

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE MYSTICISM OF ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY (1880-
1906) AND THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

by

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Dedicated to my family in gratitude
for their unwavering support and encouragement

Summary

In this investigation key elements of the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) are compared and contrasted with the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and as a result, the true nature of the relationship between their respective mysticism is elucidated. Key doctrines which exhibit a remarkable consonance are: the trinitarian foundation of their mysticism, the indwelling of the Trinity in the human soul, asceticism, desert spirituality, sacrificial love, liturgical spirituality, scriptural spirituality, deification and the doxological nature of their mysticism. Elements of divergence exist within the following: election and predestination, apophatic versus cataphatic mysticism, the Roman Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary, and the mode of God's presence in the human soul. Elizabeth's relevance for today is also considered, namely, her ecclesial mission which she now continues in heaven: to intercede for people seeking union with God and to draw people to interior recollection.

KEY WORDS

Christian mysticism

Roman Catholic mysticism

Eastern Orthodox mysticism

Elizabeth of the Trinity

Theosis

Scriptural mysticism

Liturgical mysticism

Desert spirituality

Indwelling trinity

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 NATURE AND AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

Elizabeth Catez, known in religious life as Elizabeth of the Trinity, is a young, modern French mystic who lived between 1880 and 1906. Elizabeth's legacy to the world is a profound and authentic mystical doctrine that is nevertheless simple and practical enough to inspire people¹ of diverse walks of life. What makes Elizabeth worthy of study is the nature of her mysticism² and its universal appeal, as well as the fact that Elizabeth's mystical doctrine demonstrates such close correspondence with that of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This correspondence is hardly surprising, because there is only 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Eph 4:5-6). Hence, there is in essence just one christian mysticism, although this may be expressed and lived in a variety of forms. What distinguishes different spiritualities are the arrangements and patterns of common elements (Von Balthasar 1956:18) and the ways they find expression in the lives of people. Unmistakably, any authentic christian mysticism must, by its sheer nature, have essential elements in common with the christian tradition and the great mystics and Fathers and Mothers of the Church. It is for this very reason that the Monk of the Eastern Church (1978:x) asserts that East and West share the fundamental principles of christian spirituality: 'differences do not bear on the chief points'. However, this does not imply that Elizabeth offers nothing original. Although dependent on others, Elizabeth's

originality lies in the combination of a loftiness of conception with a spareness, an asceticism of treatment; and this latter is due, not to any narrowness of mind, but to her intense concentration on the end in view. The result is a work of very high rank, both spiritually and theologically, an organic and vital growth from a single germinating idea (Von Balthasar 1956:15).

¹ In this study inclusive language will be used. With respect to God-language, male pronouns are used, but this does not imply that God is male. God is pure spirit and transcends categories of "male" and "female". To speak of God as "it" obscures the fact that God is a personal and relational being. Since there is no solution to the quandary, tradition prevails.

² There is a tendency to reserve the use of the term "mysticism" for the higher stages of the spiritual life. Notwithstanding, mysticism is not something esoteric, reserved for an elite group of christians who experience paranormal phenomena, but the normal progression of the christian spiritual life, understood as a growing awareness of the presence of God and participation in the life of the Trinity. This perspective will become clear throughout the ensuing discussion.

The aim of the present investigation is to present a comparative study of the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Elizabeth of the Trinity. In other words, the aim is not to show whether, or even that, such a correspondence exists, because the correspondence between their mystical doctrines is self-evident after even a cursory reading of Elizabeth's autographs. The aim is rather to analyse, articulate and describe this correspondence. Seeing that the act of comparing elucidates both similarities and differences, those areas where Elizabeth diverges from Eastern Orthodox mysticism will also be investigated. Such an approach is indeed appropriate since the relatively minor differences place the remarkable overall consonance between them in greater relief.

Demonstrating the connection between the mysticism of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy, makes the mystical doctrine of Eastern Orthodoxy, and hence early christian traditions, better known and appreciated among Western christians. It is well-known that understanding engenders tolerance among differing religious persuasions, and this is important in the contemporary ecumenical climate. It also makes the simple and practical nature of Elizabeth's mysticism, as well as its consonance with the Eastern Orthodox tradition, better known and appreciated. In addition, Elizabeth's way to profound intimacy with the triune God is simple and practical enough to be appealing to busy people of the twenty-first century. The characteristics of her mysticism make it especially relevant in our day, marked by a resurgence of interest in spirituality.

A further aim of this research is to address and remedy the lacunae found in the article by Eliane (1985:315-322). While Eliane draws parallels between the mystical doctrine of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy, no attention is paid to any dissimilarity. Elizabeth also differs from Orthodox theology concerning the dogma of the immaculate conception, which is not endorsed by Orthodoxy. Although this dogma does not feature strongly in Elizabeth's writings, it is indisputably in the background. There is also the ever-controversial dogma of election and predestination which Orthodoxy does not accept in its double predestination modality. Whether Elizabeth's understanding of predestination is radically different from that of Orthodoxy is a moot point. My position is that it does not constitute a radical break with Orthodoxy. The difference centres on the prominence attributed to it by Elizabeth which is absent in Eastern Orthodoxy. Had Eliane considered such differences, the article would have been greatly enhanced because it would have provided a more complete understanding of the relationship between the mysticism of Elizabeth and that of Eastern Orthodoxy, even though it was not

Elizabeth's intention to establish such a consonance with the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition.

Although not the primary aim of this investigation, the dissertation nevertheless draws attention to the role of the Trinity in spirituality and mysticism. Lash (1986:183) expresses his concern about the neglect³ of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is however Dupré (1984:9) who writes with great perspicuity that:

it is amazing how small a role the Trinity plays in contemporary Christian piety. Both in practical and in spiritual life Christians tend to be pure monotheists....Even with respect to the Incarnation, Christians rarely realize the significance of the identity of the divine Persons....The same attitude prevails with respect to that "grace" which, according to our own beliefs, introduces us into the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. We mostly treat it as if it were a created "gift" from God, independent of that personal, triune *presence* which this gift reflects. Such a neglect has not always distorted theology, and until today it has rarely affected the Eastern Church.

A realization that "grace" is not only a "gift" but also the real presence of God the Trinity in the soul of every human being, and to participate in divine life, is at the heart of Orthodox and Elizabeth's mysticism. Sadly, because of this neglect of the Trinity, Western Christians are in a sense deprived of the experience of the central dogma of the Christian spiritual life. A more in-depth study of the role of the Trinity in spirituality could be fruitfully researched with the aim of creating awareness of and teaching all Christians this great heritage of the early Church Fathers. I submit that this would lead to a spiritual renewal that would transform communities. However, such an investigation falls outside the ambit of this study.

1.2 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

³ This need has been addressed by theologians such as William Hill in his book *The Three-Personed God, knowing the unknown God* (1982) and Walter Kasper in *The God of Jesus Christ* (1984). In the West particularly, there is a need to restore the Trinity as the central dogma of our Christian faith, as it indeed is.

This investigation of the mysticism of Elizabeth Catez and its consonance with Eastern Orthodox mysticism, necessarily demarcates the study within the christian tradition. Any consonance or relationship that Elizabeth's doctrine might have with other world religions or religious philosophies falls outside the purview of this enterprise. It does not deny the validity of such a study, but it does not form part of the present work. Hence, the terms "spiritual" and "mysticism" refer to the christian understanding of the terms.

Elizabeth was influenced by various mystics such as: John of the Cross (1542-1591), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Angela de Foligno (1248-1309), Jan van Ruysbroeck (1294-1381), Dionysius the Aeropagite (fifth century) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). The carmelite mystical tradition is also an inestimable contributor to Elizabeth's spiritual formation. Chapter two is devoted to four of the major influences on Elizabeth's mystical development. The four influences selected for this study are: a) Catherine of Siena from whom Elizabeth adopted the idea of the inner cell; b) Jan van Ruysbroeck whose influence helped Elizabeth to refine her doctrine of the indwelling Trinity; c) the apostle Paul, because Elizabeth's mysticism is genuinely biblical; and d) the carmelite mystical tradition which is the primary influence on Elizabeth's mystical formation as a carmelite nun. The foundation of Elizabeth's mystical doctrine is the indwelling Trinity. This doctrine is not an innovation on the part of Elizabeth, but is as old as christianity itself. The concept of the indwelling God dates from the earliest christian communities (e.g., Paul's 'in Christ' formula: Eph 1:3; Gal 2:20; also Jn 14:15-23), desert hermits and Church Fathers, both East and West. The other mystics who have influenced Elizabeth's mystical development, who cannot be dealt with in this study, are worth further research. The influence of Teresa of Avila should be a prime consideration, because although Elizabeth does not quote her often, Elizabeth's mystical doctrine is permeated with her thought. Teresa of Avila also initiated the reform of the Carmelite Order, and together with John of the Cross, founded the Discalced Carmelite Order of which Elizabeth was a consecrated religious.

Chapter three⁴ presents an outline of the key elements of Eastern Orthodox mysticism. The expression "Eastern Orthodox" is to a certain extent artificial. This is because the final break

⁴ I am indebted to Rev. Nikolaos Giamouridis, Parish Priest of St George the Great Martyr in Woodstock, Cape Town, for his comments on this chapter.

between East and West only occurred in 1204⁵; ‘all that is prior to that date constitutes a common and indivisible treasure for both parts of a divided Christendom’ (Losky 1976:11-12). The Orthodox Church would not be what it is without the Western Church Fathers, just as much as the West would not be what it is without the Eastern Church Fathers. The objective is not to cover the entire field of Eastern Orthodox mysticism, but to lay a solid foundation that will assist the investigation and elucidate the correspondence between Eastern Orthodoxy and Elizabeth. This analysis of Eastern Orthodox mysticism is necessary because the inner experience of a christian develops on the basis of the dogmatic framework of the christian tradition he or she belongs to (Losky 1976:21). One cannot understand a particular spirituality without taking the dogmatic⁶ context into consideration. In addition, Eastern Orthodoxy has never made a distinction between theology and spirituality. Knowledge of God is attained experientially through an ascetical and spiritual life. Knowledge of God is, therefore, experiential as well as rational. Since God is truth, to arrive at truth concerning God, is to arrive at God⁷ (Armitage 2000:9). One could equally say to arrive at love is to arrive at God, because God is love.

The comparative part of the study begins in chapter four. Here a comparison is drawn between Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy in terms of the christo-trinitarian foundation of their respective mysticism. Differences highlighted in this chapter are the kataphatic nature⁸ of Elizabeth’s mysticism in contrast to the generally apophatic nature of Orthodox mysticism as well as the doctrine of predestination and election.

Chapter five continues the comparative analysis in terms of their respective understanding of the vocation of humankind. Key elements of the spiritual journey towards *theosis*, that is, union with God through participation in divine life, are analysed and compared, rather than the

⁵ The mutual excommunications between the Latin West and the Greek East in 1054 is often regarded as ‘the definitive breach’ between Latin and Greek speaking christianity. It was, however, only when the Latin crusaders sacked Constantinople in 1204 that the schism became irreparable (Geanakoplos 1966:1-2). On 7 December 1965 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople lifted the excommunications of 1054, but this did not repair the schism. It is, however, beneficial to ecumenical dialogue (see also footnote 90).

⁶ Obviously, the cultural and socio-political context plays an equally important role because humans are not disembodied spirits that live in a vacuum unaffected by their environment.

⁷ To arrive at God, implies a quest for likeness to God. Wisdom is not pursued by the mind alone; it involves a burning love and longing for God, because knowledge and love are intimately connected. True knowledge is, therefore, ‘about a way of life, a likeness to God in holiness and wisdom and justice’ (Armitage 2000:11). It involves knowing at every moment where one stands in relation to the triune God.

⁸ Apophatic theology uses negative images and statements to describe God, e.g., God is non-being, while kataphatic theology employs positive images and statements, as in the statement ‘God is love’. These two concepts will be dealt with in more detail in section 4.3.

spiritual trajectory as such. This chapter concludes with an explanation for the striking consonance between the mysticism of Elizabeth and the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The phenomenological method seems the most appropriate approach for a study of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Phenomenology focuses on 'things themselves' (Westphal 1997:143) and aims to set aside preconceived ideas. The objective is to 'look, listen' (Westphal 1997:143). Phenomenology focuses on God, not as he is in himself, but as he is seen and experienced by human beings, and as such, presents himself to human consciousness. This corresponds with the Orthodox approach to the study of God which starts with the economic Trinity in order to arrive at knowledge of God, recognising that such knowledge is only provisional. What makes phenomenology such an appropriate approach is that it includes reason and scientific criteria as part of the method, and therefore, by its very nature, tries to avoid subjectivism and preconceived notions. In this way academic integrity can be maintained; and this is the aim of the present investigation.

In contrast, a rationalistic approach such as positivism holds that only what can be perceived by the senses can form the basis of knowledge and that no metaphysical knowledge can be verified (Deist 1990:196). It demands that science be logical, that is, free from all contradiction, precise and clear, and empirical, that is, statements must be based on empirical observation. Positivism tends to reduce all knowledge to scientific knowledge and utilises scientific criteria, because 'only what can be seen and measured is real' (Kretzschmar 1999:37). Such an approach has nothing to say to the existential problems faced by humanity or the meaning of life. Life in all its fullness is reduced to mere scientific facts. Thus it denies the important role of human experience and subjectivity, not only in the field of religion, but in life as a whole. Such an approach emphasises left cerebral hemisphere functioning while the intuitive and symbolic functioning of the right cerebral hemisphere, associated with mystical intuition, is overlooked or denied. To counter the tendency to ignore what is not scientifically quantifiable, phenomenology starts with human experience and investigates this experience with the aid of reason and scientific criteria. This is in harmony with the contemporary tendency in theology to

regard human experience⁹ as an authentic starting point in theology and christian reflection. It does not mean that experience is isolated without regard for the role of human reason; mysticism is not irrational but rather 'supra-rational' as it transcends conceptual and empirical ways of knowing (Kourie 1993:112). Exclusivist approaches need to be avoided. Together, reason, intuition and lived experience provide more holistic results and this should be the aim.

The research project is reliant on literary sources (books and articles) rather than empirical data obtained from questionnaires or surveys¹⁰. Hence, the approach is literary-theoretical. In true phenomenological style, the task is to describe, analyse, interpret and finally synthesise the results. In fact, the synthetic component is of the essence to any analysis in order to overcome a possible fragmented understanding that is characteristic of analytical studies.

1.4 SURVEY OF LITERATURE

The main literary sources that were used in the research on the life and mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and the mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy will now be considered.

1.4.1 Literary sources with respect to Elizabeth

Although various studies and writings on Elizabeth are available in French and other languages, there is not a wealth of scholarly resources available in English. The works referred to in this dissertation, especially since the time of De Meester, are indispensable to any research into the life and mysticism of Elizabeth. What is regrettable, however, is the dearth of sources on Elizabeth of a more academic nature in the English speaking world. Publication of scholarly works on Elizabeth seems to have abated considerably some time after her beatification in 1984. Some of the sources will now receive due attention.

De Meester's critical three volume edition *J'ai trouvé Dieu, Oeuvres Complètes* (1980; 1985a; 1985b) is the primary source for all critical work on Elizabeth. Two of these volumes have been

⁹ In this context "experience" is not understood narrowly as referring to religious experience only, but as referring to all experience that constitutes human life, be that religious, social, cultural, political, or any other. This means that spirituality has to do with life in its fullness, and one of the positive aspects of spirituality is that it integrates all areas of life and as such brings about human fulfilment and authentication and union with God.

translated into English and have been an integral part of this exploration into the life and mysticism of this young Burgundian mystic. Volume One (1984), translated by Aletheia Kane, consists of a general introduction to Elizabeth's work and her four major spiritual writings, namely, *Heaven in faith*, *The greatness of our vocation*, *Last retreat* and *Let yourself be loved*. The general introduction provides valuable information about Elizabeth's life and autographs, and witnesses to sound scholarship. Volume Two contains all Elizabeth's extant letters¹¹ from Carmel. These letters contain the basis of Elizabeth's mystical doctrine. The academic quality of the editorial work done on these publications is superb. Volume Three, which has not yet been published in English, contains letters written by Elizabeth before her entry into Carmel, personal notes, her diary and some poems (more appropriately called *verse*).

Philipon (1947), *Von Balthasar* (1956), and *Borriello* (1986) systematised the key doctrinal elements of Elizabeth's mysticism. Since Elizabeth's autographs are occasional writings, she never presents a systematic treatise of her mysticism. These three authors distilled key elements from Elizabeth's writings, for example, her trinitarian mysticism, deification, continual prayer, silence, and a praise of glory. As such, these writings are helpful in gaining a clearer understanding of Elizabeth's mysticism and serve as indispensable secondary sources.

Valabek (1985) highlights the human qualities of Elizabeth and here she emerges as a genuinely human mystic. Therefore, this is an important contribution to research into the life of Elizabeth since it brings into relief the intimate relationship between Elizabeth's humanity and her mystical life. Valabek's work corrects the writings before the time of De Meester which tend to be more hagiographical, with the concomitant tendency to angelisation and a highly sentimental style. Since it is Elizabeth's deep humanity and the practical and simple nature of her mysticism that attract people to her, and because today role-models are required to be real people, Valabek's contribution is invaluable. In another article, *Valabek* (1977) investigates the liturgical and sacramental mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Valabek highlights the fact that Elizabeth's life as a carmelite was steeped in the liturgy and that her understanding of the term "sacrament" transcends that of the official sacraments of the church.

¹⁰ For personal reasons, I regularly attended the divine liturgy in order to become more acquainted with this family of Christianity.

¹¹ That so many letters have been preserved is a testimony to the importance attributed to correspondence in those days. Furthermore, forty of her fifty seven correspondents were laypeople, family and friends, who obviously treasured Elizabeth's letters. Of importance,

Von Balthasar (1992) draws a comparison between Elizabeth of the Trinity and Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897). Elizabeth often quotes from Thérèse. Both their spiritualities are based on the merciful love of God which was their primary way of freeing themselves of Jansenistic influences and the effects of imaginative hell-fire preaching still characteristic at the time. Elizabeth also adopted Thérèse's "little way", although Elizabeth adapted it to her own contemplative way of intense interiority. It is therefore not surprising that a parallel would be drawn between these two near-contemporaries. Nevertheless, their mystical ways are not identical. The second part of this book, which deals with Elizabeth, does not differ essentially from his earlier work mentioned above. Rather, it is an updated version of that publication.

The unpublished doctoral thesis of *Kourie* (1990) presents an interpretation of the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity against the background of a phenomenological study of the nature of mysticism. Kourie relates certain aspects of Elizabeth's mysticism with other world religions, for example, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Those interested in these world religions can explore these themes further, as Kourie also proposes. Kourie also indicates major points of convergence between the mysticism of Elizabeth and that of Eastern Orthodoxy. However, these discussions, especially with respect to Eastern Orthodox mysticism, are rather limited as they are ancillary to the theme. Finally, Kourie's interpretation concludes with a heuristic model of Elizabeth's mystical doctrine.

Moorcroft (2001) provides the latest publication on the life of Elizabeth for the English-speaking world and supplements an earlier work of hers published in 1984. This book will serve the general reader interested in Elizabeth, but for scholarly purposes, it is disappointing. The book is replete with inadequate dates. Sometimes a mere 'a few days later on March 20th' (*Moorcroft* 2001:37) must suffice, with no date given immediately before these 'few days'. To further complicate reading, the book lacks a dateline. It is not considered a significant contribution to the literature on Elizabeth as it produces nothing new.

Concerning the comparative theme of this study, just one article in French was located (*Eliane* 1985:315-322). While Eliane draws parallels between the mysticism of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy, she does not discuss any areas of divergence nor does she offer an explanation for

too, is the fact that letter writing is restricted in Carmel in a spirit of separation from the

this striking consonance which would have enhanced the article considerably. These lacunae will be addressed below.

1.4.2 Literary sources with respect to Eastern Orthodoxy

Hierotheos (1995) presents an interesting understanding of Christianity as a science that cures the sickness of the human soul which is a consequence of the fall. The church acts like a doctor who diagnosis the spiritual pathology (disordered passions), prescribes a remedy (ascetical practices, sacraments, prayer) and thus leads the soul to wholeness and holiness, that is, the illumination of the *nous*. From this perspective, “psychotherapy”, as in the title of his work, *Orthodox psychotherapy*, is not to be understood in the ordinary psychological sense, but primarily as the therapy applied to the person’s soul or spirit in its relationship with God. There is, of course, a relationship between mental well-being and spiritual wholeness and holiness, but Hierotheos concentrates on the attainment of holiness. Hierotheos’ approach is described in more detail in section 3.3.2.E. Hierotheos’ contribution was indispensable for this investigation.

Lossky (1976) is the classic on Orthodox mystical theology and, therefore, a valuable source for the primary doctrines on which the mystical life is based: God the Trinity, the economy of the Son, the economy of the Spirit, uncreated energies of God, the *imago Dei* character of humanity, the way to union with God and the divine light. In true Orthodox tradition, Lossky draws on the traditions of the Church Fathers.

Ware (1979) weaves his exposition of the fundamental doctrines of Orthodox mysticism around images of God as mystery, as Trinity, as creation, as man, as spirit and as prayer. This work is heavily supported by quotations from the Church Fathers, liturgical texts as well as the great Fathers and Mothers of Orthodox mysticism.

Maloney (1983), writing as a Roman Catholic, draws attention to the common heritage of christianity, namely, Scripture and tradition, that is shared by both East and West. Maloney asks: ‘Is there really, therefore, a spirituality that is typically Eastern Christian?’ (1983:3). His answer is positive, because Eastern christians share common sources of the East, for

world.

example, the writings of the early Church Fathers, desert spirituality and the mystical nature of Eastern spirituality. However, these same sources are shared by the West as well – Maloney makes this point very clear. Rather, the difference between Eastern and Western christian mysticism has to do with the prominence given to certain christian sources – ultimately it is more a matter of *emphasis* than an outright ignoring of certain sources. Maloney provides a concise exposition to key elements of Orthodox mysticism in the extensive Introduction, which is valuable.

Meyendorff (1974a & 1974b) concern two studies of the mystical theology of the fourteenth century hesychast, Gregory Palamas. Palamas is well-known for his theological synthesis of hesychasm as life in Christ, lived at the heart of the faith community, as well as his formulation of the energies of God through which humanity encounters the triune God. *Meyendorff* (1974b) presents the theology of Palamas in a doctrinal framework in Part Two, while Part One is more biographical in nature.

As research into the life and mysticism of Elizabeth continues, the present comparative study of the mysticism of the Orthodox Church and Elizabeth is not presented as the last word on the subject. Rather, it is part of an ongoing discussion on the life and teaching of Elizabeth of the Trinity and the hope is expressed that it will inspire others to continue where this discussion of the young mystic of Dijon has to end.

CHAPTER TWO

MAJOR INFLUENCES ON THE MYSTICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of fact that mystics interpret their experiences from within the religious frame of reference that they are familiar with. There is such an intimate link between the dogma and the spiritual experience of the divine mysteries that mysticism is regarded as the 'perfecting and crowning of all theology: as theology *par excellence*' (Lossky 1976:8). This statement by Lossky is confirmed, as it were, by Elizabeth, who without any theological training has penetrated the depths of the great christian dogmas.

Elizabeth was greatly influenced by her own tradition, namely, the Discalced Carmelite Order of the Roman Catholic Church. As a child and young girl, Elizabeth was influenced by her family and friends, French culture, religious formation at parish level, and certainly by visits to the carmelite monastery that was very close to their home. It was during this period of Elizabeth's life that the seed of a religious vocation developed to ultimately find fruition in the Carmelite Order.

Elizabeth interpreted the symbols, images and insights of other writers from the vantage point of her own experience. Elizabeth then internalised the insights gained and worked them into her vision of the mystical life. Before entering Carmel, Elizabeth had already read Thérèse of Lisieux's (1873-1897) *The story of a soul*, and Teresa of Avila's *The way of perfection*. These influences enriched and deepened Elizabeth's own mysticism. The influence of Van Ruysbroeck in the last months of Elizabeth's life, which helped to clarify her teaching of the indwelling Trinity, is a case in point. The importance of these influences on Elizabeth's mystical

development and doctrine is, therefore, of immense significance and vital for a more comprehensive understanding of her mystical doctrine.

The primary influences on Elizabeth's mystical development were: the bible, especially John and Paul, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux (a carmelite), Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena (a Dominican tertiary), Jan van Ruysbroeck, Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine, and Father Vallée¹². Therefore, Elizabeth had on hand all that the catholic and carmelite traditions had to offer, dating back to the early christian communities.

Elizabeth does not merely copy the insights and symbols of other writers, but interprets them in her own characteristic way and concentrates only on what is of ultimate importance¹³ (Von Balthasar 1956:12). Elizabeth interprets the images and concepts she adopts from others from the vantage point of her own experience of her life in the indwelling Trinity. For example, Elizabeth's "little way" of spiritual childhood is that of Thérèse of Lisieux, but Elizabeth presents it more *contemplatively* and so avoids falling into a "spirituality of trivialities"¹⁴ that could lead to a neglect of concrete action in the reign of God. Elizabeth's way is a way of interior prayer and contemplation of the indwelling Trinity that gives impetus to her apostolic life of prayer for the church, the clergy and spiritual direction to others.

Catherine of Siena, Jan van Ruysbroeck, the apostle Paul and the carmelite mystical tradition are selected for this discussion¹⁵. The reasons for this particular selection are the following. The mystical doctrine of Catherine and Van Ruysbroeck each contains an element that is

¹² Father Vallée was the Father Prior of the Dominicans of Dijon and met Elizabeth several times. Elizabeth confided to Fr Vallée the sense "of being dwelt in by the Trinity" while still an adolescent. Fr Vallée provided Elizabeth with the theological foundation of the indwelling Trinity, namely, that as a result of her baptism the three divine persons dwelt in her soul through sanctifying grace.

¹³ Much has been said about Elizabeth's 'asceticism of thought' (Von Balthasar 1956:13). One possible reason for this is that most of Elizabeth's teaching on spirituality was by way of correspondence which was restricted in Carmel. One sheet of paper was often divided between two or more people, or she used the reverse of a chocolate wrapping, leaving her with limited space.

¹⁴ Such a spirituality would be almost fixated on doing "little things" for God because "I am so small, poor and insignificant" that concrete action in the reign of God is "just too important for me to do". This, I submit, is based on a false sense of humility, often in order to be noticed and praised.

¹⁵ These influences will not be presented in a historically chronological order. In fact, Elizabeth refers to them when and where they are relevant to her own mystical insight and never attempts to show their influence on her mystical development in a historical chronological order.

absolute key in Elizabeth's mystical doctrine. In Catherine's case it is the concept of the inner cell. In the case of Van Ruysbroeck, his theology of the indwelling Trinity helped Elizabeth to refine and articulate her doctrine of the divine inhabitation. Paul is of critical importance, because many of Elizabeth's key concepts are found in his letters and because her spirituality is a genuinely *biblical* spirituality. To deny some space to the carmelite mystical tradition would not do justice to the enormous impact it had on Elizabeth's mystical development. However, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity before proceeding.

2.2 INTRODUCING ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

To Captain Joseph and Marie Catez, there was born on 18 July 1880 in the military camp of Avor in central France, their first child whom they prophetically named Elizabeth. Her name, which means "house of God" in Hebrew, encapsulates her entire vocation. Elizabeth was devout from a very young age and taught her dolls to pray at the tender age of two. Some time later Elizabeth expressed the desire to enter religious life. However, Elizabeth also had a darker side, namely, an irascible and volatile nature that caused her much pain in her efforts to gain self-control. Often Elizabeth's flashing, furious eyes would say it all. Elizabeth's elementary schooling was rather poor; since Elizabeth was a very gifted pianist, all her energies were spent on piano lessons. Elizabeth was a very intelligent, fun loving child and adolescent and much loved by everyone. Elizabeth enjoyed going to parties and loved nature.

Elizabeth's first confession and first communion were occasions of a deepened awareness of the reality of Christ in her life. Elizabeth understood her first communion as the day when Jesus made his home in her and God took possession of her heart (Moorcroft 2001:13). Elizabeth lived a life of self-mortification in order to gain victory over her two dominant faults which she identified as anger and sensitivity. An intense prayer life eventually revealed to Elizabeth the presence of the Trinity in her heart, an experience clarified for Elizabeth by Fr Vallée. Although Elizabeth's mother first refused permission for her to enter Carmel, her entrance was eventually set for 2 August 1901.

In Carmel, Elizabeth found the ideal setting to deepen her spirituality through a life of profound silence and contemplation. The doctrine of the indwelling Trinity was the touchstone of Elizabeth's entire mystical life. Elizabeth shared the richness of her mystical insights with others through the medium of correspondence to friends, family, religious and clergy.

Elizabeth's vocation developed a further aspect, namely, to be the praise of God's glory, *Laudem Gloriam*. Eventually Elizabeth became very ill, and after long and heroic suffering, which she understood as the way she was being conformed to Christ, Elizabeth died on 9 November 1906. The cause of her canonisation received a major impetus when Elizabeth was beatified on 25 November 1984.

Of importance is the fact that Elizabeth was a mystic even as an adolescent and as such already had a well developed spirituality by the time she entered Carmel where she developed into a mature and authentic human person completely transfigured in Christ. Elizabeth's cloistered life of separation from the world in no way diminished her deep humanity (Kourie 1990:70). In spite of Elizabeth's rudimentary education and the fact that she had no formal theological training, she nevertheless grasped the mystical truths of the great christian doctrines as a result of infused, or divine, insights she gained through her mystical experiences. The mystical doctrine Elizabeth invites others to embrace is simple, practical, biblical and eminently trinitarian. Coupled with Elizabeth's deep humanity, she evokes great interest and then she presents the challenge: to become a praise of glory in the ordinariness of life by living it in the Trinity who is to be found in the depths of one's soul.

As already mentioned, Elizabeth adopted the idea of the inner cell from Catherine of Siena. Who is Catherine of Siena and what is her influence on Elizabeth?

2.3 CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347-1380)

2.3.1 Introducing Catherine of Siena

In certain respects Catherine stands in stark contrast to Elizabeth. Catherine was a lay Dominican tertiary who lived "in the world" and was enmeshed in the civil and ecclesiastical politics of the day, at the time when there were two claimants to the Papacy. Catherine was a preacher, peace-maker, mystic and one of three women Doctors of the Church¹⁶. She did not live a cloistered life like Elizabeth - but this did not stop Catherine from becoming one of the great mystics of the church. It is precisely this aspect of Catherine's life that illustrates most

¹⁶ The church has conferred the title of Doctor of the Church on Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Thérèse of Lisieux. It demonstrates the church's recognition of the relevance of their theology, the universal significance of their theology for the christian life and, very importantly in our contemporary society, it affirms the role of women theologians in the church. All three titles were conferred during the twentieth century.

perfectly what Elizabeth conveyed to her correspondents, namely, that one can find God and live one's life in God in all walks of life. Both endorsed the understanding that mysticism is not an elitist, escapist, ethereal odyssey reserved for those who can afford to engage in such spiritual luxury. Mysticism is the normal culmination of life in Christ, life in the Trinity, irrespective of one's personal vocation.

The lives of Elizabeth and Catherine demonstrate that mystics are real people, not emotionless beings lost in a numinous world. They are both strong-willed and known for their love and care of others. What is more, they concur with other mystics, even those who have experienced para-normal phenomena, that such extra-ordinary experiences are non-essential to mysticism and not to be sought after. Elizabeth especially, does not write about her mystical experiences, because she finds God primarily *in the depths of her very being*. Although Catherine is more verbal about her mystical experiences¹⁷, yet for her too, her mystical life comprises 'the whole substance of the life she lived at the heart of these [political and ecclesiastical] events' (Fatula 1987:21). It is the *creative presence* of the indwelling God in the lives of people and their conscious participation in divine life that are the hallmark of authentic mysticism rather than paranormal experiences.

2.3.2 Central themes in Catherine's mystical writings

Since a systematic theology of the spiritual life is not part of Catherine's bequest to the church, it is necessary to systematise some key elements of her mysticism. More attention will be given to the 'interior cell' and 'continual prayer' since they are also key elements of Elizabeth's mysticism.

A. The will of God

The meaning and purpose of life reside in embracing the will of God. By this, Catherine means bringing one's own will in conformity to the divine will so that preference is given to God rather than self. Catherine came to understand God's will as an abyss of divine love that enfolds one with mercy, rather than a decree to be complied with (Fatula 1987:40). This concentration on the mercy of God would have resonated very well with Elizabeth who appealed to the mercy of God to free herself from the effects of hellfire-and-brimstone preaching still prevalent in the

nineteenth century¹⁸. In Catherine's view, as humans begin to understand how radically God has given himself to them, the more they want to be one in mind and will with him. Believers' "yes" to God's will for them is proportional to their openness to the Holy Spirit. Hence, to the extent that believers are able to surrender to the Holy Spirit, they are embracing the will of God. By surrendering to the will of God, Catherine, an unschooled young woman during the fourteenth century, was able to preach and write with a clarity which earned for her the title "Doctor of the Church". Furthermore, by embracing God's will so whole-heartedly, Catherine became 'another himself' (Fatula 1987:58) as she came to identify with Christ more and more. Nevertheless, the distinction between Catherine and the Divine is never obliterated. The idea of 'another himself' is expressed by Elizabeth as 'another humanity' wherein Christ can continue his ministry on earth. At first, the idea of 'another himself' is an astounding claim, but it is in fact the principle of sacramentality¹⁹ that is being expressed.

B. The interior cell

The daily events and material needs of Catherine formed an integral part of her prayer. Catherine was totally reliant on God to meet all the needs she presented to him. After Catherine embraced the will of God for her, that involved active ministry in the world and the church, Catherine interiorised the monastic cell²⁰. The Holy Spirit taught Catherine to remain in this inner dwelling. This led Catherine to intimacy with God in the inner cell which can be envisaged as 'the interior region of the spirit' (O'Driscoll 1980:40). Like so many mystics, Catherine was attracted to the mystery of the indwelling God.

Eventually Catherine came to understand the inner dwelling as comprising two cells: the cell of self-knowledge and the cell of knowledge of God. It is in the inner cell that self-knowledge and knowledge of God is attained. The inner cell gives knowledge of the reality of God's identity and one's own identity, namely, God's infinite goodness and love, and one's own poverty

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Catherine was a stigmatist, while it is not known whether Elizabeth ever experienced anything para-normal.

¹⁸ This kind of preaching dates back to the fourteenth century and was still regularly used during the nineteenth century.

¹⁹ The principle of sacramentality refers to the belief that God is present, and comes to people, through other people, events and even objects. It expresses the principle that God is not experienced immediately but mediately, that is, through the medium of some thing or symbol.

²⁰ The interiorisation of the cell or hermitage is not original to Catherine; it has a long history dating from the desert hermits. Fresen (1995) traces the history of the inner cell.

without him. Catherine insists that self-knowledge and knowledge of God constitute a unity. Catherine is in harmony with the early Church Fathers for whom self-knowledge involves knowledge of God, because the soul reflects the image of God (Louth 1981:79).

The self-knowledge of which Catherine speaks is 'metaphysical, and ultimately mystical, self-knowledge' (Fresen 1995:15). Mystical self-knowledge is knowledge of one's ultimate selfhood; it is knowledge of one's transcendent self. It is knowledge of being created in the image and likeness of God; the knowledge that God is the ground and source of one's being. 'God is perfect being, and creatures are nonbeing in themselves; they receive their being from God' (O'Driscoll 1980:38). Thus, Catherine understood God as the 'One who is', and herself as 'she who is not' (Fresen 1995:13). Self-knowledge gained in the cell of self-knowledge (that is, in the depth of one's being), according to Catherine, is knowledge of the 'transcendent essence' of one's being (Fresen 1995:19). Because of the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:27), humans *are* like God in a certain sense, because they carry his divine image in their souls.

Furthermore, self-knowledge is gained by living *in* God and it includes knowledge of God, but also knowing God in intimate relationship. Therefore, Catherine acquires self-knowledge and knowledge of God at the very core of her being where God dwells. That is why the mystical journey is a journey inwards. For Catherine, it is the metaphysical and mystical self-knowledge she gained in the inner cell of self-knowledge that is the integrating factor in her life. Fresen (1995:26-27) observes incisively that

Catherine discovers that the entire spectrum of her faith and praxis is drawn together at this point. It is from her experience of mystical self-knowledge that she is compelled outwards in proclamation and ministry. Self-knowledge is Catherine's point of departure and serves to unify and simplify her life. There is a wholeness of the self as body, mind and spirit are drawn into unity.

Furthermore, humility, compassion and generous and unpossessive love are attained in the cell of self-knowledge. When one continually abides in the inner cell, one discovers heaven on earth (Fatula 1987:91), because as Elizabeth so perspicaciously says,

We possess our Heaven within us, since He who satisfies the hunger of the glorified in the light of vision gives Himself to us in faith and mystery, it is the Same One! It seems to me that I have found my Heaven on earth,

since Heaven is God and God is [in] my soul. The day I understood that, everything became clear to me (De Meester 1995:51).

C. Prayer and the interior cell

The believer learns to pray as he or she enters into the intimate presence of God in the inner cell. Catherine insists on the importance of desire in prayer. God instils these desires in the heart because he intends to grant them when one prays for them. When God does not answer immediately, it is because he wants to increase the person's desire. 'A holy desire is continual prayer' (Stella n.d.:38; Thorold 1974:166) because it habitually places the soul in the presence of God. The true purpose of prayer is to love and be loved. In other words, many words and lofty ideas are not essential, but rather desire and love for God and these can be expressed in adoring and abandoned silence of the heart. True prayer is characterized by fruits that remain after prayer. Mystical union with God cannot be conceived of as divorced from passionate involvement with, and intercession, for the world. Intercessory prayer was a central aspect of Catherine's apostolate. Elizabeth of the Trinity was an equally ardent intercessor who carried all her friends and relatives to God in her heart.

Catherine also speaks about union with God that reminds one of the doctrine of deification also found in Elizabeth's autographs. Catherine writes, (quoted in Noffke 1980a:181). 'If anyone should ask me what this soul is, I would say: "She is another me, made so by the union of love....Not even the soul's own will stands between us, because she has become one thing with me"'.

D. The heart of mystical union

By learning the truth that sets people free (Jn 8:32), one finds the heart of mystical union, namely, intimacy with the triune God. As Catherine came to trust God's providence she came face to face with the mystery of God. As her life in the inner dwelling intensified, Catherine discovered that her thirst for God was in fact God's thirst to give himself to her. In other words, the thirst Catherine experienced was God drawing her to himself so that he could give himself to her. In the unspeakable joy and nearness of this trinitarian communion Catherine discovered her own identity and the meaning of life.

Catherine reasoned as follows: each human person is known and treasured by God before the universe existed. God has made humans in the image and likeness (Gen 1:26) of the Trinity and they come from the 'very abyss of the divine heart' (Fatula 1987:171). Therefore, we know our true selves only in God, as a reflection of God's love. Even more marvellous than humanity's creation through the love of God, is that this love 'impelled the triune God to share with us the very mystery of the divine inner life' (Fatula 1987:174). The baptismal heritage is to share in the life of the Trinity, 'to become participants in the divine nature' (2 Pt 1:4). Jesus' promise is that he and his Father (and therefore the Spirit as well) will come and dwell in the souls of believers (Jn 14:21-23). Therefore, Catherine's spirituality is completely trinitarian. Catherine describes the role of each divine Person in vivid imagery taken from her own experiences: sea, abyss, mother, waiter, friend, and so forth. However, more important than the imagery, Catherine wanted to be united with the triune God within her. It is in the depths of the trinitarian life that Catherine discovered the abyss of love which revealed to her the deepest meaning of her humanity, namely, 'in Jesus, the triune God and humanity have become one' (Fatula 1987:186).

E. Contemplation leads to apostolic service

The spirituality of the inner cell involves a journey inwards. It is mysticism of the heart. But is this not escapism? Is this not a "flight from the world" spirituality? Not at all, although it can lead to nothing more than self-centred introspection. The truth is that the unity between the experience of oneself in God and the experience of God is but one aspect of the mystical life, that is, the contemplative side. The second aspect consists of the unity between love of God and love of neighbour, namely, the active and apostolic aspect. Human growth is attained within an encounter with God and with other human beings, never through self-absorbed introspection. Hence, Catherine can speak of walking on two feet: 'love of God and love of neighbour' (Noffke 1980a). What is absolute key to the correct understanding of the relationship between contemplation and action is that it is one of integration of, not alternation between, prayer and work. In other words, prayer and work become unified and become a way of life. Continual prayer means exactly what it says, and therefore, prayer does not cease altogether when one is engaged in service to others. Hence, authentic mysticism is never escapist introspection, but the energy that propels one towards the apostolate and maintains the apostolate.

God's selfless love impels believers to offer their lives for the salvation of the world. Catherine discovered that the triune God is not to be enjoyed in isolated self-indulgence. The Holy Spirit drew Catherine into passionate engagement in the world and in the church. In Catherine's time the church was in need of serious reform. In harmony with her Dominican call, Catherine considered the apostolic proclamation of the Word of God to be the means of church reform. From being a young girl wanting to live in seclusion, Catherine became a powerful preacher and mediator in ecclesiastical politics (something unheard of for a woman) because she yielded in love to the will of God unreservedly. As this was true for Catherine in her day, so it is also true for believers of all times.

2.3.3 Catherine's influence on Elizabeth

It is not clear exactly when Elizabeth came into contact with the teaching of Catherine. Even before her entry into Carmel on 2 August 1901, Elizabeth had already interiorised the monastic cell (Moorcroft 2001:46). It is possible that Elizabeth already interiorised her own prospective cell in Carmel as a young girl. Nevertheless, Elizabeth specifically mentions Catherine of Siena in terms of the inner cell and was obviously influenced by Catherine (De Meester 1995:216).

In two letters (De Meester 1995:57; 98) Elizabeth quotes the words the Master addressed to Catherine: 'Think of me, and I will think of you' (De Meester 1995:60). This expression is foundational to a continual heart-to-heart with God, as practised by both Catherine and Elizabeth. It is a prerequisite for intimacy with God and should become habitual. Elizabeth also quotes Catherine's well-known saying, 'He who is and she who is not' (De Meester 1995:60) to express one's total dependency on God for life itself. This saying of Catherine expresses the metaphysical self-knowledge that humans exist only because God sustains them in existence and that it is only *in God* that they live a genuinely authentic life. It is the only authentic life because life in the Spirit of God will never pass away. Both Catherine and Elizabeth speak of a double current of love that passes between their soul and God.

Elizabeth, like Catherine, writes about becoming 'another humanity' through which Jesus can renew 'His whole Mystery' (De Meester 1995:179). Whether this idea is taken from Catherine is not absolutely certain. For Elizabeth, becoming 'another humanity' means that 'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20) so that Christ can continue his salvific work in and through her. This expression demonstrates the extent of their identification with the

person of Christ, and hence, the christological nature of their mysticism, which can be termed more precisely as christo-trinitarian.

2.3.4 Summary

Knowing the will of God inspires the believer to embrace it in love. This leads the person to the interior cell. Arriving in the inner cell and daily living with the three divine persons in love and intimacy leads to union with God. However, this is not the end of the journey. Union with God must lead one to be actively involved in the world. Catherine's life is a prime example of such active love for God.

The religious vocations of Catherine and Elizabeth, the one as a consecrated, cloistered nun, the other as a Dominican tertiary in active ministry in the world, are merely a particularization and intensification of this basic christian vocation. The question is then, why religious life? Religious life provides an ordered life through a rule²¹ which also includes a specific timetable that ensures a regulated prayer-life. Religious life also instils and reinforces a different set of values to those of the world and provides a distinct setting for spiritual growth. Even though Catherine, as a Dominican tertiary, did not live a cloistered life, she would have had a rule (probably adapted to life in the world) that regulated her life and especially her prayer life.

Elizabeth adopted the idea of the inner cell from Catherine even as a young lay person in the world. It probably appealed to Elizabeth because she still had a couple of years to wait to enter Carmel. Living in the interior cell, led both Catherine and Elizabeth to the intimate presence and power of the triune God and a personal identification with Christ. It profoundly transformed the way they prayed and the way they lived. Ultimately, their whole life became a living prayer.

2.4 JAN VAN RUYSBROECK (1294-1381)

2.4.1 Introducing Jan van Ruysbroeck

²¹ Lay people, serious about their spiritual life, could also have a rule which can be written by the person herself or himself. The problem is that greater *self*-discipline is required because the person does not have the same support structure as those living in community.

After serving as an assistant diocesan priest at the church of St Gudule in Brussels, Van Ruysbroeck founded an Augustinian priory in Groenendael in 1343 where he remained for the rest of his life. Van Ruysbroeck was a man who sought solitude, but his desire for solitude did not make Van Ruysbroeck an unapproachable mystic. One only needs to turn to his writings where Van Ruysbroeck describes the situation in the church and in society 'with unparalleled precision and audacity' (Mommaers 1975:44) to realise how much he was involved in apostolic ministry.

Van Nieuwenhove (2000:83-89) argues against a phenomenological reading of Van Ruysbroeck's writings, because Van Ruysbroeck does not describe mystical experience as such but 'a transformation (*overforminghe*), a conversion (*bekeringhe*), a condition (*state*), not an experience' (ibid. 2000:89). According to Van Nieuwenhove, a phenomenological reading does not do justice to Van Ruysbroeck's developed ontological approach and is at odds with Van Ruysbroeck's emphasis on the role of the church and sacraments. The problem with this interpretation by Van Nieuwenhove is that it seems to ignore the fact that the condition of transformation is the result of experience (the spiritual journey as such) as well as an experience in itself, namely, an experience of union with the triune God. One cannot describe this condition without reference to experience. Therefore, Van Ruysbroeck does not ignore this interconnection between transformation and experience. Van Ruysbroeck is very relevant to theology today which is more appreciative of lived experience as its starting point.

This discussion will proceed with a consideration of the nature of Van Ruysbroeck's mysticism.

2.4.2 The nature of Jan van Ruysbroeck's mysticism

Van Ruysbroeck synthesised the Western psychological and the objective trinitarian approach of the East (Dupré 1984:29). Not surprisingly, then, is the fact that Van Ruysbroeck's mysticism is eminently trinitarian. Central to his trinitarian mysticism is the experience of the life of grace which implies an awareness of the presence of the indwelling Trinity. In other words, he does not conceive grace as merely a created gift or the benevolence of God towards humanity (the West), but the *presence* of the Word through the Spirit as a definite *reality* (the East). Therefore, humanity's being one with God is his basic theme, and more concretely,

humanity's *experiential awareness* of this presence²². Union with God is Van Ruysbroeck's basic theme (Mommaers 1975:48) and with this statement Van Nieuwenhove would agree, as discussed above. According to Teasdale (1984:86), the hub of Van Ruysbroeck's theology is the ascent of the soul to God which, incidentally, is a matter of experience.

According to Van Ruysbroeck (Teasdale 1984:88), God is a superessential divine being subsisting in repose as a unity of complete simplicity. The undifferentiated unity of God can be called the 'contemplative center of God's being, where he dwells in the stillness of his eternal self-sufficiency' (Teasdale 1984:88). The godhead is the source of the Trinity and *everything else*, and the contemplative centre of God where humans existed in his thoughts before creation. Van Ruysbroeck (quoted in Van Nieuwenhove 2000:89) explains:

In this Image God knew us in himself before we were created, and now that we have been created in time, He knows us in this Image as destined for himself. This Image exists essentially and personally in all persons. Each person possesses it wholly and indivisibly, and all persons together do not possess more of it than a single person does. We are therefore all one, united in our eternal Image, which is the Image of God and the source of us all – of all our life and becoming. Our created being and life are directly dependent on this Image as on their eternal cause. Nevertheless, our created being does not become God, nor does God's Image become a creature, for we are created to the Image, that is, created so as to receive the Image of God, and that Image is the uncreated and eternal son of God.

This means that the person's created being is naturally directed towards God, self-transcendence and participation in God because of its image character. It also means that the soul's destiny is in God and that it is to become more God-like through the restoration of the image of God. Van Ruysbroeck's apophatic theology comes to the fore when he says that God, in this superessential unity, is utterly ineffable and incomprehensible. On the other hand, Van Ruysbroeck's theology also has a kataphatic slant because some positive knowledge of God is possible, although always provisional.

In addition to the repose and stillness of the divine unity, there is also an eternal flowing forth of the three divine persons in an act of love. 'The Trinity is this active love' (Teasdale 1984:89).

²² For Van Ruysbroeck a mystic is someone who *consciously* experiences the presence of God, which is an experience of union with God. A non-mystical person certainly possesses

The Trinity of persons is actively involved *ad extra* in creation and salvation of humankind. There is a dialectic of repose and activity, of ebb and flow within the godhead. However, this divine movement from rest to activity includes a third movement, that of a return to the divine unity, so that it is in fact a three-fold movement that Van Ruysbroeck describes. The ebb and flow of the life of God both as unity and as Trinity, Van Ruysbroeck calls 'the common life' (Dupré 1984:36). This distinction in the life of the godhead, according to Van Ruysbroeck, is one of human reason and should not be construed too literally. The imagery of ebb and flow is a powerful one to express the eternal dynamism within God, because God's being is not static, but a communion of fruitful love.

The ontological reality of the trinitarian mystery has to become an existential reality in the life of believers *en route* to their goal. Through the entire process of deification²³ the believer consciously adheres to this actuality, that is, the believer consciously lives in the trinitarian presence, and is drawn increasingly deeper into the ebb and flow of trinitarian life.

Van Ruysbroeck is concerned with the highest degree of the soul's union with God and how to attain it. However, union with God involves a journey characterised by 'dying in God' (Teasdale 1984:86) so that the soul, transformed and integrated, can be united with God. Therefore, Van Ruysbroeck's theology, concerned with the ultimate state of beatitude as it is, is also very practical. He describes in detail the mystical progress of the soul to union with God based on his own experience and employing imagery from his environment.

Van Ruysbroeck does not understand union with God in a figurative sense. Rather, it is a substantial presence of the Trinity within each person as a result of the *imago Dei*, in good and bad alike. The Orthodox Fathers also do not understand humans merely to "appear" somewhat like God because of their image character. Rather, God's uncreated image in the human soul makes humans 'into a divine image of God...Precisely because in it resides the Word, the Logos, which itself is the divine image of God' (Dupré 1984:13). Therefore, the image of God is the presence of God's son in the soul, and the very means whereby God is the ground of the human soul and an ontological reality present in the human soul. This is why union with God is understood as a substantial union.

God, but is unconscious of this presence and union with God remains a point of faith or a conviction (Mommaers 1975:11-37).

Van Ruysbroeck views the spiritual quest as retracing humanity's divine origin and the soul's return to God. What does this entail?

2.4.3 Retracing humanity's divine origin

The trinitarian indwelling, the human being as *imago Dei*, and the ebbing and flowing of intra-trinitarian life, are three fundamental aspects of Van Ruysbroeck's mystical doctrine with respect to the soul's ascent to deifying union with God. The presence of the Trinity in the soul, due to its image character, is both a gift of grace and an invitation to embark on a journey inwards towards the three persons in order to grow in the image character and become more God-like. In harmony with Eastern Orthodox mysticism, Van Ruysbroeck also understands spiritual growth as growing in the image of God. To the extent that the soul reflects this image, it has been deified. However, sharing in trinitarian life means that humans also participate in the threefold movement that characterises intra-trinitarian life. The soul goes out of itself in the sense of self-transcendence only to return within itself in order to find the indwelling Trinity. This is followed by the third movement, namely, a "flowing out" in active apostolic work. Van Ruysbroeck's phenomenology of the mystical path is interesting and his classification is more appealing than that of John of the Cross whose *emphasis* on purgation and darkness seems quite austere at times.

As usual, the phases of the mystical quest are not sequential but more cyclical by nature. Interestingly, Van Ruysbroeck speaks of a threefold path in *The spiritual espousals* (Wiseman 1985) but then adds a fourth in *The sparkling stone* (Wiseman 1985), namely, the common life.

The first phase is the active life of the beginner and aims at acquisition and growth in virtues modelled on the life of Christ. Here, Van Ruysbroeck does not say anything different from the traditional teaching.

The second phase Van Ruysbroeck calls the 'interior life'. This is the most complicated and comprehensive part of his teaching on the mystical trajectory. This phase involves the transformation and illumination of the faculties of memory, will and understanding to bring

²³ Deification, or *theosis*, can be defined as the believer's transformation in God whereby he

about their simplification and integration. It is characterised by a yearning for God which initiates the search for the Divine (Wiseman 1990:239). Van Ruysbroeck uses very descriptive imagery to describe this yearning for God, for example, fire and boiling water. The soul's yearning for God is so intense that it might desire to leave its earthly existence in order to be with God in heaven. Such intense longing to be with God is one of the outstanding characteristics of Elizabeth's mysticism; it is almost a death-wish. This is how Van Ruysbroeck (in Rolfson 1995:71) expresses it:

Sometimes the impetuous person falls into a longing and an unquiet yearning to be released from the prison of his body, so that he may be united with Him Whom he loves. So he casts his inward eyes upwards and contemplates the heavenly hall full of glory and joy, and his Beloved crowned there, flowing out with rich bliss into His saints: and he must forego it. Because of this, in some people there sometimes come outwards tears and longing.

Religious fervour is experienced, firstly in the lower sense, that is, in the "heart", including everything corporeal, sensible and affective, and secondly, the higher powers of memory, will and understanding. The yearning on the spiritual level is graphically described by Van Ruysbroeck (quoted in Wiseman 1990:240):

an interior craving and striving on the part of the amorous power and of the created spirit to attain a created good. Because the spirit desires to enjoy God and has been called and invited to this by him, it constantly wishes to fulfil this desire. Here begin an eternal craving and striving which can never be satisfied....In this storm of love two spirits struggle – the Spirit of God and our spirit....Each demands of the other what it is, and each offers to the other and invites it to accept what it is. This makes these loving spirits lose themselves in one another....In this way the spirit is consumed in the fire of love and enters so deeply into God's touch that it is overcome in all its striving and comes to nought in all its works.

The hunger for God that the soul experiences spurs the soul on towards its goal. Jesus prayed for his followers, 'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (Jn 17:21).

The third phase is the contemplative life and is characterised by 'a union so intimate that there seems to be no longer any distinction between oneself and God' (Wiseman 1990:241). Such close identification with God should not be understood in pantheistic terms, but rather as the

or she has become God-like. This concept will be dealt with in section 3.3.2.F.

expression of a profound love between God and the believer, as is repeatedly pointed out by Van Ruysbroeck. The inescapable truth of the New Testament is that humans are to become one with God. Various biblical passages speak about union with God, e.g. John 14:23, John 17:20-24, 1 Corinthians 6:17, 2 Peter 1:4²⁴. However, Van Ruysbroeck is quite emphatic that this union with God *never* implies a total ontological identification with God. It is a unity of will and ultimately of love, it is one of adoption and not one of nature. To speak about this union in objective concepts is totally inadequate because any concepts fall short of the reality of God. Union with God, or deification, is a metaphysical and mystical reality, and as such, the entire problematic surrounding the use of language in mysticism is encountered. Like most mystics, Van Ruysbroeck did not regard union with God as a problem that had to be solved philosophically and theologically. Rather, Van Ruysbroeck spoke from his own experience because his union with God was *the* reality of his life. Likewise, the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine to be *lived* by each and everyone, rather than a doctrine to be analysed philosophically, although Van Ruysbroeck did venture into the theology of intra-trinitarian life.

Since the soul originates with God there is already a substantial union with God through the image character of the soul. This union with God is like a seed that needs to be brought to fruition and this is what union with God in the mystical life attains (Van Nieuwenhove 2000:92). 'Our spirit receives according to its most interior and highest being....the imprint of God's eternal image and God's own radiance without ceasing....Created by God, we undergo unceasingly the imprint of God's eternal image....Thus our personality rests in God, and flows from God, and hangs in God, and returns to God as its eternal source' (quoted in Wijngaards 1981:1196). This is why Wijngaards (1981:1196) concludes that the mystical life is 'an ever-deepening discovery of our origin in God'. This search for humanity's divine origin relates to the transcendental self-knowledge that Catherine of Siena speaks about and which is the incentive or the impetus of the soul's journey towards ever-deepening union with God which brings about the person's deification.

Van Ruysbroeck is attuned to all the great mystics when he insists on the necessity of going out in active and loving service of others. This reaching out to others is called the common life by Van Ruysbroeck. This is part of the ebb and flow of trinitarian life in which believers, and

²⁴ More texts that speak of or allude to humanity being 'in Christ' or 'in God' are: Rom 15:5; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 5:17, 19; Gal 1:22; Gal 2:17; Gal 2:20; Eph 1:3., Col 3:3; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1.

the mystics to an eminently greater degree, participate. A mature christian life that does not reflect this ebb and flow, contemplative rest and pastoral activity, is a contradiction in terms. By adding the active apostolate as a final phase of the spiritual journey, Van Ruysbroeck elucidates the fact, endorsed by all authentic mystics, that rest in God is not the ultimate goal of love. In this, Van Ruysbroeck presents a balanced view of the truly spiritual person. 'All the people who do not possess rest and activity in one practice have not obtained...justice' (Rolfson 1995:106). Such people could be understood more appropriately as quietists as far as their behaviour is concerned.

The idea of 'the common life' also applies to mystics as they are drawn into the ebb and flow of trinitarian life. 'When God and the soul touch, a constant ebbing and flowing begins, a rising and falling, that follows the rhythm of God's internal life' (Dupré 1984:37). Van Ruysbroeck's ideal of the common life is one of integration between action and rest or contemplation. The integration is attained by means of a single-minded intention that draws all the 'scattered faculties together in the unity of the spirit and place the spirit in God' (Van Nieuwenhove 2000:95). Thus, centred on God, the soul rests in God in whatever it does. Being intent solely on God requires total self-forgetfulness and self-transcendence. Self-transcendence does not mean the person has lost the use of his or her faculties, but that the person's intention is focused on God and not on self.

Van Ruysbroeck's trinitarian theology is of eminent relevance today when the life of grace, understood as the life and presence of the indwelling Trinity in the soul of every person, is being retrieved in the West and given greater attention. Van Ruysbroeck is an authentic mystical guide for an understanding of the dynamic inner life of God in which humanity is called to participate (2 Pt 1:4). Elizabeth recognised the relevance of Van Ruysbroeck's mystical doctrine and made use of his mystical knowledge to refine her own doctrine. Of eminent importance is Van Ruysbroeck's integration of Eastern Orthodox theology into his mystical doctrine because this rich Eastern tradition has remained virtually untapped by the West.

2.4.4 Jan van Ruysbroeck's influence on Elizabeth

Elizabeth encountered²⁵ Van Ruysbroeck's writings towards the end of her life. Van Ruysbroeck's influence helped Elizabeth to refine her own mystical doctrine of the indwelling Trinity and ultimate union with the Divine which was already well developed. Van Ruysbroeck's influence, coupled with Elizabeth's artistic talents, produced a practical, simple, authentic trinitarian mysticism. Elizabeth must also have appreciated Van Ruysbroeck's bridal mysticism immeasurably, since bridal mysticism is characteristic of carmelite spirituality and Elizabeth identified so closely with Christ as her bridegroom.

Elizabeth found in Van Ruysbroeck images and expressions that helped her to articulate her own insights gained through the infused knowledge that God granted her in contemplation. The autograph, *Heaven in faith*, is a striking witness to the influence of Van Ruysbroeck on Elizabeth. An important difference between Van Ruysbroeck and Elizabeth is that Elizabeth does not theologise or philosophise about the essence of the triune God as Van Ruysbroeck did. Elizabeth focused on the activities of the Trinity in her life, that is, the economic Trinity.

Kourie (1990:144-145) correctly observes that Van Ruysbroeck's influence on Elizabeth's thought is especially noticeable in the following concepts: living the life of the Trinity, deification, silence, abyss and darkness. In addition, Kourie makes a most incisive observation, namely, that the powerful imagery that Elizabeth adopted from Van Ruysbroeck places her weak state of health towards the end of her life in stark relief. The powerful images consolidate the potency of her thought. The way Elizabeth integrates the concepts, images and expressions that she adopts from Van Ruysbroeck demonstrates her keen grasp of Van Ruysbroeck's mysticism and how greatly her experience corresponds with it.

2.4.5 Summary

Van Ruysbroeck takes the reality of God for granted and finds the three persons of the Trinity within the soul of every human where the image of the Logos is imprinted. The belief that humans originate from God, bear the image of God within them and have been made in order to grow in that image and likeness of God is central to his mysticism. In Van Ruysbroeck's understanding, mysticism is the retracing of the soul's origin in God and its return to God.

²⁵ Elizabeth's mother gave her a copy of Ernest Hallo's translation of *Rusbrock l'Admirable (Oeuvres choisies)*, (1902) in June 1906, i.e., five months before Elizabeth passed away.

Van Ruysbroeck accepts the classical threefold path of the spiritual life and refers to it as the active life, the interior life of yearning for God, and the contemplative life, but adds a fourth, the common life. The first three stages unify the spiritual faculties through a process consisting of 'the virtuous life in the heart...the God-seeking life in the mind, the God-seeing life in the spirit' (Dupré 1984:52). The goal is the deification of the person through union with God. United with God the soul participates in the intra-trinitarian life of ebb and flow, which Van Ruysbroeck describes as a three-fold movement. Hence, the deified person's life is marked by both rest (contemplation) and action, and therefore, the addition of the active life to the spiritual trajectory, because resting in God is never the end of the journey.

2.5 THE MYSTICISM OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

2.5.1 Introducing Pauline mysticism

Paul is often depicted as a moralist, and a very legal one at that, and an organiser of the early christian communities. However, a mystical hermeneutic reveals that Paul cannot be depicted so narrowly; he is in fact one of the great mystics of the early church. Kourie (1998:441-442) even asserts that he is the 'quintessential biblical mystic' who makes 'known the possibility of an essentially dynamic union with the risen Jesus'. That Paul is a mystic, there is no doubt, but whether he is the 'quintessential biblical mystic' is open for debate, because the apostle John, author of the fourth Gospel, is also a biblical mystic of great renown. Considering the fact that John is less legalistic than Paul, he appears more congenial.

Because of the intense concentration on interiority in this study, there will be a slight shift in emphasis for the discussion of Pauline mysticism. Therefore, Paul's well-known 'in Christ' formula will not be considered, as would have been expected, considering the important place being in Christ occupies in Elizabeth's mysticism. Rather, Paul's mysticism will be approached from another angle, namely, Schweitzer's (1953) idea that Paul's mysticism is a Christ-mysticism and not a God-mysticism. Afterwards, Paul's doctrine of election and predestination, which is one of the central aspects of Elizabeth's mysticism, will be considered.

2.5.2 Christ-mysticism or God-mysticism?

Schweitzer (1953:5) makes the striking and contentious point that Paul 'never makes the being-in-Christ into a being-in-God'. Schweitzer points out that even though Paul never mentions the believer's being in God, it is usually *assumed* that his Christ-mysticism *culminates* in God-mysticism.

According to Schweitzer, the reason for Paul's omission of 'being-in-God' has to do with his particular worldview. Paul understands the world as a 'supernatural historical process which has for its stages the going forth of the world from God, its alienation from Him, and its return to Him...all things are *from* God and *through* God and *in* God' (Schweitzer 1953:11). Paul's conclusion is that so long as there is a sensible, material world, believers cannot be 'in God'. God-mysticism is only possible at the end of time when all things have returned to God and creation enters the realm of eternity. Until the *parousia*, believers are 'in Christ'. This holds true also for the elect. A further reason for Paul's Christ-mysticism is probably his intention to emphasise that it is Christ who is the way to the Father and this holds until the *parousia* when all things have been restored in Christ. At the end of time Christ will hand over the reign of God to the Father and then, with the mission of Christ fully accomplished, Christ-mysticism will become God-mysticism.

The belief that believers are children of God also does not render them 'in God', because their "sonship" to God is a *future* reality. Until the *eschaton* the baptised are *assured* of their filial relationship to God, and are called children of God only by anticipation (Schweitzer 1953:12). It is only when Christ has handed over the reign of God to the Father that there will be a being-in-God. The point is, Paul does not deny a God-mysticism, but our being-in-God is not contemporaneous with our being-in-Christ. Christ-mysticism and God-mysticism do not co-exist but 'they are chronologically successive, Christ-mysticism holding the field until God-mysticism becomes possible' (Schweitzer 1953:13).

Schweitzer's interpretation of Paul's Christ-mysticism is not completely convincing. Although Paul speaks about being 'in Christ' more often than being 'in God', the latter is not completely outside his mystical vision. The dominance of 'in Christ' texts could be explained by the fact that Jesus Christ occupied the central position in the early Church's proclamation and in that of Paul (Du Plessis 1988:203). Furthermore, Paul does refer to the baptised being 'in God' as in the following two texts: 'for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:3) and 'To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (I Th

1:1). The first text suggests that believers are 'in God' through Jesus Christ. Alternatively, by being 'in Christ', the baptised are also 'in God' albeit in a 'hidden' way. What is interesting in the second text is that Paul speaks of being 'in God' *before* being 'in Christ'. That might be insignificant. Nevertheless, it remains unconvincing to say that God-mysticism does not exist contemporaneously with Christ-mysticism. The baptised are 'in God' by being 'in Christ'.

The foundational mystical doctrine of all the mystics discussed in this study, as well as the carmelite tradition and Eastern Orthodox mysticism, is the indwelling Trinity in the soul of every believer. These mystics and mystical traditions testify to the *reality* of the creative and transfiguring presence of the Trinity in their soul as a present reality. Although there is no explicit reference in the New Testament to the doctrine of the Trinity, it is nevertheless present in seminal form. The baptismal formula in Matthew 28:1 is a case in point, as is the blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14. The presence of the triune God in the soul of believers are attested to by the apostle John (14:23), 'those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them'. Because of the circumincessional life of the Trinity in the godhead, it is not possible to be 'in Christ' and not 'in God' and 'in the Spirit' simultaneously. The baptised participate in the life of all three divine persons by participating in the life of God or the life of the Trinity because of the interpenetrating nature (*perichoresis*) that characterises intra-trinitarian life. The testimony of the mystics and the rest of the New Testament cannot be ignored. Conversely, if Schweitzer's interpretation has merit, then it renders the witness of very many mystics doubtful. In addition, as a concluding observation, it can be stated that Paul's 'in Christ' formula should not be read in isolation from the rest of the New Testament's teaching on the christian's life in God.

2.5.3 Pauline election and predestination

Election and predestination have been the cause of much misunderstanding, division and anxiety for believers. While this discussion cannot do justice to the intricacies of these two doctrines, some clarification is called for because they occupy a central place in the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity.

A. Election

The doctrine of election has its roots in the Old Testament where Yahweh elects the people of Israel and enters into a covenant with them. For example, the idea of divine choice or election is expressed in Exodus 34:9 where Moses prays that God might take them for his inheritance. This idea of election is reinforced in Exodus 19:5-6: 'You shall be my treasured possession out of all the people. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation'. Within the chosen people, Yahweh continues to choose certain individuals for specific tasks or missions, for example, Moses who was to lead the chosen people, that is, the Israelites, out of Egypt. The election of the prophets is shown through their calling to proclaim the word of God. Kings were also chosen for their office. 'The *purpose* of election is to constitute a holy people, consecrated to Yahweh, "raised above all nations in honor, renown, and glory" (Dt 26:19), making the grandeur and the generosity of the Lord radiate among the peoples' (Guillet 1988:139). In the Old Testament, the elect is the people of Israel (Is 41:8; Is 43:20). From this discussion, the following observations can be made: election does not refer to individuals being elected for salvation or perdition. When individuals are elected, they are elected for a specific task, as prophet, leader or king. Their election does not place them amongst those who are saved, because they can still fall into sin²⁶. Election is understood in collective terms, the people of Israel, that is, the nation of Israel is God's elect. Hence, to interpret the doctrine of election in individualistic terms is to do violence to it, and the evidence of such violence is seen in the anxiety that many people experience over their status as elect or non-elect.

In the New Testament, Jesus is 'the only elect who fully merits this name' (Guillet 1988:140) and this brings God's work of election to a conclusion. All those who are in Christ are the elect. This means that the church is now the chosen people of God. In the Old Testament, the idea of rejection is present as the antithesis of election. If Israel is the elect, the other nations are the non-elect, those who are rejected. However, in Christ, the rejection of certain nations has come to an end because in him Jews and Greeks have been reconciled. 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). All who are in Christ are the elect, the chosen people of God. However, in the church, divine election continues in the sense that people are elected for specific tasks and ministries. For example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was elected by God to serve the poorest of the poor in Calcutta.

²⁶ Obvious examples are: Saul (1 Sam 8-13), David (1 Sam 11) and Solomon (2 Sam 11).

A few observations are called for. Being in Christ, and therefore, a member of the elect, does not guarantee salvation. Rejection no longer belongs to time, but to eschatology. In the interim, people are not rejected because until the Lord comes again, there is always time for conversion. Another point worth making, has to do with the contemporary understanding in certain circles that one can be saved outside the church, and hence, be part of the elect. I am not referring to a particular christian denomination, but the church *as such*. In this case, salvation is granted on the basis of baptism by desire, and therefore, these people are part of the elect even though they never formally entered the church. My own position is to appeal to the freedom of God to count among his elect those whom he wishes because of his bounteous love. The idea that God elects and predestines certain individuals to perdition is unacceptable because it lacks biblical foundation.

B. Predestination

The expression "Pauline predestination" is not intended to give the impression that the doctrine originated with Paul. On the contrary, he inherited the spirit of the doctrine from the Jewish religion. Paul was the exponent of the doctrine, developing it to its height (Davidson 1946:3-4).

In Romans 8:28-30, Paul speaks of God's plan for his people: 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called: and those whom he called he also justified: and those whom he justified he also glorified'. The key to understanding Paul's thought centres on his use of the term "foreknew". This word is used by Paul not in the sense of cognitive awareness, but 'an eternal loving regard' (Wright 1992:796). Out of this loving regard that God holds for humankind, God predestined that humans should be made like Christ. This has to do with retracing one's origin in God and becoming Christ-like by a restoration of the divine image in God, as was discussed in Van Ruysbroeck's mysticism. The process starts with a divine call. All those who accept God's call, are justified by God by having their sins forgiven and becoming adopted sons and daughters of the Father. This occurs at the moment of baptism. Those who persevere in their christian life are glorified and granted eternal salvation. Thus the believer has become like Christ. Paul does not consider salvation to be guaranteed once the believer has accepted God's call for he warns them in Romans 11:22 of God's severity towards those who fall away.

The problem with misinterpretations of predestination arose when “foreknew” was ‘understood more in a Greek sense of intellectual knowledge’ (Wright 1992:796). Thus it was said that God foreknew who would accept his call and remain faithful to the end. These faithful God predestined to salvation in his foreknowledge. A further problem that emerges is that this understanding of predestination is concerned with the *individual* while the bible always speaks collectively. Paul, too, has Israel in mind because it rejected Christ. In other words, Paul did not have certain individuals in mind when writing about predestination.

An individualist approach to predestination evolved into the double predestination theory according to which some are predestined to salvation and others to reprobation. The problem with double predestination is that it robs people of their God-given freedom and this can never correspond with the biblical testimony. Hence, it is a teaching that has caused untold spiritual torment for many believers. The double predestination theory ignores the fact that Paul wrote, not as a systematic theologian, but as one convinced ‘that what has happened to him in Christ Jesus has not occurred by chance, but as a result of the deliberate intention of a loving God’ (Keathley 1979:487; Davidson 1946:15). To infer from the biblical theme of election, that the converse implies that some people are divinely destined to perdition, does not correspond to Paul’s thought. There is in fact a synergy between God’s election and human freedom to respond to or reject God’s invitation. Hence, some are not predestined to salvation and some to perdition as a result of an arbitrary election by God.

The first purpose of predestination is salvation, from which issues service in the reign of God. Positively, the doctrine of election points to salvation as occurring by way of a divine *plan* as well as God’s *choice* to save. What God has planned from the beginning is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and this implies that the purpose of ‘the whole cosmic process was the coming of Christ and the emergence of a new race of men like him’ (Keathley 1979:488). God’s great plan for creation will be accomplished when all things are re-established in Christ (Eph 1:9-10). This interpretation of the doctrine of election also hints at the idea that the incarnation would have occurred even in the absence of the fall. Human nature was not complete before the fall and had to attain union with its archetype, that is, Christ, to be truly completed. This union happened with the birth of Christ (Nellas 1987:38). The incarnation makes it possible for humans to share in the union that Christ has with the Father. The fall made the incarnation imperative and it took on the element of restoration.

2.5.4 Paul's influence on Elizabeth

Paul provides Elizabeth with the foundation of her mystical doctrine with his themes of 'predestination, conformity to Christ crucified and the eternal vocation of the "praise of glory"' (Barres 1993:39). Elizabeth was deeply impressed by the absolute grandeur that God has known humans from all eternity (De Meester 1995:322) and has elected and predestined them to salvation. Elizabeth writes that God has predestined humanity to unity with God (De Meester 1995:207); to 'the adoption of children in order to make the glory of His grace blaze forth' (De Meester 1995:215); and to 'be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus, and by holy baptism He has clothed you with Himself, thus making you His children, and at the same time His living temple' (De Meester 1995:218). Elizabeth loved to read Paul's letters and was especially fond of his letter to the Ephesians, and therefore, Paul's influence can be discerned in almost all of her autographs.

The Pauline expression in Ephesians 1:14, 'the praise of his glory' made a deep impression on Elizabeth. She came to understand this expression as embodying a new dimension of her vocation, namely, to be a praise of glory: to be wholly attentive and wholly adoring in the bosom of the Trinity.

At the same time Elizabeth overlooks the practical side of Paul's writings (Von Balthasar 1956:13) and focuses all her attention on what she regards to be Paul's central vision, our life in Christ. In other words, Elizabeth focused on Paul *the mystic*, not Paul the moralist and organiser of the christian communities. Such narrowness does not mean superficiality. On the contrary, it is the profundity of Elizabeth's mysticism that enables her to read Paul with a mystical hermeneutic and, as such, uncover the mystical doctrine of Paul. This intense concentration on what is of ultimate importance, and bypassing the peripheral, is characteristic of Elizabeth in her reading and her writing.

2.5.5 Summary

At the core of Paul's vision of the mystical life is the centrality of Christ. This is evident from his emphasis that believers are in Christ who is the way to the Father. Although Schweitzer posits that God-mysticism and Christ-mysticism are not contemporaneous, this is not convincing. The primary reason for this objection is the circumincessional life of the Trinity in which believers

participate. Human participation in intra-trinitarian life is the foundation of the mystical life and is attested to by many mystics. This doctrine is especially vindicated in the life and teaching of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth was greatly influenced by Paul's writings and key elements of her mystical doctrine are adopted from Paul, for example, life in Christ, election and predestination, and the praise of glory.

2.6 THE CARMELITE MYSTICAL TRADITION

2.6.1 Introducing the Carmelite tradition

The Carmelite Order is somewhat unique in that it has no founder. It is also not known precisely when the first Carmelites began to live in community although there are testimonies to recognizable community life from the early thirteenth century (Vaughan 1999:58-59). The Old Testament presents Mount Carmel as a solitary, sacred and beautiful place. Mount Carmel is a site of great historical and spiritual significance as a symbol of God's abundance. During the time of the crusades hundreds of hermits lived in groups on Mount Carmel; the Carmelites were one of these groups (Larkin 2002:373). Eventually the desert was transposed to the external monastic cell and the interior cell of the heart. Albert, as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem between 1206-1214, formulated a rule for the Carmelites. During the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross renewed the eremitical and contemplative ideals of the rule and reorganised monastic life so that each monastery could be another Mount Carmel. The prophet Elijah is seen as the "father"²⁷ of the Carmelite Order and is its inspiration. 1 Kings 18 reports Elijah's challenge to the priests of Baal. Elijah's war cry, 'with zeal am I zealous for the Lord God of hosts' (1 Ki 19:10), has become the motto of the Carmelite Order.

The Virgin Mary is seen as the living symbol of Carmelite life. Mary's contemplative attitude, especially between the annunciation and birth of Christ, is regarded as the model of all contemplatives. Filial devotion to Mary is expressed by the wearing of the scapular²⁸.

²⁷ Claims to material succession from the prophet Elijah have been abandoned as legendary.

²⁸ The Carmelite scapular is a piece of clothing worn over the shoulders as part of the religious habit as a sign of one's commitment to follow Jesus Christ like Mary, the Mother of God. The following web page <http://showcase.netins.net/web/solitude/scapular.html> contains more information concerning the spiritual value of the scapular and its history [Accessed 30 March 2003].

Carmelite spirituality is based only partly on documents; 'it is above all *spirit and life*' (De la Croix n.d.²⁹). It is mainly the scriptures, the carmelite rule, and the lives and writings of the great carmelite saints that manifest carmelite spirituality. The carmelite rule 'reflects the more contemplative, mystical traditions of Eastern monasticism...the teachings of St. John of the Cross "in the direct line of ancient monastic and patristic tradition, from Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian and Gregory of Nyssa on down to the followers of Pseudo-Dionysius in the West"' (Konyesni 1982:26). With respect to the comparative nature of this study, it is interesting to note that Konyesni (1982:27), writing as a carmelite, maintains that there is no dichotomy or divergence between Carmelite and Orthodox mysticism. In other words, according to Konyesni, they agree on all accounts. Not being a carmelite myself, I would be more cautious and say that there is definitely a remarkable consonance between them and this is as a result of their common heritage. This, however, does not deny the dissimilarities that exist between them.

Of the four influences on the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity selected for the present discussion, the carmelite influence is no doubt the greatest. Even before her entry into Carmel Elizabeth had already read the writings of great carmelite saints. In order to appreciate the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity, both as a young lay person in the world and afterwards as a cloistered nun, it seems appropriate to centre this discussion around the following themes: firstly, desert spirituality as the roots of carmelite mysticism, and secondly, John of the Cross' understanding of the "old self" and the "new self".

2.6.2 Desert spirituality: the roots of carmel mysticism

The exodus to the desert was a reaction against the decadence of society and the tension between the church and the world that followed the conversion of Constantine and the large influx of people into the church. When christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, blood martyrdom which was understood as *the* expression of detachment, became a thing of the past. The desert experience was considered an alternate form of martyrdom, namely, a bloodless or white martyrdom because it entails a radical emptying and self-giving to God, instead of shedding of blood.

²⁹ De La Croix (n.d.) is an article on the World Wide Web without a date and pagination.

Desert spirituality (eremitical spirituality) is the precursor of christian monasticism which takes the form of organised community life (cenobitic spirituality). The ideals and spirituality of the desert were introduced to the West by John Cassian. Desert spirituality has roots in both the Old and the New Testament. The exodus story (Ex 13:17-18:27), flight of Elijah (1 Ki 19), prophecy of Hosea (Hos 2:14), John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-3), and forty-day sojourn of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1-11) were the inspiration for entering the desert to wage war against the demons³⁰ that beset one externally and internally. The desert was seen as the ideal place for a life of penance and prayer. The christian experience of the desert was soon developed into a coherent spirituality by the desert hermits of the third and fourth century of the christian era. Manual labour formed part of the desert experience; it provided sustenance and alms for helping the poor and those in need.

The main features of desert spirituality can be enumerated as follows: contemplative prayer through the cultivation of the prayer of the heart; *lectio divina* and the reading of the psalms and breviary; and the celebration of the liturgy when priests were available. The goal of desert spirituality was “to see” God. However, “seeing God” needs to be understood more in the sense of living in the presence of God by walking with God day by day in fellowship. Larkin (2002:371) states that, “seeing God”, therefore, does not imply a face-to-face encounter as in heaven, or seeing God as an object, or even a new understanding or perception of God.

The desert is a place of vast open spaces, solitude and silence. As a symbol, it depicts the desolation of the soul separated from God. On the other hand, it also symbolises the total otherness of God in its vastness and silence which is simultaneously rich in life and mystery. The desert also induces thirst, and symbolically, a thirst for union with God in silence and solitude. As a symbol, the desert democratises and universalises itself for everyone to embrace. Each person can live the desert ideal of contemplation in the desert cell of his or own heart. Hence, the absolute requirement of cultivating the prayer of the heart.

These are the roots of carmelite spirituality. It is, therefore, understandable why the centrepiece of the carmelite rule is ‘Each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby,

See bibliography for URL.

³⁰ During this time it was thought that demons dwelt in the desert and tempted people exteriorly. Eventually the idea prevailed that demons lure the believer towards evil interiorly. By the term “demons” is understood deep seated tensions and imperfections of the human psyche that prevent one from being completely open to the action of the Holy Spirit.

pondering the Lord's law day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty' (Larkin 2001:201; McGreal 1999:23). Contemplative prayer, community life and apostolic work are the three particular carmelite charisms. In order to live these ideals, carmelites live in the all-abiding presence of God and practise continual prayer in an atmosphere of silence and solitude. Although the aim is to integrate these elements, contemplative prayer remains the heart of the carmelite charism. The primacy of contemplative prayer flows out of the spirit of carmel, namely, a longing for union with God which in turn is marked by a sense of *immediacy* - "sooner rather than later". This sense of immediacy is also present in the writings of John of the Cross who sets out to show his readers how to attain union with God 'in a short time' (Payne 1990:16).

Carmel maintains that it is possible to live the divine life already here on earth. To attain this divine goal, carmelites are to realise the climate of the desert in their own heart, withdraw into this interior silence, and remain in the presence of God. This presupposes purification. Emphasising the interior life to this extent, does not for one moment imply a neglect of the apostolic life and a disdain for the world and the universe. On the contrary, contemplation is a dynamic healing and transfiguring force in the world and one that the world needs perhaps more than ever before. Contemplatives stand at the centre of this cosmic healing process. This same idea is also expressed by Lund (1984:104), 'contemplatives are the heart of the Church, and if they are this, they are also the heart of the world....Who else has more gifts, resources, wisdom and power for effecting change in the world, indeed, for transforming it than a people of prayer and total consecration to God?' Konyesni (1982:30) writes with equal conviction:

The contemplative is the central point for the healing process that is going on between heaven and earth....It is in the energy that comes through contemplation that the human person shows herself to be powerful and the divine plan for the salvation of the universe finds its most ingenious root. Because God normally works through human channels, contemplation is where the action is and a contemplative is at the center of it. What is going on in the universe is going on in the contemplative.

The aim of carmelite spirituality is two-fold. Firstly, to offer to God a pure and holy heart, one free from sin and self-centredness. Secondly, to experience in this life already, the presence of God and a foretaste of the bliss of heaven. According to Larkin (2002:364-374), 'these two goals are the blueprint of carmelite prayer which organically connects purification and union

with God'. The program for attaining these goals consists of the following: renunciation of property and possessions; obedience to the prior or prioress; celibacy; penance and mortification to gain self-control; continual prayer in silence and solitude; and the active apostolate. Carmelite spirituality, as expressed in the rule, is not based on the idea that 'union with God rests on the foundation and generous practice of renunciation. But it asks for a renunciation which "without stifling the soul will enable it to be aware of its poverty so that at every instant it will turn toward God"' (De la Croix n.d.). In other words, self-renunciation gets rid of all the clutter in one's life so that one is more free to turn to God. Therefore, all ascetic practices have as their aim growth in love for God.

Returning to the ideal of living in the presence of God, the carmelites find their model in Elijah because of his words 'The Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand' (1 Ki 17:1). Kourie (1990:80) makes a valid point, namely, that continual prayer can only be practised when there is a continual awareness of the presence of God - one could add, God the Trinity. Why is this statement valid? It is valid precisely because prayer is fundamentally a love relationship with God and such a relationship does not end when the formal prayer period is finished. Similar to two people in love, who are always mindful of the other, the Beloved should ideally always be somewhere in one's consciousness. Logically, it culminates in a life of prayer because prayer cultivates a greater God-consciousness as a result of which the believer becomes more or less continually present to God who never leaves his children.

Finally, carmelite spirituality is biblical and evangelical. The rule is replete with biblical quotations and references. Together, word and sacrament lead the carmelite to God in Christ. Private prayer continues the encounter with the Lord celebrated and received in the liturgy. The goal is to be united to Christ because he is the way to the Father. Therefore, in carmelite spirituality, Christ is not merely a model or exemplar to emulate, but the one with whom the soul seeks to be united.

Carmelite spirituality is not individualistic. Carmel's mission is to pray for the church, the clergy and the salvation of the world. All sacrifices, penances and prayers of carmelites are offered for these intentions. It aims at realising an ecclesial community characterised by discipleship in Christ. Carmelite community life is centred on the eucharist. It is not 'harshly ascetic nor is it over-enthusiastic' (McGreal 1999:30). The carmelite renounces all earthly things, sin and self-will and then strives for perfection in silence, solitude and celibacy. All these elements are

held together by love which sets one free for loving service to others. Carmelite spirituality never divorces prayer from work³¹. In fact, it is McGreal's (1999:126) contention that, especially in our post-modern world, it is the contemplative charism of Carmel that draws one 'into solidarity with all who are in need of God's mercy....Spirituality is not a cosy option but is the call to respond to the gift of God's love by our involvement in what is often a dark and difficult world'.

This objective is attained through: a well-structured and secluded life; living in the presence of God who is found everywhere and in the soul of the Carmelite; continual prayer that does not cease even amidst the ordinary tasks of a Carmelite day; and an ascetic life for the benefit of the church and the salvation of the world. However, as Elizabeth repeatedly states, this ideal can be attained by all people.

2.6.3 John of the Cross: the old self and the new self

Underlying John's system is an appreciation of the inner life of love in the godhead in which the three persons of the Trinity share (Doohan 1995:50). Humans are called to share in this circumincessional divine life and ultimately become deified (2 Pt 1:4). The path to union with God consists of shedding the old self so that the new self can emerge. John, a true child of his time, does not use inclusive language as is the tendency today, but speaks of "man" rather than "self" and several times refers to the 'the old man' (Kavanaugh & Rodrigues 1973:83, 117, 331, 487, 607).

The expressions "old man" and "new man" are found in Paul (Eph 4:24; Col 3:9) although contemporary translations use the term "self". The *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible renders Colossians 3:9 as 'you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourself with the new self'. One could also speak of "old creation" and "new creation" because 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Cor 5:17). Christ, the new Adam and the new human person, stands at the centre of human history and salvation. As the first-born from the dead, Christ has overcome a life of sin and death that characterised the life of the old self and has inaugurated a

³¹ The idea of "work and prayer" (*ora et labora*), is not original to Carmelite spirituality, but dates back to the desert hermits and has been a central aspect of Benedictine spirituality. The

new era, one of renewed and abundant life. Accordingly, D'Souza (1987a:98) sees Paul dividing 'the whole [of] humanity into two groups namely, the old and the new creation on the basis of its relation to Jesus Christ'. It is regeneration in baptism that incorporates the believer in Christ so that the person becomes a new creation. Baptismal regeneration is, however, only the start of a very long process of dying to the old self in order that the new self may come to fullness of life in Christ. It is this process of personal authentication and growth in spiritual maturity that is John of the Cross' main concern.

A. The old self

What does John of the Cross mean by the expression 'the old self'? Briefly, John refers to the old way of life driven by passions and inordinate attachments. The term describes an unspiritual person, one who is under the influence of the values of the world and not of the Spirit of Christ. The ramifications of these ideas will now be explored.

The old self is driven by myriad inordinate attachments. In order to be united to God and sing his unceasing praises, the person needs to purify himself or herself from all these controlling idols. Inordinate attachments are indeed idols, because so much energy is spent on their gratification that *they* are the organising principle of life, rather than God. The purification that is required takes place in the dark night of the senses which is marked by continual repentance and self-denial. The aim is the purification of the senses and their accommodation to the spirit (Doohan 1995:67). This purification only partially overcomes inner fragmentation; the roots remain embedded in the spirit and these require further purification in the night of the spirit. The eradication of the roots of imperfections takes place during the night of the spirit which is much more painful and occurs in the spiritually more mature person.

Because of John's detailed analysis of the purification and self-denial that are required for the soul to be able to offer God perfect praise and reverence, his system has often been criticised as working towards the destruction of the person. This is in fact a total misinterpretation of what John sets out to teach, namely, that at the root of human unhappiness and inner fragmentation lies a basic misdirection of life *away from* God toward self, that is, the old self and the world. To experience lasting happiness and authentic life, one's life needs to become

Benedictine order is the oldest Western monastic order, founded by Benedict at Monte

God-directed by a re-education of the senses and spiritual faculties which will allow the new self to emerge and blossom. God will substitute the new self for the old 'once the will is stripped of all the cravings and satisfactions of the old man' (Kavanaugh & Rodrigues 1973:83).

The old self lives life on the purely human and natural level. Instead of possessing divine knowledge in faith infused by God directly into the human spirit, it possesses mere human knowledge and images of God attained through sense perception. In other words, a person living the life of the old self does not live according to grace. As D'Souza (1987a:101) correctly explains, the person living the old life 'is guided by his own reason and imagination rather than by the Holy Spirit and theological virtues. He acts according to the inclination of his flesh and natural decision of his will rather than according to the divine gift of charity'.

The proficient in the spiritual life, that is, the person who has already been renewed to some extent and lives a virtuous and God-directed life, is also classified under the designation "old self". The reason is that proficient are more often than not attached to the consolations and gifts of the spiritual life. Instead of turning to God, proficient rest in the bliss of the consolation and this hinders their progress towards God. In addition, the roots of the imperfections are still deeply embedded in the spirit. Proficients have gained some self-control over their passions, but they are not yet perfect and the tendency towards sin is still a great obstacle to growth. This is why John considers the proficient as still in the "old" life because the means are mistaken for the end. As long as proficient remain attached to the consolations of God rather than the God of consolations, they remain in the old life.

The discussion thus far underscores the following in John's system: firstly, it is not the way of heavenly goods (spiritual gifts and consolations) nor the way of earthly goods, but only the narrow path of the perfect spirit, of *nada*³², that leads to the peak of Mount Carmel. Secondly, progress towards God consists of peaks and valleys (Doohan 1995:53). All people who have not yet reached perfection have the old self within them. Since the journey to the mountain peak is an arduous one of painful purification, it is the faithful soul that perseveres that will ultimately reach the goal which is a life of happiness and heavenly bliss in the presence of God.

Cassino, Italy, in the sixth century.

³² *Nada* is Spanish for "nothing". It refers to the stripping of everything that is not God. Neither glory, nor joy, nor knowledge, nor consolation, nor rest, whether as earthly goods or heavenly goods, leads to God. *Nada* leads to *todo*, everything, because only a person who is freed from the old self and possessiveness, can possess everything in freedom in God.

Having stressed the purgative way to such a great extent, it needs to be said that the journey is not all darkness and purgation. Periods of purgation and illumination, darkness and light, alternate. No person can endure all the purification at once. Periods of illumination serve to strengthen the soul for the ensuing night.

John's view of the "old self" corresponds with that of Paul. Paul regards the unbaptised as living the life of the "old self" and the baptised as living the new life of the "new self" because of baptismal regeneration. Paul does not regard this regeneration and the new life the baptised now live in Christ to be the end of the journey, for he exhorts his readers, 'do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12:2). Again Paul writes, 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (Phil 2:12). Paul and John of the Cross clearly have the same vision of the mystical life as one of progress, although John has a more psychological perspective at times.

Elizabeth understood the "old self" in terms of the call to die to self. Although this doctrine seems austere, 'it takes on a delightful sweetness when we consider the outcome of this death – life in God in place of our life of sin and misery. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: "Strip off the old man and clothe yourselves anew in the image of Him who created you"[Col 3:9-10] (De Meester 1984:125). For Elizabeth, the old self refers to the old life of sin and misery. To receive the new self from God, requires a death characterised by stripping of the self, dying to self, losing sight of self (ibid. 1984:152).

B. The new self

From what has already been said about the old self, it is clear that Paul views the new self as someone who has been renewed in Christ and has become a child of God. The new self lives the new life of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Such a person has become a spiritual person.

John of the Cross compares the proficient with the new self. According to John, proficient are well on their way to transformation in Christ, but they still have imperfections to overcome. In other words, the proficient has not yet reached perfection in union with God. The new self, on the other hand, has attained union with God and 'has become perfect and a mature person in the spiritual life. He is now created according to divine grace and is able to do mighty works.

His faculties and his works are divine rather than human because he is fully purified in all his faculties through the dark contemplation of faith. The new life therefore is a mature life created according to God' (D'Souza 1987b:269).

The new self is completely purified of everything that separated it from participation in the life of God. The spiritual faculties of intellect, memory, and will are strengthened by the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. This transformation of the faculties is 'far from bringing a spiritual death through their natural or imperfect operations' (D'Souza 1987b:271) but brings divine life that is the new life of the Spirit. John of the Cross (Kavanaugh and Rodrigues 1973:570) explains this renewal of the spiritual faculties as follows:

God now possesses the faculties as their complete lord, because of their transformation in Him. And consequently it is He Who divinely moves and commands them according to His spirit and will. As a result the operations are not different from those of God, but those the soul performs are of God and are divine operations. Since he who is united with God is one spirit with Him, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 6:7], the operations of the soul united with God are of the divine Spirit and are divine.

This spiritual renewal is attained by traversing the spiritual journey that involves radical self-renunciation as a necessary prerequisite. Spiritual perfection is reached in the dark night of the spirit which is characterised by infused or divine contemplation in faith during which all sinful tendencies are overcome and the roots imperfections are eradicated. The believer can do what is in his or her power to overcome imperfections and grow in virtue, but ultimate contemplative union with God is a gift bestowed by God because of his bounteous love for humankind. It is never earned, nor is it granted automatically.

Final union with God, which John calls spiritual marriage, is preceded by spiritual espousal. Spiritual espousal is characterised by peace and divine visits which 'continue the process of curing the individual of remaining weaknesses and furthering the work of integration and maturation' (Kourie 1990:108). As Kourie correctly observes, the joy and tranquillity experienced is transitory. This is why it is called spiritual *espousal* and not spiritual *marriage*, since the image of marriage conveys the idea of permanence. It should be added though that this symbolic meaning of marriage is not necessarily self-evident in the twenty-first century with its accelerating tendency towards co-habitation as the norm, and with its high divorce rate.

John of the Cross (Kavanaugh & Rodrigues 1973:497) explains the nature of the spiritual marriage as follows:

This spiritual marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual espousal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, becomes God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life. And thus I think that this state never occurs without the soul's being confirmed in grace, for the faith of both is confirmed when God's faith in the soul is here confirmed. It is accordingly the highest state attainable in this life.

Union with God is accompanied by a discovery of one's true authentic self as well as the 'discovery of God at the center of one's being' (Doohan 1995:97).

2.6.4 John of the Cross and Jungian psychology

One of the aims of psychological and spiritual development is to gain a better understanding of oneself in relation to self, others, the world and God. This is why Catherine of Siena places such great emphasis on self-knowledge. The emphasis is on self-transcendence and not self-absorption. Self-transcendence is to be understood as a transcendence of the "lower" self in order that the true self may manifest itself.

In Jungian terms, the self is the archetype³³ of human wholeness and is embedded in the unconscious. The empirical ego, as the centre of consciousness, has established itself as the centre of the personality. However, the ego is not the true centre of the personality; this is the role of the self. Therefore, in order that the self may establish itself as the true centre of the personality, it needs to rise up from the unconscious. Not surprisingly, this involves a journey of self-discovery and growth and a confrontation with one's shadow – the negative aspects of the personality. This process leads to individuation – psychological maturity as the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche are integrated (Welch 1982:67-75).

³³ Archetypes are "eternal images" or patterns of meaning that exist in the unconscious which is the part of the personality that is repressed for the sake of the ego ideal. Archetypes are patterns of meaning and guides for psychological growth. They become known in the form of symbols. Since archetypes determine human behaviour through predispositions and attitudes, they are of fundamental importance (Welch 1982: 73, 120; Wolff-Salin 1986:10).

The shadow is an intriguing archetype. It does not contain only the negative and destructive aspects of the psyche 'but also potential for greater growth and development of the personality' (Welch 1982:120). The shadow is recognised through projection. Humans project their negative personality traits that are too painful to admit onto others. Hence, what one dislikes in others, is a good indicator of what constitutes one's shadow. This kind of projection makes it "safe" for the person to deal with the shadow because it is now outside of the person. Nonetheless, the person needs to own his or her shadow in order that the authentic self may emerge. The confrontation with one's shadow takes place during the night of the senses and the night of the spirit as described by John of the Cross. The shadow is befriended and integrated into the personality. Fundamentally, it involves the death to ego-centricity. Now what is important in both Sanjuanist mysticism and Jungian psychology is that the ego is not destroyed as such. Rather, it is transformed in preparation for union with God, in the case of John, and for union between the conscious and the unconscious, in the case of Jung. As in Sanjuanist mysticism, the process of individuation brings about the formation of authentic and integrated human beings. All the same, genuine human fulfilment does not involve inner integration only, but in fact, the integration of all areas of life. This is also John's understanding who 'sees the *whole* person directing every aspect of life to God' (Doohan 1995:88). Such a person is completely God-directed.

John's system is not aimed at personal fulfilment, neither does he understand human fulfilment purely as psychological maturity. Rather, human fulfilment is regarded primarily as the soul's participation in God leading to union with God. Human fulfilment involves being fully integrated within, and in living the kind of life that God intends for humans. Humans are to live in harmony with God, with others and the environment, and enjoy contemplative union with God.

2.6.5 John's influence on Elizabeth

As a carmelite, Elizabeth was imbued with the work of John. Elizabeth intuitively grasped the teachings of John of the Cross because they corresponded to her own contemplative experience. His trajectory of the ascent of Mount Carmel and the union of the soul with God were keenly read and internalised by Elizabeth. John provides Elizabeth with a 'doctrinal foundation of prayer experience, and understanding of the dark night's passive purgation of the senses and the centrality of the cross in transformation...[and] an eschatological perspective' (Barres 1993:40). From an early age Elizabeth had a deep appreciation of the role of suffering

and mortification in the christian life. John of the Cross' teaching on the "nights" did not fill Elizabeth with discouragement and trepidation, but she embraced it with conviction, realising that it is not so much her own efforts that would bring her to union with God, but the purifying presence of God in her soul. All it requires is 'a simple turning to him' in order to receive God's abundant graces (Von Balthasar 1992:449).

From John, Elizabeth also learned about the nature of the Trinity although the inner life of God was not her main focus. Elizabeth is not a theologian and true to her self, she stays with what is of immediate and ultimate concern, namely, to encourage others to embark on the road within so that they too may find the happiness in God that she has found. Elizabeth frequently quotes or paraphrases John's works and was always reminded by John of the indwelling presence of God and the intimate communion with God that could result from growing in faith in love. This provided Elizabeth with much encouragement as she daily faced her own struggles and purification.

Elizabeth integrated John's metaphors of the divine indwelling, the inner cellar, and the inner reign into her own spiritual vision. Although 'her view of Christian transformation is simplified...in many ways [it] reflects John's descriptions' (Barres 1993:39). This is one more example of how Elizabeth assimilated and integrated the insights of other mystics through the prism of her own mystical experience. Elizabeth's simplification of insights taken from others is particularly interesting and, as such, she makes John of the Cross' rather austere teaching more palatable for people with busy schedules in the world.

Kourie (1990:120) avers that Elizabeth 'ratifies the doctrine of John, in her own life' and as such witnesses to its credibility. This is an important point, because Elizabeth is so very much "one of us", not only in time but also in her way of life. Although a carmelite, Elizabeth lived the essence of her spirituality before entering Carmel, and in Carmel she lived an ordinary life, doing nothing extra-ordinary. What makes her extra-ordinary is the quality of her love for God and her fellow human beings. By ratifying John's doctrine, Elizabeth is saying that all people can embrace this doctrine, because it does not depend on doing extra-ordinary things, but on the quality of love that puts the Other before oneself.

2.6.6 Summary

Carmelite mysticism comprises two central charisms: the abiding presence of God and continual prayer. These charisms are rooted in early desert spirituality. As a Carmelite, Elizabeth stands within a very long and ancient Christian tradition that has been tried, tested and perfected by many holy souls. Contrary to what many assert, John's system is not aimed at the destruction of the person, but the radical transformation and integration of the person's entire being and life. This integration and human authentication is of primary importance for humanity's restored participation in the life of the triune God which is the primary goal of the mystical journey. It is also the means of restoring the image of God in humans and, as a result, of their becoming deified beings.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The influence on Elizabeth of the mystics investigated in this chapter, is of paramount importance to Elizabeth's own mystical development and her ultimate articulation of her mystical experiences and insights for the benefit of others. Mostly, they provided her with a theological foundation (John of the Cross and Van Ruysbroeck) and with metaphors and symbols to describe her experiences (Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross). The combination of these influences and Elizabeth's particular artistic and contemplative talents lend depth and authenticity to her mystical doctrine.

It is said that Elizabeth actually read very little and rarely used books during prayer. When an 'idea, thought or phrase struck her, she made it totally her own. Elizabeth used it because it precisely reflected her own inner life and understanding' (Moorcroft 2001: 52). This is totally in harmony with her 'asceticism of thought' (Von Balthasar 1956:13). Elizabeth concentrates on what is of immediate relevance in terms of her goal, namely, life in union with the Trinity. The narrowness of Elizabeth's spirituality helps her to present it with the greatest clarity, unencumbered by various aspects of mysticism which could easily have eclipsed her central message. Within this particular approach, Elizabeth's special talent was to discover 'spiritual connections and parallels' (Barres 1993:38) among various earlier spiritual writers. Elizabeth trims and rearranges the texts to amplify themes and meanings in her own writings after she has prayed over them, internalised them, and structured them according to her own inner experience and convictions. Elizabeth weaves the insights of her sources persistently around the doctrine of the indwelling Trinity to arrive at a genuinely authentic, practical, simple and biblical mysticism.

It is therefore understandable that the contribution of all those who have influenced Elizabeth of the Trinity is of great importance since it is integrated into her own vision of the mystical life to produce a powerful symphony of the mystical life full of profound harmonies.

CHAPTER THREE

EASTERN ORTHODOX MYSTICISM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The term “Orthodox Church” can broadly be understood to include all those churches that are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Apostolic Sees of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, accept the one confession of faith (the Nicene Creed³⁴) and the first seven Ecumenical Councils concluding with the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787 (Monk of the Eastern Church 1978:ix)³⁵. Orthodoxy does not accept any

³⁴ More precisely, the creed is called the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, because it was drawn up at the Council of Nicaea (325) and completed at the next Council at Constantinople in 381.

³⁵ Hereafter this author will be cited as “Monk” and can be found in the Bibliography under “Monk of the Eastern Church”.

Council after this date as Ecumenical, because by that time the church was no longer united. According to the Orthodox Church, only a united church can define dogmas of faith. Although the Patriarch of Constantinople has the strongest influence in the Orthodox world, he has never occupied magisterial primacy such as the Roman Catholic Pope has. Interestingly, Orthodoxy accepted the Pope as “first amongst equals”, before the schism.

“Orthodoxy” refers to ‘right belief’ and ‘right worship’ (Farrugia 1992:306; Hierotheos 2000:69). Salvation is communicated in and by the divine liturgy of John Chrysostom (354-407) which is *the* expression of ‘right belief’ and ‘right worship’. The celebration of the divine liturgy always includes the celebration of the eucharist. The liturgy is regarded as the ‘teacher of the faith’ (Hogan 1995:37). The liturgy is the door to heaven that places worshippers in the realms of heaven – it is an *upward* movement of praise and adoration of God in which the *whole* Body of Christ partakes: the living and departed faithful, the angels and the saints, the *Theotokos* and Jesus. In Eastern Orthodoxy, spirituality is not divorced from daily life, but it is ‘the ethos and the breath which penetrates all aspects of the life of the church: its immediate relationship with God, its thought, its structure, its view of the human person and all creation, as well as its attitude and action towards the world in which the church witnesses to Christ’ (Ciobotea 1985:9). As a result of the ecclesial character of Orthodox spirituality, renewal in spirituality is not found in a change of form or expressions of faith, but rather in a ‘constantly renewed fidelity to tradition’ (Ciobotea 1985:9) - hence, the eminence of the Church Fathers. Orthodox spirituality is not characterised by different religious orders as is found in Catholicism, e.g. Carmelite, Benedictine, Franciscan, and so on. These matters cannot be addressed any further in this study. They are mentioned merely because they constitute a backdrop integral to the ensuing discussion which will include the following main themes: firstly, the different starting points for theology in the East and the West which give rise to different approaches to mysticism; secondly, central themes in Eastern Orthodox mysticism; and thirdly, the mystical journey towards *theosis*. This is intended to introduce a basic understanding of Eastern Orthodox mysticism that is necessary for the comparative nature of this study. The comparative component of the study will be dealt with in chapter four and chapter five.

3.2 EAST AND WEST: DIFFERENT POINTS OF DEPARTURE

In accordance with the New Testament witness, the Orthodox Fathers do not understand “God” in a differentiated sense. God, *Theos*, refers to the Father. For Jesus, too, God meant the

Father. In the Synoptic Gospels one reads of Jesus' relationship to his Father. John's Gospel speaks of Christ as the Word and the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete. The New Testament says little 'about God in an undifferentiated sense' (Dupré 1984:10). Whereas the Latin West tends to rely much more on philosophy, especially Aristotelian philosophy as manifested in scholasticism, Orthodoxy uses science and philosophy 'to defend and explain her Faith' (Azkoul 1994). Eastern Orthodoxy has retained the biblical patrimony and the Church Fathers as authoritative sources for theology and christian life³⁶. Orthodox theology and mysticism have a strongly liturgical, ecclesial and mystical character and have never been willing to reduce theology 'to a mere rational exercise of the mind' (Frank 1992:2). Hence, one should approach Orthodox spirituality from the perspective of the whole Orthodox tradition (*paradosis*).

There are considerable differences between the starting points of the Latin West and Eastern Orthodoxy resulting in various theological differences. For example, the West is concerned about paying the debt of sin, while the East is concerned with growth in the divine life. The Latin West includes a strong juridical element in its soteriology that is absent in Orthodoxy (Hierotheos 2000:143).

In the Latin West, theologians begin with the one God and then add "distinctions" later. 'But by that time they no longer relate to the primary object of spiritual theology, [namely, humanity's] approach to God' (Dupré 1984:10). In this framework, grace is understood primarily as a "gift" added on to nature (Berzonksy 1994:182), rather than the *presence* of the triune God in the human soul. In Orthodoxy, it is the '*distinct presence* [that] renders the soul an image³⁷ of God' (Dupré 1984:17). For Palamas³⁸ (in Meyendorff 1974a:163-164), grace is not a 'thing which God grants to nature either to "complete" its deficiencies, or simply to "justify" it, or to "add" to it

³⁶ The Catholic Church also accepts the teachings of the Church Fathers as authoritative, but in the Orthodox tradition their authority is far more prominent and explicit. It is important to bear in mind that even though this chapter presents an overall view of Orthodox mysticism, it does not imply that everything is uniquely Orthodox. Most of it holds true also for the Latin West. Although differences are noted at times, a comparison between Eastern Orthodoxy and the Latin West as such falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

³⁷ The Church Fathers do not define exactly what the image consists of, sometimes it is found in human free will, the rational faculty, or humanity's character of self-determination, the human soul along with the body, etc. (cf Lossky 1976:115). Gregory of Nyssa thought that the reason for this is that the image of God in humans is incomprehensible, because God is incomprehensible (Nellas 1987:22). The meaning of the term was determined by the context in which it was used, always with clear patristic orientation that Christ is the image of God and humans the image of Christ.

³⁸ Gregory Palamas is an Orthodox theologian and mystic who lived between 1296 and 1359.

a created supernatural, but it is the divine life itself', because it is the presence of Christ himself. Grace is an ontological reality in human nature because each person is made in the image of God – a point to which we will return.

As the core element of the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy, the indwelling Trinity is envisaged as working in the human soul. In the East, the three persons of the Trinity act upon the soul simultaneously, yet in different ways, while in the West, God's action on the soul appears as a single effect. This however does not mean that the Trinity remains an abstract concept, but that the images used to describe the inner life of God remain external analogies. Augustine's idea of the human mind consisting of three elements (memory, intellect and will), appears inadequate to Eastern Christendom as the *locus* of the divine image. Although Augustine later overcame much of his psychology of his earlier years, a basic psychological orientation remains. 'In actualizing the self's own trinity of loving, understanding, and unity, the self becomes ever more united to God and transformed into an image of God' (Dupré 1984:18). For Augustine the human mind's triune structure is in the image of God because it has the power to remember, understand and to love; and in the exercise itself, the external image of the Trinity in the soul is transformed into an intrinsic image (Dupré 1984:18). Although Augustine eventually comes close to the Eastern idea of the image as grounded in an identity, there is still a fundamental difference: the Orthodox Fathers *start* from the soul's initial identity with the image, while Augustine starts with the threefold function of the mind which bears the imprint of the Trinity. It is only through the soul's remembrance, understanding and loving that it is drawn into the life of God and thereby becomes 'an ontological image of God' (Dupré 1984:19). It was only much later with the Cistercians, the Victorines and, of great importance to this study, Van Ruysbroeck, that the more profound insight (that human beings are made in the image of God because in their deepest essence there is a primordial conformity with God) was brought into greater relief in the Latin West.

In contrast, the order of salvation is the starting point for Eastern Orthodoxy: God has saved us in Christ through the Spirit. Hence, from the outset, the Trinity appears prominently. The basis of theological reflection is the fact that God's self-revelation reaches us through the Word. Hence, it is the economic Trinity that reveals the nature of the immanent Trinity. Athanasius (c. 295-373) *On the incarnation* (1981) does not start with the dogma of the Trinity, but with the *spiritual experience* of christian life in the church and from that *experience* the dogma of the Trinity is expounded. 'One experiences truth with the whole being; one does not think it out'

(Carlson 1994:43). 'God is never simply an "object" of human intellectual enquiry. He is known existentially by human beings who commit themselves to him...' (Frank 1992:7). That is why the mysteries of faith are communicated liturgically rather than propositionally. Interestingly, Western theology has again recognised the importance of the inductive method and human experience as the starting point in theology (Sheldrake 1998:xii) as it gradually recognised the limitations of rationalistic approaches.

Finally, there is a difference between what are considered authoritative sources for theology. The West regards the following as authoritative: the holy scriptures, holy tradition (*paradosis*), and the teaching authority of the church, the Magisterium, invested in papal primacy. Eastern Orthodoxy regards as authoritative: holy scriptures, holy tradition (with great emphasis on the definitions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils), liturgical texts, and the writings of the Church Fathers. Among the Church Fathers, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzen enjoy exceptional status and are referred to as the three Hierarchs.

3.3 EASTERN ORTHODOX MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Breck (1999:3) states that there are primarily two pathways in Eastern Orthodoxy that lead to knowledge³⁹ of God: theology and asceticism. Each of these two ways is grounded in *experience* of God. It is through experience that knowledge of God is attained *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In fact, Aghiorgoussis (1993:3) maintains that God cannot be known intellectually. Orthodox Christians are unwilling to separate spiritual experience from the 'dogmatic tradition and life of the Church [or] to engage in theological reflection without a spiritual context as if "theology" could be reduced to a mere rational exercise of the mind' (Frank 1992:2). Orthodox theologians prefer to reflect on the experience of faith and the symbols of faith in a mystical and symbolic manner. A theologian is someone who has *experienced* the Mystery which is the object of theology. Consequently, the entire theological endeavour is a synthesis of the

³⁹ An important hermeneutic principle is that *faith in God* and *knowing God* are two different things. *To know* God signifies both participation in the life of God and communion with him. This is why ascetics *know* God with the same depth and truth as the theologians – a point verified in the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Armitage (2000:7) draws a distinction between spiritual knowledge and the readiness to know on the one hand, and knowledge

contemplation of scripture, experience of the christian life and intellectual reflection. What this amounts to is that Orthodox christians are to live the dogmas that express unfathomable mysteries. Lossky (1976:8) understands the christian life as lived

in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically. Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other. If the mystical experience is a personal working out of the content of the common faith, theology is an expression, for the profit of all, of that which is experienced by everyone.

Therefore, Patristic theology is essentially *mystical* theology; it includes *theoria* which is a much broader term than theology, because it includes contemplation by which the person attains infused knowledge of God *ad intra* and *ad extra*. 'Spirituality and dogma, mysticism⁴⁰ and theology are inseparably linked in the life of the Church' (Lossky 1999:291; Ciobotea 1985:9).

This mystical character of the Orthodox Church is an important aspect of its mission in that it meets the deepest yearnings of the human heart, as opposed to a rational and scholastic approach that effectively separates the faithful from full participation in the mysteries⁴¹, that is, a mystical participation that emphasises communion and participation in the divine Life.

The present discussion will centre around two main themes, namely, key elements in Eastern Orthodox mysticism, and the mystical journey to *theosis*.

3.3.1 Key elements in eastern orthodox mysticism

Eastern Orthodox mysticism is an interweaving of various elements which are so interconnected that they produce a rich mystical tradition that has been passed down faithfully

associated with learning rather than living, on the other hand. It has to do with knowledge for the mere sake of knowing rather than knowledge through daily living with God.

⁴⁰ Mysticism refers to a 'vital consciousness of the reality of God – the triune God – contemplated, celebrated, sacramentally received at the altar' (Barrois 1982:99-100). It has nothing to do with obscure mental processes and very little to do with paranormal phenomena.

⁴¹ Orthodoxy prefers the term "mysteries" rather than "sacraments".

from the era of the early church. Identifying key elements and categorising them inevitably leads to difficulties in that it could result in a somewhat fragmented understanding of the subject. This is no less true with the present analysis of Eastern Orthodox mysticism. On the other hand, it has proven to be a useful technique for the purpose of understanding a multi-faceted phenomenon. Therefore, this is the methodology that will be employed, bearing the said caveat in mind.

As a result of the interconnectedness of these components of Orthodox spirituality, there will necessarily be a certain amount of unavoidable overlap, even though repetition has been limited as far as possible. The key elements selected are: a) scripture and the Church Fathers; b) trinitarian mysticism; c) pneumatological christology; d) Orthodox spirituality as existential rather than activist; e) holistic spirituality; f) sacramental and communal mysticism; g) the synergy between divine grace and human freedom; h) election and predestination; i) communion of saints and the celestial hierarchy; and j) the spiritual value of icons.

A. Scripture and the Church Fathers

Scripture is the foundation of 'the whole of Orthodox spirituality' (Monk 1978:1; Bonis 1963:304). The divine liturgy of John Chrysostom is an interlacing of scriptural quotations⁴² and reflections on the content of the scriptures. Ascetic spirituality is also inspired by the scriptures. Furthermore, Orthodox hymns, iconography, and the symbolism of the liturgy 'all express in one way or another, the richness of the biblical message which calls human beings to salvation and to a communion of love and life with God' (Ciobotea 1985:10).

To further demonstrate the centrality of scripture, the bible is enthroned in the entrance of an Orthodox church for the faithful to venerate. The fact that the scriptures are positioned in the centre of the altar, to be kissed by the priest as a sign of humanity's desire to be always attentive to the Word of God, further demonstrates the significance of the bible as the true substance of dogma and liturgy (Bonis 1963:304; Behr-Sigel 1992:11). The bible is also

⁴² There are ninety eight quotations or reflections from the Old Testament and one hundred and fourteen from the New Testament in the divine liturgy of John Chrysostom (Monk 1978:1).

carried in procession during the divine liturgy. From earliest times Orthodoxy has encouraged the assiduous reading of scripture by both clergy and laity⁴³.

The Orthodox approach to scriptures is that of the Church Fathers for whom the doing of theology was a synthesis of the reading of scriptures, reflection and *theoria* (that is, contemplation) and personal spiritual experience, with the aim of strengthening christian faith and life at all levels. The Church Fathers hold a prominent role in Orthodox theology and spirituality, and in this way the Orthodox Church continues to witness to the spirituality of the undivided church of the first millennium.

Dating back to the third century, two theological approaches towards scripture have prevailed: firstly, the literalist and historicist approach of the School of Antioch and secondly, the allegorist and speculative approach of the School of Alexandria (Behr-Sigel 1992:12). Besides these two attitudes, there is also an *evangelical* spirituality discernable throughout the Orthodox world. 'This spirituality takes care to identify Christian life neither with the rigorous asceticism of the Desert, nor with ritual worship; it lays stress on the spirit and virtues of the Gospel, on the necessity of following Christ, on charity towards the poor and afflicted' (Monk 1978:4-5). It emphasises virtues like simplicity, kindness, trusting prayer, discretion⁴⁴ and following Christ. This spirituality also comes to the fore in the importance attributed to the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-12).

B. A trinitarian mysticism

The centrality of the mystery of the Trinity in Orthodox spirituality is very evident in Orthodox celebrations. Throughout the divine liturgy there are numerous references or prayers to the Trinity. Doxology is a leitmotif of the liturgy. It indicates that the Orthodox vocation is to glorify the holy Trinity throughout history. As Ware (1996a:38) explains: 'We think the Trinity, speak the Trinity, breathe the Trinity', in other words, Orthodox christians *live* the Trinity.

The christian East, like the West, has retained the Patristic understanding of the Trinity as a *mystery*. For example, Genesis 1:26 which speaks of humans made in the image and likeness

⁴³ Bible study classes are a widespread occurrence in Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁴⁴ Spiritual discernment is referred to as discretion – it is an awareness of one's spiritual condition and those of others.

of God, does not mean that humans appear metaphorically somewhat like God. On the understanding that the Trinity is a mystery, the Orthodox Fathers interpret the text in mystical terms: the image refers 'to the indwelling of God's uncreated Image in the human soul, which makes man himself into a divine image of God' (Dupré 1984:13). It is precisely because of the mystery of the Trinity that the theology of the Orthodox Fathers is mystical through and through. Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, anthropology, soteriology and Orthodox spirituality are entirely trinitarian. Lossky asserts that 'all theology is mystical, inasmuch as it shows forth the divine mystery' (Lossky 1976:7).

The church approaches the Trinity from the perspective of persons according to the New Testament witness (Jn 17:21) (Hainsworth 1965:282). The divine life of God is one of eternal communion of life and love shared equally by the three divine persons, i.e. *koinonia*. On the basis of this eternal trinitarian communion the salvific work of Christ and the Holy Spirit is understood as the raising of humankind to share in this inner divine life of eternal communion. The *koinonia* within the Trinity and our sharing in this divine life make it incumbent on all the faithful to show mutual love to each other, to earnestly seek the salvation of all, to strive against all forms of injustice, oppression and exploitation (Ware 1996a:38-39). The social character of the intra-divine life should find reflection in the life of all those who profess to share in the life of the Trinity. It is therefore quite clear that the very *mystical* nature of Orthodox spirituality is not an escape from engagement in the world. On the contrary, as a microcosm, humanity's vocation is to overcome the divisions in the world, to unite all the opposite elements in the world and offer creation back to God in thanksgiving after it has unified its own inner world. This vocation of humankind is to be fulfilled in and through Christ, because it is ultimately Christ who will hand over the reign to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28).

The Trinity is not an abstruse theological concept. Rather, the Trinity is the *indwelling* Trinity who is encountered in the human heart. 'Our Trinitarian claim is two-fold: that God can indwell us as he indwelt Jesus, and that we can so indwell each other' (Wilson 1988:476). The doctrine of divine indwelling expresses the idea that one lives in the other, becoming what the other is. Genuinely *living* the Trinity, brings about a transformation of human lives 'that is nothing less than revolutionary' (Ware 1996a:38).

To sum up, trinitarian mysticism is ultimately a mysticism of the heart, also known as introvertive mysticism. The Trinity dwells as an *ontological reality* in the very centre of the

human soul by virtue of being made in the image of God and humanity's incorporation into Christ through baptism. Jesus said that 'the kingdom of God is within you' (Lk 17:21). One of the primary themes in the writings of the Church Fathers is the quest for the inner kingdom.

C. Pneumatological christology

Orthodox spirituality never separates Christ from the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy recognises the Lordship of Christ and experiences communion with him, only in and by the Holy Spirit (Ciobotea 1985:13). The Holy Spirit is at the centre of Orthodox liturgical celebrations, as well as all levels of the christian life. Each person who enters the church must constantly deepen his or her communion with the risen Christ in the Holy Spirit. The entire mystical life is constituted by an ever-increasing life in the Spirit of Christ. It is for this reason that Kontzevitch (1988:11) can say the following: '...the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the main aim of man upon this earth, for it is through the ascetic struggle of "pulling down" the Holy Spirit into a repentant, humble heart that man gains justification before the face of God....and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the actuality of being saved'.

In similar manner, Serafim of Russia taught his followers that 'the whole of the Christian life consists in the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit"' (in Meyendorff 1974a:164). Christian life is life in the Holy Spirit and this is what it means to become a spiritual person.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love who unites everything in Christ. As such, believers who live Spirit-filled lives, do not live their lives as isolated individuals. The entire mystical life is also concerned with life towards one's fellow human beings. 'We discover our self-hood in encounter with others such as we are and our identity is determined relative to them' (Wilson 1988:483).

It is also the intensity of the spiritual life, that is life in the Spirit, that demonstrates whether the church 'becomes more "church"' or whether it succumbs to secularisation. Thus, says Ciobotea (1985:13), the 'problem of the secularisation of the Church is...a problem of lack of communion in the Holy Spirit or lack of living communion in Christ'. It is the Holy Spirit who gives life to the church, to the world, and to each believer as part of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit makes God present in the world and in believers, makes the Gospel a life-giving Word from God, and makes the church the body of Christ.

D. An existential mysticism

While Western spirituality is centred upon “acts” (works), ‘the ideal of the East was always the “state of prayer” (*katastasis*) which includes the whole spiritual life, a firm disposition of the heart, apart from the acts which it produces more or less frequently’ (Spidlik, quoted in Ciobotea 1985:11). This statement of Spidlik calls for caution: it does not imply that Orthodoxy, in giving priority to the disposition of soul over acts, contrasts contemplation and action, faith and good works, spirituality and morality. The Christian East also endorses the conviction that the quality of human relationships with self, others and God testifies to the presence, or absence, of the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, the fruits of the Spirit testify to a life lived in the Spirit. Likewise, Western Christianity also has its contemplative traditions in addition to its active life.

Meyendorff (1974b:119) addresses the existentialist character of Orthodox mysticism. Palamas is convinced that God does not reveal himself ‘through creatures’ but directly, in Jesus Christ. God unites himself to believers in the same way as the soul is united to the body, and dwells ‘in his wholeness in the whole of their being, so that they in turn may dwell in him; through the Son, the Spirit is poured out abundantly upon us (Titus 3:6), and yet it is not, because of that, a created spirit’ (quoted in Meyendorff 1974b:120). Palamas insists that the grace or the light that reveals God is uncreated, just like the *uncreated* light the disciples saw on Mount Tabor (Mk 9:2-10). God is essentially *uncreated*, humans are created, and thus they are totally distinct. Yet, what God grants the mystic in sacramental grace, is uncreated divine life, deification. To see God ‘face to face’ (1 Cor 13:12) does not mean a vision of the divine essence. God remains unknowable in his essence, but God can be known through his uncreated energies, which are his actions *ad extra* and are real manifestations of God outside the divine essence. All revelation and deification is a free act, a divine energy, of God. Palamas’ distinction between God’s essence and God’s energies does not break the divine unity, since God is utterly simple in his being, beyond any categories of whole and parts. He is wholly present in his energies⁴⁵ as he is in his essence, and therefore, it is truly God whom the mystic sees.

⁴⁵ The energies are *uncreated* because they originate in the essence of God which is uncreated. The energies are not gifts, but God himself. The basis of all mystical experience is the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies.

According to Palamas (quoted in Dupré 1984:73), 'The uncreated energies of God are not "things" which exist outside of God, not "gifts" of God; they are God himself in his action. They are the very God who is himself uncreated. They are therefore called "uncreated" because their cause and origin is the Essence of God'. God's uncreated presence in the human soul results in a created state of grace. These energies are understood as *grace* by eminent Orthodox theologians such as Gregory Palamas, and nowadays, Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff (Maloney 1978:112-113).

The distinction between God's unknowable essence and his knowable energies is eminently relevant, because an entirely unknowable God raises the question, 'why would Christ have come if God is always to remain beyond the reach of man?' (Meyendorff 1974b:125). Although God is an unattainable being, he is also the living God who actually desires to reveal himself to humankind and to share with humans his own uncreated existence. God bridged the chasm between the divine and the earthly realms in the incarnation.

E. A holistic mysticism

Orthodox spirituality is integrative and synthetic and as such holistic. Salvation⁴⁶ and sanctification are concerned not only with humankind, but also with the whole order of creation (Ciobotea 1985:12). Such a holistic spirituality is contrary to pantheism, deism, and modern nihilism, because of the radical distinction between the Creator and creation. Orthodoxy rejects any view that regards God as uninterested in creation or the world as self-sufficient. Orthodox soteriology takes account of the life of the world in its totality, and manifests a conviction that spirituality must be evident in all spheres of life.

Although God has given humans sovereignty over creation, he did not, however, grant them the right to exploit and destroy nature as is happening today. People made in the image of God are God's viceroys on earth. In line with the mystical character of theology, humanity's dominion over the earth 'is understood in terms of a spiritual enterprise, and, when human beings become absorbed by the material side of this enterprise, this is regarded as an

⁴⁶ Salvation is not only the forgiveness of sin; it includes restoration of communion with God, personal integration, restoration of immortality and the transfiguration of the entire cosmos.

expression of their sinfulness rather than of their rightful sovereignty' (Thunberg 1996:300). Through spiritual human beings, creation is brought into communion with God that leads to incorruptibility. Because human dominion is an aspect of their image character, it is to be exercised after the model of God: exerted through reason and accompanied by mastery over bodily passions, in creative communication with the universe, and not through the subjugation of creation.

The world is a macrocosm while humans are a microcosm precisely because of humanity's image character and because humans recapitulate within themselves the whole universe. As microcosm, the world is summed up in humanity as mediator, and humanity offers creation back to God in thanksgiving (Ware 1996a:50). This characteristic of human beings is linked to their task of mediation which is to unite in themselves the opposite elements in the world (Lossky 1976:109). In this way humanity fulfils its eucharistic mandate. Maximus the Confessor (in Thunberg 1996:308-309) speaks of five mediations:

between the sexes (since disastrous antagonism is overcome), between paradise and the inhabited earth, between heaven and earth, between sensible and intelligible creation (so that all is held together by the universal principle, *logos*, intended by God at the creation), and, finally, between God and the whole of creation through ecstasy and mystical union, so that God becomes all in all, without destroying any created differentiations or anything of humanity's instituted free will, yet bringing all to its fulfilment, gathered around humanity in perfect likeness to God.

The fall disintegrated the created order, but since the restoration achieved by Christ, humans can reintegrate the whole universe and finally bring it into permanent salvific relationship with God which leads to incorruptibility. This requires that humans exercise their stewardship of creation according to the model of God. The point is that humans are not saved *from* the world, but *with* the world. Through humankind the entire created order is to be redeemed and transfigured.

F. Sacramental and communal mysticism

Orthodox mysticism is fundamentally sacramental and communal. Life in Christ or the Spirit is understood as 'life in the sacraments' (Frank 1992:19). The mystical life begins with the

sacraments of baptism, chrismation⁴⁷, confession of sins, and the eucharist. While the believer seeks the new life of Christ in his own heart, the understanding is that 'divine life, communion with God, deification, "grace", are freely given and communicated to human beings in the sacramental life of the Church' (Frank 1992:19). This conviction is coupled to the idea of human freedom and ascetical effort, and in this way Orthodox sacramental mysticism has been preserved from becoming a magical and mechanical spirituality. In other words, the mere fact that one has been baptised and given a share in the risen life of Christ, does not mean that spiritual effort has become superfluous. Baptism does not guarantee salvation, but *initiates* the believer's journey towards deifying union with God. It also means that deification is not imposed on humans, but offered as a free gift by God, which must then be appropriated. Mantzaridis (1984:42-43) writes: 'Christ does not put an end to man's free will in the name of salvation, for this would involve a revision of the purpose of creation. Man was created free, and it was of his own will that he left God. This means that he can only continue to be man if he freely returns to God'. There is therefore a direct relationship between the sacramental and moral life of the christian. The sacraments will do no good at all if people persist in their sin.

Orthodoxy adopts a realist attitude towards the sacraments, or mysteries. The sacraments are not mere symbols but make present today the same graces as at the time of their institution by the Lord. However, Eastern Orthodox christianity does not offer too many definitions regarding the mysteries (e.g. on the eucharistic presence, or the real presence of Christ in the eucharist), but prefer to keep the mystery a "mystery" and not allow it to become 'a theorem, or a juridical institution' (Monk 1978:31). For the Orthodox it is enough to know that Christ becomes mystically present in the consecrated bread and wine. The advantage of preserving the mystical character of the sacraments is that it evokes wonder and awe, something which wanes with overly articulate explanations.

Orthodox sacramental mysticism is personal, but also communal. Orthodox mysticism is always understood as the experience of the entire christian community (Dupré 1981:19). Such a communal approach is in direct contrast to the individualism of the Western world and the tendency to regard mysticism as a subjective state of mind. For Eastern Orthodoxy, the pre-eminent nature of God is trinitarian, manifesting itself as a divine community in which each person gives himself to the other in total love (Carlson 1994:42). As Hopko (quoted in Carlson

⁴⁷ Chrismation is the equivalent of confirmation in the Western church.

1992:42) contends, 'God *alone* is not God; so also the "individual" Orthodox, apart from all others, cannot see himself or herself as complete, as a "self"'.

Individualism, or pietism, regards salvation as an individual event and salvation is enabled through individual moral endeavour. Salvation is primarily a person's individual attainment as he endeavours to imitate Christ. Frank (1992:21) argues that pietist spirituality could very well result in 'the secularisation of the Church and a divorce between life and action, dogma and morality' (Frank 1992:21). What this amounts to is that the celebration of the liturgy⁴⁸ becomes no more than a congregation of individuals who happen to be in the same place at the same time. It negates the truth that the church is an ontological community of salvation characterised by coinherence and communion. It denies the fundamental theological truth that the church is a 'way of being' which has nothing to do with *an individual* moral attainment of salvation. This 'way of being' is the way of relationship: with the world, with God, with other people as well as with oneself. It stands to reason that such a 'way of being' can be realised only in communion with other persons and with God, in *koinonia*. Frank (1992:22) captures the heart of the matter when he says that:

The Church as divinely-established communion in Christ and in the Spirit is thus more than a human institution. It is the very fact of salvation itself and the ikon of the trinitarian and communal life of Father, Son and Spirit. In this divine-human community, people are given the possibility of losing their sinful and isolated individualism and discovering "personal existence", that is, existence in relationship with God and his friends. Deification entails taking on God's "way of being", and that "way of being" is both personal and communal. The essential context of spiritual life, then, is the communion of the Church, where one both participates in the divine life of God objectively given in the sacraments and strives to live out

that new 'mode of existence' in relationship to others.

G. Divine grace and human freedom: a synergy

Incorporation into Christ and ultimate union with the triune God require two necessary energies, namely, divine grace and human *will*. The emphasis on *will* indicates that the chief *human* instrument in our union with God is the human will - not feelings or intellect. Unless the will is

⁴⁸ Schmemmann (1973:25) argues that the original meaning of *leitourgia* denotes 'an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere

surrendered to God and is conformed to the divine will, there can be no intimate union with God. However, unless the will is anticipated and upheld by grace, it remains powerless. It is only through the grace of God that one is saved (Ac 15:11). It is divine grace which 'achieves in us both the willing and the doing' (Monk 1978:24). In this synergistic operation, God works through the incarnation of the Logos and humans work through the grace received through the sacraments (Hussey 1972:137).

In contrast with Augustine's doctrine of free will and predestination, the Orthodox Fathers emphasise human freedom in the work of salvation. Key to the understanding of the co-operation between human freedom and divine grace, is the concept of *synergy*, which expresses the kind of interpenetrating action between these two forces. Synergy between God and humans is asymmetrical: likeness of God is a gift from God that can only be *received* by the person. It, therefore, conveys the idea of receptivity, but it does not exclude human effort. It does mean, though, that human effort does not automatically procure the desired results, nor can it be demanded from God. It remains a free gift; hence, it can only be received.

H. Election and predestination

Since Paul's doctrine of election and predestination features so prominently in Elizabeth's mysticism, this rather controversial theme demands some attention from an Orthodox perspective. The views of two early Church Fathers, John of Damascus and John Chrysostom, and a present-day Orthodox theologian, namely, Minatios, will form the basis of the present discussion regarding an Orthodox understanding of this doctrine.

The doctrine of predestination is said to be based on scripture. Paul writes in Romans 8:29-30: 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified'.

collection of individuals – a whole greater than the sum of its parts'. This understanding of *leitourgia* is often overlooked.

It has been noted that human freedom and divine grace co-operate in the work of salvation. John of Damascus (n.d.⁴⁹), an eighth century Church Father, distinguishes between God's antecedent will and pleasure whereby God wills that all people be saved and enter his reign, and God's consequent will and permission, whereby God allows people to exercise their free will. God respects human freedom and does not force anyone to enter his reign. How is the doctrine of predestination and election to be understood? Does God actually predestine some for the reign of heaven and others for the reign of the netherworld? The answer is that God does not predestine anybody for perdition or salvation. God desires the salvation of all and through his foreknowledge knows who will accept his grace and be saved. Even though God knows all things beforehand, he does not *predetermine* all things on the basis of his foreknowledge – a critical distinction that one should not lose sight of.

Minatios (1990:27-36) affirms that God desires to save each and every human being, and that each person possesses all the freedom to achieve salvation with the help of divine grace. 'God desires, and if [the person] desires also, then he or she is already predestined'. This is certainly another way of looking at predestination.

However, since predestination is indeed an unfathomable mystery, John Chrysostom, (quoted in Minatios 1990:27-36) says that 'it is sufficient to know these two clear, understandable, basic precepts: first, God desires that we be saved, for He loves mankind. Second, we can be saved, for we are free. Thus, the will of God and the desire of man make up predestination. God desires, and if man desires also, then he or she is already predestined'. In sum: 'predestination is the combination of divine grace and human will [and] the grace of God which calls, and the will of man which follows this calling' (Minatios 1990:27-36). This understanding rules out both doctrines of unconditional predestination to salvation, as well as double predestination, because God does not arbitrarily elect and predetermine any person either for salvation or reprobation. Orthodoxy categorically rejects any understanding of predestination that robs people of their God-given freedom, because it places the greatest possible emphasis on the image character of humans. However, each person must cooperate with grace in order to be saved. Another way of approaching this dogma is to say that salvation is not automatic; to be born Orthodox, to be baptised and chrismated do not guarantee salvation – the principle of synergy always applies.

⁴⁹ Damascus (n.d.) is an article on the World Wide Web giving no date or pagination. See

On the other hand, God may *elect* certain people for specific *tasks in the world*, for example, the Virgin Mary, the prophets and the saints. All the same, they still retain the use of their free will to accept or reject God's offer of grace. This election also does not automatically grant salvation; the person still has to co-operate with grace in order to be saved.

For Western Christians, such an exposition might be unsatisfactory, but one must bear in mind that the Eastern mind tends to be less analytical than the Western mind. Doctrines of the church are accepted as mystical truths. The important thing is *to live* the mysteries rather than enter into philosophical speculations. Orthodox theologising is done on the basis of spiritual experience. It has never developed into scholastic intellectualism, rationalism or empiricism as occurred in the West. A final comment: election and predestination do not appear to be very important in Eastern Orthodoxy, at least, they are not very prominent.

I. The communion of saints and the celestial hierarchy

The spiritual life of an Orthodox is not complete outside the communion of saints. What does this entail? It means that all Orthodox Christians by virtue of their baptism, whether alive or deceased, are all one in the body of Christ. As such they are in communion with one another. The communion of saints is 'a sharing of the prayers and good works of the heavenly Christians and a familiar intercourse between ourselves and the glorified saints' (Monk 1978:32). Just as Christians seek the prayers of fellow Christians, so Orthodox Christians commend themselves to the prayers of the saints. This communion of saints also comes to the fore in the divine liturgy which, is an upward movement uniting all the Orthodox still living and all those in heaven, including all the hierarchies of angels, in one movement of praise and adoration of the triune God. The divine liturgy leads the 'soul (*mystagogia*) to the spiritual realities of the unseen world' (Vassiliadis 1997:13) and makes it a present reality here on earth.

The saints, including the *Theotokos*, are venerated (*doxologia, sebasmos*), they are not worshipped (*latreia*) because worship is due to God alone (Monk 1978:32).

Mary, the Mother of God, the *Theotokos*, stands at the summit of the celestial hierarchy. Among all the saints the *Theotokos* enjoys a special place of honour and her intercessions are fervently sought. Unlike the West, Orthodoxy has never accepted, nor defined, a dogma concerning her immaculate conception⁵⁰ as did the Roman Catholic Church. Orthodoxy holds that Mary was born with the same fallen human nature like the rest of humankind and that this does not include the inheritance of Adam's guilt, but mortality⁵¹, like all other people. The Orthodox Church has never accepted the idea that the blessed Virgin was born with the inherited guilt of Adam, because *no one inherits Adam's guilt*. 'Mary did inherit the mortality which comes to all on account of Adam's Fall' (Azkoul 1994). According to the Orthodox Church, the only doctrinal decision taken by the church about Mary is the attribution of the title *Theotokos*, Mother of God. The doctrine of the immaculate conception is understood to be superfluous because there is 'no need to see Mary in isolation from the common lot of fallen humanity' (Meyendorff 1996a:240). The reason for this is based on a different conception of the consequences of the fall, inherited guilt according to the West, and inherited mortality, according to the East. This is further based on a difference in the *time* when God prepared Mary with special grace for her role as the Mother of God. According to the West, this occurred at the time of Mary's conception in the womb of her Mother, Anna, (hence the immaculate conception); in the East, God's special grace was conferred on her at the time of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. But, the grace bestowed on Mary at the annunciation was intended to prepare her to be the Mother of the Word incarnate. It did not place her outside the lot of the rest of humanity.

According to Orthodoxy, Christians honour Mary more if she was born like the rest of humanity, that is, with the image of God in her soul, as affected by the fall, as the rest of humankind. With this I concur unequivocally.

⁵⁰ The dogma of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary was promulgated on 8 December 1854 and holds that 'the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful' (in Neuner & Dupuis 1992:218).

⁵¹ Inherited mortality includes the idea that death generates in humans the passions (anger, hate, lust, greed, etc.), disease and aging. Hence, the spiritual combat is a battle against the passions which are under the direction of the will.

Apart from the *Theotokos* and the saints, the Orthodox Fathers also lay particular stress on the guardian angels. The angels watch over humans and convey light and guidance, according to Pseudo-Dionysius (in Monk 1978:33). In the bible, the angels are bearers of the name and power of God. 'They are flashes of light and strength of the Almighty' (ibid. 1978:34).

The Eastern liturgical calendar is replete with feasts honouring the great heroes of christianity. Through these feasts and icons, at home and in the church, Orthodox christians daily experience the reality of the communion of saints as they are drawn into the life of the church here on earth and in heaven.

J. The spiritual value of icons

The centrality of icons⁵² in Eastern Orthodoxy raises the question, "why venerate icons?" To begin with, icons are *never* worshipped. Worship (*latreia*) is offered to God, the most blessed Trinity, alone (Ware 2000b:196). Icons, saints and the Mother of God are venerated, as noted already. This distinction is of the utmost importance because to worship anything other than God would be idolatrous. It is also absolutely forbidden to venerate icons that have not been blessed by a priest.

Icons point to a new mode of existence, a transfigured reality. They are a door to the heavenly world, an encounter between divine grace and human need (Koonce 1994:23). 'When an icon depicts a person, it portrays someone who has entered into the life of God and manifests this life in God in lines and colour. The person depicted in an icon is a "*new person*" who, regardless of sex is a reflection of the New Man, Jesus Christ' (Arida 1987:2; Koonce 1994:26). Jesus Christ provides this alternative existence and reveals the true identity of every believer, namely, as created in the image and likeness of God. The icon depicts a person who 'has been restored to God's image and likeness' (Arida 1987:2). By depicting the icon of a person restored to the image of God, it becomes an object of prayer and contemplation because the person depicted in the icon is a reflection of Christ. The value of the icon resides in the spiritual power of its archetype to beckon the believer to enter into contemplation and into the life of God. When someone venerates an icon, it is *Christ* who is worshipped, not the icon

⁵² The controversy surrounding iconoclasm will not be entered into, because the focus is more narrowly on the actual spirituality of the icon. With respect to iconoclasm, the reader is referred to John of Damascus (1980).

per se. 'Through prayer and asceticism the divine presence which he encounters through the icon re-forms the totality of his existence' (Arida 1987:9) and thus brings about a tranquil and attentive spirit.

Icons depict a restored creation which extends from the future into the present and as such reveals the reality of the new creation foretold in 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' Icons bear witness to the toppling of evil because they reveal that humans are recreated or restored in the image of God. It is therefore evident that the nature of an icon can best be understood in one's inner life of prayer and contemplation augmented by an ascetical way of life.

Orthodoxy holds that to refuse to make icons of Christ, is to imply that his body and his humanity is somehow unreal. Because the Word took on bodily form in the incarnation, it is proper to depict him in human form. 'Icons safeguard not only the authenticity of Christ's material body but also the Spirit-bearing potentialities of all material things' (Ware 2000b:196).

Icons not only have implications for the doctrines of the incarnation and creation, but also for the doctrine of theological anthropology. Since humans are made in the image and likeness of God, humans are creators after the image of God the Creator, and priests of the created order who reveal God's glory in them (Ware 2000b:197). Icons bear witness to the royal priesthood of all believers.

To answer the question, "why venerate icons?", one can say that they fulfil a sacramental function in that they are channels of divine grace. According to the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787), 'when we honour and venerate an icon, we receive sanctification' (Ware 2000b:197). Icons are not mere reminders of people or events, but are avenues of communion with those depicted in the icons. Icons make heaven present on earth, as indeed does the entire Orthodox church building and liturgy. 'The church is an earthly heaven, in which the heavenly God lives and moves' (Germanus of Constantinople quoted in Ware 2000b:198).

To sum up this section, the key elements discussed here form a very rich symphony of Orthodox spirituality which has a pronounced mystical character. In principle, the mystical path is offered to all, although not all accept the invitation.

3.3.2 The mystical journey towards *theosis*

The mystical journey towards union with God is possible because humans are made in the image of God. This image is understood in Eastern Orthodoxy as the actual *presence* of the Word incarnate, who is the true image of God, in the human soul. Since this is an ontological reality, 'the basis of spiritual life is not psychological, but ontological' (Monk 1978:23). So the Monk of the Eastern Church (1978:23-24) concludes that 'an accurate treatise on spirituality is not the description of certain states of the soul, mystical or otherwise, but the objective application of definite theological principles to the individual soul' with the view of curing fallen human nature. This view accords with that of Hierotheos (1995:31) when he says that Orthodox theology is principally a therapeutic science, used to cure the fallen state of the soul⁵³. The approach to healing the soul is theanthropic, not anthropocentric as in psychiatric and psychological approaches. Healing occurs by means of the assiduous application of spiritual practices through a synergy of divine grace and human free will.

The consequences of the fall necessitate inner purification and healing of humanity in order that humans may once again enjoy union with God. The image of God in human beings is no longer in its pristine condition. Part of the malady is that the *nous*⁵⁴ has been darkened and no longer functions in its primordial manner. (This statement will be clarified in the ensuing discussion). The entire mystical quest aims at the restoration of the divine image through the curing of the entire inner spiritual organism of the person so that humans can become more God-like and so attain *theosis*. Therefore, the 'object of Christian spirituality is the *supernatural* life of the soul and not the natural effects, either normal or supernormal, obtained by human disciplines, even when they are called "religious"...[this] cannot be overemphasized' (Monk 1978:23). Latin mystical writers would concur whole-heartedly with this word of caution. It is the action of *God* in the human soul that is all important, not paranormal phenomena.

In this section the entire journey of the soul's quest for union with the Trinity will be outlined. The discussion starts with the creation of humankind in order to show what went wrong with

⁵³ On this point Orthodoxy differs somewhat from John of the Cross who wrote extensively about the psychological aspects of mysticism. John does not envisage the mystical life primarily in terms of psychological growth.

⁵⁴ The *nous* is the "eye of the soul" which perceives metaphysical realities. This concept and its role in the mystical life are discussed below.

human nature, because such an understanding is determinative in any therapeutic approach to remedy fallen human nature. This study will include the therapeutic methods of Hierotheos, Bishop of Nafpaktos. He has written⁵⁵ quite extensively on the human spiritual condition and the Orthodox therapeutic method. His vision of the spiritual life will form the basis of this discussion on the Eastern Orthodox quest for wholeness and holiness. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the doctrine of *theosis*.

A. The human person as image of God

According to Genesis 1:26, humans are made in the image and likeness of God. This distinction seems to point to a difference between humanity's 'ontological' image character given at the outset and their 'moral' similitude that is to be realised through their life in the Spirit (Thunberg 1996:293). The Hebrew terms for "image" and "likeness" do not convey a distinction⁵⁶, but are synonymous. It is in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, that the Greek terms *eikōn* (image) and *homoīōsis* (likeness) are used and which seem to indicate two different meanings. However, the concept "image" contains a dynamism in itself and this dynamism is reinforced by the notion of "likeness". 'Image represents not only a status but also a potentiality, and this potentiality blossoms only when human beings are set free by Christ from enslavement to sin and are able to develop the potential capacities given at creation to their full maturity' (Thunberg 1996:298-299). Humans have to grow in the image of God and this was necessary even before the fall (Irenaeus quoted in Ware 1996a:52). It follows that humanity was not created with fully realised perfection, but has to cooperate with God through the use of its free will – humanity's spiritual development is not inevitable or automatic (Ware 1996a:52).

Christ, the Logos, is the true image of God and humans are according to the image of Christ. The human person is the image of the image of God. The Logos is the prototype according to which God created human beings in his image. Now, the soul is in the image of God because the Word resides in the image and the Word is the divine image of God (Wesche 1985:31). To

⁵⁵ Details of a few of his writings can be found in the Bibliography.

⁵⁶ Some modern Orthodox theologians recognise that there is 'no difference between the image and the likeness, but they are forced to accept the fact that the Eastern theological tradition has always understood the image to refer to something permanent in the human character, whereas the likeness is something additional, which was lost at the Fall' (Bray 1996:20).

be made in the image of God means that humans have 'God as the innermost center of [their] being' (Ware 1996a:52). Hence, Eastern anthropology starts with the *identity* of the image. In whatever external manner the image may resemble the Word (e.g. in human psychic composition), it is merely an external reflection of the primordial identity. What is important is that this identity of the image is not the privilege of the saints only, but is an ontological reality in human nature itself. Even sinners carry the divine image in their souls, whether they know it or not. Saints are able to let the image shine fully through their human nature because they have attained their full humanity and their *nous* has been purified and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. We will return to this latter statement for a full explanation, but suffice it to say that it means that saints are people who have been deified by the Holy Spirit.

It is through the image of God in the soul that humans participate in the divine life, because to be made in the image of God signifies orientation – a relationship with God. For Clement of Alexandria, humans are united to God 'through the full *awareness* of Christ's *presence* in the soul' (in Dupré 1984:15). It is Christ who bestows the Holy Spirit who infuses in the soul sacred knowledge of God's inhabitation and of humanity's participation in the divine nature - hence the importance of the Spirit in the christian life. 'To know God, then, is to possess him; to be one with him in knowledge means to be united with him in reality. In the awareness of identity my entire conscious existence comes to partake of the divine unity. Such a *gnosis*, however, is not a matter of study, but of a loving relationship to the Logos' (Dupré 1984:15). How does knowledge lead to union? Knowledge of God and of self leads to transformation and transformation leads to union with God, that is, deification. Human beings are capable of union with God, because they *are* essentially an image of God.

B. The fallen human condition

The primordial condition of human nature has been approached from various perspectives, resulting in different emphases, which are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, these approaches draw the same conclusion, namely, that the image of God in humans has become flawed. As a consequence humans experience inner fragmentation because their desires and passions are no longer theocentric but egocentric (Kontzevitch 1988:32). Ultimately, the fall brought mortality in its wake, so that salvation consists of the restoration of immortality and incorruptibility. Mortality includes the idea that death generates in humans the passions (anger, hate, greed, etc.) as well as disease and aging. It is the human will that is the driving force

responsible for most of the malady. To overcome this malady, large-scale inner purification is required through specific therapeutic methods prescribed by the church. Positively, salvation is union with God, negatively, it is liberation from death and corruptibility through the gift of eschatological life.

Ware (1996a:58) and Schmemmann (1973:15) approach the consequences of the fall from a eucharistic perspective. As mediators, humans are to offer creation back to God in thanksgiving. Instead of acting as mediator for and the unifying centre of creation, humanity produced division between itself and the world of nature (Ware 1996a:59). This turning away from God-centeredness to self-centeredness meant that humans no longer acted in a eucharistic way, 'as a sacrament of communion with God. He ceased to regard them as a gift, to be offered back in thanksgiving to the Giver' (Ware 1996a:59). Instead of seeing other people and creation as they are in themselves and in God, humans began to exploit everything. Creation ceased to be life-giving; corruption and mortality were the result. Thus, the effects of the fall are both physical and moral.

According to Gregory Palamas (Meyendorff 1974a:142), humans lost their supra-angelic⁵⁷ state and their inner equilibrium. No longer king of the universe, humans are subjected to the laws of the flesh and allow themselves to be dominated by cosmic forces. The 'soul, destined for immortality, has become mortal' (ibid. 1974a:142). The Word became incarnate to re-establish humanity's kingship and to make it share divine immortality.

One generally held view is that Adam was completely recollected and immersed in contemplation and in communion with God⁵⁸ before the fall. This is the kingdom of God an eternal life. Prelapsarian human nature was so integrated that the elements of the world posed no temptation. Above all, humanity was immortal. It was sin, which introduced death and interior fragmentation. The order of humanity's soul became distorted and humanity's innate passions, good in themselves, became redirected away from God. Thus humanity lost contemplative union with God. In Christ the primordial image of humanity and communion with God have been restored, thus becoming the exemplar of all Christians. Baptism purifies the

⁵⁷ This state is based on humanity's bodily existence 'which enables him to exercise dominion over the universe' (Meyendorff 1974a:142). Because of sin humans are no longer 'king of the universe' and are enslaved by cosmic forces and their own disordered passions.

⁵⁸ The author of *Cloud of unknowing* (Way:1986) also understands the consequences of Adam's sin as a fall from contemplation which is restored through the grace of Jesus Christ.

image and through the ascetic life, the image is restored to likeness to God and contemplative union with God is restored.

A view that takes the above approach one step further, is that of Hierotheos, Bishop of Nafpaktos. His approach centres around the *nous* (Hierotheos 1995). The ancestral sin renders the soul sick since it has fallen away from the grace of God. This resulted in the 'blindness, darkness and death of the nous'. The fall is 'a) the failure of [humanity's] noetic power to function soundly or even to function at all; b) the confusion of this power with the functions of the brain and of the body in general; and c) its resulting subjection to mental anguish and to the surrounding conditions' (Hierotheos 1995:36). Bad relations between humanity and God and among people are the result of a malfunctioning *nous*. Clearly, the *nous* has to be cured and this is the task of the theology and worship of the Orthodox Church. Once the *nous* is cured, has returned to its proper place in the heart, it can once again contemplate God, unite the whole created order and return it to God in thanksgiving.

There is a difference between East and West with respect to the consequences of the fall. The Western forensic approach emphasises inherited guilt and understands baptism chiefly as the remission of guilt. On the other hand, the East emphasises inherited mortality. Guilt is only acquired through personal sin as a result of the wrong use of human free will. *No one* inherits the guilt⁵⁹ of our first parents. In the East, therefore, baptism is understood positively as the 'liberation from mortality and incorporation into the life of the church' (Meyendorff 1996b:356).

Latin christianity is far more pessimistic about human nature than the East. Augustinian theology understands human nature as the locus of the human spiritual problem. Human nature is fallen and produces evil inclinations and desires. In contrast, Orthodox christianity recognises that although human nature is affected by the fall, it remains 'fundamentally good and capable of responding to God' (Frank 1992:9). The locus of sin is in the human will, not human nature as such, as the West maintains. The fall weakened the human will and by conforming the human will to the divine will, the image of God is restored in the person. The weakened human will results in conflicting spiritual and bodily desires. This is why Paul says that 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate' (Rom 7:15).

C. The structure of the soul

In order to understand the movement of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit, the structure of the soul in terms of soul, spirit, *nous* and heart deserves attention.

Biblically, the soul pertains to the whole person⁶⁰ as well as to 'all the things that participate in the life-giving energy of God' (Hierotheos 1995:100). The soul is immortal, not by nature as in Platonism, but by grace, since it is life in Christ that makes the soul immortal. Just as God is three-fold, so the soul has three powers: *nous*, soul and spirit. The powers of the soul are understanding, acuteness, apprehension and quickening.

Humans are distinguished from other living creatures in that they have been given the human spirit, *pneuma*, which is the God-like principle in the human soul. The basic manifestation of the human spirit is consciousness and freedom. The human spirit is humanity's living bond with God and is manifested through the intellect. The Holy Spirit penetrates the human spirit and acts in it.

The word *nous* is often translated as "mind" or "intellect". This is, however, not an adequate translation because it does not express two distinct functions of the brain. The Church Fathers differentiate between *dianoia* (reason) and *nous* (nondiscursive and intuitive way of knowing), which issue from the two cerebral hemispheres. The left hemisphere controls rational, linear, logical and imageless thinking (*dianoia*). In contrast, right hemisphere functioning is intuitive, imaginative, and symbolic – it is the realm that nourishes the inner world of the person (Ornstein 1981:271-272). The *nous* is associated with right hemisphere mentation.

Hierotheos (1995:118-126) tries to clarify the meaning of the terms *nous*, soul, image and heart. In the bible and the Church Fathers there is often confusion, but also distinction. These expressions are often used *interchangeably*. In the biblico-patristic writings, *nous* has many meanings: it is identified with the soul, as the energy (conceptual images and thoughts) of the soul, the *nous* is in the image of God, it is the heart, etc. In general, the *nous* refers to the soul

⁵⁹ No one is guilty of the sin of others, including the sin of Adam and Eve. Humans have inherited mortality and a propensity for sin as a consequence of their weakened human will.

and the heart of the human being without excluding the other meanings (Hierotheos 1995:118-126). With respect to the image, Palamas for example, regards the *nous* as the image of God (ibid. 1995:152). Nowadays people identify the *nous* with the intellect and so people do not suspect that there is another power with greater value, namely, the *nous*. This is especially the case in the West.

To bring some clarity to the term “*nous*”, it can be defined as the ‘spiritual sense’, the ‘eye of the heart’ (Spidlik 1986:332, 333). The *nous* is the superior part of the soul, identified by Westerners as the ‘fine point of the soul’, ‘the most profound part of the soul’, ‘the summit of the soul’, or in the words of John of the Cross, ‘the substance of the soul’ (Deseille 1993:24). It is the contemplative faculty by which one is able to seek God. The *nous* enables the direct intuition of the object of contemplation. Hence, the knowledge possessed by the *nous* is distinct from the knowledge possessed by the senses. The senses perceive created light whereas the *nous* perceives uncreated light, which is the Creator, the Supreme Being. The *nous* attains knowledge of God mainly through intuition and symbolism, that is, right hemisphere functioning. The knowledge perceived by the *nous* is articulated by the mind (*dianoia*). Now the actual problem is that as a result of the fall, the *intellect* now tries to attain experience of God, instead of the *nous* whose function it was originally. Only a *nous* purified through repentance and assiduous asceticism can acquire knowledge of one’s inner world. We need to limit the functioning of the intelligence in mysticism and develop the *nous*. When the *nous* has been purified and is functioning according to its original design, then it is appropriate to speak of a noetic state of consciousness.

It has been noted that Orthodox mysticism is primarily a mysticism of the heart. This is because the heart is the deepest centre of one’s being from which flows either a religious consciousness or unbelief and sin. This metaphysical heart is an immeasurable abyss. All the manifestations of the life of the soul occur in the heart (the inner life of the person). In terms of a biblical understanding of the heart, it is the organ of intellectual comprehension as well as emotional comprehension in that it comprehends many things that are inaccessible to the intellect, e.g. holiness and beauty. It is the place where the entire spiritual life develops (Hierotheos 1995:157). For the spiritual life to blossom, one needs to centre the mind in the heart, ‘since a person has only one hidden center’ (Kontzevitch 1988:48). The Fathers link the

⁶⁰ For the Orthodox Fathers human nature is the whole person: ‘the body with all its senses and passions, the soul with its intellect and will, and the Spirit’ (Maloney 1983:11).

nous and the heart to such an extent that what can be said of the *nous* counts equally for the metaphysical heart. Through asceticism the contemplative becomes aware of the place of the heart as the place where Christ is made manifest.

God is encountered in the mysterious depths of the heart (Eph 3:17; Rom 5:5). While the *nous* is the contemplative force, the heart embraces the most profound mystical experiences. Hence, the *nous* must have control over the heart by giving it appropriate direction and guarding it from sinful thoughts. To accomplish this, the *nous* must be concentrated, attentive and vigilant over all thoughts that enter consciousness. For the *nous* to function properly it must stay within the heart. This is why Orthodoxy speaks of descending with the *nous* into the heart.

In summary, when the *nous* functions according to its nature, it acts in the heart. The aim of ascetic and spiritual endeavour is to bring the *nous* back into the heart and restrict the intellect in prayer and contemplation. The aim is to leave rational thought behind and move into a noetic state of consciousness where imagination and intuition may receive knowledge of God. In the words of Theophan the Recluse, 'all spiritual life consists in the movement from mental communion with God to actual, lived, perceptible and manifest communion' (Theophan 1996a:194). The proper functioning of the *nous* is attained primarily through hesychasm⁶¹ and orthodox asceticism. When the *nous* is in the heart it manifests its purity, inner unity and its ability to receive revelation since it is the organ by which the heart can "see" God.

D. Healing of the *nous*

As already mentioned, the need for purification stems from the fall as a result of which 'the soul lost the uncreated grace of God, and the *nous* ceased to have a relationship with God and was darkened' (Hierotheos 1995:112). On the basis that humans have retained the image of God, it is possible to restore the image, and purify the soul, *nous* and heart. It is above all the noetic faculty of the soul that must be healed because it is the cause of the darkness and defilement of the entire soul, that is, the inner life of the person. The curing of the *nous* will be approached firstly, in terms of how this healing is achieved; and secondly, in terms of the result of this healing.

⁶¹ This term will be discussed in more detail below (3.3.2.E.i).

With regards to the healing of the *nous*, tireless guarding of the *nous* is required. This means constant vigilance (*nepsis*)⁶² over the whole spiritual life, especially evil thoughts that stem from the passions. These thoughts need to be expelled immediately. The guarding of the *nous* is combined with keeping the commandments, practice of the virtues, asceticism, watchfulness, attentiveness and continual prayer, especially the Jesus prayer. The Fathers stress the importance of courage, as this is no venture for the faint-hearted (Hierotheos 1995:138-139).

The journey of the *nous* into the heart consists of three movements of the soul. Firstly, the soul enters into itself and concentrates the spiritual powers of the soul. The *nous* is united with the heart through repentance. God is revealed in the heart and the *nous* unites with God. The second movement occurs when the soul rises up from all external things to simple and unified contemplation. This second movement is in fact two-fold and consists of natural *theoria* which is the contemplation of God in nature and *theoria* proper, the contemplation of God. 'The Church Fathers give priority to the first movement...because it forms a circle. The *nous* returns to the heart and through the heart is lifted up to vision of God' (Hierotheos 1995:145). The vision of God is attained through noetic prayer which occurs when all distractions have been overcome.

As the *nous* becomes free from passions, it is resurrected. The results of the curing of the *nous* are multiple. Among the first fruits, is dispassion (*apatheia*), that is, a lack of egotistical cravings after things. The *nous* is purified and as such acquires knowledge of God intuitively. Knowledge of God is granted by the Holy Spirit, and that is why real theology is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. A purified *nous* also gains self-knowledge. Self-knowledge has to do with knowledge of humanity's origin, vocation and ultimate destiny and how this destiny is to be attained⁶³. The ascetic method is simple, and used as described (guarding the *nous*, purifying it and returning it to the heart through penitence and noetic prayer, and keeping Christ's commandments) the soul is able to see its inner desolation. True self-knowledge comes through the inner working of the Spirit in synergy with one's own efforts. It is only when the soul is illumined in this way that it can have accurate self-knowledge because only then is the true

⁶² A constant re-orientation of the mind (*metanoia*) is necessary in order to keep the mind centred on God. It has to do with seizing the *kairos* that God offers us.

⁶³ Hence, self-knowledge acquired through the ascetic way is distinct from self-knowledge gained through psychoanalysis.

nature and the extent of the passions revealed. Only then can it begin to wage war against them (Hierotheos (1995:147-148).

The raising of Lazarus is a metaphor for the resurrection of the *nous*. A purified *nous* sees the glory of Christ mirrored in it and this image changes from glory to glory (2 Cor 6:18).

In brief, according to the Church Fathers, the *nous*, as the image of God, is darkened by passions, and has become egocentric as a consequence of the fall. When the *nous* is purified and unified through the therapeutic remedies of Orthodox theology and worship, it returns to the heart and can once again assume its proper function, which is to behold the indwelling Trinity and gain spiritual knowledge of God, which constitutes the salvation of humankind. The aim is to attain a 'harmonious relationship between the *nous* and the heart, in order to develop and build up the personality in the life of grace' (Lossky 1976:202). As this process unfolds, our true selves as we are in God are established as the centre of our consciousness, in contrast to the ego which seeks only its own glory.

E. Therapeutic methods

The Orthodox Church does not only diagnose the illness of the soul, but also offers a remedy. Healing takes the form of the purification of humanity through the energy of Christ which is 'offered through the whole spiritual life which the Christian lives within the Orthodox Church' (Hierotheos 1995:271). Although there are various spiritual practices that attain healing, this analysis concentrates on hesychastic mysticism with its emphasis on noetic prayer, asceticism, and lastly, ecstasy and enstasy as a path to attain purification and integration.

i) Hesychasm

Contemplation in the Orthodox Church developed mainly through the movement called hesychasm (Monk 1978:6). *Hesychia*, which refers to inner silence and tranquillity, is a habitual disposition of the heart, that enables the *nous* to be attentive (Hierotheos 1995:312-326). The life of Christ in us is the foundation of hesychast mysticism (Meyendorff 1974a:151). In fact, it is the foundation of Orthodox spirituality as a whole.

Generally, the Church Fathers understood hesychasm as 'an uninterrupted dwelling in God' (Hierotheos 1995:314) rather than living as a recluse or fleeing to the desert. Cabasilas (1974) describes how Christians are to live in Christ, to assent to his graces and attain union with him, but he also maintains that this is attained without physically withdrawing from the world. Withdrawal from the world has to do, not with external separation essentially, but with solitude of spirit. It makes perfect sense, because Christ did not withdraw⁶⁴ from the world permanently, neither did the Apostles. The work of Cabasilas, a fourteenth-century Orthodox theologian, was especially relevant at the time because of the claim of the Renaissance that the whole life of a person is found within herself or himself and that there is no need for community life offered by the Church.

Orthodoxy has never excluded the laity from full participation in the mystical life (Hussey 1972:136) because it is communicated to believers *primarily through the mysteries* and these are available to all Christians who are in a state of grace. The believer is called to awareness of the indwelling presence of Christ, which is given existential reality through the mysteries.

In the light of the above, deification is set in an ecclesial context - the Church and the sacraments. *Hesychia* is not an optional extra of the Christian life, reserved for those blessed with the time and energies to engage in such a spiritual discipline. It is not a luxury. It is the indispensable means to keep the soul pure from passions, for communion with God and for deification. Mary, the *Theotokos*, is the prime model of *hesychia*. The Eastern Orthodox tradition understands that the call to holiness and union⁶⁵ with God is directed to all people and that it is *possible* for all sincere seekers after God.

Hesychia makes the habitual awareness of the inner presence of God and uninterrupted dwelling in God possible. Inner stillness and tranquillity, which are indispensable to this spirituality, are attained through ceaseless prayer⁶⁶, especially the Jesus prayer. The most common form of the Jesus Prayer is, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a

⁶⁴ Christ withdrew for prayer for certain periods but always returned to continue his ministry (Lk 4:1, 42; Lk 6:12; Lk 9:10) and even today he is still present and active in the world through his Spirit.

⁶⁵ Most of the Orthodox Fathers favour the view that the mystical life is offered to all people of good will, recognising the fact that not all will answer the call.

⁶⁶ Various biblical texts enjoin believers to pray unceasingly: Lk 18:1, 7a, 8; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17. Believers are also called to pray in the name of Jesus: Jn 14:14; Jn 16:23, 24; Ac 4:12, Rom 10:13. John 15:4-5 is also a foundational text for hesychastic mysticism.

sinner”, but this may vary. What matters is the name of Jesus, because the power⁶⁷ in this holy name makes the Lord present to the one praying. For Orthodox Christians the name of Jesus is like a verbal icon through which the divinising energy of Jesus flows to the believer. One can regard it as *sacramental*, ‘a sensible reality, which is completely penetrated with the acting presence of Christ’ (Deseille 1993:32).

The Jesus Prayer is central to hesychast spirituality (Meyendorff 1974b:38). It dates back to the desert Fathers and Mothers. Palamas traces this quiet contemplation at the heart of hesychasm to Mary, the *Theotokos*, although generally it is regarded as having originated among the desert Fathers.

The main characteristics of hesychasm⁶⁸ are the following: a) entering into a state of quiet without using the intellect or imagination, that is, for imageless and non-discursive prayer (Ware 2000a:176); b) repeating the Jesus prayer; c) regulating one’s breathing, and fixing one’s gaze on the heart; d) the feeling of an inner warmth or having a vision of divine light; and e) the aim of hesychasm is deification. However, breath control is not essential and all literature on the subject cautions that it should be practised only under supervision of an experienced guide.

The Jesus prayer develops through three stages and cannot be attained right away. To descend with the *nous* into the heart takes time and disciplined effort. First the prayer is recited orally, then mentally and finally the heart takes up the prayer where it becomes self-acting. This is known in Eastern Orthodoxy as noetic prayer, prayer with the *nous* in the heart. The Jesus prayer stands at the heart of Orthodox mysticism and is in the same spirit as centering prayer and the practice of the presence of God in the West.

The Jesus Prayer has a three-fold function: 1) as a verbal icon, it makes Christ present to the one praying, 2) it quietens the mind often filled with seemingly endless distractions, and 3) it leads to unification of the spiritual faculties.

In essence then, Orthodox Christians seek a new life in Christ, a life that has already been imparted through baptism. Life in Christ is sought in the interior of one’s being within the

⁶⁷ John 17:11 speaks about the power of the name of Jesus.

context of the sacramental system of the church. That is why the hesychast movement of the fourteenth century never deteriorated into individualistic and subjective mysticism but led in fact to a revival of ecclesiastical sacramentalism. Palamas himself says of baptism and the eucharist, that in these two sacraments our whole salvation is found, for they sum up the dispensation of the God-Man (*Homily 60*, in Meyendorff 1974b:114).

In sum, hesychasm is essentially the guarding of one's *nous* and watching one's thoughts – and this requires inner silence, that is, *hesychia*. Noetic prayer is a state of “sober watchfulness” in the sense that the *nous* attempts to keep the person attentive to the presence of God within the heart. The Jesus Prayer is the primary, but not the only, means of attaining noetic prayer, that is, continual prayer. It is similar to the initial stages of contemplation described by many Western mystics. Once the goal is attained the person is fulfilling the purpose of his or her existence, which is to grow in deifying union with God.

ii) **Asceticism and mysticism**

Asceticism has always been a vital part of Orthodox mysticism. As already noted, rigorous asceticism is required to purify and order the fallen and scattered *nous*. Asceticism is understood as an aid⁶⁹ to spiritual and mystical growth; it is never an end in itself. Orthodox rubrics concerning fasting are quite elaborate. Although the rules concerning fasting were progressively relaxed throughout the twentieth century to encourage Catholics to receive holy communion more frequently, the Orthodox Church still observes elaborate rules.

‘Asceticism is generally understood as an “exercise” of human will on itself in order to improve itself’ (Monk 1978:25). The Orthodox Fathers draw a clear distinction between the ascetical life and the mystical life. The ascetical life is one in which the person is acting; human action predominates with the purpose of acquiring virtues. The mystical life is a life in which the

⁶⁸ Hesychasm is not christian yoga, nor is it a mechanical technique to induce ecstasy or obtain grace. The aim is sobriety, watchfulness (*nepsis*), interior attentiveness, and union of intellect (*nous*) and heart in order to hear the still and gentle voice of the Spirit of God.

⁶⁹ There are two heretical tendencies inherent in the concept of asceticism. Firstly, the Pelagian notion that humans can achieve their own sanctity through rigorous effort. The truth is that a person is saved, sanctified and deified by grace alone. Asceticism renders a person receptive to grace. The second heresy concerns a Manichaeian hatred of the body. The body is destined for resurrection; what is despised are disordered carnal passions and desires (Sanfilippo 1994:505-506).

mystic is 'acted upon'; the action of the Holy Spirit predominates, granting infused knowledge of divine things to the mystic (Monk 1978:25). However, the mystical life is a synthesis of mysticism and asceticism. The prevalence of spiritual gifts does not preclude the practice of virtues and vice versa. 'The mystical life is not synonymous with Christian perfection' (Monk 1978:26). Christian perfection consists of charity and this blessed state can be reached by people who have never followed the mystical way, but sincerely and lovingly keep the commandments. Nevertheless, mystical graces are offered to all believers, not just to a few elect.

Prayer should always be accompanied by compunction of heart, because as the Psalmist says, 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise' (Ps 51:17). Spurred by compunction the searcher after union with God willingly practises asceticism. Not to be overlooked is the "asceticism of the heart" that is the result of dying to self in order to find God. This form of asceticism manifests itself in prayer each time the praying person rejects distractions in order to return to the one thing necessary. This attitude of heart is a constant element of Orthodox spirituality.

Orthodox asceticism expresses and testifies to the 'inner bond between the Cross and the Resurrection' (Ciobotea 1985:13). This deep union between cross and resurrection explains why Orthodox spirituality is characterised neither by sadness or despair nor by individualistic sentimentality.

Contemplation is given as a free gift of God's love only after someone, formed and strengthened by the commandments, has purified himself or herself through asceticism. Such a person has overcome his or her own will, has yielded to the will of God, and has attained the virtue of true humility. In such a state the inner fragmentation has been repaired so that the faculties now function harmoniously.

Ascetic practices are not a statement against the material order. Created things are not inherently evil; this teaching is also found in John of the Cross. It is human abuse of created things through the free use of one's egocentric will that results in evil. Therefore, as mentioned, Orthodox theology understands the *locus* of sin to be the will, not human nature. Although human nature is flawed, it remains nonetheless 'fundamentally good and capable of responding to God' (Frank 1992:9). Asceticism aims at purifying natural impulses, which incite

the will towards evil. It frees humans from the 'selfish desire to grasp and exploit' (Frank 1992:12). This is the meaning of *apatheia*. As such, it purifies the *nous* and brings healing and integration to the entire soul.

After all that has been said about the mystical character of Orthodox faith, the centrality of prayer and the hesychastic tradition, one might very well wonder what has happened to the active life. Eastern Orthodoxy does not separate the contemplative and the active apostolic life. Even for monks the two ways are inseparable, 'for the ascetic rule and the school of interior prayer receive the name of spiritual activity' (Lossky 1976:18). The physical labour performed by the monk has an ascetic end in view, viz., to overcome his fallen human nature. In order to attain the goal of christian life, human nature needs to be transformed. Asceticism has this end in view.

iii) **Ecstasy and enstasy**

Union with God is attained in an antinomic manner, that is, in a way that consists of seemingly two paradoxical ways. It involves both a going beyond oneself, in an ecstasy and also a reentry into oneself, an enstasy. The word ecstasy is not used in a psychological sense, but in its etymological sense of going out of oneself, or of leaving one's "I" behind. This is the death to self that the mystics speak of. It is the transformation of the ego, and the establishing of the higher self as the centre of the personality, which is achieved through an enstasy or reentry into oneself. Ecstasy and enstasy are not additional to other therapeutic methods, but seen from this perspective, offer further clarification of the path to wholeness and sanctification.

Aspirant mystics need to go out of themselves through inner purification, the fulfilment of the commandments and consecration of themselves to God through prayer 'in order to receive the supernatural power of contemplation' (Palamas in Deseille 1993:21). Ecstasy means that humans need to transcend themselves because God cannot be attained through any feelings the believer can evoke, or any concepts, but only through the 'divine sense' of contemplation (Deseille 1993:21). This divine awareness is neither a sensation of warmth or anything felt, nor an intellection, but something beyond either of them. More to the point, we do not attain to God through sensible perception or intellectual knowledge. It is not that knowledge of God expressed in concepts and formulations are without value. No, they do contain truth, but they do not and cannot encompass God. Humans attain union with God through an awareness of

the presence of God, which is beyond any concepts. It is a vision of the heart, not the intellect or the senses. All of this is linked very closely to faith, but faith understood as an:

inner sense that leads us to first of all go to the word of God, a faith which becomes more and more aware of its object, in the great awareness of presence [...]. Only faith is proportionate to God and only faith allows us to approach God. It is in this sense that one can say that our perception, our experience of God and our deification, implies a going out of ourselves while on the other hand, even though it seems paradoxical, union with God requires an entering into oneself (Deseille 1993:23).

Union with God is expressed in terms of a going out of oneself, an ecstasy in that the soul strips itself of its normal way of feeling, knowing and loving and renounces itself and any created thing (Deseille 1993:23). This transformation of ego is a prerequisite for finding God within. However, union with God is also expressed in terms of an interiorisation, a return of one's higher self or enstasy. Simply put, humans need to re-enter into themselves in order to find God. Basil (quoted in Deseille 1993:23), writing in the fourth century, synthesizes these two components when he writes:

The soul which is neither dispersed among exterior objects, nor distracted by the world of the sense, returns to its self and climbs by itself to the contemplation of God. Burning and resplendent with the divine beauty, it finds that it has forgotten of its own nature.

Hence, by re-entering into oneself, the old self, which had the ego as the centre of the personality, can be transformed into the higher self through the presence of God.

This going out of oneself and reentering may remind one of the neo-Platonic schema of emanation and return, found in Western spiritual writers as well, for example, Van Ruysbroeck. It may also be understood in terms of out-of-body experiences. It is clear from this entire study that such phenomena are not essential to the christian understanding of emanation.

F. Union with God – *theosis*

The Orthodox tradition holds that humans exist from all eternity, not in the divine essence, but in 'the core of the divine energies' (Deseille 1993:24). Thus, each person exists in God from all eternity through God's foreknowledge of creation and plan for the redemption of creation, which God also foreknew. God's will with respect to each human being is their deification, which is

considered to be a participation in the energies of God, not in the divine essence (Aghiorgoussis 1993:19), but which is nevertheless a *real* participation in God because God is “wholly” in his energies. God never intended humans to be self-sufficient, but desires people to grow in likeness to him and to attain the gift of deification. From all eternity God thought of human beings in terms of their ultimate destiny, namely, to become truly deified in God. God has endowed humans with the *nous* as an innate constitutive part of human nature. It is precisely in this intimate centre of the soul that the Holy Spirit infuses the grace of God and provides a yearning for God. Growth in the mystical life consists of an ever-increasing consciousness of this essential desire or instinct for God, of consenting to it and following the inner movements of the Holy Spirit in freedom towards the end for which humans have been created, namely, their deification. However, Deseille (1993:24), makes a rather bold statement, unless of course one is familiar with Orthodox theology. He claims that humans are ‘called to divinize themselves’. This statement should be understood in the context of Orthodox theology as a whole, which is quite clear about the synergy that exists between God’s actions (grace) and that of human beings through the exercise of their free will. If humans are ‘to divinize themselves’ it is to be understood solely as referring to their share in the working out of their salvation.

The patristic formula of Irenaeus (c. 125 – c. 202) has become standard in the Orthodox tradition: ‘God became human so that humans might become God’ (Wesche 1999:29; Frank 1992:4). The first part of the formula points to the incarnation, to the Logos who became flesh (Jn 1:14) and who dwelt among humans. The second part expresses the soteriological consequence of the incarnation, namely, that humans can attain union with God, that is, *theosis* or deification.

‘Union with God is conceived of as a veritable deification which the spiritual writers, following the Fathers of the church readily express by means of metaphors which express a true compenetration of the divine and the human’ (Deseille 1993:19). Metaphors such as an iron penetrated by fire, burning coal or a crystal penetrated by light are used to convey the nature of the soul’s union with the triune God. Deification involves the *whole* person; the body is also transfigured and becomes holy. It is on the basis of the deification of the *body* as well as the soul, that the remains of a saintly person become relics and why these relics are honoured.

The biblical foundation for the doctrine of deification is found in 2 Peter 1:4: ‘[that we] may become partakers of the divine nature’. Various verses speak of the unity between God or

Jesus and believers: John 14:20; John 17:21-23; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 John 2:5; 1 John 5:20. Maximus the Confessor also refers to Paul's statement: 'If I live, it is not I, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20) to express this union with God.

God as he is in his essence, is a mystery beyond human comprehension and in this sense, completely transcendent. However, there is also in God an 'effulgence which is truly divine⁷⁰, which is "something of God" if one may so express it, and which constitutes the eternal life of the [three] divine persons, and which can be communicated to [humans]' (Deseille 1993:19). Deification is the penetration of humans by this divine energy.

The question that now arises is whether *theosis* entails our becoming aware of something that already exists, or whether it is the result of a progressive⁷¹ transformation of the divine image in human beings. Both statements are in fact true. It does entail becoming aware of something that already exists and which is given in a particular way from the beginning of creation. From the moment of the creation of humankind, there exists in people a kind of 'deiformity' by which human nature conforms to God. Each person possesses this initial deiformity at the start of the spiritual life. However, this conformity is only the starting point, and for the spiritual life to commence, two conditions are necessary. Firstly, a gratuitous gift from God, which does not depend on the person at all; and this gift of grace demands from human beings an attitude of openness to and dependency on God. Secondly, it requires the co-operation of human beings through the exercise of free will. Therefore, one can speak of three stages in the conformity of humans with God: there is a fundamental conformity of human nature present in each person - which is brought to incandescence, or enlightenment by the Holy Spirit - which in turn is linked to baptism and chrismation. This calls to mind the passage in Gen 1:26, which states that God created humans in his "image" and "likeness". Following the early Church Fathers, the Orthodox Fathers maintain that the "image" refers to the initial stage of conformity between humankind and God and "likeness" to the 'full achievement of union with God or conformity to God' (Deseille 1993:20).

⁷⁰ In Orthodoxy this effulgence that emanates from the God as he is in his essence, is referred to as *uncreated energies* and has been given its classical formulation by Gregory Palamas (cf. 3.3.1.D).

⁷¹ Transformation in Christ is a perpetual growth unto infinity because God always escape our complete grasp and we can always grow in love and knowledge of God.

Theosis is a 'process of transformation from death in the flesh to life in the divine' (Wesche 1999:30; Meyendorff 1974b:40). This transformation is achieved by way of the cross as the soul journeys into the mystery of Christ's death and discovers the mystery of resurrection and eternal life through union with God. This is the divine life of the Spirit.

Theosis is the mystery of human nature's perfection, not its alteration or destruction, because theosis is the mystery of eternal life in communion with God in the divine Logos. Communion with God in the divine Logos is the very essence of a human being as "created in the image and likeness of God" (Wesche 1999:31). The Orthodox Fathers take very seriously the fellowship, *koinonia*, which exists between the believer and the persons of the Trinity. *Theosis* occurs along the line of exemplary causality – Jesus being the exemplar *par excellence*.

By way of contrast, scholastic theology of the West holds that sanctification 'is a kind of elevation of human nature to the supernatural order, a divine quickening of human nature or a created participation in God's own nature' (Hainsworth 1965:284). Orthodox theology has never adopted the idea of a "created supernature". That which the Christian seeks and that which God grants in sacramental grace, is *uncreated divine life*, not a "supernature". Contrary to the West, the Orthodox understanding is not so much *growth* in sanctifying grace (storing or saving it up to somehow merit heaven) but growth in the image of God and participation in divine life.

The goal of *theosis* is to conform the image of God in humankind to its divine prototype, revealed in Jesus Christ, as a result of which humankind becomes by grace what God is by nature, without any confusion of identity. Despite the various metaphors used to describe deification, it does not entail the absorption of humanity into God in a pantheistic sense, nor the annihilation of humanity. The ontological distinction between Creator and creature remains fully intact. Deification is a union of the human and the divine will on the basis of a union of love.

The Holy Spirit is the one who realises *theosis*. Thus, the spiritual life of a person is fundamentally a profound consenting to the inner movements of the Spirit. It is at this juncture that human free will and grace co-operate synergistically. This dynamic inner life, facilitated by the Holy Spirit (not in his essence, but as divine *energy*), is cogently expressed by Deiselle (1993:25):

In a certain manner, when [a person] enters into this divine eternal life, in the bosom of the Trinity where the Father loves the Son through the energy of the Holy Spirit, the Son also loves the Father by this same energy which re-ascends towards Him, and man is truly taken up, and introduced into this intra-divine life which is expanding in him by means of the action of the Holy Spirit.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Having examined the key elements of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and its understanding of the journey towards deifying union with God, it has become quite evident that it is profoundly mystical. Orthodox mysticism is a mysticism of the heart and as such an example of introvertive mysticism⁷². The various means to attain *theosis* clearly indicate that for those who follow the mystical path, it is a *way of life*. The dogmas of faith are never merely assented to, but *lived* in every aspect of daily life. A theologian does not merely philosophise over the great dogmas of faith, but is someone who has experienced the uncreated divine Mystery, has reflected on this experience and is able to present this to all believers. Mysticism is accordingly theology *par excellence*, *theoria*, in the true sense of the word (Johnston 2000:55).

Having completed the analysis of Eastern Orthodox mysticism, a synthesis of the various elements is now presented in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding. Humans are made in the image of God and this image finds expression in the distinct ontological presence of Christ in the soul. The indwelling Trinity is the foundation of the mystical life. The mystical journey is initiated with baptism when the aspirant mystic is incorporated by grace into the life of Christ and becomes a new creation. The ascent to God continues by way of an initial awareness of God's indwelling presence and then growth in an ever-increasing God-consciousness through participation in the divine life in the depths of the heart, participation in the worship and sacramental life of the church. To the extent that one is aware of God's indwelling presence, to that extent one is united with the triune God. This journey leads to the ultimate goal, namely, union with the Trinity. This mystical path is one of the aspects of Orthodox mysticism; the other path being asceticism.

⁷² Stacy (in Clark 1964:225) lists the common characteristics of introvertive mysticism as '1) the unitary of consciousness; 2) Timelessness and spacelessness; 3) Sense of objectivity or

Essential to this entire mystical journey is the need for inner purification, and hence, the importance of the ascetic life. As a consequence of the fall, the image of God is flawed, and humans experience inner conflict and fragmentation because the *nous* is no longer in its primordial condition. To overcome the effects of the fall, believers need to concentrate the *nous* in the heart in order that it can assume its original function – the contemplation of God within⁷³, that is, noetic prayer. This relates to the search for inner tranquillity through hesychastic mysticism because God cannot be heard amidst noise and inner turmoil. The mystical life and the ascetical life are two interpenetrating aspects of the one journey towards deifying union with the triune God. The entire mystical journey is undertaken within an ecclesial and communal context, the Orthodox Church, which offers the means to heal the inner spiritual organism and so attain *theosis*.

Through the journey to the centre of the heart, inner fragmentation is overcome by means of the redirection of passions and desires to what honours God. This inevitably involves overcoming egocentricity, which in turn results in people becoming more fully human, after Christ, *the exemplar* of the christian life. It involves ecstasy and enstasy.

Various means to attain the goal of the mystical life have been discussed. None of these spiritual endeavours, including the eucharist, is an end in itself, but all are *means to an end*. No spiritual practice should ever become such a preoccupation that it becomes the end rather than the means to the end, namely, human deification through union with the triune God.

Eastern Orthodox mysticism is therefore a mysticism of descent into the depths of the heart from where the christian lives out his or her relationship with God, self, neighbour and the entire cosmos. By finding the metaphysical heart, one finds one's true self and in that experience, one also finds God. As such, mysticism becomes a state of being and a way of life, rather than "acts" offered to God.

reality; 4) Blessedness, peace; 5) feeling of the holy, sacred or divine. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable'.

⁷³ This does *not* imply that Orthodox christians do not contemplate God's presence and goodness exterior to themselves (in others and the world around them). It is axiomatically part of a total God-directed life.

Although the mystical way is offered to all Christians, it is not necessary for salvation and not all Orthodox Christians follow this path. Christian perfection is found in love and that blessed state can be attained by keeping the commandments.

To conclude, the words of Bishop Theophan (quoted in Behr-Sigel 1992:153) are eminently appropriate, “the essential part [of Orthodox mysticism] is to dwell in God” and this walking before God means that you live with the conviction ever before your consciousness that God is in you, as he is in everything: you live in the firm assurance that he sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself. When one fervently puts into practice the advice of the Church Fathers and the teachings of the Orthodox Church, one will attain transforming union in the indwelling Trinity - one will be divinised - and *that* is the absolute unfathomable grandeur of the human vocation.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTO-TRINITARIAN MYSTICISM OF ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY COMPARED

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The premise of this study is that there is a remarkable consonance between the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Elizabeth of the Trinity. The aim is not to demonstrate whether or even that such a correspondence exists. The aim is rather to analyse, articulate and describe the correspondence between the mystical doctrine of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy that is so clearly evident. The areas of correspondence are, however, not

the only concern. In addition, those areas where Elizabeth diverges from Eastern Orthodox mysticism will also form part of the investigation, as the term “to compare” indicates. The areas of divergence are of such a nature, though, that they do not minimise the remarkable overall correspondence which is clearly discernable.

The most noticeable areas of convergence between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy are their christo-trinitarian mysticism, asceticism, silence and deification, continual prayer, liturgical spirituality and the use of icons. There is also a remarkable parallel in respect of the universal call to holiness that is taught by both Elizabeth and Orthodoxy. The prayer of the heart that is at the core of Eastern Orthodox spirituality is also the kind of prayer that nourished the mystical life of Elizabeth and enabled her to live in the presence of God irrespective of her activities. On the other hand, the doctrine of election and predestination, that does not occupy a prominent place in Eastern Orthodox theology, takes centre stage in the spirituality of Elizabeth. Elizabeth also shows a marked dissimilarity with respect to her kataphatic mysticism in contrast to the general apophatic character of Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

Of eminent importance is the fact that Elizabeth did not produce a systematic treatise of the spiritual life. What is known of her life and mysticism is limited to personal letters to friends and family and four spiritual treatises and these are all mostly occasional writings. Therefore, the spiritual treatises should not be understood as a systematic exposition of her doctrine, because they are intended for particular people as a kind of souvenir of her own mystical insights. Hence, Elizabeth’s key doctrinal elements need to be extrapolated and arranged systematically to gain a more appropriate understanding of her mysticism and its relationship to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In spite of the nature of her autographs and Elizabeth’s rudimentary education, her mysticism has a sound doctrinal basis due to the influence of eminent mystics, and the catholic and carmelite traditions which provided her with the necessary doctrinal foundation. Equally important is the fact that one cannot sever her doctrine from her life, as these are intimately intertwined, and because Elizabeth shares the insights of her own mystical experience. Even the insights and symbols she adopts from others are used because they match her experience perfectly (Moorcroft 2001:52). However, the expressions and symbols borrowed from others are filtered through her own contemplative experience of the Trinity. Once these have been internalised, prayed over and worked into her own mystical edifice, Elizabeth shares her mystical insights with others.

The remainder of this comparative study will be divided as follows: this chapter aims at comparing the christo-trinitarian mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy. The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of the mysticism of both Elizabeth and the Eastern Orthodox Church. More precisely, their mysticism can be termed christo-trinitarian, because the belief that the christian life is life in Christ, who is the way to the Father, stands at the centre of their mystical vision. The Orthodox Fathers base the doctrine of the Trinity on the economic Trinity rather than the immanent Trinity, that is, the Trinity *pro nobis*, rather than the Trinity *in se*. The trinitarian nature of the mystical theology of Eastern Orthodoxy and Elizabeth is so fundamental that this chapter will be devoted to it. In each case, an overview of the Eastern Orthodox view will be given to provide an immediate context for comparison. It is imperative that these two chapters should be understood against the background of chapter three which analyses the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church in greater detail. In the next chapter the vocation of humankind according to the mystical doctrine of Elizabeth will be compared with Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

The christo-trinitarian comparison will be done in terms of the following themes: firstly, the indwelling Trinity which focuses on the christo-trinitarian foundation of the mysticism of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy respectively; secondly, apophatic versus kataphatic mysticism; thirdly eschatology; fourthly the sacrament of the present moment; and fifthly predestination and election.

4.2 THE INDWELLING TRINITY

4.2.1 Christo-trinitarian foundation

For Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy alike, the mystery of the Trinity is the greatest of the christian mysteries, not only in terms of the dogma of God, but also in terms of human sanctification and deification. Both Elizabeth and Orthodoxy go straight to the heart of christianity, namely, the Trinity, and more precisely, the indwelling Trinity. Lossky provides an Orthodox perspective (1976:65-66) when he states that:

the Trinity is, for the Orthodox Church, the unshakeable foundation of all religious thought, of all piety, of all spiritual life, of all experience. It is the Trinity that we seek in seeking after God, when we search for the fullness of being, for the end and meaning of existence. Primordial revelation, itself the source of all revelation as of all being, the Holy Trinity presents

itself to our religious consciousness as a fact the evidence for which can be grounded on upon itself....If we reject the Trinity as the sole ground of all reality and of all thought, we are committed to a road that leads nowhere; we end in an aporia, in folly, in the disintegration of our being, in spiritual death.

The Orthodox Fathers turn to salvation history for their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. God is the one who saves humanity in Christ through the Spirit. Hence, the Trinity appears from the outset, as it does in the New Testament⁷⁴ (Dupré 1984:11). Orthodox trinitarian theology has always displayed a liturgical and mystical character and 'in both the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* of Byzantine christianity, the Trinity remained a primary and concrete experience' (Meyendorff 1983:180). Hence, it is the economic Trinity, God in his creative, soteriological and sanctifying energies active in the lives of his people that are the starting point of all theology and spirituality.

In Eastern Orthodoxy and Elizabeth alike, the Trinity is not an abstruse theological concept. Rather, the Trinity is the *indwelling* Trinity who is encountered in the human heart. Elizabeth does not theologise about the inner life of the Trinity, but concentrates on God in his saving and sanctifying actions in her life. Like Eastern Orthodoxy, Elizabeth understands the term "God" to refer to the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Her trinitarian mysticism is also decidedly Christocentric. There is only one way to salvation, that is, through Christ, because God's plan is to restore all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). To attain perfection one must be rooted in Christ, built up in him, strengthened in faith and constantly grow in thanksgiving, praise and adoration of the blessed Trinity (De Meester 1984:156-158). It is Christ who draws people into a continuous contemplative gaze of the heavenly Father. Yet, Elizabeth is fully aware of the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in her sanctification and deification. With her vocation already encapsulated in her name, her entire vocation and mysticism centring on the Trinity, it can hardly be otherwise. Elizabeth fully realises that she is 'a daughter of God, a spouse of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit' (De Meester 1984:153). But as a carmelite, Elizabeth is the bride of Christ, first and foremost. Elizabeth regards the work of deification as the work of Christ, but on the other hand, as the work of the Holy Spirit as well. Elizabeth is in perfect accord with the Orthodox patristic tradition with respect to her christo-trinitarian mysticism and the fact that it is

⁷⁴ For example, the Trinity is revealed in the Old Testament through the three angels who visited Abraham (Gen 18:1-15) and in the New Testament at the baptism (Mt 3:13-17) and the transfiguration of Jesus (Mk 9:28). The doctrine is of course revealed implicitly in the New Testament and only found formulation during the fourth and fifth centuries.

the foundation of her entire mystical life and doctrine. Elizabeth rightfully drew attention to the Trinity as the central dogma of the Christian life and this is especially significant in the West where a certain eclipse of the Trinity has been prevalent.

A further aspect of Elizabeth's Christo-Trinitarian mysticism is her understanding of conformation to Christ, but Christ crucified. Elizabeth does not have in mind merely the normal suffering that the soul endures in the mystical life, namely, the suffering that is part of the daily mystical death of the self in order that God may become the ultimate organising principle of life. Elizabeth has in mind a far more radical sharing in the mystery of the cross. 'The soul that wants to serve God...must be resolved to share *fully* in its Master's passion' (De Meester 1984:146). In Elizabeth's own life this sharing *fully* in the Master's passion is accomplished in her own suffering and death. This is for Elizabeth the ultimate proof of love. This is one aspect of Elizabeth's mysticism that is unpalatable in today's world, but is in harmony with the teaching about suffering in her day. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The basis and foundation of all mystical experience, according to the Orthodox view, is the doctrine of the divine energies which is God's way of 'existing in relationship to His created world' (Maloney (1978:60). God is unknowable in his essence and yet, humans can participate in divine life (2 Pt 1:4). Palamas (quoted in Maloney 1978:70-71) describes how human participation in divine life is possible as follows:

Since man can participate in God and since the super-essential essence of God is absolutely unparticipable, there is a certain something between the unparticipable essence and the participants, which permits them to participate in God. And if you suppress that which is between the unparticipable God and the participants...oh, what a void! – you separate us from God by destroying the bond and establishing a great uncrossable abyss between God on the one hand and creation and the governing of creatures on the other....He will thus be present for all with His manifestations and His creative and providential energies....It is by participating in the divine nature of the triune God through the divine energies that humans receive being, life and deification (Maloney 1978:71).

The indwelling Trinity and the incarnation is the foundation of Elizabeth's mysticism. The incarnation bridges the chasm between the transcendence of God and God *pro nobis*. Without the incarnation, God's descent to humanity, any communication or personal relationship with God would have been impossible because humans can never reach God through their own

efforts. Furthermore, it is 'through the incarnate Word that the life of the Trinity given her at baptism can develop' (Borriello 1986:40). Life in the Trinity is essentially life in Christ. The incarnation is also considered the foundation of the mystical life, because human deification is based on the incarnation and hypostatic union of the human and divine natures in Christ. Deification 'becomes impossible if one separates the two natures of Christ' (Lossky 1976:154). The reason is that 'what is not assumed cannot be deified' (ibid. 1976:155).

All Orthodox theology and spirituality are based on and oriented towards the Trinity who dwells in the soul of all believers through sanctifying grace. It is the underlying truth and foundation of the whole of the spiritual life. This statement is equally true of Elizabeth. The centrality of the trinitarian indwelling in the mysticism of both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy can hardly be overstated. The Trinity is the foundation of the mysticism of both Elizabeth and the Eastern Orthodox tradition to such an extent that everything that can be said about their mystical doctrine can be subsumed under this doctrine.

4.2.2 Life in Christ, life in the Trinity

The very substance of Orthodox mysticism is 'living in Christ' (Yannoulatos 1963:300) and union with the triune God in Christ. 'Abide in me as I abide in you' (Jn 15:4). 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20). This means that Orthodox Christians think the Trinity, speak the Trinity, breathe the Trinity. In short, they live the Trinity.

Elizabeth interprets 'abide in me as I abide in you' (Jn 15:4) as follows: 'Remain in Me, not for a few moments, a few hours which must pass away, but *remain*...permanently, habitually, Remain in Me, pray in Me, adore in Me, love in Me, suffer in Me, work and act in Me' (De Meester 1984:94-95). Elizabeth is essentially describing life in Christ, every action flowing from the intimate divine life of the Trinity in which the soul participates. Elizabeth insists that God's presence is constant, because he abides not just for a few hours, but permanently, habitually (De Meester 1984:95). Likewise, the believer must strive to be in God's presence habitually and constantly through a naked intention directed towards him – a habitual awareness of the presence of the Trinity. 'It is the whole Trinity who dwells in the soul that loves them in truth, that is, by keeping their word!' (De Meester 1984:154). Elizabeth often quotes John 14:23 in support of her belief in the divine inhabitation, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home *in him*' (De Meester 1984:96).

Elizabeth echoes Eastern Orthodoxy when she says that, 'we live Him, breathe Him' (De Meester 1995:17). The trinitarian dogma was not only something Elizabeth consented to and then continued to live her christian life as if this dogma was of little consequence. No, Elizabeth lived it with all her strength, finding God in everything, whether she contemplated the panoramas of nature or whether she was doing the laundry in Carmel. At work, at prayer and at play, everything was a sacrament of the presence of the Trinity. Hence, for Elizabeth, the divine indwelling is not 'a static reality but an exceedingly dynamic one' (Borriello 1986:95) that gives her a radically different worldview which views the whole of life from God's perspective. This is a mystical worldview.

According to Eastern Orthodoxy, the trinitarian dogma encompasses a twofold intention: that God indwells humans as he indwells Jesus and that humans indwell one another (Wilson 1988:476). The doctrine of divine indwelling expresses the idea that one lives in the other, becoming what the other is. Elizabeth also has these "two presences" in mind when she speaks of 'God in me and I in Him' (Von Balthasar 1992:494). Concerning God's indwelling in her soul, Elizabeth writes, 'I confide to you what has made my life an anticipated Heaven: believing that a Being called Love dwells in us at every moment of the day and night and that He asks us to live in communion with Him' (De Meester 1995:354). With regards to christians indwelling one another, Elizabeth repeatedly writes to her correspondents about her keeping them all in her heart. In the Spirit there is no separation, but a fusion of souls, a communion of saints that makes believers more present to one another than any physical presence could ever establish. To her Prioress Elizabeth writes shortly before her death, 'If you will allow her, your little host [that is, Elizabeth] will spend her Heaven in the depths of your soul: she will keep you in communion with Love, believing in Love; it will be the sign of her dwelling in you....I will come to live in you' (De Meester 1984:180). This clearly illustrates just how keenly, even radically, Elizabeth lived this doctrine of mutual indwelling. Genuinely living the trinitarian doctrine in this twofold manner, brings about a transformation of one's entire life 'that is nothing less than revolutionary' (Ware 1996a:38). It is one of the remarkable aspects of Elizabeth's mystical doctrine, that such a young girl understood and lived this twofold indwelling (De Meester 1995:52). The life of Elizabeth is a prime example of one who genuinely *lived* the dogma of the indwelling Trinity and not only did it revolutionise her life, it is still revolutionising the lives of people a century later as they become inspired by the life and teaching of this young mystic.

Both Elizabeth and the Orthodox Church express their life in the Trinity through personal relationships with each of the three divine persons. But does a relationship to each of the three divine persons not imply tritheism? Does such a mystical approach not replace monotheism with tritheism or modalism⁷⁵? Two observations can be made. Firstly, without entering into the whole debate about the problematic of mystical language, suffice it to say that the term “person” in reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit does not denote the same as with reference to human beings, but is used analogically (Kiesling 1986:600). There are similarities in meaning, but ultimately God transcends the meaning of any word or analogy that human language can provide, because God is a metaphysical Spirit. Secondly, it is appropriate to relate to each of the three divine persons because, from its inception, the church has always used such a pattern of prayer: to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. More importantly, the three persons exist as a community of persons indwelling one another. This mutual divine indwelling is referred to as *perichoresis* or circumincession and means ‘mutual interpenetration’ (Hebblethwaite 1977:255). Consequently, one cannot relate to one person without relating to the other two as well. Called to participate in the circumincessional life of the Trinity, humans are enabled to relate to each person of the Trinity. Kiesling (1986:605) succinctly states that if the spiritual life is lived as expressed here, ‘in tandem with the doctrine of one God, the risk of tritheism seems minor. It is no greater than the risks of becoming a modalist, or falling into an unchristian monotheism, or reducing God to an abstraction, or suggesting that God is an isolated, self-absorbed God forced to create for companionship, if one insists on envisioning the spiritual life as nurturing one relationship with a mysterious God’. This observation by Kiesling makes good sense.

Although Eastern Orthodox mysticism leans towards apophaticism, and hence an emphasis on the transcendence of God, it does not exclude personal relationships with the divine persons indwelling the soul. For example, Symeon the New Theologian does not consider the vision of Taboric light, the analogy used to describe the mystic’s vision of Christ, in impersonal, abstract terms. ‘It is essentially a personal encounter with Christ in light’ (Hussey 1972:135). Elizabeth also has a personal relationship with each of the three persons.

⁷⁵ Modalism has been rejected by the Church. It teaches that the three divine persons are three different manifestations, modes of operation, of God in the world.

Life in Christ manifests paradise within the soul (Serfes 2002)⁷⁶. Serfes continues by saying that 'paradise is manifest as a great spiritual joy, and a firm belief in the promise that, as christians, our Lord will indeed take care of us, He will save us, have mercy on us and keep us by His grace' (2002). However, this requires complete abandonment to God and obedience to his will. Elizabeth's life in Christ, and in the Trinity, is for her an anticipated heaven that filled her with true joy and peace because she endeavoured always to do the will of the Father. 'It seems to me that I have found my Heaven on earth, since Heaven is God, and God is [in] my soul. The day I understood that, everything became clear to me' (De Meester 1995:51). The indwelling of the Trinity in Elizabeth's soul, meant for her that eternal life had already begun, and as Kourie (1990:161) correctly observes, Elizabeth is an exponent of realised eschatology. The eschatological aspect of the mystical life will be discussed below.

Life in the Trinity 'imposes a specific kind of practical posture in regard to the world and one's "neighbour"' (Kristo 1982:35). Hence, mysticism has ethical and moral implications which are expressed in loving service in the active life. The first christians experienced their life in Christ firstly, in the eucharistic celebration and secondly, in loving service to each other (Maloney 1984:45). It is to be noted and underlined that this is a christian principle that has not yet become redundant and cannot summarily be dispensed with. Loving service is characteristic of Orthodox christianity. It is also characteristic of the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth is keenly aware of the apostolate and writes that carmelites must be 'wholly apostolic' (De Meester 1995:128). In terms of Elizabeth's understanding of the universal call to holiness, it follows that *all* believers must be apostolic since *all* believers can live the spirit of Carmel in the world. Like the early christians and Eastern Orthodoxy, Elizabeth is keenly aware of Christ's presence in the eucharist and the divine life it imparts to the soul. Elizabeth desires all people to know about the transitory nature of happiness found in the world, in contrast to eternal happiness found in living in and with the triune God.

Elizabeth's mystical doctrine corresponds closely with Eastern Orthodoxy when compared with Ciobotea's (1985:9) understanding of Orthodox spirituality which is described as follows:

The term Orthodox spirituality translates here the way in which the Orthodox Church lives, understands and expresses its faith in Christ or its

⁷⁶ Serfes (2002) is an article on the World Wide Web which does not provide any pagination. See bibliography for details.

relations to Christ in the Holy Spirit. From this it follows that the spirituality of the Orthodox Church is the life of the church in all its totality. Its spirituality, then, is not an isolated compartment in the life of the church but the ethos and the breath which penetrates all aspects of the life of the church: its immediate relationship with God, its thought, its structure, its view of the human person and all creation, as well as its attitude and action towards the world in which the church witnesses to Christ.

The mystical vision of Symeon the New Theologian succinctly sums up the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox tradition as well as the mysticism of Elizabeth. For Symeon, the whole christian life is 'a mystical, ever increasing consciousness of the abiding presence of the Trinity, not only within the mystic, but through every atom of the created universe' (in Maloney 1983:41). Christian spirituality is about life in the Trinity in and through Christ. Elizabeth corresponds perfectly with the Eastern Orthodox mystical vision by living her life in the Trinity to such an extent that Elizabeth says: 'God in me. I in Him. That is my life' (quoted in Dorgan 1985:67).

4.2.3 Mysticism as *koinonia*

It must be emphasised that in Eastern Orthodoxy the Trinity is always understood in terms of fellowship. Fellowship, or *koinonia*, is a key word in Eastern Orthodox mystical theology. Eastern Orthodoxy is not individualistic, but is primarily a communal experience especially in the context of the divine liturgy. Eastern Orthodoxy does not know the individualism of the West because personhood is defined in relation to other people. This means that "individual" is not coterminous with "person". "Person" and "personhood" can only be defined in relation to others. Separated from and unrelated to other people, one is an "individual" centred and focused only on oneself. In Eastern Orthodoxy 'a *person* [is someone] whose life is hidden in God through Christ in a community of the whole fellowship of the Church' (Ashanin 1990:30). The Trinity is understood, in the words of Zizoulas (quoted in Wilks 1995:63), as "Being as Communion", that is, as being-in-relation'. God can only *be* what God is as *communion*. Fundamentally, what this amounts to is that 'the nature of God's being is communion, and therefore, the nature of our being is communion' (Wilks 1995:64). The Trinity is the model for all authentic "being" and interpersonal relationships. It is for this reason that individualism is alien to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Watkin (1956:170) maintains that Elizabeth, who was heavily influenced by the individualism of contemporary western society and religion, does not think of the church as the mystical body of Christ in a corporate sense. Her focus is on the *individual's* identification with Christ brought about by their individual union with Christ. To rephrase Watkin's interpretation in terms of the Orthodox distinction between "person" and "individual", it is as *individuals*, not persons, that believers are united with Christ and it is as *individuals* that they are in communion with one another. Now, as I understand it, people often start their journey towards union with Christ with an individualistic mindset, but the mystical journey transforms people from being "individuals" to being "persons" as a result of a new self-understanding with respect to their relationship with the Trinity, as well as other people. Therefore, mystics are people who have been transformed from being mere individuals in the body of Christ to being persons; they have established their personhood in Christ and in fellowship with other believers. The communion of saints is therefore a communion of "persons", not a communion of "individuals". The point is that when "individual" believers mutually indwell one another (on the basis of their indwelling in the Trinity), they become "persons", because they now stand in relation to one another, and it is precisely this relationship⁷⁷ that defines humanity's personhood. The implication of this distinction is that "individuals" cannot mutually indwell one another, only "persons" can. Nevertheless, even if Watkin's argument carries weight, Elizabeth's message of mutual indwelling is still a very strong message to our individualistic Western culture. Mutual indwelling encompasses the idea of society and fellowship: fellowship with the three divine persons and fellowship among believers. In this regard, too, Elizabeth corresponds with the Eastern Orthodox Church with its emphasis on community and fellowship.

In her own life, Elizabeth expresses *koinonia*, so dear to Orthodoxy, in the context of community life in Carmel, as well as through intimate relationships with various people. Elizabeth demonstrates a keen appreciation of the role of each of the three divine persons in her prayer life. In this way Elizabeth follows the tradition of the early Church Fathers and the Eastern Orthodox Church by making fellowship with the triune God the basis of the soul's ascent to God. Hainsworth (1965:284) states that the Eastern Church has always interpreted biblical texts speaking about the fellowship among Christians and the persons of the Trinity very literally – and so has Elizabeth. Elizabeth was never so absorbed in the supernatural that she

⁷⁷ Since God is the Father of Jesus Christ and believers are incorporated into Christ and through the Spirit become one in Christ, believers are children of the Father and brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:6).

was emotionally and spiritually separated⁷⁸ from other people. Most of her writings are addressed to people with very real needs, problems or celebrations which demonstrate her concern and love for others. Elizabeth's integration of personal attention to her divine guests and interest in the lives of others, is eloquently described by Valabek (1985:16) as follows:

The symbiosis which Elizabeth spontaneously effected in her life, of a recollected attention to the three Persons of the Bl. Trinity dwelling within her, together with a faithful and detailed interest in all those she loved, is one of her sterling contributions to Christian spirituality. What an impression it makes to read in the same letter, often within the same lines this contemplative nun urging on to an ardent response to "heaven within us" as well as a request to be informed of even the details of the life her loved ones continued to live in the world.

Elizabeth's involvement in the heavenly world and the world of her loved ones on earth is very evident in her correspondence. 'What is a cross for many religious persons – the reconciliation of love of God and love of neighbour – was a strong-point of Elizabeth's spirituality' (Valabek 1985:17-18). Living her life in the sacred sphere of the three divine persons, Elizabeth was able to find again in Christ, all those she left behind. Since her heart and her love expanded in Carmel, Elizabeth was able to make each of her correspondents feel the most cherished of them all. Thus, Elizabeth comes to light as a truly *human* mystic and corrects the perception that mystics are otherworldly people with little time except for God.

A further aspect of the communal nature of the Trinity concerns the communion of saints which will be considered in the next chapter.

Life in Christ is never individualistic but the Spirit of Christ unites all believers so that there should be genuine fellowship among believers. In both Eastern Orthodox mysticism and Elizabeth fellowship among believers is an integral aspect of living the christian life.

4.2.4 Light mysticism

In Eastern christianity, the symbols of fire and light are 'archetypal symbols of illumination and transformation' (Maloney 1983:40). Palamas articulated the experience of God's presence in

⁷⁸ As a carmelite nun she was physically separated from others, and during parlour visits, she spoke to her visitors through a grille which was only opened for family and close relatives.

terms of Taboric light. This is a 'transforming light within the contemplative' (Maloney 1983:41).

Palamas writes:

Since the Son of God...also united himself...with each of the faithful by communion with his Holy Body, and since he becomes one single body with us...and makes us a temple of the undivided Divinity...how should he not illuminate those who commune worthily with the divine ray of his Body which is within us, lightening their souls, as he illuminated the very bodies of the disciples on Mount Tabor? For, on the day of the Transfiguration, that body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside...those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but now, since it is mingled with us...and exists in us it illuminates the soul from within...(quoted in Meyendorff 1974a:151).

Hence, the basis of seeing the Taboric light is the indwelling of Christ in the human soul and the sacramental life of the Church in which the contemplative participates. The life of Christ in the soul is therefore the foundation of hesychasm and the mystical life; this is also true in the case of Elizabeth.

According to Palamas (in Meyendorff 1974a:174), humans have a supernatural faculty to see God. In the contemplative, this faculty becomes light itself, grows in light as it contemplates the source of light (God). This establishes union with God and thus the saints are transformed by the Holy Spirit. According to Maximus (Meyendorff 1974a:175), this divine light is 'a gift of deification...a grace of the Holy Spirit, a grace by which God alone shines through the intermediary of the soul and body of those who are truly worthy of this'. Hence, this mysterious light is a gift of the Holy Spirit that offers existential knowledge of God (Hierotheos 1995:351). Elizabeth's mysticism is also a mysticism of light, as light imagery (fire, light, brightness radiance, star, sun) is found throughout her writings. The Trinity is the God of light (De Meester 1995:212) and he invites believers to live in light (ibid. 1995:136). Christ is a luminous star who illumines the soul with divine light (De Meester 1995:142, 139). So Elizabeth prays that the light of the Father, the Word and the Spirit may descend in her soul (ibid. 1995:233). Here, there is a link with Eastern Orthodoxy which also finds God's light in the soul through the spiritual eye which contemplates God and is transformed into light. The vision of God is one of light. Elizabeth says that the more light there is, the more she feels her powerlessness (ibid. 1995: 233). For Elizabeth, God is also a consuming fire and fire is love (De Meester 1995:233). The image of fire is especially linked to the Holy Spirit. 'Our God, wrote St. Paul, is a consuming Fire, that is "a fire of love" which destroys, which "transforms into itself everything

that it touches” (De Meester 1984:98). Renewed by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth becomes a spiritual being; she becomes a deified being. Here is the definitive link with Eastern Orthodoxy, transformed into light within, Elizabeth is granted the grace of deification. Thus deified, the soul is a crystal that radiates the light of Christ. Elizabeth writes (De Meester 1984:144), ‘such is the Creator’s dream: to be able to contemplate Himself in His creature and see reflected there all His perfections, all His beauty as through a pure and flawless crystal.’

Therefore, Elizabeth does not seek God in “inaccessible light”, but light that is accessible, uncovered and proffered through the revelation of the Son of God’ (Von Balthasar 1992:432). In Eastern Orthodoxy this light is accessible through the divine energies and is described in terms of the transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

The view that Elizabeth’s mysticism is primarily one of light, does not deny an element of darkness as well. Elizabeth experienced darkness in her own life, for example, before her religious profession (De Meester 1995:84). Yet Elizabeth seldom writes about it. Her writings are filled with light and joy, not only in good times but especially during her suffering. Without forfeiting the value of darkness and suffering in the mystical life, Elizabeth is more a solar mystic, emphasising light, than a nocturnal mystic, concentrating on darkness. In this respect Elizabeth corresponds with the essentially light mysticism⁷⁹ of Eastern Orthodoxy.

4.2.5 Experiential knowledge of God

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, true knowledge of God is attained in a lived experience of God. In other words, God is known existentially when humans commit themselves to him in a personal relationship. Within such a relationship, contemplative prayer, reading of scripture and rational reflection and interpretation allows the person to enter into communion with God so that God can reveal knowledge about himself and his work of salvation and sanctification of the world. One can only *know* God by participating in his life; faith in God is not enough to claim to know God. This means that knowledge is attained through the contemplative mind (*nous*) and not the rational mind (*dianoia*). In the West, the tendency is to speak about infused knowledge in order to differentiate between rational knowledge and that attained through

⁷⁹ This is not to deny that Eastern Orthodoxy also has its nocturnal strands. For example, Gregory of Nyssa finds God in utter darkness. This darkness, however, is due to the intensity of God’s light which blinds the eye of the soul (Malherbe & Ferguson 1978).

contemplation. Orthodoxy never allowed rationalism to dominate in the East as it has in the West, where its highpoint was found in scholasticism. In the West, a paradigm shift is taking place in which human experience is considered to be the appropriate starting point in theology.

Contemplation of scripture plays a major role in attaining knowledge of God, because 'together, scripture and prayer enable us...to sound the depths of the mystery of divine life....Every authentic doctrine, in fact, is grounded in a *living experience* of God; and it is this experience alone that enables us to acquire *knowledge* of God' (Breck 1999:5). In complete accord with Eastern Orthodoxy, Elizabeth knows the three in their saving and loving presence in her life. Elizabeth knows God through her experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in her soul. For this reason, Elizabeth places such great emphasis on silence as a prerequisite *to listen* to God in order to know God and his plan for her life.

For Evagrius, the contemplation of the Trinity is the summit of the knowledge of God (Eliane 1985:321). According to Silouan (in Breck 1999:3), there are two avenues that lead to knowledge of God: theology (*theoria*) and asceticism. Both of them are grounded in a personal and intimate experience of God. This is why the church needs to turn to the mystics for knowledge about the Trinity, because only those who have been purified and are united with God can receive infused knowledge directly from God. However, in order to attain true knowledge of God the human spirit must be transfigured by the Holy Spirit (Meyendorff 1982:183), hence the necessity of the ascetical and mystical life.

Elizabeth's contemplative gaze was habitually turned to her three in the depths of her soul. The scriptural nature of her mysticism and her acute grasp of the great christian doctrines are due to her intense love of scripture and to her having made it part of her daily spiritual exercises. In *Lectio Divina*, Elizabeth gained true knowledge concerning God's great plan for her life's vocation and his creation. Elizabeth's insights and doctrine are authentic because they are based on her own experience of God. The insights and themes Elizabeth adopts from other authors enlighten her mystical experience and are used precisely because they coincide exactly with her own experience. Once Elizabeth filtered these insights through her own contemplative experience and infused knowledge of God, only then does she teach them to others.

It is asserted that it is possible to gain *true knowledge* of God. What kind of experience yields true knowledge of God? Did Elizabeth's mystical life yield the kind of experience that attains *true knowledge*? Because Elizabeth was so influenced by John of the Cross, it is perhaps best to turn to him for light on this subject. Firstly, to attain true knowledge of God, the soul must have been transformed spiritually and must have acquired a state of habitual union with God. Such transformation culminates in the soul's likeness to God which renders the soul capable of "seeing" God and receiving infused knowledge of God. In this spiritual state, the 'touches' of God communicate him 'directly and reliably' and these are 'purely spiritual...apprehensions' (Howells 2002:10). Without inner purification and transformation (healing of the *nous*) the soul receives information via the physical senses and rational reflection and these contain elements of human error. This distinction of John of the Cross corresponds to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of knowledge acquired through the rational mind and knowledge acquired through the *nous*. The first is ordinary, rational knowledge and the latter is infused, mystical knowledge.

Secondly, the meaning of the word *sentir* (feeling), as used by John of the Cross, is often translated as "experience". The term "experience" has connotations of emotional feelings and does not convey John's original meaning of the word *sentir*, namely, experience 'not [in] the emotional sense but the epistemological value of the apprehension for *knowledge* of God. As it is a *spiritual* feeling, it is also to be contrasted with physical sensation' (Howells 2002:11). Experience in this sense refers to 'a developing spiritual *habitus* in the soul – the result of specific events like the "touch of union" and other spiritual apprehensions, referring to the *effect* on the soul of such events, rather than the events themselves, as they change the soul inwardly' (Howells 2002:12). Therefore, "experience" does not refer to "mystical experiences" as generally understood, nor to a single spiritual apprehension, but '*the way of knowing*' (ibid. 2002:12) by a person in a state of more or less habitual union with God. Knowledge attained through spiritual apprehension, is mystical knowledge which is "secret" knowledge, given within the darkness of faith, beyond ordinary knowledge – a knowledge given in grace, "infused", and part of the gift of love: it is "knowledge through love" (Howells 2002:14). In other words, knowledge attained through sense perception before habitual union with God, is rejected by John as a valid avenue of divine knowledge. John rejects knowledge gained through sense perception, because it contains human error. On the other hand, the soul is capable of attaining true knowledge of God through the spiritual way of knowing that occurs in the mystical state of habitual union with God. That is why John of the Cross, and all other

mystics, lay the greatest possible emphasis on inner purification and integration of the human soul.

The soul of Elizabeth was purified and transformed into likeness with God which created the inner dispositions necessary for God to bestow on her his gift of habitual union with him. In this intimate relationship with God, Elizabeth *listened* and received true knowledge of God as is testified by the profundity and authenticity of her mystical theology. Elizabeth's mystical doctrine is not merely a summation of everything she has gleaned from authentic sources, such as John of the Cross. Rather, as already mentioned, Elizabeth selected, trimmed and arranged those images and teachings that corresponded with her own experience, internalised them and filtered them through her own experience *before* committing them to paper for the benefit of her correspondents. In order to understand her mysticism, reference to her own spiritual life is of the essence, because Elizabeth's mysticism is not a "theoretical mysticism" but a genuinely lived mysticism. In addition, Elizabeth did not have theological and philosophical training that would have enabled her to arrive at such knowledge of God through the use of her reasoning abilities.

The conclusion is that Elizabeth must have attained a level of spiritual transformation and integration, resulting in a state of habitual union with God, sufficient for her to receive divine communications directly and reliably.

What is this knowledge that mystics claim to gain through their mystical experiences? What does mystical knowledge consist of? Mystical knowledge consists of knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Firstly, knowledge of God attained in the mystical life does not objectify God for the mystic. God does not become an object that is seen, and even worse, analysed. Armitage (2000:11) considers true knowledge as the progress towards ever-increasing likeness to God. For Dupré (1984:15), knowledge of God consists of a conscious participation in the divine life within a loving relationship with the Logos. Knowledge gained in mystical experience 'is not the knowledge which is congenial to the ordinary progress of human knowing; it is a knowledge which one has when one *loves*' (Kristo 1982:34). Mystical knowledge consists of the 'certainty that one is in God's presence and that God is close to one. It is the certainty above all which assures one that the propositions of faith are precisely what the heart's desire has been all along, and that this is the ultimate meaning of human life qua human' (Kristo 1982:32). This quotation from Kristo, that actually refers to John of the Cross' view regarding

mystical knowledge, is eminently appropriate in the case of Elizabeth and Orthodox mysticism. The knowledge of God that Elizabeth attained is the knowledge that God is a Being 'who is all love' (De Meester 1995:133. 140), who loves humans exceedingly and wants them to live in union with him. Elizabeth is blessed with the certainty that her three never leave her but have made their dwelling in her soul where she wants to spend eternity which has already begun on earth. Elizabeth has a certainty of God's abiding presence in her life, of her conscious participation in the loving intra-trinitarian life of the three divine persons, and therefore, of union with God. This is what knowledge of God consists of. Consciously living in the presence of the triune God encapsulates everything that can be said about the mystical vision of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Elizabeth, therefore, acquires some positive or kataphatic knowledge of God in her experience of the redeeming, sanctifying and deifying work of God in her life. On the other hand, Elizabeth's mysticism also has an apophatic quality as can be gleaned from images such as abyss, infinity or limitlessness, darkness. These expressions convey the notion of the indescribability of God who transcends any conceptual framework. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's mysticism is more kataphatic than apophatic. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Secondly, mystical knowledge consists of self-knowledge. This does not only refer to awareness and acknowledgement of one's particular gifts and shortcomings. On a more fundamental level, it refers to knowledge of humanity's divine origin and divine destiny and the means to arrive at that destiny. Elizabeth was fully aware of her gifts, namely, her charism of interior recollection and her mission that followed from this charism which she understood as interceding for souls who wanted to be united with the indwelling Trinity. Elizabeth had a very clear vision of her mission. When someone asked Elizabeth to pray for a sign, she refused and said that that was not part of her mission (De Meester 1995:297). However, Elizabeth also had a clear understanding, and therefore knowledge, of her origin in God and that her destiny lay in union with God, a union which she enjoyed already on earth.

The close connection between knowledge of God and self-knowledge is a central doctrine in christian mysticism. This doctrine is summarised, perhaps best of all, by Clement of Alexandria (quoted in Ware 1996a:55), 'The greatest of all lessons...is to know oneself; for if someone knows himself, he will know God; and if he knows God, he will become like God'. Both Eastern and Orthodox christians will attest to the validity of this statement. Elizabeth of the

Trinity highlights the fact that all sincere seekers of the triune God can acquire mystical knowledge of God and knowledge of self.

Having been spiritually purified and integrated, Elizabeth was capable of receiving knowledge of God directly from God in her spirit. This can also be expressed as follows: God infused spiritual knowledge directly in her spirit. This is accompanied by self-knowledge. Elizabeth demonstrates strong links with the Eastern Orthodox tradition concerning the acquisition of knowledge of God through spiritual experience, rather than rational reflection and sense perception.

4.2.6 Doxology

The prelapsarian vocation of humanity was to be eucharistic beings, offering creation to God in thanksgiving. The fall changed all this and humans began to act in exploitive ways rather than offering thanks and praise to God. Praising and thanking God for his goodness, that is, doxology, is therefore, an inherent aspect of human nature.

Verghese (1969:31) elaborates on the place of the praise of God's glory in Eastern Orthodox mysticism that echoes that of Elizabeth perfectly, 'our present function as well as our future existence is to be seen as the praise of His glorious grace, or the visible manifestation of the tremendous and adorable love of God in the life of the Christian community in the world'. This quotation demonstrates that, for the Eastern Orthodox Church, the praise of God's glory is *the* ultimate vocation of christians. That is why the celebration of the eucharist in the divine liturgy is so central to the spiritual lives of Orthodox christians, much in the same way as the Mass is the central act of worship for catholics. Doxology is interwoven throughout the divine liturgy which also begins with a blessing, 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages' (Labadarios 1990:1). Doxology is also expressed in the *trisagion* hymn, 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us' (Labadarios 1990:8).

Elizabeth's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and the christian life lived in the Trinity, has a distinct doxological character. This is an instance of the sheer authenticity of her mysticism, because 'a coherent trinitarian theology of God is possible only from within a doxological perspective' (LaCugna & McDonnell 1988:191). In addition, holiness is not the

ultimate goal of the christian life for the ultimate goal of all holiness attained by human beings is the glory of the Trinity. 'This is the summit and the highest definition of the spiritual life' (Philipon 1947:82).

As Elizabeth's vocation unfolded, she came to perceive a further dimension of her vocation. This vocation of intense interior recollection in the Trinity eventually crystallised to reveal her ultimate vocation of being a praise of the glory of God. Yet, even before Elizabeth's awareness of her extended vocation and her new name derived from it, *Laudem Gloriam*, Elizabeth had already been fulfilling this vocation by always being wholly adoring and wholly attentive to her divine guests in the centre of her soul.

Praising and thanking God are never far from her mind, because rooted in Christ, strengthened in faith, one will live in thanksgiving (De Meester 1984:128). In fact, referring to Ephesians 1:12, Elizabeth says that humans have been created to be *the praise of his glory*. What is a praise of glory exactly? It is a soul who is established in pure love, who does not live its own life, but the life of the Trinity. Elizabeth (De Meester 1984:111) describes a praise of glory as follows: 'the soul surrendered to love, through the strength of the Holy Spirit, is not far from being raised to the degree of which we have just spoken, even here below! This is what I call a perfect praise of glory!'

According to Elizabeth (De Meester 1984:112), a praise of glory is 'a soul that lives in God, that loves Him with a pure and disinterested love, without seeking itself in the sweetness of this love...a soul of silence...a soul that gazes on God in faith and simplicity; it is a reflector of all that He is...one who is always giving thanks'. A praise of glory is always listening, always thanking, always adoring and always praising. Elizabeth also connects the praise of God's glory with doing the will of God, since it is God's will that orders everything for his greater glory (ibid. 1984:112). To be a praise of glory, as Elizabeth understands her mission, involves absolute detachment in order to be free to respond to the Spirit. It requires absolute silence, and a desire to know nothing, so that the interior faculties may be completely unified and directed to the one task of giving praise and glory to God. Thus prepared, the soul possesses everything in God and God himself. These virtues are very evident in the life of Elizabeth.

The praise of God's glory is unambiguously the ultimate vocation of all souls. In heaven, each soul is a praise of glory, and unceasingly offers the hymn of praise to God:

Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.
You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed
and were created (Rev 4:8, 11).

However, since believers have heaven within their souls (because of the divine indwelling), the praise of God's glory can now already be sung by living in God, gazing on God in faith and simplicity (De Meester 1984:112). How can the unceasing song of praise of the blessed in heaven be imitated on earth? Elizabeth finds the answer in Ephesians 3:16-17, where Paul prays that his readers be 'rooted and grounded in love'. Then 'everything within it pays homage to the thrice-holy God: it is so to speak a perpetual Sanctus, an unceasing praise of glory!' (De Meester 1984:150).

LaCugna & McDonnell (1988:193) correctly assert that praise is offered to God for what he has done for humankind. This is exactly Elizabeth's intention. She praises and thanks God ceaselessly for what he has done for her, namely, God has called Elizabeth by name, has elected and predestined her from all eternity, has justified and glorified her so that she can be a praise of his glory. Elizabeth thanks God for giving her the "better part", her contemplative life in Carmel, which for Elizabeth, is heaven on earth. Furthermore, Elizabeth thanks and praises God because of his exceeding love for her (De Meester 1995:280) and allowing her to be conformed to Christ crucified through her own physical suffering.

In this regard, Elizabeth corresponds with the Eastern Orthodox view when it says that the fall is a fall from eucharist, thanksgiving and praise (Schmemmann⁸⁰ 1973:15). Redemption is, therefore, the restoration of praise and thanksgiving, and hence, communion with God. LaCugna and McDonnell (1988:193-195) concur with Schmemmann when they assert that 'the history of creation and redemption is the history of praise lost and regained' and 'the fall from grace is the fall from praise. Salvation is the restoration of praise'.

A further aspect of doxology is that all one's relationships are rooted in and through God, because the contemplative increasingly lives in a sacral sphere where the triune God is the ultimate reference point for every reality and event encountered. This aspect is particularly

evident and characteristic of Elizabeth. Everything and everybody Elizabeth left behind when she embraced her carmelite vocation, she finds in God again. Hence, all her relatives and friends, even panoramic vistas, are encountered in God so that there is no more separation between them. In fact, for Elizabeth, she is now much closer to them than before and she speedily covers vast distances through the wings of prayer (De Meester 1995:101).

In this doxological character of Elizabeth's mysticism, she corresponds very closely to Orthodoxy. Elizabeth's understanding of the praise of God's glory as linked to God's eternal plan for creation and salvation is summed up for her in the doctrine of election and predestination (De Meester 1984:111).

In brief, the christo-trinitarian foundation of mysticism affects the whole of life, because mysticism as lived by Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodox Christians, is essentially a way of life. A consequence of participating in the circumincessional life of the Trinity is that of *koinonia*. Life in the Trinity also leads the soul eventually to the acquisition of knowledge of God and knowledge of one's metaphysical self: knowledge of humanity's origin, destiny and the means to arrive at that destiny. Knowledge of all that the triune God has done for humanity, logically concludes in doxology. In the words of Elizabeth (quoted in Valabek 1977:24), 'lastly, he (the Apostle Paul) wants me to be "overflowing with gratitude" for that is how everything should end'.

4.3 APOPHATIC VERSUS KATAPHATIC MYSTICISM

This comparison between the apophatic character of Eastern Orthodoxy and Elizabeth of the Trinity, will illustrate that this is one area in which they diverge from each other. Firstly, the Orthodox position will be sketched.

Dionysius the Areopagite proposes two possible ways of speaking about God: the kataphatic and apophatic ways. Kataphatic refers to positive statements about God as in the statements "God is light" and "God is being". The apophatic way is the way of denial and concerns negative statements about God as in the statement "God is nonbeing" or in expressions such

⁸⁰ Schmemmann writes from an Eastern Orthodox perspective.

as immensity, incomprehensibility, divine darkness or otherness when referring to God. Kataphatic theology yields some knowledge of God, but is an imperfect way. Since God's nature is essentially unknowable and incomprehensible, the apophatic way leads to more accurate knowledge of God. Often a synthesis of these two ways is proposed, operating in a mutually corrective, and complementary manner. However, even the apophatic way and the synthetic way need to be transcended eventually, because the excellence of God surpasses "all affirmation, but also all negation; it surpasses all excellence which could enter into the mind....Contemplation therefore is not only detachment and negation; it is a union and a divinisation which happens mystically and inexpressibly by the grace of God after detachment" (Meyendorff 1974a:207). 'It is by *unknowing* (*agnoia*) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge' (Lossky 1976:25). Apophaticism destroys the mental idols of God that people acquire and construct.

Therefore, apophaticism does not deny any knowledge of God at all, only intellectual knowledge of the divine essence (Spidlik 1986:329). God 'can be known "existentially", by "connaturality", as He offers Himself in communion. This is knowledge of God in the Scriptural sense' (Aghioroussis 1993:4). It is knowledge acquired through noetic contemplation of God. For the Hebrews "to know" surpasses abstract knowledge and expresses an existential relationship. One knows God when one enters into his covenant (Jr 31:34) and is introduced little by little into intimacy with him' (Spidlik 1986:329).

Knowledge of God at issue here can be stated quite simply as the difference between knowledge *about* God and *knowing* God. The latter is loving knowledge of God attained existentially and does not focus on facts or theology but the knowledge that 'there is a Being who is Love and who wishes us to live in communion with Him' (De Meester 1995:351). These words of Elizabeth of the Trinity expresses an authentic understanding about what knowledge of God entails and it corresponds to the Orthodox view outlined here. Elizabeth's mystical journey did not concentrate on acquiring much knowledge about God, but rather *to know God* in the depths of her soul and drink new divine life from this divine source.

Meyendorff (1983:12) concurs when he expounds the position of the Greek Fathers 'who affirm in their apophatic theology, not only that God is above human language and reason because of man's fallen inadequacy, but that He is inaccessible *in Himself*'. For this reason, the Orthodox view is that humans experience God in his *energies*, although this is a genuine experience of

God himself in communion. These energies do not mediate God to humans, rather, they are 'the very reality of God, as this reality can be communicated to us' (Aghioroussis 1993:3). Human experience of God in his energies is human participation in the trinitarian activity of God in the world. This presupposes an I/Thou relationship with God, one in which knowledge and love are intimately connected.

For the Eastern Orthodox Fathers, there is no knowledge of God without love because there is an intimate link between knowledge and love. The greatest commandment is to love God and to love neighbour. 'It is clear that without love the knowledge of God through "connaturality" is impossible, because "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8,16)....in reality contemplation and charity, truth and love are, according to Ephrem, inseparable wings' (Spidlik 1986:335).

Eastern Orthodox mystical theology is apophatic in nature (Aghioroussis 1993:3). However, the 'unknowability of God does not mean agnosticism, or refusal to know God' (Lossky 1976:43). It means that humans cannot know God exhaustively and that human language about God is always provisional. 'The negations of "apophatic" theology signify only the inability of reaching God without such a transfiguration by the Spirit' (Meyendorff 1982:183).

Evagrius taught a formless way of praying, that is, prayer without images and many words. 'Such a mysticism insists that the highest union, the infused union where God speaks to us directly about himself, is not achieved in any conceptual knowledge but in an immediate, experiential knowledge wherein he opens himself to us' (Maloney 1983:26). Hence, apophatic theology, or mystical theology, culminates in union with God through the gift of grace. Mystical theology, is not primarily a way of knowledge about God, but a way of union with God through pure unknowing 'which leads towards the silence of the divine union' (Lossky 1976:29). The idea of "unknowing" entails letting go of all images and concepts of God as these are quite literally idols of one's own making. They are not God. In this sense, Kourie (1990:172) is correct in saying that 'apophatic theology endeavours to evoke religious experience', that is, experience of union with God and not intellectual knowledge of God through discursive meditation. It concurs with the Eastern Orthodox perspective which does not teach its members elaborate techniques for mental prayer or meditative reading of the bible (Ware 1996a:111).

The mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity is not outright apophatic. Certainly, there are traces of apophaticism in her mysticism, or as Kourie (1990:172) asserts, 'negative theology is implicit in her experience of the double abyss'. Elizabeth speaks of this double abyss as that of the immensity of God and that of the creature's nothingness. "The abyss of God's immensity encounters the abyss of the creature's nothingness," and God embraces this nothingness' (De Meester 1984:126). For Elizabeth, God is an abyss (De Meester 1984:95). The abyss of the human heart should be taken over by the abyss of God and so the two abysses become one – the soul becomes deified as it reflects more and more the image of God. It speaks of a journey of interiority.

Elizabeth was absolutely captivated by the infinity or limitlessness of God. Von Balthasar (1992:421) incisively observes that, for Elizabeth,

infinity is no empty word devoid of imagery, and it is no experience of nothingness beyond the familiar finite world. For her, it is a spiritual disposition, a physical experience and an ever more inescapable need. She does not encounter God as a Someone who, among other attributes, also happens to possess infinity. She encounters Limitlessness and knows that it is God.

Elizabeth encounters infinity within finitude and this means that the soul lives now already the heavenly life; it is an anticipated heaven, heaven in faith (De Meester 1995:105, 110). Thus the soul can 'practice being a citizen of the infinite world' (Von Balthasar 1992:421) that the soul hopes to inherit one day, by living in this anticipated heaven here on earth. Elizabeth lived infinity in the finite and even before her entry into Carmel spoke of an 'infinite thirst for him' which later becomes 'a thirst for the infinite' (Von Balthasar 1992:422). Living in the realms of the infinite also implies living in the eternal present, where there is no past nor present, only this eternal moment and 'to do only what is divine' (De Meester 1984:155). The doctrine of the eternal present and Elizabeth's realised eschatology that are hinted at in this paragraph will be treated separately below.

Elizabeth often gives the impression that she merely hovers over the earth in eager anticipation of the day when she can fly away to heaven and leave mother earth behind for good. This is not a full portrait of Elizabeth who enjoyed life and was fully involved in the lives and daily vicissitudes of others. For Elizabeth it is good to be alive (De Meester 1995:100) in spite of her longing for heaven, because she finds God everywhere. Von Balthasar (1992:431) also posits

as proof that Elizabeth's mysticism is not acosmic, the fact that Elizabeth's mysticism is completely devoid of any negative theology. He asserts that Elizabeth does not seek a distant unapproachable God, but the Father of Jesus Christ who is Immanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). Kourie (1990:172) does not concur with Von Balthasar when he denies any apophatic theology in the mysticism of Elizabeth at all (1992:431). It must be acknowledged that Kourie says that apophaticism is *implicit* in Elizabeth's mysticism – it is not fundamentally apophatic.

Elizabeth's mysticism can be classified more appropriately as kataphatic with some apophatic undertones found in certain images that she employs, for example, the abyss. The basis of her mysticism is the indwelling Trinity and the goal is to live in the creative presence of God every minute of the day. For Elizabeth, God is conceptually unfathomable, but experientially intimately present in the soul of believers. In Elizabeth's view, God bends over her, is alive in her soul, is always with her, and 'is more present to her than she is to herself' (De Meester 1995:53, 69, 85, 110, 210). Elizabeth was habitually conscious of God's presence, not only within her own soul, but everywhere else as well. In this regard, Elizabeth corresponds very closely to Eastern Orthodoxy. For the Orthodox Fathers, God is incomprehensible and unattainable by the human intellect, but the indwelling Trinity in the hearts of all believers, are central to the mystical consciousness of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This is coupled in the East with the understanding of the universality of the call to union with God. These two doctrines would have been impossible were God entirely transcendent and unapproachable. If God were inaccessible to human beings, God's invitation to humanity would not have made sense at all. What indeed would have been the purpose of the incarnation?

A propos the apophatic/kataphatic nature of mysticism, Elizabeth's mysticism appears to be the direct opposite of the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition. While the latter is overridingly apophatic with kataphatic elements, Elizabeth's mysticism is kataphatic with apophatic undertones. For both, God's being or essence is intellectually completely unattainable and incomprehensible, but the triune God has descended to humanity in the incarnation and as such has made an intimate and personal relationship with him possible. Therefore, God is experientially approachable through, what the Eastern theologians call, the energies of God. As such the goal of humanity's vocation can be attained, namely, union with the triune God. Although Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy correspond on the transcendence and immanence of God in human history, Elizabeth expresses this understanding primarily in a kataphatic way and the Orthodox Fathers in an apophatic way. However, there is always a continuum

between the apophatic and the kataphatic ways – even the most apophatic of mystics says something positive about God. This is also true in the case of Elizabeth and Orthodoxy.

4.4 ESCHATOLOGY

From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, eschatology, if understood comprehensively, characterises all theology. Eschatology does not only

consider man's destiny – and the destiny of all of creation – as *oriented toward an end*; this orientation is the main characteristic of the sacramental doctrines, of its spirituality, and of its attitude toward the "world". Furthermore, following Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, it considers the ultimate end itself as a *dynamic* state of man and of the whole of creation: the goal of created existence is not, as Origen thought, a static contemplation of divine "essence," but a dynamic ascent of love, which never ends, because God's transcendent being is inexhaustible, and which, thus, always contains new things yet to be discovered (*novissima*) through the union of love (Meyendorff 1983:219).

Clearly, eschatology does not only pertain to the "events of the *eschaton*", that is, a future reality at the end of time, but is already a present reality in and through Christ and his Spirit. Christians live *now already* the events of the end time, albeit veiled from sight and in faith. Eastern Orthodox eschatology emphasises very strongly the *realised* nature of eschatology. *Now already*, in this life, 'Christians can experience the vision of God and the reality of "deification"' (Meyendorff 1983:219). In this sense, time and space have already been transcended even though humanity is still living in time and space. Thus Christians live their lives within the tension of the "already and not yet".

Realised eschatology also implies that the reign of God has already been established on earth in Christ and thus Christians live now already in the eternal now, the ever-present moment. This doctrine will receive attention in the following section.

A very interesting point concerns the Latin doctrine of purgatory which is not endorsed by the Eastern Orthodox tradition, but finds support in the autographs of Elizabeth (De Meester 1995:344). The doctrine of purgatory (Catholic Church 1994:268) states that the souls of the

just who are not yet perfect enough to enter heaven are purified in the fires⁸¹ of purgatory before entering final blessedness. This is based on a very legalistic understanding of sin and justification in terms of which retribution must be made of every sinful act. The Orthodox Church interprets sin more in terms of moral and spiritual disease and consequential mortality (Meyendorff 1983:220) and hence salvation consists in healing the inner spiritual organism of the person. A further ramification of the doctrine of purgatory concerns prayers offered for the dead. An interesting point raised by Meyendorff (1983:221) concerns the Orthodox understanding that prayers can help the just and even the *Theotokos*. The reason for this approach is linked to the Orthodox understanding of spiritual growth as a *perpetual progress* towards union with God. The state of the blessed is not understood as 'a legal and static justification, but as a never-ending ascent, into which the entire communion of saints – the Church in heaven and the Church on earth – has been initiated in Christ. In the communion of the Body of Christ, all members of the Church, living or dead, are interdependent and united by ties of love and mutual concern; thus, the prayers of the Church on earth and the intercession of the saints in heaven can effectively help all sinners, that is, all men, to get closer to God' (ibid. 1983:221).

The eschatological nature of Orthodox mysticism is disclosed in the divine liturgy (Ashanin 1990:47). The Orthodox liturgy 'embraces two worlds at once, for both in heaven and on earth the liturgy is one and the same....as the faithful gather to perform the Eucharist, they are taken up into the "heavenly places"' (Ware 1995:12).

To return to the theme of Taboric light, the transfiguration, described in Matthew chapter 17:1-9, has always been interpreted as a 'foretaste of the Second Coming' (Meyendorff 1974b:116). However, the *parousia* is a present reality for Orthodox Christians, firstly in the eucharist, and secondly, in their spiritual experience. This is possible because the kingdom of God is within, that is, *already* present in the world, although its full manifestation will take place only at the *eschaton*.

One of the most striking aspects of Elizabeth's mysticism is its eschatological character. For Elizabeth, her soul, Carmel and the whole world are ablaze with the glory and presence of God.

⁸¹ It must be added that not all Catholics understand the *fires* of purgatory in a literal sense. Many would interpret the fires as referring to the soul's torment resulting from its separation from God.

For Elizabeth, this means that heaven is already a present reality. Elizabeth finds God everywhere and in everything. Elizabeth's eschatological outlook means that she is attached to heavenly realities and has become completely detached from worldly ones. Perfectly in accordance with Elizabeth's view, Von Balthasar (1992:393) observes that 'contrary to all earthly appearances, the space in which the believer moves is fundamentally eternal; the believer's homeland is where God is, the house of God, the city of God, the communion of the saints. The "time" in which the believer lives is fundamentally an "incipient eternity", a "steadily progressing eternity"'. Thus, Elizabeth speaks of an 'anticipated heaven' (De Meester 1995:52). Having died to the world and finitude in baptism, the believer rises into this incipient eternal reality lived now already. The day of Elizabeth's death is not her physical departure from this world, but the day she gave her "yes" to God (Von Balthasar 1992:424). The transcended life the believer now lives, is a 'life hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:3). Elizabeth is so keenly aware of the heavenly life lived here already that she writes, 'it is almost the gate to Heaven that is opening!' (De Meester 1995:20).

For her, the eschatological aspect of the christian life is such a reality, that only a veil separates the present from the future reality. Elizabeth (De Meester 1995:213) writes, 'our soul, once released from our body, will be able to see Him without the veil *within itself*, just as it *possessed Him during its entire life*, but without having been able to contemplate Him face to face'. Elizabeth lived the heavenly life on earth so intensely in the heaven of her soul, that only a veil separated her from God. Hence, the same God whom the saints contemplate face to face in heaven, lives *now already* in the human soul in a state of grace. Thus, according to Elizabeth, 'the transition to heaven', her physical death, will be very simple (De Meester 1995:303).

Von Balthasar (1992:444) points out that the 'heaven of our soul' that Elizabeth speaks of, expresses two aspects of God's indwelling by grace. Firstly, it expresses the anticipation of eternity in the present, although the direct vision of God remains a matter of faith. Secondly, corresponding to the Greek Fathers, it expresses the idea that God is present in the soul in an unmediated way. Hence, it is God's presence or immanence in the truest sense of the word. 'Heaven in our soul' is therefore a very suitable concept to express the realised eschatology as lived by Elizabeth; bear in mind that Elizabeth never presents herself as a theologian. Elizabeth listens, gazes, internalises the knowledge she gains in contemplation and then lives these mystical doctrines.

Elizabeth wanted to be a saint and see her beloved three face to face. This was not only a future expectation for Elizabeth, but a reality she lived day and night. This is exactly the destiny of Orthodox christianity as described by Verghese (1969:31) and, therefore, Elizabeth corresponds very closely with Eastern Orthodox mysticism in her eschatological outlook.

4.5 THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

The sacrament of the present moment is the doctrine of living in the eternal *now*, or the eternal present moment, which mediates the presence of the Trinity in every event of life. Elizabeth writes shortly before her death about her understanding of the eternal present moment as follows:

“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” [Mt 5:48]. When my master makes me understand these words in the depths of my soul, it seems to me that He is asking me to live like the Father “in an eternal present,” “with no before, no after,” but wholly in the unity of my being in this “eternal now”. And what is this present [now]? This is what David tells me: “They will adore Him always because of Himself” (Ps 71:15). When the soul forsakes all, then she will adore her God always because of Himself [for his own sake] and will live like Him, in that eternal present where He lives....(De Meester 1984:152-153).

The first thing that is noteworthy in this quotation is that Elizabeth is sharing her mystical insight about God’s life in the eternal present and humanity’s participation in it. This insight Elizabeth gained through her intimate communion with God in prayer. It is existential or experiential knowledge, the knowledge of a mystic. For Elizabeth, living in the eternal present entails praising God always, and in turn, this requires self-forgetfulness and renunciation. All the concepts employed here are central in the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Secondly, we have here an ‘asceticism of time’ (Dorgan 1985:69), that requires one’s full attention to the present moment, because *that* is where one is in touch with eternity - not in the past, nor in the future, but the ever present *now*. The present moment is the point ‘at which time touches eternity’ (Ware 1996a:114). Likewise, ‘the now of the passing present moment is the now, the abiding present of eternity’ (Watkin 1956:159). Living in the eternal now is the most authentic way of living because the past is no more and the future is still to come. One has no control over the past or the future. The present moment can be controlled only in so far as one is able to choose how to respond to it. Furthermore, in God there is only the eternal

now, there is no past or present in him. God sees all that humans know as history, as well as the future, in this eternal present moment.

Eastern Orthodoxy considers the kingdom of God as already present in this world, especially in the church and in the holy mysteries. What is more, the kingdom of God is within (Lk 17:21). The kingdom of God transcends time and space and is already part of the eternal now⁸². Although these are the thoughts of an Orthodox priest, they correspond with Western theology.

At the heart of Eastern Orthodox mysticism lies the question, 'what is it that God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wants me to do right now?'⁸³ Discerning the will of God at every moment of the day, which is what this question implies, requires nothing less than living in the eternal now, because it is *now* that the contemplative needs to know what God wants him or her to do. It is what Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) means by "seeking and finding God" in everything.

Therefore, watchfulness (*nepsis*) is an important aspect of Eastern Orthodox mysticism and important for the doctrine of the sacrament of the present moment. The neptic man is one who has overcome his inner fragmentation, at least partially, and has integrated all aspects of life. Watchfulness means 'to be *present where we are* – at this specific point in space, at this particular moment in time' (Ware 1996a:114). The neptic man or woman is then fully present in the here and now, seizing the *kairos*, the decisive moment of opportunity afforded by God. The neptic man or woman is one who stops, looks and listens (Ware 1996a:117), words echoed by Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth's response to the present moment is one of maintaining her recollection in the Trinity. Elizabeth does not allow her mind to wander in the past or the future, but wholly attentive, she waits and listens to what God communicates to her now and, as such, she adores her three. This is what will make her perfect and, therefore, to be perfect as God is perfect, Elizabeth needs to be wholly attentive, wholly adoring in the triune God – here and now.

The present moment is a sacrament in that it is the medium of the encounter with God (Severin 1985:403). This led Elizabeth to find God everywhere and in everything, the simple and mundane realities that make up the life of a cloistered nun. Elizabeth's understanding of

⁸² Matusiak (2003). See bibliography for details.

sacramentality is far broader than the recognised seven sacraments. For Elizabeth, 'a sacrament was a tangible, visible, accessible reality which contained a deeper, spiritual reality within. In this sense everything in the world about us could serve as a sacrament...In other words, persons, events, experiences are signs of something deeper: God uses them to allow man to come into contact with the reality of God's life offered to men' (Valabek 1985:21). A further implication of this sacramental sense of Elizabeth is that everything is seen as coming directly from God, blessings as well as suffering. Everything is an emanation of God's love for humankind, even suffering.

Ware (1996a:118-119) also speaks most eloquently about the sacramental nature of everything in the world: 'All things are permeated and maintained in being by the uncreated energies of God, and so all things are a theophany that mediates his presence'. Hence, intrinsic to Eastern Orthodox mysticism is the notion 'to see God in all things and all things in God – to discern, in and through each created reality, the divine presence that is within it and at the same time beyond it. It is to treat each thing as a sacrament, to view the whole of nature as God's book' (Ware 1996b:398). God communicates to his children, moment by moment, and therefore, one needs to be ever watchful and attentive to God in the present moment. To see God in all things and all things in God is not pantheism, but panentheism. Pantheism which means that God *is* everything and everything *is* God, is contrary to the biblical teaching about God the Creator and the universe, his creation. Neither Roman Catholicism nor Eastern Orthodoxy endorses pantheism.

Living in the eternal now has a further implication, namely, that spirituality can never be an isolated realm of one's life, unrelated to the whole of life in all its beauty and misery. Mysticism is then not something that one engages in at specific times, but a way of life. Mysticism does not only unify and heal one's interior world, but the whole of life. The life of Elizabeth of the Trinity is a prime example of someone whose inner and external life have been unified and integrated and as such healed to bring about wholeness and holiness. The way in which this was accomplished is described in her autographs.

Both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy's understanding, that by seizing the *kairos*, the decisive moment of opportunity afforded by God through living in the eternal present moment, manifests

⁸³ Matusiak (2003). See bibliography for details.

the intrinsic sacramental nature of everything. Then the words of Oliver Clement (quoted in Ware 1996a:119) encapsulate the essence of such a spirituality, namely, that 'true mysticism...is to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary'.

4.6 PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION

On the basis of human free will and the synergistic nature of the co-operation between God and humans in the history of salvation, Eastern Orthodoxy rejects any understanding of predetermination and predestination that robs people of their God-given freedom. Chrysostom (quoted in Spidlik 1994:34-35) is very articulate about human free will when he says the following:

We are directed by free will and not, as some say, subjected to the compulsion of inescapable fate....We are free and the masters of our fate...from the way we normally behave, it is clear that our lives are not directed by fate. For if fate were the cause of our actions rather than our free will, what justification have you for whipping the slave who is a thief?...When you do stupid things, why are you ashamed?...The myth of a compelling destiny is nonsense. Our lives are subject to no unavoidable fate. Everything, as I have argued, points to the beauty of free will.

Hence, each person is responsible for his or her own actions, even, let it be said, salvation. While God does not withhold his grace from any person seeking a saving relationship with him, neither does he force it on anybody. God cannot be held responsible for the reprobation of any person. On the last day each person will have a final opportunity to accept or reject Christ (Meyendorff 1983:222).

God knows from all eternity what people will do, but he does not predestine their choices and actions. In chapter three it was noted that the Orthodox understanding of predestination could be described as a combination of divine grace and human free will. God desires the salvation of all; if humans desire salvation, then they are predestined. In other words, predestination is not automatic, nor unconditional. This understanding of predestination also rules out any notion of double predestination. With respect to *election*, God may elect certain people for specific tasks in the world: the *Theotokos*, for example, but even these elect must cooperate with God's grace to attain salvation.

Once again, Elizabeth corresponds very closely to Eastern Orthodoxy. Elizabeth approaches the doctrine of predestination with the utmost simplicity so that there is no trace of the frightening interpretations found in Augustine and some Protestant circles. Elizabeth confines her understanding purely to what Paul teaches in scripture and does not engage in any speculative argumentation about it. Elizabeth was so preoccupied with predestination because it revealed to her God's *plan* for creation and the redemption of humankind. Predestination is proof of God's all-inclusive love and providence, and therefore, Elizabeth approaches it with trust and confidence in God's all-embracing goodness towards his creation. Humanity is not here by chance, but having existed in the mind of God from all eternity, God gives humans material existence in the world. Humans are to love and serve God in the world in order to unite all things in Christ unto the praise and glory of his name. Worthy of special mention, is the fact that Elizabeth never understands predestination in terms of particular individuals, but always collectively. Other people, beside herself, are equally among the elect and the proof of election is baptism, which seals the person with the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, election always has a social, ecclesial and communal reference.

Elizabeth's understanding that humans existed in the mind of God before creation, accords with Maximus the Confessor (in Deseille 1993:22), an exponent of the doctrine: 'man exists in God from all eternity in so far as he is the *logos*, the *logos* being the uncreated thought of God'. The image of each human being therefore exists in God from all eternity, yet not in the divine essence, but at the core of the divine energies.

In my opinion, Elizabeth's understanding of election and predestination is not essentially different from that of Eastern Orthodoxy. This is probably due to the fact that both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy remain faithful to Paul's doctrine and do not engage in intellectual speculations. Both approach the doctrine from a mystical point of view rather than analytically and philosophically. In fact, Elizabeth's entire mystical edifice is characterised by a mystical approach and even in this she corresponds closely to Eastern Orthodoxy. A mystical approach to the doctrine of predestination, rather than an analytical approach, preserves both Elizabeth and Orthodoxy from interpretations that are completely alien to the bible (that God elects and predestines some individuals to reprobation). The bible focuses mostly on the community of faith, not individuals.

However, the research for this dissertation has led to the conclusion that predestination is not a very important or even prominent doctrine in Orthodoxy, while in Elizabeth, it is second only to the indwelling Trinity. On this point then, one can ascribe an element of divergence between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodox christianity.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The mysticism of both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy has a definite christo-trinitarian foundation. This christo-trinitarian foundation is expressed in the lives of believers by a mystical incorporation in Christ through baptism. In turn, this incorporation leads to life in the Trinity because of the circumincessional relationship between the three divine persons in the godhead. Consciously living life in the Trinity leads to a deeper appreciation of the presence of God in everything and the realisation that everything is a sacrament that reveals God's presence. This requires one to be vigilant and watchful in the eternal present in order to seize the *kairos*. Through inner purification and integration attained through the ascetical struggle, which is indispensable, the contemplative is able to receive true knowledge of God. For both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy, knowledge of God is attained through mystical experience and not rational and philosophical reasoning. These are the chief areas of correspondence analysed in this chapter.

There are also areas of dissimilarity. Both Elizabeth and Orthodoxy hold that God is both transcendent and immanent. However, they express their understanding of God's transcendence and immanence differently. Elizabeth expresses her understanding primarily in a kataphatic way, while Eastern Orthodoxy describes its understanding in an apophatic way. It can be stated that Elizabeth's mysticism can be described as primarily kataphatic with some apophatic elements (because apophaticism is not completely absent), while Eastern Orthodox mysticism is apophatic with some kataphatic strands.

The dogmas of predestination and election also demonstrate a degree of divergence. The conclusion is that the difference centres around the prominence given to the doctrines. In the mysticism of Elizabeth, these doctrines are central, because for her, they reveal God's intention to create the universe and humankind, and hence, God's love for and providential care of his creation. In contrast, these dogmas are not very important nor prominent in Eastern Orthodox theology, probably because the doctrine of the synergy between divine grace and human

freedom is so greatly emphasised. Notwithstanding the difference regarding the place that election and predestination occupy in the mysticism of Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy respectively, there is no real conceptual difference to be found. In other words, Elizabeth does not understand this doctrine essentially any differently than Eastern Orthodoxy – she only gives it greater prominence. These elements of divergence are of such a nature that they do not infringe upon the overall quite significant consonance between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VOCATION OF HUMANKIND: ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY COMPARED

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter a remarkable consonance between Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy was elucidated in terms of the christo-trinitarian foundation of their mystical doctrines. Despite minor differences, the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy are remarkably similar. This striking similarity is especially evident in the experience of the vocation of humankind and the mystical life that realises this vocation. The major areas of correspondence are: asceticism, the universal call to salvation, the metaphysical, biblical heart as the centre of the mystical life, scriptural and liturgical nature of their mysticism, to enumerate just a few. Even the doctrine of deification that is very prominent in Orthodox christianity has a definite place in Elizabeth's mysticism, and as such corresponds closely to Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

As in the previous chapter, it is important to read this one against the background of chapter three where the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy is analyzed in greater detail. The same method as in the previous chapter will be followed, that is, a brief overview of the Eastern Orthodox position will be given to provide an immediate context for comparison.

The discussion centres on the following main themes: firstly, the vocation of human kind; secondly, salient aspects of the mystical journey; thirdly, the *Theotokos* and the communion of saints; and fourthly, an explanation of this remarkable consonance will be offered.

5.2 THE VOCATION OF HUMANKIND

5.2.1 Image and likeness

The Orthodox Fathers find the vocation of humanity in Genesis 1:26, according to which humans have been made in the image and likeness of God. The idea of image and likeness contains a dynamic character, a potential for growth. While humanity has received the dignity of the image of God at creation, the perfection of the image into the likeness of God is left to the believer (Origen quoted in Eliane 1985:116). According to Origen (quoted in Spidlik 1994:25) '...the human race received the dignity of God's image at the beginning of its creation, whereas the perfection of God's likeness is reserved for the end. Human beings must achieve it by imitating God in his works. The possibility of perfection is there right at the beginning by

virtue of the image'. This implies that humans were expected to grow in their image-character and become God-like from the very beginning, even if the fall never occurred. In other words, growth in God-likeness is not a consequence of the fall. It is the restoration of the image of God in humans that is directly linked to the fall. The image of God in the depths of the human soul is the uncreated image of God's Son, in whose image humans are made and in whom all live and have their being. The uncreated image in the human soul is the mode of God's indwelling; it is the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The ascent of the spiritual life is an increasing awareness of the indwelling presence of God and continual growth towards and restoration of the divine image present in the centre of the soul. Union with 'God is through the full *awareness* of Christ's *presence* in the soul' (Dupré 1984:14). This emphasis on anthropology does not mean that Orthodox spirituality is individualistic. On the contrary, the person is always understood in a communal context, and therefore, anthropology and ecclesiology are interrelated (Thunberg 1996:291).

Elizabeth alludes to the image of God in humans several times. In *Heaven in Faith* (De Meester 1984:104), Elizabeth quotes Gen 1:26, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness: such was the great desire in the Heart of our God'. Elizabeth understands the *imago Dei* to consist of reason, memory and will, for she writes, 'the image of God imprinted on the soul is formed by reason, memory, and will. As long as these faculties do not bear the perfect image of God, they do not resemble Him as on the day of creation' (De Meester 1984:104). Furthermore, '...we must let ourselves be transformed into one and the same image with Him' (De Meester 1995:116). 'We are drawn into the depths of the "intimate sanctuary" where God "imprints on us a true image of His majesty"' (De Meester 1984:103). Then 'God contemplates God' in the centre of the soul (De Meester 1984:100). Therefore, according to Elizabeth, believers need to allow God to transform their spiritual faculties so that they can resemble God as on the day of creation. Likeness to God is a gift of God's grace which God bestows on the believer when he sees that the person is ready to receive it. The gift includes God himself, his likeness, forgiveness and freedom from slavery to sin. Reception of God's grace is dependent on the person's inner integrity and a radical openness to the creative presence of God, which incidentally, is a carmelite charism. According to Eliane (1985:315), this view of grace and human likeness is a central theme among fourteenth century mystics. Eliane (1985:315) is correct in pointing out that this interpretation highlights the synergy that exists between grace and human freedom and that this accords with the Eastern tradition. Although Elizabeth does

not use the term “synergy”, she clearly understands God’s action in the life of the believer and the believer’s response to divine initiative in a synergistic manner.

According to Elizabeth (Meester 1984:104), humans should grow in likeness to God because without this likeness eternal damnation awaits them. Here traces of the influence of the nineteenth century’s emphasis on damnation are apparent. Although Elizabeth received her basic religious education in an era that had overcome much of the hellfire and brimstone approach to religion, ‘she adhered to the belief in damnation’ (Kourie 1990:61), even though it is not a prominent theme in her writings. This is because Elizabeth was able to free herself of Jansenistic images of God after she read Thérèse of Lisieux’s *The story of a soul* (De Meester 1984:16). Obviously, Elizabeth’s mystical experience of God’s love and mercy for her alleviated much of these fears. Nevertheless, deep in her psyche the effects of harsh and distorted images of God still influenced her at times. Had Elizabeth lived a longer life, she could very well have been freed from these images completely as she continued to grow in union with the Being who is all love (De Meester 195:351, 354).

Von Balthasar (1992:443) asserts that when Elizabeth speaks of the soul as the place of God’s indwelling, she does not have in mind, as the Church Fathers have, ‘the soul’s character as image and likeness or the reflection of the divine archetype in its human image when the image has been cleansed’. In other words, for Elizabeth, it is not the image of God which primarily manifests God’s indwelling presence in the soul. Elizabeth has in mind ‘the gospel mystery of the *indwelling of God through grace* and the nearness and intimacy that his indwelling engenders in the innermost soul’ (Von Balthasar 1992:443). In terms of De Letter’s (1961:52) interpretation of Van Ruysbroeck’s trinitarian mysticism, the divine indwelling by grace ‘is a new dynamic presence of the Triune God by which we are enabled to begin our return or *epistrophe* to the Source of our being’. The return journey to God involves becoming God-like, that is, growing in likeness to God. God comes to dwell in the soul through sanctifying grace received in baptism. Here John of the Cross’ view of the three ways in which God is present in the soul is in the background: ‘first is the presence by essence (God sustaining all creation); second is the presence of grace (God living in those who have not rejected the divine self-gift); third is the mystical presence, which includes a deeper appreciation of the other two’ (Doohan 1995:110). Hence, while the Orthodox Fathers have the presence of God through the image character of humans in mind, Elizabeth has God’s indwelling by grace in mind. It is the second mode of God’s presence as described by John of the Cross. This mode of God’s presence,

which culminates in the third mystical presence of God in the soul, is the foundation of Elizabeth's entire mystical life and doctrine.

Besides this note of dissonance, the overall consonance between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy goes one step further. For both, humans existed in the thought or mind of God before creation. This idea is expressed by John Damascene (quoted in Lossky 1976:94) as follows, 'God contemplated all things before their existence, formulating them in His mind' and each being received its existence at a particular moment, according to His eternal thought and will...which is a predestination...and image...and a model...'

To her two little nieces, Elizabeth writes (De Meester 1995:218), 'for from all eternity you were in the mind of God; He has predestined you to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus, and by holy baptism He has clothed you with Himself, thus making you His children, and at the same time His living temple'. To Elizabeth this means that humanity's existence is not due to chance, but rather the result of God's eternal design for creation and his love for humankind. Part of this design is to 'recognize the image of his beloved Son in whom He has placed all His delight' in the human soul (De Meester 1984:98). Because of God's image in the human soul, Elizabeth wanted to kneel before her nieces and adore God within them. This raises the question as to why christians have never taken up the practice of bowing to one another in recognition of the indwelling God. In the far East bowing to one another is commonplace, and yet, many christians would regard them as "pagan" at worse, and unchristian at best. Yet, it seems to me that the East has a better conception of the Divine immanent in human life.

For both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy the process of the restoration of the image of God begins in baptism. In Eastern Orthodoxy, baptism is understood as a rebirth into the life of Christ. The aim is the reception of new life, divine life, and this is achieved through the acquisition of the Holy Spirit given at baptism. According to Elizabeth, it is the creative action of the Holy Spirit that maintains believers in this new existence and brings about the christification and deification of believers. The Eastern Church would agree, because '...the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the main aim of man upon this earth, for it is through the ascetic struggle of "pulling down" the Holy Spirit into a repentant, humble heart that man gains justification before the face of God....and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the actuality of being saved' (Kontzevitch 1988:11).

Kourie (1990:161) observes that Elizabeth elucidates the fact that human nature and God are somehow contiguous because of humanity's image character. This is correct, and this image character is what makes humans truly human and icons of God. Furthermore, Elizabeth directs renewed interest to the importance of humanity's image character and the need for its restoration in the mystical life, in contrast to psychological states in the mystical life. A concentration on psychological states in prayer has been especially prominent in Carmelite mysticism since Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591). Attaining likeness to God through the restoration of the image character is the vocation of humankind. Elizabeth's understanding in this regard has strong links with the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

5.2.2 Universal call to perfection

Eastern Orthodoxy has always presented the mystical life as available to all Christians, demanding the same sanctity from both monk and layperson alike. The distinction between the counsels of perfection (for monks, celibates and religious) and the evangelical precepts (for married and single people "in the world") are unknown in Orthodoxy (Eliane 1985:316). In Orthodoxy, spirituality is the only path to fullness of communion with God. The main difference between monks and lay people concerns the degree of intensity with which the path is pursued.

John Chrysostom writes equally succinctly, 'The Holy Scriptures do not know of any such division. They wish that all lead the lives of monks, even if they are married' (quoted in Maloney 1984:51). In the scriptures one does not find a distinction being made between different classes of Christians, except that some are martyrs for the faith. Jesus also does not make similar distinctions, but exhorts *all* people to 'be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). Paul writes in the second letter to the Corinthians (13:9), 'This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect'. One can assume that Paul means *all* the Corinthians, and especially, all the Christians in Corinth. Eliane (1985:316) asserts that the distinction between "monk" and "lay person" is a product of the human spirit and totally ignorant writers and that Christ wants all people, including married people, to live the life of monks. This distinction is also due to the innate penchant in human beings to elitism and class distinctions whereby some perceive themselves as better than others and are desirous to portray this perception. In line with the foregoing, Paul Evdokimov, a lay, married, Orthodox theologian insists on "interior monasticism" that can be lived by all Christians (Evdokimov 1963:276). In

similar vein, Theophan the Recluse defines monasticism as 'staying with God with complete openness and continual attentiveness of mind and heart' (quoted in Louth 1993:10). In this quotation from Theophan the Recluse, the monastic life is evidently not a prerequisite for attaining spiritual perfection.

Elizabeth would agree wholeheartedly with Evdokimov since she relativised the "better part" which was her privilege in Carmel for all people. By linking it to the will (De Meester 1995:58), and not the monastery, Elizabeth makes the monastic ideal possible for lay people in the midst of their daily cares. Most of Elizabeth's correspondents are lay people and she tirelessly explains her mystical insights and invites them to follow the way to union with God in the depths of their own soul. Elizabeth does not water down her teaching for lay people either. According to Elizabeth, all people can enjoy the same happiness she has found in Carmel by living with God who dwells in their souls. 'This better part, which seems to be my privilege in my beloved solitude of Carmel, is offered by God to every baptized soul. He offers it to you, dear Madam, in the midst of your cares and maternal concerns' (De Meester 1995:57). To a young layperson Elizabeth explains that 'Jesus recognizes the Carmelite from *within*, by her soul' (De Meester 1995:62). And again to the same person, Elizabeth explains that living in one's heart '*alone and set apart*', does not refer to the 'religious life, which is a great separation from the world, but [to] the detachment, the purity that places a veil over all that is not God' (De Meester 1995:278). Here too, the implication is quite clear, to live '*alone and set apart*' does not require a radical separation from the world, but rather a radical separation from the values of the world and an *inner orientation directed towards God*. This in turn, involves a radical new worldview, one which recognises that the temporal and ephemeral cannot bring lasting happiness and peace. Peace and lasting happiness are found only by participating in the inner life of the triune God. The essence of this new worldview is viewing everything from God's perspective, a divine perspective.

The foregoing also has to do with the Pauline distinction between a spiritual person, *pneumatikos*, (one in whom the Spirit of God dwells and who is under his influence) and a natural person⁸⁴ (one who is under the influence of the perverted values of the world) (1 Cor

⁸⁴ Although it is often thought that Paul's distinction has to do with the spirit/body dichotomy, this is in fact not correct. His intention is to distinguish between two orientations in life: one oriented towards God in and through the Holy Spirit, the other oriented towards the world through the perverted values it offers.

2:12-15). A spiritual person is someone in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells and who lives his or her life in the Spirit.

Elizabeth is able to speak with great confidence on the subject of the universal call to salvation because she lived in her own interiorised monastic cell as a young layperson. Before her entry into Carmel, Elizabeth writes in her personal notes, 'Que je vive dans le monde sans être du monde: je puis être carmelite en dedans et je veux l'être' (quoted in Eliane 1985:317). In order to live the monastic life in the midst of the world, Elizabeth suggests that people interiorise the monastic cell. Interestingly, Theophan the Recluse (1996a:224) also speaks of the cell of the heart.

Therefore, Elizabeth is saying that it is one's inner disposition, one's Christ-centredness (or God-centredness) that makes of one a carmelite, that is, a monastic, rather than physical withdrawal from the world. What this teaching conveys is that the carmelite vocation of Elizabeth, just as much as the monastic vocation of others, is *not essentially different* from the universal christian vocation to holiness, but may be understood as an *intensification* of the baptismal vocation. This corresponds with the Eastern Orthodox perspective mentioned above, namely, that the difference between the vocations of lay people and monastics has to do with the degree of intensity with which the path is followed. For Elizabeth, 'religious life solidifies and intensifies baptismal commitment to God and God's family', as Valabek (1985:23) cogently states. Being removed from the lures of the world leaves the person more free to live with and in God, but as I understand it, monastic life is also not free of its own peculiar difficulties, simply because monastics take their humanity with them into the cloister. The lifestyle peculiar to monasticism certainly renders itself more conducive to the mystical life, because of its regulated lifestyle, but it is by no means the *only* way. Hence, *all* people can follow interior monasticism and attain the same happiness and union with God that Elizabeth enjoyed in Carmel. Here too one finds a remarkably close parallel with the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Consequently, Elizabeth's insistence on the inherent capacity in all people for the mystical life refutes the erroneous belief that mysticism is the more or less exclusive prerogative of an elite class of christians. This view is especially prevalent in the West. In contrast, Elizabeth presents a truly democratic mysticism that is lived in the ordinariness of everyday life, whether inside or outside the monastery. With respect to the democratic nature of Elizabeth's

mysticism, Kourie (1990:220) elaborates by saying that, 'fluctuations of circumstance do not affect mysticism since the emphasis is not on the accidents of life but on the substance'. What gives substance to life is humanity's participation in God's own life and this is what ultimately matters. In similar vein, Graeff (1956-1957:47) succinctly summarises as follows: 'It is not the surrounding that makes a saint; it is his or her own complete surrender to God, which may be made as much – or as little – by a nun as by a housewife'. The truth of this statement is testified to by the fact that there are many saints from among the laity⁸⁵ in both Eastern and Western christianity.

Elizabeth transfigures religion: religion is no longer a matter of doctrinal adherence, institutional affiliation and the quest for virtues through the exterior imitation of Christ. No, religion consists of a personal engagement, a heart-to-heart relationship, with the Trinity who is a mystically experienced Reality in all the vicissitudes of daily life as well as in the depths of the human soul.

Elizabeth reflects an Eastern Orthodox understanding of the spiritual life as egalitarian. The egalitarian nature of Elizabeth's doctrine gives her mysticism a universal relevance. This is in perfect accord with the Eastern Orthodox tradition which regards mysticism as the privilege of all believers and which is expressed especially in the context of the divine liturgy (Dupré 1984:19).

5.2.3 Deification

Both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy understand human deification in terms of the eternal trinitarian community of life and love in the godhead and understand 'the salvific work of Christ and the Holy Spirit as being the raising of humanity to a sharing in this communion of eternal life and love' (Ciobotea 1985:11).

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the image character of humankind is restored after the true image of God, Jesus Christ, through a process called christification, which in turn leads to deification. Christification is both the anthropological and the christological content of deification (Nellas

⁸⁵ Many lay people were martyred in the early church, e.g., Catherine of Alexandria who was martyred on 25 November 305. Further examples of lay saints are: Maria Goretti (d.

1987:40). The aim of the creation of humankind in the image of God is to lead 'human nature to hypostatic union with the divine Logos in Christ' (Nellas 1987:33). Adam was supposed to be purified and to love God so much that God would come and dwell in him. In this way the human nature would become enhypostasised in the Logos. 'Hence the original creation of man, formed in the image of God, was for the sake of Christ, so that man should be able one day to make room for the Archetype' (Palamas quoted in Nellas 1987:36). To be made in the image of God denotes both a gift and a destiny. The image of God in human nature is clearly uncreated grace and an ineffable gift. The destiny is the christification of human nature which leads to deification. Deification is the doctrine about human participation in the life of God (2 Pt 1:4) through the action of God's uncreated energies (God's work *ad extra*) in the human soul. However, this divine action demands the person's free cooperation in synergy with God. Through the grace⁸⁶ of God's uncreated energies, God transforms the person into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the image of the Father. The restoration of the image of God, that is, the process of the deification of the human person, continues unto infinity. For all eternity, the deified will grow in loving response to God.

Deification is the same goal that Elizabeth strives for because then she will be so united with God as to be like God, a deified being. 'But He is the Same One, and we carry Him within us. He bends over us with all His charity, day and night, wanting to communicate with us, to infuse us with His divine life, so as to make us deified beings who radiate Him everywhere' (De Meester 1995:53). Again Elizabeth writes about the power of God flowing into the soul to transform and divinise it (De Meester 1995:203). Elizabeth returns to the concept of deification shortly before her death when she says that the soul 'will be transformed to the point of becoming very like God' (De Meester 1984:96). Clearly, Elizabeth does not consider deification as a total identification with God – and this is authentic theology.

Like the Eastern Orthodox Church, Elizabeth sees deification as the work of the Holy Spirit. 'it is the Spirit of Love and of strength who transforms the soul, for to Him it has been given to supply what is lacking to the soul' (De Meester 1984:111). Ordinarily, the baptised soul possesses the life of the Trinity given at baptism only imperfectly and the divine indwelling is not always a conscious reality for people. The soul has to become aware of this divine life

1890), Stephen of Hungary (a king, d. 969), members of the Russian Romanoff family who were recently canonised by the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁸⁶ According to Gregory Palamas (quoted in Maloney 1984:72), 'Grace...is the energy or procession of the one nature; the divinity insofar as it is ineffably distinct from the essence and communicates itself to created beings, deifying them'.

within and still has to learn how to behave and be like God. It is, however, Valabek (1977:20) who cogently describes the situation as follows:

what remains on an ontological level in most men, Sr. Elizabeth experienced on a conscious level. Most Christians receive the Lord and his life, but because they are deluged with many other varied experiences as well, this encounter often does not reach consciously personal proportions: it remains the object of faith.

In other words, the distinction is between faith and experiential awareness. Some people believe in God's indwelling presence without having experienced it consciously, while others have a more or less permanent experiential awareness of God's abiding presence. The awareness of God's presence is of the essence in mysticism and that is why the mystical life develops greater God-consciousness so that what is *believed* (that is, faith) may become a *lived*, and therefore, *conscious*, reality in the life of the mystic.

It is the Spirit of Christ who teaches believers everything. Hence, Von Balthasar (1992:375) can assert that Elizabeth stands under the shadow of the Holy Spirit rather than under the shadow of the Trinity. On the other hand, the centrality of Christ in the life of Elizabeth is clearly evident from her writings. As Kourie (1990:182) states, Christ is 'not only the paradigm and exemplar, but also the *enabler*, effecting divinisation and glorification'. Two observations follow from this: firstly, the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit should not be contrasted to the extent that they are viewed as alternatives. This is especially valid when studying the life and work of Elizabeth. The work of Christ and the Holy Spirit is to be understood as complementary within the salvific work of the Trinity in history. Although this point is also made by Kourie (1990:182) in terms of Elizabeth's christology and trinitarian doctrine, it holds equally for the work of the Spirit and Christ respectively. The second observation is that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and therefore, there will be a close relationship between their work of sanctification and deification in the lives of people.

In Orthodoxy, the whole person is deified, body as well as soul. The reason for this is that, for the Orthodox Fathers, human nature is constituted by the whole person with all its senses, passions, intellect and will. Furthermore, Irenaeus maintains that the image of God resides in the total human being which consists 'of body and soul relationships' (quoted in Maloney 1983:12). It is the whole psychosomatic human being that grows in union with God. Elizabeth

is not quite as explicit as the Orthodox Fathers about a holistic understanding of deification, although Elizabeth does appear to come close to it, 'so that this God...might transform and divinize your whole being' (De Meester 1995:272). The question is just what Elizabeth understands by 'your whole being' – that is not quite clear. Here as well as in other instances, it is important to reiterate that Elizabeth does not develop her mystical insights as a theologian, but writes as a mystic. Her particular charism is to gaze and listen in silence, not philosophise and theologise. Furthermore, Elizabeth concentrates on "the one thing necessary" (Lk 10:41) and does not delve any further.

According to the Eastern Orthodox Church, deification as a process begins on earth and continues for all eternity, the person growing eternally 'from glory to glory' in contemplative union with God (2 Cor 3:18). Elizabeth refers to the same Pauline text when she writes that the glorified know God as they are known by him and are 'transformed from brightness to brightness into His very Image' (De Meester 1984:144). However, whether Elizabeth understands spiritual growth in love and knowledge of God to continue through all eternity is not quite clear. Elizabeth is mostly concerned with praise and adoration of God, here on earth as in heaven and through all eternity. However, the dying nun concludes her retreat notes (De Meester 1984:162) with the following, '...and becoming by an always more simple, more unitive gaze, the splendour of His glory'. This statement seems to hint at the idea of perpetual spiritual progress even in heaven because one's gaze will become 'more simple and unitive'. Elizabeth is more explicit about perpetual growth when she says that one 'can always go farther in infinity!' Notwithstanding, Elizabeth does not develop the idea of a perpetual progress as did Gregory of Nyssa (Malherbe and Ferguson 1978) and as taught by Eastern Orthodoxy.

For Gregory of Nyssa, spiritual growth continues perpetually, through all eternity. In fact, perfection consists precisely in this eternal progress towards God, that is, in the soul's thirst for God that is never quenched (Malherbe & Ferguson 1978:12). 'This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied' (Malherbe & Ferguson 1978:116). Hence, the importance of desire in the spiritual life and the need to kindle it.

The doctrine of deification is so central to the Orthodox Fathers that more emphasis is placed on the goal than the process of acquiring virtues, in contrast to Roman Catholic scholasticism. The acquisition of virtues in Orthodoxy is not unimportant or ignored, but the emphasis is on the goal of the spiritual life. One possible explanation for this is that if one is constantly focused on asceticism and acquiring virtues, one may become discouraged in the face of so many failures each day. In addition, it is counterproductive to self-forgetfulness as it directs attention to self and the body rather than to God. Clearly, it is not conducive to self-forgetfulness. It is preferable to keep the goal, that is, the holy Trinity, ever before one's gaze, because the Trinity encourages the soul and keeps it faithful to the quest for deification. If this is done through continual prayer of the heart, the virtues will follow. It is when the eye of the heart is not directed towards God, that attentiveness and watchfulness go by the wayside and sin follows. Hence, the importance of keeping the eyes fixed on the goal.

Elizabeth clearly recognises the importance of virtues in the spiritual life, and like the Orthodox Christians, she keeps her goal ever before her to the extent that Elizabeth ignores everything peripheral. However, more than all the virtues Elizabeth can acquire, it is the creative presence of the Trinity in her soul that forgives and sanctifies her so that she can become a divinised being. According to Elizabeth's autographs, she diligently recorded her victories and failures over her dominant faults, which she identifies as anger and sensitivity. Nevertheless, Elizabeth is not preoccupied with acquiring virtues. Rather than constant self-examinations and preoccupation with sinfulness, Elizabeth understands that it is more advantageous to turn inwards where the Saviour dwells who wants to purify her at every moment (De Meester 1995:229). The purifying presence of God is far more efficacious in the quest for deification than any asceticism or mortification on the part of the believer.

For Elizabeth, the process of human divinisation and human authentication entails being conformed to Jesus Christ, that is, christification. Unable to be a martyr like the early Christians, Elizabeth begged for the unbloody martyrdom of love, a bloodless martyrdom that is no less efficacious. Consequently, in a feat of absolute heroism, Elizabeth died to herself moment by moment. When Paul tells the Colossians (3:3) that they have died and that their life is hidden with Christ in God, Elizabeth is quick to add that the necessary condition is *death*. This indicates the close connection that Elizabeth makes between life in God (mysticism) and death to self (asceticism). However, as already noted, Jesus is more than just an exemplar or model to follow; he is also the one who brings about her christification, that is, a radical

transformation of her entire person in Christ (Watkin 1956:168). Her desire for christification is expressed most pertinently by Paul, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20). The quintessential *modus operandi* of Elizabeth to become a praise of God's glory and so fulfil God's plan, was by interiorising all aspects of the christian faith and then actualising them in her life.

Deification is the mystical condition which exists when a person has become, by grace, what God is by nature, through an intimate union with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. A deified person shares in the circumincessional life and love of the three divine persons. What is the state of union with God like? Orthodoxy describes it as rest and peace (*hesychia*). It is a spiritual silence that is above prayer and which properly belongs to heaven (Lossky 1976:208). According to Isaac the Syrian (quoted in Lossky 1976:208), in this state of union with the Divine, 'a man leaves his own being and is no longer conscious whether he is in this life or in the world to come; belongs to God and no longer to himself; he is his own master no more but is guided by the Holy Spirit'. Elizabeth also speaks of this state of peace and rest which resembles the future age. 'The highest perfection in this life...consists in remaining so closely united to God that the soul with all its faculties and its powers is recollected in God, that its affections united in the joy of love find rest only in possession of the Creator' (De Meester 1984:104).

It is worth mentioning that the different Eastern and Latin trinitarian perspectives lead to a different understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. The West has been greatly influenced by Augustinian Platonism and an unhealthy separation between body and soul, spirit and matter, nature and supernature, and secular and sacred. With such dichotomies operating in the background, scholastic theology regards sanctification as the elevation of human nature to the supernatural order effecting the soul's participation in God (Hainsworth 1965:283). It can be described as a created participation in the divine nature through the action of divine grace. Eastern Orthodoxy has steered away from such unbiblical dichotomies and approaches sanctification from a biblical perspective, understanding it more as *fellowship* between the christian and the persons of the Trinity and the consequent deification of human nature (Hainsworth 1965:284). In this process of sanctification it is the action of the three divine persons and the I/Thou *relationship* that is all-important – with which Elizabeth concurs wholeheartedly. In other words, discipleship comprises more than the adherence to dogma, exterior imitation of Christ and growth in virtue. It also entails a very real union with God who

dwells in the human heart, through the transfiguration of the whole person leading to deification. Orthodoxy is more concerned with what humans *are*, the image or icon of God, than what they *do*. Sanctity means the image of God in humans and the acquisition of likeness to God. The concept of deification is not central in Western spirituality. The latter is more concerned with questions concerning debt owed by humans to God and how to satisfy divine justice. Its approach is more forensic. The downside of the Western approach is that it invites, by its sheer nature, anxiety and preoccupation with the idea of “certainty of salvation”. Questions such as “are you saved?” overshadow heart-to-heart fellowship with the divine persons as lived by Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodox Christians. This understanding of salvation is exponentially exacerbated when linked to the doctrine of double predestination.

Elizabeth of the Trinity is once again in accord with the Orthodox Fathers. Her mysticism is essentially based on fellowship and communion with each of the three persons of the Trinity, hence its *personalistic* character. Elizabeth relates in a very personal way to each of the three divine persons: she is ‘the daughter of the Father, the spouse of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit’ (De Meester 1984:153). Given the Western milieu in which Elizabeth lived that envisaged God as a stern judge demanding perfection, it is remarkable that she would speak of God in such personalist tones, for example, she often speaks of ‘my Three’ (De Meester 1984:184). Her prayer *O my God, Trinity whom I adore*, is addressed to all three divine persons. Like the Orthodox Church, Elizabeth envisioned the Christian life as one of fellowship with the three persons of the Trinity based on 1 John 1:3, ‘truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’.

Living in fellowship or communion with God requires two things. Firstly, the ability to recognise God in daily activities because one cannot be in communion with someone whom one has no contact with. Secondly, it is not enough to possess God in the centre of one’s soul; one needs to abide with God in this interior sanctuary. In other words, living in God’s presence through daily activities and events as well as in the depths of the heart, is a prerequisite.

Finally, union with God is one of love after the will has been conformed to the divine will. In both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy faith and love are the virtues that unite one with God. Love is the greatest of the virtues, the fulfilment of the Law and the only one of the three

theological virtues that continues to exist in heaven⁸⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, representative of both East and West, expresses asceticism, purification and union with God constantly in terms of love (Dupré 1984:15).

Bearing the distinctive marks of a *pneumatikos* (1 Cor 2:15), Elizabeth has become a spiritual being not only because 'her actions proceed from the Spirit, but also because she comports herself in such a way that, forgetting the works of the flesh, she renews herself daily (2 Cor 4:16) in the image of the Creator (Col 3:10). Effecting in her the mystery of the rebirth (Tt 3:5) the Holy Spirit gives her a new mode of being that conforms to the image of the Son of God who dwells in her' (Borriello 1986:73).

5.3 SALIENT ASPECTS OF THE MYSTICAL JOURNEY

5.3.1 Place of the heart

In Christ, the image of God can be restored through traversing the spiritual journey. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition the spiritual journey entails finding the place of the heart and descending with the *nous* into the heart, attaining *apatheia*, and contemplating the blessed Trinity through continual prayer, most notably, the Jesus Prayer. The place of the heart is of cardinal importance, because God is encountered within the heart as the ground of one's being and not in the mind (Maloney 1984:53) as is so often thought in the West.

In addition, there are certain requirements, namely, silence, solitude, (both exterior and interior) *hesychia*, watchfulness and asceticism. Hesychasm places great emphasis on asceticism and interior attentiveness in order to control the movements of the heart (Maloney 1978:87). The immediate goal is inner harmony, tranquillity of mind, and unity of body, mind and spirit while the ultimate goal is *theosis* which in turn gives glory to God. Therefore, asceticism is not aimed at destroying bodily passions, but 'to acquire a new energy which will allow both body and mind to share in the life of grace' through a mystical union with the Trinity (Maloney 1978:90). These are fundamental aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy, and here too, Elizabeth demonstrates a striking correspondence with the Eastern Orthodox tradition since these themes have been lived and taught by her to all who are willing to listen and learn from this young mystic.

⁸⁷ In heaven, the blessed no longer need to hope, because they have attained the *telos* of

Elizabeth understood the way to be followed as involving 'union with God (in Christ) by a return to the center of our soul where, since our baptism, the Trinity opens a dwelling for us; this implies a prayerful and assiduous searching, full of loving attention to the hidden God who is the great Present One, and requires the total gift of love that dies to all egoism' (De Meester 1984:86). Elizabeth finds the place of the heart by creating an inner cell in the depths of her being, or heart. The text quoted here describes most beautifully the Orthodox understanding of the place of the heart, that is, the inner spiritual core where the Trinity dwells, and what is required to find this inner kingdom, namely, prayerful and assiduous searching, full of loving attention to God. The deep tranquillity of mind and soul that Elizabeth experienced as a result of her spiritual life is reflected throughout her autographs and it is especially striking during her suffering towards the end of her life.

Elizabeth's intense concentration on interiority stands in stark contrast to the materialism, consumerism and competitive spirit that mark our day and age. Her message is very clear: the key to lasting happiness does not lie in a journey into far eastern spiritualities or even in entering religious life. The key to eternal happiness is the kingdom of God which is within (Lk 17:21), hence the need for interiority in spirituality and mysticism. This clearly accords with Eastern Orthodoxy.

5.3.2 Finding the place of the heart

Eastern Orthodoxy often refers to the *nous* as the eye of the soul or heart. Elizabeth also speaks of the eye of the soul, blessed enough to witness the coming of the Master into the inner sanctuary, or the heart (De Meester 1984:99). With the eye of the soul Elizabeth gazes on her three and attains intuitive knowledge of God with such theological accuracy that it has astounded many eminent scholars⁸⁸. But the eye of the soul must have 'simplicity of intention which gathers into unity all the scattered forces of the soul and unites the spirit itself to God....[and] places man in the presence of God' (De Meester 1984:99). If one's fears, joys, sorrows and desires are not God-directed, then one cannot be solitary, because these passions produce interior noise. 'There must be peace [*hesychia*], "sleep of the powers" [*apatheia*], the unity of being' (De Meester 1984:153). Such a state of inner unity is the beauty

human life. Faith is no longer necessary, because God is seen face to face.

with which the King is enamoured. 'For beauty is unity, at least it is the unity of God!' (De Meester 1984:154). The parallel between Elizabeth and Orthodoxy is very striking indeed.

The Eastern Orthodox expression "finding the place of the heart" is, therefore, supremely appropriate in terms of the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity. It expresses the idea that in finding the place of the heart, one finds the indwelling God and this is what is at the heart of Elizabeth's mysticism. Now the crucial point that should not be overlooked is that God has always been in this place; the contemplative, whether Eastern or Western, does not fix God in it. God has not moved at all, 'rather it is the soul who has arrived at the place of God' (Von Balthasar 1992:444) and this place is the place of the heart. It is the soul who has arrived at the place of the heart, or as the Eastern Orthodox Christians say, the *nous* that has arrived in the heart. From this understanding, there follows a deeper meaning, namely, 'God in the soul' leads to 'the soul in God' (Von Balthasar 1992:445) and this is the meaning of deification. The mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodox mysticism, are examples of genuine introverted mysticism in the form of a mysticism of the heart or a mysticism of the soul.

Continual prayer in the Orthodox tradition usually takes the form of the Jesus Prayer. Elizabeth taught her correspondents to practise continual prayer through acts of recollection in God's presence (Meester 1995:301), in order to stay recollected and become united with God within. Elizabeth even made a chaplet for her mother to assist her in her acts of recollection. Continual prayer for Elizabeth herself, consisted mostly of simply turning her gaze towards the Trinity in loving adoration and doing everything in the presence of God. But living always with Him within, 'requires great mortification, for to unite oneself to Him constantly like that, one must be able to give Him everything' (De Meester 1995:278). It is necessary to 'practice the way of sacrifice and suffering, for this must be the great law for all Christian life' (De Meester 1995:277). Elizabeth realises that great purification is required if the soul is to live in the divine presence habitually.

In the East, continual prayer includes the recognition of being a sinner and absolute confidence in the mercy of God. This compunction is expressed in the Jesus Prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner'. Like Eastern Orthodoxy, Elizabeth relies on the merciful love of God with great confidence, rather than dwell on her sins, because in the latter instance, it leads

⁸⁸ Such as Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1956, 1992) and Luigi Borriello (1986).

to greater concentration on self which is counterproductive in the quest for self-forgetfulness, as already noted.

Orthodox Christians often unite the Jesus Prayer with their breathing or the beating of the heart, although this is not considered essential. Elizabeth made her prayer in unison with the beat of her heart, 'Que chaque battement de mon coeur te redise cette offrande. Je suis à toi....Chaque battement de mon Coeur est un acte d'amour' (quoted in Eliane 1985:320). Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth writes (De Meester 1984:158), 'I think that this prayer should be like the bride's heart-beat: "Here we are, O Father, we come to do your will'. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth is a hesychast of great renown.

'A harmonious relationship should exist between the spirit and the heart, in order to develop and build up the personality in the life of grace – for the way of union is not a mere unconscious process, and it presupposes an unceasing vigilance of spirit and a constant effort of the will' (Lossky 1976:202). Recollection includes re-establishing such interior unity and harmony, because since the fall, the desires of the spirit and the flesh are no longer in harmony. One's attention needs to be unified, because this brings one back to oneself and leads one to be rooted in God. A dissipated imagination runs riot and then there can be no single-minded attention to the divine Guests. Kourie (1990:175) concurs when she quotes John Climacus (d. 650), 'prolixity in prayer often fills the mind with images and distracts it, while often one single word draws it into recollection'.

Elizabeth (De Meester 1984:142) elaborates on the necessity for interior unity:

It seems to me, therefore, that to keep one's strength for the Lord is to unify one's whole being by means of interior silence, to collect all one's powers in order to "employ" them in "the one work of love," to have this "single eye" which allows the light of God to enlighten us. A soul that debates with itself, that is taken up with its feelings, and pursues useless thoughts and desires, scatters its forces, for it is not wholly directed toward God....How indispensable this beautiful inner unity is for the soul that wants to live here below the life of the blessed.

What this amounts to is rigorous discipline over thoughts, feelings and general disposition in order to maintain inner silence and integration of the spiritual faculties. It requires constant exercise of the will (De Meester 1995, 278; 1984:98).

To attain the integration of the powers of the soul, requires simplicity, that is, a simplification of one's prayer, many words becoming one single, silent word, or better still, a simple and direct gaze at the One who dwells within. To her sister, Elizabeth counsels, 'simplify all your reading...fill yourself a little less, you will see that this is much better. Take your Crucifix, look, listen' (De Meester 1995:23). In Eastern Orthodox mysticism, the use of a single word to maintain inner recollection is unusual, usually it takes the form of the Jesus Prayer in its various formulations. Having acquired inner unity, the soul lives 'in the bosom of the tranquil Trinity, in my interior abyss, in this "invincible fortress of holy recollection"' (De Meester 1984:162). Such a soul has been divinised by God and can say 'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). This passage from Galatians is the 'epigram of the spiritual life, the very substance of Orthodox spirituality' (Yannoulatos 1963:300).

The active part of the spiritual life requires every human effort possible to overcome inner fragmentation in view of reintegrating the spiritual faculties. This in turn demands heroic self-forgetfulness. In preparation for her first confession, Elizabeth engaged in a laudable battle against her dominant faults. Elizabeth continued the struggle to overcome these faults because they do not reinforce inner unity, besides being displeasing to God. In her well-known prayer *O my God, Trinity whom I adore* (De Meester 1984:183), Elizabeth prays, 'help me to forget myself entirely that I may be established in You as still and as peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity'. Elizabeth was not only fully aware of the primary place of self-forgetfulness, self-renunciation and ascetic effort, she practised them herself, perseveringly and with a tenacious determination concerning her goal. A scattered and fragmented interior world hampers the spiritual combat. Elizabeth realises that recollection, ascetic effort and purification are essential in order to find the place of the heart and to let the mind descend into the heart (Eliane 1985:317). One cannot claim to be a contemplative and to practise continual prayer without dying to all sensible and inordinate desires. It is not possessions *per se* that are harmful in the spiritual life, but the cravings and desires after created and spiritual things. Such inner dispositions do not enable the soul to enjoy everything in God in freedom, but lead to enslavement that is a manifestation of a tacit concentration on self rather than on God.

Silence is not the mere absence of words, rather it is rooted in the silence of God himself. Silence, as practised by Elizabeth, is a specific form of inner attention, a gazing with the eyes of the heart to the invisible Reality within. Silence introduces and leads the soul increasingly

deeper into the transforming love of God. It brings the person into contact with eternal peace, of which God is the origin. Kourie (1990:173) introduces an interesting perspective that one does not encounter frequently, namely, that 'the stages of silence correspond to the stages of the mystical path. First, an *active* silence, sought in the nakedness of faith....Then follows a silence of ever-deepening intimacy with the Divine, leading eventually to the ultimate silence of mystical union'. It is therefore a journey from silence to silence because it is in contemplative silence that words acquire meaning. Another way of expressing this insight is that words acquire deeper dimensions of meaning when they have become an existential reality in one's life, and even more so, if the deeper meaning is acquired in silence. For example, a beginner in the spiritual life has a different conception of the expression "union with God" than a mystic in the later stages of the ascent to God. Beginners often confuse union with God with feelings of spiritual consolation, while the experienced mystic knows that the gifts of the spiritual life are not God.

The key to victory in the spiritual combat is vigilance or watchfulness, what the Orthodox Fathers call *nepsis*. Vigilance 'is the "sobriety" (*nepsis*), "the attention of the heart"...the faculty of discernment and of the judgement in spiritual matters...which are characteristic of human nature in its state of wholeness' (Lossky 1976:203). The Orthodox Fathers do not make a clear distinction between the active and passive states of the higher stages of the spiritual life. The reason is that the normal condition of the human spirit is neither one of activity nor passivity, but vigilance. Active and passive states are considered signs of inner disintegration because they are the consequences of sin (Lossky 1976:203-204). Asceticism strengthens the human spirit in its efforts to be vigilant.

Inner silence and tranquillity (*hesychia*) and asceticism are the *sine qua non* for attaining union with God. Asceticism is vital to the mystical life because it fosters *hesychia*. In fact, asceticism is such an integral aspect of Orthodox spirituality, that Sanfilippo (1994:504) asserts that "life in Christ" is essentially an ascetical life. He continues by defining the concept "asceticism": 'Asceticism comes from the Eastern word meaning athletic training...implying the complete orientation of one's daily activities towards a single goal. It is neither a system of juridically meritorious or propitiatory suffering, nor giving up something (usually something trivial) as "my sacrifice for God," nor finally a legislated (and repealable) religious obligation. Asceticism is...[a] call...to divest himself of every trace of ego-centrism and become limpidly transparent to Christ'. This is exactly what Elizabeth mastered in her spiritual life. Having died to ego-

centrism and the passions that arise from it, Elizabeth was conformed to Christ through her ascetical lifestyle and suffering as a result of her illness.

Elizabeth also insists on the necessity to stay 'wholly vigilant' (De Meester 1995:82). Watchfulness is also attentiveness to God, 'Oh! Let us be attentive to the mysterious voice of our Father!' (De Meester 1984:108). Faith should never allow the soul to fall asleep, but should keep it vigilant beneath the Master's gaze (De Meester 1984:157). It is only a vigilant heart that can pray ceaselessly. Elizabeth often expresses her desire to pray ceaselessly. 'I want to spend my life in listening to you' (De Meester 1984:183), because prayer, for Elizabeth, consists mainly of listening to God in a gaze of love and adoration of the Trinity. In fact, the very life of a Carmelite is one of prayer. A Carmelite's prayer never ends (De Meester 1995:38).

A word about extraordinary phenomena is necessary. Traditional mystical theology does not attribute much value to visions, stigmata, locutions, clairvoyance, and so on. While it does not deny a place to paranormal phenomena, it is not considered an essential part of mysticism. Attachment to such spiritual gifts demonstrates spiritual immaturity. In similar vein, Symeon the New Theologian, a celebrated theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church, regards ecstasies and visions as appropriate to beginners and novices only. A soul progressing on the spiritual path no longer needs such crutches because 'it has the constant experience of the divine reality in which it lives' (Lossky 1976:209). Hence, detachment from spiritual consolation is a sound test of authentic mysticism and therefore a sign of significant spiritual growth. Why? Because one learns such detachment through the (long) purificatory nights of sense and spirit. Mystics learn that no spiritual gift, however exquisite, is God and since it is God that mystics seek, these gifts should be transcended in order to find God. A true child of her tradition, Elizabeth also cautions against the seeking of paranormal experiences (De Meester 1995:116). In accord with Orthodox mystics, Elizabeth does not describe her mystical experiences in detail, but concentrates on explaining the meaning of the mystical life and the insights she has gained. Her aim is to teach others how to find eternal happiness in God and not eternal happiness in the "spiritual crutches" but to see these for what they are.

The mysticism of both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy are of the introvertive kind. Not that this in any way detracts from their understanding of the active life as an intrinsic element of the spiritual life. Finding the place of the heart *is* to live one's life in the Trinity. The Trinity is the model of all relationships, and therefore, faith and life in the Trinity makes a person 'an ikon of

the Trinity' and commits each one 'to living sacrificially in and for the other' and to practise 'a life of practical service, of active compassion' (Ware 1996a:39).

5.3.3 *Epectasis*

Gregory of Nyssa viewed the journey to christian perfection as one of perpetual progress (*epectasis*) and it is a central theme of his spiritual theology (Malherbe & Ferguson 1978:113). The concept of *epectasis*, is borrowed from Paul's letter to the Philippians 3:13-14: 'but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining [*epectasis*] forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ'. The idea of *epectasis* contains the notion of a synergy between human effort and free will and God's grace. Humans are not passive subjects in the divine Artist's hands, but have to yield freely to the purifying, illuminating and deifying action of the Holy Spirit. The term "straining" (*epectasis*) denotes effort and struggle.

Elizabeth refers to the same Pauline text, 'I pursue my course striving to attain what He has destined me for by taking hold of me. My whole concern is to forget what is behind and to strain forward constantly to what is ahead. I run straight to the goal, to the vocation to which God has called me in Christ Jesus' (De Meester 1984:106). The work of straining towards the goal is further expressed by her, as follows, 'before attaining this [the deepest center], the soul is already "in God who is its center," but it is not yet in its *deepest* center, for it can still go further. Since love is what unites us to God, the more intense this love is, the more deeply the soul enters into God and the more it is centered in him...; but when this love has attained its perfection, the soul will have penetrated into its *deepest* center' (De Meester 1984:95-96). The idea of spiritual progress appears also in her letters. 'Each minute is given us in order to "root" us deeper in God, as Saint Paul says, so the resemblance to our divine Model may be more striking, the union more intimate' (De Meester 1995:358). Elizabeth also sees her work as a praise of glory as beginning on earth already and continuing in eternity. However, for Elizabeth, even time is eternity begun and in progress (De Meester 1984:141).

The principles contained in *epectasis* are also beautifully addressed by Elizabeth in numerous letters where she speaks of abandonment (De Meester 1995:28,229) or resting in God like a child in its Mother's arms (ibid. 1995:111,158,216), as well as efforts to remain recollected within (ibid. 1995:216). Abandonment is mentioned here as an example of *epectasis* in

Elizabeth's mysticism because it involves *real effort* and constant straining of the will. It is not easy to be totally surrendered to the will of God like a babe in its mother's arms. There is nothing passive about forgetting self, ignoring self, looking at the Master only, accepting everything as coming from him directly (De Meester 1995:358). "I die daily". I decrease, I renounce self more each day so that Christ may increase in me and be exalted' (De Meester 1984:97). 'But to attain to this love the soul must first be "entirely surrendered"' (De Meester 1984:99). The concepts expressed here by Elizabeth entail very real effort, sacrifice and constant fidelity to the goal, and hence, *epectasis*.

Far from a radical predeterministic conception of divine grace, which could easily have been the case due to the centrality of predestination in her mysticism, Elizabeth unambiguously and explicitly encourages her readers *to strive* for growth in their spiritual lives. *They too* have a task to fulfil, and this is primarily a matter of *opening themselves* to the triune God so that *he* could do his divine work in them – watching, waiting, abiding are the operative words, words which describe *epectasis*. How is that accomplished? By recollecting themselves within, in the healing, forgiving and sanctifying presence of the three divine persons and abandoning themselves to the three. The concept of synergy implied here, although Elizabeth does not use the word, is very dear to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Her exhortations to her correspondents to practise sacrifice and renunciation and to grow in interior recollection (De Meester 1995:277-278), reinforce the idea that union with God is a process of continual growth. Elizabeth's autographs are replete with examples⁸⁹ that can be cited in support of the idea that union with God involves human effort and yielding to God in faith, hope and love. The title of her treatise *Let yourself be loved* (De Meester 1984:179-181) speaks for itself.

In the mysticism of both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy the contemplative is called to a perpetual straining towards the goal. Paradoxically, the goal is never fully attained, because God is an infinite and spiritual being.

5.3.4 Sacrificial love

⁸⁹ See for example, the need to descend into the interior abyss in order to develop solitude of spirit (De Meester (1984:96) as well as the need to 'Walk in Jesus Christ' to be 'rooted in

The early Christians regarded martyrdom as the perfect imitation of Christ and end to their pilgrimage on earth. To follow Christ meant the way of the cross and suffering. Coupled with an eschatological hope and expectation, the early Christians strove to live detached from worldly things. After the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the martyrdom of blood changed into the martyrdom of the will in a daily struggle against selfishness and egocentrism. 'Eastern Christians inherited the exaltation of the cross as a basic theme and a lived experience' (Maloney 1983:8). 'To be human, after the image and likeness of God the Holy Trinity, means to love others with a love that is costly and self-sacrificing', writes Ware (1986:20) concerning the Orthodox understanding of suffering and sacrifice in the life of the Christian desirous of following the Lord.

If God the Father so loved humanity that he gave his only-begotten Son to die for them on the Cross, if God the Son so loved humans that he descended into hell on our behalf, then humans shall only be truly in the image and likeness of the Trinity if they also lay down their lives for each other. Without *kenosis* and cross-bearing, without the exchange of love and all the voluntary suffering which this involves, there can be no genuine likeness to the Trinity (Ware 1986:20).

Based on the example of the blessed Trinity and Christ and his injunction to lay down one's life for another (Jn 15:13), it is clear that love is costly, love is sacrificial; it is the 'inner law' of human nature (Guroian 1983:186). Orthodoxy never separates the mystery of the cross (lived as suffering and struggle against egoism) from the mystery of the resurrection (lived as a joyous communion with God) (Ciobotea 1985:12). While laying down one's life for another or martyrdom does occur today, more generally, the cross is lived out in daily struggles and asceticism against egoistic passions and tendencies. The deep union between cross and resurrection explains why Orthodox asceticism never becomes sad or desperate, and why Orthodox joy never overflows into sentimentality or exaggerated elation. Rather, Orthodox asceticism is marked by peace (Ciobotea 1985:13).

Elizabeth desired suffering even at a very young age. Is it not rather odd for a young girl who had a brilliant future ahead of her as a musician to desire suffering? Such a desire in Elizabeth becomes more comprehensible if one considers the religious climate in France in her day and

Him, built up in Him, strengthened in faith and growing in Him in thanksgiving' (ibid.

its influence on Elizabeth. Kourie (1990:210) explains that passion mysticism which arose in medieval Europe was still widespread in France in Elizabeth's time. Elizabeth was influenced regarding the desire for suffering through her religious formation as a child and adolescent. Catholicism in Elizabeth's days was characterised by a morbid obsession with suffering, mortification and even death. Elizabeth desires to wear herself out for Christ (De Meester 1995:110). Why is this necessary? Surely, God does not want his children to be tired and unhealthy because they have worn themselves out for him. In Elizabeth's time, God was understood as a stern judge who demanded perfection and if perfection requires suffering and death, then that was the immediate goal. Generally, suffering was understood as sent by God to chastise those whom he loves. To some extent, Elizabeth transcends this fatalistic notion of suffering by turning towards the merciful love of God and linking it to the growth of Jesus Christ in believers. Suffering becomes a relationship, 'a deeper self-forgetfulness in order that prayerful attention to God and fraternal charity be lived ever more deeply' (Valabek 1985:43). Certainly some of her sayings about suffering⁹⁰ are unpalatable in our day, but this also has to do with a tendency today to choose what is pleasant and ignore or deny what is unpleasant in the spiritual life.

For Elizabeth, being in Christ and being conformed to Christ means that suffering is unavoidable. Why? Because the christian faith runs counter to the values and aspirations of the world. In pursuit of christian ideals over worldly ones, the believer is inevitably caught up in suffering each time he or she is called to self-renunciation. For Elizabeth, conformity to Christ is the way of suffering, the way of the cross:

The soul that wants to serve God...must be resolved to share *fully* in its Master's passion. It is one of the redeemed who in its turn must redeem other souls, and for that reason it will sing on its lyre: "I glory in the cross of Jesus Christ" (Gal 6.14). "With Christ I am nailed to the cross..." (Gal 2:19). And again, "I suffer in my body what is lacking in the passion of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church" (Col 1:24) (De Meester 1984:146).

What do sacrifice and suffering entail? Sacrifice and suffering do not always refer to physical suffering such as Elizabeth endured during her illness. They refer more generally to the suffering and pain that accompanies self-denial in whatever form it may take. Renunciation of

1984:127).

one's will and the inevitable death of self-love do not come cheaply. In the words of Elizabeth to her mother (De Meester 1995:210), 'the suffering of the heart is the greatest suffering'.

Isaac the Syrian (quoted in Ware 1996a:129) writes about suffering as follows:

if you would be victorious, taste the suffering of Christ in your person, that you may be chosen to taste his glory. For if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him. The intellect cannot be glorified with Jesus, if the body does not suffer for Jesus. Blessed are you if you suffer for righteousness' sake. Behold, for years and generations the way of God has been made smooth through the Cross and by death. The way of God is a daily Cross.

These words echo the sentiments of Elizabeth exactly.

According to Kourie (1990:203), Elizabeth accepted suffering as the patrimony of Carmel and recognised the efficacy and spiritual benefits of suffering which extended far beyond the parameters of the cloister. Elizabeth desired and accepted suffering because it conformed her to the Master. Furthermore, it completes what is lacking in the suffering of Christ, according to Paul (Col 1:24), as the passage cited clearly testifies. Kourie (1990:206) cogently points out that this does not mean that anything is lacking in the suffering of *Christ*. 'Christ's life and death are all-sufficient, and no supplementary action is necessary....What Paul refers to as being still "lacking" [refers to]...his own fellowship with that suffering' (ibid. 1990:206). While Christ's victory is objectively complete, it still needs to be appropriated by individuals and this is accomplished by taking up one's cross and following Christ through daily self-denial and self-forgetfulness.

Elizabeth's life in the Trinity is not characterised or dependent upon spiritual consolation. Rather, it is based on faith, but with immolation and the suffering that stems from self-surrender and self-emptying that embraces her whole person. All this is done for the love Elizabeth bears the Lord Jesus. Her inspiration comes from Christ who loved her and gave himself up for her (Gal 2:20). Therefore, love must end in sacrifice. 'We must be sacrificial beings, for it seems to me that sacrifice is only love put into action' (De Meester 1995:232).

In accord with Orthodoxy, asceticism does not render her sad or despondent, rather Elizabeth is filled with joy and peace and these inner dispositions radiate from the pages coming from her

⁹⁰ For example, Elizabeth desires suffering almost more than heaven (De Meester

pen. Her inner peace and tranquillity and joy are evident even during the last months before her death when her suffering was at its peak. Never for a moment does Elizabeth lose her hold on her inner peace. Furthermore, like everything else, sacrifice is a sacrament that brings God to her (De Meester 1995:119). Elizabeth is quite emphatic that she does not love suffering for its own sake, but she loves it because it conforms her to her Beloved and is a pledge of God's love for her. Through her own suffering, Elizabeth realised the soteriological value of suffering. This made suffering meaningful and bearable. Orthodoxy also values the soteriological value of suffering and does not support suffering merely as an end in itself. In fact, everything in the spiritual life is considered a means to the goal of deification and the ultimate glory of God and should never become the goal itself.

Elizabeth does not discuss ascetical practices in any detail, neither does she counsel her correspondents to practise asceticism. Elizabeth does support them and counsels them on suffering at the time of their affliction. Although Elizabeth does not underestimate the role of mortification and suffering in the process of deification, her focus is more on the purifying presence of God within the soul. All that is required to be purified is to turn inwards to the indwelling Trinity. 'He will purify us, through His continual contact with us, through divine touches' (De Meester 1995:116). Here, too, there is a link between Elizabeth and Orthodoxy which places more emphasis on the goal than the acquisition of virtues, as already mentioned. Neither ignores asceticism, suffering and the importance of virtues, but what is hard for humans to acquire, is given by Christ in a flash to a soul open and surrendered enough. Elizabeth understood that to have God's will fulfilled in her, she must think less of the work of the destruction of vices still to be accomplished in her, and more of the sanctifying presence of the Trinity whose love is a furnace that burns away all that darkens the image of God within. Simply, the purifying effects of the Holy Spirit will help her towards her goal much more quickly than being concerned about her weaknesses and engaging in extraordinary acts of mortification and suffering.

Orthodoxy does not regard the ascetical life as leading to acquired and infused contemplation. Rather, it is considered the therapy necessary for enabling the person "to see" what has always been there, namely, God's presence and self-giving in every event of life, because asceticism purifies, illumines and integrates the eye of the heart to "see" metaphysical realities. In this

1995:332); suffering is a pledge of the Father's love (ibid: 1995:317).

way it facilitates growth in Christ and christification, so that the Holy Spirit can deify human nature. Trained in the spiritual tradition of the time, Elizabeth would have regarded acquired and infused contemplation as being a result of the ascetic life. On the other hand, Elizabeth would agree with the therapeutic value of asceticism as viewed by the Eastern Church, because she was keenly aware of the need to die to self so that Christ may live in her.

5.3.5 Icons

The significance of icons in Orthodox spirituality cannot be disputed. Icons point to the primordial intrinsic sacramentality of all things which, lost through the fall, is now being restored. Icons point to a transfigured existence and a renewed reflection of the image of God, already attained by the person depicted in the icon, to which the praying person aspires. Icons beckon the believer to a deeper participation in the life of the Trinity. Gregory of Nyssa regarded icons as scriptures that speak from the walls (in Koonce 1994:22). Their power to lead souls to contemplation and union with God is well attested in the East and has inspired a renewed interest in icons in the West.

The value of icons or sacred images is an integral part of Elizabeth's mysticism. 'Take your crucifix, look, listen....I settle down with my crucifix....I will look very often at this precious picture and will unite myself to the soul of the Virgin' (De Meester 1995:23, 27, 226). When Elizabeth unites herself to the soul of the blessed Virgin while looking at an icon of the annunciation, she is genuinely Orthodox at heart. Icons, whether the crucifix or holy images, are an aid to constant remembrance of God and deeper communion with the triune God in the soul. Elizabeth used holy pictures to build up, maintain and deepen her life in the Trinity. Elizabeth also incorporated medals into her spirituality. As a carmelite, Elizabeth wore a habit which included the wearing of the scapular, a devotion dedicated to Mary. For Elizabeth, the scapular is a means of dedication to and veneration of Mary.

In other words, Elizabeth used icons and other sacramentals as aids to the contemplative life, that is, as a means to enter more deeply into the presence and life of the Trinity. Such externals can easily entrap one, and the danger of them becoming nothing more than mere instruments of superstition is ever present. Nevertheless, Elizabeth always went beyond them to the invisible Reality they signify, staunchly exercising her belief in the sacramental nature of everything.

5.3.6 Liturgical spirituality

The liturgy is absolutely central to Eastern Orthodox spirituality. The Orthodox liturgy is extremely elaborate and 'full of spiritual meaning and beauty' (Monk 1978:16). Because of the communal nature of Orthodox spirituality and faith, corporate worship is considered more important than private devotions. A person's spiritual life begins with the liturgy, is nourished by the liturgy and ends with the liturgy. In other words, the liturgy is the avenue through which the christian lives the normal development of the soul. The many feasts that fill the church calendar enable the believer to walk the year with Christ and meditate on the meaning of salvation history with the purpose of growing in union with Christ and attain *theosis*. The feasts of the saints and martyrs provide additional nourishment for the soul on its journey to the centre of the heart and to God.

Elizabeth deeply immersed herself in the liturgical spirit of her time which was characterised by living the mysteries of the faith and incorporating them into one's life, as Orthodox christians would do. Like Orthodox christians, Elizabeth's spiritual life began with the liturgy, was nourished by the liturgy through the eucharist and the many feasts of the liturgical year and finally ended with the liturgy. Hence, the mysticism of both Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy is rooted in the sacraments. Baptism incorporates believers into Christ and makes them children of the Father. The baptised are sealed with the Holy Spirit and 'are raised to a new mode of existence, over and beyond a merely natural mode; we are made sharers in the divine nature itself' (Valabek 1977:27). This is typically Orthodox theology.

According to Elizabeth, God justifies people by his sacraments and his direct touches when recollected in the depths of the soul (De Meester 1984:127) as well as by faith (Rom 5:1) (De Meester 1984:105). Elizabeth has in mind the many times that God forgives and heals believers each and every day. Thus, Elizabeth encounters God in his saving actions, not only in the sacraments, but also in extra-sacramental encounters. In this way Elizabeth's daily life anticipated the Second Vatican Council's (1962-1965) teaching that 'the Liturgy never exhausts the Church's saving activity' (Valabek 1977:28). The eucharist is the opportunity for Elizabeth to free herself of self-seeking so that God will recognise in her only Christ (De Meester 1995:299). It is the only occasion in which the believer receives Christ in his humanity (De Meester 1995:271) since Christ is present in his divinity through the divine indwelling.

Elizabeth corresponds closely with the Eastern Church's understanding of the communal nature of the liturgy. Elizabeth (in De Meester 1995:105) writes regarding the eucharist: 'this whole mystery is so much "ours"'. For Elizabeth, the liturgy is never purely an individualistic celebration, but an ecclesial celebration. Her correspondence with Orthodoxy regarding the eucharist goes even further: the eucharist is an anticipation of the occupation of the blessed in heaven, namely, glorifying God. Hence, Elizabeth's vision of the liturgy, as well as her mystical vision, is eschatological. This corresponds with Eastern Orthodoxy for which the celebration of the eucharist is the participation in the *eternal heavenly banquet*, and therefore, the entire church (on earth and in heaven) participates in the celebration.

As a Carmelite, Elizabeth celebrated the canonical hours, or the divine office, and dedicated particular hours to the needs of those dear to her. In the life of Elizabeth, private prayer and liturgical prayer formed a harmonious unity that enriched and nourished her contemplative spirit. In other words, as a mystic who found the Trinity in the depths of her being, the liturgy did not become superfluous, but continued to be a dominant aspect of her mystical life. Here Elizabeth demonstrates a close link with Orthodoxy which understands life in Christ as 'life in the sacraments' and that 'divine life, communion with God, deification, "grace", are freely given and communicated to human beings in the sacramental life of the Church' (Frank 1992:19).

For Elizabeth, the feasts of the church's calendar are opportunities to celebrate the lives of Mary, Jesus and the saints, and as such, are opportunities to meditate on the great mysteries of the faith. Elizabeth couples many graces to particular feasts of Christ, Mary and the saints. Elizabeth celebrates the feasts with spiritual preparation and devotion. The feast of the Trinity is indeed her own feast (De Meester 1995:45). The seasons of the year are equally precious times to imitate Christ (during Lent) or Mary (during Advent). Therefore, feast days are an expression of Elizabeth's own spiritual life and a stimulus to a deeper experience of God. For Elizabeth, contemplation and liturgy blend in a harmonious unity, the one sustaining and nourishing the other. Seen from another perspective, Elizabeth blends corporate worship in the liturgy with seclusion offered by monasticism in one harmonious life in the Spirit.

Elizabeth highly esteemed the eucharist and nothing expressed the love of God better than the eucharist, which 'is union, consummation, He in us, we in Him, and isn't that Heaven on earth?' (De Meester 1995:105). In Elizabeth's days the frequent reception of holy communion (as is general Catholic practice today) was not yet a reality. It was on 20 December 1905 that Pius X

authorised daily communion for all catholics in a state of sanctifying grace (De Meester 1995:269; Neuner & Dupuis 1992:378). Although Elizabeth loved to receive communion, when she was deprived⁹¹ of holy communion it was not an obstacle to her. Because God can be encountered in every event of life, there is no need to suffer when one cannot receive holy communion as often as one would like, because one can communicate with God all day long since he is living in the soul (De Meester 1995:65). God is not restricted to the official sacraments of the church but can offer himself in any event of the day.

5.3.7 Scriptural mysticism

Scripture is the foundation of Orthodox spirituality and asceticism. *Theoria* or the contemplation of scripture is at the heart of Orthodox mystical theology, as it is at the heart of the mysticism and asceticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Orthodox evangelical spirituality lays more emphasis on following Christ and practising charity to those in need than rigorous asceticism or ritual worship, although the last two are also considered important to a holistic spiritual life. In evangelical spirituality as found in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-12) take on a prominent position.

Elizabeth was steeped in scripture and its teaching, especially that of John and Paul. The Gospel and Old Testament are more or less presumed by her and do not feature prominently in her writings. As Elizabeth matured in her spiritual life, her autographs became replete with biblical references. Every word of scripture captivates her and Elizabeth receives it as the word of her Master. Each word of scripture is a sacrament of God and Elizabeth receives each word with the same reverence as she received Christ. The reading and contemplation of scripture⁹² in the time of Elizabeth was something almost unheard of amongst catholics. Yet, because Elizabeth interacted with scripture and allowed it to transform her, this young girl without theological education was able to penetrate the greatest christian mysteries with a clarity and orthodoxy that was marvelled at by eminent theologians (for example the present Pope John Paul II, and Hans Urs von Balthasar). How is this possible? Paulot (quoted in Von Balthasar 1992:487) presents a probing perspective, 'That a young woman of twenty-three or twenty-four

⁹¹ Towards the end of Elizabeth's life, her illness no longer allowed her to receive holy communion.

⁹² The clergy and professed religious communities did pray the Divine Office several times a day and this prayer of the Church consists mostly of Psalms as well as other scriptural passages. It is still part of the daily liturgical cycle of the Church.

years should attain this understanding of the word of God without formal studies, that she should know how to expound the mystery of grace with flawless orthodoxy, can only be explained through an essential kinship of her soul with the things she explained, a deep affinity that she undoubtedly experienced before she ventured to speak of these things'. These words of Paulot pinpoint an essential correspondence between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy that accounts for the remarkable similarity between their respective mystical doctrines, namely, the centrality of scripture as well as the contemplation of scripture through which knowledge of the Divine is acquired. Elizabeth follows the same method as the Church Fathers, namely, the contemplation of scripture and rational reflection, linked to experience of the christian life.

Granting that Elizabeth's lack of theological erudition does not permit her to uncover hidden truths in the bible by means of theological deduction, she nonetheless fulfils the purpose of contemplation perfectly, namely, uncovering the abundance of truth and grace and the call to service that they evoke (Von Balthasar 1992:488). Both Elizabeth and the Orthodox Fathers employ a mystical hermeneutic in the reading of scripture, and therefore, it would have indeed been surprising if there had not been such a remarkable correspondence between Elizabeth of the Trinity and the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

This is what two catholic theologians have to say about Elizabeth's use of scripture. 'As it was for the Church Fathers, so too for Elizabeth: to think and speak as a christian is to think and speak within the thought of Scripture. Her asceticism is the asceticism of the Scriptures; her mysticism is the mysticism of the Scriptures' (Von Balthasar 1992:486). Arintero (quoted in Von Balthasar 1992:487) says that 'what I marvel most about her is her deep sense for the great mysteries of Christian life...this sensitivity – so similar to that of the Apostle – has permitted her to become a faithful expositor of the finest and most profound passages of his letters'.

Elizabeth situates herself completely within the tradition of the Church Fathers and this accounts for the marvellous similarity between her mystical doctrine and that of the Eastern Orthodox Church which has continued the tradition of the Church Fathers.

5.4 THE *THEOTOKOS* AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Mary occupies a central position in the spiritual life of Carmel in particular and Catholic and Orthodox Christians in general. The *Theotokos*, highly venerated in the East as she is, enjoys a privileged position in the celestial hierarchy. Mary is often venerated as the *Akathiste*, that is, the gateway to paradise. After Christ, the *Theotokos* is *the* model of interior souls, *the* prime example of a contemplative who lived her life in God. Mary is *the* contemplative model who ponders everything in her heart. Mary's place in the life of the Christian is indisputably one of leading souls to contemplative union with God in Christ by always directing souls towards her Son.

"*Theotokos*" means "God-bearer". In Eastern Orthodoxy 'every believing soul is and becomes *Theotokos* (the bearer of God)' (Maximos the Confessor quoted in Koonce 1994:25). Elizabeth would agree with Maximos because of the divine indwelling as well as through her understanding that at Christmas Christ is born anew in the soul of believers (De Meester 1992:139). This notion echoes that of a German mystic, Meister Eckhart, 'It is in vain that Christ was born in Bethlehem if he is not born in your heart as well' (quoted in Ashanin 1990:62). Eastern Orthodoxy understands the incarnation very realistically: the incarnation 'is not an abstraction. It is not a divine act in the past but a *recurring enactment* of the divine life in the life of believers' (Ashanin 1990:62).

Elizabeth dedicated herself to the protection of Mary and renewed her dedication with each Marian feast. Mary is *the* model of a true disciple of Christ, *the* model for all contemplatives. Elizabeth also speaks of Mary pondering the mystery of Christ in her heart (Lk 2:19). The period between the Annunciation and the Birth of Christ reveals Mary as the model of those whom God has chosen to live within, in the depths of the bottomless abyss of the heart. Mary is the one who is always contemplating the divine Face she sees within. Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth gave Mary the title of *Janua Coeli*, Gate of Heaven. It is Mary who will lead Elizabeth into the heavenly courts after her death (De Meester 1984:161). Elizabeth, true contemplative that she is, does not lose sight of the fact that contemplation did not prevent Mary from acts of charity when called upon by God to do so. 'Never did the ineffable vision that she [Mary] contemplated within herself in any way diminish her outward charity....If an order from Heaven arrives, contemplation turns towards men, sympathizes with their needs, is inclined towards all their miseries....When it has finished its work here below, it rises, burning

with its fire, and takes up again the road on high' (De Meester 1984:111). Here, Elizabeth is describing the "ebb and flow" that characterises true contemplation. Elizabeth was also keenly engaged in apostolic work even from within the confines of the cloister. Elizabeth tries to arrange a marriage partner for a friend, asks her mother for some clothing for a needy family, prays for the needs of her correspondents, and most of all, provides spiritual direction to her correspondents and those who visited her in Carmel. It is one of Elizabeth's greatest qualities that she was able to remain attentive to 'her Three' dwelling in her heart and be interested and involved in the concrete situations of others at the same time. Elizabeth was able to do this because she found those she had left behind in God, a genuine communion of saints. Although Elizabeth could easily be understood as "an otherworldly mystic" because of her intense concentration on heavenly realities, this is in fact not a true portrait of Elizabeth. Elizabeth corresponds closely with Eastern Orthodox Christians in their love and veneration of the blessed *Theotokos* and their endeavours to emulate Mary's contemplative spirit.

Elizabeth would disagree with the Orthodox tradition concerning the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception promulgated in 1854. When Orthodoxy calls Mary "immaculate", it means that she never committed personal sin as a result of the correct use of her freewill and her complete openness to the grace of God operating in her soul and not because she was born without the effects of original sin. On the other hand, there are some Orthodox theologians who recognise Mary's failings and imperfections, for example John Chrysostom (Meyendorff 1996a:240). Mary is seen within the mystery of salvation and as the representative of humans in need of salvation. Mary is the closest to the Saviour and the worthiest receiver of the new life Christ has brought and therefore a perfect model for the Christian life (Meyendorff 1996a:240).

Veneration of Mary reminds one immediately of the veneration of the saints and the doctrine of the communion of saints. In Eastern Orthodoxy all believers are one in Christ, and therefore, believers are also in communion with one another because there is no separation among those who live in the same spirit of Christ (Ashanin 1990:64). The doctrine of the communion of saints helps the church and the individual to move beyond time and space and live in the eternal *now*. The doctrine of the communion of saints features very prominently in the divine liturgy during which all the faithful, those on earth and those already passed on, the Virgin Mary and the angels worship and adore the thrice-holy God. The communion of saints is also

expressed in the veneration of icons because it puts the believer spiritually in communion with its prototype.

For Elizabeth, the communion of saints is a fulfilment of Christ's prayer: 'Father, may they be made perfectly one' (Jn 17.23) (De Meester 1995:53). In Christ there is no more separation. Elizabeth leaves no stone unturned to tell her friends and family that there is no separation between those who are in Christ. 'No more distance, no more separation, but already, as in Heaven, the fusion of hearts and souls!...There can no longer be any separation...since He whom I possess within me dwells in her, and thus we are quite close!' (De Meester 1995:110, 113). All believers live the same life in the Spirit, and therefore, there is no separation between them even though Elizabeth was physically removed from friends and family because of her cloistered life. Elizabeth also appealed to the intercessions of the saints in heaven and their feast days were keenly observed and celebrated by her. Elizabeth viewed the saints as models for the christian life and says that 'it does us much good to look into the soul of saints and then to follow them through faith right up to Heaven' (De Meester 1995:134).

Elizabeth remembered the name days of her friends and families and often wrote to them on the occasion of their feast day. Like all the great christian doctrines, Elizabeth truly *lived* the communion of saints by bearing all her loved ones in her heart.

In Elizabeth's time many catholics found it difficult to turn directly to God who was seen as a stern judge. Consequently the cult of the saints and Mary was the more or less general avenue to divine favours. Not so with Elizabeth, she turned directly to the triune God and did not consider God unapproachable. Soliciting the intercessions of the saints and Mary was an aspect of Elizabeth's christian faith that she lived fully, without it detracting in any way from her trust and confidence in turning to God like a child to its father or mother.

5.5 EXPLAINING THE CONSONANCE BETWEEN ELIZABETH AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Two questions arise spontaneously from this analysis. Firstly, why is there such a notable correspondence between the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Eastern Orthodoxy? Secondly, was Elizabeth conscious of this consonance?

With respect to the first question, the most obvious answer that can be proffered is that there is only one Christ, one christian faith, one life in the Spirit of God (Eph 4:5-6), and therefore, essentially only one christian spirituality or mysticism. On the other hand, there are different "schools" of spirituality, e.g. Jesuit, Franciscan, Carmelite, Benedictine, etc. These different schools of spirituality are not essentially different, but are more appropriately understood as the product of different *aspects* of christian spirituality being emphasised. To emulate Christ is no mean feat. For example, the Franciscans emphasise the poverty of Christ, the Benedictines are a teaching order and the carmelites, an enclosed order (primarily) that witnesses to the contemplative life. Any school of spirituality must by its sheer nature have salient aspects in common with others. The phenomenon of different religious orders is peculiar to the West, though. Eastern Orthodoxy has never developed different religious orders because the call to follow Christ is the same for all christians. On the other hand, there are different strands of spirituality in Eastern Orthodoxy. Hesychasm, for example, is not pursued by all Orthodox christians. Some would follow the way of the commandments, or develop their spirituality around the sacramental life of the church. Once again, this does not mean that the hesychasts do not follow the commandments or do not regard the sacramental life as vital to their spiritual development - on the contrary. It remains a matter of *emphasis* and even this should not be taken out of all proportion, whether in the East or the West.

Another explanation for the consonance between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy is the fact that the carmelite tradition traces its roots as far back as the early desert Fathers and Mothers and even beyond that to the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Just as Elijah was called to the desert (1 Kings 17:3,4), so the same Holy Spirit calls the carmelite to go to the desert so that God can speak to the heart. The carmelite spiritual tradition comes down from the early desert hermits, some of whom went to live on Mount Carmel, and continued with the desert spirituality of these saintly spiritual Mothers and Fathers. Carmel spirituality has close links with the ancient monastic and patristic tradition, Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian and Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, through John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. There is, therefore, a close affinity between carmelite spirituality and the Eastern Orthodox tradition which continued this ancient mystical tradition. Konyesni (1982:27) even asserts that there is no 'dichotomy nor divergence' between Eastern Orthodox and carmelite spiritual traditions and that the experience of carmelite life blends with the teachings of the Orthodox Fathers. The carmelite rule reflects the more contemplative and mystical traditions of early Eastern monasticism. It is this same tradition in which Elizabeth of the Trinity received her carmelite formation and lived

the last five years of her life. This means that Elizabeth received the same formation as all carmelites do. Elizabeth's religious formation, humility and unreserved surrender to God through the correct use of her freewill enabled her to receive mystical knowledge from God. In this way she arrives at a mysticism that corresponds so closely to the mystical tradition of the Orthodox Church which transmits the unaltered christian tradition as handed down by the apostles and Church Fathers.

Van Ruysbroeck synthesised the Western psychological approach to spirituality and the objective Trinitarian approach of the East. Elizabeth was influenced by Jan van Ruysbroeck during the last couple of months before her untimely death. Her encounter with his writings helped her to clarify her own spiritual doctrine. Jan van Ruysbroeck is, therefore, one more avenue which put Elizabeth in touch with Eastern Orthodox theology.

Was Elizabeth conscious of the consonance between her teaching and that of Eastern Orthodoxy? Elizabeth's writings do not provide a definitive answer to the question. Since Elizabeth did not have an extensive education, it is highly unlikely that she was conscious of the similarity. That Elizabeth would *consciously develop* her doctrine in accordance with Eastern Orthodoxy is in my opinion out of the question. The correspondence is due to the spiritual elements and practices held in common by both traditions, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodoxy. These elements are intrinsic to her particular carmelite spirituality, and hence are *emphasised* with greater clarity than in many other schools of spirituality.

In brief, the correspondence is due to the *authenticity* of the spiritual doctrine of both Elizabeth and Orthodoxy which in turn is attributable to the highly scriptural and doctrinal character of both. The correspondence is also accounted for by the fact that the carmelite tradition has its roots in the early eremitic and cenobitic spiritual traditions. In both cases their mysticism is genuinely patristic. The teachings of the early Church Fathers would have reached Elizabeth via the carmelite contemplative tradition. Elizabeth was also influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite, a late fifth-century Syrian monk, well-known for his work *Mystical Theology*. It almost goes without saying, that Eastern Orthodox spirituality has handed down this rich and ancient spiritual tradition to the present. Bearing the foregoing in mind, it would have been surprising indeed had there *not* been this close correspondence between the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition and that of the young mystic of Dijon.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The vocation of humankind as envisioned and lived by Elizabeth of the Trinity and within Eastern Orthodoxy corresponds so closely that Elizabeth emerges as a *hesychast* in true Orthodox tradition. This is because the key elements of the journey towards union with the triune God are the same in their respective doctrines: the place of the heart as the kingdom of God where the three persons indwell the human soul, the search for the place of the heart as the search for God within, the emphasis on dying to self, self-forgetfulness and the resulting suffering, continual prayer as the means to abide always in the divine presence and the understanding that every event, every incident is a sacrament through which the divine can be encountered.

There are elements that Elizabeth does not develop to the extent that the Orthodox Fathers have done, for example, the idea of perpetual progress as developed by Gregory of Nyssa. Elizabeth is also not explicit on the deification of the whole human being in its psychosomatic entirety. It is always important to remember that Elizabeth does not set herself up as a theologian, but shares her mystical insights with others through the medium of occasional writings and retreat notes. In addition, Elizabeth concentrates only on what is immediately relevant in terms of her ultimate goal. Elizabeth bypasses what is peripheral in her opinion. As already noted, the nature of the points of divergence is such that it does not detract from the overall remarkable consonance that exists between the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Elizabeth of the Trinity.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this investigation was to compare and contrast the mystical doctrine of Elizabeth of the Trinity, on the one hand, and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, on the other. This comparative enterprise was undertaken against the background of the major influences that shaped the mystical life and doctrine of Elizabeth and an analysis of the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The study of the major influences on Elizabeth's mysticism revealed that Elizabeth did not merely copy images and symbols from her sources in a parrot-like manner, but filtered them through her own contemplative experience. Elizabeth assimilated and internalised these images and symbols because they expressed exactly what she experienced. The analysis of the carmelite tradition highlighted the main reason why such a striking consonance exists between Elizabeth and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, namely, the fact that the carmelite tradition traces its roots to the early desert hermits whose mystical teachings are an integral part of Orthodox theology. Steeped in this tradition, this consonance is not really surprising, but in fact, inevitable.

The aim of the study of the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition was to serve as background for the comparative part of the investigation while also making it more known and appreciated by Western Christians. The main section of the study investigated the consonance and divergence between Elizabeth and Orthodoxy. The juxtaposition of similarities and dissimilarities greatly facilitated keener understanding and appreciation of the correlation between the mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity and that of Eastern Orthodoxy. This comparative enterprise revealed deeper nuances of meaning which could easily have been overlooked, for example, Elizabeth's understanding of the mode of God's indwelling in the soul (see list of dissimilarities below). The areas of similarities and dissimilarities will now be enumerated in order to summarise the results of this study.

Striking *similarities* were found in the following areas:

- christo-trinitarian foundation and the absolute centrality of the Trinity to the extent that everything in their respective mysticism can be subsumed under the Trinity;

- life in the Trinity through life in Christ which has the following consequences:
 - * indwelling of the triune God in the human soul which in turn leads to the experience of heavenly life in the soul now already, hence a realised eschatology;
 - * mutual indwelling of human beings which results in real *koinonia* among believers and by extension, the communion of saints;
- mysticism of light in which the triune God is encountered in light rather than darkness, although darkness is not completely absent;
- experiential knowledge of God through a purified *nous* which is capable of receiving knowledge of God that is reliable when interpreted within the context of the christian community and tradition;
- sacrament of the present moment in which the Trinity is found in every event and moment of the day;
- vocation of humankind: made in the image of God, humans strive for likeness to God and human perfection through purification and integration of the *nous* in order to arrive at the place of the metaphysical heart;
- universal call to perfection;
- asceticism, silence, purification, renunciation and continual prayer as the means to realise inner integration and dispose the soul for the divine gift of deification;
- *epectasis*: always straining towards perfection;
- sacrificial love as an expression of one's relationship with God as a result of values and norms that run counter to those of the world;
- icons as an aid to constant remembrance of God and deeper communion with the triune God;
- liturgical spirituality which emphasises the importance of the sacraments in the mystical life;
- scriptural spirituality in which the contemplation of scripture is an integral part of the mystical life;
- *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, always directing believers to her son;
- deification as union between the soul and God in which the ontological difference remains intact; and
- doxology as the ultimate conclusion of the mystical odyssey.

An element of *divergence* was found in the following areas:

- election and predestination: after the indwelling Trinity, this is the second most central and important doctrine in the mysticism of Elizabeth while it is not regarded as very important in Eastern Orthodoxy because of the emphasis on human free will. The difference between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy has to do with the place it occupies in their respective mysticism, and not to their interpretation of the doctrine as such;
- immaculate conception: Eastern Orthodoxy does not accept the dogma of the immaculate conception which is embraced by Elizabeth;
- indwelling Trinity: Elizabeth seems to understand the presence of the triune God in the human soul as a result of grace and not because of the image character of humanity as in Eastern Orthodoxy;
- the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory finds support in Elizabeth, but is not endorsed by Eastern Orthodoxy; and
- apophatic versus kataphatic mysticism: Although Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy correspond on the transcendence and immanence of God in human history, Elizabeth expresses this understanding in a kataphatic way and the Orthodox Fathers in an apophatic way generally.

On the one hand, differences between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy should not be overemphasised; they are not of such a nature that they detract from the overriding correspondence that exists between their respective mystical doctrines. On the other hand, inclusion of areas of divergence enables a more holistic understanding of the relationship between their mystical doctrines because they bring the similarities into even clearer focus. A discussion of the areas of divergence between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy also draws attention to the fact that differences within christianity cannot merely be glossed over – christendom is still divided precisely because of doctrinal differences. These differences are, therefore, of fundamental importance but need to be situated within an overall framework of general similarity.

Of what relevance is this study to christians living at the start of the third millennium? The relevance of this enterprise is directly linked to the aims of the investigation. The first aim, as already mentioned, was to make the Eastern Orthodox tradition more known and appreciated in the West. It is a rich source for spirituality and mysticism. In the light of the contemporary search for deeper spiritual experience, the Eastern Orthodox tradition has much to offer

seekers after genuine christian mysticism. Since ignorance produces suspicion and animosity, a better understanding of the Orthodox mystical tradition augments ecumenical relations.

Secondly, the aim has been to make Elizabeth's mysticism more known and appreciated especially in the light of its correlation to the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition. Having articulated the striking consonance between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy, it is my contention that Elizabeth focuses attention on mystical experience as an authentic source of knowledge of God because it is through her mystical experiences that she attained infused knowledge of God. This knowledge she interpreted and tested against the wider christian tradition she found in the Roman Catholic Church and the carmelite mystical tradition. The result is a mysticism in harmony with the Eastern Orthodox tradition which in turn has remained virtually unchanged since the time of the earliest christian communities. Authentic christian mystical experience may very well prove to be the instrument of divine grace that will ultimately effect christian unity. As Scupoli (1987:15) clarifies,

It is not in the sphere of ecclesiastical organisation, of canon law and church government, that unity will be discovered and union achieved. Nor is in the sphere of dogmatic discussion, severed as that so often is from actual life of the Christian community and reduced to a battle of abstractions. It is where we fight and pray together, in the same spiritual combat against the same unseen enemies, that we shall find ourselves to be one army – not become one army, but discover that we are one. And when we discover that, the formulae and the institutions will be adjusted accordingly.

However, this will only be possible when the experience of mystics are given serious consideration in theological discourse and reflection.

The greatest aspect of Elizabeth's relevance concerns her ecclesial mission which she now continues in heaven. Elizabeth understands her mission as one of intercession for people who seek a deeper union with God and of drawing people to interior recollection. There is hardly a mission more suitable and opportune to our contemporary needs. Many people feel overwhelmed by the values, more precisely, the lack of meaningful values, of the global society that is emerging. It is often difficult to maintain a sense of human dignity and value, and to fulfil one's vocation. What does Elizabeth offer? She invites people to enter into the secure haven of their soul, and to unite with the Trinity who indwells each and every baptized soul. United to the triune God, life takes on horizons previously unknown. Elizabeth offers inner rest, love,

hope, silence and peace in the presence of the Trinity which gives meaning and value to life, even when that life is marked by suffering and death. Elizabeth witnesses to the fact that mysticism has to do with *life* and life in all its fullness.

The *simple* and *practical* nature of Elizabeth's mysticism renders it eminently suited to our time and its frenetic lifestyles. In addition, in contrast to the Western dry formalistic and rationalistic approaches to theology and spirituality of the past, Elizabeth draws attention to the mystical experience itself as an intimate heart-to-heart relationship with the triune God in which God is encountered in every event of the day. Elizabeth offers the aspirant mystic a way to overcome the surface ego and allow the metaphysical self to be divinised through the simplification and integration of the inner spiritual world through increasing docility to the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth is almost emphatic that it is possible to follow her mystical way in any walk of life. This counters the Western notion of one-sided elitism which tends to exclude the largest segment of the faithful from the mystical life. The value of Elizabeth's mysticism resides not only in her doctrine and mission, but also in the universal application of her mysticism. It is *every christian's* vocation. Elizabeth brings the hermitage or the cell into the lives of ordinary people, the office, the home, the factory and, 'enthrones contemplation in the heart of action' (Watkins 1953:263). She presents traditional mystical doctrine in clear, unencumbered terms, applies it to the marketplace of everyday life, and this she does from within our own time, because in the realm of the spirit, time is transcended.

The mysticism of Elizabeth is said to be a harbinger of theological developments of the twentieth century, especially in the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Elizabeth highlights the role of the Trinity in spirituality and the importance of relating to each of the three divine persons. Of great importance is Elizabeth's mystical scriptural hermeneutic as a corrective of the overly rationalistic hermeneutics that were prevalent during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century. Elizabeth's devotion to contemplative reading and study of the bible was quite revolutionary in her day as ordinary catholics had little knowledge of the bible, and even worse, were not encouraged by the church to read and study the bible.

Elizabeth is deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of the church, and as such does not offer new images or ideas. Her originality lies in the way she filters time-honoured concepts and images through her own mystical experience. Elizabeth speaks directly to the heart and this

makes her a very effective teacher of mysticism. Certain things about Elizabeth enable her to reach believers today more powerfully than some of the other great mystics who share her doctrine. Chronologically, Elizabeth is closer to our own time than many other great mystics – and this makes it easier to identify with her. Elizabeth writes in a very informal way; she is *one of us*. Elizabeth does not present a doctrinal synthesis that the theologically non-erudite cannot comprehend, neither does she record any paranormal psychological or physical phenomena that would separate her from “ordinary” people. In fact, it is the very ordinariness of her life as a carmelite, doing nothing extraordinary, just *living her baptismal vocation* that speaks to people today. Elizabeth’s autographs have been translated into various languages which demonstrate a global interest in her mystical doctrine. Nevertheless, as a modern mystic, it is not possible to fully determine her influence from literary sources, precisely because her writings and research into her life and teaching are still in the process of being disseminated.

The third aim was to address certain lacunae found in Eliane (1985). While Eliane focuses on similarities in terms of trinitarian mysticism, asceticism, silence, deification, universal call to holiness, areas of dissonance are not addressed. The areas of dissimilarities have already been enumerated above. It is hoped that this study offers a fuller understanding of the correspondence and relationship between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy than Elaine’s study presents.

Some comments regarding *future research* into the life and mysticism of Elizabeth of the Trinity are in order. Firstly, in my research, I have not found any studies which place Elizabeth’s mysticism in a Mario logical context. It logically follows that this is an area for future research that would greatly enrich knowledge of Elizabeth’s mystical doctrine. Of special interest to the comparative nature of this investigation, would be a closer comparative analysis between Elizabeth and Eastern Orthodoxy concerning Mariology.

Secondly, as a carmelite, Elizabeth was greatly influenced by Teresa of Avila, the founder of the Discalced Carmelite Order. An investigation into the nature and extent of Teresa’s influence on Elizabeth will be beneficial as it would filter the teaching of Teresa through the simple and practical system of interiority of Elizabeth and thus make it more accessible to christians today: through Elizabeth to Teresa.

Thirdly, and deriving directly from Elizabeth's trinitarian mysticism, ongoing study of the role of the Trinity in the mystical life would greatly contribute to making the Trinity the basis of all christian mystical life. Of course, the aim should not be a philosophical work on the Trinity *in se*, but the Trinity *pro nobis*. In this regard, I submit that Eastern Orthodox trinitarian theology could be of great assistance, if only the West could be more open-minded concerning the *bilious*⁹³ clause that was not originally part of the creed.

In conclusion, Elizabeth is a modern mystic who presents the mystical vision of the ancient christian church in simple and democratic terms that make it attractive to all who search for a deeper experience of the Divine and human fulfilment and authentication. In this way, Elizabeth of the Trinity draws attention to the rich mystical traditions of the early desert hermits and as a consequence shows a remarkable consonance with the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition which has transmitted these traditions down to our own day. Elizabeth emerges from this study as a hesychast in true Orthodox tradition, because a hesychast is one who listens and who is open to the presence of God.

⁹³ The Joint International Commission for the theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has met several times without having resolved anything definitively: Patmos and Rhodes (1980); Munich (1982); Crete (1984); Bari (1986); Valamo, Finland (1988); Freising, Germany (1990); Ariccia, Italy (1991); Balamand, Lebanon (1993); and at Baltimore, Maryland, USA (2000). Two online websites can be accessed at www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/CATHORTH.HTM and, from a Russian perspective, www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ve11771.htm. Both were accessed on 7 October 2003.

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