-making—irrespective of religious affiliation, or even its absence.

effort of will, but simply because they have an alternative place to call home. Ministerial students who have learned religious practices as a part of their holistic way of life and an integral aspect of their identity (rather than a set of isolated spiritual exercises) will become restful ministers because their religious praxis is no longer a matter of performing “external tasks” but a “habit”: as such, it is much less likely to be abandoned, when other, more pressing tasks begin to invade their schedule. In the long run, helping ministerial students to become religious persons is not only a way to safeguard their future from premature ministerial failure, but also a way to make them better religious professionals in the truest sense of that term, as persons who effectively “profess” their faith—not simply their functional skills and know-how but in and through their ordained responsibilities: their working for God would be a natural expression of their resting in God.

Having discussed the three shifts for teaching rest in theological education, I now re-visit the notion of partnership between the monastery and the seminary which I suggested earlier as a normative vision for theological education as an avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout, in order to reflect, in brief, on the possibilities of its practical implementation, some of the problems that such implementation may face, and name the reasons why, if implemented, my proposal for addressing the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education has the power not only to enhance the seminary’s ability to teach rest, but also to increase its effectiveness in teaching the work of ministry.

10.4 Looking Forward: Issues of Practical Implementation

Following the three shifts in perception about the dual dimensions of rest and burnout (positive *and* negative), about the twofold nature of seminary teaching process (purgative *and* didactic), and about the fundamental outcomes of ministerial preparation (development of professional expertise *and* maturation of religious commitment), it is now possible to see my evolving normative vision of partnership between the seminary and the monastery, as well as the possibilities for its practical implementation, anew.

Possibilities for Practical Implementation

In the most basic sense, the partnership between seminary and monastery can take place on a *theoretical level*, that is, by realizing that the Cistercian monastic tradition could be accepted as a “prophetic witness” to contemporary mainline liberal Protestant theological education. While its educational methods cannot (and should not) be replicated in the seminary, its paradoxical insights into the nature of rest and the process of becoming restful can inform the work of the seminary faculty and staff. In this way, even if ministerial students themselves never set a foot on the monastery grounds, the new awareness on the part of the seminary faculty and staff would become an important source and powerful impetus for positive change.

A deeper change, of course, would take place if the vision of the seminary-monastery partnership would affect not only the theoretical understanding of the seminary faculty and staff, but the actual experience of the seminarians, that is, if the seminary alters its *praxis* enough to send some of its students and faculty, voluntarily and selectively, to the monastery for regular retreats. Seminary’s practical enactment of all three “shifts for

teaching rest”—regaining complexity in understanding rest and burnout, reimagining the nature of theological educational process, and remembering the twofold focus of ministerial preparation—can benefit tremendously from including regular retreats at the monastery for select ministerial students in its curriculum. For example, while it would be very beneficial to teach ministerial students about the negative dimensions of rest and positive dimensions of burnout in the seminary settings, such (theoretical) teaching would be far more effective if they have the opportunity to go to the monastery for retreats and discover these truths in the immediacy of their own experience, as they engage in the work and war of resting that the monastery so effectively sponsors. Similarly, while it would be extremely helpful for the students to have the darker dynamics of their unlearning explicitly acknowledged and be guided in understanding the unlearning that needs to accompany their seminary learning, such guidance would be even more effective if they have the opportunity to go to the monastery for retreats, where they have the time and space in which the tremendous work of facing failure, getting “un-done,” and grieving the end of the known world and self can be carried out safely. Finally, the recent expansion in the seminary’s understanding of ministerial preparation to include not only thorough professional training but also an in-depth spiritual formation is already a welcome development. Yet, such work could be done even better if ministerial students have the opportunity not only to be introduced to the (isolated) religious practices and texts, but to experience (holistic) immersion in the genuinely religious culture, community and way of life, as well as to sample the explicitly religious ways of resting provided by the monastery retreats.

Thus, we can now see that inclusion of monastery retreats in the seminary curriculum is not an expression of a well-intended but naïve proposal to form restful ministers by merely building some “time off” into the demanding schedule of the seminary faculty and students. Nor is it a more reasonable approach to teaching ministerial students a healthy balance between work and rest by modeling the balance between learning and resting in the context of theological education. Rather, it is a radical proposition to expand the seminary’s “contextual education” in a paradoxical direction: towards an environment that focuses not on their ministerial performance, but on their *non*-performance. The setting of the monastery retreat—precisely by virtue of its silence, solitude, and inaction—has the potential to teach ministerial students something essential about rest and burnout, to make them aware of the secular and religious dimensions in their worldview and self-understanding, and to sponsor the maturation of a genuine religious commitment. Lastly, the monastery would offer ministerial students, as no other teaching context in the seminary curriculum can, a place where they can re-engage religious tradition on a new level, deeper than that of intellectual reflection, and a place where they can re-discover God, who has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.

Problems of Practical Implementation

My conscious decision is to leave the question of specific recommendations for institutional implementation of my proposal of partnership between the monastery and the seminary *intentionally open*. Such a decision is prompted not merely by the pragmatic lack of space. Rather, it is a matter of my acute awareness of the inherent challenges involved in making such recommendations. On the most fundamental level, any attempt to draw up

a generic program for the seminary-monastery partnership on my part would be inherently problematic: as an individual researcher, I am a “daughter” of a specific institution of theological education, Candler School of Theology, and as such, I am necessarily unaware of the particularities of the institutional environments and communities that make each school unlike any other. On a deeper level, my decision to abstain from articulation of a specific course of action stems from the desire to highlight and honor the true birthplace of institutional change: the practitioners of theological education of clergy themselves. It is only when the “three shifts for teaching rest in the seminary” touch the imagination of the actual people who work in places of theological education, inform their own in-depth knowledge of the opportunities and limitations present in their particular contexts, and become embodied in their daily praxis, that they would acquire the power to engender genuine, and lasting, transformation.

At the same time, even as I choose to leave the details of practical implementation to the practitioners themselves, I would like to identify some of the potential problems that any institutional implementation would face—not to solve them, but to underscore their importance as questions for further reflection, research, and experimentation. The issues could be divided, roughly, into two categories: broader institutional and denominational concerns, and matters that apply more specifically to seminary praxis.

On the broader institutional level, three problems of practical implementation may be named. First, there is the challenge that partnership with the Cistercian monastic institution poses for development of denominational understanding and formation of identity of Protestant seminary students. Both faculty and students (not to mention higher ecclesiastical authorities and members of local congregations) may raise strong concerns

and even objections to the proposition to immerse Protestant students in the environment and culture which in many ways are deeply Roman Catholic. Second, and more pertinent to the seminaries and schools of theology in the United Methodist tradition that are frequently situated in the context of university: the proposition to extend the scope of seminary education into the realm of significant personal change and even profound transformation, such as assisting seminarians to become “religious persons” may receive a strong resistance, if not outright restriction, from university leaders, donors, and trustees who may feel they must limit the work of schools within the university to conventional academic and professional education and who are concerned about the ethical and legal issues that arise when deep-level or radical religious change is the object of an educational program. Finally, there is a difficulty connected to the notion of the “monastery retreat” itself. In my reflection on the implications of my case study findings for theological education of clergy, I drew on my knowledge of retreats at actual Cistercian monasteries; yet, not every seminary has a Cistercian monastery in its vicinity.

On the level of the seminary praxis, three additional problems of practical implementation may be named. First, there is an all too obvious issue of time. For ministerial students during their three years of seminary training, time is one of the most elusive commodities. Since many of them hardly have time to rest as it is, the proposition to travel to another location for retreat seems to present a great challenge not only for individual participants in such undertaking, but also for the seminary’s own curriculum, programs and policies. Second, the proposition to send ministerial students on retreat to the monastery raises heavy concerns about the monetary basis for such an undertaking. Given the already pressing financial problems experienced by theological schools and

individual ministerial students, difficult questions must be raised: Who will pay for the monastery retreats? Where will the money come from? If the movement of the partnering seminary with the monastery becomes more institutionalized, these questions would assume even greater weight and significance. The third important concern is about the “human resources” required for the success of such undertaking. If monastery retreats for ministerial students are to become a genuinely transformative experience—that is, if ministerial students are not only to observe and participate in the “religious world” that the monastery imagines, but also to reflect in depth on the implications of this experience for their faith, identity, and ministry, and attempt to imagine and practice the new ways of working and resting—then, they have to be led and supported throughout their monastic encounter. Such work, by definition, would require the presence and assistance of the faculty. But of course, the seminary faculty is no less pressured for time, financial security, and of all things rest, than the very students they teach!

It is my sincere hope that, in raising concerns about the practical implementation of my proposal, I do not paint too gloomy a picture, thus presenting my vision of partnership between seminary and monastery as an impracticable enterprise. I strongly believe that, while these concerns would require careful reflection and creative, and perhaps even paradoxical, solutions, they also hold within themselves important opportunities for growth and further realization of the seminary’s existing teaching commitments. As with burnout itself, what appears dark and destructive at a first glance may hold an unexpectedly positive promise. For example, one may argue that it is precisely the challenge of a live encounter with the Roman Catholic monastic tradition that would endow ministerial students with the

more in-depth awareness of the distinctive character of their own religious tradition (precisely because it stands in relief against the other) and provide an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of it, as well as provide real substance to the theory and practice of ecumenical relations that the seminary also seeks to teach. Similarly, one may point out that “to form or not to form?” is not really a question for the seminary, larger university, or any other educational institution; it is rather a question of what kind of formation will it be offering. Irrespective of the explicit scope of academic instruction, schools are powerful fields that form, and at times transform, their students by the very culture that they create: presumably, this is what makes the graduates of Candler School of Theology so exceptional!⁵¹¹ Likewise, one may wonder if the “monastery retreats” themselves could be re-imagined as the “monastic-like retreats,” which would open the seminary’s partnership to the broader and more accessible milieu of not only Benedictine monastic communities (which are far more plentiful than Cistercians), but also to the emerging Protestant neo-monastic communities? Such creative re-imagining of the institutional landscape of the seminary-monastery affiliation would present the seminary with even greater opportunities to explore religious praxis in its active and contemplative dimensions.

Pursuant to my earlier suggestion, perhaps the best way to respond to these difficulties would be to imagine practical implementation not as a large-scale seminary reform, but a small “pilot program,” an experiment of sorts, supported by a specific grant,

⁵¹¹ The critical role of schools in formation of character for their students has been recognized by several prominent theological educators. For example, in their case study of two Protestant theological seminaries, the mainline liberal and the evangelical, Jackson Carroll, Barbara Wheeler, Daniel Aleshire, and Penny Marler describe the process of ministerial preparation in those two institutions, reflect on their formation process, and offer broad theoretical observations about the role of culture in educational practice: Carroll et al.

in which willing volunteers among ministerial students and seminary faculty would be invited to augment the traditional scope of their theological education with a retreat-based “Spiritual Pastoral Education” in a monastic setting. Another possibility would be an incorporation of monastic religious practices into classroom instruction, and field experiences in the form of monastery retreats, during the traditional seminary courses on religious education, as was done in the one the *RE 501, Religious Education as Formation and Transformation* course described in my personal narrative (Chapter 1). Still another interesting possibility might be to consider augmenting an existing CPE program (on the intern and resident levels), for willing participants, with an extended retreat at the monastery at the end of each unit: the approach that would have the benefits of a very rare combination of active and contemplative contexts for professional preparation. Conducting such institutional “case studies” would make the radical changes inherent in the practical implementation of my proposal much smaller and as such, significantly more doable. At the same time, it would create conditions under which my preliminary hypotheses could be tested and refined, and, should such small-scale experiments succeed, they would hold invaluable lessons about how the larger-scale advancements could be carried out.

As I look for further sources of inspiration and encouragement in the face of the aforementioned challenges to practical implementation, my mind once more turns to the work of Anton T. Boisen and the history of the CPE. This undertaking too had a humble, complex beginning, burdened with many practical difficulties. Yet now, in the ninth decade of its development, CPE has not only become one of the core normative elements of liberal Protestant theological education, but it has also in turn challenged and changed theological education itself for the better. Through its understanding of the nature and fundamental

orientation of pastoral ministry, its insistence on the importance of reading the “living human documents” for the practice of theology, its emphasis on the development of pastoral identity, interpersonal and professional competence, ethical awareness and spiritual guidance, and not the least its thorough engagement with resources and methods in such seemingly distant fields as medicine, psychiatry and social work, it has raised the praxis of theological education of clergy to new heights. Thus, I conclude my reflection on practical implementation of my proposal for the retreat-based partnership between seminary and monastery partnership by naming the potential benefits of such work, which promise not only to address the problem of clergy burnout but also to enhance the seminary’s existing praxis and educational effectiveness.

Potential Benefits

It is no secret that contemporary liberal Protestant theological education is a rigorous and demanding enterprise. The wide array of theoretical, practical, and clinical requirements that it poses before its ministerial students calls for plain hard work, stamina, and significant levels of energy and determination to complete. To learn well, ministerial students need to have the ability to manage stress, deal with anxiety, and regularly renew their bodily and emotional reserves. Hence it is reasonable to assume that when the seminary fails to teach them the importance and skills of resting, it may also be far less successful in teaching its primary subject matters as well.

In contrast, any shift in its praxis that would enable the seminary to teach rest and create opportunities for its ministerial students (and their faculty) for resting well, would hold strong promise for increasing its ability to meet its principal educational objectives. For example, ministerial students who have been guided in discovery and constructive

response to the sources of their unrest would have more energy (not only physical but psychic) and greater interest in the work of learning. Students who had a regular outlet for in-depth rest would be even better prepared. Similarly, ministerial students who are made aware of the restive side of the seminary training (the necessary “losses”) and who feel supported in their unlearning, would be far more willing to take the risks that come with the new learning (educational “gains”). Finally, students who are assisted in the work of making and maturation of their religious commitment would be significantly less defensive when presented with the challenges of critical thinking and deconstruction of their faith. They would likely be more capable of engaging the academic curriculum on a much more profound level, because religious experience and orientation would provide them with a more secure vantage point for responding to the stresses of learning and living. In each of these instances, it is the seminary’s advances in teaching *rest* to its ministerial students that would enable it to become an institution that is also increasingly more effective in preparing them for the *work* of ministry.

EPILOGUE

Reflecting on the true nature of education, Father M. Louis of Gethsemani Abbey, better known in the world as Thomas Merton, once wrote: “Education in this sense means more than learning; and for such education, one is awarded no degree. One graduates by rising from the dead.”⁵¹² In this dissertation, I have argued that my personal becoming as a restful person and minister under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition has come at the cost of dying as my “false self.” The solution to my burnout is not an outcome of the positive practices of self-care, but rather as a fruit of intense, obscure, and terrifying personal struggle: the ultimate negation of the deeply ingrained habits of living responsible for the formation of my restless self. My becoming restful is a matter of “rising from the dead.”

I have further argued, having been myself surprised by such a discovery, that my ability to traverse the dangerous path of the unmaking of the self, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, has been made possible by my long-term and rigorous training in the institutions of mainline, liberal Protestant theological education: the in-depth theoretical knowledge and practical skills I learned, the community of mentors I found, and, not the least, the memory of “deaths” inflicted upon me during the years of my professional ministerial preparation, formed the foundation for my constructive response to the negative dynamics of transformation—a transformation that threatened to destroy, or remake, me.

⁵¹² Merton, *Love and Living*, 5.

My key suggestions for teaching rest in the context of theological education—via a peculiar work-rest partnership between seminary and monastery—are based on these fundamental insights. Yet, keenly aware of the deeply unusual nature of my propositions, and deeply conscious of the hazards of “adding” one more project to the already all too full agenda of ministerial education, I have trodden with care. I tried to craft my constructive proposal in such a way as to shield it from the critique of impracticality and pragmatic ineptness. I tried to imagine avenues of practical implementation that would create the least amount of cost and interference to the seminary’s current praxis. I tried to use language that would not offend. I like to think that I have succeeded in my safeguarding measures.

But as I sit back in my study, quietly regarding the thick stack of pages crowning my desk, my mind turns away from its fussy analysis of possibilities for action, to the restful pondering of contemplation. No longer so intensely preoccupied with the issues of practical implementation, I begin to wonder about the deeper questions of meaning. Is it really accurate to claim, as I have, that my proposal for teaching rest in the context of theological education amounts to no more than asking the seminary to be true to its existing identity and mission?

I now think not. Looking back at my own in-depth reflection one more time, I begin to see that my proposal is not as innocuous and gentle as I have tried to make it. It hides in its belly a far more radical and subversive supposition: a fundamental, if unvoiced, critique of the liberal Protestant seminary’s relation to the modern Enlightenment heritage and to the premodern religious tradition. When I really listen to my own proposal, I hear a disturbing message: to sponsor for its ministerial students the intricate process of dying and rising to the ultimate restfulness of their personhood and pastoral vocation, theological

education itself has to go through a sort of “death,” the ultimate embodiment of its commitment to deconstruction. It has to put to good use the very gift that it seeks to impart on its students, by learning to think through its liberal, secular and scientific, cultural origins *and* its deeper religious roots—in order to reach the second naïveté of its institutional identity and praxis.

So in the end, I have to face the radicality of my own proposal. I must spell out what earlier I could not see and dared not say: solving the problem of clergy burnout in the context of theological education, under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition, asks of the seminary nothing more, and more importantly, nothing less, than allowing itself to “be solved.”

Appendix A

Subquestions for Procedure Questions

Procedure Question 1: What kinds of information do I need to collect in order to produce a “thick description” of my experience of the monastery retreat and my subjective experience of post-retreat transformation?

- A. What sources of evidence and data collection techniques could provide me with the necessary data?
- B. What measures will I use to ensure that my data is being collected in a manner that is thorough and methodic, and in the amount that is ample for the purposes of my research?

Procedure Question 2: What strategies should I employ for analyzing and interpreting collected data?

- A. What is my recording system for my Case Study Database? What are my categories?
- B. What analytic categories and themes emerge from repeated reflection on my case study evidence?
- C. What theoretical constructs and/or traditions of accumulated experiential wisdom (from the Biblical Scriptures and Christian Tradition, monastic theology, social scientific theories, etc.) should I turn to, in order to widen my perspective and test my emerging understanding?
- D. What “alternative interpretations” of my experience can I identify and explore? And how do refine my research in light of such understanding?

Procedure Question 3: How will I build trustworthiness and credibility into the work of studying my own case?

- A. Who can hold me accountable in my scholarly findings and how—especially, in the scholarly findings that are related to the realm of subjective knowing and therefore obtained by and large introspectively?
- B. What kind of measures and criteria will I use to scrutinize my own work for inaccuracy or potential bias?
- C. What specific steps should I take to practice “intersubjective accountability,” i.e., to facilitate the communal testing and validation of my scholarly conclusions?

Procedure Question 4: Does my case study pose any ethical problems?

- A. Am I planning to involve “human subjects” in my research?
- B. Do I need to get the Institutional Review Board permission to work with faculty and students of theological education, and/or Trappist monks?

Procedure Question 5: What specific research actions do I need to undertake to carry out my study?

- A. What main domains of “fieldwork” can I identify?
- B. Do I anticipate any “access issues” or “ethical issues” for doing fieldwork—and if so, how do I plan to address them?
- C. How is the difference in the order of importance between the “primary unit” of my study (i.e., my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition) and the “context” of my study (i.e., theological education of clergy) reflected in the formal plan for my fieldwork?
- D. What kind of format should I use for my Case Study Protocol to keep myself on track throughout the entire duration of my research?

Procedure Question 6: What format should I choose for the composition of the final report, my dissertation?

- A. What kind of narrative structure does my case study call for?
- B. How can I signal the difference in the order of importance between the “primary unit” of my study (i.e., my experience of recovery from burnout under the guidance of the Cistercian monastic tradition) and the “context” of my study (i.e., theological education of clergy) within the dissertation’s structure?
- C. How do I convey the existential nature of my research in the narrative?
- D. Could I compose my narrative in such a rich and descriptive way, that my readers have the vicarious experience of “having been there?”
- E. How would such format and narrative voice relate to the traditional dissertation genre in the field of practical theology?

Appendix B

Case Study Protocol

To create my Case Study Protocol in a format that would allow me to perform my investigation in relation to both the Issue and the Procedure Questions of my research, I created a Table that features the Issue Questions of my research as the organizing units for rows, and the Procedure Questions of my research as the organizing element for columns. My ongoing discernment and decision-making about the particularities of conducting my case study investigation, therefore, occur at the intersection of the two.

To highlight the evolving nature of this document, I present the excerpt from the earlier stages of composition (February 2013). The last column, featuring the projected dissertation chapters, reveals that at that point even their titles and numbering are not yet as they will become in the final draft of the manuscript.

(Due to formatting requirements, Table 6 starts on next page.)

Table 6. Case Study Protocol

ISSUE QUESTIONS:	PROCEDURE QUESTIONS:				
	Sources of Evidence and Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis?	Strategies for testing conclusions?	Potential Ethical Problems?	Research actions to perform?	Projected Sections of Manuscript?
WHAT IS GOING ON in the monastery from a perspective of lay visitor?					
DESCRIPTION of Retreat	RETREAT DOCUMENTATION (brochure and printouts, published descriptions by other monastery visitors, etc.)	<u>PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY:</u> Research Protocol, Dissertation Log, Case Study Database		Develop <u>Case Study Database</u> and formal note-taking system	Chapter 5: <i>Initial Taste of Rest: One Day in the Abbey</i>
ANALYSIS of the Formative Influence of Monastic Culture	ASSORTED MEDIA (photos, sketches, musical scores, conference recordings, etc.)	<u>TRIANGULATION OF EVIDENCE:</u> Do my personal observations of monastic culture converge with publicly available accounts of monastic living? Are my personal observations of my restfulness confirmed by independent observers (e.g., my therapist, husband, friends, etc.)?	For the information that pertains to my personal life, what are the limits to my disclosure?	Ongoing <u>Fieldwork</u> at the Monastery	
	PHYSICAL ARTIFACTS			Ongoing Observation of Myself-in-transformation	
	PERSONAL RECOLLECTION AND RECORDS (journal entries, reflective writing, poetry, drawings) and research notes			Ongoing Review and Analysis of Collected Data	Chapter 6: <i>Entering Peace, Part 1: The Making of the Monastery Retreat</i>
	Obtained through:	<u>RIVAL EXPLANATIONS:</u> what alternative explanations can I identify for the peacefulness of the monastery living? ...my recovery from burnout?	For the information that pertains to monks' life, how do I honor their vocation as cloistered contemplative, while making the monastery living an object of my description, analysis, interpretation, and eventually a published text?	<u>IRB for monks:</u> particular attention to the issues of confidentiality and voluntary participation	
	DIRECT OBSERVATION			<u>Formal Monastery Data Collection:</u> administer Questionnaires, review classic and contemporary Cistercian sources at the Monastery Library	
	PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION				
	INFORMAL INTERACTION	<u>QUESTIONNAIRES:</u> with monks			
	PERSONAL COMMUNICATION with monastery staff, retreatants, lay Cistercians, monks	<u>THICK DESCRIPTION</u>			
INTERPRETATION of the meaning of Monastery Peace for my life and work in the World	MEDITATIVE READING (monastic lit-re and Scripture)	<u>MEMBERS' CHECKS:</u> mss drafts reviewed by monks and lay Cistercians		Ongoing sharing of mss drafts, with individual monks and lay Cistercians	Chapter 7: <i>Entering Peace, Part 2: The Details about Return to the World</i>

ISSUE QUESTIONS:	PROCEDURE QUESTIONS:				
	Sources of Evidence and Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis?	Strategies for testing conclusions?	Potential Ethical Problems?	Research actions to perform?	Projected Sections of Manuscript?
WHAT DO WE HOPE FOR in the seminary?					
Institutional Reform?	<p>In depth review of Cistercian Founding Texts and Formation Program</p> <p>Comparative reflection on Documents, Media, and my experience related to the Institutional Commitments, Values, and Mission of the Seminary (Candler)</p>	<p><u>TRIANGULATION OF EVIDENCE:</u> Is there any published literature, existing seminary programs) that testify to the possibility of transferring monastic institutional principles and values to the fast-paced and demanding world of the contemporary TE? If so, this would contradict my conclusions about the unfeasibility of such normative objective</p> <p><u>TRIANGULATION OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:</u> Are there any social scientific theories that can corroborate my description of dynamics of personal transformation and the affirmations of monastic wisdom? (check Fowler, Loder, who else?) If so, my point is stronger.</p> <p>Are there any theories that actively disprove my account? If so, I need to re-think my hypothesis</p>	<p>I do not anticipate any ethical issues here, as the objects of my reflection are publicly available documents and media</p>	<p>Study Rule of St. Benedict, Exordium Program, and accompanying documents on Cistercian history, law, and institutional values and principles</p> <p>Review Candler School of Theology's website, mission statement...?</p> <p>Study monastic writings on the True/False Self: How does this theoretical construct help me understand my becoming restful?</p> <p>Review Harbaugh's discussion of the seminarians' little "d"-death experiences: Are there parallels between the negative and positive dynamics of my personal transformation and the negative and positive aspects of the seminary training?</p>	<p>Chapter 8: <i>Monastery Peace for Seminary Students, part 1: Pondering the Promise of Institutional Reform</i></p> <p>Chapter 9: <i>Monastery Peace for Seminary Students, part 2: Reflecting on the Inner Dynamics of Transformation</i></p>
Students' Personal Transformation?	<p>In-depth reflection on dynamics of my transformation into a restful person in light of Trappist understanding of the True Self and False Self</p> <p>Comparative Reflection on the negative aspects of the seminary training</p>	<p><u>TRIANGULATION OF EVIDENCE:</u> Is there any published literature, existing seminary programs) that testify to the possibility of transferring monastic institutional principles and values to the fast-paced and demanding world of the contemporary TE? If so, this would contradict my conclusions about the unfeasibility of such normative objective</p> <p><u>TRIANGULATION OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:</u> Are there any social scientific theories that can corroborate my description of dynamics of personal transformation and the affirmations of monastic wisdom? (check Fowler, Loder, who else?) If so, my point is stronger.</p> <p>Are there any theories that actively disprove my account? If so, I need to re-think my hypothesis</p>	<p>I do not anticipate any ethical issues here, as the objects of my reflection are publicly available documents and media</p>	<p>Study Rule of St. Benedict, Exordium Program, and accompanying documents on Cistercian history, law, and institutional values and principles</p> <p>Review Candler School of Theology's website, mission statement...?</p> <p>Study monastic writings on the True/False Self: How does this theoretical construct help me understand my becoming restful?</p> <p>Review Harbaugh's discussion of the seminarians' little "d"-death experiences: Are there parallels between the negative and positive dynamics of my personal transformation and the negative and positive aspects of the seminary training?</p>	<p>Chapter 8: <i>Monastery Peace for Seminary Students, part 1: Pondering the Promise of Institutional Reform</i></p> <p>Chapter 9: <i>Monastery Peace for Seminary Students, part 2: Reflecting on the Inner Dynamics of Transformation</i></p>

ISSUE QUESTIONS:	PROCEDURE QUESTIONS:				
	Sources of Evidence and Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis?	Strategies for testing conclusions?	Potential Ethical Problems?	Research actions to perform?	Projected Sections of Manuscript?
HOW MIGHT WE BEST PROCEED in developing TE as an avenue for prevention of clergy burnout?					
<p>Even if transferring of Institutional principles, values, and practices from Monastery to Seminary is an impossibility, could Seminary still benefit from the institutional relations with Monastery?</p> <p>How could Seminary utilize monastic wisdom about forming restful persons in its curricular and pedagogical process?</p>	<p>Could something like "CPE" at the Monastery be possible? -- perhaps, it could be called "Spiritual Pastoral Education"-- here, too, students would be immersed in practice, but practice of spiritual living, surrounded by the actual community of faith, with subsequent reflection on this experience back in the Seminary setting?</p> <p>What kind of institutional support could the Seminary provide for the constructive "loss of faith" and the "dying onto life" for its clergy in training?</p>	<p><u>QUESTIONNAIRES and INTERVIEWS:</u> with seminary students and faculty about the meaning of rest, and the obstacles to rest and/or supporters of rest commonly encountered in the context of theological education</p> <p><u>TRIANGULATION OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:</u> Could my proposal be related to the works of any contemporary reformers of TE (e.g., by <i>Farley, Kelsey, Hough and Cobb, Banks, Chopp and other feminists, etc.</i>)</p> <p><u>MEMBERS' CHECK:</u> my dissertation committee itself, comprised of the experienced seminary faculty, also serves as an in-built tester of the plausibility of my constructive proposal for theological education</p>	<p>For the information that pertains to the reflection on theological education, by students and faculty of theology:</p> <p>How do I protect my study participants, given the fact that I have identified Candler School of Theology an explicit context of my study?</p> <p>The participating faculty members are especially hard to protect: by nature of their teaching profession, the idiosyncrasies of their conversational styles are publicly available, and therefore potentially identifiable</p>	<p><u>IRB for students and faculty:</u> particular attention to issues of confidentiality, voluntary participation</p> <p>Review CPE history/influence on TE: could a similar institutional development be imagined in relation to prospective clergy's personal and spiritual formation?</p> <p>Review contemporary proposals for reforming theological education: parallels, convergences, or clashes with my work?</p> <p>All throughout Drafting: Are the formal Criteria for high-quality Case Study and Autoethnographic Writing being met?</p>	<p>Chapter 10: <i>Changing Habits: Teaching Rest in the Context of Theological Education of Clergy</i></p>

Appendix C

Seminary Data Collection

Questionnaire

Study: *Unlearning Burnout: Rest, Restlessness, and Theological Education of Clergy*

Principal Investigator: Natalia Shulgina

Co-Investigator, Faculty Advisor: Theodore Brelsford

Please, fill out this (same) questionnaire prior to each interview.

I. This part of the questionnaire contains questions about you. This information is needed in order to learn about answers of individuals who have different backgrounds such as sex, length of time in theological education, age, marital status, etc. *Please, make **one** response to **each** question.*

1. You are ___faculty or ___student
2. You are ___male or ___female
3. How many years have you participated in theological education?
 ___ First year student
 ___ Second year student
 ___ Third year student
 ___ Junior faculty
 ___ Senior Faculty
4. Your age? ___y.o.
5. You are ___married or ___single
6. You have ___children
7. Your ethnic/racial background_____

II. This part of the questionnaire contains questions about and statements describing your current understanding of, feelings about, and participation in activities related to rest or lack thereof. This information is needed to learn about sources of rest and causes of unrest for people involved in theological education. *Please, fill in the blank and/or circle **all** that applies.* Please, use an extra page provided in the back of the questionnaire, if necessary.

1. What word(s) or image(s) come to mind when you think about rest?
2. What word(s) or images come to mind when you think about absence of rest? Rest-lessness?

3. What word(s) or image(s) come to mind when you think about your present state (related to how rest-full or rest-less you are)?
4. *Please, name:* What has been happening in your life in recent days and months that leads to these words or images?
5. *Please, name:* What are the general sources of unrest in your life as a student or a faculty of theology? What creates anxiety? What stresses you out? What irritates you? What tires you up? What robs you of rest? What/who interferes with your rest? What barriers to resting (if any) do you find *within yourself*? Once you have completed your list, please, circle the most powerful obstacles to your resting.
6. *Please, name:* What have you found to be most helpful in assisting your rest and restoration? What refreshes and energizes you? What brings renewal? What makes your heart soar? What makes you feel “nice and easy?” When, where, or around whom are you at most at peace? What do you do or avoid doing to rest? Once you have completed your list, please, circle the most powerful “supporters”—whether people, activities, settings, etc.—of your resting.
7. *Please, check **all** that applies and/or fill in the blank:* To whom or where do you turn for support, when you are tired, drained, feeling down, spent, overwhelmed, spiritually weak, feeling trapped or stuck, uncertain about your vocation, identity, etc.?

<input type="checkbox"/> fellow students/colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> spiritual director or guide
<input type="checkbox"/> friend(s) (outside theological education)	<input type="checkbox"/> spouse
<input type="checkbox"/> God, through prayer and meditation	<input type="checkbox"/> clergy (pastor/DS/bishop)
<input type="checkbox"/> denominational support groups	<input type="checkbox"/> pastoral counselor
<input type="checkbox"/> secular therapist	<input type="checkbox"/> No one

III. This part of the questionnaire contains questions about and gives you an opportunity to make statements describing the impact which theological education has made on your rest or lack thereof. This information is needed to learn about promising and problematic aspects of theological education in relation to rest and rest-less-ness among its students and faculty. Please, *circle one, fill in the blank, or check all that applies*. Please, use an extra page provided in the back of the questionnaire, if necessary.

1. Overall, what impact theological education has had on your rest?

Exceptionally positive **Positive** **Neutral** **Negative** **Extremely negative**

2. *Please list some specific examples* from your experience of theological education (events in your study/work situations and/or in your communal worship experience and personal prayer life) that generated the impact which you identified in the previous question. (What has been done or avoided in theological education as you know it to deepen your understanding and experience of rest? What has theological education done or failed to do to contribute to your unrest, stress, fatigue, exhaustion, drain?)

3. *Please name the courses* in which you have participated (whether as a student or faculty) that have explicitly dealt with the issues of rest, self-care, and sustainable ministry.
4. *Please finish the sentence:* The most valuable thing I learned from studying/working in the seminary about rest so far is...
5. *Please check all that applies:* At this point of the semester I feel or am or do...

- | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> pretty good | <input type="checkbox"/> emotionally drained | <input type="checkbox"/> rested |
| <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> worn out |
| <input type="checkbox"/> at peace | <input type="checkbox"/> stressed out | <input type="checkbox"/> content |
| <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> cool, calm, and collected | <input type="checkbox"/> OK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> strained | <input type="checkbox"/> not bad, not bad | <input type="checkbox"/> disturbed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> can be worse | <input type="checkbox"/> lack self-confidence | <input type="checkbox"/> exhausted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hanging in | <input type="checkbox"/> angry | <input type="checkbox"/> happy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> need to remind myself that there is a whole another world outside | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feel like crying | <input type="checkbox"/> sweat about small stuff | <input type="checkbox"/> sleepy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> don't care | <input type="checkbox"/> need a beer | <input type="checkbox"/> easily tired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> impatient | <input type="checkbox"/> are you kidding? | |
-
-

6. Theological education would be more restful for me...

...if administration would _____,

...if my teachers/students _____,

would _____,

...if my peers/colleagues _____,

would _____,

...if I _____,

would _____.

7. If you were given the power to change one thing...

A. ...in *theological education*, what would that be?

B. ...in the way *you* participate in theological education, what would that be?

Please, when using extra pages, indicate the number of the section and the number of the question to which you are referring.

*Thank you very much for taking time to respond to the questionnaire.
Please email it to me at nshulgi@emory.edu.*

Interview Questions

All interview questions are guided by the basic research questions:

- What is the nature and meaning of rest, and what kind of educational or life experiences engender rest?
- What is it that robs people of their rest, and how do the ways in which we imagine, think about, and do theological education of clergy influence prospective clergy's abilities to resist the obstacles to rest?

Interview questions will include and be similar to the following ones:

- Was there anything that “stood out” for you in the process of working with the questionnaire?
- The questionnaire responses were heavily weighted on the side that students/faculty of theology often have problems with resting. What has your experience been? Why do you think that has been so for you?
- Have you ever found yourself in a bind, tired and not effective anymore, but yet unable to stop...? What do you think is at play there?
- When you are completely wiped out, what do you do? Does it help? Does it do you good?
- Do you think people involved in theological education can support each other in their “pursuit of rest?” What might help or what might get in the way of such mutual support?
- Clergy burnout is a “hot” topic these days. Do you think, this is a real issue? Do you think clergy burn out in the same ways that other care-giving professionals (like medical personnel, fire-workers and so on) do? Or, do you think there is something different because they are in a religious vocation? If so, what?
- According to the numerous studies done on burnout clergy, “spiritual dryness” is a big factor and component of burnout. And yet, some studies also indicate that clergy feel least supported in this area. Do you think this is a valid assessment? Does your experience, as a student/faculty of theology, support such an observation? What are *your* key resources for spiritual nourishment? Is there any one with whom you share your spiritual journey? Is this an important area for you? Or, do you think this is merely a matter of pious talk, a part of how clergy are *supposed* to behave?
- When you think about the most powerful obstacles to your resting, what is the effect that theological education has been having on them? What seems to be most promising in theological education in lightening of these obstacles? What seems to be most daunting in reinforcing of these obstacles?
- When you think about the most powerful “supporters” of your resting, what is the effect that theological education has been having on them? What seems to be most promising in theological education in strengthening of these “supporters?” What did it do (if anything) to undermine these “supporters,” thus, blocking the paths to genuine resting for you?

- For people with diverse backgrounds (women and men, single and married, homosexual and heterosexual, etc.): How does this affect your ability to rest and to find the support you need?
- What has been for you the best part of being a student/faculty of theology? What has been the hardest? Do you think that students/faculty of theology are in special need of support? If so, what kind?
- What advice would you give to a first year student or a junior faculty in your field regarding work and rest?
- What do you think can be done of the level of theological education to prevent clergy burnout down the road?

Appendix D

Monastery Data Collection

The list of documents associated with this phase of data collection includes Permission letter from the Abbot, Invitation Letter for the monks, and Questionnaire.

Permission Letter from the Abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit

Date: June 19, 2009
 Signature: Dom Francis Michael Stiteler, OSCO
 Address: Monastery of the Holy Spirit
2625, Highway 212 S.W., Conyers, Georgia 30094, USA

Dear Dom Francis Michael,

Peace be with you.

As I mentioned in my previous letter to you, I am studying clergy burnout and the ways that intentional spiritual formation in the context of theological education of clergy can confront this critical issue. In particular, I am interested in the wisdom of Cistercian tradition about the meaning of, and means to, true rest. Your monastic community is invited to participate in this study because of its ministry: by offering silent and thematic retreats, spiritual direction, arts of bonsai, storytelling and photography, as well as cultivating the environment, practices and attitudes that embody and teach contemplative living, your community shares the good news of peace with many people within and beyond Georgia.

The purpose of this study is to learn from the monks what they believe to be true about the nature of human rest and restlessness, about the connection between rest and peace, and about the ways in which the ‘people of peace,’ people who could rest in God—and work out of that rest, have been formed in Cistercian tradition.

I ask your permission to administer a short questionnaire to the members of your monastic community. This letter provides some background information and description of my larger project.

Description of the Project

My dissertation is entitled “*Unlearning Burnout: Rest, Restlessness, and Theological Education of clergy.*” Its purpose is to understand and address clergy burnout in the context of institutional theological education by seeking to:

- understand the deep nature of human rest and restlessness;
- discern problematic and promising aspects of seminary training in relation to rest and burnout;
- identify specific practices and processes involved in forming persons and communities, whose character and action can be characterized by a particular quality—that of peace.

The monks are asked to fill out one short questionnaire with questions pertinent to the nature of human rest, the nature of human restlessness, and to the issues and practices of spiritual formation in Cistercian tradition. The questionnaire will also contain a request for short textual passage (and/or bibliographic references) concerning rest and peace which participants find personally significant. The purpose of the latter is not exhaustive but explorative: rather than compiling an anthology, I seek to identify some entry points into the well of Cistercian writings on rest and peace. Please, see the copy of the questionnaire attached.

As a principal investigator, I will write a letter, inviting monks to participate in this research. Together with the hard copies of the questionnaire and extra paper and pens, it will be placed at the location where the monks can read the invitation letter and respond to it at their convenience. I will be in the monastery during 10 days from the initial distribution of the questionnaire to address any questions regarding this study and to utilize the resources of the retreat house library in Cistercian publications. At the end of ten-day period, I will collect the monks' responses.

Potential Risks and Procedures to Reduce Risks

Participation in the research concerned with rest and restlessness could involve some stress. The nature of the questions about the deepest meaning of rest and lack thereof may involve reflecting upon issues and tensions that lay at the core of human existence. Some of these thoughts persons might not commonly share publicly. I do believe however that for people who contend with the basic questions of human existence daily by virtue of their vocation, this risk is compatible with their ordinary stress. To further reduce risk, the following measures are taken.

Monks' participation in the questionnaire is completely voluntary and completely anonymous. Your signature on this Permission Letter *authorizes administration* of the questionnaire to the community, but it *does not order participation* of individual monks in this research. Individual consent to participate in this research will be implied by a personal choice to take and fill out the questionnaire. During the process of filling out the questionnaire, individual monks may choose not to answer a certain question of the questionnaire—or to revoke his decision to turn it in.

Confidentiality

The information that individual monks share in the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential and used only anonymously. The invitation letter will state clearly that no names should be put on the questionnaire. Questionnaires will be collected in a secure box to which only I, as a principal investigator, will have access. I myself will be typing up the hand-written copies. When the process of typing up is complete, all data will be placed in the file which will be kept in a secure location. Only I will have access to this file.

In my writing and in any publication, all information that may make identification possible will be omitted, and monks' identity will be intentionally obscured (for example, a "Cistercian religious" or "monks living under the guidance of St. Benedict Rule"). After my dissertation is complete, all questionnaires collected will remain in an anonymous form for potential future research use.

There is one exception to my confidentiality promise. People other than myself may look at the data collected if they represent agencies that make rules and policy about how research is done and have the right to review those records, or the court officials. Those with the right to look at the questionnaire include Emory University Institutional Review Board and the Office of Human Research Protection. Records can also be opened by court order. I will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. I will do this even if outside review occurs.

Benefits

Should you find such a document as valuable, I will share with you the results of this part of my research, a summary of the monks' responses and bibliography. Apart from deepening the monks' individual and communal understanding of what supports and robs people of genuine rest, and of the issues and practices involved in the process of formation, there will be no direct benefits to your community for participating in this project. Your participation in this research, however, will contribute to envisioning the ways in which institutional theological education can provide a critical avenue for addressing the problem of clergy burnout by forming persons and communities of peace.

Communication

Please, contact me—Natalia Shulgina, Principal Investigator—if you have any questions about this study. I can be reached at 678-799-1321 or nshulgi@emory.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding my background or/and objectives of this study, you may also contact my advisor at Emory University, Theodore Brelsford, Assistant Professor in the Practice of Religion and Education at 716-601-8511 or tbrelsf@learnlink.emory.edu.

If you have any concerns about the rights of your monastic community as a participant in this research, you may contact The Emory University Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or toll-free at 1-877-503-9797.

I thank you very much for giving serious consideration to participation of your monastic community in this study. I do believe that it will make an important contribution toward understanding of the complex nature of human rest and rest-less-ness and confronting pastoral burnout, thus, benefiting persons and communities of faith, who seek to grow and serve in the society increasingly bereft of rest.

If you are giving me a permission to administer the questionnaire to your community, kindly print out and sign this letter. I ask that you keep one copy for your reference and return one copy to me. Upon receipt of your permission I will print out the invitation letter for monks and the hard copies of the questionnaire and set up a time for my ten-day monastery visit to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

Rev. Natalya A. Shulgina

Dom Francis Michael Stiteler, OSCO

preferred phone number

preferred email

date and time

Invitation Letter for the Monks

Tuesday, September 15, 2009
Atlanta, GA

Dear Brothers and Fathers,

Peace be with you.

My name is Natalia Shulgina, and I am an elder in the Russia United Methodist Church, working on my doctoral dissertation on Clergy Burnout at Emory University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research by sharing with me your thoughts about rest and rest-less-ness of the human heart, and about the ways in which people of rest are formed in Cistercian tradition.

It feels somewhat awkward to start this letter with an official introduction of myself, for I feel that I have come to know you—and be known by you—deeply. In some strange sense I feel that I have come to be a part of this house—or, perhaps, rather, this house, in the particularity of its lands, people, and its Church has become a part of me. Coming here for visits has shaped me in ways beyond what I can put into words—and much beyond what I could have ever imagined when I stood at the Monastery gate some five years ago (baffled by the question: what was a female...Protestant...ordained elder...from Russia doing in the house of Roman Catholic men devoted to the wholly contemplative life in the middle of Georgia?). I came to your monastery at the time when the subject of my research, clergy burnout, became a stark reality of my own experience. I came looking for rest, for peace of mind and heart and body, for reconciliation with myself and others—and, perhaps, God. I came searching for peace that surpasses (merely academic) understanding and lengthy scholarly discussions. I came seeking salvation from slavery to people's—and my own—expectations, from hectic ministry bereft of genuine connection, from the 'violence of overwork' that kills the capacity to care.

And I found peace—or maybe, it has finally found me. In these five years, I have tasted rest, not in a naïve and sentimental way, not in the way of intellectual abstraction, but rest as deep abiding peace which I have come to know in my very being. It was the rest that I could feel in my body. It was the peace that I could remember from long ago, when I was a little child, alone in the fields, when the world was still new and loving (when I was “enough” as I was, and did not have to work so hard to earn being loved—by bugs and birds, and, occasionally, cows and horses ☺). It was the peace in which my heart was immersed and which it drunk deeply, and there was such an abundance of peace that my heart stopped fearing that there would not be enough, and even my mind was so stunned that it stopped buzzing (for a little while, anyway). It was the peace too deep for words. Too deep for Fear. Too deep for my ever so tiresome drive to work in order to prove, protect, and perfect myself. And, this peace was powerful enough to—little by little—reshape my life and my ministry and the lives of those with whom I live and work. In the span of these years I have noticed that a different kind of work is engendered by that peace. When it becomes a part—or, rather, takes possession—of me, not only I, but people around know it (and even animals can sense it!), and the zones of liberation and healing are being created—without effort, and at times, even without intention.

Yet, I have also come to realize that the rest and peace which I have come to know in the monastery is no “monastery magic,” but rather a genuine fruit of the age-tried wisdom and intentionality, under the guidance of the Spirit. I have come to see how Cistercian values and principles of

organizing time and space—and the inner realms of human heart, its attitudes and its passions—brought order, harmony and calm to one’s relationship with God, self, others, and the world around. I have come to see that during these years, *you have been teaching me peace*, even if in ways that are different from those of conventional academy. You taught me peace *through the very environment* of your monastery: the silence of the church at night and the ways light travelled in there during the day, the rhythms of prayer, the way air smelled when I came in the evening, the hiding places in the woods where I played my flute, the kudzu branches which could hold my weight for me to swing on them, the places to meet graceful deer, shy rabbit, and thoughtful heron—and, well, chiggers (a not-so-gentle reminder that true peace is never just a ‘nice and easy’ thing). It is there, hidden in the quiet of the sanctuary and the woods, in the solitude of being nobody, I began to discover who I really was, apart from my credentials, responsibilities, and other identity marks. You have taught me *through the practices*—I have learned to pray by praying with you—the Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio, centering prayer, and that one most simple and profound prayer of all: of simple being before God as I am, of resting my heart in God moment by moment. But you have taught me most *through your presence*. Some of you I have had the grace to meet in person. Some of you might never know how much your silent kindness—a gentle smile, a nod, a waving of the hand—spoke to me. Still there are some of you, who might forever remain in my memory as deeply familiar black-n-white silhouettes against the light from the altar, quiet embodiments of peace—teaching me, without uttering a single word, how to bow before God, not just with my body, but with my whole being.

My dear Brothers and Fathers, as I am writing this letter, gratitude is welling up within my heart. I have so much to thank you for. And yet, I have come to ask for more. I have come to know rest in your house, to know it deeply. But now, I seek to understand with my mind what I have come to know deeply in my heart—and I seek to share it with the world which is increasingly devoid of peace, in a however humble offering of my dissertation. Throughout these years, your community has taught and formed me in ways which did not compromise but rather fulfill your contemplative vocation—through silence, simplicity, and solitude; but now, I have come to ask for some explicit teaching—this too, I believe is deeply congruent with your vocation. I have come to listen to the thoughts which have been born of that silence and simplicity and solitude. I have come to ask you for a Word.

Please, teach me yet again—by sharing with me your thoughts in a questionnaire which I prepared for you about the rest and rest-less-ness of human heart, and about the ways in which students and servants of peace have been formed in Cistercian tradition. While I have sought and been granted the permission of our Father Abbot, Dom Francis Michael, *to invite* your participation in my research, your individual decision *to participate* is, of course, completely anonymous and completely voluntary.

Please know that your confidentiality and well-being is of utter importance to me, and that I would rather give up this part of my research altogether before I do anything which may harm our monastery in any way. Should you choose to participate, kindly turn to the Questionnaire for instructions about the process. I will remain in the house **Tuesday, September 15 through Friday, September 25**, working in the library, and will gladly answer any questions.

Peace be with you,

Natalia

Questionnaire

Dear Brothers and Fathers,

Thank you very much for choosing to participate in my research by responding to this Questionnaire. I am looking forward to listening to your thoughts deeply.

- I have provided paper, pens and a stapler for your work: as my international origins make it hard for me to read English handwriting, I prefer that you type your responses or kindly to write as clearly as possible
- Please know that I will treat your responses with much care and respect. They are completely anonymous and completely voluntary, and your confidentiality is of critical importance to me. You have the right not to answer a certain question of the questionnaire—or even revoke your decision to turn your questionnaire in.
- I will stay in the retreat house, working at the library, Tuesday, Sept 15 - Friday, Sept 25. Should you have any questions regarding your confidentiality or the nature of the questions, please, do not hesitate to ask me.
- Upon completion, please, staple and place your response into the box provided. Kindly, by COMPLINE of Friday, September 25, so that I could collect them before my departure.
- Please, DO NOT put your name on the Questionnaire.

Human Rest

- 1) What *gives* you rest? What do you find restful? When we say “beautiful,” we mean “full of beauty”; then, what are we “full of” when we are “restful?” What does it mean to call something “restful?”
- 2) What do you *need* in order to rest? What do you *do—or avoid doing—*on your Sabbath day?
- 3) How do you understand the meaning of the ancient monastic phrase, *otium negotiotissimum* (“*always be at rest yet never be idle*”)?
- 4) What do you hear...
 - when Jesus says: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid* (John 14: 27)?
 - when the Hebrews’ author says that the *Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God* (Heb. 3:7-4:13)?
 - How would you connect “rest” and “peace?”

Human Restlessness

- 1) What robs you of peace? What gets in the way of your resting? What makes you feel restless? What is it that we “lack” when we are “rest-less?”
- 2) Have you ever felt that you *really wanted* but *really could not* rest? ...that there is *something within us* that resists or is afraid of resting? What do you think it is?
- 3) Do you find keeping Sabbath easy? Or hard? What are the obstacles to your Sabbath-observance? What/who are the helpers?
- 4) What do you hear, when the Hebrews’ author speaks about rebellion/disobedience of those *to whom God did swear that they should not enter his rest*, and summons us to *harden not our hearts* but to *enter God’s Sabbath rest while it is still ‘today’* (Heb. 3:7-4:13)?

Formation

- 1) What do you hear, when Jesus says: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Matt 11:28-30)?
- 2) What are we to *learn* from Jesus in order to rest?
- 3) There is a growing awareness about burnout among ministers of the church, which seems to contradict Jesus’ affirmation about the easiness of his yoke and the lightness of his burden. What do you think about this seeming contradiction?
- 4) How have people who can rest in God been formed in Cistercian tradition? What is Holy Leisure? Why is it important?

Words that Spoke to Your Heart

In this section I ask you to share with me passages from Cistercian fathers and mothers (or from our Christian tradition in general) which have spoken to your heart during your journey of “entering into God’s Sabbath Rest.” I do not intend to create an anthology of Christian writing on rest (not in this dissertation, at least ☺), but I would like to receive and ponder the “words of Peace” which you have come to cherish.

When possible, please provide the name of the author and/or the name of the book.

Thank you very much for taking your time to share with me your wisdom.
I look forward to learning from you.

Peace, Natalia

Selected Bibliography

Given the thematic, methodological, and disciplinary breadth of my case study, the option of a complete bibliography is impractical. I therefore limit my bibliography to the subjects and fields central to my dissertation argument: Benedictine-Cistercian Monasticism; Clergy Burnout, Sabbath, and Self-Care; Qualitative Research; Practical Theological Methodology; and Theological Education. Even these subsections list only the sources that are most relevant to the primary focus of my investigation.

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