

**Existential Religiosity, Individuality, and Theosis
in the Thought of Bishop George Khodr.**

Submitted by John Miles Elwell to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This work is a study of Bishop George Khodr, a leading Orthodox figure in the Church of Antioch in Lebanon; more specifically, its central hypothesis is that Khodr practises what is described as ‘existential religiosity’, which evolves both from an unflinching commitment and dedication to Christianity, and from his character. It considers whether his existential religiosity is a challenge to the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular, but also to Christians in general and how it might affect his philosophico-theological position on the ‘Other’, particularly with regard to the interfaith and intra-Christian relational dynamic. To expedite the task, the study will consider subject areas that include the role of religion and spirituality within the broader framework of modernity.

The context of religion and spirituality is of some significance in a world where technology and social media have arguably instigated another Age of Enlightenment. It is the *zeitgeist* of this new age, it is contended, that is putting theistic spirituality under sceptical scrutiny, while questioning what religion means, not only to the Lebanese Orthodox community – has it a spiritual core or is it more a hook on which to hang one’s communal identity within a confessional society? – but to Christians worldwide.

Khodr’s book, regarded as an autobiographical novel, acts as an analytical tool by which his attitudes to spirituality can be measured. These will be weighed against confessional insights into his own character as they are filtered through the fictional man. This will be supported by a variety of literary sources taken from Khodr’s other writings, as well as one-to-one interviews with him.

The study seeks to show how, through Bishop Khodr’s existential religiosity, a profile can be created of a unique theologian and religious thinker, one that reveals his spiritual vision, his personal character, and his unique position, not only within the Lebanese Orthodox community, but within Lebanese society at large.

Acknowledgements

The list seems endless, but, most naturally, I should start with my supervisor, Professor Ian Netton. My association with him over eight years has been to experience a master class of kindness, understanding, empathy, erudition and wisdom (not always the same thing), and an uncanny ability gently to steer me away from rapids that would have foundered my delicate intellectual craft. From our initial meeting, when his willingness and openness to support this venture quite literally left me speechless, his insight and guidance throughout have been exercised in an astonishingly subtle and dexterous manner, often leaving me to reflect in wonder how he does it, and always with gentle humour and boundless patience.

In Lebanon, I have received much help and generosity, so if there are omissions, I trust I shall be forgiven: the late George Sayegh, who was instrumental in helping me form this project in its early stages by personally introducing me to Bishop Khodr; Father Porphyrios, who arranged meetings at the University of Balamand, and with whom I had many valuable discussions; Dr Souad Slim, also of Balamand; Father Boulos Wehbe; Maha Milki; Maud Nahas, who has been the friendly, helpful interface between Bishop Khodr and myself; all interviewees for their time and their willingness; Amin and Amal Hamadeh for friendship and accommodation. Thanks also go to Dr Fadia Homeidan, Dr Tarif Khalidi, the late Dr Sami Makarem, all of the American University of Beirut, and to my brother-in-law, Dr Nabil Itani. To Bishop Khodr, I am forever grateful. Meeting him on a number of occasions, both formal and informal, has been a privilege, allowing me to converse with, and get to know, a deeply spiritual, deeply human, individual. An instinctive respect for him has grown over time and been embellished by an emerging awareness of his humour and his humanity.

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

Prolegomenon & Literature Review

1. Introduction

This study focuses on George Khodr, Orthodox Bishop and Metropolitan of Byblos and Botrys, with the aim of constructing a profile of Khodr as a person and as a theologian and thinker.¹ It additionally argues that he embodies a form of religiosity described as existential, which is outlined below. The work acts as a basis to answer an underlying main research questions: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

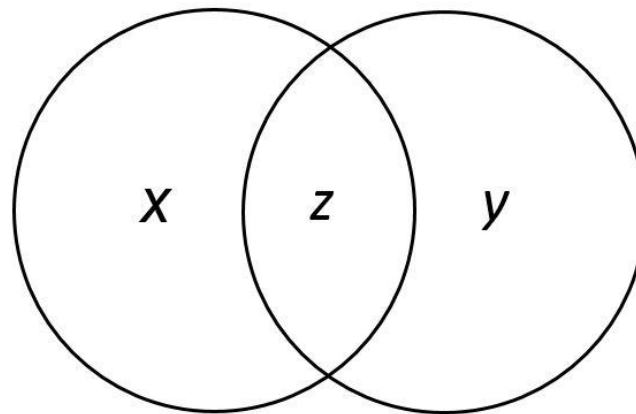
2. Key Definitions

In clarifying what is meant here as 'existential religiosity', it is necessary to define the terms 'existential' and 'religiosity'. The term 'existential' is drawn from the philosophy existentialism, a background of which can be found in Appendix A. In brief, existentialism relates to that branch of philosophy which focuses on what it means to *be*, and on the sense of suffering, dislocation, and loss that permeates human existence. 'Religiosity' is defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as "Religiousness, religious feeling or sentiment", and as "Affected or excessive religiousness."² It is acknowledged that the term can be associated with the latter definition; however, it is used here to denote the former definition, 'religiousness', a word which may have been used in this work, but was judged to be clumsy. As a result, 'religiosity' was adopted. 'Religiosity' is not meant to be pejorative, or to convey any adverse insinuation; it simply means religiousness as it is felt, experienced, and practised.

¹ This thesis has chosen to use the Anglo-Saxon spelling of Khodr's Christian name. It is not unique and corresponds, for example, to how his articles are accredited and to his website.

² Little, W., Fowler, H. W., Coulson, J. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*. C. T. Onions (ed.). London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Coupling the two terms to make the phrase 'existential religiosity' not only qualifies the noun 'religiosity', but brings forth a broader meaning. This can be described in a Venn diagram,³ in which two circles, representing two different fields of study, overlap, creating a space shared by, in this case, the two fields of existentialism and religion/spirituality. It is in this overlap, wherein reside common characteristics, that existential religiosity resides. The diagram below is used as an illustration.



x = existentialism
y = religiosity / spirituality
z = existential religiosity

Existential religiosity, as it is used here, is understood as religiosity that is rooted in spirituality, yet at the same time is cognisant of, empathetic to, and concerned with, the existential experiences of existence, including fear, anxiety, and abandonment; obversely, it also means that such existential experiences of existence recognise the spiritual dimension of humankind. Existential religiosity evolves out of an attitudinal perspective on religious issues, which is derived from, and driven by someone with, the following characteristics. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but conveys a summation of generalities; the generalities themselves are not put in order of significance.

- Unconventional, uncompromising, rebellious, radical.
- Standing outside organisational structures and hierarchies.
- Solitary, of a meditative nature, favouring solitude and humility.

³ Grateful thanks to Professor Morwenna Ludlow of the University of Exeter for suggesting this image as a means of explicating existential religiosity.

- Overcoming barriers, pushing at boundaries of understanding.
- Seemingly contradictory, use of forthright language devoid of nuance.
- Visceral, emotional, a tendency to resist worldly authority/power.
- Living out Christ's precepts without regard to disapproval or censure.
- Allegiance to no-one and no-thing, save to Christ and his word.
- Unease with the intellectualising of religion and spirituality.
- A deepening spirituality emphasising experiential spirituality.

Existential religiosity is neither a departure from the edicts contained and implied within Christianity, nor a supplementary strand of Christianity. It endorses the fundamental messages of Christianity by propagating an uncompromising adherence to Christ's precepts – for example, resisting violence as an option no matter what the circumstances – regarding them as sacrosanct and as a crystallisation of spiritual purpose that brooks no modulation, whether it be to accommodate modernity or secular bias. Indeed, it sees Christianity itself as uncompromising; to a large extent, standing outside worldly institutions and at odds with worldly values, insofar as they contradict, or exist in opposition, to Christ. Those who inhabit and practise existential religiosity often find themselves diametrically opposed to others and to the world at large; they are also 'necessarily' an individual and an Outsider. 'Necessarily' an individual because, within the universality of humankind, they recognise their uniqueness before God, and belong only to Christ; and because the existential attributes, such as fear and alienation, 'necessarily' require individual experience to give them meaning. 'Necessarily' an Outsider owing to their inflexible stance and because their outspokenness courts ostracism and makes them a Socratic gadfly; consequently, they remain on the outside – in the world, but not of it. Existential religiosity would maintain that it is logically impossible to be 'of this world' and to be a Christian. Thus, the (spiritual) Outsider is the personification of existential religiosity.

In order to demonstrate that Khodr's profile, as a man and as a theologian, corresponds with existential religiosity, six existential criteria will be used as analytical tools to sieve his autobiographical book for evidence and allusions

that match each existential criterion. This material, bolstered by his other writings and recorded interviews with him, will allow a coherent picture of him to emerge. The criteria – identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, the Outsider – are not selected at random, but rather because each one is an existential characteristic or attribute, and can, at the same time, be associated with spirituality.⁴ This process will be substantiated in Section 5 of this chapter, ‘System of Analysis’.

3. Literature & The Autobiographical Genre

The thesis will use two translations of Bishop Khodr’s book *Law Hakayt Masra al-Tufula*. The first, which was officially approved by Bishop Khodr, is called *The Pathway of Childhood* and remains unpublished; the second, and more recent translation, has been published as *The Ways of Childhood*.⁵ It was considered helpful to use two versions of the book because the first unpublished translation captures the personal quality of the work and some of the poetic character of the writing, while in some instances, the first version also resorts to the first person singular, which emphasises the confessional nature of what is being said. On the other hand, the second published translation makes the occasionally esoteric text clearer and more accessible.

The book is widely acknowledged to be an autobiographical work, in particular, by Khodr himself,⁶ and it is worth noting that the concept of the

⁴ See Appendix A, Fn.25, where Roberts states that, “Existentialism began...as a frankly Christian mode of thinking”. (Roberts, D. E. *Existentialism and Religious Belief*. R. Hazelton (ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.3.)

⁵ Khodr, Metropolitan Georges. *The Ways of Childhood*. Nuha Jurayj (trans.). New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-88141-538-4. The original Arabic version, *Law Hakayt Masra al-Tufula*, was published in 1979 by Dar an-Nahar, Beirut. In footnotes, *The Ways of Childhood* is abbreviated to *TWOC*, *The Pathway of Childhood* to *TPOC*.

⁶ Interview with Georges Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013. In the introduction to *TWOC*, Bishop Ephraim, Metropolitan of Tripoli, al-Koura, and Dependencies, writes that the book “is a journey with a man longing for God, for the real Truth, the Metropolitan Georges Khodr.” (*TWOC*, p.14.) Earlier, Bishop Ephraim describes the book as containing “many edifying subjects concerning your [the reader’s] soul and your life. These are problematic questions, which could occur...to anyone having difficult problems. These personal problems demand answers, and need real experiences; nonetheless they have all been experienced in the Gospel, wherein one could find their solutions.” (*Ibid.*, pp.13-4). The first extract underscores the autobiographical nature of the book, while the second indicates a vision that is to be

autobiographical novel, and the novel working as a conduit for life experience, is not without precedent.

Miguel Cervantes, whose book *Don Quixote* is considered to have created the literary template of the modern novel,⁷ is seen in the mould of an autobiographical author;⁸ as too is Evelyn Waugh.⁹ Another author, Charles Dickens, may have infused most of his fictional canon with a blend of personal perceptions and life experience, but it is his novel *David Copperfield* that is widely regarded as a simulacrum of his own life.¹⁰ On the other hand, when applied as a prefix to the term 'novel', the attribute 'autobiographical' should not be understood by the reader wholly without qualification. It does not, for example, mean that everything appearing on the page has a direct, or even

taken seriously, and can be interpreted as condensing Khodr's own thoughts. See also Avakian, who says of the book, "This work...is usually regarded as his autobiography; however, despite the fact that it contains several autobiographical references by Khodr, it is not an autobiography in the strict sense of the term, since Khodr elaborates more on certain theological and philosophical issues, rather than narrating his own biography." (Avakian, S. *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology & Georges Khodr's Spiritual Theology within the Near Eastern Context*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2012, p.103, Fn.299.) Avakian encapsulates with precision what this book represents and validates its confessional autobiographical status, while stressing Khodr's own philosophico-theological digressions, which are an expression of his writing style. In addition, see Fr. Chad Hatfield, Orthodox Profile Series Editor at St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, who presents the book as a work "which reflects the life of George Khodr". (<https://www.svspress.com/the-ways-of-childhood/> - accessed 28 June, 2017.)

⁷ "The long and tangled history of the modern novel begins in Europe, and it begins with Cervantes...The Czech novelist Milan Kundera...regards *Don Quijote* as "the first European novel,"" (de Armas Wilson, Diana. 'Editor's Introduction'. In: de Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quijote*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p.vii.)

⁸ In his review, Hahn writes how Cervantes' life experience left him with "a profound understanding of ambivalence", an understanding that was reconciled and expressed through the creation of Quixote and Sancho Panza, who "attempt between them to negotiate their conflicting perceptions (on soldiery, honour, patriotic duty) on Cervantes' behalf". (Daniel Hahn, review of *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* by William Egginton. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. In: *The Guardian*, 23 July, 2016.)

⁹ See William Boyd's review of *Evelyn Waugh* by Ann Pasternak Slater. Northcote House, 2016; and *Evelyn Waugh: A Life Revisited* by Philip Eade. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016. In: *The Guardian*, 30 July, 2016. "As she [Pasternak Slater] points out, Waugh was a very autobiographical writer...As Pasternak Slater brilliantly demonstrates, even Waugh's most surreal, grotesque comic inventions have their factual counterparts and origins in his biography."

¹⁰ "*David Copperfield* is generally held to be Dickens's most personal and autobiographical novel." Gavin, Adrienne E. Introduction. In: Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1992, p.xii.

indirect, correlation to the life of the author. Nuances of reality and fiction in the practised writer's work are skilfully overlaid and overlap, often obscuring where authorial biography shades into fiction, sometimes allowing the two to mingle in order to educe, almost alchemically, another dimension – in this instance, a world of fictionalised characters animated by the tensions of a preconceived 'unreality'.

Such skill sets may be described as literary devices and, like other authors, Khodr employs them to move the narrative along chronologically or as a means of emphasis. However, what distinguishes Khodr from other autobiographical novelists is that he is not first and foremost a novelist. This is his sole fictional work. Khodr has a number of spiritual credentials and is an accomplished exponent of other forms of writing, but, it is argued, his novel lacks the necessary literary prowess that can produce a series of linguistic veils, which may cloud what is fictional and what is factually autobiographical. It may additionally be argued that his book cannot even be categorised as a conventional novel where, amongst a cast of players, characterisation interplays in order to create a separate world of competing hierarchies, motivation, allegiances and grievances.¹¹ It is too introspective, too didactic, too one-dimensional.

This is a value judgement neither on the book's literary merits nor on its intrinsic worth. If the book lacks literary depth – for example, there is little justification or explanation of developments, and, as a result, nothing to clutter the reader's mind with situational backdrops – the demarcations can be more clearly discerned. As a consequence, it is an adjunct to this thesis; for, when, in this avowed autobiographical novel, the fictional character speaks his mind, it may reasonably be assumed it is Khodr talking, Khodr's views that are being regurgitated. When the fictional man fulminates, it is Khodr, speaking from the heart; where there are broad philosophical and theological brushstrokes, these may be taken as mirroring Khodr's own religiosity and his own

¹¹ See 'About This Book' in Khodr, *The Ways of Childhood*, where the book is described as "a live work of art that refuses to be classified within conventional genres of literature." (*TWOC*, p.7.)

Weltanschauung. His book is simply a fictive parcel to package his spiritual values and personal religiosity, and it would not purport to be anything other than that. In other words, its literary style aptly facilitates the extraction of relevant passages and the piece-by-piece assembling of a spiritual and personal profile. If this is the case, it is appropriate to enquire what is clearly fictional.

Whereby it is known that Khodr went to Paris, the reader can be certain it was for purposes of tertiary education and not for self-banishment, which is the lot of the fictional man. The stint in the carpentry workshop never occurred. Khodr was asked by the author whether this was a true rendition of events and he replied that it bore no relation to his life, although amateur carpentry seems to have been something of a pastime in his own life.¹² Other novelistic allusions – the employment in a radio station, the meetings with various people, the descriptions of particular scenes – can be seen as literary devices. What, it is asserted, is reasonable to treat as accurate reflections of Khodr's thinking are the views expressed on a variety of matters – the Antiochene Church, ecumenism, sexual equality, the role of priests, the spirituality of the clergy and laity, the effect of technology on society – along with all the philosophising that fills the pages. For, as one of the introductory comments in *The Ways of Childhood* states, "The author does not merely give us his opinions or present a position, but rather he reveals his vision and presents situations through a real person who is still living among us...";¹³ a sentiment Bishop Ephraim echoes when he describes the book as "a journey with a man longing for God, for the real Truth, the Metropolitan Georges Khodr."¹⁴

4. Following A Literary Tradition

Khodr's book, *Law Hakayt Masra al-Tufula*, was published in Arabic in 1979 by Dar an-Nahar in Beirut, and in 1997 a French edition, *Et Si Je Racontais Les Chemins De L'Enfance*, translated by Raymond Rizk, was published by

¹² Interview with Georges Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

¹³ 'About This Book'. In: Khodr, *TWOC*, p.7.

¹⁴ 'Introduction'. In: *ibid*, p.14.

Les Éditions du Cerf. In 2009, Nuha Jreije translated the work into English as *The Pathway of Childhood*, a task which was completed and approved by Bishop Khodr in 2011. In 2016, however, the manuscript underwent another translation and was published as *The Ways of Childhood*.

One of its main themes is an account of personal spiritual development, not so much as linear progression, but one that is suffused with a confessional tone. Although Khodr's book has a commonality with the tradition of autobiographical fiction referred to above, what is additionally important is its links to the genre of confessional spiritual biographies, exemplified by such historical works as the *Confessions* of Augustine, *The Life of Teresa of Ávila by Herself*, and Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.¹⁵ It may be suggested that Khodr's book differs from the other three because it is presented as a novel; but, it may be argued, Khodr's work is nonetheless largely confessional, presenting "his opinions...[and] his vision".¹⁶ However, as much as these four works may refer chronologically to spiritual development, this will be less the case in the analysis of Khodr's book. While there may be a general sense of burgeoning spirituality in the fictional man – early awareness of the numinous in nature, applying Christian principles in the world of work, a seeking after solitude – a more definite chronological path of spiritual development would, because of the style, be difficult to ascertain and is considered here to be immaterial. Rather, it is the *words* behind a spiritual developmental 'flow' that is of interest to this study.

Clearly, such literary endeavours, which can often be psychologically painful exercises in introspection, are rarely conducted in a vacuum. It has been suggested that Augustine's *Confessions* was written to answer critics inside and outside the Church, and to offer an exposition of his spiritual

¹⁵ Augustine 354-430, Teresa of Ávila 1515-1582, Cardinal John Henry Newman 1801-1890. Saint Augustine. *Confessions. A new translation by Henry Chadwick*. UK: Oxford World's Classics, 2008; *The Life of Teresa of Ávila by Herself*. J. M. Cohen. (trans.) UK: Penguin Books, 1957; Newman, Cardinal John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua. Being a History of His Religious Opinions*. M. J. Svaglic (ed.) London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

¹⁶ 'About This Book'. In: Khodr, *TWOC*, p.7.

development, from baptism to ordination.¹⁷ Teresa's *Life* seems to have appeared by way of a request from her confessors, who were keen for readers to be assured, at a time when the Church was plagued by apparent heresies, that her mystical experiences were within, and thus 'approved' by, the Church.¹⁸ The impetus for writing the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* came from Newman's public spat with Charles Kingsley, who had accused Newman of mendacity with regard to his spiritual leanings while an Anglican priest; and who had additionally claimed Newman had posited the notion that Catholicism was less to do with veracity and more to do with guile. The bitterness of this literary feud, and the awkwardness of Newman's position *vis-à-vis* his standing in the religious world of Victorian England and Rome, necessitated Newman's literary response for which he was ill-prepared, and which cost him dear emotionally.¹⁹

All four – the three examples above and Khodr's book – were written as an exercise, in varying degrees, of catharsis and *apologia*; however, there are differences as well as similarities. Although Augustine felt compelled to record for public consumption the fissures and flaws of his personal character as he progressed towards a spiritual awakening, the compulsions that drove

¹⁷ See, for example, Chadwick's introduction in Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, pp.xi-xiii.

¹⁸ Even so, it has been suggested that the composition of this work had commenced a few years prior to her confessor's intervention. "The book...was certainly begun some seven or eight years before the date when it was asked for by her confessors". Cohen goes on to claim it was composed for "four close spiritual friends". (*The Life of Teresa of Ávila by Herself*, 1957, p.11.) But see her own introduction, where she states unequivocally that it was "written...at the command of her confessor, to whom she submits and directs it". (Ibid.:21) See also Netton, who claims that at the time of Teresa and Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), there was deep suspicion, by "[m]any theologians, and those in high places in the Church", of any inner experiential mysticism. (Netton, I. R. *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey. A Comparative Exploration*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p.70.)

¹⁹ Svaglic quotes from Wilfred Ward's biography of Newman: "...he wrote through the night, and he has been found with his head in his hands crying like a child over the, to him, well-nigh impossibly painful task of public confession." (Ward, W. *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*. Vol. 2. London: Longmans, Green, 1912, p.23; Newman. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p.xli.)

him, and the others, do not match the emotional evisceration that Newman suffered in order to rebut the very public charges levelled against him.²⁰

The compulsion to write *Law Hakayt Masra al-Tufula*, it is suggested, came solely from Khodr; and yet he is a figure of some controversy. Doubtless, in writing an explication of his spiritual vision, he is affording himself the opportunity to respond to critics; to lay before the public his own understanding of what and who he is as a man, as an individual, and as a spiritual person; and to entrench his attitude towards the world, his fellow human beings, and the (Orthodox) Church.

Nevertheless, each work offers its author the opportunity to give vent to their own religiosity, none less so than Khodr, who uses the literary facility to extemporise on a number of socio-theological issues. Another parallel can be found in the way Newman curdled public opinion because of his avowed dissatisfaction with the Anglican Church and his eventual apostasy when he joined the Catholic Church; similar to Newman, Khodr is critical of his Church and has his own critics, perhaps as a consequence. On the other hand, unlike Newman, he had neither specific accuser nor specific charge to which he felt compelled to respond.

While for Augustine and Teresa the adoption of the first-person may have made for an uncomfortable fit, for Newman it was utterly galling because it went against the grain of his character.²¹ For Khodr, a contemplative religious

²⁰ It may not be an irrelevant aside to suppose that because the dissemination of information in the days of Augustine and Teresa was comparatively constrained, thereby limiting exposure, public humiliation would have been restricted; whereas even in the Victorian era, before the advent of technological communication, public knowledge would have had a far broader penetration, and, as a consequence, would have been potentially more damaging.

²¹ Contrast Teresa, who is described as “a natural writer and a mistress of metaphor, proverb, and telling image”. (Cohen, *The Life of Teresa of Ávila by Herself*, p.12.) In other words, it may be assumed she was enjoying the role of writer and of publicly declaring her experiential spirituality. For an example of third person singular autobiographies, see Taha Hussein, who reverts to first person only briefly; and, more recently, Salman Rushdie, whose autobiography is written entirely in the third person singular. (Hussein, T. *The Days*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1997; Rushdie, S. *Joseph Anton. A Memoir*. London: Vintage Books, 2013.)

figure, the 'first person' could be said to be similarly unappealing, for it smacks of individualism and self-aggrandisement. However, Khodr appears to have gone further and adopted a stylistic ploy, which manages to lay before us the literary equivalent of a *trompe l'œil*. He avoids the discomfort that Newman experienced with a confessional 'first person singular' format by introducing a 'third person singular' format and combining the whole within a three dimensional layer. The book has an anonymous narrator ('first person' format), who talks about the character ('third person' format), a man, also unnamed. This is the first dimension. The narrator describes the man's early years, but, eventually, through the use of correspondence from an unnamed country, the voice of the man is heard speaking for himself in the first person (second dimension). All these instances of grammatical juggling coalesce into a third dimension where there is a wraithlike presence that is Khodr.

This juggling is not an attempt to obviate or mask self-disclosure, for Khodr, like other authors of this confessional tradition, engages in bouts of unmitigated self-analysis and introspection. In short, what is revealed – at times, perhaps more clearly in the earlier translation – is a classic 'baring of the soul'.²² If it is the voice of the fictional man, or the narrator, that appears on the page, in reality it is Khodr, delving into himself, often in a mode of self-castigation. As a result, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suspect that the style and alternating personal pronouns may have been construed to make it easier to facilitate the confessional quality of the book. Finally, the novelistic approach facilitates the use of more robust, colourful language, which might appear incongruous in a theological essay, and offers a channel for a more personal, intimate style of cogitation.

5. System of Analysis

5.1 Use of Literary Sources

In order to corroborate the supposition that Khodr's voice comes through the book and is representative of his vision, his theology, his socio-philosophical world view, and his existential religiosity, extracts from the book will be

²² This more personal approach in *TPOC* is revealed through use of the first person singular, rather than the first person plural.

supported by two main resources in a process of triangulation: other articles, written over the course of fifty years, and constituting the large proportion of his literary output; and conversation recorded in more recent times over a number of days at his residence in Broumana.

The articles from different periods of his life will show how Khodr and the man in the book share a common perspective on the spiritual life and demonstrate intellectual consistency and a continuity in his thinking; they will also reveal how the six existential criteria, which constitute the spine of this thesis, have been woven into the subject matter of his varied literary output over the years. The interviews, conducted during the winter and early autumn of 2013, are valuable repositories, which show how his spoken thoughts conform to both the fictional man's radical views and to Khodr's own uncompromising spirituality. Thus, the flow of his spiritual argument and the tenor of his theological ideas, which may have been captured in myriad articles, and lent a more poetical flourish in the book, are given additional corroboration by the interviews, during which spoken comments offer an intimate glimpse of Khodr's mind outside the restrictive formality of the written word.

5.2 Confessional Accounts and Existential Criteria

However the four chronicles of Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, Cardinal Newman, and Bishop Khodr may vary either in style, intent, motivation, or through their respective content, the major unifying characteristic is that they are personal accounts of experiential religiosity. As such, they represent a variety of actions. First, each one is a confessional narrative, a very public and psychological stripping away of all pretence and self-aggrandisement. It is an individual's introspective unravelling of identity, who they are, an attempt to plumb their inner depths, to understand the components of *self*. Second, this is no idle act of introspection, but an endeavour to connect with the numinous in their heart, and to realise a renewed, authentic sense of *being* – as such, a re-consolidation of personal identity forged in a distinct and consuming religiosity. Third, it is a meditative exploration of how this discovery of personal interiority can integrate with, and relate to, the material world of exteriority. It is, in short, a meeting of two realities, of the inner life and the

external life. There is a further common denominator: a personal sense of *being* seen through the prism of spirituality, which infuses the accounts, maps the journey, and governs the language used to express the experiences, both inner and outer.

Where these differing chronicles of confessional literature have a common theme is in the alienation, experienced by the authors, that seeps through the text, conveying as it does a sense of not belonging, and, in some instances, of having a jarring fit with the establishment or established thinking. Augustine's detachment from his former life and the world, exemplified in the mystical experience at Ostia; Teresa's own, very personal experiential mysticism, which had the potential to set her at odds with the established Church of her time; Newman's 'self-imposed' alienation from the Anglican Church; the sense of a gulf between world and Spirit that pervades Khodr's book.

5.3 The Concept of Alienation: Societal & Spiritual Implications

The Outsider, by definition, stands outside – but outside what? Are they standing outside macrocosmic society as a whole? Or is it more a case of standing outside inner sociological circles, or entities, which comprise their own microcosmic society? For instance, belonging to a community, but not taking part in its activities or committing to avowed communal credos. It may be contended that it could be either, or both. In Khodr's case, he is a spiritual figure existing in a modern secular society, and, for that reason alone, may be like a number of other spiritual figures, who, by dint of their spiritual activities, perhaps experience a developed sense of 'unbelonging'.

A person might assume the persona of an Outsider because they wish to disassociate themselves from mainstream group activities, practices, or beliefs. On a different plane, the term may be applied by others – metaphorically, in a similar way to medieval branding – to label those with 'unfashionable' views as undesirable, 'not one of us'; or it may be used pejoratively as a means of invalidating opinions. Spinoza is identified more with the latter on the grounds that he was anathematised by his own Jewish community and because this communal execration extended beyond his

Jewish compatriots;²³ Beckett may be more in keeping with the former, owing to his voluntary exile from Irish society and Ireland.²⁴ Kierkegaard, it could be said, veritably embraced the role of Outsider, courting controversy by, for example, attacking the Danish Lutheran Church;²⁵ but he did so in order to get his message across. The Outsider must agitate, become a gadfly, to stir ‘the body ecclesiastic’ and gain attention. Roubiczek comments how Kierkegaard made it absolutely clear that he wanted people to take notice;²⁶ hence, it was incumbent on him to be strident if he were to live by his own fundamental belief that to be a Christian one must believe passionately.²⁷ However, such a stance requires a high degree of commitment; and Kierkegaard demonstrated this by sacrificing his personal life on the altar of his uncompromising principles.

The Outsider, whether as a concept or as a corporeal reality, cuts something of an enigmatic figure: they can occupy a central role in society, but not feel part of it; they can physically retreat into self-imposed isolation; they can appear socially acceptable or present character traits that suggest an aversion to their fellow human beings and to society as a whole; they can possess atheistic or irreligious sentiments, or be driven by a powerful awareness of the numinous. Spiritual or atheistic, they can also share an experiential conviction that existence is ineluctably associated with suffering and with a profound sense of alienation.

²³ Baruch (or Benedict de) Spinoza 1632-1677, a Dutch philosopher. “The man thus driven out from the fellowship of his own people found no welcome from Christian congregations. They feared his influence and called him atheist.” (Woodbridge, F. J. E. ‘Spinoza’. In: *Spinoza. Ethics & On the Improvement of Understanding*. James Gutmann (ed.). New York: Hafner Press, 1949, p.xxiii.)

²⁴ Writer Samuel Beckett 1906-1989. Beckett believed, according to Esslin, that “habit and routine was [sic] the cancer of time, social intercourse a mere illusion, and the artist’s life of necessity a life of solitude”, and, as a result, abandoned his career and “cut himself loose from all routine and social duties.” (Esslin, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1968, p.33.)

²⁵ Roubiczek, P. *Existentialism. For and Against*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p.109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.108.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107. This manner of presentation, and presenting oneself – courting controversy; stridency and passion – could be said to parallel, to some extent, Khodr’s own style.

Khodr himself stands outside what might be described as the establishment, both from secular and spiritual perspectives, and, as in the case of others, this has been neither an easy position to adopt nor a comfortable one. On occasion, it has provoked opposition if not downright hostility, yet it has also inspired support and admiration. However, to stand outside society requires unusual levels of strength and resilience, qualities that often stem from contumaciousness, and in the thesis, it will be shown how his character has sometimes been described as ‘difficult’.²⁸

To be an Outsider, one who stands outside, can additionally imply a somewhat solitary life, and while many of his peers would have married and had families, he has never sought a conjugal relationship, opting instead for a singular and intensely spiritual existence. While others have striven to better their careers, it would seem he has never been preoccupied by worldly ambition. Indeed, his views, often expressed without reservation or adulteration, have not only served to estrange him from others, but would have hampered any efforts at professional self-promotion.

An example of Khodr’s standing outside to confront the status quo is seen in his pivotal role in the Orthodox Youth Movement. Although intellectually capable – he has been a university teacher – he eschews the intellectualising of spirituality.²⁹ Yet, he was an instrumental force within the movement that gave Orthodoxy, in the face of establishment opposition, an intellectual boost and raised it from a moribund state to a vibrant community of informed believers.

Contrary, willing to stand outside, to go against extant hierarchies within the Church or within society, it is his independent demeanour, his forthright style

²⁸ This raises a ‘chicken-egg’ conundrum. Does the one who stands outside possess a ‘difficult’ character because they are outside, or are they congenitally so disposed?

²⁹ It has been observed that he is not an academic writer. See Khairallah, A. E. ‘The Way of the Cross as a Way of Life: Metropolitan Georges Khodr’s Hope in Times of War.’ In: *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, p.486.

of communicating, and his singular ways that mark out Khodr's alienation and identify him as an Outsider.³⁰

5.4 Existential Criteria: Bridging the Fictional and the Non-Fictional

In the confessional, autobiographical accounts described above – Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, Cardinal Newman, and George Khodr – elemental themes that are part of the existential lexicon begin to emerge: identity; authenticity; relationality; alienation; individuality. However, there are also fictional works that depict 'Outsiders'. These offer a deeper, more intimate understanding of what it is to experience alienation, and though they are populated by characters who embody these themes, they are also written by authors whose own experiences inform and shape the birth of their literary creations.³¹ For example, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky presents a character, Ivan Karamazov, who is tortured by an apparent contradiction between a suffering humanity and a loving God. In the testament of *The Grand Inquisitor*, recounted by Ivan, "he unfolds...an appalling picture of totalitarian humanity...as to outdo any nightmare."³² This dismal picture is, arguably, made possible only by dint of the fact that it comes from the pen of an Outsider to be delivered by a fictional Outsider. If Dostoevsky himself can be categorised as an Outsider – turbulent youth, arrested as a member of a group of atheists, subsequent imprisonment in Siberia, return to mainland Russia and renewed spirituality³³ – Albert Camus, who may have felt on the fringes of French society owing to his status as a *pied-noir*, could be said to identify with the downtrodden. "Camus' insight into the anger and resentment born of genuine suffering and guilty memory introduces a nuance of empathy

³⁰ Illustrations of standing outside society can be found in Chapters 4-9 where the six existential criteria are explored – for example, Chapter 4, p.127; Chapter 5, pp.208-9; Chapter 6, pp.217-8; Chapter 7, *passim*; Chapter 8, pp.344-5; Chapter 9, *passim*. However, the concept of the Outsider and standing outside society underpins much of the thesis.

³¹ This will be explored in a little more detail in Chapter 9, 'The Outsider'.

³² Lavrin, J. *A Panorama of Russian Literature*. London: University of London Press, 1973, p.141.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.133.

that was rare among his contemporaries".³⁴ It was an empathy that enabled his creation of characters who now form part of the existential literary canon.³⁵

Thus, fiction and non-fictional reality coalesce in the existential criteria of identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, and the Outsider, and validate the overarching framework for this work's system of analysis.

6. Structure & Planning

The thesis is divided into three parts, Part I and Part II, with a concluding chapter, Chapter 10, constituting Part III. Part I is comprised of foundational Chapters 1 to 3, with Part II (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) acting as the main body of the work. At the end of the thesis, there are three main appendices: Appendix A on existentialism; Appendix B, offering a more fleshed out biography of George Khodr; and Appendix C, which contains a short profile of Lebanon, with a summary of the country's recent history.

6.1 Part I

While Chapter 1 acts as a rationale for the work – in general, referring to the defining of key terms, stated aims, the system of analysis – and will additionally cover the literature review, Chapter 2 will offer an historical profile of the Church of Antioch. A section on pneumatology will complete this chapter. Chapter 3 will contain a snapshot of Bishop Khodr's life, combined with a summary of his religiosity, encapsulating the main features of his theology, a brief assessment of his character, and how some others view him. Chapters 2 and 3, in tandem with Appendix B, are important, it is contended, because they aid a preliminary understanding of Khodr and help to situate his life against a national and theological backdrop.

³⁴ Judt, T. 'Afterword'. In: Camus, A. *The Plague*. Robert Buss (trans.). London: Penguin, 2001, p.245. First published in France as *La Peste*, 1947.

³⁵ See, for example, Camus, A. *The Outsider*. (Originally published as *L'Étranger*, 1942.) Stuart Gilbert (trans.). London: Penguin Books, 1961.

6.2 Part II

The existential criteria referred to above – identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, the Outsider – will each act as a chapter to explore Khodr's book. In other words, material in the book, supported by some of Khodr's writings and recorded interviews, will be found to correspond to each existential criterion. The subsequent data will help to flesh out the two dimensions of Khodr, his religiosity and his character.

6.3 Concluding Chapter (Part III)

This will sum up the findings relating to Khodr as an *individual*, an Outsider, and as a spiritual thinker and theologian. It will additionally underscore how Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity has implications for the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?³⁶

7. Establishing Parameters

In a work that focuses on Christian (Orthodox) religiosity and touches on a range of theological and philosophical expressions, it is important to establish where the parameters lie and to identify areas into which the thesis will not be straying.

While there will be a degree of exploration into Orthodoxy and Orthodox doctrine, it will only be within narrow bands, for the work is not intended to be a doctrinal study of Orthodox theology. Reference will be made to politics and to Lebanon's political situation; but, although these are, in their own place, important considerations, there will be no detailed examination of either Lebanese politics or the geopolitical issues that serve to shape Lebanon and the Lebanese.

Spirituality refers strictly to its fundamental religious dimension, and to how human beings connect and communicate with the numinous in general and

³⁶ For a more detailed picture of what the aims of the thesis will consist of, see Section 9 at the end of this chapter.

with the Divine in particular. *However, the work is not intended to be an exegesis on Orthodox spirituality, central as it is to the core of Orthodox theology; or indeed, on religious spirituality in general.* And although there may be references to mystical theology and allusions to mystical experience, the work will not delve into the meaning, nature or content of experiential mysticism/spirituality.

While existentialism represents a stanchion of the work and will be referred to throughout the thesis, it is not the main beam. In other words, philosophical existentialism will not be explored in depth; instead, the existential criteria referred to above will direct the flow of this exploration.

8. Literature Review

There is a formidable range and quantity of extant scholarly works that relate to main themes of this study. As a result, the literature review will be highly selective and based on works that have informed the direction of the author, either by a unique focusing or through inspirational argumentation. The major themes to emerge from the following include Orthodox spirituality, priorities of the Church of Antioch, apophaticism, 'existential' theology, *being*, Lebanon, existential concepts, and Bishop Khodr's theology.

8.1

Apophaticism is a significant strand in this study and has been a lynchpin of Eastern Orthodoxy theology since the Church's inception.³⁷ As Hägg observes, it was the Greek Fathers who posed the apophatic question: in what sense can humankind know God?³⁸ He reinforces the point by situating

³⁷ Calian claims that Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) "identified three basic themes of Eastern Christian spirituality and theology: (1) theology as apophatic in character; (2) revelation as light; and (3) salvation as deification." (Calian, C. S. 'Hesychasm and Transcendental Meditation: Sources for Contemporary Theology?' In: *Eastern Churches Review*. G. Every, J. Saward, K. T. Ware (eds.). Vol.10, 1978, pp.126-140, p.132.) This, it is suggested, incontestably stamps Orthodox spirituality with a mystical and experiential emphasis, encompassing both Christic transfiguration and the pathway of theosis or deification.

³⁸ Hägg, H. F. *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.1.

apophaticism in its contemporary setting: “God’s apophatic and incomprehensible nature is a major concern in Eastern Orthodox theology.”³⁹

Hägg’s work is a comprehensive overview of formative Christian apophaticism as seen through the theology of Clement of Alexandria. While acknowledging that Clement is not the first Christian theologian to explore apophaticism,⁴⁰ he offers sound reasons for focusing on him, stressing the calibre of Clement’s argumentation, which is “the most articulate among the earliest Fathers and his insights [are] the deepest.”⁴¹ Hägg covers Clement’s conception of God, and of God through Christ; in his discussion of knowledge, he includes the *via negativa*, describing how humankind’s ‘unknowing’ relates to, but does not clash with, Clement’s epistemology. As such, the work concentrates on apophaticism as an intellectual, theological concept, but, because it is framed in the academic appraisal of apophaticism’s influence on inchoate Christianity, excludes the personal effect apophaticism has on the individual.

8.2

Ticciati embarks on a different tack, refusing in her development of “a contemporary apophatic theology”⁴² to countenance the ‘traditional’ apophatic language that is often employed to demonstrate God’s ineffability and humankind’s incapacity to know him. Negative theological enquiry steered by such apophatic phrases as ‘God is not love’, ‘God is not might’, ‘God is not power’, are not permitted. She is more concerned with “the power of words to transform human beings in their relationship with God”.⁴³ In her argument, she makes the case that “words do not signify God, human beings do”,⁴⁴ instead, “[w]ords transform”.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid., p.258.

⁴⁰ “[B]oth in the Apologists and in Irenaeus there are traces of negative theology”. (Ibid.:5)

⁴¹ Ibid. “We know not what God is but what he is not”. (Clement of Alexandria. *Stromateis* 5. 71. 3, cited in Russell, N. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004, p.137.)

⁴² Ticciati, S. *A New Apophaticism. Augustine and the Redemption of Signs*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, p.1.

⁴³ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.14.

It is an important distinction and a pointer to the role of what she terms “God-language”⁴⁶ in our relationship with God. ‘God-language’ is what we use in our praise or worship of God, while praise, she asserts, is a means by which divided people are united in their worship of God, and who “in the act of praising God...become for one another vague signs of God.”⁴⁷ The reference to divided people is suggestive of the ‘Other’ and thus of interreligious relationality. She is not dismissive of the “apophaticisms of the past”;⁴⁸ rather, it is suggested, she is endeavouring to remove the sting of apophasis from the human experience of God. It is an invigorating introduction to a new way of perceiving, or thinking about, an unknowable Absolute and the words we use when we refer to God. However, while this thesis will confine itself to an interpretation of apophaticism, Ticciati’s focus is directed towards a significant re-interpretation.

8.3

Apophaticism may be described as an understanding of the Divine, but Rowan Williams’ book is an exploration of what it means to adopt an apophatic stance.⁴⁹ It could be argued, however, that, although apophaticism acts as a backdrop, this is not so much a treatise on apophaticism; rather, it explores the science of speech and the philosophy of linguistics. Williams utilises the works of prominent scholars within the corresponding philosophico-scientific fields, not only to build a picture of how we communicate, but also to construct a theory of how we can ever talk about the apophatic God. In the process of discussing various scientists and theoreticians, he lays the foundations of his argument, making it clear that the ‘I’ needs the ‘Other’ in order to make sense of the world and of the ‘I’, of the ‘self’. In addition, and underlying this, there emerges a pattern of thought whereby what we say in advancing a belief or observation is provisional; statements are made to be built on and nothing is forever absolute. In our

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.245-6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.4.

⁴⁹ Williams, R. *The Edge of Words. God and the Habits of Language*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

search for 'truth', we are forever assembling pieces, as if in some cosmic, metaphysical jigsaw, as a means of getting ever nearer to a clearer understanding, without ever exhausting its (whatever that 'it' is) meaning. In short, there are always more pieces of the jigsaw and a 'bigger picture' to be seen. Interlinked with this is our use of metaphor,⁵⁰ the functioning of the artist,⁵¹ and of fiction,⁵² which are employed to convey other perspectives, other ways of interpreting. What Williams finally presents us with is an apophaticism in which silence is not imposed or resorted to in desperation; rather, it is a silence that must be achieved.⁵³

Williams' important book sheds light on how we extend our understanding and express ourselves in our search for eternal truths. In some ways, it is an inspirational work; however, even though, in part, the direction of this study could be seen as a fleshing out of some of Williams' ideas, *The Edge of Words* does not venture into character profiling, and there is no real context for religiosity.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.21-2. In exploring the use of metaphor and representational thinking, Williams draws on a number of scholars, but at one point, he ascribes much of his argument to "Max Black's discussion of 'the representational aspect of metaphor' as one among several means of showing what there is in language that cannot be understood as 'substitutes for bundles of statements of fact'...and ultimately metaphors and other more challenging usages of speech." (Ibid., pp.22-3. See Black, M. 'More about Metaphor.' In: *Metaphor and Thought*. A. Ortony (ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.41.) He also cites Arbib and Hesse, quoting their belief that "some of the mechanisms of metaphor are essential to the meaning of any descriptive language whatever". (Ibid., p.23. Arbib's and Hesse's words. See Arbib, M. and Hesse, M. *The Construction of Reality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.152.)

⁵¹ Williams, *The Edge of Words*, pp.121-2. One of the sources that Williams cites is David Jones and his assertion that we are continuously engaged in refinement. As Williams expresses it: "we cannot leave our superficially clear and definitive perceptions alone, it seems, but elaborate and reconfigure, looking constantly for new relations that make new and enlarged sense of what we perceive." (Ibid., p.122.) See Jones, D. 'Art and Sacrament.' In: *Epoch and Artist; Selected Writings*. H. Grisewood (ed.). London: Faber & Faber, 1959, pp.143-79.

⁵² Williams, p.138. Williams cites two works of fiction, which are "made strange" in order for us, the reader, to extend our understanding of what it is to be human. Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. London: Penguin, 2003; Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina*. Oxford, UK: Oxford World Classics, 1998.

⁵³ Williams, p.178.

8.4

Sylvie Avakian's published thesis is a useful insight into Khodr's religious thinking.⁵⁴ Her work compares Karl Rahner, the Catholic, with Georges Khodr, the Orthodox, and there are, as expected, disparities in perspective and emphasis; but there are also similarities and overlaps, and it is these that Avakian has exposed – notably, for example, in the importance of the 'Other'. We find in Rahner that human beings are a key element in the cosmos,⁵⁵ and that "it is through being open to life, to others...that one is open to God, the 'absolute Mystery'."⁵⁶ However, there are clear departures – for instance, despite Rahner's Christian inclusivism and his theology of the 'anonymous Christian',⁵⁷ there is his attitudinal representation of other religions, such that Christianity is posited as the only valid religion, and, indeed, that only Catholicism can best represent Christianity.⁵⁸ This 'exclusivism' on the part of Catholicism is something Khodr experienced as a student, but in this respect he himself remains more open. Avakian highlights a more 'cosmopolitan' side to his theology, claiming that for Khodr there is "one God, one divine Word", but that God, the Word, is "revealed in all different forms of the different religious traditions".⁵⁹

Avakian's book is a good account of Khodr's theology, but she would have been exceeding her parameters had she embarked on an exploration of Khodr's character as an individual; and whether his religiosity can be contextualised within an existential framework lies outside her work's ambit.

⁵⁴ Avakian, S. *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology & Georges Khodr's Spiritual Theology within the Near Eastern Context*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2012.

⁵⁵ "It is in and through the human being that God communicates Godself...God reveals God's inner reality in, with and through the human being". (Ibid., p.39. Avakian's words.)

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.40. Avakian's words. But see Rahner, K. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1978.

⁵⁷ A view that sees the non-Christian 'Other' as those who manifest humility, love and compassion towards all of God's creation.

⁵⁸ Avakian, pp.83-4, citing Rahner, K. Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions. In: *Theological Investigations V*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, pp.157-192.

⁵⁹ Avakian, p.129. Avakian's words. See Khodr, G. Al-Kalimah wal-Jasad [The Word and the Flesh]. In: *An-Nahar*. 29 March 1987.

8.5

Heidi Hirvonen focuses on four contemporary Lebanese theologians, one of which is Bishop Khodr.⁶⁰ She divides this quartet into two Christians and two Muslims: on the Christian side, Georges Khodr and Mouchir Basile Aoun; on the Islamic side, Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah and Mahmoud Ayoub. Her study encompasses a wide range of issues, with each one offering views that reflect their religious standing and, to some degree, their personal interpretations, which have been filtered through their respective religiosities. However, as the title of her work indicates, she focuses in the main on Christian-Muslim dialogue as seen through the eyes of these four theological thinkers.

Hirvonen captures the essence of her subject, describing the development of dialogue as a concept and setting it against the backdrop of historical precedents, whether negative (the Crusades⁶¹) or more positive (the Second Vatican Council⁶²). Her emphasis is on the systematic analysis of religious encounter, which she utilises to unpick the respective theologies of her four subjects with especial regard to their attitudinal stance on dialogue. Her work is investigative, scholarly, and illuminating; however, owing to the strict boundaries of her enquiry, she inevitably stops short of a more personalist understanding of her subjects.

8.6

Andrew Sharp has looked at the encounter of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Islam,⁶³ stating that his aim is to “examine the distinctive ecclesial

⁶⁰ Hirvonen, H. *Christian-Muslim Dialogue. Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

⁶¹ Hirvonen claims that “Muslims’ perceptions of the Christian West are stamped by their memories of the crusades and colonialism” (Ibid., p.29) For more of a Lebanese perspective on the Crusades, see, for example, Maalouf, A. *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*. J. Rothschild (trans.). London: Saqi, 2006.

⁶² *The Documents of Vatican II*. W. M. Abbott. (ed.). London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967.

⁶³ Sharp, A. *Orthodox Christians and Islam in the Postmodern Age*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. This is the published version of his thesis, which bears a different title: *Eastern Orthodox Theological and Ecclesiological Thought on Islam and Christian-Muslim*

dimensions of Orthodox thinking on Islam and Muslim-Christian encounters within the context of the modern theological renewal in the Orthodox Church over the past few decades.”⁶⁴

The study begins with an historical survey of Christian-Muslim relations before shedding light on Orthodoxy’s perspective on other religions, particularly Islam; reviewing the interfaith position of leading Orthodox figures; and highlighting Orthodoxy’s presence, in a dialogical capacity, at the World Council of Churches. The attempts of Orthodox Christians to “define and refine their identity in the postmodern age”⁶⁵ is given attention, while the need for “Orthodox Christians to engage in “an honest assessment”⁶⁶ of their relationship with Islam and with Muslims is emphasised.

Sharp’s work is a significant achievement, amassing data and information to compile a comprehensive record of developments and of major players in world Orthodoxy, and offering an historical examination of Christian-Muslim encounter, including a survey of its contemporary status. By contrast, this study focuses on George Khodr, as a theologian, thinker, individual, and as a person with radical views.

8.7

One of the main thrusts of Aristotle Papanikolaou’s *Being with God*,⁶⁷ is an exposition of Vladimir Lossky’s and John Zizioulas’ thought to reveal the disparity and gap that exist between the East’s theology of divine-human communion and Western rationalism.⁶⁸ The issue is brought to life through

Relations in the Contemporary World (1975-2008). The thesis was originally submitted to the University of Birmingham in February 2010. References to Sharp’s work are to this latter version.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.9.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Papanikolaou, A. *Being with God. Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

⁶⁸ For Eastern Christian theology, see Lossky, V. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976. Papanikolaou also refers to Lossky’s compendium of articles: Lossky, V. *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*. I. & I. Kesarcodi-Watson (trans.). New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978. For Zizioulas, two major works illustrate his theology and concepts of

the different ways in which both writers use apophaticism in their theology; in short, the work amounts to a critical comparison between their trinitarian theologies. His study ranges across a series of subject areas, including knowledge of God, or union. For Lossky, says Papanikolaou, this is achieved through ascent, whereas for Zizioulas it is through a relationality that is realised through the Eucharist.

In bringing the two together to explore the intellectual structure of contemporary Orthodox thinking, as set against traditional patristic thinking, Papanikolaou focuses on personalism and the concept of *person*, highlighting his belief that both Lossky's and Zizioulas' theology of *person* is more attuned to a modern understanding as opposed to a patristic understanding. This touches on a main existential attribute of this study, that of individuality; however, individuality as such is not considered in any depth.

8.8

'Personhood' and existentialism are brought more centre stage by Kallistos Ware. In *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*,⁶⁹ he offers his own view on what should be the foundations of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world. From the outset, he promulgates the view that the Church is "ready to respond to the existential needs of humanity",⁷⁰ and if there is any doubt as to what this precisely means, the core of this short book is taken up with an exploration of *person*. Ware is in no doubt about the importance of this subject area: "it is essential to reaffirm the uniqueness and infinite value of each specific human being".⁷¹

In his consideration of the human person as a central feature of not only Orthodox theology, but as a pivot in the divine economy, Ware calls for a revival "to reactivate the Greek Patristic idea of the human person as mediator

'person' and 'personhood'. Zizioulas, J. D. *Being as Communion*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985; and *Communion and Otherness*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006.

⁶⁹ Metropolitan Kallistos Ware. *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2012.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

between heaven and earth, as cosmic liturgist, as priest of the creation.”⁷² He advocates developing the vision of ourselves – ourselves within a multicultural environment – in three different aspects: mystery, image, and mediator. The first refers to the belief that we remain mysterious to ourselves; the second to the theological assertion that we are made in the image of God; the third follows, as above, from our role as the link between Creator and created. As an important statement about Orthodoxy’s theological responsibilities in the new millennium, it affords something of a vindication of this study. On the other hand, its brevity does not allow any elaboration.

8.9

For a panoramic view of Orthodox Christianity as it is strained through the more secular sieve of political engagement, Daniel Payne uses a comparative methodology, exploring John S. Romanides and Christos Yannaras. He additionally reviews the way spiritual theology is being utilised to formulate a political ideology, one that reshapes Eastern Orthodoxy as it responds to increasing Western influences.⁷³ He questions the practice of equating secularisation with religious decline, but sheds light on the way nationalism has replaced religion, identifying how the two can be conjoined – for example, in the theocratic state of Iran.⁷⁴ Payne covers a plethora of relevant,

⁷² Ibid., p.43. When elucidating this point, Ware writes that he is summarising points made in his article. See Ware, K. ‘The Unity of the Human Person according to the Greek Fathers.’ In: *Persons and Personality: A Contemporary Enquiry*. A. Peacocke and G. Gillett (eds.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp.197-206. But see also Maximus the Confessor. *Ambigua* 41 (PG 91: 1304D-1308C). It is here, says Ware, that Maximus emphasises our intended mediatorial role “to unite the created with the Uncreated”. Ware’s words. (Ware, *The Unity of the Human Person according to the Greek Fathers*, p.45.)

⁷³ Payne, D. P. *The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Contemporary Orthodox Thought. The Political Hesychasm of John S. Romanides and Christos Yannaras*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011. Payne references a number of works relating to Romanides and Yannaras, but see, for example, Romanides, J. *Franks, Romans, Feudalism and Doctrine*. MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981; ‘Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics.’ In: *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 6 (winter 1960), pp.186-205; and ‘Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics. Part 2.’ In: *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 9 (winter 1963), pp.225-70. Yannaras, C. *Chapters of Political Theology*. Athens: Papazese, 1976; ‘The Distinction between Essence and Energies and its Importance for Theology.’ In: *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 19 (summer 1975), pp.232-45; and *Orthodoxy and the West in Contemporary Greece*. Athens: Domos, 1992.

⁷⁴ Payne, p.21.

interconnected issues, including globalisation, pluralism, and a sense of identity, and does so at an apposite time when the porosity of borders informs much of contemporary domestic and international politics; for example, in Lebanon, as the country struggles to absorb a veritable tide of Syrian refugees, who, it is feared, will undermine confessional demographics and economic viability.

His work's relevance lies in the way he sees the roots of spiritual (Orthodox) Christianity in monastic hesychasm.⁷⁵ And while grounding this profile of Christianity in the East, he examines the effect of the West and Western theology on Orthodoxy. Towards the end, he makes the observation that globalisation – and the “existential dilemmas of modern life”⁷⁶ – engenders a need for identity, and how people, in their search for identity in an amorphous world of flux and change, incline themselves towards that which is not subject to flux and change: religion.⁷⁷ These are themes that run through this thesis, but while being a significant contribution to how Orthodoxy is utilised in the world, its (Payne's work) value lies in its general coverage; consequently, as he discusses Orthodoxy's political edge in world terms, the subject matter of this thesis is less general, less political, and more individualistic.

8.10

A central core of Orthodox religiosity is the concept of *theosis*. Norman Russell⁷⁸ traces its development, covering the Platonic understanding of deification, the early Fathers, the spiritual renaissance inspired by the *Philokalia*,⁷⁹ and the influence of Russian thinkers, up to its current understanding in the contemporary world of Orthodox thinking. Assuming that

⁷⁵ “While it is possible to argue that the universalist position is grounded in the political theology of the Byzantine Empire, it is also important to keep in mind the importance of the spiritual vision of Christianity, particularly as it was manifested in monastic hesychasm.” (Ibid., p.81.) Relevant because of Khodr's own monastic and contemplative Christianity.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.263.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.259-60.

⁷⁸ Russell, N. *Fellow Workers with God. Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009.

⁷⁹ *The Philokalia. The Complete Text compiled by St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*. G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (eds. and trans.). London: Faber & Faber, 1979ff.

theosis is to do with relationality, he links the patristic concept of being created in the image and likeness of God, and its connectivity to theosis, with the observation that no personal relationship is possible when there is no commonality.⁸⁰ Russell's value lies in his conciseness and the clarity of his elucidation, but it is general and theoretical, rather than particular and actual. For this study, perhaps one of the most important aspects of the book is his citing of Stelios Ramfos.⁸¹

8.11

Ramfos' book is taken up with a concerted defence of the individual.⁸² He argues that, *contra* the West and after the Cappadocians,⁸³ there was no development of the concept of *person* in Eastern Orthodoxy until the first half of the twentieth century and the Russian émigré thinkers.⁸⁴ The thrust of Ramfos' work is captured in the question he poses: "Are we going to manipulate the issue of the person so as to bind the average modern Greek schizophrenically to the heart of the group, or are we going to think about it in a perspective of fundamental openness to atomic individuality, which instead of encouraging disintegrative tendencies in society can support moves toward more integrated forms of unity, proportionate to the realities of the technological revolution?"⁸⁵ In brief, are we going to allow space for the individual to galvanise communal spirit?

The exploration that follows is a disquisition on the merits of individuality, but not at the expense of the community. Ramfos is keen to strike a balance, but, in stating his case, he is at odds with those who would champion 'community' over the individual. His argument, however, does not veer too far from the essential position of, for example, Yannaras and Zizioulas, evinced by his (Ramfos') assertion that we need the 'Other' to exist.⁸⁶ But he makes other

⁸⁰ Russell, p.91.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.166-7.

⁸² Ramfos, S. *Yearning For The One. Chapters in the Inner Life of the Greeks*. N. Russell (trans.). MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011.

⁸³ Fourth century.

⁸⁴ Ramfos, p.4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.91-2.

observations, which buttress his support of the individual: for example, he believes Gregory of Nazianzus implies that the “human being does not seek the self externally but turns its gaze inward.”⁸⁷ Insofar as his critique of the Orthodox Church is concerned, he asks whether there exists “any anthropological presuppositions” that can “facilitate...the difficult transition from a group identity to the self-aware individual?”⁸⁸ He is persuaded such presuppositions do exist. That aside, it is his support for the individual that undergirds the approach of this thesis, and his theoretical argumentation is drawn on and applied.

8.12

Yannaras’ *Relational Ontology* concentrates on the value and meaning of ‘relation’.⁸⁹ Formatting his work in a quasi ‘Wittgensteinian’ style with numbered, aphoristic paragraphs, the book covers subject matter relating to the ‘Other’ and claims that reciprocity – the inter-referential encounter between two entities – is “a necessary condition for any interpersonal relation”.⁹⁰ But Yannaras is insistent that relating to the ‘Other’ means relating to the *person*. For him, relating to the ‘person’ as *person* qualifies as a success, whereas failed interrelationality is when the person is reduced to an object; failure can also mean seeing the ‘Other’ as a threat;⁹¹ all of which suggests a reaction to classic Sartrean existentialism.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.115. Ramfos’ words. There are neither footnotes nor bibliography in this edition of Ramfos. Within the text, he refers to “the *Verses Addressed to Myself* of Gregory the Theologian (328-91), written for the most part toward the end of his life...with... its interest in self-knowledge”, (Ibid.:111); and to “no.78 (*To My Own Soul*)...no.80 (*To Myself*)...no.88 (*Iambic Verses to My Own Soul*)”. (Ibid., p.115.). See, as an example of his individualistic, inward style, Gregory of Nazianzus. *Autobiographical Poems*. C. White (ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁸⁸ Ramfos, p.278.

⁸⁹ Yannaras, C. *Relational Ontology*. N. Russell (trans.). MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011. Yannaras, along with John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev, may be viewed as theologians on the margins of Orthodoxy, or at least with perspectives that do not mesh with more mainstream Orthodox thinking. However, owing to Khodr’s own marginal status in the Church of Antioch, it was considered these authors paralleled his own position to some extent and so justified their inclusion.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.66.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp.110-1.

⁹² See, for example, Sartre, J-P. *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*. London: Routledge, 1969.

The overall point that Yannaras seems to be making is a theme that appears in other works he has written: his repudiation of rationalism as a gateway to spiritual conviction, and his discomfort with individuality; and yet some of his theories, it is suggested, are those about which Ramfos would have little to cavil. What distinguishes Yannaras' position is his absolute rejection of the individual as a manifestation of individuality; in other words, an egoism, which Ramfos sharply differentiates from individuality.⁹³ Yannaras' philosophical position is difficult to reconcile with the approach of this thesis, even though many of his observations have supreme value.

8.13

Zizioulas' *Communion and Otherness* is tantamount to a sequel to his seminal book *Being as Communion*. He argues that, as a result of the Fall, we see the 'Other' as a threat. We are fearful, and our fear is not only sinful, but the consequence of sin. The model for subduing or overcoming the falsity of our erroneously skewed relational paradigm is Trinitarian.⁹⁴ In the Trinity, as in life, there is 'otherness', difference, but it is this difference that allows us to *be*, a conclusion that touches on interreligious relationality with the religious 'Other'. Difference, in Zizioulas' schema, is a positive and preserves uniqueness, but it is a qualified compromise.

Zizioulas differentiates between uniqueness and 'self', claiming that the advent of 'self' derives from Adam's rejection of God, for this rejection is not simply a manifestation of misguided independence, but a rejection of 'otherness' as a prerequisite of *being*.⁹⁵ "Death came...at the moment that man became introverted, and limited the ekstastic movement of his

⁹³ "Our acknowledged individualism is an egoism, in the midst of the group and in the spirit of the group, that lacks individuality...Individualism without individuality includes that which must be transcended by individuation". Ramfos asserts that there is nothing wrong with acting as an individual, but that one acts as an individual within, and in accordance with, the group. Individuation is the means by which we transcend selfish forms of individualism to make just that connection. (Ramfos, p.145.)

⁹⁴ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006, p.4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.43.

personhood to the created world.”⁹⁶ Zizioulas’ theology is unequivocal, while he is insistent that “[t]he person cannot exist in isolation. God is not alone; he is *communion* [Zizioulas’ emphasis].”⁹⁷

As a compendium of thought-provoking insights, *Communion and Otherness* is a major landmark in contemporary Orthodox theology, one that displays an impressive schematic approach to the ‘problem’ of ‘I’, ‘self’, and identity. However, there is less apprehension, perhaps, of the human condition, and of the existential pressures on the ‘I’.

8.14

The *Pastoral Letter* of Patriarch John X,⁹⁸ which was published in 2013 soon after his enthronement, is a declaration of what hierarchical Orthodoxy stands for today, what the Church sees as its responsibilities, and what it regards as an agenda for action. As a result, it embraces issues that are important in their own right, but which also have relevance to this study.

John emphasises that the activities of “[p]reaching and ministering for the Word cannot be achieved by returning to old things...We should express the truth of our faith and our ministry of the Word in contemporaneous language resorting to technologies”.⁹⁹ Spiritual renewal should not ignore “science, arts, literature, and all cultural aspects”, for these are part of “the spiritual experience”.¹⁰⁰ There is acknowledgement too of the existential problems that confront human beings, who are “dealt with as machines, not as persons”,¹⁰¹ and a highlighting of the Church’s concern for the environment.¹⁰² There is ample mention of the need for pastoral theology that covers the family, the poor, and people with special needs;¹⁰³ in addition, there is a call to

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.228.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.166.

⁹⁸ Patriarch John X. Patriarche d’Antioche et de tout l’Orient des grec-orthodoxes. *Pastoral Letter*, 2013.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.9-10.

those working within Orthodox intellectual centres, such as the University of Balamand in Lebanon, to evolve constructive responses to pressing contemporary issues such as cloning.¹⁰⁴

Dovetailed with these priorities is an appeal for the development of monastic life, and a stated aim to “abolish the estrangement the believer feels between his Church affiliation and his affiliation to the world”.¹⁰⁵ This is a critical commentary on identity and the supposed incommensurability of religion, community, and nationality. In similar vein, Patriarch John stresses the need to reject the way religion is used to categorise people, reminds the Orthodox community that the Muslim ‘Other’ shares with the Orthodox common concerns, and offers a pledge to continue dialogue¹⁰⁶ in “an age of profanization and materialism”.¹⁰⁷ There is little that is excluded from this document, and although these are laudable intentions, gauging successful implementation would be another matter.

8.15

The positive aims of the Antiochene Church are counterbalanced, to some extent, by Samir Khalaf. In the preface to Khalaf’s book, *Lebanon Adrift*,¹⁰⁸ Ghassan Hage sets the tone in his introduction by drawing attention to the state of denial permeating Lebanese society. Khalaf continues this theme, citing the plight of Lebanon’s citizens “trapped in a disparaging threefold predicament: alienation from the past, anxiety and unease about the present and uncertainty about the future.”¹⁰⁹ A little later, he fleshes this out by claiming that never before have the Lebanese been so “engrossed in two seemingly inconsistent, often irresistible, forms of false consciousness.”¹¹⁰ On the one hand, people are resorting to “religiosity, communalism”, to the security of “cloistered groups and self-enclosed defensive spatial identities”;

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁰⁸ Khalaf, S. *Lebanon Adrift. From Battleground to Playground*. London: Saqi Books, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.17.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.18.

on the other hand, growing numbers are “finding refuge and temporary relief in the hyped and seductive appeals of mass consumerism, image-making and self-representation.”¹¹¹ Whatever religiosity people are resorting to, he makes it clear that it is not rooted in spirituality, a quest for “redemption in a deity or divine savior”; rather, it is representative of a “revivalist and assertive bigotry and intolerance of the other.”¹¹²

Although this suggests condemnation, Khalaf is more generous, saying that it is understandable why people “seek shelter in communal solidarities”, but he adds a caveat. By doing so, “fear, paranoia and distance from the other are heightened and, thereby, compound the intensity of enmity and hostility”.¹¹³ Khalaf’s snapshot depicts a population seeking consolation in the ephemera of modernity: technological gadgetry, together with the immediacy and superficiality of Western-style avocations such as fashion and social fads. The Lebanese, he argues, must reinvent their character; rather than indulging in the excesses of materialism, they must modulate their expectations. Self-denying asceticism is not the answer. Instead, he muses, there must be a middle way where the Lebanese can satisfy their predilection for adventure and public display, while reining in “desires and expectations”.¹¹⁴ The reader is left wondering, as he wonders, how this can be achieved.

8.16

Khalaf wrote an essay, approximately ten years prior to *Lebanon Adrift*, in which he drilled down into Lebanese communalism.¹¹⁵ The phenomenon he was then addressing concerned “the reassertion of communal solidarities”,¹¹⁶ and how socio-economic dissatisfaction can crystallise into intercommunal enmity. He draws attention to the belief amongst sociologists, and promoted by political commentators, that communalism would be subject to natural

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.24.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.272.

¹¹⁵ Khalaf, S. ‘The Radicalization of Communal Loyalties.’ In: *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*. T. Scheffler (ed.). Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg In Kommission, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.283.

erosion in the quest for modernisation and would eventually disappear. On the contrary, as he shows us, the opposite happened and communalism became more pronounced. He makes the point in 2002 that politicians were not slow to capitalise on this, incorporating communalism into their politics and shifting communal concerns towards the top of their agenda.¹¹⁷

One of the important observations – important for this study – Khalaf makes is that “religiosity and confessionality are not coterminous”.¹¹⁸ He uses a survey that he co-conducted in 1983-4, which throws light on the way communal members differentiate between the two, and shows how their religiosity may have been declining at the same time that “their confessionality and sectarian identities and prejudices were becoming sharper.”¹¹⁹ This leads him to make another observation of equivalent importance: that this trend appears not unconnected to a blatant intolerance of the ‘Other’ by members of the educated elite.¹²⁰

What Khalaf is able to show is how these tendencies and behavioural complexities initiate a hardening of hearts towards those existing without the community, which develops into an objectification of the ‘Other’ and a fortification, both literally and figuratively, of the borders that delineate communities. He additionally indicates how the entire panoply of consequential sloganising and propaganda, in all their manifestations, act as a subtle and not so subtle symbolism, which stokes prejudice to a sufficient level that it mists perception of the ‘Other’ and fuels the expression of real and imagined grievances. It is sobering to reflect that after a ten year gap, Khalaf has exposed in *Lebanon Adrift* a similar vein in Lebanese society: the often mutual exclusivity of religiosity and communalism. This phenomenon and the parallels he exposes over a ten year period are observations of which this study takes note.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp.288-9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.290.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.291.

8.17

The “threefold predicament” of the Lebanese as described by Khalaf in *Lebanon Adrift*, as well as the besmirched image and objectification of the ‘Other’ identified in his earlier essay, suggests a degree of alienation – particularly in the way the Lebanese are alienated from a more authentic version of themselves. Merold Westphal describes existentialism as “the urgency of deciding what to do with our lives, more specifically, what to do with my own life.”¹²¹ He builds a picture of how existentialism has been interpreted by major ‘existential’ figures, starting with Søren Kierkegaard, whose Christian existentialism depicts a faith radically different from that practised by many Churches. Kierkegaard’s refutation of reason in ‘the age of reason’,¹²² and his denunciation of Hegelianism, make for interesting philosophical polar opposites; but instead Westphal pairs Kierkegaard with Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ‘atheistic’ philosophy contrasts with Kierkegaard’s theism. For Nietzsche, God is dead;¹²³ but, as Westphal explains, Nietzsche is referring not only to the Judaeo-Christian Divine, but to all ‘deities’, whether they be Platonic, polytheistic, or innovative products of modernity. Citing Heidegger, he explains this can mean “conscience, reason, historical progress, the earthly happiness of the greatest number, creativity, and even business enterprise.”¹²⁴

His other pairing is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973). As with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, these pairings are certainly not twinnings, and in this instance represent diametrical opposites. While Sartre’s existential philosophy is atheistic – and perhaps pessimistic – Marcel’s is theistic, more positive, and more life-affirming. While Sartre sees the ‘Other’ as something of a threat, Marcel believes that, on the contrary, the ‘Other’

¹²¹ Westphal, M. ‘Existentialism and Religion.’ In: *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. S. Crowell (ed.), 2012, pp.322-341, p.322.

¹²² See, for example, Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹²³ Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. W. Kaufmann (trans.). New York: Random House, 1974.

¹²⁴ Westphal, p.333. Westphal’s words based on Heidegger. See Heidegger, M. [1943]. *The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’*. In: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. W. Lovitt (trans.). New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p.64, pp.53-114.

may be a loving influence,¹²⁵ and through this realignment of relationality, introduces God as “the ultimate other”.¹²⁶

Westphal’s choice of thinkers are pertinent and although the concise nature of his exposition is governed by considerations of allotted space in the compendium, they are adequate representations. However, his account focuses less on the individual, experiential phenomenon of *being-in-the-world*. Interestingly, it is only in the section on Sartre that oblique references to this aspect can be found: “anguish (*angoisse*; *Angst*), forlornness or abandonment, and despair”.¹²⁷

8.18

Thomas Flynn’s article, *Toward the Concrete*,¹²⁸ appears, at one and the same time, to be a rediscovery of existentialism and an asseveration of its survival in the light of its presumed demise.¹²⁹ On the origins of existentialism, Flynn reverts to the time when he was a graduate student and the class was asked by Lucien Goldmann, the guest professor, when existentialism began. The class was silent and perhaps flummoxed – Flynn was wondering whether Goldmann was “looking for Pascal, or Augustine, or perhaps even Socrates?”¹³⁰ In the end, Goldmann gave the answer as 1910, when Geörgy Lukács’ book *Soul and Form* was published.¹³¹ Arguably, Flynn’s point is that existentialism and existential attributes have a fluidity, a free-flowing presence that runs through the history of human thought –

¹²⁵ Westphal, pp.338-9.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.339. See Marcel, G. *Creative Fidelity*. R. Rosthal (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

¹²⁷ Westphal, p.335. Westphal’s words. See also Sartre, J-P. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. C. Macomber (trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

¹²⁸ Flynn, T. R. ‘Toward the Concrete.’ In: *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Vol.26, No.2, 2012, pp.247-255.

¹²⁹ Cf. Mark Twain (1835-1910), who commented on a confused and erroneous journalistic report that had conferred a cousin’s illness on him and then reported that Twain had subsequently died: “the report of my death was an exaggeration.” While there may be a perception that existentialism was ‘of its time’, Flynn insists it has current influence in diverse fields of human activity, including moral philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the arts. (Flynn, pp.253-4.)

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.247.

¹³¹ Ibid. Lukács, G. *Soul and Form*. Anna Bostock (trans. 1910). New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

because what it pertains to is endemic to the human condition¹³² – and, as a result, to pin down a ‘starting date’ is precarious if not presumptuous.

He cites Sartre’s discovery of phenomenology and “Raymond Aron’s assurance that it would enable him to make philosophy out of his perception of the apricot cocktail glass before them”,¹³³ a stage in Sartre’s intellectual development, it is suggested, that would equip him to look beneath the surface of objects and experience. Not unconnected, he also cites Joseph Catalano’s observation¹³⁴ that Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* made possible a theory of “existential psychoanalysis” that would empower Sartre, intellectually, to write his existential biographical accounts of “Baudelaire, Malarmé, Genet, and, above all, his multivolume study of Gustave Flaubert”.¹³⁵

8.19

John McGowan examines the concepts of ‘self’, identity, individuality, and the world, and how they interact and interrelate; and he does so through a comparative study of Hannah Arendt and E. L. Doctorow.¹³⁶ For McGowan, Arendt sees politics as a way of “providing meaning to a potentially pointless existence”;¹³⁷ Doctorow’s novels, while addressing meaning in activity, are taken up with the idea of justice. Arendt, according to McGowan, posits the view that modernity has not been able to replace the “lost God of Christianity”¹³⁸ with a sense of meaning. She links this with a lost tradition, which, as well as offering a degree of stability, binds human beings to an interpretation of the past. What we are left with is an ever-changing

¹³² “Many of its [existentialism’s] themes are perennial even if their specific “spin” has changed.” (Flynn, p.253.)

¹³³ Ibid., p.248.

¹³⁴ This work is not referenced. However, it would appear to refer to Catalano, J. S. *A Commentary of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Phoenix Edition), 1985.

¹³⁵ Flynn, p.248. Flynn’s words.

¹³⁶ McGowan, J. ‘Ways of Worldmaking: Hannah Arendt and E. L. Doctorow Respond to Modernity.’ In: *College Literature*, Vol.38, No.1, winter 2011, pp.150-175.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.151. McGowan’s words.

¹³⁸ Ibid. See Arendt, H. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1968.

(egalitarian) world, as opposed to the hierarchical authoritarianism of the past. She identifies, and groups together, religion, authority, and tradition, asserting that neither one of these can exist without the other two. It would seem, as McGowan observes, that Arendt has a view of individuality that is at odds with other existential writers, who, on behalf of the individual, stand their ground against the plurality of the mass.¹³⁹

However, McGowan espies a similarity between Arendt and Doctorow in that both, fundamentally and in principle, believe in the individual's contribution, as part of a social plurality, towards the shaping of the world. Nevertheless, there appears to be a kind of idealism existing at the core of Doctorow's thinking, compelling us to make things better, even though, McGowan adds, we continually fail to live up to our own expectations – or at least, Doctorow's expectations, the nature of which hinge on justice.

Infiltrated into Doctorow's concern about justice are other elements which create the dynamic in his novels – injustice, anger, indignation – the need to tell one's own story and how one fits into the broader narrative.¹⁴⁰ From this is born a desire to belong to the world, a desire so potent that it overpowers other more spiritual considerations.¹⁴¹ This coincides with a motif in this thesis, that of belonging and how communal identity is weighed against the correlative religiosity of the group.

Finally, it would seem that in Doctorow's work, as presented here, there is a sense of characters who invest their trust – in other people, in ideas and ideologies, in 'entities' – for the creation of a more just world, only to be disappointed when all endeavours are ineluctably undermined by the ever-

¹³⁹ McGowan, p.159.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.163-4. "...the need to locate oneself as a legitimate inhabitant of the world, out of one's own "authority" as a human being endowed with rights, but also out of the authority that comes with a sense of self." (Ibid., p.164.) See Doctorow, E. L. *Reporting the Universe*. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 2003; and Doctorow, E. L. *Poets and Presidents: Selected Essays 1977-1992*. New York: Random House, 1993.

¹⁴¹ "The immediacy of the desire to gain "recognition" for oneself as a full-fledged member of the world takes precedence over more abstract worries about whether my life and deeds are meaningful." (McGowan, p.164)

present fault line of a flawed humanity. It is this existential reality – neither grand design nor clear panacea for humanity’s troubles; the perennial lack of stability in an uncertain world; the absence of coherence, consensus and general acquiescence; the sense that we are simply coping – that, in part, informs and directs this study.

Flynn delivers a validation of existential considerations, which, it may be argued, specifically legitimises the use of alienation as part of a system of analysis. On the other hand, McGowan’s binary account of Doctorow’s work as an exposition of fiction working to create another perspective and a better understanding of what it is to *be* in the world,¹⁴² is another vindication of the use of Khodr’s book as a matrix on which to construct a profile of his character and his religiosity.

9. Aims of the Thesis

This thesis will build on extant works – in particular, studies by Wehbe,¹⁴³ Avakian, Hirvonen, and Sharp, the latter three having been cited above in the literature review. Wehbe is a Lebanese Orthodox priest, who has known Bishop Khodr on a personal basis for many years. The work of the other three authors was addressed in the literature review; however, a brief recapitulation is presented here.

Wehbe’s study is centred on the formation of the Orthodox Youth Movement and the climate in which it evolved, but includes a reference to Khodr’s character, as well as an historical background of the Church of Antioch. Avakian’s work is a comparative study, which contrasts the ‘Other’ as presented in Karl Rahner’s and Khodr’s theology, including the latter’s theology of the ‘Other’. Hirvonen has also produced a comparative study, but from a Lebanese interfaith perspective. Other than Khodr, she imports another Christian theologian and two Muslims. Sharp has collated an

¹⁴² See above and Rowan Williams’ discussion of fiction as a tool for revealing other perspectives.

¹⁴³ Wehbe, M. F. *The Rise, Development, and Stability of the Orthodox Youth Movement*. MA Thesis, the American University of Beirut, 1981.

immense bank of information, of which Khodr is a constituent part, relating to ecumenical and interfaith activity, but focusing on “Orthodox thinking on Islam and Muslim-Christian encounters”.¹⁴⁴

Each of the four works is of especial importance and will act as a platform to break new ground: specifically, to focus exclusively on Khodr *the man* in order to create a fuller personal and spiritual profile of him as an individualist and religious outsider; to offer a study of his theology in a situational narrative; and to consider how practical his religiosity is. It may be argued that his theology has already been subjected to previous studies, but these have been within the framework of academic theorising. The purpose here is to detach Khodr’s theology from this framework and examine it, and him, more closely within a situational narrative where a literary flow fleshes out his theology of the ‘Other’ and his overall spiritual vision. This newly rendered portrait and analytical study of Khodr, as a person and as a significant figure in Lebanon and in the Church of Antioch, a study that also brings together, through a series of interviews, *aperçus* of Khodr and his theology, has not been accomplished before.

Relying on fictional narrative to assemble a picture of Khodr’s spirituality, spiritual vision, and his theology of the ‘Other’, does not, it is argued, restrict the validity of the task. This was demonstrated earlier by references to other literary works where fiction has been used efficaciously to process real issues and reflect cogent philosophical and theological perspectives. In addition, there is the widespread acknowledgement that Khodr’s book is autobiographical in nature. This touches on another fresh approach: the analytical style adopted by the thesis will, to some extent, draw on philosophy, theology, literature, and the ‘creative arts’ in general, relying on all four disciplines – which appear as threads within the main fabric of the book – to dissect, interpret, and identify.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Sharp, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ The appropriateness of the creative arts as an auxiliary, analytical adjunct in any theological venture is given currency by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey (1904-1988). “God is Creator not...like a carpenter who makes a

As already indicated, the main tool for conducting this exercise is Khodr's book, which has never previously been subjected to an analysis. As an autobiographical work – that is, one that reveals his vision and innermost thoughts – it will provide four new perspectives on George Khodr. First, it will allow a more *personal* account of his thinking – including his theology of the 'Other', his respect for Islam, his call to reach out beyond barriers, and his view on ecumenism – to emerge, as it is transposed from academic theorising to be placed within quotidian, situational contexts. Second, Khodr's views on what is required to embark on the spiritual pathway, including the need to push barriers of understanding and transcend one's own boundaries, will be more readily discerned. Third, in the interstices of these revealed thoughts, freely expressed through the conduit of literature, a more keenly defined picture of Khodr as an individual will take shape. Fourth, throughout this exposition, Khodr's thoughts, sentiments, and spirituality, together with his yearning to overcome barriers and reach out to the 'Other', will be linked to the thesis' underlying hypothesis, that Khodr practices what is described here as 'existential religiosity'. In short, the book is a unique tool to create first, a portrait of how the personal characteristics of Khodr has influenced him as a theologian and thinker; second, and linked to the research question, to offer in the final analysis, a view of how *practical* his religiosity is, as a general principle, for Christians everywhere, and, more specifically, for the Lebanese Orthodox community, considering their apparent spiritual tenor and religious capabilities . Neither of these has previously been systematically accomplished.

Over the years, Khodr has been used to addressing a pluralistic lay audience through articles, but these have, in general, only ever been relatively short, pithy essays and homilies, which allow him to opine on a range of single issues. A cross-section of these writings will be included in the thesis to

box, once for all complete and static; or like a watchmaker who makes a mechanism and leaves it to run of itself...God as Creator is more like an artist who expresses himself within the beauty of his work, or like a dramatist whose drama unfolds itself in the characters he has called into being." (Ramsey, A. M. *Introducing the Christian Faith*. London: SCM Press, 1970, p.17.)

interlink with the book, which represents, it is suggested, a greater opportunity for him to dress his overall vision in a deeper, more personal, comprehensive and interconnected narrative for general readership. This symbiotic conjunction of his writings will be enhanced overall by one-to-one interviews, which were conducted relatively recently with Khodr. The latter is a unique compendium of his thoughts on issues and themes embedded in the book and the articles.

Scholarly works may have been written about Khodr's theology, but, as will be shown, even though he is a respected theologian and thinker, when it comes to understanding him and his perspective on the spiritual life, it should be noted that he has little sympathy for the discursive debates associated with academia. Khodr is quite open about his discomfort with the formal academic study of theology as a suitable guide for living the spiritual life. "I am certain that, what attracts me the most in Christianity is not the theology, but the sanctity."¹⁴⁶ Later, and in direct reference to the saints, he says that, "Because of them, I have closed all the books."¹⁴⁷ In conversation, he puts it more plainly. "I'm not against theology. I deal with it in my professional life. But there is the danger of knowledge in general. If you are very eloquent speaking of God in a lecture...you could imagine that you are near to God and that is not always true. To speak of God is [one] thing, to know God is another."¹⁴⁸

For him, spirituality is more true when it is practised with total immersion, deep devotion and as spontaneous activity, ungilded by intellectual theorising. Thus it is that the book, which obviates academia and is not bound by the

¹⁴⁶ Khodr, G. 'The Saints'. Father Symeon Abou Haidar (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 9 January, 1999.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013. When asked on the same day how he would describe the *Philokalia*, he replies that despite all the "tremendous theological work in the Orthodox Church, the soul of Orthodoxy is centred, or is in, the person of Jesus – despite all this 'decoration'...of saints, icons, architecture...Orthodox are simple souls of Jesus". He also adds that, nonetheless, they need art, and that art, in the form of icons, is very important for them. (Ibid.)

constraints of parishional communiqués, offers a unique gateway into gaining a fuller understanding of him as a (spiritual) person.

CHAPTER 2

The Church of Antioch & The Lebanese Orthodox Community

In the last chapter, key definitions were set out and the literature review presented a general overview of the main themes with which the thesis will be associated. The aims of the thesis and its contribution to existing works on Khodr were established. This chapter will now attempt to sketch a contextual backdrop to Khodr's spiritual inheritance by presenting a short profile of the Antiochene Church, concentrating on its recent history; this will act as a prelude to a more substantial piece on Orthodox spirituality. Proceeding this, there will be a section surveying the tenor of contemporary religiosity within the Lebanese Orthodox community, with specific reference to Bishop Khodr's own lifetime, and exploring its sense of identity within Lebanon's pluralistic society.

2.1 The Church of Antioch: Historical Foundations

As an autocephalous Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Church of Antioch has a presence in a number of Middle Eastern countries, including Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Iraq, and some of the Gulf states. It should be noted that the full title of Patriarch John Yazigi (b.1955), who acceded to the position in 2013 following the death of Ignatius IV (1920-2012), is Patriarch of Antioch and All The East. The Patriarchate moved to Damascus in 1342 where the Patriarch has his official residence, while the contemporary Antiochene Church comprises sixteen dioceses, of which six are in Lebanon.

The Church of Antioch in Lebanon has been subject to something of an 'identity crisis' as part of its historical narrative set against a pluralistic backdrop. Apart from intra-Christian divisions and Islamic subordination in late antiquity,¹ it suffered rupture in the eighteenth century when the Melkite schism of 1724 split the Church, allowing for the rise of the Melkite or Greek

¹ See, for example, Ignatius IV, 'Address to a debating group between Orthodox and Catholics at the *Pro Oriente* foundation, Vienna, 19 October 1987'. In: Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*. Balamand, Lebanon: Publications of the University of Balamand, 2006, p.46.

Catholic Church. This schism was exacerbated by the practice of appointing 'Greeks' from Constantinople, Jerusalem or Cyprus to the patriarchate² over and above indigenous Orthodox, many of whom were proud of their Arab origins and, culturally, their connection to Arabism.³ Breaking this Greek dominance depended, to some extent, on education and it was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that a revival in educational standards, enabled by Russian support, helped to create a sufficiently intellectual clergy, who, potentially, could take on the role of patriarch. In 1899, the desires of the indigenous Orthodox were met when Meletius al-Doumani became the first Arab to assume the post since the schism of 1724. Having won the right to elect their own patriarchs, the Church hierarchy continued their programme of education, Patriarch Meletius founding the Balamand seminary, later to become the University of Balamand, in 1901.

The latter half of the nineteenth century proved an auspicious time not only for the Church of Antioch, but for Arabism and the Arab renaissance, coinciding as it did with the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire,⁴ and it was within this Arab renaissance movement that a number of Antiochene Christians occupied leading roles. However, many were supportive of a secularist state and exercised their quest for Arab independence through creative pursuits – poetry, literature, journalism – rather than religious ones.⁵ Intellectuals within this movement called for freedom not only from the Ottoman yoke, but from Westernisation in general, and from missionising and colonialism in particular.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these extraneous influences – missionising and colonialism, or simply European presence – gnawed at the foundations of Orthodoxy. Indeed, following the First World

² Abou Mrad, N. 'The Witness of the Church in a Pluralistic World: Theological renaissance in the Church of Antioch.' In: *The Orthodox Christian World*. A. Casiday (ed.). London: Routledge, 2010, p.246.

³ A more pithy, emphatic statement than Ignatius' would be hard to find. "We belong to the Arabic culture." (Ignatius IV. 'Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, 5 June 1983'. In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.68.)

⁴ Abou Mrad, p.247.

⁵ Ibid. There is a striking parallel here with the pre-revolution, Russian religious revival of the nineteenth century.

War, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, and the concomitant territorial appropriation and reorganisation by Western powers, a new wave of missionaries came on the coat-tails of these occupiers and engaged in routine proselytising, which overshadowed Orthodoxy. This, it could be argued, was an extension of colonialism and fomented resentment amongst some of the indigenous population.⁶

These were not the first Western missions to the region. Both Protestants and Catholics had come to the Near East, in particular to Lebanon, prior to the First World War, but the influx of Protestant missionary movements in the nineteenth century tended to be seen as something of a threat to the sense of community and identity.⁷ It has also been said that Protestantism deliberately targeted the Orthodox, having successfully proselytised neither the Jews and Muslims of Palestine, nor Christians of other denominations.⁸

⁶ Ignatius IV describes the relationship of the Church with the West as “one of conflict when the Western confessions sent us missionaries who ignored our identity and worked to detach individuals or groups from our Church.” (Ignatius IV. ‘Introduction to the translation of Cardinal Ratzinger’s book, ‘Entrance into Christian faith’, Lebanon 1994’. In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.25.) This thinly veiled antipathy towards Rome has long roots that are many hundreds of years deep. The schismatic fractures, which are well documented, may have appeared prior to 1054, but, arguably, the bitterness of Europe’s Reformation curdled the relationship between the Latin West and Eastern Orthodoxy even further when Protestantism courted Christianity’s ancient Churches in the East for support against Rome. Whatever divisive relationship existed before may have been greatly soured by this politicking. See, for example, Cunningham, M. B. & Theokritoff, E. ‘Who Are The Orthodox Christians? A historical introduction.’ In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*. M. B. Cunningham & E. Theokritoff (eds.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp.9-10. MacCulloch suggests that division occurred two hundred years or so before 1054. The arguments of the eighth and ninth centuries, he says, “led to realignment...[and] Orthodox Christianity”. (MacCulloch, D. *Silence. A Christian History*. London: Allen Lane, 2013, p.108.)

⁷ See Sammak, who believes that “[foreign] intervention...used minorities during the dark ages of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islam and its teachings, in order to fulfil the ambition of conquering and dominating the Middle East.” An example, perhaps, of divide and rule. (Sammak, M. ‘Religion and Politics: The Case for Lebanon.’ In: *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*. T. Scheffler (ed.). Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg In Kommission, 2002, p.540.)

⁸ Wehbe, p.13. See also Steve Runciman. Referring to the Church as “the poorest of the Patriarchs”, he goes on to say that it was subject to “depredations by Protestant missionaries, mostly American, who, failing to make any impact on the Muslims, turned their attention to the local Christians”. (Runciman, S. *The Orthodox Churches and The Secular State*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.77.)

2.2 Spirituality: General Traits of an Orthodox Tradition

2.2.1 Introduction

This section is not intended to be a detailed disquisition on Orthodox spirituality; rather, it will be a broad account, highlighting some central characteristics. As such, it will sculpt a paradigm that stresses three major pillars of Orthodox spirituality: theosis, the apophatic and hesychasm. Along the way, additional facets idiomatic of Orthodoxy spirituality will be alluded to: Trinitarianism, pneumatology, the *Filioque*, and the anti-individualistic tendency within Orthodoxy. Finally, a perspective of Orthodox spirituality in the contemporary world will be included.

2.2.2 Spirituality & Materialism

Orthodoxy has always stressed the apophatic, spiritual/mystical side of Christianity, although this is not to say it is confined to contemplative or meditative praxis.⁹ Spirituality, within Orthodoxy, has a material dimension; and distinguishing between the material and the spiritual – that is, defining spirituality as something at odds with the material – would be going against the grain.¹⁰ However, this unicity of the spirit and the flesh has to be viewed itself with some qualification; for example, as Popov observes, the mysticism of Eastern Christianity is focused on the “immaterial”, on sacred *mystery*, on the ineffable nature of the Divine, rather than on the earthly existence of Christ. This, he continues, contrasts with Western experiential spirituality or mysticism, which focuses on the *material* aspects of Christ’s life, a practice that, he asserts, sometimes strayed into “the extreme of stigmata”.¹¹

⁹ See, for example, Calian, who claims Palamas “identified three basic themes of Eastern Christian spirituality and theology: (1) theology as apophatic in character; (2) revelation as light; and (3) salvation as deification.” (Calian, C. S. ‘Hesychasm and Transcendental Meditation: Sources for Contemporary Theology?’ In: *Eastern Churches Review*. G. Every, J. Saward, K. T. Ware (eds.). Vol.10, 1978, pp.126-140, p.132.)

¹⁰ See Andreopoulos, where he makes the remark that the spiritual, “where it implies the distinction between the spiritual and the material, would be viewed with extreme suspicion...” (Andreopoulos, A. ‘A Modern Orthodox Approach to Spirituality’. In: *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol.11, No.1, Spring 2011, p.18, pp.10-23.)

¹¹ Popov, I. V. (1906) B. Jakim (trans.:2011) ‘The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church’. In: *Theosis. Deification in Christian Theology. Vol. Two*. Vladimir Kharlamov (ed.) Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011, p.73.

This polarity, where the body can be used as an exercise in asceticism as well as a tool for worldly purpose, suggests that there may be a contradiction between spiritual aspirations and the exertions of material passions.¹²

Andreopoulos draws attention to a prayer, uttered by the eucharistic celebrant and originating from the Fathers. Its central theme is the unworthiness of the imperfect human being to "approach or draw near or minister" to the "King of glory".¹³ This would appear to stymie any meaningful relationship with God were it not for the prayer's continuation, which recognises that, because God took on human flesh and all that is human, we should, nonetheless, be encouraged to draw near to the Divine. The resultant spirituality emphasises an important aspect of Orthodox spirituality, entwining as it does the material and the spiritual. It might also suggest an existential religiosity with its implicit reference to our struggle for authenticity, set against our innate existential fears, inherited flaws and an ever-present propensity to sin. This drive towards authenticity additionally intimates the theotic pathway and the true destiny of humankind in deification.

2.2.3 The Holy Spirit & the *Filioque*

Having established a dualism within spirituality, Andreopoulos indicates that, rather than being preoccupied with the binary polarisation of spiritual-material opposites, we should instead focus our attention on what is more significant – that is, "the spiritual in reference to the Holy Spirit".¹⁴ This pneumatological emphasis reveals the significance within Orthodox spirituality of the Holy Spirit, not only its role of mediation between the Divine and earthly spheres, but where the Holy Spirit 'sits' within what may be described as the Trinitarian expression of God. It is this latter point that contributed to a theological

¹² But see Blowers on use, and transformation of, the passions. (Blowers, P. M. 'Hope for the Passible Self: The Use and Transformation of the Human Passions in the Fathers of the *Philokalia*'. In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*. Brock Bingaman & Bradley Nassif (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.) "For all of its teaching on self-control, the *Philokalia* has much to say about godly affections, some of which are converted vices." (Ibid., p.226; but see *passim*, pp.216-29.)

¹³ Andreopoulos, p.18.

¹⁴ Ibid.

rupture between Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity. The original wording of the Nicene creed states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and that the Holy Spirit “with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and together glorified.”¹⁵ In the sixth century, the Western Church inserted an additional phrase ‘from the Son’ (*Filioque*), directly inferring that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Ware makes the point that, although the furore surrounding the *Filioque* may seem today “utterly trivial”,¹⁶ it is an issue that merits attention because of its connection to Trinitarian theology and because, he asserts, “belief in the Trinity lies at the very heart of the Christian faith”.¹⁷

2.2.4 Trinitarianism, Individuality, & Relationality

These intricacies reveal two other traits that lie at the heart of Orthodox spirituality: the concepts of personhood and relationality. Each ‘person’ of the Trinity is in some way interdependent, or as Zizioulas puts it, “none of the three persons can be conceived without reference to the other two, both logically and ontologically.”¹⁸ This notion of *perichoresis*, or interdependent relationality, gives rise to another consideration, individuality. It may be a simplistic assumption, but the short extract from Zizioulas neatly brings into focus Orthodoxy’s discomfort with its understanding of individuality. In the socio-theological structure of Orthodoxy, experiential spirituality cannot be achieved outside the community of the Church and individual, or inwardly independent spirituality, is thus neither wholly validated nor countenanced. Indeed, it is only by relating to the ‘Other’ that the ‘I’ can be; in other words, relationality is an ‘enabler’ of individuality, of one’s identity.¹⁹

Trinitarianism, the Holy Spirit, the *Filioque*, and the concepts of relationality and individuality, are important and influential elements of Orthodox spirituality. It is now proposed to highlight what is, arguably, at the core of Orthodox spirituality – theosis.

¹⁵ Ware, T. *The Orthodox Church*. London: Penguin Books, 1997, p.50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.210.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.161.

¹⁹ For more on this from an existential perspective, see Appendix A.

2.2.5 Theosis

The term 'theosis' is interchangeable with the word 'deification', and both refer to the process by which human beings can become 'deified', a process, it is believed, which was initiated by the Incarnation – the Logos becomes flesh so that human beings can become God.²⁰ Scholars identify a reference in the psalms that alludes to theosis: "I have said, Ye are gods: and ye are all the children of the most Highest";²¹ and in the gospels, where there is mention of "great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature".²² Kallistos Ware prefers the phraseology 'made in the image of God' when describing human personhood, rather than the reference to an element of 'divinity' that resides at the core of our being and which potentiates our deification. Such statements, he believes, blurs the distinction between the Uncreated God and the created human being.²³ The interconnectivity of elements within Orthodox spirituality is evinced by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose catalytic role in enabling deification or theosis is decisive.²⁴

What is equally decisive is the recognition that theosis is divinely bestowed, albeit through the individual's willing acceptance. This suggests something of a paradox, whereby deification is not initiated by personal action on the part of the subject, yet the process itself cannot commence "unless they [human subjects] are first, through their own free choice, begotten in the Spirit by means of the self-loving and independent power that dwells naturally within them."²⁵ The ensuing state of the soul following deification is such as to bring peace and utter sublime tranquillity through a transcendence of our earthly

²⁰ This conviction, that God became man so that man (humankind) can become God, derives from, among other sources, Athanasius (c.296-373).

²¹ Psalm 82:6.

²² 2 Peter 1:4.

²³ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 24 March, 2014. See also Russell, who explains that "Christians transformed by Christ...become not "who" God is but "what" he is, sharing in his divine plan for the reconciliation and glorification of humankind." (Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p.36.)

²⁴ "The human person is recreated...through the Holy Spirit." (Bingaman, B. 'Becoming a Spiritual World of God: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor'. In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*. Brock Bingaman & Bradley Nassif (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p.156.)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.160

condition with all its existential pressures and troubles. As Maximus the Confessor says, “And this peace makes it [the soul] pass beyond...the limits not only of malice and ignorance, of lying and wickedness and of vices opposed to virtues, knowledge, truth, and goodness...but even the limits of virtue itself, and knowledge, and truth and goodness as we know them.”²⁶

Although theosis may have been central to patristic and apostolic spirituality, it has not, perhaps, been consistently so for the historical Orthodox community as a whole.²⁷ Russell refers to Maximus the Confessor’s re-establishing of theosis within monasticism, which suggests it had fallen into disuse, and adds that, up to Palamas, theosis was not discussed in the Byzantine Church, not through fear of heterodox associations, but because it was simply not a controversial issue.²⁸ This, perhaps, lends it the significance of theological furniture – present, but rarely acknowledged; yet also suggests that it may have been of marginal interest. While crediting the Russian émigré movement with reviving theosis,²⁹ Russell identifies three main sources of contemporary Orthodox thinking on theosis: “modern personalist philosophy, fourteenth-century hesychast doctrine, and the teaching of the early Greek Fathers.”³⁰

This snapshot of theosis may suggest an historical ambivalence, but it would appear that even within relatively modern times, the concept of theosis is generally unknown. Russell claims that the mention of theosis in the 1950s “would probably have been met with a puzzled look.”³¹ However, even the very notion of spirituality can be problematic. Chryssavgis asserts that “the term ‘spirituality’ itself assumes numerous meanings...[and] is vulnerable to

²⁶ Maximus Confessor. ‘The Church’s Mystagogy’. In: *Selected Writings*. G. C. Berthold (trans.). New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985, Chapter 5, p.194.

²⁷ Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p.28.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p.29.

³⁰ Ibid., p.30.

³¹ Ibid., p.13.

misunderstanding and misuse”.³² What ‘spirituality’ means for one person may not have the precise connotations for the next person; and, according to Chryssavgis, to assume there is a direct link between spirituality as it is understood today and the patristic tradition, may be erroneous. “Some Orthodox theologians are quick to claim there is no reference in the classical tradition to ‘spirituality’ as such”; instead, they “rightly emphasise the connection between the Spirit of God [the Holy Spirit] and the spiritual life.”³³ Kallistos Ware makes the point that human beings should distinguish between ‘Spirit’ and ‘spirit’. The former refers to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the uncreated Spirit of God, and the latter to the spirit with which we, as created beings, are endowed.³⁴

If the term ‘spirituality’ itself is seemingly complicated by semantics, there are, arguably, characteristics of spirituality, such as apophaticism, that may be more coherent, universal, or susceptible to unequivocal, concretised interpretation.

2.2.6 Apophasis & The Apophatic

The apophatic has occupied a prominent place within spirituality and within Orthodoxy’s conception of the Divine. Ignatius of Antioch (d.107)³⁵ was an early Christian martyr and first/second century advocate of apophaticism, something reflected in his recognition of the silence of the divine.³⁶ However, there are existential consequences of apophaticism, such as the inculcation of profound loss and abandonment.³⁷ Some scholars, on the other hand, see

³² Chryssavgis, J. ‘The Spiritual Way’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*. M. B. Cunningham & E. Theokritoff (eds.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.150.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ware, Bishop Kallistos. *The Orthodox Way. Revised Edition*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995, p.48.

³⁵ The dating of Ignatius of Antioch’s death comes from Frend. Ignatius’ birth is estimated by some sources as c.50, and his death between 98 and 117. Frend seems to have taken a mean average for the date of his demise. (Frend, W. H. C. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p.23.)

³⁶ See, for example, MacCulloch, p.55. He also cites Ignatius of Antioch on Jesus: “the Word that came forth from silence”. (Ibid., p.49.)

³⁷ Ignatius IV addresses this perceived distance between God and his creation, and acknowledges that humanity “sometimes despairs of reaching him”. (Ignatius IV. ‘St

apophaticism as having a more positive connotation; Buckley, for example, who conceives it as a gateway “into the infinite mystery that is God”.³⁸ This is a significant observation, for it suggests that apophaticism signals a move towards a culmination of spirituality, where the apophatic and experiential hesychasm undergo a synthesis to become the Christianised *telos* of theosis.

The apophatic is a central motif throughout the theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, the late fifth/early sixth century anonymous author, in whose works, it has been said, we can see “[i]n its purest form...the idealistic version of the idea of deification [theosis]”.³⁹ Out of the apophatic tradition comes a refined form of spirituality on the basis of which Dionysius structured a three stage “intellectual ascent”.⁴⁰ The first stage entails an interpretation of symbols and Holy Scripture, which Origen describes as utilising “riddles, images, allegories”;⁴¹ the second stage involves ‘knowledge’ of God through abstract thought; the third stage necessitates a transcending not only of our physiological senses and our facility for rationalising, but also of our very being.⁴²

2.2.7 The *Philokalia*

If this entire spiritual process is suggestive of a religiosity associated with the spiritual elite and beyond the reach of the laity, the *Philokalia*, the compendium of spiritual treatises collated in the eighteenth century by Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805) and Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809),⁴³ opened up to the wider world a treasury of spiritual writings that are skewed towards a theotic pathway.⁴⁴ The book has been referred to as “a

Porphyrius’ Church, Archdiocese of Beirut, 3 December 1997.’ In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.167.) See also Appendix A where apophaticism is linked to existential abandonment.

³⁸ Buckley, M. ‘Atheism and Contemplation.’ In: *Theological Studies*, December 1, 1979, 40, 4, pp.680-99, p.690.

³⁹ Popov, p.57.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.71-2.

⁴¹ Origen. *C. Cel.* 7.10, PG 11:1433. In: *ibid.*, p.72.

⁴² Popov, pp.72-3.

⁴³ See Appendix A, where the *Philokalia* is described as offering spiritual guidance.

⁴⁴ Palamas believed “all Christians (not only monks) have access to the deifying power of grace.” (Calian, p.132.) Calian also claims that Gregory of Sinai (c.1265-1346), who practised hesychastic prayer on Athos, encouraged his followers to return

product of the Enlightenment”,⁴⁵ in that it was a response to rationalism, as a well as a bulwark against the influences of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. However, the fact that the *Philokalia* put into the public domain a collation of deep, almost esoteric, writings by some of the most distinctive spiritual thinkers within Christianity strongly suggests that theosis is not the preserve of spiritual elitism, but is intended as a textbook of spiritual exegesis intended for humanity at large and as a pathway to theosis for individual human beings.

In contrast, perhaps, to rationalistic thinkers, the early Fathers saw human beings not as a coincidental appendage to the cosmos, but as an entity with a specific purpose in God’s plan. Mankind is seen as a microcosm and the world as “*macro-anthropos*”, “man writ large, destined through man to attain its eternal purpose in communion with the personal God”⁴⁶ – which, in itself, is an allusion, perhaps, to theosis. Human beings are tasked with shaping and moulding this world, putting everything in it to (holy) use and offering it back to God. This strongly intimates an existential realignment of human beings’ interiority with their exteriority. The Fathers see Christians engaged on two fronts: they are to embrace “all that is good and holy within our physical world and...contribute toward its social progress”; but they are also reminded that they are “on the front lines of spiritual warfare” where the passions are to be subdued and the ‘self’ purified.⁴⁷ In this light, the *Philokalia* can be seen as

to Thessalonika and establish what Calian refers to as “urban hesychasm”. He believes Gregory of Sinai “viewed inner prayer as a possibility in the city as well as in some isolated mountain spot...mysticism and society were not necessarily incompatible or mutually exclusive.” (Ibid., p.129.)

⁴⁵ Collins, P. M. ‘Theosis, Texts, and Identity. The *Philokalia* (1782) – a Case Study.’ In: *Theosis. Deification in Christian Theology. Vol. Two.* Vladimir Kharlamov (ed.) Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011, p.185. See also Zecher, who describes the *Philokalia* as representing “the nexus of spiritual revival which took place in the eighteenth century”. (Zecher, J. L. ‘Tradition and Creativity in the Construction and Reading of the *Philokalia*.’ In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality.* Brock Bingaman & Bradley Nassif (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p.123.)

⁴⁶ Theokritoff, E. ‘Creator and Creation.’ In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.71. In this context, Theokritoff cites Stăniloae, who fleshes out this patristic perspective. See Stăniloae, D. *The Experience of God. Vol.2.* London: T&T Clark, 2002, p.61.

⁴⁷ Bingaman, B. and Nassif, B. ‘Introduction: Love of the Beautiful.’ In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, p.5. Ware makes a similar point

feeding the soul in readiness for this 'ascetical' struggle; but, it is argued, it also has another purpose.

2.2.8 Hesychasm & the Human Being

If apophaticism induces a sense of abandonment, 'aloneness', of being alienated from a distant God, and theosis represents a gradation from inauthentic to authentic existence, hesychasm may be described as the bridgehead between the two; and it is the spiritual contents of the *Philokalia* that opens the way to hesychasm, the quintessential experiential spirituality of Orthodoxy. With regard to the *Philokalia*, some scholars believe that hesychasm is neither hidden, submerged, nor disguised; on the contrary, it is emblazoned within its opening. Louth, for example, asserts that "the very title page of the *Philokalia*" indicates a pathway of purification, illumination and perfection".⁴⁸ McGuckin makes a similar claim: "all the valid line and spiritual pedigree of patristic teachings on prayer ran up to and through the Hesychastic fathers...This was the tradition to which the Athonite Kollyvadic revival belonged."⁴⁹ Even though Louth cautions on treating the *Philokalia* as the primary inspiration for "Palamism or hesychasm",⁵⁰ he argues elsewhere that, for Nikodimos, "renewal of the life of the Church...included...a deepened spiritual life involving practice of the Jesus Prayer...",⁵¹ which may be described as a major characteristic of hesychasm.⁵²

when he writes that the *Philokalia*'s "primary subject is not outward asceticism or liturgical prayer. Its concern is rather with the "inner Kingdom" of the heart". (Ware, Kallistos. 'St. Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*.' In: *ibid.*, pp.34-5.)

⁴⁸ Louth, A. 'The Patristic Revival and its Protagonists.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.190.

⁴⁹ McGuckin, J. A. 'The Making of the *Philokalia*: A Tale of Monks and Manuscripts.' In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, p.47. The "Kollyvadic revival" refers to the *ressourcement* spiritual movement (the return to ancient traditional sources) to reinvigorate spirituality within Orthodoxy, to which the original editors of the *Philokalia* subscribed.

⁵⁰ "[T]o regard the *Philokalia* as a whole as...the *Herkunft* of Palamism or hesychasm seems unbalanced". (Louth, A. 'The Influence of the *Philokalia* in the Orthodox World.' In: *ibid.*, p.52.) In a footnote, Louth says, "There is no real English equivalent to *Herkunft*: "origin" or "heritage" comes close."

⁵¹ Louth, A. 'The Patristic Revival and its Protagonists.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.190.

⁵² In the introduction to the *Philokalia*, the translators make it plain why they believe the Jesus prayer is a cohesive element in the work as a whole. While acknowledging that the *Philokalia* deals with other issues, "it would not be too much to say that it is

The theological furore of 1340, which effectively put hesychasm and hesychastic practice on trial, placed Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) in a protracted dispute with an opposing theologian, Barlaam of Calabria. As intense as these opposing theological viewpoints proved to be, they do offer, it is suggested, a profile of the dyadic polar opposites of spirituality: Orthodox pneumatology with its emphasis on the apophatic, experiential mysticism of the East; and a more scholastic approach, often associated with the West.⁵³ Barlaam, described as a 'philosopher',⁵⁴ "was shocked by the claim [of hesychasts] that human beings could participate in God."⁵⁵ Palamas, however, defended hesychasm by recourse to the essence-energies argument. The divine energies, says Palamas, can be experienced; the divine essence, as an apophatic 'Beyond-Being',⁵⁶ can be neither experienced nor known.

Theosis itself, according to Gregory Palamas, is ineffable,⁵⁷ which links it to the apophatic; both, it would appear, are entwined within the overarching schema of Orthodox spirituality. It is a spirituality that has undergone and continues, perhaps, to undergo modulation in an increasingly complex world of technological sophistication where the spiritual, as intangible phenomena, is, arguably, given limited credence. Is it possible then for the Orthodox Church as the instrument of spirituality to have a credible presence in the lives

the recurrent references to the Jesus prayer which more than anything else confer on it its inner unity." (*The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol.1. G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware (trans. and eds.). London: Faber & Faber, 1979, p.15.)

⁵³ The difference between East and West, however, may be seen as more subtle. See, for example, Demacopoulos, G. & Papanikolaou, A. (eds.). *Orthodox Constructions of the West*. New York: Ford University Press, 2013.

⁵⁴ "[T]he 'philosopher' Barlaam of Calabria." (Russell, N. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004, p.304.)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The phrase 'Beyond-Being' is much used by authors in discussing concepts of God. For a broader application of its meaning, see Schuon, F. *Christianity/Islam. Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism. A New Translation with Selected Letters*. M. Perry, J-P Lafouge, J. Cutsinger (trans.); J. Cutsinger (ed.). Indiana: World Wisdom, 2008, *passim*. See later, Chapter 4, p.135, Fn.189.

⁵⁷ "For even when spoken about, deification remains ineffable". Gregory Palamas. *The Triads*, E. The Uncreated Glory, III.i.32. J. Meyendorff. (ed.); N. Gendle. (trans.). New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983, p.87.

of people today? Kallistos Ware argues for a shifting of priorities within the Church's dynamic relationship with the world. Whereas, he says, the previous century saw Orthodox theology concern itself with ecclesiology, its role in the twenty-first century should be more focused on the human being,⁵⁸ who, despite frailties, existential fears and uncertainties, is made in the image of God. It could be argued that humanity has, in the past and to a degree, been marginalised by the intricacies of theological debate. Now, with a momentum to bring collective and individual human suffering into the foreground, and with the knowledge that people are being tempted away from traditional spiritual practices into questionable, if not spurious, spirituality, the human being qua *person* has attracted a measure of not insignificant attention. Certainly, as Andreopoulos confirms, Christian anthropology has stirred interest.⁵⁹

2.2.9 The Modern Context of Orthodox Spirituality

With regard to the development of a vibrant contemporary Orthodox spirituality, one that is intellectually and theologically tilted towards *personhood* and adequately equipped to deal with the existential dilemmas and problems of a modern humanity, Andreopoulos proposes a synthesis of "the contemplative and ecclesiological traditions".⁶⁰ While acknowledging what he considers "the basic understanding of spirituality in the East...[which] is not so much concerned with the human spirit as it is with the presence and the operation of the Holy Spirit",⁶¹ he implies that this synthesis has a cogency, even though, he admits, it is not entirely successful when it comes to other "challenges and issues" that inform debate in the modern world.⁶² It is clear from this that Orthodoxy spirituality still has work to do; specifically, opening itself to the potential for effectively addressing humankind's problems. How does it deal with liberal modern attitudes to sexuality and gender; how does it react to calls for a greater role for women in the Church? How does it respond to greater openness in ecumenical fora, while preserving its own identity; how effectively does Orthodoxy reach out to the 'Other'?

⁵⁸ Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, pp.17 and 25.

⁵⁹ Andreopoulos, p.20.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.22.

⁶² Ibid., p.21.

What theological approaches can be devised to deal with the darkness that resides in human souls and arguably springs, in part, from the lacuna of apophatic religiosity? This brings to the fore the study's research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

2.3 The Church of Antioch, the OYM, & the Orthodox Community

This section will describe in a little more detail the spiritual activity of the Orthodox laity in Khodr's lifetime, and the pressures and sense of inferiority that characterised the Church of Antioch during the twentieth century. It will additionally cover the foundation of the Orthodox Youth Movement (OYM), which was a reaction against its perceived subordination, and highlight some of the movement's main tenets, which Khodr played such a central role in formalising, and which act, in part, as a bellwether of his religious thinking. Bringing this chapter to a close, there will be an overview of the contemporary Lebanese Orthodox community to offer an assessment of its religiosity and spiritual understanding.

2.3.1 The Orthodox Church in Lebanon

As discussed earlier, Western infiltrations into Lebanon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century undermined the country's sense of 'self' and put the Antiochene Church under pressure. There was, however, an additional factor. Orthodoxy's sense of identity in the first half of the twentieth century was little more than pusillanimous, the Church requiring from the faithful only basic acting out of Orthodox rites and ritual.⁶³ This observance by rote that effectively marginalised the religious and existential needs of parishioners had an unforeseen consequence: it drove the Orthodox into the arms of Western Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who had so positioned themselves that they could offer a level of pastoral support lacking in Orthodox communities.⁶⁴

⁶³ Wehbe claimed that "the Orthodox Church demanded loyalty solely on the basis of the religious services it held". (Wehbe, p.13.)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

In the 1920s, following the break up of the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon was being torn two ways: by a desire to forge an authentic identity; and by the need to modernise under the influence of the West.⁶⁵ By the 1930s and the 1940s, the Church was perceived to be in a parlous state: structurally archaic and thus ineffective in the countering, or incorporating of, new ideas. Instead, there was “blind following of the [Orthodox] rituals...and hostility...from the Protestant and Catholic Churches.”⁶⁶ Around 1941, Khodr and other Orthodox students were completing their secondary education at Catholic educational institutions, very much aware of Orthodoxy’s sorry state, but fired with a determination to do something about it.

Following the precedent that established the Balamand seminary, educational centres were set up at a number of monasteries in the early part of the twentieth century. This development, however, must be contextualised within a prevailing and widespread lack of education amongst the priesthood and laity, so it scarcely constituted a comprehensive and dramatic raising of standards.⁶⁷ Wehbe alludes to congregations at Sunday liturgies and special services, claiming “they have normally little or no understanding of their meaning”.⁶⁸ Earlier, he lends the point greater weight, claiming that the Church of Antioch was “moving by inertia”; that it did not offer “any non-liturgical services”; that elderly congregations followed rituals in a manner which were at once routine, mechanical, and spiritually vapid;⁶⁹ and that literary output of theological works was confined to a range of books merely apologetic in nature.⁷⁰ The Church appeared not to be alarmed at this stasis, for as Wehbe makes plain, it was bolstered by “past glory...always conscious of itself as part of the universal Orthodox Church and thus did neither feel a threat to its existence nor the real need to cater to its adherents.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.20.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.13.

⁶⁷ Wehbe refers to the “ignorance of the clergy” during the first half of the twentieth century. (Wehbe, p.2.)

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.13.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In highlighting the educational shortfall in the Church, Parsons suggests, perhaps inadvertently, a nexus between this and what might, charitably, be called discomfiture when comparing itself with Catholicism. “The intelligent and loyal members of...[the Antiochene] Church,” he writes, “had to face the fact that there was a great paucity of resources, intellectual and spiritual, within their Church, and this was the more obvious when compared with the great wealth of resources of every kind possessed by the Catholic Church.”⁷² Indeed, Parsons asserts that Orthodox young people, schooled in Catholic institutions, were not sufficiently equipped with knowledge about Orthodoxy to respond constructively when their faith was challenged, something which they experienced, explicitly or implicitly.⁷³ This lack of resources was made evident in extra-curricula activities where the well established European Catholic youth movement, ‘Jeunesses Etudiants Catholiques’ (JEC)⁷⁴ was able to host a convivial sense of belonging for young people of every denomination, including those from the Orthodox Church. The Lebanese JEC was, in fact, led in 1941 by George Bourji, an Orthodox.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the indelible Catholicity of the organisation did nothing to shore up Orthodoxy’s confidence and, combined with the latter’s organisational discordance,⁷⁶ its mechanical religiosity, and its spiritual aridity, made Lebanese Orthodox prey to Western proselytisers and increasingly suspicious of Catholic and Protestant motives. It may not be going too far to say there developed a conviction amongst some members of the Orthodox community that they were being ‘targeted’ by Western Christianity.⁷⁷ All this had an impact on Orthodoxy’s sense of its own identity, and, as a consequence, many activities were skewed in such a way as “to assert their Orthodox identity”.⁷⁸ This insidious sense of inferiority in the face of Western Christianity reached a pitch, Wehbe citing an elderly

⁷² Parsons, S. ‘The Orthodox Youth Movement of the Church of Antioch: Some Notes on its Early History 1941-6.’ In: *Eastern Churches Review*, 1966-78, Vol. 8, No.1, Spring 1976, p.68.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁷⁴ Wehbe, p.3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁷⁷ Wehbe talks of a feeling that “the activities of the other Christian communities were partly aimed against them”. (*Ibid.*)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

anonymous source, who said that “the Orthodox were “fanatic against the westerners rather than being fanatic for their Orthodoxy.””⁷⁹

Such was the pervading influence of Protestantism and Catholicism throughout the Lebanese social strata, particularly within education, that a number of Orthodox forsook their Church to improve their career prospects. A professor at the American University of Beirut was reported to have told his students that if you were Catholic you became a professor; if you were Orthodox you became a janitor.⁸⁰ There were other worldly incentives to join Rome, advantageous tax arrangements being one.⁸¹

As outlined above, the clergy were comprised of priests whose education was barely on a par with their, often unsophisticated, parishioners over whom they had jurisdiction, while worship was conducted in accordance with Church practice and the religious calendar, conforming to basic requirements, but generally with scant attention paid to spiritual succour or content. As for the Orthodox community, Parsons is blunt in his observations. “The feelings of Orthodox young people of Lebanon and Syria towards their Church in the years before the foundation of the [Orthodox Youth] Movement ranged from indifference to a deep affection mingled with frustration.”⁸²

Wehbe makes the point that, when Khodr was a student in Beirut, there was a concerted desire to create change, but that reform called for “more administrative and financial organization”,⁸³ with little or no thought for meeting spiritual requirements. Hence, Khodr’s insistence that there should be an injection of spirituality, that the cause of the Church’s malaise was not organisational, but spiritual.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.14.

⁸⁰ Interview with Father Porphyrios, University of Balamand, 16 January, 2013.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Parsons, p.68.

⁸³ Wehbe, p.44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.45.

2.3.2 Establishing the Orthodox Youth Movement

The mood within the Orthodox community, akin almost to mesmerised acceptance of the status quo, or to a form of social ennui, was not sufficient, Wehbe argues, to stimulate an effective remedy.⁸⁵ That fillip was to come by way of the JEC, which was thought to be infiltrating schools and youth movements in Lebanon.⁸⁶ This was seen as an affront to Orthodoxy and was met with a radical determination to structure a similar organisation to meet the needs of Orthodox youth and initiate a spiritual revitalisation of the Orthodox faith within the community as a whole.

If the spiritual revival was somewhat staggered and its organisation scarcely coordinated, there was also a parallel awareness of the need to co-exist with modernity and the secular world. Abou Mrad highlights the views of George Nahas, former Secretary of the OYM and later Vice-President of the University of Balamand, who, at the time, drew attention to what may be described as a radical world vision propagated by the new generation of thinkers. The Orthodox Church had “to be aware of the human, technical and intellectual changes that are taking place”.⁸⁷ The times were changing and it was beholden on the Church, not only to keep up with them, but to offer solutions, support and spiritual guidance to the people. This was a recognition of Orthodoxy’s existential responsibility to people, to respond positively in the face of modern challenges. Nahas places great emphasis on one of Khodr’s central beliefs: that worship and the exercising of spirituality cannot be accomplished exclusively with a formal, outward participation in Orthodox practices such as ritual observance. Religion, Orthodoxy, must be exercised as an experiential spirituality, an inward belief. Only through an interiorising of Spirit can Orthodoxy work within the community and the wider world. “The Church in the world must be a milieu of revelation, through a life

⁸⁵ As Khodr played such a major part in the formation of the OYM, imbuing it with a foundational philosophy that reflects his religiosity, this work will return to the emergence of the OYM in Chapter 3, which concentrates on, amongst other aspects of Bishop Khodr, his theology. This introductory sketch is designed merely to outline how the OYM evolved.

⁸⁶ Wehbe, p.3.

⁸⁷ Abou Mrad, p.250. Abou Mrad’s words.

of humility and sacrifice in its service and obedience to its Lord.”⁸⁸ It is this experiential spirituality, how it is nurtured within an individual interiority and applied in the exterior world, that is reflective of an important facet of existential religiosity.

The formation of the OYM came at a particular convergence within Lebanon’s social history – a pronounced migration from rural areas to urban towns,⁸⁹ as well as an increase in commercial activities, which would have provided the work opportunities migrants were seeking. Voluntary organisations, like the OYM, Wehbe argues, tend to mushroom following such socio-economic developments to substitute for the sundering of community ties caused by migration.⁹⁰

As it developed, the OYM’s character became clearer. Stress was laid on the fact that it was a movement *within* the Church⁹¹ – presumably to quell any suspicion that it was a body vying with the Holy Synod⁹² for authority. Its resistance to Western influence and its opposition to Catholic hegemony, indicated its attachment to the Arabic language and its promotion of the Antiochene heritage. As a movement, it additionally called for “a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Islamic faith, and condemned sectarian fanaticism”.⁹³

2.3.3 Contemporary Religiosity within the Orthodox Community

Within the reality of Lebanese society, confessionality, it could be argued, exceeds the parameters of religion. Thus, to be Orthodox is to have a socio-political tag, whether one is a pious churchgoer, an indifferent congregant, or

⁸⁸ Ibid. Abou Mrad’s words.

⁸⁹ Wehbe, p.26.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.24.

⁹² Although there is no single voice of absolute authority in Orthodoxy, the Holy Synod is an ecclesiastical body that collectively represents the Church.

⁹³ Wehbe, p.25. From this it can be seen how, from his early days as a theological force, Khodr’s respect for other faiths and intra-Christian movements was made manifest.

a stout atheist.⁹⁴ If this is so, the perceived deprecation of Orthodoxy as a religion had implications within the broader sociological framework. And while the heightened denominational inferiority and an enervation of self-esteem, as outlined above, may have been of its time – that is, within the first half of the twentieth century – it is apparent that stimulating self-assurance is neither straightforward nor swift. As Ignatius IV observed in 1983: “Having almost lost our self-confidence, we are gradually regaining it”.⁹⁵ Such a statement would suggest that a restructuring of self-belief has been slow and that subordination to Western Christianity was, after forty to fifty years, almost as fresh a contagion within some quarters of the Orthodox community as it was in the 1930s and 1940s. What confidence has been restored is encrusted with a sense of pride in what Orthodoxy represents. Whether this has a connection to a spiritual religiosity or to a socio-political expression of community is a moot point.

The Lebanese Orthodox do not identify themselves as members of a national Church, as they do in Greece and Russia,⁹⁶ which allows the religious establishment to distance itself from the political milieu. As a result, Šlajerová claims, direct engagement with politics is more of a personal activity, quite apart from religious affiliation.⁹⁷ In the past, she continues, political allegiances of Christians were “influenced by family, religious and geographical ties”, a tendency that has given way to a more individualised political viewpoint. Almost by way of illustration, Orthodoxy was amongst those Christian communities which refrained from forming a militia during the 1975-1990 civil war.⁹⁸ On the other hand, she states that the political system

⁹⁴ See, for example, Hourani, who, in reference to Lebanon and Syria of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, refers to “a society where identity was expressed in terms of membership of a religious community”. (Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991, p.307.)

⁹⁵ Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. ‘Antiochene Orthodoxy and the Churches United to Rome’, Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, 5 June, 1983. In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.66.

⁹⁶ Šlajerová, M. ‘Conditions of Political Behavior of Lebanese Churches.’ In: *Communio Viatorum*, Vol. 51, Pt. 3, 2009, pp.344-370, pp.363-4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.364.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.367.

of Lebanon necessitates belonging to a community,⁹⁹ which would insinuate that Lebanese Orthodox need not necessarily be churchgoing adherents of the faith. These points should be balanced against Elie Dannaoui's argument that, prior to the civil war, political parties were not confessional, and now they are.¹⁰⁰

Dannaoui goes on to talk about relationality. The fact that the Church of Antioch is not a national Church implies, he says, that it cannot talk directly to people on a personal basis, addressing matters that are important to people's secular lives. Thus, there is a divide between theology, which pertains to God, and politics, which belongs to, or is in, the world. He attributes this divide to the millet system.¹⁰¹ Even now, he says, there is a gap between the clergy and laity, and a lingering question: do politicians represent the people or do the clergy?¹⁰²

There is, he asserts, a distinction between the official attitude of the Church and individual bishops. The Church has not adapted to the lives, problems, of ordinary people. He cites the recent emigration of Christians and believes the Church is doing nothing substantial to try to stem the flow out of the country. We cannot, he says, make our theology touch people's lives;¹⁰³ by which, it is suggested, he means it cannot impact or shape lives. Orthodox Lebanese do not want their young people to leave.¹⁰⁴ However, he says, they do not suggest anything in the way of programmes or projects to encourage people to stay because the Church would not know how to implement them. The Church, he argues, knows about pastoral theology, but structurally it cannot deal with this. "It can't act like a government and make long-term projects."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Elie Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 16 January, 2013.

¹⁰¹ The millet system, operated by the Ottomans, divided up communities according to a codified structure based on religion.

¹⁰² Interview with Elie Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 16 January, 2013.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Dannaoui talks of a difference between the essence of tradition, to which the Church is harmoniously conjoined, and how it reveals itself in the diurnal life of the Orthodox community. He goes on to say that this divide between the people and the clergy is exposed in the way people have a hold over liturgical life. “The priest can’t celebrate on his own.”¹⁰⁶ Which may suggest that each has a vested, interdependent interest: the priest, whose role becomes, in part, redundant without the presence of the people; and the people, who are constrained to be present in the church in order that the religious event can lend meaning to their lives and preserve a sense of confessional identity, both from an individual perspective and for the sake of communal coherence.

Dannaoui is cautious about according the OYM unmitigated approval. Its avowed purpose, he argues, was to renovate without creating a gap between history and tradition.¹⁰⁷ This, he claims, was not wholly successful as it failed to make the Church relevant to the lives of ordinary people. Instead, it adhered to concepts that had little or no purchase in people’s secular existence. However, he goes further, claiming that in the OYM’s repackaging of Orthodoxy for the Orthodox community, the use of linguistic spiritual concepts only enhanced, for a sizeable proportion of people, the divide between the clergy and the laity. In other words, religious concepts expressed in archaic or esoteric phraseology were, and are, failing to enliven, or even to connect with, people’s religiosity. Khodr was, he maintains, “representative of this transcendent theology, the ardour, love, sacrifice – and this made the Church not linked to society. And now the OYM is suffering because it was limited to this conceptual level.”¹⁰⁸ The problem is exemplified by what he sees as the OYM’s development of “their own language”.¹⁰⁹ This, he believes, is mirrored in an understanding of the liturgy. The words are ingurgitated and processed on a noetic level, but on a practical level, and in general, they fail to seed religious sensibilities. This, for Dannaoui, identifies the lingering problem of contemporary Orthodoxy: how to bridge the spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

cleavage between the Church hierarchy – which, arguably, may include the theological intelligentsia within the Orthodox lay community – and ordinary people.¹¹⁰

He believes there should evolve a new type of language to communicate with people and not reliance on a tradition. When he is asked whether Orthodoxy is more of an identity than a spiritual way of life, he replies that, unfortunately, this is the case. He adds that the spiritual concerns of the OYM, which included the ‘Other’, was on a theoretical level and people did not understand it,¹¹¹ and presumably continue to fail to understand it. With regard to dialogical interfaith communication, he argues that this too is mostly on an intellectual, apologetic level, with no real bridgehead. When he is asked whether this has something to do with an entrenchment of communities, a hardening of communal boundaries, he replies in the affirmative.¹¹² This has much, he says, to do with the new way politics works in Lebanon. Whereas before, members of communities maintained political allegiances based, as Šlajerová observes above, on family as well as religious affiliations, Dannaoui says that now confessionalism and religion are kept within political parties.¹¹³ Put another way, political parties ‘own’ religious groupings.

Dannaoui asserts that the Orthodox Church’s beliefs and theology are a treasure, but that “we” – and it is not clear whom this ‘we’ refers to – “are not trained...we are not being trained enough or smart enough to expose this treasure...to others.”¹¹⁴ This is due in part, he says, to a level of self-satisfaction with Orthodoxy’s past; which can be interpreted as a firm conviction that Orthodoxy has religious authenticity – that is, it holds to the notion that it is the one true faith.

This disjuncture between theory and practice extends to Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’. Dannaoui wonders whether this theology of the ‘Other’ is

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Cf. Khalaf in Chapter 1, p.33.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Elie Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 16 January, 2013.

sufficiently and satisfactorily expressed. It is a theory which is articulated within the Church, but, as Dannaoui puts it, “it is not only theory, it has many implications”. It is a theology that should be transmitted more consistently by the Church, he insists, but, in its transmission, there is a need “to adapt the language to the current situation, and current understanding of people – not to remain like a prestigious traditional history.”¹¹⁵

The aim of the OYM, Dannaoui says, was to make Orthodoxy “not just an historical identity”, but to awaken people to a spiritual resurrection, a realisation that being Orthodox was self-transforming – perhaps, a reference, deliberate or otherwise, to theosis. He describes this self-transformation as one that has to entail the ‘Other’, that is capable of changing the environment, that necessitates sacrificing for the ‘Other’. This, he believes, exists on a theoretical level, but it was, and is, couched in language people find difficult, not only to understand, but to internalise in such a way that it becomes part of their spiritual landscape. “If we take this spirituality, how can we represent it to normal people, which language do you choose?...we always have a gap between theory and practice. For this reason...we need to reconsider everything and the Church I think now is at a turning point.”¹¹⁶

2.4 Conclusion

It is clear that the Church of Antioch has, within living memory, felt itself to have been disadvantaged and, in general, to have suffered from a consequential debilitating sense of inferiority. At the same time, being Orthodox is to have an encrusted inner conviction that one is heir to a truly authentic Christianity. Nonetheless, it would seem that for many within the Orthodox community, the nomenclature ‘Orthodox’ is more than an expression of religiosity. It is a communal identity within a confessional pluralism, part of a sociological compartmentalisation foisted on the Lebanese by a complex system of multi-confessional government and political representation.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The perception of being marginalised is not, however, without foundation. It may not be going too far to say that Protestantism and Catholicism, fired by an equivalent sense of religious authenticity, and backed by considerable resources, had been able to mould Lebanese society in such a fashion as to make Orthodoxy into something of a social restraint that had the potential to blight one's prospects, both from career and educational standpoints. Thus, it could be argued, the (Western) interloper could make other interpretations of Christianity appear incidental, irrelevant, even heterodox. The perceived belittling of Orthodoxy by Europeans within educational establishments intimidated many Orthodox students of Khodr's generation. Unable to substantiate their faith or to offer an apologetic defence, owing to a lacklustre religious education within Orthodoxy, they were caught on the back foot by their European teachers. In addition, the accounts of an intellectually challenged priesthood ministering to an unsophisticated and ill-educated community, both of whom were satisfied with a perfunctory acknowledgement of ritual set within the rigidity of the Church calendar, insinuate a community beleaguered by an atrophied spirituality. However, for Khodr and others of his circle, being subject to disparagement, rather than having a demoralising and immobilising effect, acted as a spur to address the urgent need of revitalising Orthodoxy, not just to create a dynamic response to this, mostly Western, threat to their faith, but to reawaken their spiritual destiny. This, in short, was what fuelled the foundation of the Orthodox Youth Movement.

There is plainly some debate about how successful the OYM has been in its quest for reform. It has to be said that its existence has had a substantial impact on the community, raising Lebanese Orthodox from the doldrums, shaking up the ecclesiological system, and transforming the Church of Antioch into a vibrant body, in which coordinated programmes of spiritual education have infused the community, whether laity or clergy, with confidence and renewed pride in their (religious) identity. That said, how much of this work has awakened or implanted the type and level of spirituality for which Khodr and others had hoped? How much of the energy put into producing this newly burnished identity has been siphoned off to feed into secular communal aggrandisement? Or, to put it another way, how much of

the spiritual messages have been lost on ordinary people? Such considerations have direct ramifications for our research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

It is clear there is a school of thought that believes core messages emanating from Khodr and the OYM in general are too theologically ethereal, too refined spiritually to have any real meaning, let alone enduring relevance for the average congregant. This seems to have opened up a fissure between the spiritual hub of the Church and the people. Dannaoui was adamant that Khodr's transcendent theology, as admirable as it might be – for the tenor of its spirituality as well as for its openness to the 'Other' – cannot speak to people who, it might be argued, live in a less rarefied, secular atmosphere, where they are exposed to the existential strains of local pluralism and subject to the pressures of a high-octane, Near Eastern *realpolitik*.

What may be surprising is that Khodr himself implies he is not wholly convinced that the OYM's role has been unequivocally and enduringly successful. When he is asked whether another revival would be desirable, he replies in the affirmative.¹¹⁷ When Dannaoui is asked about revival, he says that it is not a matter of trying something new, but utilising what the Orthodox already have and transposing it into a language which ordinary people can decipher. However, this is not, it could be argued, exclusively about linguistics. Rather than tinkering with fundamental principles, it would necessitate, it is suggested, a resetting of coordinates within the existing spiritual matrix to address, as Dannaoui emphasises, current situations and to take account of the experience of Orthodox within those existential situations.

What is being called for, perhaps, is a new kind of religiosity that enters into people's lives from an oblique direction; one that is not exclusively accessed through the regular channels of church attendance, pre-formatted worship,

¹¹⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 22 October, 2013.

and liturgical recitation. It would need to be a religiosity that recognises the spiritual bemusement of people who are puzzled by the intricacies of intellectual theology, yet are nonetheless suffering, one way or another, from spiritual deprivation; a religiosity that stands apart from secular, organisational interests, is empathetic to the existential pains of existence, and is suitably equipped and expressly programmed for life within the dark expanse of a silent universe under an apophatic God. It is this religiosity that is described here as existential religiosity, and which, it is asserted, distinguishes Khodr's own religiosity.

CHAPTER 3

Bishop Khodr: Theology, Religiosity, Character

The previous chapter offered a summary of the Church of Antioch and its recent development; a more detailed overview of Orthodox spirituality; and an assessment of the current level of religiosity within the Lebanese Orthodox community. This was undertaken to provide background, together with the theological and historical setting into which Khodr was born, and which subsequently helped to shape him as a thinker and a theologian.

This chapter now focuses on George Khodr, the person, and offers a thumbnail of his life, along with a précis of his theology and theological thinking, which, in part, have engendered his religiosity.

3.1 Khodr's Life: A Résumé

George Khodr was born in 1923 in Tripoli in the north of Lebanon and, after local schooling, went to Beirut to study law at the University of St. Joseph.¹ He graduated in 1944, but two years earlier, in collaboration with other fellow students, he founded the Orthodox Youth Movement. He practised law for a short time, but left for France in 1947, where he entered the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. Five years later in 1952, he completed his theological studies and returned to Lebanon.²

Following his return, he took monastic vows, but was persuaded by the patriarch, Alexandros Tahhan, to become a parish priest.³ He was subsequently ordained in 1954.⁴ However, he dovetailed his spiritual responsibilities with a career as a teacher in Islamic philosophy and pastoral theology,⁵ and, in 1970, was appointed Metropolitan Bishop of Byblos and Botrys.

¹ *TWOC*, p.5.

² *Ibid.*

³ Wehbe, p.46.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

While being described as “spiritually poetic, idealistic, hot tempered and intelligent”,⁶ he has worked extensively in interreligious bridge-building.⁷ Nevertheless, he is also seen as a divisive character,⁸ who does not give unconditional deference to earthly authority, disapproves of those who do, and would never compromise his endeavours to fulfil what he believes to be Christ’s message.⁹

3.2 Bishop Khodr’s Theology & Religiosity

Further to the key definitions in Chapter 1, it is important to define how this study differentiates between theology and religiosity.

In the context of this work, ‘theology’ refers to intellectual religious or spiritual concepts, and the abstract conceptualising of religious and spiritual ideas. It includes dogmatic and systematic theology, the discursive exploration of religious theory, and the study of spirituality through the prism of intellectuality.

As described earlier, religiosity is that which addresses religious ‘feeling’ or the experience and expression of religion, not without taking account of theology, but through a more subjective interpretation of it. It can involve a personalised application of theology or theological thinking by means of actions and beliefs that have as their basis theology, but are moulded by a person’s character, their natural capabilities and proclivities, their innate capacity for (religious) belief, and their own ‘philosophical’ biases. ‘Theology’ is rigorous and objective enquiry; ‘religiosity’ is subjective experiential spirituality and religious practice that may be rationally defended, but, at

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “The churches are separated, not only within themselves, but in the variety of feelings towards Islam and Judaism as historical and cultural entities...it is indispensable to the Christians to acquire a scholarly and serene understanding of these two religions, and more particularly of Islam, because of our common engagement in the Arabic culture.” (Khodr, G. *Christian Mission and Witness in the Middle East*. A paper delivered at Washington D.C., 1994, p.6.)

⁸ Cardinal Newman was himself a divisive, even an unpopular, figure outside his own circle. See Svaglic’s Introduction to Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

⁹ See also later in this chapter, Chapter 4, and Appendix B.

times, may depend more on the calibre and depth of a person's faith than on intrinsic, intellectual logic.

3.2.1 The Orthodox Youth Movement

The founding of this movement was covered in Chapter 2. This section will focus, in a little more detail, on the burgeoning ideas that, under Khodr's guidance and leadership, imbued it with an identity and direction.

In exploring Khodr's religious thought, it would appear he has much in common with other Lebanese Orthodox religious thinkers. As Wehbe observes, "When we talk about the thought of Khodr, we are talking about the thought of the [Orthodox Youth] Movement."¹⁰ In short, the OYM is an expression of Khodr's, and his co-founders', theological and religious thinking. What differentiates Khodr, perhaps, are the emphases he places on certain aspects of this thought, together with the uncompromising manner in which he espouses and seeks to implement them.

As discussed earlier, the OYM transformed Orthodoxy from a lackadaisical Lebanese Christian denomination, mired in formality and a high degree of spiritual insouciance, into a vibrant organisation committed to spiritual education and actively dedicated to the promotion of a religiously cohesive community. Such is the identification of Khodr with the OYM that some have called it "the school of George Khodr".¹¹ Wehbe claims that he provided it with "its theology, social aspirations and its socio-political outlook".¹² Under his role as General Secretary, a set of principles was conceived, agreed on, and adopted as the OYM's religio-philosophical charter.¹³ These principles addressed a number of key areas that defined the movement's spiritual core.

¹⁰ Wehbe, p.47.

¹¹ Ibid., p.43.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p.22. In a footnote, Wehbe points out that the principles were published in two documents: the first written by Khodr in 1950; the second, "submitted to the sixteenth annual conference in 1979 by Tarek Mitri." Mitri (born 1950) is a member of the Orthodox Church in Lebanon, and, at one time, was a Lebanese government minister. He is also a leading figure in the field of interfaith dialogue in Lebanon and an active presence at congresses of the World Council of Churches.

In the document, they declared that the OYM was a “spiritual movement which calls all members of the Orthodox Church to a religious, moral, intellectual and social revival”.¹⁴ This revival was to be rooted in “religious duties” and “knowledge of the Church teachings [*sic*]”.¹⁵ There was reference to the establishing of an “Orthodox culture”, and a statement of firm belief that following “Orthodox principles” was “a basic condition for strengthening the religious sentiment” and for establishing “brotherly ties with the rest of the Christian Churches”.¹⁶

Some of these principles may seem, *prima facie*, vague and ambiguous. On the other hand, it would appear that Khodr was trying to nail some general colours to the mast. This, he appears to be insisting, would be a movement of experiential spirituality and not a secular grouping, one whose identity was synonymous with Orthodoxy, as embodied in the Church of Antioch. What Khodr was advocating was a type of spirituality that can be likened to Maximus the Confessor and his threefold pathway to theosis. Aquino describes these stages as ascetic/practical philosophy, natural philosophy, and theological philosophy. “The first stage of the path involves the cultivation of the virtues...The second stage is contemplation of God in and through nature...The third stage entails direct perceptual knowledge of...the triune God.”¹⁷ The central beam of Maximus’ theology, which holds it all together and acts as a foundation of theosis, is love.¹⁸

The founders of the OYM were possessed of “the deep and profound awareness of the complete bankruptcy that flourished as an expression of the identity of ‘a juridical group’”.¹⁹ In particular, Parsons notes that Khodr’s letters betray his “profound disquiet at the continuance of ‘ethnic’

¹⁴ Wehbe, p.22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.22-3.

¹⁷ Aquino, F. D. ‘The *Philokalia* and Regulative Virtue Epistemology: A Look at Maximus the Confessor’. In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*. B. Bingaman & B. Nassif (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p.243.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.248-9.

¹⁹ Parsons, p.72.

Orthodoxy”.²⁰ Parsons makes an important observation here. He claims this latter point did cause some hostility, presumably within Orthodoxy; hostility, which, he says “continues till the present”.²¹ Khodr’s discomfort with the tincture of ethnicity in Lebanese Orthodoxy is, it would seem, an indicator of his intolerance of anything other than spirituality to define people’s religiosity. His openness to other religions and those of other faiths is a hallmark of his spirituality, and explains his antipathy towards an ‘ethnic’ Orthodoxy. As if to emphasise this, another underlying and initiating principle was that the movement called for “a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Islamic faith, and condemned sectarian fanaticism”.²² This statement of intent, which Wehbe claims to have been the fifth principle composed by Khodr, shows that respect for Islam and for Muslims was in the forefront of his thinking.

3.2.2 Khodr’s Theology

A main theme of this study focuses on the supposition that Khodr embodies what is described here as ‘existential religiosity’. In order to glean a more specific understanding of Khodr’s religiosity, there follows a general appraisal of his theological thinking as a gateway into his religiosity. What is offered is not a fully fleshed out exposition; rather, it is an overview of some of his main theological standpoints.

One of the primary features of Khodr’s thinking is his theology of the ‘Other’, which is not unique in itself as a theological idea, although it might be argued that the manner in which it is articulated sets him apart from other religious thinkers. As a means of mapping out Khodr’s thinking, as it is expressed through the more general theology of the ‘Other, Avakian identifies what she describes as his “primary theological themes”. These “indispensable” themes include “God as Mystery, God as Creator, God as Christ, God as Spirit”. She

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Parsons acknowledges that he is writing during fractious times – the civil war had started in 1975 – but comments that it is precisely this type of ethnic religiosity that lies at the root of the fighting. Parsons appears to be suggesting that, over the years, predominating sentiments of the time may fade, mutate, or largely remain the same. However, the suspicion here is that in some quarters of Lebanese society, ethnic religiosity has not been abandoned.

²² Wehbe, p.25. See Chapter 2, Fn.93.

also lists God's relationship to the human being and the human being's potential for theosis.²³

Trying to pin down Khodr's theology, or rather to encapsulate it within a clutch of subheadings, is, Avakian infers, somewhat challenging.²⁴ However, she believes that if anything characterises his theology it is experiential spirituality. In describing his approach, she says that, for Khodr, "an experiential knowledge of God is vital for theology since God is beyond human access and the human descriptive, demonstrative abilities."²⁵ She also manages to summarise some main theological cornerstones which feature in many of his writings, including "Christology, Pneumatology and Ecclesiology."²⁶ Coterminous with these are encountering God through the 'Other', the apophaticism of God, and "participation in God through the divine uncreated energies",²⁷ which is synonymous with the hesychastic pathway to theosis. She does not say how these may be categorised, but she does state that they are "prior to any conceptualization and dogmatic expression of theology."²⁸

Avakian also points to his conviction that Christ belongs to a pluralistic humanity and is not the sole property of Christianity,²⁹ a view echoed by Hirvonen, who points to his inclusivism – Christ having a presence within the interreligious landscape of humanity's experiential spirituality.³⁰ Hirvonen says Khodr plainly admits that God is "active" among those of other religious traditions,³¹ giving "qualified acknowledgement to the revelatory nature of the Qur'an as a kind of manifestation of Christ".³² Elsewhere, Khodr himself adopts a distinctly universalist tone. "As for others, they belong to God...they are in God's economy and freedom...regardless whether you are a church-

²³ Avakian, p.106.

²⁴ Ibid., p.152.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.118 and 122.

³⁰ Hirvonen, p.86. Hirvonen, citing George C. Papademetriou, adds that inclusivist views are not uncommon "among contemporary theologians of Eastern Orthodox affiliation." (Ibid.)

³¹ Ibid., p.90.

³² Ibid., p.143.

member or not, whether you have entered the Kingdom in love or it has penetrated into you through divine mercy. In different terms, Christ is able to make you a member in his body only if he chooses you. Some refer to this by using the term the ‘invisible Church’.” To illustrate his point, he identifies two non-Christians from Islam, who fulfil his definition of spiritual beings. “I see two beloved persons to me out of Christianity [*sic*], in its legal sense, and they are *Rab‘a al-‘adawiyyah* and *al-Hallaj* and some of their friends in Islam.”³³ These observations, which essentially revere spiritual figures belonging to another religious tradition are what sets Khodr apart, something Hirvonen implies when she highlights “his profound spiritual vision of the unity of all believers [which] is rather original.”³⁴ She bases this originality on the emphasis he lays on the “human need for encounter” – that is, a straightforward existential need for the ‘Other’, which makes the ‘I’ dependent on the ‘Other’. Existentially, this recalls Buber’s ‘I’/‘Thou’ philosophy,³⁵ indeed, Hirvonen believes Khodr has been inspired by Martin Buber.³⁶ However, whereas Buber ignores any recourse to the numinous in order to underpin his philosophy, it would seem that inherent within Khodr’s call for Christian-Muslim dialogue is an acknowledgement of the *spiritual* unity shared by all believers.³⁷ This reading of his theology of the ‘Other’ would seem to bear out Hirvonen’s assertion about Khodr’s originality, implying as it does that his theological interpretations go beyond the well-trodden tracks of dogmatic theology and interreligious relationality, rooted, as they are, in a genuine regard for Islam and the Muslim ‘Other’. It is this abiding regard that is reinforced by a deep sense of spirituality – a spirituality that, Khodr believes, interpenetrates Christian-Muslim interlocutors in any secular encounter.

³³ Khodr, G. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven’. S. Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 November, 2009. [His italics.] In discussions, Khodr, as if to underline this universalist theme, says “there are many, many Muslims, who are baptised without water.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

³⁴ Hirvonen, p.64.

³⁵ This is discussed in Appendix A.

³⁶ Hirvonen, p.69.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.64.

It is also suggestive perhaps of Khodr's additional assertion about identity and relationships, which is of importance for an understanding of his spirituality and his theology of the 'Other'. "Your identity is that link between you and God; and I think that the word identity – "hawiyya" in Arabic – is derived from the word "houwa" indicating the third person. Thus you know who you are through the Sole Other who is God."³⁸ In other words, the human 'Other' can become, arguably, a point in an interrelational triangle with God at the apex, linking the 'I' and the 'Thou'.³⁹

The 'Other' implicates difference – difference from the 'I' – and it is difference that is a central pillar of his religiosity. "Minds are different and they disagree most of the time"⁴⁰ is a statement that at once acknowledges alterity, but also how this difference can be a precursor to rupture and conflict. However, Khodr is quick to emphasise that for the wise, difference need not ineluctably lead to "existential collision",⁴¹ but to an encounter based on love. This, he maintains, is the meaning of dialogue – an activity grounded in recognition of the 'Other' and the 'Other's' recognition of the 'I'.⁴²

3.2.3 Ramifications of the Theology of the 'Other'

Perhaps one of the differences between angels and humankind is that angels presumably know God exists; human beings know no such thing. Experiential union with God, within the earthly realm and on the theotic pathway, is achieved by few, and even then is short-lived. And allowing for brief experiences, the very fact of being apart from God – of literally being kept in the dark – whether one experiences union or not, arguably gives rise to the feeling of displacement experienced by ascetics and mystics. Such feelings of displacement, which conjure the notion that earthly existence does not

³⁸ Khodr, G. 'Identity.' R. Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 17 July, 2010.

³⁹ Wilson claims Kierkegaard regarded God "as the intermediary between himself and his fellow human beings, and cannot even accept their existence without first accepting the existence of God." (Wilson, C. *The Outsider*. London: Picador, 1978, p.287.)

⁴⁰ Khodr, 'The Others'. S. Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 28 July, 2012.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

represent our real home, could be described as the driving force behind theosis.⁴³ This, together with an awareness of the apophatic God, *beyond-the-beyond*, inculcates an existential sense of alienation, abandonment, spiritual deprivation, and overall anxiety. The consequential inner spiritual desolation is compounded by the woes and travails of quotidian life, particularly with regard to modernity.

This is neither individual fanciful speculation nor a poetic rendering of the human condition, for others appear to be in accordance with the belief that existential cares are endemic to the human condition. Kallistos Ware refers to our living in an age of anxiety and that non-Christians may have real concerns about what it is to be a person, about identity, and meaning.⁴⁴ Neither is it the case that existential tensions are the exclusive preserve of Christians confronted by an unknowable God. Sartre refers to the problem of existence and how this ‘problem’ is not governed by God’s existence or non-existence.⁴⁵ However, the human experience of aloneness is ameliorated by relationality, by relating to the ‘Other’ – particularly from a theistic perspective. If the world is God’s creation, manifested by God’s *ekstasis*, a ‘going out of himself’, our ‘going out of ourselves’ – to experience the world and other people – is the means by which we can communicate with God.

⁴³ That said, there is a plethora of religious texts indicating that earthly life is not our true destiny. It revolves around what Nellas describes as “the unnatural condition in which we find ourselves”. (Nellas, P. *Deification in Christ. Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987, p.43.) In Christian terms, this “unnatural condition” is embedded in the belief that human beings are made in the image of God, and since the Fall, we are drawn back to union with the Divine. This connection to God makes earthly life an uneasy fit with our natures, a conviction that goes back to Plato. Plato believed that humankind’s souls originally “contemplated the eternal truths or realities” until they were joined to material bodies. This world of flux and change is a place “in which...knowledge in its perfection is impossible”; thus life becomes a “quest [that] takes the form of searching for that which transcends the changing and shifting nature of this world”. [Louth’s words.] Hence the need, Plato asserted, for philosophy to prepare one for leaving this world and for realigning ourselves to a true existence. (Louth *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.1 and 2. See also Plato. ‘Phaedo’. In: *Plato. Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (eds.). Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, p.55, 64A.) The Platonic advocacy of philosophy may be said to have been superseded by the (Orthodox) Christian concept of theosis.

⁴⁴ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 24 March, 2014.

⁴⁵ See Appendix A, Fn.78.

Yannaras' concept of freedom is tied in with his concept of authentic personhood. Freedom is self-transcendence, freeing ourselves from the constraints of the world in order to relate, through love, to the 'Other'.⁴⁶ Indeed, Yannaras draws a parallel between understanding God and how we understand, or relate to, the 'Other', likening the divine essence and energies to a person's corresponding nature and mode of existence.⁴⁷ It is useful, perhaps, to note Ware's observations on the implications of relationality when considering the apophatic anthropology of individuals and that human beings are made in the image of God. He states that, "as human beings we know and understand only a small part of what we are; we are a mystery to ourselves."⁴⁸ This means that the 'Other' is also to some degree unfathomable; and this has a logical symmetry for, as Ware adds, we are made in the image of God, and God too, the apophatic God, is unknowable.⁴⁹

When considering Yannaras' belief that the 'Other', by implication, can be a some-one or a some-thing, receptiveness of the 'Other' can be made more questionable. Are we supposed, in our transcendence, to love the 'Other' no matter what? Is every encounter with the 'Other' always a positive event? Maalouf provides a pertinent illustration, which suggests this might not always be the case. "When modernity bears the mark of "the other" it is not surprising if some people confronting it brandish symbols of atavism to assert their difference."⁵⁰ Here there is presented a broadening of the concept: a perception of the 'Other' as threat, and a presumed response that can be construed as antagonistic.

Khodr's existential religiosity could be said to stem, in part, from his theology of the 'Other', for it reflects Williams's work on language and how in our quest

⁴⁶ Payne, p.246.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.245.

⁴⁸ Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, p.32.

⁴⁹ "[S]ince God is incomprehensible, so also is God's image, the human person." (Ibid., p.33.)

⁵⁰ Maalouf, A. *In The Name of Identity. Violence and the Need to Belong*. B. Bray (trans.). New York: Penguin Books, 2003, p.73.

for greater understanding there is a requirement to ‘push beyond’ barriers.⁵¹ If ‘community’ is a barrier to reaching out to the Muslim ‘Other’, it is Khodr who is advocating a ‘pushing beyond’ this barrier by transcendence. He is directly appealing to the Lebanese Orthodox to go beyond, or step outside, their sense of communal identity, to transcend it, in order to connect with the Muslim ‘Other’.

Both Williams and Khodr are unambiguously advancing the notion that as human beings we need the ‘Other’ in order to be. It is, for Williams, in line with Hegelian universalism; a way of getting beyond what *is* in order to find new ground – of being, of knowledge. As such, it works as a dialectic; and, by dint of this, it is, through synthesis, inclusive of the ‘Other’; and it is this that underlines an aspect of Khodr’s religiosity: he is, it is suggested, committed to developing an Orthodoxy that is existential, that includes the ‘Other’, no matter who the ‘Other’ is, but which connects to the (apophatic) Divine. Although convoluted, it is relevant to the work’s main research question –to what extent does Bishop Khodr’s existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? The Orthodox community are integral to the Church’s teaching, but are they, with reference to the ‘Other’, suitably equipped facilitators of his type of religiosity? Dannaoui believes Khodr’s spiritual language may be difficult to fathom, and makes the point that his theology of the ‘Other’, whereby everything about the ‘Other’ is to be considered acceptable, jars with some members of the Church; he also suggests that such a position may be seen by them as threatening to emasculate Orthodoxy’s defence of its rights, which includes the right of presence in the country.⁵²

Put simply, Orthodoxy’s theology of the ‘Other’, and its validation of the ‘Other’, could be said to be neither unique nor radical, but an innate, instinctive facet of the human condition. To deconstruct its fundamental components is to recognise it as the mundane building blocks of human co-existence. Few people would argue against the proposal that it is good for

⁵¹ Williams, *The Edge of Words*.

⁵² Interview Elie Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

mental well-being to interact with others – sharing ideas, no matter how trivial, appreciating the value that lies in mutual empathy, comparing life experiences and the experience of life. This is basic psychopathological awareness, and Christianity’s theology of the ‘Other’ breaks no new ground in this respect. Where Orthodoxy’s theology of the ‘Other’ gains more spiritual depth is in its understanding of Trinitarianism. The *perichoresis*, or relationality of the three ‘persons’ of the Trinity, has a real impact on ‘personhood’, relationality, and the ‘Other’. In a simulacrum of the Trinitarian concept of ‘personhood’, God can be found in the ‘Other’.

Khodr extends this emphasis, or intensifies the intention behind relating to the ‘Other’. The importance of the ‘Other’, and relating to the ‘Other’, overrides all other considerations – whether the ‘Other’ is perceived as an enemy, of a different religious group, or belonging to a community other than one’s own. And Khodr does not just advocate the cultivating of good relations with Muslims, he has an abiding openness to other bona fide faiths, including Hinduism. He writes that more than forty years ago, “I was studying Hinduism with Evangelical pastors in Switzerland by [*sic*] a Hindu professor”, who asked Khodr how it was that he seemed almost intuitively to understand Hinduism. Khodr replied, saying there is “cognition between the Eastern Church and...[Hinduism], on aspects of asceticism, spirituality and the heart.”⁵³ In theory, a counterargument may suggest that this, again, is a basic precept of Christianity and applies, in theory, throughout the Christian world and in other faiths. However, this study’s supposition is that comprehensive application of this precept is not so stringently adhered to, and may even rank below other ‘Christian’ priorities. The argument here is that Khodr does not allow himself to re-prioritise, to deviate one iota from this precept and other theological, socio-existential principles, even though such inflexibility might discomfort some of the Lebanese Orthodox community, who see their existence, identity, and survival attuned to the finely balanced pluralism of macro-Lebanese society. This intransigence, which sets him apart as an Outsider, is another characteristic of a religiosity defined here as existential religiosity.

⁵³ See Khodr, ‘The Origins of Christ’. S. Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 December, 2009.

3.2.4 Khodr the Outsider

For someone to stand apart, they must, *ergo*, stand outside something.⁵⁴ This can be a hierarchical corpus of belief or simply a corporate body. It was additionally noted that Khodr may not be the most flexible or accommodating individual when it comes to defending or propounding his own convictions.⁵⁵ This trait may be perceived by others as belligerence and potentially curdle relations with others; it might even foment downright animosity. When it was put to Nicolas Abou Mrad that Khodr has the type of unyielding character that might generate such feelings amongst his peers, he (Abou Mrad) claims Khodr is not a popular figure in the Antiochene Church.⁵⁶ When asked whether he still makes enemies, Abou Mrad replies, “More than ever.”⁵⁷ It would seem that Khodr’s opinions on a variety of matters and how he presents his theology generates neither wholesale popularity nor comprehensive uncritical approval. As if to lend weight to this assertion, Abou Mrad claims Khodr stands alone in the Synod.⁵⁸ In general, he is supported by his “disciples”,⁵⁹ a small, but not inconsiderable number, among whom Abou Mrad includes himself, even though, as a biblical scholar, he does not agree with everything Khodr says.⁶⁰

Sometimes Khodr “does theology independently of biblical categories...he has some Marcionist tendencies...in his way of understanding the relationship between [the] Old and New Testaments.”⁶¹ Perhaps there could be no clearer indication of Khodr’s standing in the Church than by paralleling his biblical understanding to that of Marcion, a second century heretic. However, to put

⁵⁴ See Appendix A, where the terms Outsider and Insider are differentiated.

⁵⁵ See above, where Wehbe describes his personality, which tends, at times, towards irascibility.

⁵⁶ Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Marcion was a second century Christian, a heretic, who, according to Kelly, “found the Old Testament impossible to reconcile with the gospel of Christ.” By which he meant, “[t]he legalism and strict justice” of the former, and “the grace and redeeming love” of the latter. (Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines. Fifth Edition.* London: Continuum, 1977, p.57.)

this into context, Abou Mrad says that the supposed 'Marcionism' stems from Khodr's "Arabic education and the Arab thought of the nineteenth century that tries to prove the importance of the Arab culture vis-à-vis Zionism."⁶² This school of thought, he continues, presumes the Bible – and here Abou Mrad must be referring to the Old Testament – reflects a Zionist or Jewish way of thinking. "We," continues Abou Mrad, "look differently at that; we think this was the word of God and we have to deal with it."⁶³ This is not to say Khodr subscribes to the minutiae of this nineteenth century appraisal, but the 'Marcionist' tag places him in a category very much his own, a point Abou Mrad goes on to confirm. "Khodr is very controversial in his way of thinking, in his way of understanding the Church, and in his way of acting as a bishop."⁶⁴

Abou Mrad says that he and other followers believe Khodr to be the embodiment or representative of the Antiochene theology of the twentieth century. This, according to Abou Mrad, is in sharp contrast to others, who see him as an aberration, as "a burden on the Church; and they want in all sorts of way to get rid of him."⁶⁵ For Abou Mrad, Khodr has produced a brand of theology, which, at time of interview, he (Abou Mrad) struggles to describe, eventually settling for "liberal conservative theology".⁶⁶ He explains it as a theology that comes from the Fathers, to which Khodr has added his own liberalism or liberal thought.⁶⁷ When it is suggested to him that Khodr appears decidedly left wing, Abou Mrad concurs, adding that he is nonetheless steeped in a tradition that belongs to a bona fide Orthodoxy.⁶⁸ The phrase "liberal conservative theology", together with his supposed 'left wing' outlook, aptly capture aspects of Khodr's existential religiosity. The label "liberal conservatism" is sufficiently oxymoronic to intimate a status that is not readily or easily categorised, and, this alone helps to earn Khodr the nomenclature 'Outsider'.

⁶² Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

3.3 Conclusion

In tracing some of the main points of Khodr's theology and his theological thinking, it can be seen that, in some measure, his theology does not differ much in tone or content from what one would expect to find in an Orthodox theologian from the Eastern Christian tradition. It is also possible to register areas where his thought chimes with existential thinkers like Buber; but this is a common denominator he may share with theologians from a similar background. It is only, perhaps, when one considers how his theology is extrapolated, how it is expressed, how he, as a person, handles these theological axioms, does some degree of originality convey itself.

In theory, the theology of the 'Other', a major theme within Orthodox spirituality, is viewed as a manifestation of all that is positive in Christianity, a living embodiment of what it is to be a Christian, and an essential chord in the composition that is interreligious dialogue. Dannaoui, however, introduces an additional, perhaps jarring note. He asserts that the theology of the 'Other' has provoked a measure of Orthodox opposition for the way it is given expression, and that Khodr must take some responsibility for this. Seen in this light, and put bluntly, the Lebanese Orthodox fear Khodr's apparently unconditional acceptance of the 'Other' might jeopardise Orthodoxy's security within the delicate communal framework of Lebanese society. As a counterargument, it might reasonably be suggested that Khodr would disagree with this interpretation and promulgate the view that whatever possible negative connotations there may be are greatly outweighed by positive ones.

Khodr would draw attention to Yannaras' concept of freedom, which includes self-transcendence, an idea, it is argued, that Khodr would endorse. Yannaras' point may be interpreted here as implying that personal freedom is generated by freeing oneself from antagonism, which itself evolves from a concept of communal identity that is fundamentally confrontational. To follow the stream of Khodr's theology of the 'Other' is to find it contiguous with Williams's thematic argument about breaking barriers, a 'going beyond'. Khodr, it is suggested here, would wish to recast self-perception in order that

communal identity is not so much undermined as superseded in an act of self-transcendence, thus allowing one to instigate a positive relationship with the 'Other'. It is possible to see that this may be unconvincing to those whose Orthodox identity has a more secular hue, and even to congregants who may be possessed of a somewhat flaccid spirituality, whose spirituality is an uncomfortable fit with Khodr's, or who just plainly do not understand him.

The discussion with Nicolas Abou Mrad and his subsequent observations, creates a portrait of Khodr as a 'nonconformist', yet also a deeply spiritual man driven by a radical form of religiosity that corresponds with existential religiosity.⁶⁹ Abou Mrad has had the experience of knowing Khodr since he was a boy, and, as a teenager, had the opportunity to work in Khodr's household, enabling him to observe the man in his routine.⁷⁰ As an academic, Abou Mrad has been able to assess Khodr's views and make objective appraisals of his thinking as the latter aired them within the trusted bounds of mutual friendship. In short, Abou Mrad, as an 'Insider', is in a uniquely advantageous position of assessing Khodr from the dual perspectives of character and scholarship.

What Abou Mrad describes is someone who does not confine himself to the recognised boundaries of theological or religious thinking, nor appear to conform to accepted patterns of conduct and protocol. Instead, he is what might be described by the more generous as a creative thinker, and by the

⁶⁹ Khodr's uncompromising form of religiosity is not without precedent. Ramfos insinuates that Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) was something of a radical, bent on reform. "Symeon saw the ossification of the ecclesiastical system". (Ramfos, p.191) "Symeon fought fiercely with all his strength to liberate us from the frozen immobility of formalism and enable us to attain authentic spiritual life by raising the spiritual temperature several thousand degrees, an endeavor which drove his community at the monastery of St. Mamas into revolt." (Ibid., p.192.) This is suggestive of a challenging character with unrelenting spiritual principles, which, to some extent, finds its reflection in the person of George Khodr. When asked whether there are writers on mystical experience, who inspire him, Khodr answers Symeon the New Theologian; pressed to give reasons, he claims Symeon said what we need to know. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

⁷⁰ Abou Mrad says that when, as a teenager, he worked in Khodr's house, what struck him was that Khodr spent fourteen or fifteen hours on his own, reading and writing. (Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.)

less generous as someone with *outré* ideas, a radical, a rebel perhaps, even as a loose cannon. It is these variegated assessments that, it is argued, coalesce into what is described here as existential religiosity. Khodr's autobiographical novel is a tool by which it will be shown that these assessments and the resultant coalescence meaningfully apply to him as a person and as a theological thinker; in other words, rather than incidental daubs on a canvas, they are central brushstrokes of a broader portrait.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

Identity

Chapter 3, the final chapter of Part I, presented a brief biographical thumbnail of Khodr's life, summarised his broad approach to theology, and drew a sketch of his general character. This was carried out to create a route into his religiosity. In Chapter 1, a system of analysis was laid down whereby six existential criteria would be individually used to sieve the book for content that would illustrate each criterion. As the opening chapter of Part II, Chapter 4 will now focus on identity and examine where concerns and discussion about different categories of identity occur both explicitly and implicitly in the text.

1. Interpreting Identity

As a term, 'identity' will be treated here as a binary concept. First, group identity may have various manifestations, including nationality, community, ethnicity, religious belief, political persuasion. Second, personal identity, which connotes individuality, may have more to do with appetitive preferences and introspection. Within a religious context, these two categories may be interconnected. For the individual, it may be a matter of what God means to them as a person, as an individual – even though the individual may have a personal identity that is, in part, informed by the group.

However, group identity, it is suggested, could overwhelm individual identity, by familial persuasion or even group indoctrination for the sake of communal cohesion. Breaking the barriers of such group solidarity – for instance, through interreligious marriage – may be regarded as betrayal. But if this suggests that the one choosing personal identity over group loyalty is free, Wilson is not so sanguine. Comparing the Outsider to others, Wilson says, "He is in prison too...*but he knows it.*"¹

¹ Wilson, p.167. Wilson's italics.

Bauman is clear that, “committing oneself to a single identity...is a risky business.”² Maalouf is more specific. He believes that identity with one single affiliation “encourages people to adopt an attitude that is partial, sectarian, intolerant, domineering, sometimes suicidal, and frequently even changes them into killers or supporters of killers.”³ Contextualising this tension between the group and the individual within a religious context, it could be argued that both may have a distinct correspondence: group identity with the Church; personal identity with theosis. Personal identity suggests free will, and it is theosis that depends on free will, the consent of the individual, to embark on the theotic pathway.

2. Disclosure & The Structure of Literary Identities

The fact that the two characters in the book – the narrator and the man – are cloaked in anonymity is arguably significant. Neither of them is encumbered by nomenclature, which can make novelistic characters or protagonists highly specific rather than universal; Khodr’s chosen style is one that boosts the autobiographical aspect of the novel, allowing him to inhabit both personages, the narrator and the man, and embellish them with a veneer of ‘Everyman’, the existential character and identity of every human being. But it also introduces an additional dynamic – the psychological framework of introspective existence, during which an individual can reflect on what they are thinking and how they are acting. This process introduces an inquisitorial, almost ‘schizophrenic’ dialogue to a person’s cogitation, opening them to personal self-criticism and enlivening critical awareness.

For Khodr, the subject of identity is inextricably linked to his understanding of God’s relationship with humankind and humankind’s relationship with God. “When you are a believer, God will bestow on you an identity.”⁴ However, it is suggested, this can be extended to encompass an application of identity within the empirical world of experience, emphasising the binary split –

² Bauman, Z. *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004, p.89.

³ Maalouf, *In The Name of Identity*, p.30.

⁴ Khodr, *Identity*.

personal identity and group identity. This chapter will thus be exploring these two polarities, as well as other aspects of identity, as they appear in his autobiographical novel, and will end by configuring identity to Khodr's own thinking, as represented in the book and, more broadly, in his other works. Apart from these specific categories, the concept of identity, as it is interpreted in this work, will be unpacked synonymously to include references to 'character', 'role' and 'self'.

3. Khodr's Personal Identity

In Chapter 3, a biographical and character sketch of Khodr, the individual, was made as part of a foundational outline of his general religiosity. This section to some extent recapitulates what was said in Chapter 3 so as to contextualise this portrait in terms of the novel, and to create a connection between Khodr and the autobiographical contours of the book.

Identity, it is argued, is not simply a bureaucratic stamp, which may be more associated with group identity, but is inextricably linked to character. When discussing someone, human beings often refer to an individual identity whereby a person is recognised by who they are as an individual, what they stand for, their idiosyncratic responses to the world, and what distinguishes them, psychologically as well as physiologically, from others. It is this that *identifies* them. Earlier, it was recorded how Khodr is a multifaceted person, one who is "spiritually poetic, idealistic, hot tempered and intelligent".⁵ He writes in a style that is often not immediately accessible, but, it might be argued, what he is writing about cannot be distilled into easily digestible chunks of adulterated spiritual fodder. This is reinforced by Khodr's long-time friend and associate, As'ad Khairallah, who believes that Khodr does not adapt his style of communication in either his writing or his speech in order to make it more accessible to a greater number. When he preaches in a church, says Khairallah, where there may be four or five hundred congregants, he is talking to about thirty people, who will be able to understand him. The rest

⁵ See Chapter 3. (Wehbe, p.46.)

may say to themselves, “What is he talking about?”⁶ While discussing the impact of his writings, Khodr implies that they go over people’s heads. Earlier in the discussion, he also says, “I don’t think we think very profoundly.”⁷ The ‘we’ may have referred to Lebanese Orthodox, but, it is suggested, could be applied more generally. As for the phrase “spiritually poetic”, what emerges from the book is a poetic rendering of the natural world, a personal vision, which may signify a philosophical Romanticism and a ‘pagan’ spirituality. “Rocks in that part of his country,” says the narrator, “are multi-coloured, bright or somber, and have inspired more than one painter of the Impressionist school at that time.”⁸ Revealed here is the artist’s eye for colour and detail, and a precise link to a style of artistic representation. Khodr’s identity clearly has a creative streak, evidenced by his love of painting and music. Even more specifically there is reference to Gauguin, “whose work he [the fictional man] enjoyed a good deal”,⁹ and how “he came to love the music of Wagner.”¹⁰

Khodr is certainly idealistic, a characteristic given weight by his collaborative role in the formation of the Orthodox Youth Movement, during which time he exhibited a relentless determination to reconfigure the Lebanese Orthodox community to a more spiritual commitment. Idealism is often accompanied by obstinacy or pugnacity and can sometimes be the credentials of the Outsider, but it is this strength and determination which served the Orthodox community well during the civil war of 1975-1990 when he refused to countenance any militaristic stand against other communal forces, believing perhaps that ‘fighting fire with fire’ would only deepen the divide and perpetuate bloodshed. However much this might be laudable, this belligerent resistance, when applied in more pacific times, has had implications. It was earlier noted by Nicolas Abou Mrad that Khodr does not cut a popular figure within the

⁶ Interview with As’ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.

⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana 22 October, 2013.

⁸ *TPOC*, p.10.

⁹ *Ibid.* Paul Gauguin (1848-1903).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Richard Wagner (1813-1883). In conversation, Khodr confirms his love of Impressionism and of Wagner’s music, although he says he does not listen much to music now. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.)

Lebanese Orthodox Church, and how he still makes enemies. “Khodr is very controversial in his way of thinking, in his way of understanding the Church, and in his way of acting as a bishop.”¹¹ It was also suggested to Abou Mrad that Khodr is “decidedly left wing”;¹² Abou Mrad tended to agree and described his theology as “liberal conservatism”.¹³ This chimes with the career of the man in the novel, who, when working in a joinery, involves himself in industrial relations on behalf of his fellow workers.¹⁴

In the book, the narrator gives a character description of the man. Within the context of the book as an autobiographical novel, the tone seeps with a kind of confessionalism, a delving into the inner self, and replicates a style found in other works of first person narrative.¹⁵ Here, however, it is covered with the mantle of the third person singular. What used to hurt the man, the reader is told, was that “in our country and abroad”¹⁶ people drew the wrong impression of him; in the later version, the translation states that “even his friends often held a false image of him.”¹⁷ They would misread him, interpreting “his enthusiasm as anger and his anger as animosity. They did not always realize that it hurt him to throw the truth in their faces. They would say that he was a troublemaker, an outrageous man. For years he had forbidden himself any sort of complacency in order to avoid the least compromise.”¹⁸ He learned afterwards that a bit of compromise might be one of the aspects of patience.¹⁹ That said, the reader is told, “those who...stayed by his side were not themselves patient with him”.²⁰

In this extract, it is evident that the man’s character elides with Khodr’s, and that this ‘shared identity’ as a splenetic character is at odds with Khodr’s own

¹¹ See Chapter 3. (Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.)

¹² Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *TPOC*, pp.20-22.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1 for examples of Augustine, Cardinal Newman, and Teresa of Ávila.

¹⁶ *TPOC*, p.41.

¹⁷ *TWOC*, p.104.

¹⁸ This refusal to compromise corresponds to one of the defining features of existential religiosity. See Chapter 1.

¹⁹ *TWOC*, p.104.

²⁰ *TPOC*, p.41

assessment of himself – in other words, he claims people get him wrong. On the other hand, much of what is said by the narrator about the man echoes the comments, alluded to above, made about Khodr by those who know him best. As a creative individual, and in common with the man in the book, Khodr clearly has aesthetic tastes; but why does this literary portraiture come across as someone with a short temper, who seems, every now and again, to bristle at the slightest provocation? In general, it could be argued, the creative person is often quickly roused to passion, a facet he shares with the spiritual man; both are searching for the elusive. It may also be that as an Outsider he, the creative/spiritual person, is ranged against the forces of the world and must ‘fight’ those who represent establishment viewpoints. The references to “troublemaker” and “an outrageous man” precisely encapsulate Abou Mrad’s assertion that Khodr is shunned at the Synod and regarded by many as someone who is “a burden on the Church...they want in all sorts of way to get rid of him.”²¹ It is a view that is reflected in the book. “He had a gift for stirring people up, and getting them to take extreme emotional positions with regard to him. This tendency increased his solitude.”²²

It is clear Khodr is a passionate man, and allowing passion occasionally to infiltrate his dealings with the world may not necessarily be a bad thing. Gregory Palamas talks not of eradicating the passions, but of redirecting them: “not the man who has killed the passionate part of his soul who has the pre-eminence, for such a one would have no momentum or activity to acquire a divine state and right dispositions and relationship with God”.²³ In an explanatory note, Gendle adds that, “the irascible urge can be transformed

²¹ Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013. See Chapter 3.

²² *TWOC*, p.105.

²³ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, p.54. See also Maloney. “A sensitive love of God’s will, wish, command and delicate inspiration, as received from the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit, comes as a result of *apatheia* [his italics], a passionless passion to do whatever at the moment corresponds to God’s good pleasure as manifested by Jesus Christ through His Spirit, in accord with Gospel values.” (Maloney, G. Introduction. In: *Symeon The New Theologian. The Discourses*. C. J. deCatanzaro (trans.). New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980, pp.34-5.)

into righteous wrath and a passion for justice”.²⁴ This can perhaps describe Khodr in the way he employs irascibility to feed his outrage at happenings in the world. An illustration of this may be found in a piece written at the time of the 2006 Lebanon-Israeli war. In it, Khodr excoriates Israel, accusing it of disproportionate action and of perpetrating a “scorched earth” policy; but, Khodr adds, “I am not surprised by Israel’s actions; this is present in the literature of its fathers who ordered the annihilation of the Canaanites that is our people.”²⁵ He also vilifies America’s disinclination to exert pressure to bring about a ceasefire. Is this passion *in extremis* a response to a national tragedy; or a violently passionate outburst expressed in intemperate language? Ware asserts that some of the Fathers regarded the passions as “intrinsically evil”, whereas others saw them as natural to humankind, having been placed in us by God: “our aim is not to eliminate the passions but to redirect their energy...spiteful jealousy into zeal for the truth, sexual lust into an *eros* that is pure in its fervor.”²⁶

Such unmitigated language from 2006 demonstrates his existential religiosity as described in Chapter 1 – that is, “use of forthright language devoid of nuance”. It also reflects his uncompromising stand on non-violence, which will be addressed in Chapter 9. Khodr’s non-violence is based on his identity as a Christian, which begs the question whether Khodr believes the enmity between Israel and the Jews is religious in nature. He says elsewhere how “Charles Helou used to say that our wars with Israel are wars of prophets. By this he used to refer to the religious nature, which the Jews used to give to their assaults. However, any child would know that prophets do not fight and that commissioning the prophets are forged papers which people write for

²⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, p.130, Fn.114. Gendle’s words. Dionysius promotes a different form of righteous anger. He says that “among those lacking in intelligence, anger is a raging, passionate and irrational urge...For intelligent beings anger is...the sturdy working of reason in them and the capacity they have to be grounded tenaciously in holy and unchanging foundations.” An interesting observation, which resonates with Khodr’s character perhaps, but what this has to do with intelligence, or the lack of it, is a moot point. (Dionysius. ‘The Celestial Hierarchy’. In: *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*. C. Luibheid (trans.). New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p.151.)

²⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘This Terrible War’. Father Symeon Abou Haidar (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 22 July, 2006.

²⁶ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.116.

their own benefit.”²⁷ Khodr was born into a colonised country and witnessed violence from the Western occupying force; he was also taught by Westerners, and “detested their ignorance of his Church and their contempt toward it...certain elements of the Christianity they taught him were nothing but aspects of European colonization.”²⁸ As a result, the fictional man and Khodr both smart at the reality of subjugation, whether ‘irenic’ or bellicose, because of its corrosive effect on identity.

Abou Mrad’s account of Khodr has the latter spending the large proportion of every day on his own.²⁹ This exposes an inclination for self-imposed renunciation, a need for solitude. In the book, the man’s character is that of a loner, even though he spends time with his circle of close friends. There is a reference, early in the book, to a time of self-imposed exile. “At the end of secondary school, my friend took refuge in a mountain village.”³⁰ “Mountain life increased the solitude of our friend...In the village they used to see him going on walks with a book under his arm.”³¹ Here, there is a convergence of Khodr and the man in the need to seek and sustain periods of solitude, a pattern that would allow spirituality to grow and flourish.

4. Group Identity: Heritage, Religion, & Nationalism

Khodr’s own group identity could be described as containing two prominent seams – that of Lebanon and the Church of Antioch. The latter is exemplified by his leadership of the Orthodox Youth Movement; the former, by relatively unusual circumstances. Growing up in a country that was mandated to the French meant he was born into a colonial setting. Colonialism has a number of implications for indigenous populations, but, for him, it could be said that the harsh reality of occupation came home to him when, as part of a peaceful student demonstration, he witnessed a French tank driving through the ranks

²⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Politicization of God’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 3 February, 2007.

²⁸ *TWOC*, pp.20-1.

²⁹ See Chapter 3. Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

³⁰ *TWOC*, p.29.

³¹ *TPOC*, p.10.

of protesters, killing some of his friends.³² A direct reference to this is made in the book. The fictional man, as a Union leader, is in a protest march about workers' rights and he (the fictional man) is reminded of an incident in his past. "Earlier in his youth he had walked in a demonstration against the foreigner. Some of his comrades were crushed...under a tank."³³ On the occasion of the workers' march, he is beaten and sworn at by soldiers, and they (the organisers of the march) "had been told: humiliation is a policy."³⁴ Experience in the world has made Khodr detest power. When asked about his attitude to France following the real incident with the French tank, he says unequivocally that he did not hate France. But when asked whether the incident made him think differently about people in general and about authority, he responds, "I hate power. To this present time. And I think in Christianity, there is not a concept of power. There is a concept of authority, not power."³⁵ Likewise, the man in the book is someone whose opinion of those who wield power is not entirely flattering.

The fictional man's stay in the mountains brings forth some bittersweet pronouncements based on Lebanon's submissive role as a country to which others come for their own interests; how Lebanon is used as the road to elsewhere, an "asylum country";³⁶ refugees enter "to escape from a cause", whereas Lebanon is said to have "no cause of its own".³⁷ This questioning of Lebanon's place in the region is, arguably, an example of depersonalisation, one that leads to a trouncing of national identity; it is additionally a *cri-de-coeur*, a lament for an enervated, muted nationalism that can be likened to a caged mouse on a wheel with nowhere to go except inside its own head. And it is to the resources of imagination that Khodr accuses his fellow countrymen and women of retreating in their search for an appealing identity. In doing so, they retrace their lineage to fabulistic and ancient history. "We decorate it [history] in a fanciful manner to suit our pride, distort it to uphold an interest, a

³² See Appendix B.

³³ *TPOC*, p.22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

³⁶ *TPOC*, p.8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

reputation, or a fable...In place of an identity forged by our own aspirations, we have a tendency to seek refuge in an identity lost to the past.”³⁸ But this fantasy, argues Khodr, “wards off the responsibility for the present and having to prepare for what is to come”.³⁹ Perhaps, in addition, it is a declaration that has more to do with galvanising his fellow patriots to take charge of their secular destiny; but it is nonetheless hard to resist drawing another parallel, that of people’s spiritual destiny – earthly existence being but a preparation for our theotic destiny beyond death.

The narrator indicts the physical delights of his country, for it is a beauty that “leads us to a state of numb drunkenness”,⁴⁰ disabling any action, draining the self of doing anything beyond gawping, mesmerised, at the “paradise-like” panorama.⁴¹ Identity, for Khodr, certainly in the mouth of the narrator, does not evolve in the Lebanese psyche from dignified origins. He indirectly accuses people of sanctioning and adopting an identity that suits the community’s preening sense of self.

“Perhaps memory, to us, is the text of books we do not read, or open only for the purpose of boasting, or to find proof of theses determined by our collective pride.”⁴²

This is another way of suggesting, it would seem, that identity can confer a nominal status, that identity, in other words, can mean what one says it means. Papanikolaou recalls attending a lecture by a philosophy academic at the University of Athens in 2004. The former asks an academic colleague

³⁸ *TWOC*, p.30. This may be an allusion to the Phoenician era. See Atiya, where he assumes the link to Phoenician heritage to be established fact. (Atiya, S. A. *A History of Eastern Christianity*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1968, p.392.) The Phoenicians had a civilisation that endured from approximately 1200 BCE to the first century BCE and stretched from the eastern Mediterranean to its western extremities. Renowned as skilled seafarers, they are also credited with the development of a highly cultured society.

³⁹ *TPOC*, p.8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.* It is worth considering how this is redolent of Edenic pleasures, and how the garden was and is revered in Middle Eastern culture, how the verdancy of imaginatively landscaped surroundings is synonymous with a sense of the numinous. See for example Yannaras, who believes that, for a variety of religions within the region, the garden acts as “a symbol of ideal happiness”. (Yannaras, C. *Elements of Faith*. London: T&T Clark, 1991, p.75.)

⁴² *TWOC*, p.30.

whether the lecturer is Orthodox and this is confirmed. Later, he is prompted to ask whether the lecturer believes in God. She replies in the negative.⁴³ Papanikolaou is making a different point, but it serves to emphasise how assumptions about identity may be misleading; how an interpretation of communal identity can override our own assumptions about a person's religion and religiosity. It would be difficult to understate the importance of this. Identity, for many people, is a critical beam of their existence, an existential prop for functionality and sense of 'being'. What we are and who we think we are, are factors that condition our existence; and while communal identity – in particular, the multivalented demography of Lebanon where communities are paramount – is, arguably, essential for the majority, it is sobering to think how a communal (or otherwise) identity can conflict with extraneous assumptions of what that identity might actually mean. In other words, identity *x* might imply political or religious affiliations *a*, *b*, or *c*. In reality, however, this may be far from the case.⁴⁴ In the end, however, Khodr would say – and this will be substantiated later – that identity, whether personal or group (communal), must be transcended for the purpose of theosis, for theosis, *per se*, represents our true identity.⁴⁵

5. Identity East and West

Khodr's own views suggest an anti-colonialist streak, perhaps because he has an abiding antipathy towards power; although, as established earlier, he is not anti-French.⁴⁶ This may appear to be confusing, even contradictory, but it may

⁴³ Papanikolaou, A. *The Mystical as Political. Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, p.143.

⁴⁴ Khodr says that in conversation with Régis Debray (French intellectual and one time official in the French government, b.1940), Debray said of himself, "I am an agnostic, but I belong to a Catholic culture" (Khodr's words). Khodr finds this an extraordinary statement to make without faith. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

⁴⁵ In conversation, his attention is drawn to a section in the book where it prescribes transcending one's culture, nationality, and nationalism for a purity of spirit. He is asked whether he still agrees with this and he replies in the affirmative. See Fn.155. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.)

⁴⁶ The debate relating to perceived differences between the East and the West has been attended to elsewhere; for example, it has received a comprehensive airing in the compendium of informative essays edited by George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou. (See Demacopoulos, G. & Papanikolaou, A. (eds.). *Orthodox Constructions of the West*. New York: Ford University Press, 2013.) In

be put into context when it is understood that, to the colonised of the East, colonialism may be synonymised with the West as a depersonalised entity – that is, colonialism has less to do with the person or persons wielding power, and more to do with an abstract symbolising Western hegemony – hence, the fictional man’s expression of ‘guilt’ over youthful infatuation with the West.

“As a youth, my friend was seduced by the West; he held feelings of superiority toward his own. Much later, he returned to the bosom of the East with gratitude and joy. He realized then that the sons of the Orient, who studied Arabic in the Book of Psalms and acquired beauty and goodness from the way they worshipped, belonged to the civilization of wisdom and contemplation to which he aspired.”⁴⁷

Khodr’s latter education was in Paris, so his early development was comparatively sophisticated and this, he may feel, did at one time skew his vision. In general, and extrapolating on this passage, the West could offer much, particularly in the way of technological superiority, but was lacking spiritual advancement which was abundant in, and endemic to, the East. This coincides with Khodr’s own identity as an Arabist and his pride in his Eastern heritage. The fictional man goes on to express his concern about what he regards as an encroachment, by the West, with its seemingly more sophisticated grasp of the earthly realities of existence, on the East’s identity. “From here I see that the traditional East will not remain an East as technology invades it”.⁴⁸ The man in the book sees faith as the bulwark against this apparent threat, faith “that has to deepen a great deal and will,

contrast, the difference between the East and the West alluded to here is founded less on historical events, historiographical shifts in perception, or theological minutiae, and more on an understanding that purported difference is experiential and thereby existential. In short, it is about a differing *Weltanschauung*. (See Chapter 6.) As Khodr says in conversation, “Orthodox people here don’t feel they are Western...[even so] they are not anti-Western”. (Interview with George Khodr, 26 October, 2013.) Had this thesis been concentrating more broadly on the supposed divide between East and West, this, and other similar works, would have proved essential and valuable resources. However, while the proceeding discussion may allude to theories on East-West diversity, some of which are acknowledged and covered by their compendium, in essence it will skirt the subject matter dealt with in Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou.

⁴⁷ *TWOC*, p.17.

⁴⁸ *TPOC*, p.37.

alone, keep us standing firm in the face of the temptations of the age.”⁴⁹ Such a statement begs the question as to whether the Orthodox are sufficiently equipped to resist the Siren calls of Western technology. It also brings to the fore the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr’s existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

In parts, the book is punctuated with references to the man’s repudiation of the West, not just for its supposed cultural hegemony, but for what the West represents. “I am not impressed with the western person in general despite his virtues.”⁵⁰ This is a softer tone, indirectly acknowledging that the West is comprised of some positive qualities, but it is also measured. “I do not...see that he [the western person] surpasses the Eastern person or the African person. Often the Western person talks of the greatness of his civilisation because of his belief that he is the one who is superior.”⁵¹ The fictional man is bullish in response to this perceived arrogance, pronouncing that the East can save the West from itself and thus help to burnish its (the West’s) own identity. “We must help Europe to transcend itself.”⁵² The European cannot achieve it because he is submerged by his own “eurocentrism”.⁵³

Khodr is embarked on an argument about culture, a spiritualised culture, relating to identity and stemming from the heart. The fictional man introduces

⁴⁹ Ibid. This is suffused with religious intonations; for a more secular view which corresponds, see Khalaf, *Lebanon Adrift*.

⁵⁰ *TPOC*, p.39.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *TWOC*, p.103.

⁵³ Ibid. The source of what may be described as a superiority complex may lie in the Enlightenment (late 17th-18th centuries), which, arguably, yielded an explosive confidence in rationality and human endeavour. But there were those who saw undesirable repercussions. “It is customary to consider it a major shortcoming of this epoch that it lacked understanding of the historically distant and foreign, and that in naive overconfidence it set up its own standards as the absolute, and only valid and possible, norm for the evaluation of historical events.” (Cassirer, E. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. F. C. A. Koelln & J. P. Pettegrove (trans.). New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 1951, p.x.) Cassirer goes on to say that this needs to be qualified. Nonetheless, even if only partially accurate, such characteristics would, it is suggested, be a most apposite breeding ground for eventual and enduring feelings of superiority.

the subject of literature as an illustration of what he means. French literature he deems as “rather poor at expressing feelings, spontaneous movements, and flaming hearts. If we start with the great school of Arabic culture...we will be better equipped than the French scholar in this regard.”⁵⁴ This is not say that Khodr is dismissive of, for example, other forms of literature, only that he is endeavouring to celebrate diversity – how we all have a contribution to make. Where one culture lacks a certain quality, another culture can fill the void. This validation of pluralism is imported into Khodr’s religiosity, which sees Muslims as theists who are as spiritually advanced as Christians.⁵⁵ What Khodr objects to, through the mouth of the fictional man and as an Arabist, is the arrogance of the West in assuming a superiority and in endeavouring to impress its own identity on the East; a view that can be traced, perhaps, to his discomfort with colonialism and his hatred of power.

The importance he lays on Arabism, with regard to his conceptualising of identity, is made explicit through the narrator.

“Here my friend [the fictional man] felt that his country gets all of its calling from this eastern neighbourhood that extends from Alexandria to Antioch and Persia and its surroundings, passing through Jerusalem; and when he lovingly embraced the heritage of the Arabs he did not feel as if this were totally separated from the brilliance of the first Christian masters who sanctified these eastern lands with their souls and blood.”⁵⁶

And he is not inhibited to say that Christianity should not hide itself away. It should “explain itself with an eloquent Arabic tongue”,⁵⁷ a statement which springs directly from Khodr’s avowed love of the Arabic language.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ *TWOC*, p.102.

⁵⁵ When, in discussion, it is suggested to him that he has met Muslims, who are pious, highly spiritual and holy people, he agrees without hesitation. (Interview with George Khodr, 26 October, 2013.) See also Sharp, who says that Khodr “suggests that the Christian can benefit a great deal through discovery and dialogue with the Islamic mystical tradition”. (Sharp, p.99.)

⁵⁶ *TPOC*, p.17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Although this is undoubtedly true, Abou Mrad says that, in private, when discussing theology, he speaks beautiful French, eloquently and poetically – a direct influence,

fictional man, adds the narrator, rejected the view that, “the Arabic Language was impervious to Christianity.”⁵⁹ Indeed, he “joined the language arts faculty...so he could spread the message of Christ in Arabic.”⁶⁰ Khodr seems sensitive to any suggestion that ‘Arab’ can exclusively be identified with Islam, and, in a later article, was quick to point out that there is a sizeable number of Christian Arabs in the region. Reacting to some words of Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey, he remarks that “the Premier does not recognize the presence, in this part of the world, of, at least, twelve million Arab Christians who do not expect to have their national identity...affirmed by a foreigner (Erdogan).”⁶¹ This is another instance of Khodr’s “use of forthright language devoid of nuance”. But there is also something else. Khodr tends to disdain politics, as does the man in the book – “A [political] party is canned thought”⁶² – and yet this article from 2011 shows how he will, if provoked, engage with it in a forthright manner, especially when it applies to identity. “Politics is a must.”⁶³ Elsewhere, in an article from 2013, he offers a glimpse of his passionate sense of identity that is both Arab and Christian – “our identity...is remaining faithful to Christ”;⁶⁴ while the reader is told that when the fictional man “embraced the cultural heritage of the Arabs, he felt no...break with the spirit of the first Christians who sanctified this land in spirit and blood.”⁶⁵ Two aspects of identity are thus highlighted in Khodr’s thinking: on the one hand, there is his important identity as an Arab, which distinguishes him, and the man in the book, from Western cultural ties; on the other hand, his overall identity as a Christian enwraps every other subsidiary element relating to identity.

Abou Mrad believes, of his time in Paris. (Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.)

⁵⁹ *TWOC*, p.52.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Mr Erdogan! How Well Read Is He?’ Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 24 September, 2011.

⁶² *TPOC*, p.22.

⁶³ *TPOC*, p.23.

⁶⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Antioch: The Great City of God’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 16 February, 2013.

⁶⁵ *TWOC*, p.52.

For all that, Khodr himself admires the beauty of the Qur'an and eulogises about the spirituality of some Muslims – “he [the fictional man] loved certain Muslims whose closeness to God he knew, and who behaved in a godly manner”⁶⁶ – so it is clear that the man in the book reflects Khodr's own views, and that Khodr, in his identity as an Eastern Christian, a member of the Antiochene Church, and a Lebanese, looks not to the West, but to the East.⁶⁷ As for the earthly identity of Christians, they are, according to the narrator, “fundamentally strangers; they settle anywhere.”⁶⁸ It could equally be taken to mean, perhaps, that Christians belong everywhere and nowhere. For any religious group to have a home, they must surely have a national identity that roots them in a particular place. To think otherwise may appear, arguably, to make licit any attempt to oust Christians from countries of the Near and Middle East.

In an interview, it was put to Khodr that the man in the book appears not to have experienced growth in exile, but his thinking may have been sharpened; Khodr was asked whether he, himself, changed during his time in Paris. His reply was that his identity remained Orthodox, but he acknowledges that, probably, he grew intellectually.⁶⁹ Close adherence to a life of study and his own natural disinterest in wayward youthful pursuits might suggest that he did manage to preserve his identity as a Lebanese, an Arabist, and an Orthodox.

6. The Convergence of Identities

The concept of identity is made more complex when personal identity can be seen to contain elements of both communal identity and religious identity. The problematical nature of identity for the Lebanese has been tellingly documented by Samir Kassir, who, in discussing the build up to the civil war of 1975, writes about the country's exposure to the fallout from the Arab-Israeli Six Day War of 1967 and how Lebanon was, and is, buffeted by

⁶⁶ *TWOC*, p.53.

⁶⁷ Cf. Sharp, who says that Khodr “acknowledges that both Christians and Muslims in the region share the historical legacy of their glorious Islamicate civilization”. (Sharp, p.178.)

⁶⁸ *TWOC*, p.51.

⁶⁹ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

regional storms generated by the geopolitical climate. “The project of building a nation was therefore doomed to remain incomplete, and the identity of the country to remain undecided in the eyes of its citizens.”⁷⁰ The country, Kassir is saying, was thus confused as to where it stood, and even what it was – was it more Arabist or more Western? In such circumstances, it is argued, it would only be natural for people to cleave to their communal identity, not only as a substitute for a firm foundation of national identity, but as a firm foundation for personal security.⁷¹ Religious convictions, however, were clearly not *de rigeur*.

“In each community, the dogmas that historically were at the root of religious belief were often little known; in the extreme case of the Druze, they could be taught only once students had reached a certain age. Knowledge of these tenets was unnecessary, in fact, to the extent that membership in the community, acquired at birth, did not require a reasoned commitment. Adherence to dogma was something almost incidental.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Kassir, S. *Beirut*. University of California Press, 2010, p.459. A journalist and progressive thinker, Kassir was born in 1960 and assassinated by a car bomb in 2005.

⁷¹ See Waardenburg, who claims that “in the Middle East, including Israel, people have been and still are identified and defined according to the socio-religious communities to which they belong...A Christian Arab may call him- or herself in the same breath a Christian and an agnostic.” He adds that in conflict situations, the social denomination overrules the religious one. (Waardenburg, J. *Muslims and Others. Relations in Context*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, p.429.)

⁷² Kassir, p.441. He underlines this later with other pertinent observations. “Divisions between communities in Beirut were independent of forms of worship or any specific anthropological substrate...religious communities can be considered as so many tribes, whose exclusive sense of solidarity is akin to the *‘asabiyya* detected by Ibn Khaldun in his sociology of Arab dynasties and clans.” (Ibid., p.442) See also El Cheikh, who claims that in the seventh century “tribal and ethnic affiliation are seen as superseding religious allegiance”. (El Cheikh, N. M. *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, p.63.) Paradoxically, while flagging up confessionalism as a problem, Kassir also points to the intellectual fecundity, which “conflicting allegiances promoted [in the way of] the free discussion of ideas, which had become impossible elsewhere, and helped to form points of convergence between rival – and often antagonistic – doctrine”. (Kassir, *Beirut*, p.463.) But see also Vishanoff, who claims that boundaries are erected to afford a sense of identity. While being porous and not restricting movement across the communal boundary, and allowing for those boundaries to be redrawn, the purpose of redrawing them has, he argues, more to do with ‘self’ than with the ‘Other’. (Vishanoff, D. R. ‘Boundaries and Encounters.’ In: *Understanding Interreligious*

If then religion, in its guise as confessionalism, creates a strong sense of belonging for the Lebanese, can a practical, personal spirituality also be part of this identity?

For Khodr, speaking as the man in the book, neither the apophatic God nor the numinous comes across as impersonal. As a child, the fictional man may have enjoyed the natural world as a parallel sense of spirituality grew in him, but, “Heaven, to him,” the narrator says, “was not flora. It was a face.”⁷³ The inclusion of the word ‘face’ suggests an identity; someone or something with a face, a visage, admits to an external identification for the ‘Other’. The fictional man possesses a childlike wonderment about the natural world, but the latter has its bounds and does not encroach on his sense of the numinous. Here, it is suggested, the reader is presented with the tenor of Khodr’s spirituality and a conception of the Divine that has a distinct ‘anthropological’ connection; that is, something to which human beings can relate. In short, God may be unknowable, but the celestial realm is not without a face, an identity. Later, however, this conceptualisation of God and the numinous develops and the reader is led to a bridgehead where the ‘identity’ of God is linked directly to appreciation of beauty. “The beautiful face recalls the face of God”;⁷⁴ and “love songs remind us of him.”⁷⁵ These, the reader is told, are sayings of the Fathers. “A face may become present in us, either as nature or as art. I fear that we cannot ignore this face unless we refuse to be part of creation, creating a vacuum that even the gracious face of God will find difficult to fill.”⁷⁶ Such a sentiment echoes Buber’s belief that the ‘Other’ is the necessary experiential charge that enlivens or validates the ‘I’s’ existence.

Relations. D. Cheetham, D. Pratt, D. Thomas (eds.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.350.)

⁷³ *TPOC*, p.1. Comparison can be made with a Neoplatonic, or more specifically, a Plotinian understanding of Soul, a Cosmic or Universal Soul, and a world in which all is interconnected. “Why, then, need we hesitate to think of Soul as a thing not extended in broken contact, part for part, but omnipresent within the range of its presence, indwelling in totality at every point throughout the All?” (Plotinus. *The Enneads*. S. MacKenna (trans.). London: Penguin Books, VI.4.xii, 1991, 451.) Later, Plotinus, while remaining on the same theme, refers to “a self-enclosed unity and a principle manifested in diversity.” (Ibid.)

⁷⁴ *TPOC*, p.27.

⁷⁵ *TWOC*, p.74.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

In the contemporary world where globalisation can undermine the sense of *self*, there can develop a crisis of identity. As discussed earlier, it is at this point people cleave to that which is less likely to cause the earth to shift under their feet: religion.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Ignatius IV observes disapprovingly how “religion has become a kind of communal identity and is no longer a faith”.⁷⁸ It must additionally be considered how in today’s social environment, one person can assume a plurality of identities⁷⁹ – professional person, community leader, Christian/Muslim, father/mother, carer – and, perhaps, as the contemporary world continues to be shaped by modernity, this agenda may be extended. These worldly identities can, it is argued, supervene and inhibit the practice of spirituality, or even effectively stifle it.

7. Technology, Modernity, & Spirituality East & West

Throughout the text, there comes across a sense of the nebulosity of faith, and how this may be remedied by experiential spirituality.⁸⁰ While extending comparisons between West and East, the fictional man touches on asceticism,⁸¹ describing the Holy Spirit as “the scribe of our spiritual

⁷⁷ See Chapter 1 and Payne, p.259.

⁷⁸ Ignatius IV. ‘St George’s Cathedral. Tripoli, Lebanon, 21 February 1988.’ In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.165. Khodr says Ignatius was a great friend, intelligent and smart, but he did not, as Khodr understood him, have profound roots in Orthodoxy, except in a form of popular Orthodoxy. He was, says Khodr, “not personally rooted in the great Orthodox vision.” He strove instead to have a Cartesian mind. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.)

⁷⁹ See, for example, Bauman.

⁸⁰ Orthodoxy’s chief contention is that experiential spirituality is at the core of the Christian message. See, for example, Mantzaridis, who cites Gregory Palamas’ dictum that, “Not through rational thought but through the Holy Spirit within us do we achieve the experience of love and the gifts it bestows.” (Mantzaridis, G. I. *The Deification of Man. Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. L. Sherrard (trans.). New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984, p.34. Mantzaridis takes the quotation from Palamas’ *On The Holy Spirit 24, 55, PG 32, 172B.*) For an alternative, but not wholly dissimilar perspective, see Papanikolaou. “The true goal of theology, knowledge of God, is not abstract ideas, but an encounter of mystical union with the personal God.” (Papanikolaou, A. ‘Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God.’ In: *Modern Theology*, 19:3, July 2003, pp.357-85, p.359.)

⁸¹ The meaning of asceticism can, to a certain extent, be governed by personal interpretation, from purging the *self* of passions through inner discipline, to scourging of the body. Margaret Smith describes the latter as “war against the flesh, believing that the subjugation of the body meant the growth of the spiritual nature and faculties,

existence”,⁸² and referring to the Fathers, who immersed themselves in the harsh environment of desert conditions, “giving their flesh and their bones until the truth consumed them and their being became united with it in a union from which there is no going and no hesitation, then the Spirit would run out of their lips”.⁸³ It is this form of extreme asceticism that is unique to the East, Khodr seems to be saying, a giving of the whole identity, body and soul, until the spiritual truth that is God becomes blended with their own lives, which have been purged of *self* and extraneous needs.⁸⁴ This, he argues, is not so in the West.

“In the West you feel that *man* is the centre and that he believes in himself, in his brains and his analysis and his criticism, in his keeping away from mystical tales, in his seeking after a system which, at the peak of its inventiveness, is called technology.”⁸⁵

It is a passage that captures Khodr’s wariness of modernity; however, it should not be assumed he is a Luddite.⁸⁶ In the book, Khodr is very careful not to condemn technology comprehensively, for it could traduce a sense of ‘developing’ identity. “A country needs a certain level of technology...to assure its people a level of security enabling them to flourish and develop”.⁸⁷ It is clear from this he sees influences at work in the world, extraneous to spirituality and of which technology is a part, but which humankind can

and the power to see visions and receive revelations.” It is more the former that is meant here. (Smith, M. *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*. Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1973, p.17.)

⁸² *TPOC*, p.37.

⁸³ *Ibid.* Behind these observations, there is a vagueness about how religiosity works, how it is effected. See, for example, Gendle, who says that Palamas “points to a central paradox of Christian experience: that the Holy Spirit, Who is the very milieu of the believer’s innermost life, is also the most elusive and intangible of realities. He as it were effaces Himself to make known the Father through the Son.” (Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, p.122, Fn.20.)

⁸⁴ This compares with Palamas’ description of hesychast methodology. “They strip the cognitive powers of the soul of every changing, mobile and diversified operation, of all sense perceptions and, in general, of all corporal activity that is under our control; as to acts which are not entirely under our control, like breathing, these they restrain as far as possible.” (*Ibid.*, p.46.)

⁸⁵ *TPOC*, p.37. His emphasis.

⁸⁶ Luddites were a nineteenth century movement, made up of workers, who saw innovative methods of mechanical production in the weaving industry as a threat to their jobs and, consequently, set out to destroy machinery.

⁸⁷ *TWOC*, p.97.

harness. Human beings, he maintains, have a divine destiny; this is an ineradicable element of their identity. However, one should not sweep aside other influences that can facilitate the attainment of that true identity. It is a *modus vivendi* reflected in 'Idols', a later article from 1996, in which he acknowledges that "technology...is good in itself"⁸⁸ and "[k]nowledge is not a danger";⁸⁹ at the same time, he is aware that science and technology must not take over our lives. Technology "comes with a price",⁹⁰ while the worshipping of science and technology, he says, "constitutes a new religion."⁹¹ It is clear he views technology as a danger because it has a potential to beguile, to divert human beings from their true identity as spiritual beings on the spiritual pathway of theosis. This is made evident elsewhere. "You are bearers of a great vocation, you are a leaven of salvation. This is so on account of the One whose name you bear, and in whom you have been baptized." Equally, in the same article, he makes the statement that Christ "grants salvation to all by diverse paths, among them: culture, technology, and legitimate social struggles".⁹² However, in the West, as the originator of scientific advancement, the human being, *qua* person, occupies a loftier position, even though, it is suggested, there is something of a paradox lurking here. One way of interpreting Khodr's statement is that the West seeks to place the human person within the centre of sublunar existence; and yet, perhaps, the West subsumes the individual in modernity's drive towards ever greater materialism. In the West, the human being's unfolding identity depends on incremental development of the human intellectual capacity to create and sustain a material world that is set squarely on the twin foundations of science and technology. For the East, which was not caught up in the intellectual and creative vortex of the European Renaissance (c. 14th-17th centuries),⁹³ and

⁸⁸ Khodr, G. 'Idols.' A. Haddad (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 22 September, 1996.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Khodr, Bishop George. 'A Call to Christians'. Archpriest Alexis Vinogradov (trans.). In: *Lissanulhal*, 14 January, 1968.

⁹³ Ramfos points out that the East experienced a creative watershed of its own in the Byzantine Renaissance of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which, by comparison, was, he says, stunted, if not stillborn. (Ramfos, p.108.) It could also be said that the East was, in large part, excluded from the European Enlightenment (17th-18th centuries) because of its occupation by the Ottoman Empire.

only experienced its ripples somewhat later, there has been, traditionally, less preoccupation with predominant materialism and the advances of science and technology. Clearly, such a statement requires qualification. The advent of the washing-machine and the refrigerator was undoubtedly a most welcome innovation on a global scale, but this was a relatively early stage of modern technological development – comparatively modest advances with comparatively modest sociological effects. Since then, it is argued, there has been a tidal wave of modern innovative technology that is capable of radically and fundamentally transforming lifestyles and mindsets. Between these eruptions in the West and the subsequent waves breaking on the shores of the East, there was perhaps a time lapse. As a result, the East trailed behind the West, not only in the acquisition of life-changing technological gadgetry, but in its taste for an acquisitive materialism. What, arguably, may be occurring now is that this time lapse is barely in evidence and modernity is modulating the Eastern identity and treading on the toes of a traditional way of life in Lebanon.

Khodr, through the book, fears that the invasion of modernity – in all its manifestations, including technology – will result in a conquest of the Eastern religious and socio-philosophical identity. However, his views are scarcely unique.⁹⁴ Legions of people, from both East and West, while condoning the undoubted benefits of technological advancements, continue to express opinions, ranging from understated concern to vociferous protest, about the deleterious effect of modernity on human identity. Technology is progressing at an ever faster pace and, in trying to keep up, people fear their identity, what it is that makes human beings who and what they are, is being occluded. Khodr would sympathise; but he would perhaps be more unequivocal in his belief that technology is stifling the spirituality he believes is innate to the human condition. “This is the industrial civilisation,” says the man in the book,

⁹⁴ “The Orthodox are often afraid of modernity. They feel that it has been imposed on them from outside, that it constitutes the brutal, if not cruel, intrusion of a West deformed by heresy.” (Ignatius IV. ‘Orthodoxy and Modernity. Faculty of Theology, University of Athens, 19 April, 1991.’ In: *Orthodoxy & The Issues of Our Time*, p.220.)

“that invades the world and sweeps everything else away”.⁹⁵ There is an alternative, muses the fictional man; the evolving of a society that is not so dependent on technology, so avid for the latest technological ‘app’, but it could not come about without “a great deal of restraint and austerity”.⁹⁶ On the other hand, there is a touch of realism in Khodr’s writing. One needs, the man in the book states, “a certain amount of technology...so your people can maintain a level of security that enables it to grow and flourish under an atmosphere of freedom.”⁹⁷ While this refers to an alleviation of some of life’s hardships, it is a sentiment articulated by someone who was writing amidst internecine warfare and rampant sectarianism.⁹⁸ People, he claims, are not at a stage of spiritual maturity that they can do without technological adjuncts, while settling for the superior advantage of possessing a developed spirituality.⁹⁹ He additionally acknowledges a positive symbiosis between the exercising of spirituality and the practical employment of modern techniques whereby “prosperity protects spiritual inspirations”.¹⁰⁰ The corollary of this symbiosis is that “[p]olitics should be a servant to spiritual life”.¹⁰¹

Khodr is making an important point. The marginalisation of Spirit, if not etiolation of spirit, that he is fearful of, supports the contention that the spiritual identity of Lebanese Orthodox has been, and is, actively under threat, not just from local ‘political’ pressure to maintain an identity on a communal level, but from an invasion of ‘western’ technology. If, on the other hand, it is supposed that Western consumerism might be a unifying factor in Lebanon, uniting Christianity and Islam, there is, it would appear, equivalent reservation in

⁹⁵ *TPOC*, p.37.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ The Arabic version of the book was published in 1979 during Lebanon’s civil war.

⁹⁹ “People are not at such [a] level of spiritual strength...so as to remain politically and economically behind while being advanced on the humane and spiritual level”. (*TPOC*, p.37.)

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* This is made more explicit in the newer version. “When spiritual life becomes incarnate in history as a movement, ready to be transmitted by utilizing the instruments of knowledge, even politics itself can be placed at its service.” (*TWOC*, p.97.)

some quarters of the Islamic world in Lebanon at the seemingly overbearing influence of Western culture.¹⁰²

What concerns Khodr is that the East is losing its way and, in doing so, adulterating its identity. While admitting that the “temptations of the age...are not bad in themselves”,¹⁰³ he would maintain that they overlay and atrophy the spiritual dimension of human beings. What he calls for is a rebalancing, necessitating a revival of matters spiritual, similar to what he promoted at the time of the Orthodox Youth Movement. It will not be achieved by “pushing the West away...but by rejecting its spiritual degeneration.”¹⁰⁴ To express it idiomatically, one should be careful what one throws out with the bathwater. For example, the West “retains some good manners which we have not attained”.¹⁰⁵

Good manners apart, it is perhaps useful at this point to recall the fundamental difference between the Western identity and the Eastern identity, accentuated in the former by reliance on what is perceived to be excessive rationalism. Yannaras has been especially vocal in this regard,¹⁰⁶ while Markides sees Western thought “trapped within its intellectual and scientific constructs”.¹⁰⁷ This secularising of Christianity is linked to a Western

¹⁰² Sheikh Fadlallah (1935-2010), a significant spiritual leader of Shi'a Islam in Lebanon, has talked about the arrogance and oppression of imperial Western powers, referring to America and “major corporations as wielders of arrogant power, and Latin Americans, African and Middle Eastern workers and peasants as the oppressed of the world.” (Hirvonen’s words. Hirvonen, p.263.) See also Sharp, who, addressing the broader Orthodox world – that is, apart from Lebanon – cites Metropolitan Damaskenos’ (1936-2011) belief that “a common enemy for both Muslims and Christians...[is] materialism, and the spiritual void caused by modernity”. [Sharp’s words.] (Sharp, p.124.) In addition, see his assertion that possibly uniting in this way “has been the conclusion of a growing number of Orthodox theologians and leaders over the past few decades.” (Ibid., p.169.)

¹⁰³ *TPOC*, p.37.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, Yannaras, C. *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*. London: T&T Clark, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Markides, K. C. *The Mountain of Silence. A Search for Orthodox Spirituality*. New York: Image (Doubleday), 2002, p.235. The tendency of Eastern Orthodoxy to favour experiential spirituality is echoed elsewhere. Roussos cites Kallistos Ware’s proposition that there are three outstanding features of the Greek Orthodox Church in the twentieth century – “martyrdom, Diaspora and Orthodox renaissance

tendency to exalt reason above all else and reject metaphysics.¹⁰⁸ In discussion, Khodr says he does not want rational proofs of God's existence,¹⁰⁹ and makes the point that in Orthodoxy "the source of knowledge is the heart", citing a saying that "reason has to descend into the heart" and then rise upwards.¹¹⁰ Ware adds his own understanding of the difference, arguing that "Latin thought was influenced by juridical ideas, by the concepts of Roman law, while the Greeks understood theology in the context of worship and in the light of the Holy Liturgy".¹¹¹ In the end, the roots of the Orthodox Church are indelibly stamped with the mystical nature of Eastern theology and seen as having a sound and valid spirituality that are deeply grounded in the tradition

movements" – the third being "the increasing emphasis on the study of Philokalia and the Hesychast tradition. This intellectual movement tried to move away from westernised academic and scholastic views of Orthodoxy to a very different theological approach." [Roussos' words.] (Roussos, S. 'Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the Middle East.' In: *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*. A. O'Mahony and E. Loosley (eds.). Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, p.109; Ware, T. 'The Witness of the Orthodox Church.' In: *Ecumenical Review*, 52/1, 2000, pp.46-56.) Roussos goes on to make the point that this movement "makes use of major mystical authors of the middle and late Byzantine period, such as St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas." (Roussos, p.109.)

¹⁰⁸ In discussing al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), a pivotal nineteenth century Egyptian thinker, Hourani says that one of his (Tahtawi's) observations when in France was that the French "believe in human reason alone". (Hourani, A. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.82.) See also Nasr's argument that in the West "...after the Middle Ages and the Renaissance...philosophy became more and more wedded and also subservient to modern science...in the Islamic world philosophy became ever more closely associated with 'irfān [gnosis]". (Nasr, S. H. *The Garden of Truth*. New York: HarperOne, 2007, p.232.)

¹⁰⁹ See Radu Bordeianu, who cites Anna Williams and her comparison between Origen and the Enlightenment. The former's purpose, she writes, is "quite different from that of the Enlightenment thinkers". Origen "declares that the faith is not something that needs to be proved by human reason, and that his purpose in pursuing particular points is only to follow the inquiry where it logically leads." (Bordeianu, R. '(In)voluntary Ecumenism: Dumitru Staniloae's Interaction with the West as Open Sorbornicity'. In: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, p.349, Fn.7; Williams, A. N. *The Divine Sense. The Intellect in Patristic Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.66-7.)

¹¹⁰ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013. Khodr's dispensing with, or disinterest in, rationalistic discourse of theology feeds into the perceived illogicality of Christianity by some Muslims and Muslim theologians. One of their criticisms of Christianity is that it is neither logical nor rational. See, as an early example, Thomas' citing of Abū 'Īsā Muhammad al-Warrāq (d. 247/861), who judges Christian doctrines to be either contradictory or to "contravene what is generally held about the being of God." [Thomas' words.] (Thomas, D. 'Islam and the Religious Other'. In: *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, p.159.)

¹¹¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p.48.

of Eastern Christianity.¹¹² Khodr emphasises this point in the opening sentence of an article, entitled *Eastern Christians*. “The above expression [that is, *Eastern Christians*] is of no geographical significance but a theological one. It sets the distinction between the theology that developed in the West during the thirteenth century from the Eastern theology that remained faithful to the Patristic thought.”¹¹³ Perhaps because of all this, Khodr, while implicitly recognising the West’s superiority in important spheres of secularism, such as science and technology, but fearing their blanketing of spirituality, ultimately has faith in the different heritage and, indeed, different nature of Eastern Christianity.

The man in the book illustrates this ambivalence.

“The East’s encounter with the West oscillates between boundless admiration and rejection to the point of hatred. Admiration often led us to blind imitation of the West, including the faults considered to be an integral part of its civilization. Suffering from an inferiority complex...obsessed with Greece, Rome, modern science, and western Christianity, these partisans of imitation at any cost have lost all sense of scale, refusing to recognize anything good outside of western civilization.

“Others have distanced themselves from western civilization for the sake of their national and religious identity, thinking they could oppose it with another civilization, which they imagined to be still alive.

¹¹² Plested, on the other hand, is not so sure about this kind of spiritual compartmentalising. “...the philosophical rationalism of the West is routinely contrasted with the experiential and mystical theology of the Christian East.” In a somewhat caustic footnote, he says, “[t]his tired and artificial dichotomy has long outlived any usefulness it might once have had.” This is not to say it has no currency, and Plested would be misrepresented if it were suggested this is what he is saying. As a result, it is argued, such a perspective has validity within the context of this thesis. (Plested, M. “Light from the West”: Byzantine Readings of Aquinas’. In: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, p.60 and pp.281-2, Fn.6.)

¹¹³ Khodr, G. ‘Eastern Christians.’ R. Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 15 January, 2011. This would seem to contradict the assertion made earlier that Khodr’s appraisal of the difference between the Western and Eastern mind has more to do with differing psyches. However, see Chapter 6 where Khodr, in the book, clearly believes a different *Weltanschauung* exists in the West.

“Both extreme stances are wrong...”¹¹⁴

They are wrong, says the fictional man, because “civilization is nothing but the material, institutional, and historical expression of a culture”, whereas the “human, existential, and spiritual elements” made manifest in art, religion, and literature, “lie within the culture, rather than the civilization.”¹¹⁵ Khodr is making the same point, but in a different way. In *Eastern Christians*, he identifies the distinction between East and West as theological, even though the diverging identities may derive in part from differing psyches. In the book, he drives a wedge between theology (the Spirit and spirituality) and society. Elsewhere, he brings the two disparate parts together, thereby identifying the complexity of his own existential religiosity. This convergence is made explicit in another article, which touches on Lebanese identity, and how a developed, established spirituality is the foundation of state identity.

“People, who in their inner essences have become deep and deified, who always transcend in order to set up a house for God on the earth, can make Lebanon. The homeland, then, is formed structurally, molded and envisaged politically in accordance to this spirit. The homeland is to be founded from outside the political framework, from outside the political talk. It[s] foundations are to be raised on spiritual life, which descends upon it from above.”¹¹⁶

Later, in the same work, he makes the point even more explicit. “Thus, I shall build my homeland by the language of the deified ones and their pursuit. And deification means to be molded by the dispositions of God and to approach the energies that God supplies me with; these are given in Christianity and Islam.”¹¹⁷ Khodr, speaking through the pages of the book, is not against politics; he simply rejects the notion that it is the sole panacea. Earlier, the narrator says, “My friend did not despise political action, but he found the subject prone to fragmentation, partial and bewildering. He was convinced of the need to go deeper.”¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, Khodr refers to politics as “the great

¹¹⁴ TWOC, p.100.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The New Human Being’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 10 January, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ TWOC, p.32.

arena for the lust for power.”¹¹⁹ In the same piece, he addresses leaders in general. “Perhaps you are known on account of your position, yet this does not in any way warrant a pandering to you out of fear of your overbearing self-inflation.”¹²⁰ And although acknowledging the necessity of politics, he has a deep suspicion of its influence. “Human relationships become ones [*sic*] of violence when what brings them together is money or political reign.”¹²¹ The book and the articles coincide. They show that Khodr sees politics as part of life, but it is equally clear from the two articles – one from 2005 the other from 2013 – and from the much earlier book, that he is suspicious of politics and of politicians, and believes that there is a need for human beings to go further and plumb the depths of the spiritual for the sake of their own authentic identity.

In the end, and regardless of the contrast between East and West, Khodr emphasises the divinity in all humankind, that our identity is made in the image of God. “Divinity is never imposed from the outside; it is an intimate part of us and partakes of our own identity.”¹²² This is not something that is additionally grafted on to our nature, but such an intrinsic part of our being that, “Our humanity develops only to the extent that it reveals this image and gives it reality.”¹²³ This notion is embedded in relationality, for, “Each person’s ultimate request is for recognition by his peers”, and broadened to have reference to entire nations: “The recognition of other nations allows it to affirm its existence and identity”.¹²⁴

To sum up, Khodr fears that the phenomenon of technology may have the potential of driving a wedge between spirituality and religion. This it achieves by tapping into humanity’s weakness for nurturing materialistic identity – how having the latest smart phone, for example, can be seen to elevate personal

¹¹⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Lust for Power’. Mark Farha (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 February, 2005.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Lambasting’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 23 February, 2013

¹²² *TWOC*, p.37.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.60.

identity – and is aided and abetted by the placing of technology on the altar of human progress, thereby separating people from Spirit and substituting worship of God with the worship of human ingenuity. Religion *per se* survives, but is cut off from spirituality. This perforce would underpin the notion of Orthodoxy in Lebanon as a socio-political identity, rather than a religious (spiritual) identity, and give credence to the view that the role of religion in the lives of the Lebanese has shifted. This, in turn, might suggest that authentic relationality, pertaining to inter- and intra-religious dialogue is, in a corresponding fashion, withering and requires the radical adjustment that Khodr's existential religiosity would provide. As a consequence, it pertains to the research question.

8. Gender Identity

Within the concept of identity, as described here, there are accretions, which are acquired consciously or subconsciously, such as career or political affiliation. It is through the narrator that Khodr now advances a theory relating to congenital identity, that of gender, and how masculinity needs femininity in order for a man to be a fully rounded male.

“A man's familiarity with women other than his mother and sisters is necessary for the completion of the feminine image inside him. Indeed, his personality does not achieve its full masculinity unless it builds upon a femininity which he can imagine and sense in the very constitution of his manhood.”¹²⁵

Again, this view may not be unique, but it arguably goes against the grain of Lebanese society, which is, at its roots, patriarchal. It is, nonetheless, repeated elsewhere in Khodr's more recent literary output. “Psychologists speak of the complementarity between the two sexes.”¹²⁶ In their diversity, man and woman complement each other; but, as the narrator emphasises in the book, man's character, his identity as a man, is not complete without an embrace of his feminine side. There is, however, a caveat. “Yet if that is not in God the relation between them can turn into one of feuding to the point of

¹²⁵ *TWOC*, p.78.

¹²⁶ Khodr, George. 'Man and Woman in God'. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 16 March, 2013.

complete breakdown.”¹²⁷ What comes through the book and the more recent article is a categorical recognition that predominant gender identity is founded on a dualism of both masculinity and femininity. He says something similar elsewhere: “marriage starts with a covenant and continues through faithfulness. There is no difference whether it is called “civil” ...or “Ecclesiastical” because it is based on the eternity of love... What is important is the covenant we make in marriage and the acceptance by God of that covenant.”¹²⁸ In other words, God must be part of a relational triangle that includes at its base the relational dyad of man and woman, joined together in a symbiotic whole. This has important ramifications in a confessional society that theoretically does not ‘recognise’ civil marriage, and where couples from differing religions are forced by circumstances to follow a secular route to marital union.

In the book, there is a sequence where his thoughts turn to the identity and role of women.¹²⁹ It is autumn, but the sun is out, the day is warm and it feels, the fictional man says, like spring. The weather entices him outside for a walk. After a while, he comes across a women’s march, “asking for sexual liberty and the liberty of sexual deviation”.¹³⁰ While the latter may refer to gay women, this is not made explicit.

He acknowledges that men have a history of “suppressing” women in “one way or another, and especially where it comes to legislation.”¹³¹ However, as the man in the book perceives it, women are trying to gain entry into a male dominated world as if this objective were both natural and desirable.

“The struggle of women today is political and social and through it they want to break into the world of men from every direction and every side

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Civil Marriage’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 9 February, 2013.

¹²⁹ This comes from the sixth letter, which does not appear in the more recently published version, *The Ways of Childhood*.

¹³⁰ *TPOC*, p.49.

¹³¹ Ibid.

as if this were the heaven within which the features of humanity become complete.”¹³²

Even though Khodr may be a traditionalist, there is in this, and in a preceding passage, a strain of negativity about the (male) world, with its sets of dubious values, moral orientation, and social mores. In other words, and as Khodr might see it, why would women want to identify with male worldly values, which are questionable; why seek equality of power in a misconceived and misled society, one that is neither natural nor desirable, and instead exacerbates the threat to humankind’s spirituality, whether male or female? For him, the answer lies in the way modernity has intervened and shaped our thinking.

The fictional man’s thoughts on this demonstration – “I reflected upon this women’s march from which the greatness of the woman in the eternity of essence was absent”¹³³ – show him to be at odds with modern thinking; and, considering the autobiographical nature of a book, it would not be unreasonable to assume this mirrors Khodr’s own views. While clearly revering women, Khodr appears to have an idealistic view of Woman. On the strength of what he writes in the book, it would be easy to misjudge him as a reactionary. However, this might be a hasty judgement. Equality for him means equal in value, not sameness; he sees different roles for men and women, but also a congruence through their coming together in a common bonding of humanity. Is this at odds with contemporary Lebanon? Previously in traditional Lebanese society, there would have been a marked difference in gender roles, with women fulfilling the traditional tasks of homemaker and the man working outside the home in an occupation that yielded a family income. Both roles were interdependent beams that supported the nuclear family, assuring its stability and continuation. If one beam fell away, there was a danger of insupportable internal strain or even implosion. To some extent, this blueprint has been redrawn, with women taking on a secondary role

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

outside the home to bring in a supplementary income.¹³⁴ More specifically, in the Orthodox world, acceptance of this new reality has given rise to methodological innovation in pastoral care, affecting the implementation of spiritual and practical care in and for the community.¹³⁵

The sociological reorientation of woman's role began, according to the man in the book, with the Industrial Revolution and when women "entered the world of work".¹³⁶

"I am in no doubt that the true enslaving of the woman started when she entered the world of work at the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution. And likewise the child had been enslaved so each of the sexes found itself a slave to the other, and the whole purpose was to increase production so that luxury may increase with this and they did not think that they are in a whirlwind, in a satanic cycle, and that the great human civilisation cannot be built without austerity and that the basic solutions are those that come out of the relinquishing self and are accepted by the self."¹³⁷

The book equates an increase in production with the production of luxury goods, and believes that it whets the appetite of humanity for more possessions, strapping men and women to the capstan of production, enslaving them to an eternal process of trying to satiate the unending macrocosmic demands of a market economy. At the end of this extract, he gives us a glimpse of his alternative view, which seems to bring to the fore his anti-materialism, suggesting that an ascetic lifestyle – or at least a lifestyle not given over to the sybaritic pursuit and indulgence of luxury – is required for

¹³⁴ What is being referred to here is more the traditional (working class) stratum of Lebanese society. In other sociological sectors, for example the urban middle class, women, it is suggested, often, but not always, follow the West, pursuing careers in their own right.

¹³⁵ In conversation with Father Bassam, who teaches pastoral theology at the University of Balamand, he made it clear that Orthodox priests are now given extensive training for pastoral roles, which includes a grounding in psychology. This is to equip them to deal with a new reality of working mothers, wayward children, and dysfunctional environments within families. (Interview with Father Bassam Nassif, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.)

¹³⁶ *TPOC*, p.49.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

the 'good life'. Luxury is often understood as a pampering of 'self', so his reference to relinquishing of, or giving up, *self* points in this direction. The apparent contradiction of a subsequent 'accepting of *self*' is not perhaps inconsistent, for a renunciation of *self* in an act of asceticism should not mean one becomes robotic, without a sense of personal identity or awareness of *self*; rather, the relinquishing is a restraining of *self*, even a denial of *self*. The *self* ostensibly remains, but willingly (that is, by one's will) accepts austerity for a greater good, that of progress along the spiritual, theotic pathway.

What Khodr is saying, through the fictional man, is that women's desire to enter the world of men is misconceived because the world of men is fundamentally flawed. Women have a more valuable role. As for the book's call to women and men to adopt a more austere lifestyle, it is an austerity that ties in with Khodr's own, somewhat reactionary and idealistic, view of women.

"We are not against women's beauty. But does beauty mean that women have to be provocative for those who look at them?...this clothing style is based on an intention to be provocative, and on the perception that sexual arousing is a good thing that gives body pride for the young lady and lets the young man be subjugated so that she feels he is a slave to her...Do relationships between humans have to be shaped as master-slave? Did women feel that they are in bondage, and they wanted consequently to make men slaves to them?"¹³⁸

The way for women to protect their identity, Khodr seems to be saying, flying in the face of modern attitudes, is not to succumb to the superficiality of sexual provocation and posturing. "Who believes that a woman wearing short and tight clothes is not doing it intentionally? Is she really convinced that she is not exposing herself and that she is not arousing men's desires?"¹³⁹ In a later article, he is energised by similar considerations. "The beautiful woman must not wear makeup in a way that tempts people, and let the ugly know that

¹³⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Nude Clothing'. Amani Haddad (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 17 July, 1994.

¹³⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. 'This Summer'. Amani Haddad (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 1 August, 1993.

she might be more beautiful in God's eyes."¹⁴⁰ It is a view that harmonises with the narrator, who declares that "the absence of spiritual qualities transformed even the most beautiful woman into a mere statue of mere passing interest."¹⁴¹ This shows how the narrator and the fictional man are reflective of Khodr's own mindset on identity. Indeed, both the book and the later articles parallel an attitude that is not moralistic so much as reflective of an idealisation of women. Khodr and the fictional man see women as valuable role models in themselves – as discussed earlier, they complement masculinity; males need to be in touch with their feminine side – whereas the sexualising of fashion is something Khodr does not countenance, for, by objectifying women, it traduces their true identity. It is a view that may not appeal either to feminism or to socio-sexual patriarchy, but, in defying neat categorisation, it illustrates his existential religiosity.

9. The Identity of Politics & Religion

In Chapter 2, attention was drawn to Dannaoui's assertion that confessionalism and religion are now identified with political parties.¹⁴² His view is that the 1975 civil war in Lebanon was a watershed with regard to religion, politics, and identity, and was responsible for bringing about a shift. Before the outbreak of hostilities, political parties, he argues, were not confessional, they were nationwide. After the war, this changed as parties started taking on a confessional hue, to the point where they became identified with a particular religion, as in the case of Hezbollah and Shī'ism.¹⁴³ If Dannaoui is correct in his assertion, religion is dressed in new garments. Separated from its sacramental and pietistic foundations, and endued with a political stamp, religion becomes secularised and confined to ritualistic

¹⁴⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. 'The Love of Appearing'. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 25 August 2002.

¹⁴¹ *TWOC*, p.75.

¹⁴² See Chapter 2, p.68. Interview with Eli Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

¹⁴³ Cf. Kippenberg, who draws attention to the auxiliary role religion plays in delineating communities within fragmented societies. Describing the Lebanese and Bosnian situations, he suggests that when the internal system of "public legal order" broke down, people "were no longer bound by the requirements of a legal system enforcing tolerance. The social circles to which people belonged were reduced to religious allegiances." (Kippenberg, H. G. 'Religions and Violent Actions.' In: *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, p.317.)

observance, thus tending to make people less pervious to any fundamental spiritual message, with potential of transforming spirituality into a comparative irrelevance in their lives, and, flying in the face of Jesus' dictum, conflating Caesar and God.¹⁴⁴ Hence, interreligious understanding is under siege from both directions – from the influence of technology and from a political usurpation of religion. At the root of this, it could be argued, is a misconceived communal (group) identity and an atrophying sense of religious and personal identity.¹⁴⁵

In many communities, the parish church has always been a significant piece in the jigsaw that makes up communal life; as for the priest, he is a familiar figure, almost extended family. It may also be the case that, even if people are not regular attendees at church services, the priest will nonetheless be called upon to officiate at baptisms, weddings and funerals; and, within most members of the community, there resides an abiding, if covert, respect for the priest, both as a social pillar and as a representative of Orthodoxy as a sociological identity. In these instances, where there is scant religious observance and weak spiritual vitality, the priest becomes more of a tribal or community leader. If the enervation of spirituality within Lebanese Orthodoxy has any foundation in fact, and the supplanting of religious identity with socio-political identity is accepted as a given, it does not augur well for an effective engagement with the 'Other' based on developed spirituality.

It is here, in the fissure between what the priest may represent in the reality of diurnal life in Lebanon and what may be the limits of his actual spiritual influence that existential religiosity could seed itself; and it is here that Khodr's religious outlook has been formed, where his spiritual energy is most vibrant.

¹⁴⁴ Luke 20:24-5. See also Waardenburg, Fn.65.

¹⁴⁵ The conflation of politics and religious identity can be compared with Khalaf's observation that Church, Lebanese society, and Westernised consumerism are conjoined. See where, *inter alia*, he argues that religion has been commodified and communities repackaged – for example: "...Greek Orthodox, Catholics and Sunni Muslims, are beginning to experiment with measures for enhancing and reinventing their special heritage and particular identity." (Khalaf, *Lebanon Adrift*, p.43.) Later, he is more direct: "Even religious vestiges are not spared commodification." (Ibid., p.194.)

In the tension between what the Church stands for and what it does in the world, the foundations of his theology of the 'Other' are laid. This interconnects with the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

The conceptual 'Other' can be Christians of another denomination and in the book the man laments the fact that Christ's Church is sundered. "Here, alas, we are faced with the sad reality of a splintered church."¹⁴⁶ As a result of this fracturing along either faith, theological or authoritative lines, Christianity has, it might be argued, a blurred identity; hence, the drive to find a way towards coherence and unity. In *The Ways of Childhood*, the fortunes of the ecumenical movement, from the man's perspective, are given unambiguous clarity in the heading for Chapter 20: "Eighth Letter from Exile: The Ecumenical Movement's Dreams Will Not Be Realized Any Time Soon".¹⁴⁷ This reflects Khodr's own views. When it is put to him that perhaps he sees ecumenical activity as an engine simply chugging along – motion with no real purpose and going nowhere – he nods in agreement.¹⁴⁸

10. Identity in Foreign Lands

At one point, the fictional man refers to identity, the meaning of who we are, and how the Russian émigrés reached a decision to make a new home for themselves away from their homeland, to re-root themselves and their Orthodox identity in Paris, and to develop their theological ideas and embed a reinvigorated form of spirituality.¹⁴⁹ He claims that their cultural

¹⁴⁶ *TWOC*, p.141.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013. Khodr's lacklustre enthusiasm for ecumenism could be based on fears of a dilution of Orthodox identity, particularly now when communal identity is critical to survival, and where identity and survival are under threat by the haemorrhaging of Christians from the Middle East. See, for example, O'Mahony's pertinent article. O'Mahony, A. 'Christianity in the Middle East: Modern History and Contemporary Theology and Ecclesiology. An Introduction and Overview'. In: *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65 (3-4), 2013, pp.231-260. doi: 10.2143/JECS.65.3.3011243.

¹⁴⁹ See Nicholas Lossky, who claims that the Russian émigrés "regarded their uprooting from traditional Orthodox territories as an expression of the will of God." (Lossky, N. 'Orthodoxy and the Western European Reformation Tradition: A

acclimatisation leads them to adopt the indigenous language, and this spurs him into asking, “Is it possible to blend into a new environment without abandoning one’s own traditions? Or again, is it possible to preserve one’s identity without a certain degree of conservatism?”¹⁵⁰ These were questions, he insists, with which his new circle of associates continually wrestled.¹⁵¹ His contribution to the debate is that the Christian Arabs, while seeking to develop their spirituality, lived under “the House of Islam” for a long period of history, and did so with “our faith identity at the same time”.¹⁵²

What Khodr is exploring is the hypothesis that identity can undergo transmutation, while preserving its hypostasis. Is it possible, he asks, to retain a discrete personal sense of *self* despite the environment in which we live? The answer, it would seem, is in the affirmative – and is certainly

Memoir.’ In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2-3, May-August 2010, p.90.) See also Miller and O’Mahony. “The creative witness...of the *émigré* community in France...has had an incalculable impact not just on non-Orthodox perceptions of Orthodoxy but on the Orthodox tradition itself.” (Miller, C and O’Mahony, A. ‘The Orthodox Church in Contemporary Contexts’. In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2-3, May-August 2010, pp.83-4.)

¹⁵⁰ TWOC, p.131.

¹⁵¹ Bauman describes how identity implies security. (Bauman, p.29.) If this is the case, it suggests a psychological tussle between (i) an almost congenital sense of original identity; (ii) realising that, although this sense of identity might be incongruous, there is nevertheless a need to internalise and preserve it; and (iii) a necessity to cultivate a new identity attuned to, and more in keeping with, the host culture. It is possible, perhaps, to create an excursus and liken discussion of identity and earthly exile to the Edenic exile; for, existentially, it goes some way, it is suggested, to explain the sense of cosmic loss, abandonment, and alienation that people feel in their sublunar setting.

¹⁵² TPOC, p.56. The relative success of the two religions’ contiguous existence (that is, Eastern Christianity and Islam) is captured by Dalrymple. “Only when you travel in Christianity’s Eastern homelands do you realise how closely the two religions are really linked...When the early Byzantines were first confronted by the Prophet’s armies, they assumed that Islam was merely a heretical form of Christianity”. (Dalrymple, W. *From The Holy Mountain*. London: Harper Perennial, 2005, p.168.) For another view, see, for example, Griffith. While stressing the differentiation between the two religions, he writes that Christians “strove to cultivate good relations with Muslims...Nevertheless, their acculturation into the Arabic-speaking, Islamic commonwealth inevitably resulted in a measure of Arabicization and even of Islamicization in their diction, both in Arabic and in their native languages...These developments in turn, along with a number of theological issues, seem to have played a role in the estrangement of Oriental Christians from their coreligionists in the West and outside of the world of Islam.” (Griffith, S. H. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p.175.)

conveyed by Khodr in his asseveration of Orthodoxy's continuing existence at a time when Islam was pervasive and comprehensively applied as the dominant culture.¹⁵³ However, there can surely be no certainty that such strict adherence to Christianity would always have been secure; there is a possibility that, under predominant Muslim occupation, Christians may have been swayed towards Islam, either through personal conviction or for pragmatic reasons.¹⁵⁴ What is clear is that human individuality, although not impervious to extraneous influence, can still retain the integrity of *self*. In other words, while it may be true that migrants do become absorbed by the host society, there is, nonetheless, a tendency in them, when the opportunity arises, to fraternise with people from their own culture, tradition, and religion. In the end, exiles straddle two worlds because the fear of losing one's cultural way and becoming psychologically stateless is very real. In the book, the fictional man alludes to a feeling of isolation and alienation, utterly removed from all that is familiar, and feeling marginalised as a result.

The Russians appeared to be adopting a range of tactics to retain a sense of *self*, laying down roots through a process of acculturation; creating their own Orthodox enclave of intellectuals and dedicated Christian theologians; zealously protecting Orthodoxy, yet vigorously promoting and re-emphasising Orthodox spirituality. Khodr would regard this as transcending a predominant

¹⁵³ Khodr says that the Church of Antioch is the only Orthodox Church that does not combine culture and faith; for them it is about faith alone. This, it is insinuated, is linked to their existence under Islam. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.)

¹⁵⁴ Whatever the theological complexities, they may have attracted Christians to the perceived accessibility of Islam. See Hourani, who points to the apparent and relative philosophical simplicity of Islam as a persuasive agent in the act of conversion, especially at times of Christological controversy. "Some Christians, however, touched by controversies about the nature of God and revelation, might be attracted by the simplicity of the early Muslim response to such questions". And the lack of formality, he adds, made the procedure of conversion relatively straightforward. (Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, p.29.) He also claims that converts to Islam may have been motivated by economic considerations – the avoidance of tax paid by non-Muslims. (Ibid.) See also Beaumont, who says that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, focusing on the Christological complexities of Christ, wanted to show "how much more rational is the teaching of Islam." (Beaumont, M. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims. A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cumbria: Paternoster, 2005, p.110.)

culture to express a common set of values – that is, common to East and West – grounded in a cosmic theology. Thus, it is argued, there is a subliminal message embedded in this section: in transcending their own Orthodox community to reach out to the religious ‘Other’, Christians are not creating a precedent.¹⁵⁵

As an illustration of transcendence and sublimation – whether to remain aloof from the host culture and retain one’s identity, or to immerse oneself in the new culture – the man in the book tells of one who retained his identity in the face of western influence. A young man, a member of the Orthodox congregation, was inordinately spiritual and possessed of great spiritual presence; he was one of a “rare group of people who rise above their culture and it does not rise above them”.¹⁵⁶ It would seem that he had a medical background, but, being deeply religious, had chosen instead to become a priest. His home is described as “a haven for the homeless”,¹⁵⁷ for the hungry and the dejected; and he was an expansive host, plying good wine, food, conversation within the civilised environment of a stylish home. He managed to cope psychologically with the trauma of migration because he loved the West,¹⁵⁸ and he had since his arrival as a child. Seemingly uninterested in the past, his problem, according to the man, was ‘modernising’ influences. Nonetheless, he had time for people and practised a profound humanity towards all whom he met. He died and was missed.

It is plain Khodr believes people who fall into this category, although appearing to be thoroughly acclimatised, do not necessarily become locked into a new and rigid identity. Instead, “the apostle must go beyond the boundaries of his own history, his own body and mind, without abandoning

¹⁵⁵ This is a section in the book (*TWOC*, pp.131-4) where he puts rising above one’s culture in a positive light. Asked whether he still agrees with this, he replies in the affirmative. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.) This could also be understood as pushing, or transcending, boundaries or barriers, for a boundary can become a barrier.

¹⁵⁶ *TPOC*, p.56.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹⁵⁸ “[H]e loved the culture of the West and the best there is in the Church of the West and embraced the affairs of the country”. (*Ibid.*)

the fabric of his humanity.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, those who are engaged in spiritual activities can overcome boundaries, transcending both national and group identity.¹⁶⁰ Hence, it would seem that a rejection of relationality, reaching out to the Muslim, cannot be reasonably justified by appealing to communal identity. A counterargument might suggest that national identity is not equivalent to communal identity; although, it is possible to demur at this.¹⁶¹ The whole point of communal identity, it may be argued, especially in a country like Lebanon, is that, in theory, it has the potential to offer an additional, more pertinent sense of belonging than national identity. It infuses a more powerful, more immediate sense of identity and engenders greater group loyalty in an environment where national unity is comprised of a multivariied confessional patchwork, wherein resides the possibility for intercommunal antagonism. As such, the underlying message in the book is that reaching out to the ‘Other’ can only be effective if the ‘I’ transcends its own communal identity to engage with the ‘Thou’.

11. The Need for Identity: Politics or The Spirit?

Earlier, it was noted how Khodr’s obstinacy served him well when, during the civil war, he steadfastly refused, even under pressure, to indulge in rabid denouncements from the communal barricades. The narrator, talking about the fictional man, says that, “It is certain that he never associated with any political current in his youth, and avoided all partisan engagement.”¹⁶² Thus, as in the book, so in his life, Khodr has never identified with any political movement and has fought shy of any official association with politicians. This attitude is given renewed emphasis when, elsewhere, Khodr refers to Amin

¹⁵⁹ *TWOC*, p.134.

¹⁶⁰ Berdyaev makes a similar argument to Khodr’s. In describing the two ways by which the individual goes out from subjectivity, Berdyaev states that the first path “proceeds by way of objectivication.” It leads to “forms of universal obligation...the way of science with its laws of universal obligation.” This results in the “alienation of human nature...The other path is...through the process of transcendence...on this path there takes place the existential meeting with God, with other people, with the interior existence of the world. It is the path not of objective communication but of existential communion. Personality reaches full realization of itself only on this path.” (Berdyaev, N. A. *Slavery and Freedom*. London: Bles, 1943, p.29.)

¹⁶¹ Cf. Bauman, who claims that in some instances ‘nation’ means the immediate neighbourhood. (Bauman, p.18.)

¹⁶² *TWOC*, p.32.

Maalouf, who “has realized the destruction that can result from the limitation of “identities” like one being from a certain village, or belonging to a certain confession or other qualities.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, it is clear that his justification for repudiating politics and the political ‘solution’ is rooted in his belief that, owing to humankind’s pathway to deification, political domination of the state can be, to put it generously, a mere distraction; indeed, it cannot offer any lasting existential ‘solution’. Earlier, it was seen how this is underlined by Khodr in a 2009 article. “People, who in their inner essences have become deep and deified...can make Lebanon...The homeland is to be founded from outside the political framework, from outside the political talk. It[s] foundations are to be raised on spiritual life, which descends upon it from above.”¹⁶⁴ Politics, far from being the major player must, on the contrary, be subordinated to the spiritual identity of the state. All this is reflective of Khodr’s philosophico-theological vision that runs like a leitmotif through his thinking, from the book to more recent times, that of compartmentalisation – the things of this world and the things of the Spirit must exist in parallel but not be confused. They are to remain discrete facets of the individual and elemental human identity.

For those who might protest that a spiritual and inevitably irenic stance jeopardises the Christian’s sense of identity at a time when Christians need to assert themselves to avoid expulsion, Khodr might reply that there is a difference between standing firm and reacting in a confrontational, semi-militant manner to perceived threats. Indeed, the juxtaposition of Islam and Christianity had ensured a clearer identity for the latter, a greater awareness of what Christianity stands for: “the fact that this country had lived in a recurring and permanent fashion within a Muslim context led it to become aware of itself, to affirm a set of Christian values that stand in contrast to Muslim civilization.”¹⁶⁵ And, as if to anticipate accusations of a covert Christian pursuit of religious domination, Khodr, in what may be described as a Kantian gesture, sweeps aside the very notion. “My friend considered the

¹⁶³ Khodr, *Identity*.

¹⁶⁴ Khodr, *The New Human Being*.

¹⁶⁵ *TWOC*, p.48.

idea of a Christian homeland a heresy from a solely political standpoint, but above all spiritually.”¹⁶⁶

With this in mind, it may be supposed that Khodr’s agenda is irrevocably connected to a religious mission, one that disregards worldly activity as inappropriate for the spiritual pathway and inimical to the human being’s search for an essential existential identity. This would appear to be not the case. Khodr is something of a realist in the sense that he recognises how some earthly institutions can feed the human being’s spiritual identity; but he is not alone in this.

Nellas draws attention to the Orthodox view that, despite the Fall, God ‘honours’ our earthly identity, clothing us in what is referred to as “garments of skin”¹⁶⁷ and equipping us for our postlapsarian state. The consequence of this is that politics, in its place, is acceptable, and secular institutions such as marriage are made holy; that said, there is a rider: when such secularism is pursued for its own sake, we are courting our final, complete destruction.¹⁶⁸ This accords with Orthodoxy’s more exalted view of humankind: the “theology of the image”; humankind’s innate divine identity and the call to regain it in full through the Archetype, Jesus Christ, and the mystical process of theosis. All of this could be said to be part of Khodr’s textual substructure, but it is occasionally made explicit.

Marriage is viewed by the man in the book as a valuable secular institution, although this position is as much to do with pragmatism as it is to valuing it *per se*. “To avoid immorality, the lover must either become a monk or

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Kant’s position is explored in his work, ‘The Critique of Pure Reason’, where the categorical imperative is explored at length. In brief, and vernacularised, it may be described as what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Do not follow a path, which, in another context, you would condemn. (Kant, I. *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. Norman Kemp Smith (trans.). London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1978.)

¹⁶⁷ The phrase “garments of skin” comes from Genesis. But see Nellas, p.44 and *passim*.

¹⁶⁸ “It [the “theology of the image”] honors the “garments of skin,” marriage, science, politics, art and the rest, without however hesitating to testify to mankind that when these are made autonomous they bring about the final consolidation of sin and the destruction of man.” (Ibid., p.95.)

marry.”¹⁶⁹ Monasticism is seen as a spiritual tradition that has generated “historical greatness”,¹⁷⁰ while from monastic institutions all over world flows a “divine magic”;¹⁷¹ but it is nonetheless a hard road and not for everyone.¹⁷²

Marriage “domesticates the ardor of the passions and, in principle, leads to serenity. It stabilizes life and allows for its transmission.”¹⁷³ Khodr, in the guise of the man, makes another pronouncement. “Conjugal fidelity is a school where we are educated in divine love. In marriage, the generous attitude of giving oneself and the practice of forgiveness initiates the human being into divine humility.”¹⁷⁴ While this would seem to argue that a marital relationship, whereby two identities merge (yet, similar to Trinitarian relationality, remain discrete in their own identities), can give us an inkling of God’s love, and that the very act of cohabiting offers the opportunity for “personal growth”, it would also appear to insinuate that marriage can, in part, aid theosis, the acme of human spiritual achievement and the fulfilment of our true identity.¹⁷⁵

12. Identity & Spiritual Destiny

At the start of this chapter, reference was made to Khodr’s statement that, “When you are a believer, God will bestow on you an identity.”¹⁷⁶ This

¹⁶⁹ *TWOC*, p.72.

¹⁷⁰ *TPOC*, p.52.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² “[W]e must not urge anybody to become a monk.” (*TPOC*, p.54.) In discussions of a similar hue, Khodr implies that deification, theosis – and he includes some Sufis in this – is not commonly achieved, although everyone is born, as Palamas maintains, with the potential. When it is suggested to him that this smacks of spiritual elitism, he replies that it is not an expression of belief, it is an expression of experience. In other words, deification is not governed by individual endeavour and ostensibly is beyond the control of human beings. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

¹⁷³ *TWOC*, p.73.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ In conversation, Khodr, while extolling the spiritual life exemplified in monasticism, sets a balance. “I have nothing at all against marriage...and very often I admire married people as being superior to some monks.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.) See also Symeon the New Theologian, who cites examples of those who live in the world, but are not part of it; how they can be better than the monks who retreat from the world. (Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, p.109.)

¹⁷⁶ Khodr, *Identity*.

interconnects with the definition of personhood offered by Kallistos Ware that personhood, when related to human beings, involves an amalgam of human nature and an awareness of being made in the image of God. Without the 'divine' element, there is, he says, a hole at the centre of human beings.¹⁷⁷

The part of the book where motley groups are adrift on a street late at night¹⁷⁸ is an important sequence in the story and will be cited in proceeding chapters because it is a rich vein involving other existential criteria. Here it is highlighted because it suggests people whose lives are empty of 'personhood'; instead, their existence is defined by that hole. As a consequence, they may be oblivious to theosis, to their divine identity, having marginalised all things divine. The scene is given a veneer of poetic poignancy. "It is past midnight and the wind is blowing outside."¹⁷⁹ Some wander aimlessly, others appear braced by the frivolity of some ephemeral avocation, something, it is inferred, intrinsically without purpose and indicative of an existential vacuum. Despite the impression of finality – it is the end of the night's distractions, the streets are dark and beset with a "glacial cold"¹⁸⁰ – these revellers "come out of theatres and cinemas and there are other ones who sway...as they are drunk. Running away, running away and running away."¹⁸¹ To the man, they appear to be in flight. But from, or to, what? They may have been trying to bottle life, to capture it in some artistic experience, a play or a film, or to stifle their sense of who they are in a bar. Whichever way they have spent the evening, they are seeking distractions, although in the case of theatre, people have sat in seats to experience life vicariously. "How do we freeze it, so that we may better analyze it."¹⁸² However different the pursuits of the night, they share a commonality. "The important thing, for them, is to get outside of the self. Who cares about the means? What

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January, 2017. See also his essay on the uniqueness of human beings. Ware, Kallistos. "In the Image and Likeness": The Uniqueness of the Human Person'. In: *Personhood. Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul*. J. T. Chirban (ed.) Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1996, pp.1-13.

¹⁷⁸ *TWOC*, Chapter 17, p.117.

¹⁷⁹ *TPOC*, p.47.

¹⁸⁰ *TWOC*, p.117.

¹⁸¹ *TPOC*, p.47.

¹⁸² *TWOC*, p.117.

matters is to achieve intoxication...art, wine, drugs. Intoxication is the end and the means, all at the same time, yet it always comes with great misery and distress.”¹⁸³ Later, the fictional man wishes he had approached one or two, “to start a dialogue with them, to enter a little into their misery”;¹⁸⁴ a dialogue that may have led to “my taking him along into my Christ.”¹⁸⁵

The reference to Christ is important, for this dark, novelistic, rendering of the human condition may be paralleled to Christ’s suffering, the psychological nadir of which he experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. For Khodr, Christ drained the cup of human suffering, even to its most bitter dregs, and, it could be argued, was constrained to do so in order to be fully human and to ‘fulfil’ his human identity. Khodr was asked whether one could say Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, experienced existential abandonment. Replying in the affirmative, he adds, “One could say, in a philosophical way, that Jesus felt a kind of atheism. What is atheism? – abandonment by God. Atheism is not a philosophical position, it’s existential. Yes, I think in his humanity, he felt he was alone, abandoned by his Father.”¹⁸⁶

Other than a manifestation of existential religiosity,¹⁸⁷ this seems a curious statement, giving way to a perspective on Christ’s Passion that may be regarded as unconventional, verging on the heretical, and, from a sense of identity, psychologically so convoluted as to suggest mental breakdown. Baldly, it suggests that Jesus, as God, disbelieves in his own existence; it can also be said to smack of Arianism.¹⁸⁸ The key phrase perhaps is “in a philosophical way”. For Khodr, atheism is “not a philosophical position”. But what does that mean? Perhaps, he is suggesting we can have thoughts of an

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.118.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁸⁵ *TPOC*, p.48. This earlier translation reflects, it is suggested, the more poetic tone of the text. The later translation offers, “to take a few steps with Christ” (*TWOC*, p.119); but, it is argued, the first version conveys the feeling of suffering with the sufferer, the difference between pastoral theology and existential religiosity.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 1, pp.2-3, and the characteristics of existential religiosity.

¹⁸⁸ Arianism, derived from Arius (c.250-c.336), claimed that Jesus was wholly man. It was denounced as a heresy in his own lifetime and disowned by the early Church.

atheistic grain, even though they have no rational spine, no vestige of philosophical foundation, meaning that disbelief in God has no basis in anything, let alone rationalism; equally, the same can be said of theism, belief in God. For atheists, the non-existence of God cannot be satisfactorily proven according to scientific principles; for theists, apophaticism could be said to hamper a personal relationship with God, who is 'beyond-the-beyond', and preclude any rational debate about him.¹⁸⁹ Both positions are convictions, individually conceived and experienced. The link here between theism/atheism and Orthodox theology is individual identity. The 'I' in atheism cannot recognise the Absolute 'Other' because, psychologically, the 'I' as an individual is not tuned to a numinous 'wavelength'; whereas the 'I' in theism, according to the Orthodox position, is positively animated by the absolute 'Other' because it connects to a belief that human identity is rooted in a special relationship with God, and that God has a special relationship with the 'I'. However, theosis – the other, more difficult half, of that relationship – depends neither on corporate or group consensus, nor on Divine coercion – that is, God's 'possession' of us and the subsequent taking over of our senses. Human beings have to submit themselves individually and willingly, to declare that they wish, personally, to realise their divine identity and embark on the theotic pathway – part of the process may even be described as *paradosis*, a 'handing over' to God – but, either way, this must be a conscious decision on the individual's part, a conscious move, as an *individual*, towards God, in order to instigate the deification process towards theosis.¹⁹⁰ Both atheist and theist must wrestle with their convictions and have their 'Gethsemane moment'.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Schuon talks about Beyond-Being to denote that which is neither knowable, nor describable. He also cites Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) in his conception of the Divine. "Let us note here that Meister Eckhart clearly defined this *distinguo* by calling Beyond-Being *die Gottheit*, "the Divinity", while reserving the word *Gott*, "God", for Being, which is the divine self-personification." (Schuon, p.159, Fn.17.) Later, Schuon refers to Beyond-Being as "the pure Absolute". (Ibid., p.183.)

¹⁹⁰ The Orthodox theology of deification is based on a symbiotic conjuncture. Grace is bestowed, which facilitates theosis, but theosis cannot be fulfilled unless we submit ourselves willingly. Deification is "at one and the same time, a gift of divine grace and an act of human free will". (Pelikan, J. Introduction. In: Maximus Confessor. *Selected Writings*. G. C. Berthold (trans.). New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985, p.11.) See also Ware, who succinctly expresses it, saying we can do nothing without God, but without our co-operation God will do nothing. (Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.112.)

Dealing with Christ's supposed 'disbelief' or doubt may be less troublesome for what is a post-Freudian age. First, there is modern psychology's assertion that our individual identity is comprised of multifaceted 'images', which usually acquire a harmonious syncretism, a 'face' that we present to the world. This delicate harmony, however, can be upset to the extent that an individual syncretism becomes unbalanced. The person of Jesus Christ, from a Chalcedonian perspective, was God-man, together in union, but neither mixed nor confused.¹⁹² Thus, the harmony within Jesus, in the dire and stressful circumstances leading up to Golgotha, could, perhaps understandably, have become disturbed. With the psychological syncretism disrupted, the human element of Jesus could have doubted the divine element; indeed, in these extreme circumstances, it may be argued that Jesus, rather than doubting the existence of God, doubted the existence of the divine element in him – in other words, that which defined him, his identity – thus undermining his entire existence. Clearly, such arguments stray somewhat into the vortex of Christology, which remains outside this study; nonetheless, a brief excursus was necessary to try to unpack Khodr's statement. Suffice it to say that Jesus, as God, had to experience the agony of existence, replete with all its

Such a view is reinforced by Lossky, who recalls St Macarius of Egypt's dictum that "The will of man is an essential condition, for without it God does nothing." (Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.199; Macarius. *Spiritual Homilies*, XXXVII, 10, P.G., XXXIV, 757 A.) It is similar to the Islamic conception of God's relationship with humanity, illustrated by the hadith, which says that if someone walks towards God, God will run towards them.

¹⁹¹ Another way of interpreting Khodr is to equate his statement about philosophical atheism with Cartesianism, or intellectual doubt. Descartes may not have in reality doubted the empirical world, reserving his certainty for his own understanding or thinking; it was perhaps more of an intellectual exercise to unravel a philosophical perspective. So Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was putting his own human capacity for theistic belief to the test, as do so many human beings – believers, disbelievers, and agnostics. This may be described as pushing the barriers, a hard, gruelling, and, in this instance, painful experience. See Descartes. 'Fourth Meditation. Of Truth and Error.' In: *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*. F. E. Sutcliffe (trans.). London: Penguin Books, 1968, pp.132-141. See also Williams, *The Edge of Words*.

¹⁹² The tension between the Creator and the created, the human and the divine, that is presented to us in the God-man dynamic of Christ, recalls the exchange between Timothy I, the Nestorian Patriarch, and al-Mahdī, the 'Abbasid Caliph in the latter quarter of the eighth century. See Thomas, D. 'Early Muslim Responses to Christianity.' In: *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule. Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*. D. Thomas (ed.). Leiden: Brill, 2003, pp.244-5.

existential characteristics of fear and abandonment common to the human condition, including the existential quandary, 'Who am I?'.¹⁹³ It is this existential quandary and people's concomitant fears that the fictional man identifies in the souls wandering aimlessly about the night streets. These are people who are unclear about life, about their purpose, and about how to live. Questions hang over them, fears hound them: 'am I really happy in my job'; 'who can I turn to?'; 'I might lose my job'; 'I'm afraid of getting old and being alone.'

What may strike one when reading Khodr's statement about Christ in Gethsemane, is the utter despair, the totality of the blackness, which Jesus must have felt in the Garden and on the cross. It uniquely epitomises a complete sense of hopeless abandonment, the impenetrable existential darkness of the kind that can afflict human beings and enfold their lives in a stifling fog. With regard to our identity and how human beings are created in the image of God, Jesus' suffering still conjures, theologically, a dystopian vision wherein resides a kaleidoscope of jarring shapes and patterns, an inversion of Cartesianism, whereby a solipsistic confirmation of personal identity echoes with a painful emptiness, in which every effort at intellectual fumbling for something solid, palpable to grasp or hold on to, is defeated. Add to this a consideration of an apophatic Father, and for Christ there was nothing left and the effect threatened, psychologically, to eviscerate him.

Rendered in prosaic terms, this existential identity crisis can be manifested when people feel they are contravening their fundamental identity by being in the wrong job, the wrong marriage, the wrong place – it curdles feelings of existential suspension, perhaps nausea, sometimes even panic. It is now

¹⁹³ Jesus' mission, it is suggested, was not just salvific, but existential. See, for example, Ayoub: "A savior is not simply one who dies for the sins of others but also one who heals the sickness of the human soul". (Ayoub, M. 'The Miracle of Jesus'. In: *A Muslim View of Christianity. Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*. I. A. Omar (ed.). New York: Orbis Books, 2007, p.115.) See also Pelikan, who quotes Theodosius of Alexandria in one of his epistles: "...the humanity which the Logos had taken up into his one nature "did not omit any of the things of which a human being consists"." Pelikan, J. *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine. Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974, p.58; Thds. Al.Ep. (CSCO 103:3 [17:8].)

apparent that transgender people feel they are in the wrong body; and even if we cannot fully understand what this means, we must accept the agony of identity, the sense of personal alienation, the desperation, and the suicidal thoughts that all this, putatively, engenders.

In so describing Jesus' existential state in the Garden and on the cross, Khodr is reaffirming the theological assertion that God took on the identity of human beings to suffer with us, that is, suffering not just in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, but to the utmost depths in life. It underlines what is behind the fictional man's sentiment when he looks at the broken people on the street and says how he wanted to initiate a dialogue that may have led to "my taking him along into my Christ."¹⁹⁴ This statement by Khodr of Christ's philosophical atheism can be said to represent Khodr's own theological position – that is, human identity entails human suffering of the utmost bleakness, and reaching out to human suffering is a manifestation of existential religiosity.

13. Conclusion

This chapter on identity highlights a number of observations on Khodr the person, both in secular and spiritual terms, which have been gleaned from the book and supported by his other writings. As alluded to earlier, Khodr employs literary artifice in the former to convey his own thoughts,¹⁹⁵ in particular, the fictional man's stint in the joinery is devised to address the equality of rights for workers.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ *TPOC*, p.48.

¹⁹⁵ See Chapter 1, p.7.

¹⁹⁶ Contrast this concern with the issue of human rights. Orthodoxy is suspicious of human rights as they are understood in the contemporary world, and they are so for socio-theological reasons, three of which are outlined by Papanikolaou. "... (1) its [human rights'] seemingly inherent link to atheistic humanism; (2) a secular, human rights rhetoric implies a marginalization of religion from public life that is especially problematic for traditional Orthodox countries; (3) human rights language is grounded in an anthropology that is individualistic, a-relational, and solipsistic and, as such, incompatible with a Christian theological anthropology." (Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.87.) According to Hirvonen, there are similar reservations in the Muslim world because human rights are perceived as coming from the West. (Hirvonen, p.320.) Unease with Western influence is not the exclusive province of the Muslim world; Jillions claims "there is no doubt that large parts of the Orthodox

He talks about the tedium of the workers' lives, how they have little or no time for uplifting pursuits, their work being the filling in a daily sandwich between sleep and domestic responsibilities. The man in the book – and it is here one can more clearly conflate Khodr and the fictional man¹⁹⁷ – takes up their cause; and, while recognition of the workers' plight is little different from the concern of other reformists, what sets Khodr apart as the author is the fact that here is a bishop of the Orthodox Church using the episode to harangue the powers that be and impugn the army. Khodr, in writing this, is prepared to stand up for these principles because of his recognition that all people, no matter their rank or standing, have their spiritual identity in the image of God, and thus it is essential to ensure everyone's rights are preserved and safeguarded. As a result, it is necessary to fight on behalf of the downtrodden for the dignity they deserve as human beings made in the image of God. However, it is not only the establishment – the bosses, the rich, the powerful – that is an open target for Khodr; he castigates the Lebanese in general for romanticising their origins, accusing them of resorting to “boasting” about an

world still have a hostile view of the West.” (Jillions, J. A. ‘Orthodox Christianity in the West: the ecumenical challenge.’ In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.277.) See also Zizioulas, who explains why “any ethics based on natural law or the idea of justice and the ‘rights of the individual’ would become unacceptable.” (Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.68.) See also the pre-conciliar document, *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*. “The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society...The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition.” (Holy and Great Council, June 17-26, 2016. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*. 5.2-5.3; www.holycouncil.org (Accessed 8 August, 2017).)

¹⁹⁷ In conversation, it is clear Khodr, as someone with a socialistic streak – it may be recalled that Abou Mrad described his theology as liberal conservatism – and one who practises a Christianity described here as existential religiosity, sides with the downtrodden. The essence of his thoughts on social equality, distilled from an admixture of his other writings, consolidates this view. As a call for restraint on people's greed and acquisitiveness, a reminder to reset one's priorities and give to the poor, see, for example, Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Lust for Money’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 29 August, 2004. “Do not ask how much money you should give today; give according to your love. You have to strengthen your desire for giving in order to get rid of the slavery of acquisition.” (See also Abou Mrad, Chapter 3.)

identity “lost to the past.”¹⁹⁸ It is an example of someone who does not care whom he confronts or offends, and exemplifies existential religiosity.

The fictional man’s involvement with the Union may give the impression that human beings are of primary importance. While this may be essentially correct with regard to their spiritual identity, another passage, contrasting the East and the West, contains veiled criticism of the latter for placing man, puffed up and proud, centre stage – “he believes in himself, in his brains and his analysis and his criticism, in his keeping away from mystical tales, in his seeking after a system which, at the peak of its inventiveness, is called technology.”¹⁹⁹ This is an indictment of a culture whereby human beings are, paradoxically, exalted, but have their spiritual identity confounded by modernity and their uniqueness quashed by secular conformity to an impersonal rationalism. Khodr has an alternative vision in mind for the East and has committed himself to salvaging his country’s own sense of identity, spiritual and secular.

In making it plain this is what he would like to achieve, he sets out how this new identity should take shape. His quest is not for a theocracy. A realist, insofar as acknowledging that secular politics must have a leading role, he nonetheless makes an unequivocal pronouncement that spirituality must be at the root of the new state,²⁰⁰ and, as Khodr says, “I shall build my homeland by the language of the deified ones and their pursuit. And deification means to be molded by the dispositions of God”.²⁰¹ Politics is tolerated, but subordinated to spirituality and humanity’s reclaiming of their natural identity in theosis.

If some of the realities of the material world are accepted within limits, materialism is treated to a sceptical eye. While sharing his views on womanhood, which seem at odds with contemporary thinking, the fictional man describes how women have been duped into engaging in “a whirlwind, in

¹⁹⁸ *TWOC*, p.30.

¹⁹⁹ *TPOC*, p.37.

²⁰⁰ “Next to the union with God that we seek in the spiritual quest, men’s encounter according to the manner and themes of politics is irreplaceable.” (*TWOC*, p.32.)

²⁰¹ Khodr, *The New Human Being*.

a satanic cycle”²⁰² – the use of the word ‘satanic’ is as arresting as it is comminatory – in which consumerism and the appetite for goods thrives and creates the seedbed in which retail technology can flourish. It is a viewpoint that is not without support,²⁰³ but here it is couched in theological terms with a teleological twist – human beings deserve better than anything that the consumerist world can offer because their intrinsic identity gives them a claim to theosis and a destiny in eternity. However, if the Orthodox Church is the gateway to this destiny and the realisation of our true identity, Dannaoui’s observation may potentiate a problem. In the new world of post-civil war Lebanon, politics and religion have been so intermingled that the political affiliation of a confessional community can imply its religious identity and *vice versa*; and, it could be argued, the ensuing blend produces a religiosity that is expressed through ritualistic observance rather than spiritual commitment – in short, it is a religiosity bereft of the kind of spirituality Khodr envisions or promulgates.

The priest may be considered to be the one most propitiously placed to amend this imbalance, but Khodr’s bluster when referring to some priests’ spirituality does little to imbue confidence. “The truth is that these have faced a religion other than the one I know. They found in front of them some preachers’ prattle, a description of a heaven and a hell that befit [*sic*] dwarfs.”²⁰⁴ As for others who purport to be religiously observant, they appear to be spiritually bankrupt. Khodr remarks elsewhere that “The Lord knew that some of the people murmur the commandments but don’t have a true encounter with God.”²⁰⁵ The latter extract has echoes of Khodr’s trenchant views, as expressed through the man in the book, that the priesthood can dispense a religious message that is mere “prattle”; and, by doing so, it insinuates what the later article states explicitly – that is, religion can become perfunctory. In another work, he again warns about routine. “The heart often becomes lukewarm and the person becomes a victim of his appearance, of

²⁰² *TPOC*, p.49.

²⁰³ See, for example, Khalaf, *Lebanon Adrift*.

²⁰⁴ *TPOC*, p.55.

²⁰⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘What is Eternal Life?’ Mark Najjar. In: *Raiati*, 28 November, 2010.

his speech or of his church social life... Sometimes he might make Christ drown in the masterful rituals... You cannot continue the journey being lukewarm. Remember that the Lord spits the lukewarm out of his mouth."²⁰⁶ Categorically resisting any compromise, it is a position that defines Khodr's religiosity, his existential religiosity. The only divergence is stylistic in tone. While it is clear there is concinnity in the variety of literary output, in the book, Khodr can camouflage the passion of his feelings by cloaking them in the outburst of the main character.

Disparagement aside, the work of parish priests in their capacity as pastoral carers seems nowadays to be impressive. But herein lies the nub – the difference between efficient professionalism, epitomised by modern methods of pastoral care, and existential religiosity. The latter represents Khodr's belief, and insinuates a primary requirement that, apart from effective care, one must suffer with the sufferer. "The priest must be a suffering person like us so that he may be able to help those who have been led into temptations."²⁰⁷ Put more baldly, and as stated earlier, human identity entails human suffering, and reaching out to human suffering, rather than ritual observance, is a manifestation of existential religiosity. Indeed, Christianity itself comes across as a 'suffering religion'; suffering is part of life, and God, who shared our humanity in Christ, plumbed the depths of human suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross.²⁰⁸ This empathetic suffering is expressed succinctly when the fictional man, echoing Khodr's own thoughts, says that he would like to have approached one or two of the people on the street, "to

²⁰⁶ Khodr, Bishop George. 'To The Priest'. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 27 July, 2003.

²⁰⁷ *TPOC*, p.53.

²⁰⁸ See Wallace-Hadrill, who states that the distinguishing feature of Antiochene theology is "the reality of Christ's humanity". (Wallace-Hadrill, D. S. *Christian Antioch. A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.26.) The existential dimension of Jesus' worldly existence is also reflected by Bouteneff. He argues that the Fathers believed "Christ heals human souls...by suffering, by experiencing temptation and natural passions". (Bouteneff, P. 'Christ and Salvation.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.99.)

attract him into a dialogue that may lead into his taking me along into his misery or my taking him along into my Christ.”²⁰⁹

Finally, if theosis is our true identity, Khodr is mapping out a means by which human beings can embark on the pathway to attaining it. But first we have to adjust our own earthly identity, to skew it more towards a spiritual lifestyle, which means having to amend our vision of what it is to be a human being. What he suggests may seem challenging and demanding: implementation of workers’ rights; the bringing forth of man’s feminine side; marriage wherein love becomes a foretaste of Divine love; dispensing with the kind of nationalistic aggrandisement that fosters a pretentious national identity; subordinating technology, and modernity, to the ‘spiritual’ needs of humankind; accepting that the state, modern society, must be rooted in a spirituality administered by those advanced on the theotic pathway; allowing politics a role in this new society, but a role that will not depart from the precepts and directions of the spiritual foundations of the state; a priesthood prepared, not only to take sufferers “along into my Christ”, but to coax people beyond the limits of ritual observance to experience a spirituality that can act as the grounding for their eventual theosis.

Unreasonable, if not unrealistic, all this may be, but the road was never going to be easy and the failure rate is forever and discouragingly high. Khodr observes that “Nietzsche said: “The last Christian died on the *cross*”. I do not consider what he said fully wrong though he did not hit the mark because he did not know the glory of the martyrs and the saints...But he is right in that you cannot be another Christ though you try to be like the savior to a great extent.”²¹⁰ However, it is argued here, it is in the gap between what is reasonable and what may appear unreasonable, between the aspirational and the failing, that existential religiosity can appear.

²⁰⁹ *TPOC*, p.48.

²¹⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christ and the Christians’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 16 May, 2009. Emphasis in text.

On the other hand, to those who would argue that breaking ranks – with one’s own community, one’s own identity – to defy ‘the powers that be’ is a risky business, Khodr’s defence might be that, although it courts disapprobation, social ostracism, and worse, it is what Christ wants and asks of us. As the narrator observes at the time of the man’s tempestuous involvement when fighting for workers’ right, “And my friend was fully convinced that Christ was on his side and on the side of his understanding”.²¹¹ Reforging a more assertive identity in such ‘ascetic’ fires may indeed be risky, but as the fictional man says, “Christianity is resurrectional in its entirety.”²¹² And, acknowledging that it still seems a high price to pay with the suffering and the heartache and the hurt such an agenda can cause, he adds, “That is why it [Christianity] all passes through Golgotha.”²¹³ It is Khodr’s existential religiosity, manifested in uncompromising Christianity, and his unrelenting commitment to Christ, that puts into context the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr’s existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

²¹¹ *TPOC*, p.22.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.59.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

Authenticity

In the last chapter, Khodr's autobiographical novel was examined through the prism of identity. There followed an analysis of the implications of the findings, and, as a consequence, it was posited that Khodr is deeply concerned about his country's identity in the face of modernity, and firmly believes that modernity can hamper the individual's progress towards theosis, the authentic identity of all human beings. There was also a supposition that he harbours a vision of how the situation might be rectified and the threat averted. As a broad generality, Khodr's book focuses on the need to conform one's life to spiritual authenticity, which can lead to theosis and the regaining of one's true, authentic, identity. However, prior to exploring authenticity through the book, it is necessary to define authenticity as it is understood within this work.

1. Authenticity: Contextualising The Term

From an existential perspective, authenticity constitutes, at its core, the exercising of one's free will;¹ and, by extension, the development of one's own identity. However, Buber and Fichte stress that an encounter with the 'Other' is necessary for the 'I' to be fully formed. Within a spiritual dimension, this is corroborated by the Elders Barsanuphius and John, who maintain that the path to self-knowledge lies in trusting "at least one other person".²

From another perspective, the 'I' can experience something of a dilemma when encountering the 'Other'. In being subject to myriad influences, deriving perhaps from pressures to conform to community or parental aspirations, or from the need to meet familial responsibilities, a tension may arise in the 'I'

¹ "The authentic person...is one who acts, chooses and evaluates fully conscious that he or she does so as a free being."¹ (Cooper, D. E. 'Existentialism as a Philosophical Movement.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Steven Crowell (ed.) UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.43.)

² Chryssavgis, J. 'Solitude, Silence, and Stillness: Light from the Palestinian Desert'. In: *The Philokalia. A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, p.272. Barsanuphius and John were monastic elders in sixth century Palestine. See *ibid.*, pp.264-5.

between what others expect of it, and what the 'I' personally wants to develop within itself as an autonomous being. In this instance, an authentic human being is one who does not necessarily kowtow to the wishes of the 'Other', to the whims of the crowd, or to mass consensus. If we do, *forfeiture* occurs and we "betray ourselves by living in the same superficial way as everybody else – an indifferent life on a low level."³

This might seem at odds with the positive aspects of the 'I/Thou' paradigm, but, as Macquarrie emphasises, Buber himself was not unaware of "the other side of the coin",⁴ that is, the potential disadvantages of conforming to the 'demands' of the 'Other'. By conforming, "[w]e do not attempt to understand what we are doing; our behaviour is determined by habit, custom, or a vague sense of what is required...We do not talk seriously about matters of any importance; it is bad taste to discuss religion, politics, or philosophy."⁵ Thus, authenticity can mean both the development of one's inner self and refusing to capitulate to a crowd mentality, which traps the 'I' in an anaesthetising web of superficiality where day-to-day concerns, at once routine and trivial, prevent the exploration of insightful meaning.⁶

Transposing these interpretations of existential authenticity to a spiritual context, it may be found that the philosophico-theological conundrum of resolving who we are as an individual entity, what we are meant to be, and how we are supposed to live, hinges on the belief that we are made in the image of God. This, in turn, implicates our potential, which is enwrapped in theosis, our rightful destiny. In spiritual terms, this means what is real in the world is subordinate to a greater Reality in which we have our being and our destiny – in other words, what is more true (authentic) is associated with this Reality, and this Reality governs what is more true. Nevertheless, commitment to this pathway can be derailed by two factors: first, by our

³ Roubiczek, p.134. *Forfeiture* is the term Roubiczek uses when discussing Heidegger's explication on authenticity.

⁴ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.121.

⁵ Olson, R. G. *An Introduction to Existentialism*. New York: Dover Publications, 1962, p.137.

⁶ "Instead, we talk shop or gossip about friends." (Ibid.)

succumbing to the lures and trappings of the world, which distance us from what we really are – *beings* made in the image of God; second, by our failure to live according to the precepts of Christ – loving one’s enemies and one’s neighbours, turning the other cheek, rejecting vengeance, looking after the poor and those who are victims of life. In brief, by harking to the Sirens of material attractions and effectively marginalising Christ’s values, we become both spiritually marooned and inauthentic.

Returning to Khodr’s autobiographical novel, which, to some extent, is both a philosophico-theological statement and a spiritual treatise, the task of this chapter will be to identify those parts of the book that illustrate or flesh out this spiritual perspective of authenticity. To this end, the chapter will apply a five-fold paradigm of ‘universal’ features that comprise the concept of ‘authenticity’, as it is understood within the parameters of this work: (i) examples of modernity that, according to the book’s purview, distract from humankind’s spiritual identity and destiny; (ii) references to our being made in the image of God; (iii) emphases on theosis; (iv) allusions to the precepts of Christ – loving one’s enemies and one’s neighbours, turning the other cheek, rejecting vengeance, looking after the poor and the disadvantaged; and (v) evidence of preoccupation with worldly values and success, exemplified by, for instance, the pursuit of power and position.⁷

2. Authentic Spirituality

2.1 Fractured Christianity

Earlier, in Chapter 4, it was observed how Khodr is not overly enamoured with ecumenism and is openly disillusioned about intra-Christian dialogue. The man in the book, however, expresses concern that the Church is splintered, for, it is implied, this traduces the very essence of Christianity. “Indeed, faced with the phenomenon of the division of the churches, how do we take seriously the claim that the Savior has come to gather God’s scattered

⁷ In the original Arabic text, it was found on occasion that the Arabic words for ‘authenticity’, *asala* and *asrah*, translated as ‘purity of origin’ and ‘more pure’; which, it is maintained, correspond in essence to the meaning of ‘authenticity’ as it is understood in this work.

children?”⁸ This gaping gap in the Church’s universal fabric is a cause for shame, but then, “The Church is not a perfect society”.⁹ In conversation, Khodr believes ecumenism is making no substantive progress, and that real division is not attributable to theological issues; instead, he claims it has more to do with administrative structures, such as, it is suggested, papal infallibility.¹⁰ This contrasts somewhat with another of his observations made in 2006.

“These [“difficulties that exist to this day”] are theological issues and cannot be overcome easily.

Saying that we want to become united today whatever it takes is rejected because Church issues are serious issues and problems cannot be solved without the opinions of Patriarchs, bishops and scholars.”¹¹

An article from two years earlier, is similar in tone. Citing a document from the Vatican, Khodr singles out a sentiment, which he clearly cannot countenance.

“Christ’s Church is present as a whole in the Catholic Church. This is the strongest statement that isolates the Orthodox Church from being the Church of Christ...too. As for the Papal letter on the Eucharist, it says that the offering must be done by a bishop that is united with the Pope. This suggests that the Orthodox Liturgy has a defect in it...In addition...the meeting that was held by the “Papal council for Christian unity” on the “Service of St. Peter” was disappointing because the Roman documents in it didn’t contain anything that shows a change in the Catholic position that is related to the status of the bishop of Rome.”¹²

⁸ *TWOC*, p.141.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.146.

¹⁰ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

¹¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Rapprochement Among Christians’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 5 February, 2006.

¹² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Where do we stand from [sic] the Rapprochement with the West?’ Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 8 February, 2004.

These four illustrations of his thought, evinced through the book, interview, and two articles, may appear, in parts, to be a rough fit with each other. However, beneath this apparent contradiction – an antinomy that defines his existential religiosity – there is an underlying harmony. In interview, when he refers to division that is not attributable to theological issues, Khodr explains that structure is what distinguishes the Eastern Church from the Western Church. “If you go deeper in[to] the East, you don’t find a notion of structure – legal or juridical”.¹³ However, if theology may be defined as “The study...which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His *relations* with man and the universe...”,¹⁴ the Church as an institution represents, in its relational capacity, an organisational framework, which implies systemic structure as a means for God to relate to his creatures. It must thus follow that structure has an inextricable link to theology. Papal infallibility might seem a structural stumbling block to ecumenism, and yet the unpicking of its origins will reveal it to be an expression of a particular theological interpretation. Likewise with other so-called administrative ‘structures’, whose origins may be traced to dogma. It would appear that in Khodr’s thinking, there is an insurmountable chasm existing between the Western Church and Orthodoxy, brought about by simple, yet fundamental differences on authenticity. Having identified the reality of this, it is understandable perhaps that Khodr might appear somewhat indifferent to talk of unity. It comes across in the book, where the fictional man seems to regard the process by which countless edicts, papers, and speeches have been produced as something of an industry, but this is not to say he wants to undermine the work of ecumenical campaigners.

“I do not wish now to criticise this ecumenism which has turned here and there into monotonous bureaucracy, to a factory that produces its own products and markets and exports it to prove to itself the necessity of its survival...It has drowned in boring papers”.¹⁵

¹³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

¹⁴ Little, W., Fowler, H. W., Coulson, J. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*. C. T. Onions (ed.). London: Oxford University Press, 1970. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁵ TPOC, p.62.

Despite his reluctance to carp, this attitude scarcely constitutes a ringing endorsement of ecumenical efforts to restore Christian unification; rather, it suggests that serious commitment has been swamped by pronounced disdain. Khodr's prejudices towards ecumenism may have been coloured by his personal experience of colonialism, particularly his time as a pupil when he was subjected to what was perceived to be the attitudinal superiority of some of his teachers, who talked down Orthodoxy while promoting the Catholic Church as the true faith.¹⁶ This is echoed in the book.

“Although [writes the narrator] he was indebted to these teachers for his knowledge of the basics of Christian religion, my friend detested their ignorance of his Church and their contempt towards it, both in their books and on their lips. Later, he understood that certain elements of the Christianity they taught him were nothing but aspects of European colonization.”¹⁷

Further on, the narrator refers to the teachers' insistence that Catholicism was authentic Christianity: “the Roman Catholic Church alone was the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ.”¹⁸ It is clear his views on the division between Rome and Orthodoxy did not mellow after the book was published: “the Church of Rome is in an intellectual status that isn't moving towards us...The global Christian situation is in crisis and needs...divine grace to be changed. However, I don't think that right now Rome would soften its position and that the shaky trust between the East and West would be strengthened.”¹⁹

This dogmatism on the part of some Catholic teachers, and the consequential inference that all other denominational forms of Christianity are approximations of an authentic Christianity centred in Rome, would clearly have had an effect on impressionable minds. Khodr's personal view of Catholicism as an auxiliary form of colonial hegemony would also have been compounded when, as a student, he witnessed 'Jeunesses Etudiants

¹⁶ See Wehbe for more on the general reception of Catholicism in Lebanon and, in particular, Khodr's disillusionment with it.

¹⁷ *TWOC*, pp.20-1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Where Do We Stand From The Rapprochement With The West?' Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 8 February, 2004.

Catholiques’, the Catholic youth movement, actively inveigling Orthodox students, amongst other denominations, to join this overtly Catholic organisation.²⁰ But such matters of faith work both ways. The fact that he cleaves to Orthodoxy suggests that he would propagate Orthodoxy as the authentic version of Christianity.²¹ However, the narrator offers another perspective. “[H]e [the fictional man] became convinced that sanctity was not confined by any walls of separation. God dwells in those hearts it pleases him to visit, and he gives himself to man without regard for his methods of prayer, nor for his dogmatic convictions.”²² It is a clear statement that to be an authentic Christian does not necessitate belonging to a particular denomination; and, furthermore, being authentically spiritual, it is may be argued, does not necessarily mean being Christian. This is a theme in Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’ that Avakian highlights. For the former, “Any human being is every human being.”²³ Avakian also points to his conviction that Christ belongs to a pluralistic humanity and is not the sole property of Christianity.²⁴ Khodr expresses similar views of inclusive spirituality through a much earlier article. “Nevertheless, the view of the apostle [Paul] as expressed in his Areopagus speech is that the Athenians worshipped the true God without recognizing Him as the Creator. His face had not been unveiled to them. In other words, they were Christians without knowing it.”²⁵

Running through the whole of Khodr’s canon and across the decades is the conviction that God is not confined exclusively to Christianity and that authentic, valid, and valuable spiritual experience can be gained by pathways other than Christianity. It is a conviction that feeds his interreligious

²⁰ Wehbe, pp.20-1.

²¹ In discussion, he says that Muslims do not yet feel the necessity for dialogue with the Orthodox Church because they themselves feel they are complete, Islam being regarded as the final word of God. When it is suggested that this is what an Orthodox would think, he laughs and replies, “That’s right.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.)

²² TWOC, p.22.

²³ Avakian, p.118.

²⁴ Ibid., p.122.

²⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christianity in a Pluralistic World’. In: *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol.23,1971, pp.118-128, p.119. Sharp makes a similar point with the same article by Khodr. (Sharp, p.52.)

philosophy and his theology of the 'Other'. This article from 1971, 'Christianity in a Pluralistic World', pre-dates the publication of his book, while a later article 'I Have Called You Friends' juxtaposes Islam and Christianity, drawing parallels between the experiential spirituality of Christian mystics and Sufis, between Paul's theology and Sufism, and culminates in his statement, "The "Household of Christianity" is not a self-asserting community as over and against the "Household of Islam."²⁶ His much later article 'The Others' (2012) reminds readers that God sees the 'Other' as necessary so that "the light might be manifested through the encounter... You and the other are in the family of the Father, in which all turbulence vanishes, and the soul faces the soul, since each is the mirror of that loving God."²⁷ As such, Khodr's thinking represents a spiritual perspective that is very much open to other versions of 'the truth'.

2.2 The Role of the Priest

As was seen in the previous chapter, Khodr, through the auspices of the book, expresses an idiosyncratic view of some Orthodox priests and how they represent authentic Christianity. These views are reflected in other writings.

"A priest cannot consider that he is a shepherd for simply going to a family and asking about their health and their children's education: This is only a social contact and not pastoral care because the latter should be based on God's words. If this priest didn't say divine words such as verses from the Holy Book or from a life of a saint and if he wasn't able to answer the questions people ask, this visit would be a waste of time... Perhaps, someone among the brothers haven't [*sic*] heard this before and thought that the whole thing is about rituals."²⁸

According to the man in the book, the priest's application of spirituality is impaired because he is subservient to a self-willed worldliness.

²⁶ Khodr, Georges. 'I Have Called You Friends.' In: *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXI, Nos. 3-4, July-October, 1981, pp.163-177, p.176.

²⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. 'The Others.' S. Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 28 July, 2012.

²⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. 'The Priest, the Shepherd'. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 27 May, 2012.

“As for the priests, many of them are unaware of their responsibilities within the Church, but are content to bask in a decadent clericalism. Such behavior would be excusable if it came from an ignorance imposed by historical circumstances. But nothing can justify priests whose total lack of initiative suggests either a lack of faith, or an apparent disinterest in Christ and the spiritual life.”²⁹

Khodr believes that if the priest’s education is lacking, “let him start studying for the first time. I have some priests that have become excellent after understanding this and recognizing that priesthood cannot be separated from fatigue.”³⁰ Here, these extracts represent different pieces of a jigsaw that comprise Khodr’s coherent vision of the priestly role. The fictional man bemoans how priests are “unaware of their responsibilities within the Church” and may be disinterested “in Christ and the spiritual life.”³¹ From ‘The Priest, the Shepherd’ comes an assertion that the priesthood and studying are inseparable, that the priest should be an uncompromising spiritual agent, blind to worldly distraction, and aware that their visit to parishioners should not concern itself only with family matters; they should also be a conduit for “divine words”. In another article, having stated that the first job of a priest or bishop is to teach, he writes, “How could a person teach if he doesn’t know anything or if he knows just a little? Therefore I will not respond to the request of those that want me to let a person with little knowledge into priesthood just because he is pious.”³² Throughout these extracts, a clear thought process becomes evident, one that hinges on his idea of what the role of an authentic priest or bishop should be. As such, Khodr implies a stringent job description that is very much in keeping with his own uncompromising existential religiosity.

In discussion, he talks about bishops, who are “convinced the Church has to be rich...and to be in very good relations with the rich people and the powerful

²⁹ TWOC, p.123.

³⁰ Khodr, *The Priest, the Shepherd*.

³¹ TWOC, p.123.

³² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Virtues of the Priest and Bishop’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 29 January, 2006.

people”.³³ He goes on to say they belong too much to this world, that they start off with good intentions, but become persuaded that it is necessary to consort with, and be on good terms with, the rich and powerful, because they believe it will benefit the Church and attract the faithful.³⁴ This is reflected by the man in the book, who issues what sounds like a proclamation. “The idol of money must fall down, the domination of the wealthy must be eradicated; every philosophical or political call that would sanctify wealth and the wealthy...must be exposed.”³⁵ In Khodr’s eyes, even those among the rich and powerful who give to the Church do not practise authentic Christianity. “I know people in my Church who are very active building churches and houses for the Church and give money and who believe they are Christians because they don’t murder or commit adultery...they are happy about themselves...[they behave] according to the law...But of course this is the Mosaic understanding – which continues now in the Church in some countries. And they are nothing.”³⁶ His distaste for the power that money can bring – and, he might venture, *vice versa* – which is virulently proclaimed in the book is thus given unambiguous support by Khodr in conversation. In a more recent article, Khodr shows a suspicion about the worldly appurtenances associated with wealth because he implies that they create an obstacle to an authentic existence, how a person should conduct their life. He writes candidly that the rich may not naturally be disposed to Christianity. “It is hard for the rich to feel that they are in need of God. This requires of them to touch the reality that all [that] they have is nothing.”³⁷ In conversation and in his written work, it is clear Khodr sees danger in the seductive power of worldly acquisition and success. The fictional man strips himself of possessions and flees from ambition and career – “[h]e had to sell his books”; “he decided not to take up literature as a profession”.³⁸ Elsewhere, Khodr is

³³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *TWOC*, p.60.

³⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.

³⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Those in Need of God’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 20 April, 2013.

³⁸ *TWOC*, p.54; *TPOC*, p.18.

emphatic: “Pride threatens successful people and active priests.”³⁹

Throughout these cited works, there is a common denominator: Khodr is making allusions about what authentic Christianity entails.

Khodr’s criticism of the priesthood does not end with their supposed fraternising with the rich and powerful; he is, through the man in the book, unsparing in his observations about what he sees as the inauthentic way priests fulfil their routine duties. “Many examples convinced my friend that possessing faith and professing respect for the sacred did not necessarily go hand in hand. A person [a congregant] can shuffle through religious words and perform ceremonial rituals, yet be an atheist at the same time.”⁴⁰ This is not only a call for experiential spirituality rather than ritualistic observance, it insinuates that some priests give cursory attention to the dispensing of an authentic spirituality – that is, a spirituality which awakens congregants’ awareness of the divine constituent in their true nature, persuades them to disassociate themselves from selfish worldly aims, and inspires them on their own theotic pathway. This, however, is balanced by another observation where he implies that Eastern Christians are more spiritual than Western Christians. “I firmly believe that the multitudes of poor people in our country possess attributes of the heart which generally seem to have been lost in the West.”⁴¹

This is as much about authentic spirituality as it is about being a Christian. In Khodr’s view, one should not describe oneself as something without reflecting it in practice – it is uncompromising and thus a characteristic of existential religiosity. For instance, one should not claim to be a pacifist and then advocate violent retaliation, whatever the provocation. In the last chapter, it

³⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘To The Priest’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 27 July, 2003.

⁴⁰ *TWOC*, p.45. Cf. Habibis. She cites the example of a Sufi sheikh, Abdullah Daghestani, who “could be very direct and had no compunction about expressing his opinion of the behaviour of those around him, regardless of their social position. According to Sheikh Nazim he told the Mufti of Syria that he was not a real Sheikh.” (Habibis, D. ‘Change and Continuity. A Sufi Order in Contemporary Lebanon’. In: *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*. No.31, July 1992, pp.44-78, p.70.)

⁴¹ *TWOC*, p.102.

was stated how Khodr, in discussion, cited Régis Debray, a Frenchman, who declared himself to be an agnostic belonging to the Catholic culture. Khodr finds this an extraordinary statement to make without faith and was genuinely baffled by it. In his view, the phrase ‘agnostic Catholic’ is an oxymoron. How can one claim to be a Catholic and be without faith? For him, this was a contradiction.⁴² In similar vein, to claim to be a Christian without authentic spirituality would be, for Khodr, anomalous.

2.3 Institutions & The Image

If some Orthodox Christians have their faith mediated through priests, who, in Khodr’s opinion, officiate with a degree of insouciance, the congregants’ spirituality may start to fray and wear thin. Assuming Khodr is not wholly wrong, it would be appropriate to wonder how the Church of Antioch, as an institution, balances the organisational dimension of Christianity with Orthodox spirituality. And is it possible he is suggesting that the Orthodox Church is becoming more like the Western Church? Khodr quotes Feuerbach and how “western man” prefers the image to the original, a direct allusion to what is authentic and what is not.⁴³ However, it is argued, this may be a slightly skewed interpretation. Although Feuerbach may unconsciously have been referring to Westerners, there is little to indicate he is identifying this trait as specifically Western. It has even been suggested that what Feuerbach is really responding to is the advent of photography.⁴⁴ As far as Khodr is concerned – and notwithstanding his love of painting and poetry – he is making an observation, through the man in the book, about the apparent preference people have for artistic expression or interpretation, rather than authentic, firsthand experience of life events. In an ironic passage in the book, the fictional man comments on movies: “As for the cinema, we see it as

⁴² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

⁴³ “[T]he western man, according to Feuerbach, “prefers the image to the thing and the copy to the origin and the act to the reality and the appearance to the true form.” *TPOC*, p.47.

⁴⁴ See Susan Sontag’s article ‘Photography Unlimited’ in *The New York Review of Books*, June 23, 1977. (Accessed August 13, 2014.)

an image of the image, a copy of the acting that takes place in the studio.”⁴⁵
In other words, doubly damned. He hastens to add, however: “This does not prevent the cinema from being a great industry”.⁴⁶

Khodr is not condemning art. He would probably accept that artistic expression is a valuable tool for understanding reality *qua* existence, but this may be missing the point. We can read a poem, marvel at the penetrating force of allusion and imagery conjured by a sophisticated literary technique, wonder at the underlying skill which can breathe life into an embryonic idea, but, what Khodr is insinuating is that this should not intimidate the reader into renouncing their own (creative) responsibilities to experience existence; it certainly should not exempt them. Reading such works, viewing such paintings, should act as a collective *paraenesis*, an artistic, ethereal encouragement to delve into ourselves, to be in touch spiritually with a cosmic wholeness – or, for the theist, to be in touch with the source of all creation, God.⁴⁷ Transposed to a religious setting, it is beholden on the individual congregant to experience personally, authentically, what is being alluded to by the priest and transmitted by the atmosphere. Are human beings all guilty of inauthenticity; preferring instead either to experience vicariously or to duck the responsibility entirely? What is the difference, the fictional man rhetorically asks, between theatregoers and those who imbibe at bars?

“How does this production [“theorising theatre”] differ from drink which other groups take as they enjoy themselves...And no doubt there are other groups of young people who take drugs and each one of these is seeking to realise himself; seeking a completeness that, he imagines, lies in going out of himself without lifting himself up to God or seeking him as a pole. The important thing is to get away irrespective of the purpose; ecstasy, whatever its images are, art or wine or opium, is the

⁴⁵ *TPOC*, p.47. This extract was brought to his attention during an interview on 25 October, 2013.

⁴⁶ *TPOC*, p.47.

⁴⁷ His latent criticism, through the book, of theatre and cinema could be said to hinge on the spectator/entertainment aspect of these pursuits, which lulls the creative intellect into a merely absorbent mental facet.

end and the means at the same time. All this is accompanied by the great misery.”⁴⁸

What is perhaps being suggested here is that the seeking after vicarious experiences and the ingurgitation of drugs and alcohol are not a quest for authentic existence, that is, being true to our ‘divine’ selves, but a flight from it; and it may not be whimsical to suggest that “the great misery” refers to existential anxiety.⁴⁹ Working back from this phrase, and using this interpretation, this may, it is argued, be described as a descant on the human condition – or more precisely, the different ways human beings variously deal with a sense of befuddlement when they consider *being-in-the-world*, and how they benumb their senses in order to cope with the realisation of ultimate failure that mortality renders all our earthly endeavours.⁵⁰ Seen from an existential perspective, such lifestyles are blatantly inauthentic in the sense that they are living a lie, dousing the true *self* in anodyne activity so as not to experience authentic (spiritual) life.

Khodr’s discomfort with artistic representation must be weighed against other factors. For instance, as has been established, he is a lover of impressionistic painting. When questioning the tendency, deriving from the Feuerbach quotation, to prefer the copy to the ‘real’, the man in the book asks, “Does this quotation preclude the possibility of art? No.”⁵¹ However, he goes on, “But it places it into serious question unless art becomes capable of creating life

⁴⁸ *TPOC*, p.48. In the later translation, the man in the book asks: “What are the benefits of such speculative theatre?” (*TWOC*, pp.117-8.)

⁴⁹ It is worth drawing out Khodr’s existential religiosity at this juncture by suggesting that the exercise of reaching out to people, as depicted here, is not to offer a panacea for their troubles, it is to ease the burden of existence by helping people to see their true destiny. A similar point is made in St. Matthew: “Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” (Matthew 11:28.) In other words, Jesus was not offering a ‘cure-all’ for the pains of existence, but temporary rest and loving empathy – a ‘pit stop’ for spiritual rejuvenation. See also Markides. “Christ was not speaking of things of this world...He was not trying to make this world better and more just. Whatever Christ offered us through the Gospel had a deeper meaning, the salvation of humanity, our eternal restoration within the Kingdom of God.” (Markides, p.174.)

⁵⁰ “...everything shall fail in the end...the achievements of history will all wilt like grass in the desert.” (*TPOC*, p.24.)

⁵¹ *TWOC*, p.117.

itself.”⁵² This is to assume that art is lifeless, that it cannot propagate in the viewer a creative reaction that will inform and shape that person’s thinking. On the contrary, art has the potential, it may be argued, to do the job of the priest – to implant a personal ‘spiritual’ experience that will take seed within the individual.

But can this discursion on image, distilled from the book, serve as a fair appraisal of Christianity? Following on from Feuerbach’s remark about preferring “the sign to the thing signified”, he (Feuerbach) makes an observation that is, arguably, relevant.⁵³ He writes that, “Religion has disappeared, and for it has been substituted...the *appearance* of religion – the Church – in order at least that “the faith” may be imparted to the ignorant and indiscriminating multitude”.⁵⁴ Feuerbach’s judgement about Christianity comes down to its being a copy of something else.⁵⁵ That ‘something else’ is described here as authentic – genuine, true – and is in accord with the definition at the start of this chapter: authenticity means the real, whether that be the real *self* or our real destiny in theosis, which *is*, Khodr would maintain, Christianity. Earlier, it was stated how the man in the book says that a person – and arguably this could refer to the priest or a congregant – “can shuffle through religious words and perform ceremonial rituals, yet be an atheist at the same time. Faith is not a mere assertion, but a joining of oneself.”⁵⁶ Such a description would appear to correspond to Feuerbach’s assertion. But, in a general sense, Feuerbach may be mistaken; following Khodr’s argument, the accusation of ‘inauthenticity’ does not apply to Christianity *per se* because, as

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For more on semiotics, and words as linguistic signposts, see Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who was fifteen when Feuerbach died.

⁵⁴ Feuerbach, L. Preface (1843). *The Essence of Christianity*. G. Eliot (trans.). New York: Harper & Row, 1957, p.xxxix. His emphasis. Interestingly, Pelikan highlights that “for the hoi polloi of the church [of the eighth century] the icons were a cherished object of religious devotion and a valued source of religious instruction”. (Pelikan, p.132.) In other words, for those who were ill-educated and could not read, they were a tool that informed and complemented their religious knowledge and worship. In this sense, it would seem that, for Feuerbach, the entire Church had become an icon.

⁵⁵ Cf. Nellas who states that “Christ constitutes the image of God and man the image of Christ; that is to say, that man is the image of the Image.” (Nellas, p.24.)

⁵⁶ TWOC, p,45.

discussed earlier, it is the role of the priest to instigate or enliven authentic spirituality within the congregant. In other words, “the *appearance* of religion” is not a default position of Christianity; it is slippage that can occur if the priest is not executing his duties adequately.

2.4 Monasticism as Prototypical Christianity

Later in the book, the fictional man describes how he goes on monastic retreat a few times every year. He repudiates any insinuation or assertion “that monastic life is an escape from engagement and struggle in the real world.”⁵⁷ In *The Pathway of Childhood*, this is expressed in colourful language: it is rejected “even to the point of vomiting”.⁵⁸ The people “who say such things know nothing about the reality of Christianity.”⁵⁹ On the contrary, monasticism is seen as quintessential Christianity, and it imbues the man in the book with reinvigorated spirituality, a glimpse of heaven. “Monasticism is a prototype of the Kingdom to come”.⁶⁰ According to Wehbe,⁶¹ Khodr spent time as a monk early in his adult spiritual life and it is clear he is naturally inclined towards a reclusive routine.⁶² Khodr’s attraction to monasticism is made clear in a short piece Khodr wrote in 2010, following a visit to Mount Athos. Khodr eulogises about the monastic environment, the structured spiritual worship, and the physical beauty of the natural location. “If...nature [on Athos] is very beautiful then the piety is even more beautiful...It is a center

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.128. See Clément, who claims that, without monks, the Church would perish. (Clément, O. *On Human Being. A Spiritual Anthropology*. J. Hummerstone (trans.). London: New City Press, 2000, p.74.) Payne offers another perspective, claiming monasticism helped to shape “the tradition and theology of the church”. (Payne, p.140.)

⁵⁸ *TPOC*, p.55.

⁵⁹ *TWOC*, p.128.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.126. Monasteries, however, may not always have included the right kind of Christianity. See, for example, Dunn, who claims that in early Christianity and the formative years of monasticism, monasteries harboured the heterodox, including Manichaeans. She adds that in the late fourth century, Timothy Ailouros, Bishop of Alexandria, allowed meat to be served on Sundays so he could identify Manichaeans. Followers of Mani were not carnivorous. (Dunn, M. *The Emergence of Monasticism*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000, p.21.) See also Chapter 4, where reference is made to monasticism in comparison with marriage.

⁶¹ See Chapter 3, p.73.

⁶² See Abou Mrad, Chapter 3.

for Orthodox worship with an exceptional strength and inspiration.”⁶³ Khodr, like the man in the book, valorises monasticism as a quintessential spiritual existence, and, owing to its very nature – solitude, humility, a meditative life of worship, a decisive rejection of the secular – it is connected to existential religiosity. But the notion of retreat that defines monasticism is partly qualified by its link to the Church, which lends it authenticity. However, it could be said that, for Khodr, monasticism and the Church are not two different entities. Monasticism *is* the Church in its most refined and pure state. Khodr makes the Church’s ‘pre-eminence’ clear in another article. “You cannot exist outside the magnificent prayers and teachings that make you see the beauty of the Lord. He who has not tasted that beauty finds it easy to say that “he prays on his own” and that the spiritual side of his life is private. No man is an island...None of us was born in a desert; we all have drunk from this living water (the Church’s life).”⁶⁴ More explicitly, Khodr has written, “Solitude might help one in the spiritual life but not necessarily so for certain”, going on to say that monks, and clergy, “might put you in a frame...and thus you do not progress spiritually.”⁶⁵

Thus, there appears two sides to his argument. On the one hand, monasticism, for the man in the book, is the prototype,⁶⁶ while Khodr claims the piety on Athos is more beautiful than the natural landscape. On the other hand, Khodr infers that the Church is pre-eminent in the spiritual life and that monasticism could hamper spiritual progress – once again, it might seem that inconsistency creases the smooth fabric of his argument. And yet, for Khodr, both sides of his argument hold true. Monasticism, he might say, can be the highest form of spirituality, but only if the person is already inclined towards it. The Church, however, which not only includes “the magnificent prayers and teachings” but informs the staple of monastic routine, is the centre of all

⁶³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Mount Athos’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 17 October, 2010.

⁶⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Church and the Prophets’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.) In: *an-Nahar*, 20 August, 2005. His parentheses.

⁶⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christianity and Institutions’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 November, 2011.

⁶⁶ *TWOC*, p.126.

devotion and worship. Authenticity is not a 'one size fits all' concept; on the contrary, you can be an authentic Christian and not a monk.

Denying that monasticism is an escape from the struggles of life may be slightly disingenuous; for, it might be argued, the reason why monasticism is such a spiritual boon is precisely because of its disengagement from the world and from the values and traditions that define it. As if to illustrate this point, the man in the book claims that the spiritual joy he experiences "can be apprehended neither by science nor by philosophy, since it can never become an object of analysis."⁶⁷ The science and philosophy alluded to are very much part of the secular world; and the rationalism that pervades even the East is powerless to analyse, explain, or replicate the spiritual experience inspired by the monastic retreat. The man in the book, however, adds that, "I do not seek to negate my reason, but rather to restore it to its proper dimensions."⁶⁸ Thus, it would seem, reason must itself be purged of worldly influences to become more authentic. What Khodr is outlining here is a difference between reason and rationalism. Rationalism, it may be argued, is that which is exercised as part of discursive, intellectual activity; reason is that which can, for example, artistically conjure images on a canvas or words on a page. This distrust of rationalism is caught by the narrator.

"Always he [the fictional man] was learning to be wary of intellectuals who made knowledge into a closed world – a world where sophisticated ideas with no grip on reality, strangers to wisdom, danced a waltz and enslaved man to their magic. The professional intellectuals were bent upon stirring up these ideas after they had changed them into principles and beliefs and rational systems, or social codes. There

⁶⁷ *TWOC*, p.128. Cf., for example, Gallaher, who elucidates Bulgakov's antinomism thus: "By antinomism is understood that with any theological truth one has two equally necessary affirmations (thesis and antithesis) which are nevertheless logically contradictory. In the face of their conflict, we are forced to hold both thesis and antithesis together through faith." (Gallaher, B. 'The 'Sophiological' Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism'. In: *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.66, Issue 03, August 2013, pp.278-298, p.278.)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127.

was often no more truth to this organizing than the desire to satisfy a certain logic.”⁶⁹

However, having asserted that authentic spirituality is something that cannot be rationalised, the man in the book casts doubt on the rationality of some of the worshippers. “Of course, the Church may sometimes become a club for the simpleminded and a refuge for the mentally unstable.”⁷⁰ According to the man in the book, some people may only think they are practising Christianity. These observations lend the research question renewed relevance.

3. The Church as an Organisational Structure

The implication of Feuerbach’s observation is that the Church, as an organisation, has institutionalised spirituality, which, it is contended, may have causally adulterated its spiritual message. As has previously been established, Khodr is implacably opposed to power and has expressed disapproval of those who court it, even for the Church’s sake. As alluded to earlier, his distaste for worldly power is a theme that occurs throughout the book – for instance, “[e]xcessive wealth leads to power, and power inclines the soul toward tyranny”⁷¹ – and it has echoed down the years in more contemporary writings, to demonstrate a consistency in his thinking. “I am afraid that the Church...feel[s] that Her strength is in the institutions She has while Her power resides in Her holiness.”⁷² This can be compared to the fictional man’s disillusionment: “I expect nothing from those cautious institutions – secure in their wealth, their universities, and the charm of their rituals – that we call the Church.”⁷³ The language here may be more florid, a little more extreme, because he can use the fictional man’s feelings vicariously to show his contempt for the institutionalising of spirituality – and of course to jolt – but, in essence, Khodr the man and Khodr the ‘novelist’ are

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.20.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.128. In *The Pathway of Childhood*, the translation is a little more blunt: “the temple can become a compound of imbeciles and a shelter for lunatics.” (*TPOC*, p.55.)

⁷¹ *TWOC*, p.61.

⁷² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christianity and Institutions’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 November, 2011.

⁷³ *TWOC*, p.153.

trafficking the same message: the very nature of institutions cannot help but undercut the authenticity of true spirituality.

If institutions are the embodiment of power, Khodr shows he is suspicious of what institutional Christianity stands for: “But Christianity is revolutionary against the legalistic system that comforts itself...[by] the existing of a higher human authority that is never wrong in what it says. The authoritative mentality between leaders and subordinates is extremely comforting, it simplifies the decision-making on any level, simplifies the redaction of any text and it sleeps on the pillow of the infallibility of the council and saves the faithful the hassle of thinking and standing on the rock of testimony and martyrdom.”⁷⁴ In other words, the institutionalising of Christianity replaces experiential engagement and treats the faithful as incapable of individual experience, reducing religiosity to unthinking, perfunctory, group observance.

However, the institutionalising of the message may be inescapable, for the evolution and existence of the Church necessitates organisational structuring, which, in turn, has the potential for compromising its spirituality.⁷⁵ An example

⁷⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Spirit and the Blood’. [No translator cited.] In: *an-Nahar*, 30 October, 1999.

⁷⁵ Pelikan includes some interesting perspectives on how the organisation of the Church was inspired. “There was, of course, a pragmatic and even a political aspect to the administrative structure of the church.” (Ibid., pp.157-8) As a counterbalance to this, see Louth, who, exploring Maximus the Confessor’s ecclesiology, says that for Maximus, “the Church...is a sovereign body, with its own institutions. However deeply bound up with Christian Empire it might be, it may not be confused with it.” (Louth, A. ‘The Ecclesiology of Saint Maximos the Confessor.’ In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2004, p.118.) Later, Pelikan cites Dvornik’s claim that the early Church structured its own organisation on the political organisation of the Roman Empire, rather than on the apostolic tradition. (Pelikan, p.169.) Both Pelikan citations, it is argued, indicate the possibility of a non-spiritual dimension at the heart of the Church. That said, it is worth considering Erickson’s observations. Referring to the “canonical corpus” as a collection of “conciliar and patristic texts”, he says, “[t]hose responsible for these texts were concerned...with maintaining the sacramental life of the Church, with safeguarding our full access to God in Christ...Church structures and institutions were meant to safeguard this reality. They were not considered apart from this reality, much less as something over this reality and controlling it in some way.” (Erickson, J. H. ‘The Church in Modern Orthodox Thought: Towards a Baptismal Ecclesiology.’ In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 11, Nos. 2-3, May-August 2011, p.138.) Later, he reports Father Schmemmann’s comment that “the

of this may be found in the historical formation and functionality of the Orthodox Youth Movement (OYM), which was instigated to restore the Church's spiritual authenticity. Such a development called for a structured dissemination of the OYM's spiritual message, which may have presented something of a paradox: dissemination on this scale requires organisational prowess, which risks overriding the spiritual message and introducing eventual hierarchical sclerosis. Georges Nahas, Vice President of the University of Balamand and a founder member of the OYM, does not agree. While acknowledging it is always difficult to sustain a balance between maintaining an organisation and avoiding institutionalisation, it is possible, he believes, to keep the two strands – organisational and spiritual – running freely, mutually unopposed and in tandem with each other. He is convinced the two are not necessarily contradictory or antipathetical. It is possible to be a hierarch, he maintains, to have a strong spiritual life, and work within the organisational structure that is the Church, so long as one does not invest the institution with the importance people sometimes ascribe to it. But, he admonishes, this depends on a vital balancing of the two strands: the institution or organisation must never be stronger than the essence that is at the core of Christianity – in other words, its spirituality. This, says Nahas, is achievable; the Church, he asserts, already has hierarchs who are able to accomplish what may be regarded as a subtle balancing act.⁷⁶

Concern about these two elements co-existing within the same theological corporate body is not unique. In discussing sixteenth/seventeenth century Eastern Christianity, Pelikan says that “Eastern doctrine, while insisting that the Holy Spirit would not permit the church to capitulate to heresy, continued to describe the church in a manner that did not completely equate its spiritual reality with its institutional structure”, adding that “the church...could not be identified with a legal corporation.”⁷⁷ Nonetheless, there is no concrete

Church is a sacrament with institutions, not an institution with sacraments.”
[Erickson's words.] (Ibid., p.141.)

⁷⁶ Interview with Georges Nahas, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

⁷⁷ Pelikan, p.289. See also Macquarrie, who claims Bulgakov believed “Eastern Orthodox Christianity...is not the rigid petrified survival that the rationalistic mind of the West so often imagines it to be...the Church...is to be regarded not as an

reason to doubt Nahas' assertion that the Church of Antioch possesses the necessary capability to run spiritual and institutional matters in tandem without either compromising the other; but, equally, one must take account of Khodr's critical stance towards the Church and his antipathy towards power, which, in earthly terms, is manifested through organisational structures. For the man in the book, faith is above such worldly issues. "Christianity is not an institution we join as if it were a club, a party, or a nation...Christianity is a building with no roof."⁷⁸ In other words, its authenticity lies not in its physical structure, but in its ethereal spirituality. It is also a statement that stands in stark contrast to exclusivism.⁷⁹ As Khodr expresses it elsewhere, "there is no evidence that those who enjoyed the great Cathedrals had more piety than the Bedouin Christians."⁸⁰

It is clear that, across the years, Khodr has not modified his tone with regard to what Christianity and the Church should represent – a structure that is open to the world, one that is comprised of people rather than stone blocks. In an earlier article, where he talks about the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, he asks the question, where does the Church stand in all this? "The answer that I venture to give is that the church, which is the body of Christ, has some kind

institution but as a life...faith is not a doctrine but life itself." (Macquarrie, J. *Twentieth Century Religious Thought. The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1980*. London: SCM Press, 1981, p.205.) Pagels is of similar mind. "...I wondered when and how being a Christian became virtually synonymous with accepting a certain set of beliefs." "I know from my own encounters with people...believers, agnostics, and seekers...that what matters in religious experience involves much more than what we believe (or what we do not believe)." (Pagels, E. *Beyond Belief. The Secret Gospel of Thomas*. New York: Macmillan, 2003, pp.5 and 6.)

⁷⁸ TWOC, p.124.

⁷⁹ Reference to exclusivism recalls the 'extra Ecclesiam nulla salus' of the Catholic Church. Steenberg, however, highlights an Orthodox equivalence in the pronouncement of Cyprian of Carthage that "outside the Church there is no salvation". But, he says, although this can suggest exclusivity, it can be interpreted as meaning that "all who are saved are *in some sense* [his emphasis] within the Church." (Steenberg, M. 'The Church.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.132.) See also Stylianopoulos, who claims that Irenaeus argued forcibly for scripture to belong exclusively to the Church. (Stylianopoulos, T. G. 'Scripture and Tradition in the Church'. In: *Ibid.*, p.24.) Rotenstreich's claim that organisations limit spontaneity suggests an institutional desire to exert control, which may have pertinence here. (Rotenstreich, N. *Alienation. The Concept and its Reception*. Leiden: Brill, 1989, p.81.)

⁸⁰ Khodr, *Christianity and Institutions*.

of relationship with this Kingdom. However, the church is not only the body of Christ...It is also human. It consists of human beings who receive the Spirit of God".⁸¹ This belief that the spiritual authenticity of the Church is mediated through people rather than buildings is obliquely supported by Khodr's comment in interview, cited earlier. "I know people in my Church who are very active building churches and houses for the Church...who believe they are Christian...they are nothing."⁸² Collectively – that is, through the book, other written work, and in discussion – these observations highlight his perspective on power and money, but also what he believes the Church stands for – a spiritual entity rather than a physical building. In the later article, he suspects that the Church, given the opportunity, would usurp the state as a centre of power: "Everything indicates that the Church wants the language of the world and the ways of the world, and that She considers Herself as an alternative for the State". What is forgotten, Khodr continues, is that "Christ came to change...the logic of the world...If we do not use Christ's logic, then automatically we are of the mind of the world; and we would adopt the ways of the world and empower ourselves with its power."⁸³ Authenticity, while acknowledging the world, requires complete severance from the secular. Again, it shows his uncompromising existential religiosity.

4. Modernity, The World & The Spirit: Conflict of Authenticity?

How will Christianity be healed, the Church reformed, and authenticity restored? Certainly not, the man in the book surmises, through the convening of learned members at formal conferences, or within the portals of hallowed institutions where intellectuals deliberate.

"Councils and church seminars will never restore Christianity's authenticity. All too often, these meetings are nothing more than occasions for new speeches and analysis, all couched in elegant language that seems insightful.

⁸¹ Khodr, Bishop George, 'The Kingdom of Heaven'. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 November, 2009.

⁸² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.

⁸³ Khodr, *Christianity and Institutions*.

“Eternal life is not the domain of intellectuals and scholars, but of those who are wounded and disfigured.”⁸⁴

As for the Church itself, it would appear Khodr does not see it as an unfailingly efficacious institution successfully inculcating and inspiring spirituality; and, for him, as expressed through the man in the book, “The Church, in the end, is not an establishment.”⁸⁵ In discussion, it is clear Khodr laments the discordance between what the Church should stand for and what it actually is in the world. “The terrible thing is for the intelligent Orthodox to see the gap between Orthodoxy as an idea or an absolute and the real situation of the Church. How this wonderful Church in principle is so weak here and there.”⁸⁶ In a corresponding passage in the book, the man in the book says, “Only her [the Church’s] immersion in the problems of the world will give the Church, whose usual jargon seems so out of step with reality, the necessary power to speak intelligently about her social and political positions, and also about her theological issues.”⁸⁷ It is a plea for a kind of religiosity that will make a communicational connection with the secular world and the suffering humanity in it, to talk their language; in short, it is a plea for the implementation of existential religiosity.

As for the Church’s subsidiary organisations, its ‘outreach’ and ways of spiritually influencing people within the wider world, Khodr himself implies there is no ready formula, and the obvious solution can be no solution at all. “It is well known that some of the avid atheists in the West did their studies at institutions run by monks...I have witnessed spiritual splendor in people who have been pastored by priests who have little education and I have witnessed spiritual lukewarmness in people who had a great spiritual guide.”⁸⁸ Spiritual enlightenment will come by way of devices of which we know little; for, as the

⁸⁴ *TWOC*, p.153. In the earlier translation, it reads, “survival is...for those who have been tortured by suppression or disfigured by persecution.” (*TPOC*, p.65.) In the original Arabic version, it is *asalat* – meaning trusted, true, genuine – that has been translated as ‘authenticity’. This is via the root *saraaHa*, meaning frankness, openness, candour, sincerity.

⁸⁵ *TPOC*, p.38.

⁸⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

⁸⁷ *TWOC*, pp.156-7.

⁸⁸ Khodr, *Christianity and Institutions*.

man in the book observes, “The Holy Spirit distributes this breath wherever he pleases.”⁸⁹ It is another way of saying what Khodr stated in the article – that is, no matter what the intellectual or social environment may be, spirituality may be implanted by other means. This may be compared with Khodr’s understanding of the apophatic God and “The Divine Darkness of Unknowing...We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community.” He refers to “the night of an expectation...the common night of our common expectation”. While this has strong interreligious overtones, it also implies experiential spirituality, the authenticity of which is validated through inner awakening or revelation; and this, it may be argued, has little to do with formal religious learning environments.⁹⁰

The route to the authentic life, so Khodr’s argument goes, is not via cerebral debates and analyses; and it may also be the case that the laity, in general, are interested neither in the intellectualising of spiritual matters, nor in academic opinionating on doctrine. What they perhaps might prefer is the comfort of the Liturgy recounted with a spiritual assurance capable of inspiring their own spirituality. It is an experience that, according to the man in the book, and as noted earlier, “can be apprehended neither by science nor by philosophy, since it can never become an object of analysis.”⁹¹ What is more, he continues, “It resembles delirium or insanity. However, only this experience can guard us against the pitfalls of literature, politics, and the narcissistic contemplation that threatens the overly cultivated mind.”⁹² It could be said that such a statement is a gift for sceptics and unbelievers, who might argue this is tantamount to owning that experiential spirituality seeps from an unstable mind to become set within a systematised framework of beliefs that are inevitably – because of their origination – flawed. A counterargument – and this may be what Khodr, through the man in the book, supports – may be that means do not govern validity. Whether Paul’s conversion on the road to

⁸⁹ *TWOC*, p.156.

⁹⁰ Khodr, *I Have Called You Friends*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁹² *Ibid.* This contrasts with the fictional man’s assertion that the Church can be peopled by the “simpleminded” and the “mentally unstable”. See above, p.163.

Damascus involved an epileptic fit, or Teresa of Ávila's visions were the result of sexual privation and voluntary incarceration, is beside the point.⁹³ If God is to communicate with people, the supposed fact of his communicating, by dint of its communicator, is bound to be extra-ordinary – that is, out of the ordinary, deviating from what is considered the normative, rational, perfunctory routine of everyday life.⁹⁴ Further, the channel or method by which God communicates does not necessarily invalidate the communication. If two people hear voices, one may be schizophrenic, the other may be a thoroughly 'sane' mystic.⁹⁵ The means or 'condition' by which God communicates is merely the vehicle, and if this is an epileptic fit, or springs from a psychologically flawed mind, this is, the argument might go, irrelevant. As Khodr observes, through the man in the book, it (experiential spirituality) is a kind of madness.⁹⁶

The incongruity of rationalism and intellectuality when applied to existential pressures and matters spiritual has been taken up by Khodr elsewhere.

“Yet knowledge, no matter how wide it can get, does not alleviate the impact of neurosis nor inner anxiety, or family problems, or the isolation we feel in the church where things are not working out as we expected when we sought its revival...We can never rid ourselves of the fear of

⁹³ See Underhill, who says “rationalistic writers” have attributed mystics' experiences to “hysteria or other disease”. She even claims Teresa has been dubbed “the patron saint of hysterics”. (Underhill, E. *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. New York: Dover, 1930, p.58.)

⁹⁴ Von Balthasar makes a similar point when citing Seeberg's analysis of Lutheran theology. Seeberg writes that “In Christ, we see the way in which God acts at large, namely, in opposition to reason, evidence and so on.” (*Luthers Theologie II* (Stuttgart 1937), pp.8ff; von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Mysterium Paschale. The Mystery of Easter*. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (trans.). San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, p.62.)

⁹⁵ Of course, the schizophrenic may also be the recipient of Divine communication.

⁹⁶ James argues that to those who look through the lens of medicine, “these ecstasies signify nothing but suggested and imitated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition, and a corporeal one of degeneration and hysteria.” James' response is that this is all very well, and may be true in some cases, but we must look beyond the symptoms “for knowledge of the consciousness which they induce”. (James, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1960, p.398.)

the future or the fear for our health which is threatened with heart disease, cancer, hypertension...”⁹⁷

Bracketed with palpable fears, relating to such issues as health, are the more abstruse existential concerns of anxiety, neurosis, fear of the unknown future. It mirrors the empathy shown by the man in the book towards the crowds of lost humanity on the streets,⁹⁸ which was cited earlier in Chapter 4. It also shows that Khodr’s concerns about the existential pressures of life are endemic to his spirituality. While recognising that suffering is a part of life, Khodr contextualises it theologically in a later article, attributing suffering to the loss of our authentic identity and our subsequent postlapsarian state: “what we have now is that every rational creature is stricken in soul or body or both at one stage of his life or throughout all of his life.”⁹⁹

While acknowledging that science and technology have their place and their worth, he writes that the worshipping of them, “constitutes a new religion.”¹⁰⁰ Although he does not say as much, this may amount to a *substitute* ‘religion’, which overshadows and stifles what is referred to here as authentic spirituality. Insofar as Christianity is concerned, there is no point in the believer searching for a logical base in which to root their faith. Whereas the man in the book says that his experiential spirituality “resembles delirium or insanity”,¹⁰¹ Khodr makes it explicit where he thinks spirituality fits in with rational knowledge. “I always get shocked at the claims of atheists, skeptics and those who waver in their faith, that they base their claims on human logic...[W]ho says that all human logic and thought is sane and superior? There is no logic in the absolute.”¹⁰² The fictional man and Khodr are clearly of one voice. The former is convinced that experiential spirituality does not accord with any notion of normality. Khodr, himself, while declaring that there is “no logic in the absolute”, also implies that atheists and those of similar ilk

⁹⁷ Khodr, *Idols*.

⁹⁸ *TPOC*, p.47.

⁹⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Suffering’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 April, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁰¹ *TWOC*, p.128.

¹⁰² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Those in Need of God’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 20 April, 2013.

like to maintain that their doubts and disbelief are rooted in firm rational positions. How, Khodr might argue, can this be so when their assertions undermining spirituality cannot be empirically proven. If experiential spirituality, what both Khodr and the fictional man might describe as the hallmark of authentic Christianity, cannot be put under the microscope and studied in laboratory conditions, neither, realistically, can atheistic claims.

On the other hand, Khodr does not believe science and technology are inimical to the Christian faith. “I would go so far as to say that the Lord is connected with ethical, artistic and scientific revolutions currently taking place in the world; in one or another manner they reveal his presence in the universe.”¹⁰³ As cited earlier in Chapter 4, such a view is echoed by the man in the book, who says how a certain level of technology is needed so people “can maintain a level of security that enables it to grow and flourish under an atmosphere of freedom.”¹⁰⁴ This kind of positive language can be interpreted to show how technology can aid human beings to live authentically. As Khodr states in his article ‘Idols’, “[k]nowledge is not a danger... technology...is good in itself”.¹⁰⁵ Does this make the Church capable of accommodating modernity, and being the fulcrum of a revived, authentic spirituality? The man in the book is, in his early days, positive. “Surely the Church would bring about man’s renewal, and he would see this revival with his own eyes.”¹⁰⁶ He soon, however, comes to learn that youthful aspirations are weathered by the realities of life. “He lived with this hope for a long time, then came the time of disillusionment.”¹⁰⁷ The idealism of youth that defines the fictional man’s early spirituality meets reality and he realises people’s faith is inherently weak and, in many instances, lacks basic strength to counter the flaws within human nature.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘A Call to Christians’. Archpriest Alexis Vinogradov (trans.). In: *Lissanulhal*, 14 January, 1968.

¹⁰⁴ *TPOC*, p.37.

¹⁰⁵ Khodr, *Idols*.

¹⁰⁶ *TWOC*, p.43.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁰⁸ This implicates the research question.

5. Communication & The Church in Contemporary Orthodoxy

Within the context of contemporary Lebanese Orthodoxy, Morcos records how some “Greek Orthodox leaders” estimate that only around 5% of Orthodoxy practise their religion,¹⁰⁹ although it would be enlightening to know precisely what is meant by practising a religion; further, and, as established earlier, the Church has, for many, come to stand more for a communal identity rather than a religious conviction.¹¹⁰ As for Christianity, it could be said that for Khodr, it can be summed up in deceptively simple tenets and principles, although authentic Christianity is quite another matter. For him, it would seem, authentic spirituality (Christianity) entails bringing those tenets and principles to life, experientially, in one’s own being, and this calls for dedication and commitment. Orthodoxy, for Khodr, is not a suit, which one puts on once a week for attendance at church, it is a permanent way of life, a set of interiorised spiritual coordinates that permeate the body and soul, and which fundamentally govern one’s existence. But, it might be said, human beings are not naturally given to an overt expression of this kind of religiosity; the distractions of earthly life seem more appealing or more pressing, and it would appear the man in the book is of similar opinion. “Generally, a parish does not devote much time to prayer. Outside of Sundays, it meets only for the occasional feast day.”¹¹¹ Technological innovations, it may be argued, are far more likely to capture the imaginations of people as they infiltrate the

¹⁰⁹ Morcos, A. A. *Greek Orthodox Monasteries of Lebanon and their Impact on Lay Communities*. MA thesis, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, p.107.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 4 and Kassir, pp.441 and 459. See also Owen Chadwick, who discusses the shifting notion of what being a Christian constituted – from being opposed to the state (pre-Constantine – Emperor Constantine, 272-337), being identified with the state (post-Constantine), to modern times when “Christian and citizen are no longer synonymous terms”. (Chadwick, O. *John Cassian. A Study in Primitive Monasticism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950, p.180.) See also Loosley, who describes religion in Syria as being “worn in the same way that an ethnic minority seeks to have a badge of identity in the west.” (Loosley, E. ‘Christianity and Islam in Syria: Island of Religious Tolerance?’ In: *Christian Responses to Islam. Muslim-Christian Relations in the Modern World*. A. O’Mahony and E. Loosley (eds.) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, p.167.) Loosley addresses the complexity of identity elsewhere. “One of the most divisive debates in Middle Eastern Christianity today is that of identity. These questions hinge on language, bloodlines, diaspora communities and political affiliation”. (Loosley, E. ‘After the Ottomans: The Renewal of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.’ In: *Studies in World Christianity*. Vol.15, Issue 3, 2009, p.237.)

¹¹¹ TWOC, p.138.

home, stealing a march on spiritual matters, and even overshadowing, perhaps, the icon in the home. And yet, to paraphrase Khodr's observation above, technological sophistication cannot cure the existential neuroses that afflict the human condition.

The importance of conveying this to people – the message that they do not have to resort to ineffective or dangerous placebos (drugs, alcohol) to assuage these neuroses – is taken up by the man in the book, who, when confronted by people on the street, ponders on the gulf that exists between worldly preoccupations and the spiritual realm. He answers his own question.

“The difficulty...[is] that the Churches here have become of one culture while those people are in another culture. It has its language and they have theirs, as if it cannot address their hearts. So if a cult that stirs emotions and plays music appears in the streets it may win some of them, but only very few.”¹¹²

Here, there is a convergence of two perspectives on the Church, Khodr's and Feuerbach's. The man in the book says – and this is more akin to Khodr's view – that the Church talks in a language and of concepts that are entirely at odds with the modern world;¹¹³ whereas Feuerbach's argument implies that the Church cannot do its job simply because it is a facsimile, a copy of something else. However, it would seem that Eli Dannaoui does not exonerate Khodr, and the OYM, from committing the misdemeanour of communicating to the people in a disparate language. In Dannaoui's view, the OYM, of which he was a member, itself talked in abstruse concepts. Far from creating a breakthrough and bringing the Church closer to people, says Dannaoui, Khodr, as one of the leaders, was a representative of a transcendent theology that included love, ardour and sacrifice, and these

¹¹² *TPOC*, p.48.

¹¹³ See Adams, who cites Habermass. “If its [the language of religious traditions] truth-claims (and Habermass is most interested in moral claims) are to become publicly available, they must be translated into a language that others can understand.” (Adams, N. ‘Interreligious Engagement in the Public Sphere’. In: *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, p.299; Habermas, J. *Between Naturalism and Religion*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008, p.131.)

perceived intangibles tended to discourage engagement.¹¹⁴ This could be taken in one of two ways: that Khodr and the OYM were off target; or that Khodr's theology remains intact and it is the people who have to 'raise their game' in order to acquire authenticity in their spirituality.

Both Feuerbach and Khodr, albeit for differing reasons, claim Church activity amounts to an approximation. Weighed against this is Eastern Christianity's generalised observation that only a few can actually aspire to a high level of spirituality – for example, the saints;¹¹⁵ the rest of humanity must be satisfied with a blend of often simulated observance and symbolic representation enwrapped, though it may be, in sincere spiritual commitment. This goes hand in hand with Morcos' research that asserted only 5% of Orthodox are actually practising Christians, even though a slightly different point was being made. Morcos' claim additionally begs questions. Does lack of regular attendance by the overwhelming majority equate with an inability to practise a developed form of Christianity? Does it signify widespread agnosticism? These questions are relevant because they put into perspective people's religiosity and are directly related to the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? Be that as it may, a shortfall in traditional Christian credentials is not in itself a new phenomenon. Pelikan, citing Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), claims there was at the time (eleventh century) "very few genuine Christians".¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Interview with Elie Dannaoui, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013. See Chapter 2, pp.67-8.

¹¹⁵ "If men of religion are numerous, the people of God are few." (TWOC, p.46.) See also Archimandrite Zacharias. "Elder Sophrony says that "to live a Christian life is impossible: all one can do is 'die daily' (1 Cor. 15:31) in Christ, like St. Paul"." (Zacharias, Archimandrite. *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.41; *We Shall See Him As He Is*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1988), p.73.)

¹¹⁶ Pelikan, p.255. Cf. also Dionysius. "For not everyone is holy and, as scripture affirms, knowledge is not for everyone." (Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchy*. In: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p.199.) He expresses similar tones in *The Celestial Hierarchy*: "Not everyone is sacred, and, as scripture says, knowledge is not for everyone." (Ibid, p.149.) See also Russell, who, when citing Archimandrite Vasileios' description of spiritual excellence, says, "Such mystical heights are beyond

If people are indifferent to religious expression, it may be either because religion is used to a great extent as a communal identity, or because the language of authentic spirituality may be too esoteric to be accessible for lay comprehension. Khodr would not concern himself with such considerations; he turns it around the other way, insisting that what matters is that the Church talks to people and makes a connection to people's lives. Practitioners of pastoral theology may insist that the Church is making that connection by addressing a number of issues. But how selective are the issues, how successful is the engagement? And how far does the Church persevere with people of little or no faith, or who may have deep reservations about the Church's role in society, or who are extra-communal and do not belong to the Church? How open is Orthodoxy to conducting vigorous debate on subjects such as power sharing in the Church, gender equality, women priests, sexual proclivities, interfaith marriages? If, the argument goes, the Church's response to all these were in the affirmative, religion would be transformed into a relevant experience. The man in the book does not care whether the people he would like to approach on the street are Orthodox, Christian, or non-believers. He sees them as children of God. The book was written when Khodr was in his fifties, and is an example of how his theology of the 'Other' could be applied *in situ*. It is vividly reflected in an article published much later when he was ninety. "God is God through kinship... your Lord is in everything, and you love through Him whatever He loves and you dwell wherever He dwells."¹¹⁷ This is compounded elsewhere where he says, "Do not search for a "neighbor" among your relatives or the sons of your village. No human being is created as a neighbor for you. You make him so if you

the reach of most monks." (Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p.84. Russell quotes from Archimandrite Vasileios. *Hymn of Entry: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984, pp.126-9.) In a more general sense, while referring to the autobiographical mystical accounts of Archimandrite Sophrony (1896-1991), founder of the monastery at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex, Russell comments, "Such experiences are granted to the few as a foretaste of the world to come. But they can encourage even those of us who merely read of them." (Ibid., p.109.)

¹¹⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. 'God and the Human Being'. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 24 August, 2013.

went to him and offered what he needs.”¹¹⁸ These extracts reaffirm his wish to inculcate an authentic spirituality, one that bestrides borders and is no respecter of boundaries. They represent a continuity of thought and an illustration of both his vision and, because of the intercommunal, interreligious openness of his theology of the ‘Other’, his existential religiosity. The man in the book insinuates that whatever the nature of the gulf that divides the Church from ordinary people, the result is it confounds people’s religious expectations, and suggests that those who yearn, even subconsciously, for some form of spiritual succour are not impervious to false ‘prophets’. Sadly, the fictional man muses, they will be prey to anyone who talks their language.¹¹⁹

With regard to Orthodoxy’s willingness, or capability, to engage with modern issues, Riad Mofarrij implies that the Church of Antioch has still some distance to go.¹²⁰ Discussion of issues such as same sex marriage and sexual proclivities is not, he maintains, at odds with the Church, for he believes that Orthodoxy is less of a legalistic religion and more of an existential one.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Who is my Neighbor?’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 11 November, 2012.

¹¹⁹ “So if a cult that stirs emotions and plays music appears in the streets it may win some of them, but only very few.” (*TPOC*, p.48.) The problem of finding a way of making faith meaningful in the modern world is, seemingly, as perennial as it is ubiquitous; the dangers of consigning such matters to the theological attic can result in alienation, entrapment by dubious cults, and a seeking after more apparently relevant and accessible belief systems. Florovsky, in discussing the development of Russian Orthodoxy, laments the fact that faith was reduced to a “pitiful language”, and thus was spirituality expressed. The consequence was a leeching of church numbers and an increasing preference of some Christians for Marxism. (Florovsky, G. *Ways of Russian Theology*, Vol. 6, Pt. 2. R. L. Nichols (trans.). Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979, pp.291-2.)

¹²⁰ Riad Mofarrij reinforces this, claiming that the Church is not inclined to discuss topical issues. (Telephone interview with Riad Mofarrij, Beirut, 30 October, 2013.) For an earlier perspective on renewal, see his article, Mofarrij, R. ‘Renewal in the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Lebanon.’ In: *Studies in World Christianity*, 15 pt3, 2009.

¹²¹ Telephone interview with Riad Mofarrij, Beirut, 30 October, 2013. To the author, he said that if he were to write the article today, he would include challenging issues like same sex marriage and forms of sexuality.

In saying that cults play on the emotions of people, Khodr is suggesting that authentic Christianity is not about emotional attachment. What then is it about? And how does the Church communicate Christianity to people – or more specifically, how is it received? It is less about the Law, it would seem, and more about love. Khodr implicitly recognises that the authentic life is about leading a Christian existence; but he would additionally claim that suffering is very much a part of existence.¹²² Thus, *ipso facto*, Christianity would appear to be, at least in part, about suffering, both as an external causal phenomenon and as an inner spiritual tussle.

“[W]hat we have now is that every rational creature is stricken in soul or body or both at one stage of his life or throughout all of his life... This humanity is a field planted with wheat and tares and God will separate them on the last day. That same admixture is in the human heart also, but it is done away with through true repentance.”¹²³

What is brought together here is, first, Khodr’s focus on suffering as the ‘stigmata’ of life in the world and, second, the role of the priest. Earlier in the book, he states unequivocally through the fictional man how “[t]he priest must be a man of suffering”;¹²⁴ in the article, and as stated earlier, suffering is part of our postlapsarianism. Both exemplify Khodr’s existential religiosity for it compels the priest to dispense his spiritual healing horizontally rather than vertically – that is, suffering *with* the person (on the same level) rather than empathising from above. This is the mark of the authentic Christian. It is similar to how he sees the priest acting in his parish. Other than reading theological and divine literature, he expects the priest fully to connect with a family. A visit “is not only to ask about the sick and the sad but to also know the spiritual situation of the house”.¹²⁵ In other words, and in keeping with his existential religiosity, the priest’s role is not exclusively about pragmatic considerations or about acting as a kind of spiritual doctor, but suggests a

¹²² See Chapter 4, pp.138 and 142, where the suffering of Christ is discussed and Christianity itself is identified with suffering.

¹²³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Suffering’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 12 April, 2008.

¹²⁴ *TWOC*, p.124.

¹²⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Heart of the Priest’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 11 December, 2005.

need to connect with people on a horizontal level rather than communicating with them from a vertical, distant, level.

How does the Church respond, in laymen's language, to the assertion that authentic Christianity is about suffering? Can the Church assuage the existential suffering of ordinary people, contextualising suffering as a chrysaline stage on the theotic pathway towards their authentic destiny? For the man in the book, it would seem to depend on the Church's affiliations at any one time. "The Church herself becomes the kingdom of Caesar when she allies herself to Caesar...The religious community then sinks to the level of prostitution...The lies, deceits, and pretenses perpetrated by men of religion make them true prostitutes."¹²⁶ In the earlier translation, Khodr scoffs, "Men of religion', what an ugly phrase! As if there is a profession called religion, as if you can practise religion as a sector without it being the whole of your life."¹²⁷ If, for whatever reason, the language of religiosity fails to instigate authentic spirituality, people may, perhaps, seek alternative amelioration in artistic objectification, or in the allure of alcohol and drugs, which will infuse life with a little bogus sweetness, bringing down the curtain on their pain with eventual, but temporary oblivion.

6. Death As A Means To Theosis

In the fourth letter, the man in the book says he has heard about the passing of a mutual friend. He expresses sorrow, but also issues an admonition not to let emotion take charge of their grief.

"Do not plant people in your eyes lest they become imprisoned in them.

Let them go to where they have been called. Choose for them the

¹²⁶ *TWOC*, p.124. This is not to suggest that the Church of Antioch can be uniquely indicted. See, for example, Netton. "This [Christianity] claims to be a divinely founded institution yet it has proved down the centuries to be only too capable of corruption and degradation. Under the iron rod of fallibility, the sacred may be transmuted into the profane, whether epitomised in a licentious Borgia pope, a politically weak Pope, a modern paedophile scandal or a mediaeval romance such as that of Heloise and Abelard. The world of late antiquity, inhabited by an Arius or an Augustine, was no more naturally inclined to moral or other perfection as a whole [his emphasis] than is the secular world inhabited by contemporary Christianity." (Netton, I. R. *Islam, Christianity and Tradition. A Comparative Exploration*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp.70-1.)

¹²⁷ *TPOC*, p.52.

peace with which their Lord has surrounded them. If you looked through their eyes, if you loved them enough so as to look unto the great existence from their perspective, do not hesitate for a moment to bless their departure to where they yearn to be.”¹²⁸

For the man in the book, death can be seen as a gateway to authenticity.

“In death, the human being finds himself alone. Freed from his shackles, he moors himself to God. And God restores his being to that unity which had been undermined by distance.

“The purpose of death is to allow us to attain this unity.”¹²⁹

Death is seen by Khodr as a natural process tied in with our spiritual destiny beyond this life, or as he puts it elsewhere, “you cannot understand death as part of life if you do not perceive life as bound to what is “above””.¹³⁰ It is almost as if death provides the final bureaucratic stamp authorising our transition to authenticity.

“Every shock, grave illness, recurring sin, disgrace of one’s country and the treachery of the institution one works in...makes death more desired than life because Man was not created to live with deception, oppression and oblivion; all that is a disfiguration of existence. This contradiction...leads one to long for the wholeness of one’s being; a wholeness that one does not find in this earthly life”.¹³¹

Khodr does not change his view about death. In the book, it is described as a release; in his 2004 article, he fleshes out what that release constitutes. These two examples show there are two things going on in Khodr’s mind. The fictional man is encouraging his friends to think of death as a freeing process. He talks about shackles, which can only restrain and bind. The article completes the picture by detailing what those shackles are – all the disappointments, physical and psychological pains that are concomitant with life. In conversation, Khodr admits that even faith is hard. When asked

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.44.

¹²⁹ *TWOC*, p.113.

¹³⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Death’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 27 November, 2004.

¹³¹ Ibid.

whether one has to be happy to have a vibrant spirituality, he replies no.¹³² At another time, it is suggested to him that experience of God would appear to come only through suffering. He agrees.¹³³ In another discussion, which will be addressed in Chapter 9, he says that we can never know whether we are close to God or not. And when it is put to him that this is tough, he comes straight back. “Yes, of course it is tough.”¹³⁴ To some extent, for Khodr, striving for an authentic spiritual life is conditioned by the existentialist’s bleak perspective, and whatever ‘celestial colour’ might occasionally appear is fleeting.

Life may be a gift, but, due to our postlapsarian state, it is also fractured along lines of existential tension and failure. To be liberated from this is paradoxically a blessing because death opens the door to a state of being free of these imperfections. Talking of the one who died, the man in the book says, “Waa’el’s leap into the hereafter should make us bound like deer. He should stir up our desire to meet those who have completed their course, who are awaiting glorification.”¹³⁵ This is not to say that he is oblivious or indifferent to the emotional and psychological stress that death engenders in those who are left behind: “Separation is always painful.”¹³⁶ But we must learn to develop “another way of looking at it which is more authentic and more lasting...We know it when we arrive at faith.”¹³⁷ It is through this new perspective of death that Khodr expands the theme of theosis. God, he says, “does not live in isolation”;¹³⁸ Christianity may be interpreted oxymoronically as ‘personified apophaticism’, but God the Father is not the remote, apophatic Divine, who leaves us to our own devices, remaining apart from us permanently and forever. Death is a freeing from the “shackles” of existence, and thus the mortal human “moors himself to God. And God restores his

¹³² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

¹³³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.

¹³⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

¹³⁵ *TWOC*, p.112.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.113. In the original Arabic version, it is *asraH*, via the root *saraaHa*, meaning frankness, openness, candour, sincerity, which has been translated as ‘authentic’. See also Fn.7.

¹³⁸ *TWOC*, p.113

being to that unity which had been undermined by distance...The purpose of death is to allow us to attain this unity.”¹³⁹

In an article of 2011, he focuses on what the fictional man says about death. The souls of the departed “find their way to God and God receives them through God’s mercy”.¹⁴⁰ “Separation is always painful,” says the fictional man,¹⁴¹ and Khodr echoes this. “No one can be reconciled with absence”;¹⁴² understanding why someone dies is beyond us, but then “[t]he whole universe is not founded on rational understanding and the shedding of the tears is nothing else than a sign for lacking understanding”.¹⁴³ The man in the book makes it clear that death leads to the soul’s reposing in God, and Khodr delivers the same message. “Whenever we trust the departed ones to the divine care and to the truth of divine love, we elevate them to Truth as such.”¹⁴⁴ Hence, Khodr is saying in the book and through the articles, even though death brings sadness – as established earlier, our earthly existence is one of suffering – it allows for the realisation of our authentic identity.

Even though death may be the pathway to theosis, Orthodoxy believes our earthly existence behoves us, in our pursuit of authenticity, to lay the foundations of deification here and now in the fullness of life. Such a belief is reflected in the text where the man in the book claims that the “perfection which our friend has attained urges us to become more complete”.¹⁴⁵ The perfection is accomplished through death, the severing of earthly ties, and the transformation of the individual, but we can prepare ourselves here and now. On the other hand, this perfection, which, it is asserted, is achieved through leaving this life, may need to be qualified. The process of deification, it has

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Awe of Death’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 19 March, 2011.

¹⁴¹ *TWOC*, p.112.

¹⁴² Khodr, *The Awe of Death*.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *TPOC*, p.45.

been said, continues after death, a procedure that could be described as involving our becoming ever more perfect in an unending process.¹⁴⁶

Further into the fourth letter, there is a distinct allusion to an ‘upstairs-downstairs’ demography. “I felt when Waa’el passed away that he had moved to the attic and that we are with him in one house.”¹⁴⁷ This may appear almost graphically childlike, but, in a vague parabolic style, it conveys what Khodr, and others, believe existence to be.¹⁴⁸ And there is a certain literalism, which aids the narrative. We are fallen creatures, fallen from our authentic being – the belief that the human person is made in the image of God – and we are, to use modern vernacular, hard-wired to return to this state. “In truth, this life which comes from heaven is what gives meaning to death.”¹⁴⁹ Death is not a tragedy because it is a cessation of all we know and love; instead, it is a beginning, a spiritual embarkation to secure our authentic destiny,¹⁵⁰ and, because of our postlapsarian state, it is only through living that we can come to realise this.

“Life...enables us to understand death – its meaning must be found there. Is sadness not a longing for joy? Does our misery not come from the fact we have not yet attained the joy which our nature seeks with every fiber? There is no Good Friday which does not foreshadow and anticipate Easter Sunday.”¹⁵¹

Philosophically, this extract presents an interesting twist on humankind’s postlapsarian existence, inasmuch as it suggests, theologically, that there can be no cosmic positive without a corresponding, proportional negative. It is

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Ware, who, citing Gregory of Nyssa, writes, “In a fine paradox he [Gregory of Nyssa] says that the essence of perfection consists precisely in never becoming perfect, but in always reaching forward to some higher perfection that lies beyond.” (Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.138.) Ibn ‘Arabī (560/1165-637/1240), the Sufi and Islamic philosopher of great renown, holds a similar view.

¹⁴⁷ *TPOC*, p.44.

¹⁴⁸ This is similar, perhaps, to Jesus’ analogising of the heavenly kingdom. “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2.)

¹⁴⁹ *TWOC*, p.113.

¹⁵⁰ For another view of death, see Bulgakov, S. *The Bride of the Lamb*. B. Jakim (trans.). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002, pp.351, 353 and 354.

¹⁵¹ *TWOC*, p.114.

almost as if it is the bad that brings forth the good. This unambiguous statement from the book – “no Good Friday which does not foreshadow...Easter Sunday” – is reproduced in an article from 2013, where Khodr himself is clear about this Orthodox understanding of Passiontide.

“Hope always follows pain. This is our journey, and it is in accordance with the image of the Savior, as His Resurrection day has followed His death. For us, there is no separation between death and resurrection. In philosophical language this is the dialectic between death and revivification. That is why, in the First Church, Easter...included the three last days of the Holy Week, and the believers were not attentive to celebrate the Good Friday and the Easter day separated or secluded one from the other.”¹⁵²

In discussion, Khodr repeats this, confirming Orthodox theology, but also offering his own perspective. “Suffering is only a path to the Resurrection.”¹⁵³ Pain, in other words, may be seen as a prelude to joy.

Extrapolating this theme, it could be argued that the salvific message of Christianity is so fundamental to its core beliefs it is tantamount to implying that failure is an indispensable part of being Christian – in other words, apart from being associated with the Fall, human beings have to fail within the earthly dimension in order to qualify for this essential salvation. In such a theoretical schema, it is the only way Christianity can work. Imperfections are our guarantee of being saved. In talking about sin, Khodr implies it has a positive side, saying that the Fathers believed sin, if one repents, can make one’s faith clearer, stronger. When it is put to him that sin can be seen as a learning process, and that if this is so, then Adam almost had to fail because this is the journey humanity has to make, he answers, “Right, probably.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Passion and Resurrection’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 September, 2013.

¹⁵³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

7. Towards Authenticity

Prior to expatiating on some ways in which authenticity can be understood and applied, it is worth recalling the explications at the start of this chapter. In essence, authenticity was contextualised within an 'I/Thou' dynamic with an importance laid on relating to the 'Other', balanced by a caveat that this encounter with the 'Other' can test whether the 'I' is true to the inner self. In a religious dimension, this hinges on the scintilla of divinity which resides within each individual human being, while testing our resolve to prioritise our worldly activities in favour of our spiritual destiny in theosis.

7.1 Christianity's Focus

Christianity is considered, at its core, anthropological if only because of the Incarnation, the conciliar development of Christology and the concept of the God-man. Horujy's assertion is emphatic: "Christianity is profoundly anthropological in its very essence, it is addressed personally to each human being, since the Gospel of Christ is revelation about Man, that tells everyone about his own nature, destiny and salvation." However, he believes this to be "paradoxical" because "until very recently" it has always been subordinated by other areas of Christian doctrine. He goes on to claim how the popular view is that "Christianity and the Church are far distanced from the situation and needs of the ordinary man, and have too little to say to him, because the Christian doctrine is just some abstract discourse on God."¹⁵⁵ It is a notion which recalls Dannaoui's assertion that Khodr and the OYM formulated difficult and convoluted spiritual messages.

The man in the book wrestles with the problem of how to help human beings who suffer through a sense of existential isolation.

"How do we face a multitude of people closed in upon themselves, packed and frantic, so as to reconstruct a community of persons, each with his own world and particular destiny? How do we make it so that

¹⁵⁵ Horujy, S. S. *Christian Anthropology and Eastern Orthodox (Hesychast) Asceticism*. (http://www.orthodox.cn/catechesis/horujy/2_en.htm) Accessed 13 October, 2014, p.1.

each human being becomes a cosmic harmony, living love in great simplicity, always ready to give and receive?”¹⁵⁶

How, in other words, to replenish human beings with a sense of who and what they spiritually are – gods destined for theosis? But prior to this, the man in the book asks, “How do we revive the conversation between young people and the world today, with everything they reject?”¹⁵⁷ For Khodr, it will not be through adulterating the Christian way of life; and he makes this explicit elsewhere.

“Man will go on sinning. This is not my problem, but God’s...Jesus knows that in his Church, many people will continue to wallow in their mire.

“But the above condition of Man does not convince me that we have to present to people a Christianity watered down with a mediocre morality to make it more available to those who are corrupt in this world.”¹⁵⁸

These two extracts, from the book and from Khodr’s article, can, arguably, be read as one piece. Khodr is not concerned about people’s sinning, but he does care about people. This is why the Christian message is, for him, so important. But in saying that the message itself cannot be adulterated, he is emphasising the uncompromising nature of his existential religiosity. It also corresponds to his position, as stated during an interview, when he says, “Personally, I don’t like...to revolutionise [sic] text. I prefer to interpret them. Because old texts keep us within truth.”¹⁵⁹ It is, in other words, of paramount importance to preserve the authenticity of the Christian message. However, at another time, he makes the point that, “you have to adapt the expression of truth to the understanding of [the] people whom you preach [to] or evangelise.”¹⁶⁰ There is a subtle difference here between tampering with the essence of a text and interpreting it in such a way that ‘true’ meaning is not distorted. The ‘problem’, however, remains. He addresses something similar in another article. There is, he argues, “disagreement between the

¹⁵⁶ TWOC, p.119.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Khodr, *Christ and the Christians*.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

interpreters because of the imprecise scrutiny of the texts, or because my hermeneutical method disagrees with yours.”¹⁶¹ He then suggests a way of communicating, which answers the man in the book. “[Y]ou may, without denying your sources, choose from them whatever inspires love rather than controversy.”¹⁶²

In searching for some direction, however, there would seem to be some measure of discordance in Khodr’s assessment of what constitutes an authentic spiritual life. In one part of the book, the fictional man holds up monasticism as the acme of existence – “Monasticism is a prototype of the Kingdom to come”¹⁶³ – in another part, he says that chastity is not for everyone, that God chooses only those who can deal with being chaste and, however determined someone might be to live a chaste life, if it is not meant to be it will forever elude them.¹⁶⁴ Later, this is expressed in emphatic language. “And therefore we must not urge anybody to become a monk.”¹⁶⁵ But monasticism is also hailed as being emblematic of the authentic life, that is, authentic spirituality, while monks are paragons of authenticity. “Through these elderly monks, the Church regains her original virginity, clothed in the flawless obedience to Christ which she wore at the time of her betrothal.”¹⁶⁶ Monasticism is the pinnacle of authentic spirituality on earth, but the necessary asceticism cannot be undertaken by everyone. The subliminal message, it would appear, is that each person does what they can – which brings into consideration the research question.

¹⁶¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The New Human Being’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 10 January, 2009.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *TWOC*, p.126

¹⁶⁴ *TPOC*, p.50. This appears in the chapter that was excised from the published version of the book.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54. This unambiguous language does not appear in the later version, although the sentiment that monasticism is “selective” and “even elitist” remains: “since God invites only those who wholeheartedly wish to follow Jesus.” (*TWOC*, p.126.)

¹⁶⁶ *TWOC*, p.126.

7.2 Authentic Morality

Living in accordance with authentic spirituality, while keeping within the bounds of 'traditional' Christian morality would seem to be not so straightforward. The book addresses the subject of stealing. Through the mouth of the narrator, the fictional man's perspective on the prohibition about stealing is revealed.

"It appeared to my friend that '*thou shall not steal*' does not mean much as a general abstract statement. Who is the one who is stealing, the weak petty thief or the powerful one from whom he had stolen? Is the divine commandment a protector of the one who exploits? So to preach it as it is; to let it go out to equate between the robbed poor and the robbed wealthy is utmost indecency and utmost betrayal."¹⁶⁷

Further on, the narrator insists "there can be no higher nor more honorable act than to strike down this type of morality."¹⁶⁸ This radical stance, emblematic of existential religiosity, is echoed in one of Khodr's subsequent articles. Here, he makes an allusion to how some people become affluent, giving the impression that they may have acquired their wealth illegally, but this is not his concern: "it is not up to us to condemn him...Social justice is the concern of the community as a whole and the concern of the government in particular."¹⁶⁹ What exercises Khodr are the more general, more insidious illustrations of stealing.

"Depriving people unjustly of their rights is very common: the employee who is not paid his minimum wage or who is kept with a minimum wage while you are capable of paying him more; the poor maid whom you use and exploit because she is Lebanese while you pay the foreign maid twice as much; all these acts are stealing."¹⁷⁰

This radical viewpoint from the book is another manifestation of his call for Christianity to push barriers of understanding and transcend situations – in this instance, to reconsider the notion of stealing; but it additionally reveals a

¹⁶⁷ *TPOC*, p.21. His emphasis.

¹⁶⁸ *TWOC*, p.62.

¹⁶⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Stealing'. Amani Haddad (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 25 April, 1993.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

dogged consistency in his thinking from different periods. Here, the article continues where the fictional man stops, with Khodr listing examples of everyday activity regarded as legal, but which are, morally, tantamount to underhand purloining. Authentic morality, Khodr is saying, is something this is not. Elsewhere, he places stealing firmly in the ethical camp by being more direct. “Although it is easy to say: “you shall not steal”, it is much more difficult to accuse a poor and deprived person who is “stealing” some food for his starving children.”¹⁷¹

The principles that are at the foundation of this interpretation of Christianity are lofty in the extreme, the language couching them scarcely nuanced; as such, this stance is existential religiosity made manifest. However, it could also be argued that the post-Edenic human condition, and the earthly realm in which it is played out, may be partly defined by imperfection;¹⁷² as a result, failure of compliance in all respects is, it would seem, but a learning curve.

7.3 Unity: An Authentic Christianity?

The phrase ‘authentic Christianity’ refers to that which is in accordance with Christ and his precepts, facilitates spiritual development and advancement along the theotic pathway, and a Christianity that has its values and priorities coordinated to Christ’s teaching rather than to the world. If, Khodr might argue, Christianity is lived in strict accordance with its fundamental precepts – in other words, in accordance with Christ – it represents the authentic life *non pareil*. However, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, the fragmentation of Christianity into exclusivist denominations, where each theological enclave claims authenticity for itself, is a thorn in the side of those Christians who feel the bitterness of what may be described as a shameful paradox – Christ’s calling all to gather under the edict of divine unicity; and Christianity sundered by humankind’s inability to live with diversity. This has some relevance to the research question, highlighting, as it does, Christian religiosity in general as well as intra-Christian and interfaith relations.

¹⁷¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christian Ethics’. Amani Haddad (trans.), n/p, 23 March, 1993. Downloaded 26 January, 2017.

¹⁷² See p.184.

Nonetheless, as the text progresses, failure to unite ecumenically is put into perspective. “Who can assure us that unity, once achieved, will not be shattered anew?”¹⁷³ An oblique reference, perhaps, to humankind’s wretched fallibility. Besides which, the man asserts:

“Unity has never been considered a prerequisite, either in the Church of Jerusalem gathered around James or at Antioch. The history of the Church in both East and West is rife with separations and schisms, showing that unity is seldom achieved or maintained for long. Unity...should not become a major obsession of the Church...The evangelical spirit has many other things to say to suffering and starving humanity...our commitment to serve the poor...should never become less important than the cause of unity.”¹⁷⁴

It is not just the denominational fracturing that is in Khodr’s sights, it is the prioritising of concerns. To become more reflective of an ‘authentic Christianity’ as defined above, the Church should eschew the kind of organisational intellectuality he feels is bedevilling Christianity, such as the practising of bureaucratic callisthenics in local church administration. These, along with Christianity’s preoccupation with unity, clog the systemic arteries, while the expended energy would be more effectively utilised if given over to Christ-like endeavours to help the suffering. The man in the book lays down an indication of what needs to be done in order to correct this stigmatism in the Church’s vision.

“The Church that truly wants to bear witness should learn that a prophetic stand must be translated into action, not just words. She must come to see the word as the beginning of action, and understand that a truly strong word must be only the beginning of energetic action. A disembodied word has no grip on reality, and thus cannot transform it.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ *TWOC*, p.143.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.156.

The problem, the fictional man continues, is “that the Christian community often exhibits extreme weakness; entire generations of Christians remain hopelessly sterile.”¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, it is not a matter of creating a new direction, but of returning to basic principles. “Eternal life is not the domain of intellectuals and scholars, but of those who are wounded and disfigured.”¹⁷⁷ In other words, our authentic destiny – that is, according to the earlier definition, theosis – is not for intellectual dissection, but for suffering humanity as a whole.

8. Imagery: The Place Of The Icon

Earlier, it was seen how the man in the book questions the merits of theatre and cinema, linked, as these two creative media are, to supposed facsimiles of the ‘real’. What was established above was Khodr’s evident unease, made apparent through the man in the book, with the analgesic effect of art, an anaesthetising of the soul, a deliberate move to supplant the authentic – that which is true, that which is associated with Reality – with facsimiles so as to avoid the pain of direct involvement; for example, relying on visits to the theatre to deal vicariously with life’s challenges. To him, and, it is argued, to Khodr, all of this becomes a gross form of cultural voyeurism.¹⁷⁸

The icon, as ‘representative art’, presents, it would seem, a somewhat different case. “The icon is not of this world, but through it one enters into a mystical relationship. God is made present in it and draws near to us.”¹⁷⁹ It is, so the narrator insinuates, a window into a world of spiritual mystery; and for this reason, it can lay claim to being authentic Christianity. Khodr confirms this in conversation. For him, the icon is not a mimetic exercise, the reproduction of an image. He is quite emphatic, claiming that understanding this is “very important in Orthodoxy”.¹⁸⁰ Referring to an icon of Jesus, which

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.152.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.153.

¹⁷⁸ For a similar argument, see Plato on art and artists. Socrates takes issue with the works of artists, which in his view, are “imitations of a life which has itself only secondary reality”. (Lee’s words. Plato. *The Republic*. Desmond Lee (trans.). London: Penguin Books, 1974, p.421, but *passim* pp.421-439.)

¹⁷⁹ *TWOC*, pp.16-7.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

hangs in his study, he says, “When I see this, it is not an image. There is a presence. I would not say a real presence in the Roman Catholic sense, [but] there is some presence in it.”¹⁸¹ So for Khodr, meditating on an icon is akin to a genuine, mystical, spiritual experience of the Real; the icon gives the viewer an insight into divine, authentic ‘reality’. “This icon works, it blesses me. It’s living in a way.”¹⁸² Asked whether this is connected in some way to Palamas’ essence/energies distinction, he replies that to a certain extent this may be true.¹⁸³ Elsewhere, Khodr describes an icon as “closer to being a symbol than a physical...form. It is a theological reading of the person we are drawing...The important thing when looking at the icon is to spiritually ascend to the person portrayed on it.”¹⁸⁴ He goes on to say that we have no “quest to know about the Lord’s skin or the color of his eyes...Our relationship with...[him] is through the Holy Spirit. We don’t know him physically but spiritually”.¹⁸⁵

The iconographic sense of presence is one aspect, but some icons are also said to inspire occasional miraculous happenings. Is this supposed to be through the agency of the artist? If so, this would imbue the artist with saintly, even divine qualities. Khodr cited a professor of patristics, whom he knew when he was a student in Paris, and who was a monk as well as being an accomplished scholar. In the latter’s view, no icon is miraculous in itself, but can become so if God pleases.¹⁸⁶ Thus, it appears there is a wedge between the distillation of artistic skills and the enduement of divine power.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid. Buss cites Kartashov, who “has shown...that the Russian-Orthodox people consider the icons as not created by human hands”. Buss, it is estimated, is referring here to the seventeenth century. (Buss, A. ‘The Individual in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition’. In: *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 40e Année, No. 91, July-September, 1995, p.53; Kartashov, A. ‘Smysl staroobryadchestva’. In: *Mélanges Pierre Struve*, Prague, 1925.)

¹⁸⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christ’s Visage’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 17 June, 2001.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 24 October, 2013.

These two competing positions – is the icon, as an instrument of faith, authentic as the term is understood here; or is it a facsimile and thus an illustration of idolatrous worship? – recalls the historical debate between iconoclasts and iconophiles, which matured into a theological storm during the eighth and ninth centuries. For the iconoclasts, icons and imagery contravened the fundamental scriptural commandment, which forbade the worship of graven images, and thus inspired a fear that such practice represented a recidivous tendency towards paganism. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine V (718-775), a supporter of iconoclasm, contributed to the argument by essaying a definition of what an image actually was: if it were genuine, it had to correspond in essence to its object.¹⁸⁷ As the image of Christ in the church could not be identical in essence with the real Christ, people were worshipping a false image. Iconophiles responded by arguing that a distinction had to be made between the “prototype” and its portrayal.¹⁸⁸ In brief, it is what the image relates to that is important. By worshipping an image of Christ, one is worshipping neither the wood nor the paint that mediate as a material depiction of the image; instead, one is worshipping that which the image portrays, namely, in this instance, Christ.¹⁸⁹ This, and the subsequent presence it can exude, imbues the icon with authenticity, its worship an act of authentic spirituality.¹⁹⁰

Khodr puts his own case. “We don’t worship the piece of wood or mosaic, but we go through the mind and the heart towards Lord Jesus or the Mother of God or the Saint that is painted. We feel that these saints are present with us in the Church through their spirit and paintings. This is how the Church of

¹⁸⁷ Pelikan, p.109.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.125.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. also John Damascene. In refuting those in the iconoclastic camp, he was unequivocal. “I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter who...became matter”. (St. John of Damascus. *On the Divine Images. The apologies against those who attack the divine images*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980.) There is also a school of thought that believes icons are a visual aid, which serve to convey that which cannot be expressed in words. According to Forest, Merton often used to quote the Chinese proverb “He who follows words is destroyed” to his novices. “Icons were part of the word-free, God-charged silence toward which Merton was so powerfully drawn.” (Forest, J. ‘Thomas Merton and the Silence of the Icons’. In: *Merton & Hesychasm*, p.226.)

earth and the Church of heaven are united.”¹⁹¹ Fortounatto and Cunningham make an iconographic connection to Hesychasm in the sense that painters of icons are endeavouring to render a visible description of those who have undergone not only a transformation, but a transfiguration, one that is brought about through consistent Hesychastic practice.¹⁹² There is a connection to this in an observation made by the man in the book when he is on monastic retreat.

“The face of this old abbot...is more beautiful to me than the entire universe. And the youthful blooming face of this monk, where blood is burning red and muscles are tense, is not beautiful at all. All that is good in him will come to him when he gives up this perishable beauty to become a thin skeleton renouncing food and woman and property and power and glory and opinion, to become an icon that God looks at without being shamed.”¹⁹³

Fortounatto and Cunningham refer to the icon as “a symbol, which manifests something greater than its physical limits allow”.¹⁹⁴ According to these definitions then, an icon is both an image that has been purged of superfluous materiality, and an image which exudes, through its purified materiality, a divine transcendence.

¹⁹¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Testimony and Icons’. In: *Raiati*, 14 October, 2012.

¹⁹² Fortounatto, M. & Cunningham, M. B. ‘Theology of the Icon’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.142. Hesychastic practice, although experiential, has been described as not exclusively so. “In the period of the mature late-byzantine hesychasm, ascetic discourse includes considerable elements of reflection and analysis.” (Horujy, S. *Hesychast Formation of Theology and its Modern Prospects*. (http://synergia-isa.ru/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/hor_phil-theol2010_eng.pdf), p.2. Accessed 30 October, 2012.

¹⁹³ *TPOC*, p.53.

¹⁹⁴ Fortounatto and Cunningham, p.136. For more on symbolism and allegory as a form of symbolism, see Harmless, who cites Evagrius’ (Evagrius Ponticus 345-399) allegorical reading of biblical text, and how “he transposes outer realities into inner ones. Mount Sinai, the “place of God,” is not only a place on a map of the Holy Land; it is an inner landmark, a center in the geography of the soul.” (Harmless, W. *Mystics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.153.) Others who have interpreted biblical text allegorically include Philo (20BCE-50CE) – see Stang, C. M. *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*. “No Longer I.” New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp.177-9. Louth cites Dionysius the Areopagite and his forceful and unflattering view that literalism in bible reading is absurd. (Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, p.23.)

Iconography cannot be compared to other forms of art, which, the man in the book admits, may take you to “the magnificent face of God”, but this is just “elation”, a spiritually limited exercise.¹⁹⁵ As sacred as the icon is, says Clément, it is not an illustration of Scripture, but rather part of the liturgy itself.¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, secular artists, it could be said, also struggle to convey something behind the image and beyond the immediately accessible to convey a presence of ethereal authenticity. This endeavouring to lift the veils of material reality refers both to the work of poets and artists in general, and to the experiences of mystics, who, when persuaded to describe mystical experience, offer what are often inane and even seemingly confused accounts. However, an opposite viewpoint might suggest that, when dealing with the invisible or the apophatic, human abilities to communicate become blunted and artists and mystics can only, Platonically perhaps, convey an approximation of what it is they think they mean.¹⁹⁷ The narrator outlines what the painting of an icon entails.

“The image thus appears as a drawing of grace, an intertwining of graces and colors. Painting an icon does not result from fleshly fantasy, nor the whims of the imagination, nor an instinctive convulsion of nature. On the contrary, it is an expression of a gentle bubbling

¹⁹⁵ *TPOC*, p.3.

¹⁹⁶ Clément, *On Human Being*, p.138. The various means, apart from icons, by which people, some of whom were illiterate, could access, connect to, and be instructed about, the numinous, is addressed elsewhere. See, for example, Louth, who makes the point that, “[liturgical] texts... were clearly intended, as theology in song, to make accessible the riches of the Byzantine theological tradition to many who could not read, but could learn to sing the texts in the church services.” (Louth, A. ‘The Greek Tradition.’ In: *The Orthodox Christian World*. A. Casiday (ed.). London: Routledge, 2010, pp.11-2.) See also Kitchen, who claims there are good examples of how early Syriac literature and liturgy “used verse homily for...congregational instruction, biblical exegesis, and homiletic discourse”. (Kitchen, R. A. The Syriac Tradition. In: *Ibid.*, p.69.)

¹⁹⁷ This touches on the use of imagery, symbolism, and the spiritual experience. Hick refers to Pseudo-Dionysius’ dilemma: an apophatic God, with whom human beings anticipate having “a personal relationship...For how could we worship the totally transcategorical?” [Hick’s words.] Hick says Dionysius resolves this by asserting that Scriptural language is metaphorical, God making himself known through the use of symbolism. “The Word of God makes use of poetic imagery...but...it does so not for the sake of art, but as a concession to the nature of our own mind.” [Dionysius’ words.] (Hick, J. ‘Ineffability’. In: *Religious Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 2000, pp.38-9; Dionysius. ‘The Celestial Hierarchy’. In: *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, p.148, 1, 137A-137B.)

which opens the heavens to reveal a glory beyond any art of this world, such is its magnificence.”¹⁹⁸

Alongside this discussion of artistic expression and what it might be portraying, a parallel may, perhaps, be drawn with the sacraments. In worship, the creature attempts to commune with the Creator, a process that, it is suggested, cannot be limited to created materiality; instead, one must look beyond the material means, by which the sacraments can give expression to spirituality, and connect with the divine source.¹⁹⁹ This requires, it is argued, great meditative powers on the part of the congregant on which this onus is placed, and recalls again the research question.

Early in the book, reference is made to the scintilla of divinity that resides in each one of us, as a result of our being made in the image of God. “The human soul conceals an indelible mark.”²⁰⁰ This mirrors the definition of authenticity as described at the outset – that is, it corresponds to our true nature, the part of our being that is divine. The inextinguishable quality within the human soul has external, material equivalence in the immediate world of the fictional man’s childhood, for within the homes of the people there resides a corresponding glow – the candle lit for the icon.²⁰¹ It is a passage that portrays a religiosity that might suggest deep and abiding faith in the people. In conversation, Khodr is asked whether the Lebanese Orthodox have icons in their home and he confirms that they do; but when asked whether they pray, he replies no.²⁰² This may be indicative of a faith that is rooted in ritualistic observance where icons, although respected for what they represent, are treated as domestic furniture rather than stations of prayer or a

¹⁹⁸ *TWOC*, p.17.

¹⁹⁹ “[W]hoever receives the sacraments must not limit his vision to their material covering, but must behold, spiritually, the “divinity concealed within.” (Mantzaridis, p.42.) Mantzaridis takes the phrase “divinity concealed within” from Palamas’ *Homily 56, Oikonomos*, p.205.)

²⁰⁰ *TWOC*, p.16. In the previous translation, it states that, “In the human soul there is something non-extinguishable.” (*TPOC*, p.2.) Cf. also Clément, who, commenting on an extract from Isaac of Nineveh’s ‘Ascetic Treatises’, puts it succinctly: “The world is within for the spiritual person.” (Clément, O. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism. Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary*. London: New City, 2002, p.253.)

²⁰¹ *TPOC*, p.2.

²⁰² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 24 October, 2013.

mnemonic nudge for a person to pray. The icon is thus representative of a graphic spirituality that is a limited stimulus for inner spirituality. Nevertheless, the Orthodox are encouraged to have icons in their homes.

“If you filled your house with icons, you would be showing your Orthodox faith.

The Lord wants this testimony from you.”²⁰³

This exhortative statement might suggest that icons act like a communal badge for the Orthodox; however, Khodr, through the man in the book, makes it clear that Orthodoxy is more than that, and that ‘living icons’ should be the figurehead for a new authentic Christianity. “We need Christians whose way of life is a model and source of inspiration that provides evidence of the truth of Christ...Christians should always keep this statement from Nietzsche in mind: ‘Show me that you are saved, so that I will believe in your Savior.’”²⁰⁴ Here, we are taken back to what authentic Christianity means to Khodr’s understanding of the phrase – a transforming, experiential spirituality that will visibly shape character and behaviour, changing a person’s transactions with the ‘Other’ and the world.

Throughout this section on icons, extracts from periodic articles have been blended with passages from the book, and supported by Khodr’s comments in interview, to show how, for him, icons exemplify authentic spirituality, are a central feature of Orthodoxy, and have been the focus of his own personal, spiritual experience over the course of his life. In particular, the narrator’s description of an icon as opening “the heavens to reveal a glory beyond any art of this world”, encapsulates Khodr’s own experience of the iconic image of Jesus that hangs in his study.²⁰⁵ For Khodr, an icon conveys a vivid and condensed spirituality that is barely of this world, and may be seen in those who have travelled the ascetic way of the committed Christian. “I feel the need to encounter a person who embodies the word. I am in need,” says the man in the book, “of a living icon who sees me eye to eye. His gaze penetrates my

²⁰³ Khodr, *Testimony and Icons*.

²⁰⁴ *TWOC*, pp.153-4.

²⁰⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

soul with a benevolence that scrutinizes without condemning. He condescends toward me, spilling forth grace.”²⁰⁶

9. Striving For Authentic Existence

If theosis, our authentic destiny, lies outside the material world, our pursuit of it perforce finds expression in kenosis and self-denial, an emptying of selfish passions, an ascetic taming of the ego; and the drive towards this entails goals, which, individually, we can aspire to according to our spiritual strength.²⁰⁷ The man in the book refers to his spiritual father: “Completely emptying himself, he gave himself to nourish his flock.”²⁰⁸ Not everyone can become a monk or a nun, but they can rein in their earthly wants, expand their capacity for empathy, for tolerance, and extend their love to embrace universal humanity. The fictional man’s early life is a modest illustration when he chooses to deny himself the opportunities afforded by his education and background, “to rid himself of his books”,²⁰⁹ turn his back on literary and cerebral pursuits, and instead take up a manual occupation in a joinery. It is an exercise in humbling oneself, but also, in the vein of existential religiosity, the prelude to the development of an authenticity that derives from a universal, ‘socialistic’ perspective – equality of rights for working people. And yet it would seem that this retreat from the world is not to be entirely bereft of

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.127.

²⁰⁷ In Orthodoxy, *kenosis* represents God’s emptying out of himself to become incarnate and so present humanity with an opportunity for deification; it is a selfless act of giving up one’s own identity. A similar process of *kenosis* can be found in the Incarnation, when God emptied himself to take on human form to become a servant. See Philippians 2:5-8. See also John 13:4-17, where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. On *kenosis*, see, for example, Russell. “The kenosis of the divine Son took place in order to bring about the theosis of the human person.” (Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p.267.) Medley describes Fiddes’ citing of Balthasar and the latter’s belief that “the Son surrenders himself without reserve in order to save humanity”. (Medley, M. S. ‘Participation in God. The Appropriation of Theosis by Contemporary Baptist Theologians.’ In: *Theosis. Deification in Christian Theology. Volume Two*. Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011, p.222.) *Kenosis* can be linked to the transcending of boundaries, for, in order to relate positively to the ‘Other’, it is necessary to transcend one’s identity and boundaries, which entails, to a certain degree, the emptying of one’s *self*.

²⁰⁸ TWOC, p.137.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p.57.

consolation for he “kept two or three books that dealt with the history of art, a book of modern poetry and some Sufi literature.”²¹⁰

In the workshop, his artistic abilities naturally incline him towards the design aspect of carpentry, but this proves problematic. He refers to “the dilemma of beauty”²¹¹ with which he was confronted when he was working as a boy in a jewellery shop, and when he was trying to carve out a literary career for himself. Hence, he finds himself dealing with an irony – ascetically escaping the temptations of literature, the struggle with words to express the inexpressible, he is forced once again to face the artist’s struggle to articulate the ineffable, the apophatic. Yet, asks the man in the book, with an air of hopelessness, “How do we renounce beauty, once we have attained it?”²¹² But it is also, perhaps, an oblique reference to the allusiveness of beauty, the tortuous road of the artist to nail Beauty, the Platonic Ideal, to the flagstaff of humankind’s existence, a struggle that may only, and inevitably, end in our being nailed to the cross of our own crucifixion.

This sequence, however, is not devoted to aesthetic consideration alone. The main theme is the inauthentic life of workers. The man in the book states that, while “the Kingdom of God is for all...the masters succeed one another and take turns enslaving their brothers. The slaves must revolt if they are to make humanity aware that all people are called to be kings.”²¹³ There is a need, continues the man in the book, to undertake “an historical-economic analysis of the conditions of the worker”.²¹⁴ This aptly illustrates the definition of existential religiosity outlined earlier, that of a radical and radical spirituality.

In laying down in almost prophetic terms how society should operate, he is emulating Christ, who, while acknowledging the right of secular leaders to rule

²¹⁰ *TPOC*, p.19.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

²¹² *TWOC*, p.73.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.60.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

– not the same, it is contended, as granting them a seal of approval²¹⁵ – implies that human beings are subject to another authority, that of God and the Spirit. If there is any doubt about the pioneering, reformist trait of the man in the book – who, it is argued, echoes Khodr’s own character and political stance²¹⁶ – the narrator then makes a categorical statement: “My friend wished to work toward the creation of a more humane society in which each person could develop his own gifts.”²¹⁷ As stated earlier, he issues a coruscating denunciation of the wealthy and every intellectual ploy to justify it.²¹⁸ And he rails against those who would camouflage and excuse their immorality through the religiosity of preachers, who would countenance the actions of the rich and powerful.²¹⁹ “These cries are generally...orchestrated by preachers in the pay of the “haves”...Alas, there are many false references to the Creator inspired by the devil in various places of worship. Preaching often goes courting the demons.”²²⁰ The man in the book is allowed a further, more radical step of rebellion. He rejects what he sees as an expression of inauthentic religion – “this untruthful religion”²²¹ – and turns his back on a Church that appears to support the oppressors. Again, it portrays a radical spirituality that is the essence of existential religiosity.

These extracts address the plight of human beings, not just in their existential predicament, their sense of cosmic dislocation or existential abandonment, but in a social setting which compounds this suffering through dehumanisation and exploitation, a process that the Church, perhaps unwittingly, perhaps not comprehensively, appears to endorse through its consorting with the rich and

²¹⁵ This is a reflection of the “garments of skin” argument, which allows for certain conditions, institutions, as endemic to our postlapsarianism. See Chapter 4, p.131.

²¹⁶ See Chapter 3 and the discussion with Abou Mrad.

²¹⁷ *TWOC*, p.66.

²¹⁸ See above, p.154. “The idol of money must fall down, the domination of the wealthy must be eradicated; every philosophical or political call that would sanctify wealth and the wealthy...must be exposed.” (*TWOC*, p.60.)

²¹⁹ See above, p.188, where the man in the book addresses this in his consideration of stealing.

²²⁰ *TWOC*, p.62.

²²¹ *TPOC*, p.22. Siding with Marxists, he believes that this religion “had truly been opium for the people”. (Ibid.) The contextual meaning of Marx’s phrase, arguably distilled from other sources, has a subtlety of interpretation that lies outside the scope of this work.

powerful. In a later work, Khodr adumbrates how the priest fits into his vision of authentic parish life.

“The time of mercenary priests is gone, and the time of big sacrifices and giving all the time of the priest to the parish has come.” The priest needs to “know the spiritual situation of the house...Of course, this cannot be done in details in big parishes, and therefore, we need new priests that can know the situation of every individual as much as possible...We cannot continue having large parishes just to satisfy the priest and keep the big living he makes.”²²²

In this article from 2005, there is a call for priests to become immersed in their parish, a sentiment that converges with the fictional man’s viewpoint. “Only her [the Church’s] immersion in the problems of the world will give the Church, whose usual jargon seems so out of step with reality, the necessary power to speak intelligently about her social and political positions, and also about her theological issues.”²²³ Another dimension is added in a later article where he says that a priest’s responsibilities “is first in his holiness and second in nourishing the faithful through the Word of God”, but this must be done authentically, for “the faithful can differentiate between a person that recites a lesson he has read and a person that lives these words in his heart.”²²⁴

The ensuing peaceful demonstrations, which the man helps to organise, are met with violent reaction from the authorities, while the consequential grievances felt by the workforce become the focus of attention of political parties. Conscious involvement in politics, the man in the book seems to be saying, should be avoided. “My friend,” says the narrator, “preferred not to run the risk of being manipulated by the political parties.”²²⁵ This is supported by Khodr’s avowed discomfort with power, but, nonetheless, should be weighed against other references to politics in the book. It is viewed elsewhere as unavoidable: “Politics is a must. You do not choose it. It is

²²² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Heart of the Priest’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 11 December, 2005.

²²³ *TWOC*, pp.156-7.

²²⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Priest and His Life’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 10 July, 2011.

²²⁵ *TWOC*, pp.63-4.

thrust upon you by a pressurising history that is full of interests.”²²⁶ Later, there is a covert admission that the political world cannot be entirely dispensed with: “Politics should be a servant to spiritual life”.²²⁷ It does not, however, escape further barbed comment. “A party transforms the movement into an establishment. A party is canned thought; a following of ideology that is only one step away from petrification.”²²⁸ But standing on the sidelines is not sufficient to protect you. If you stand in the way of the ‘rulers’, if you refuse to countenance their policies, if you advocate an ‘other worldly’ way of life as an alternative to their political credo, you will be crucified as Christ was. “It is not important that you should talk or practise politics for them to fight you.”²²⁹ In other words, if one opposes earthly power and authority, it matters not whether one is a political activist; the one who opposes is “a burden..a living reproof to our way of thinking...Let us condemn him to a shameful death...”²³⁰ This passage is redolent of Khodr’s standing in the Church as outlined by Abou Mrad, how he is not a popular figure in the Church of Antioch and marginalised at synodal gatherings; it is also a depiction of the Outsider.

10. Conclusion

Describing how best to coordinate our life towards a more authentic existence – by which is meant being in accord with the truth of our inner self, which is partly divine; setting our spiritual coordinates for the theotic pathway; and promoting spiritual values rather than the world’s – Khodr, through the narrator and the man in the book, delineates a general outline that draws on a cross-section of themes: imagery; ecumenism; workers’ conditions; attitudes to death; monasticism; and morality. Nonetheless, two overarching themes sum up his approach – the first is falsity, being true to our self and to our capacities; the second is Christianity, which, for Khodr, must be experienced firsthand and lived existentially, otherwise, it becomes a cold collation of texts, beautiful ritual, dutiful routine – in a word, Christianity forsakes experiential

²²⁶ *TPOC*, p.23.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.37.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²³⁰ This is part of an extract from Wisdom 2:14-20, which is quoted in full in *TWOC*, p.64.

spirituality to become solely an agglomeration of collective 'imagery'. But also in these two themes, there is an overlapping, an interconnectivity; for, to be true to our spiritual self would imply, for Khodr, living life in the full realisation that we are made in the image of God and intended for the reclamation of our theotic identity.

When, in the book, Khodr writes critically of the plight of workers, he comes across as a radical socialist, with some of his denouncements reading like a clarion call to arms; when advocating spiritual revivification, he assumes the mantle of an unyielding religious prophet. Both imply existential religiosity, both refer to authenticity – a radical because the workers' conditions, under which they labour, are an affront to the workers' authentic identity (that is, persons made in the image of God); a prophet because it entails a resetting of spiritual coordinates for the theotic pathway. However, it is argued, what distinguishes Khodr from the politically idealistic and the religiously self-assured, is a realisation that authenticity comes not from the material world, but from immaterial grace. It is bestowed by God; indeed, every advance in our spiritual lives and all inspiration comes from God. "The grace of this same Spirit fills the one who writes the text as well as whoever chants it. This power, which comes from on high, elevates the listeners to God."²³¹ For, in the end, all our own efforts, however grand and lofty the ideal, however earnest the intention, will wither and be consigned to oblivion.

"[W]e know that everything fails in the end. The achievements of history wilt like grass in the desert...Christian utopias...have practically all disappeared...Christianity owes its perennial existence to that particular grace which prevents it from being identified with any one image, while at the same time consistently promoting the vitality of society as nothing else can. Creation is in the breath of life, not in

²³¹ TWOC, p.91. Theosis itself is as an act of grace. See, for example, Lossky, who describes the deification process as, "on the one side there is the divine and deifying will granting grace through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human person; on the other side there is the human will which submits to the will of God in receiving grace and making it its own, and allowing it to penetrate all its nature." (Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.127.)

institutions. We must perpetually transcend every worldly situation, and thus every kind of institution.”²³²

The reference to “grace which prevents it from being identified with any one image” bespeaks an openness to other faiths and variant expressions of Christianity; while it also, perhaps, alludes to the celestial Church, which, unlike the Church on earth, is not sundered by fractious division. It is maybe why Khodr deeply loves the (celestial) Church, but is wary of institutions – “Creation is in the breath of life, not in institutions” – which represent the workings of mortal minds rather than the will of God. This may be the nub of his grievance. For him, the Church on earth should stand as the home of human beings’ spiritual aspirations and the most apposite place to which human beings should gravitate in order to prepare themselves for their real theotic destiny after death and a reappropriation of their true identity.²³³ Once they are within the physical building that is the church, the entirety of their experience will be orchestrated by, and synchronised to, the Liturgy and the sacraments. But he is aware that preoccupation with Church rites and ritual may have a nugatory effect on Christians if worship remains unmitigated by a distinct form of spiritual authenticity – experiential spirituality. It is a problem with which he is personally familiar. He explains that his generation experienced Christ “as a living person – or even that he was life”,²³⁴ by which he means the theandric Jesus filled and animated their religious life. However, “somehow, to some extent this was hidden by the practice...of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy” in the form of “performances and ritualism”;²³⁵ and this, he contends, was because of “the pious generation”,²³⁶ who represented the generation before Khodr’s own, and who were predominant prior to the formation of the OYM. “I’m convinced that the pious generation...was a good generation, but not so much with the vision of Christ’s face, the personal

²³² *TWOC*, p.67.

²³³ For Payne, in the footsteps of Yannaras’ argument, “[o]nly through a return to the ecclesial community...can authentic human existence be achieved.” And for Yannaras, according to Payne, that community is the Orthodox Church. (Payne, p.253.)

²³⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

Christ. This is not the sickness of Orthodoxy, but the temptation of Orthodoxy.”²³⁷ The pious generation, although worthy Christians, was so preoccupied with the Liturgy and with the formalities of the written word and the ritualism accompanying it, that the idea of the person of Christ was overlaid or even ignored.²³⁸ For him, this was a religiosity that could be said to have been, in some measure, lacking in spiritual authenticity.

As for ecumenism, it is regarded as no more than a symbolic gesture enveloped in intellectual pretension and delivered with little hope of realistic success, but there is also philosophical acceptance. Unity, if it is meant to be, will come in God's own time. Meanwhile, if the Church seeks spiritual authenticity, it should prioritise its responsibilities, placing ministration to the poor and suffering at the top of its agenda. This exemplifies Khodr's existential religiosity; but there is further illustration of Khodr's existential perspective, how he thinks in an existential way, in some of his other writings, where existence is seen as fraught with uncertainties. “We can never rid ourselves of the fear of the future or the fear for our health...Fear will always remain regardless of all the sophistication and luxury.”²³⁹ Christianity's role, Khodr is implying, is about addressing these fears and tending to the ones who need concrete help. The man in the book is likeminded. “The time will come when we will not be able to understand the word of God unless we listen to the cries of the oppressed and those who are suffering.”²⁴⁰ This is made explicit in a much later article. “Christianity is a call for the sake of the needy and the poor”.²⁴¹ It is Khodr's theology of the ‘Other’ placed in a real and social setting, rather than, as he might see it, exposed to the airless environment of intellectual debate; and, because it strips Christianity, in its application, down to its essential, authentic nature, it represents his existential

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ramfos reflects something of this when he talks about Byzantine society and the increasing reliance on the word leading to an aridity of meaning. “So long as the symbolic type, then, remained without any link to the emotions, the word became increasingly unable to be a source of creation...language was sucked up into the symbol and became ossified.” (Ramfos, p.161.)

²³⁹ Khodr, *Idols*.

²⁴⁰ *TWOC*, p.154.

²⁴¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Poor’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 5 January, 2013.

religiosity in practice. Thus, to know that Christianity is so far or so near reunification is immaterial to the poor and irrelevant to all who suffer. Actual help administered through the love of Christ is what counts.

Although saddened by the state of the Church, Khodr is steadfastly Orthodox; but it is also clear, as asserted above, that he appears open to other versions of Christianity. This openness additionally applies to other forms of spiritual truth, and is a continuing feature of his theology. In an article published in 2011, he refers to an initiative he launched thirty years previously. Christ “existing in the ‘night’ of religions,” meant (at the time), he says,

“the latent or concealed truth in those religions that is the truth which God sends to whoever He wishes...I refrain from evaluating religions in their doctrines but I cannot but notice people of those religions who are pure in their ways”.²⁴²

The reference to the two articles separated by thirty years, together with Khodr’s article ‘I Have Called You Friends’, which was alluded to earlier in this chapter, chime with the narrator’s comments in the book. “My friend refused to denigrate the Islamic faith; he loved certain Muslims whose closeness to God he knew, and who behaved in a godly manner...Does the Spirit not blow where it chooses...?”²⁴³ This espousal of the spiritual authenticity of Islam and the holiness of Muslims acts as a bridge between the fictional man and Khodr’s own professed belief in the authenticity of other religious faiths.

All this, represents an unequivocal endorsement of the essence of other spiritual belief systems, other versions of truth. As cited earlier, he esteems Islam, has profound respect for the spirituality of Muslims,²⁴⁴ and professes a deep love for Sufism – evinced, for example, by his retention of “some Sufi literature” during his own ‘self-emptying’. That said, this openness should not camouflage his abiding love of Orthodoxy. “That faith [the Orthodox faith] is a

²⁴² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Holy Spirit’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 June, 2011.

²⁴³ *TWOC*, p.53.

²⁴⁴ See, for example, Sharp, p.178.

guarantee of peace and serenity in our minds and souls. It can become in us the starting point of great self-sacrifice, which allows us to discern spiritual realities – the vector of revelation that God plants in the soul and in history.”²⁴⁵ This is a paean to authenticity in faith, and the narrator records what amounts to a *satori*, which the man in the book experienced early in his life, a ‘mystical’ asseveration that Orthodoxy reflects this authenticity.

“One of the most beautiful days of his life, it dawned on my friend that the Church into which he had been born had never fallen captive to verbal sophistication, nor had it been frozen by canons, nor seduced by a carefully arranged rational structure. Through its unifying vision of the elements of existence, the Church makes us sensitive to what God continues to reveal to every creature around us... This vision mainly takes shape through worship and celebration.”²⁴⁶

To claim that Khodr’s quest for authenticity in faith revolves around Christianity, with its splintered countenance and redolent exclusivism, would be neither entirely accurate, nor, perhaps, convincing. It might be more precise to say his vision of authentic spirituality is Christocentric. “Christ... is the only prophet in the full meaning of the word. Only those who enter his school and are willing to sacrifice themselves can truly bear witness to the word of God.”²⁴⁷ Yet Khodr’s Christocentrism is universalist, and is reflected in his belief that Christ is for Muslims, not just for Christians.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ *TWOC*, p.22. Later, the man in the book refers to the Eastern Church, “adorned by its great theologians in a wedding garment woven out of freedom and authenticity.” (Ibid., p.99.)

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.23. Khodr describes a similar experience when he and others, as young students, realised that the Orthodox Church did not need to be justified. It could live, as Khodr recounts it, by its own tradition, which was/is “the first Christian tradition”. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.)

²⁴⁷ *TWOC*, p.125. Later in the book, the fictional man talks about education, specifically religious education. “It should not become bogged down in sentimental, watered-down religious imagery, nor confine itself to the narration of miracles. Its goal is to reveal God’s mode of being in Christ Jesus”. (Ibid., p.136.)

²⁴⁸ Avakian, p.122. In conversation, Khodr said he believes a Muslim may be a member of the Church through the Holy Spirit, and that Christ could be with him (the Muslim), not in him. This differentiation is important because he believes that Muslims cannot accept the notion of ‘in man’ as this insinuates incarnation. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.) See also Ladouceur, who cites Bulgakov. “The doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, has...an anthropological significance. This doctrine affirms a

Khodr's disquiet about Orthodoxy's mingling with the rich and powerful, and women's desire to have, in every respect, societal equality with men, is that both groups, men and the rich and powerful, are associated with a society that is fundamentally rotten, corrupt, and irrevocably inauthentic.

“Such a society develops social inequalities. By increasing the wealth of some and the poverty of others, it encourages the emergence of a world moving at two different speeds – a world which ignores the fact that man is made for man, and that only by pooling his riches can he control his own destiny and find meaning in life.”²⁴⁹

The suffering of humanity can be represented in a binary model: secular suffering in the form of inequality, exploitation, and dehumanising social categorisation and employment; and spiritual suffering incurred by existential factors and our awareness, conscious or subliminal, of the apophatic gulf that exists between God and ourselves.²⁵⁰ If suffering, both secular and spiritual, has been depicted separately by writers such as Camus and Zola,²⁵¹ Khodr, it is argued, is concerned with both strands and interweaves secular and spiritual suffering within the fabric of the book.²⁵² Equating equality of workers'

certain pan-christism and pan-pneumatism, to which no limits are set. In this aspect this doctrine contains the idea that, after the Incarnation and the Pentecost, Christ is the head of humankind and therefore lives in all humankind. The same thing is affirmed concerning the Holy Spirit.” (Ladouceur, P. ‘Religious Diversity in Modern Orthodox Thought’. In: *Religions*, 8 (5), 77, 2017; doi:10.3390/rel8050077 (Accessed 11 May, 2017); Bulgakov, S. *The Bride of the Lamb*. Boris Jakim (trans.). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans and Edinburgh: T&T Clark, [1945] 2002.)

²⁴⁹ *TWOC*, p.66.

²⁵⁰ Non-believers have their own ‘spiritual’ suffering whereby they perceive themselves as alone in an empty universe.

²⁵¹ Camus’ work, as an existential writer, covers the human condition from a ‘spiritual’ perspective, which is philosophically reflected in *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Zola, in, for example, his book *Germinal*, captures the appalling working conditions of French miners in the nineteenth century. (Camus, A. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin Books, 1975; Zola, E. *Germinal*. Peter Collier (trans.) Oxford, UK: Oxford World’s Classics, 1998.)

²⁵² Khodr’s concern and what enlivens his existential religiosity, is following an Antiochene tradition. See, for instance, Ignatius IV. “The spirit of Antioch is directed towards man, seeing him as the bearer of a divine breath, and as the dwelling-place of love without limit or restriction. All knowledge, value, or culture that deprives man of his essence as end in himself pierces his heart...” (Ignatius IV. ‘Interview with the

rights with spiritual mission in a form of religious social radicalism, while fusing the spiritual with contiguous existential tensions, echoes the characteristics of existential religiosity – as does Khodr’s emphasis on suffering humanity, his qualifying of moral principles such as stealing, and his view that experiential spirituality is more vital than ‘image’ and ritual on their own.

In practical terms, Khodr’s existential religiosity is not just about instigating radical reform in the workplace, it is also about initiating, within the person, a resetting of their spiritual compass. The alternative is to dull the awareness of our fallen state by allowing our lives to take on a self-centred, hedonistic pattern, or by developing personal ambition and the pursuit of self-interest; however, authenticity, in terms of our divine identity and our divine destiny, will be denied us and true personal fulfilment will be forever beyond our grasp.²⁵³ By facing up to the reality of our existential condition and learning to articulate our pain creatively,²⁵⁴ rather than falling back on “eternal complaining”,²⁵⁵ it is possible to transcend our suffering and progress towards theosis.

newspaper *al-Safir*, Beirut, 6 February, 1981.’ In: *Orthodoxy & The Issues of Our Time*, p.111.)

²⁵³ It may not be the case that personal ambition, particularly that which eases someone out of their social predicament, is always regarded negatively; it is more the case that those who give full rein to their ambitions at the expense of their spiritual growth, trouncing spiritual values, pushing aside others in their quest to gain ever greater status and evermore personal acquisitions, are not living ‘authentically’.

²⁵⁴ “When shall wounds be transformed into words?” (*TPOC*, p.20.)

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 6

Relationality

Chapter 5 linked Khodr's book to the theme of authenticity, connecting it to our being made in the image of God and our true destiny in theosis. It was subsequently shown how authenticity can be an expression of existential religiosity. As has already been stated, the six criteria are intrinsically interconnected, especially within the dyadic connectivity of identity and authenticity. Chapter 6 now addresses 'relationality', which is another link in the overall interconnecting chain of six criteria, for our identity depends on how we relate ('authentically') to the world, but in particular to the 'Other'.

1. Defining The Term 'Relationality'

As understood within this work, relationality is intrinsically about relating to, and having a relationship with, the 'Other' and with the world. However, Ware's apophatic anthropology is an acknowledgement that we remain a mystery even to ourselves,¹ let alone the 'Other', and that 'personhood' (what it is to be a human person) is mercurial and impervious to precision definition;² which is why it may be supposed the 'Other' is an unknown entity.³ This can be processed either negatively or positively. With regard to negative connotations, the 'Other', it is argued, can thus be seen as a threat and become the phenomenon of 'not-'I'', which is akin to a Sartrean interpretation. This may slide into a form of egotistical individuality, philosophical solipsism, or simple selfishness, which, it is contended, can be summed up in one word: objectification. Objectification, in this context, may be the means by which the world and the concrete entities within it become other than 'I'; they are not, however, experienced by 'I' as feeling subjects, as potential co-operatives in the world, extensions or variations of 'I', but as alien objects impinging on the world of 'I'. Taken to an extreme, the 'I' feels little or no compunction towards

¹ "[W]e are a mystery to ourselves." (Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, p.32.)

² "Personhood remains elusive and ultimately indefinable." (Ibid., p.39.)

³ Stang cites Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) to show that the apophaticism of God is not unique to God. Eckhart, says Stang, states how "God and soul enjoy a union of indistinction owing to the fact that they share the same ground, or *Grunt*." [Stang's words and italics.] (Stang, p.157.)

the world and what is contained in it; violence may hence be ruled a legitimate means by which the 'I' can achieve its goal. This negative understanding of 'I' can be expanded into a group mentality.⁴ Thus, if harmonious social cohesion between disparate groups is to be maintained, relationality has a particular significance in Lebanon with its pluralistic background.

Heidegger's philosophy, while rejecting the notion of a "subject and object" dichotomy, nonetheless presents a seemingly harmonious concept centred around "the unity of Being-in-the-world."⁵ However, Buber and Fichte illustrate a more positive perspective. The 'I' can only be fully human when it communes with another human being.⁶ As Ware puts it, "I cannot know myself as a person apart from my relationship with you".⁷ Khodr makes an additional observation, predicating "dialogue...on the recognition that the other exists".⁸ This positive aspect is central to the communality of Orthodoxy – Payne observes how, for Yannaras, relationality is concentrated on the communal Church⁹ – and, it is argued, forms the backbone of Khodr's theology of the 'Other'.

⁴ Hourani refers to incidents of interreligious tension in the Islamic empire during times of hardship or danger. "Pressures upon Jews and Christians may have come mainly from the urban masses, particularly in times of war or economic hardship, when hostility might be directed against the non-Muslim officials of the ruler." (Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, p.118.)

⁵ Heidegger, M. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. A. Hofstadter (trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p.297. Cited in Cooper, p.32.

⁶ Cooper cites Fichte, a representative of German idealism, who, similarly, sees the fulfilment of the 'I' in the existence of the 'Other', and makes the unequivocal statement that "the human being becomes a human being only among other human beings". (Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*. [1797], p.37, cited in Cooper, p.44.) Or as Cooper succinctly puts it, "To exist is necessarily to exist *with* others [his italics]." (Cooper, *ibid.*)

⁷ Ware. 'In the Image and Likeness: The Uniqueness of the Human Person', p.4.

⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. 'The Others.' S. Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 28 July, 2012.

⁹ See Chapter 5, p.204, Fn.233, where a shorter version of this quote is used. "For Yannaras, apophaticism allows for the full expression of the person since the person is not construed as an object of knowledge that can be comprehended, but as a subject that can be known through ecstasy and love. Only through a return to the ecclesial community, as a way of life according to the truth, can authentic human existence be achieved. For Yannaras, that community is none other than the Orthodox Church." (Payne, p.253.) See also, Yannaras: "...the desire for a fulfilling *relation*...is the real starting point for the birth of the rational subject." [His emphasis.] (Yannaras, *Relational Ontology*, p109.)

2. Relationality Through Friendship & Diversity

In the book, the fictional man remains unmarried; and although marriage and sexual relations are touched on in the narrative, it is reasonable to conclude that he probably never experienced a sexual relationship, and, of course, never married. For Khodr, it may be equally reasonable to assert that a physical relationship with a woman was something he himself chose to avoid. He has a coterie of solid, loyal followers, whom he would call friends, and who represent a meaningful substitute for the loss of a consort and family. For the man in the book, friendship became, “his greatest comfort”.¹⁰

“Upon leaving school, my friend felt a deep need for friendship, as if a great torrent of affection had suddenly welled up in his soul. He lived in the warmth of friendship, and it continued to be his greatest consolation. For him friendship was stronger, perhaps purer, than love.”¹¹

A little later, the narrator adds, “Friendship is humility, because it is an admission that the other is as essential as breathing.”¹² This is succeeded by the narrator’s comment on existence. “Life is a desert, and those whose eyes gleam upon seeing us are the oases.”¹³ Khodr, through the narrator, is making an existential point about friendship, ranking it high on the scale of relationality. Life is harsh, but, “[t]he familiarity linking friends does not require much talk. Each is conscious of the other person, and together they form a relational being.”¹⁴ In the bleakness of naked existence, the presence of the ‘Other’ in the world and our ability to relate to the ‘Other’ saves the ‘I’, providing it with the nourishment that is essential to existence. It is also suggestive perhaps of relational union, with the ‘Other and the ‘I’ remaining discrete individual entities.

Friendship, it could be argued, crystallises from elements of commonalities – age, interests, background. What, however, of those with whom there is a fundamental divergence? In Lebanon, religious diversity has historically been

¹⁰ *TPOC*, p.7.

¹¹ *TWOC*, p.26.

¹² *Ibid.* Cf. the references made to marriage in Chapter 4, pp.131-2.

¹³ *TWOC*, p.26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

a cause of antagonism. The country's history is replete with violent interreligious clashes, which, like storms, wreak havoc before subsiding, leaving in their wake a semblance of harmony between Christians and Muslims. Whereas there have been Lebanese Christian communities whose relationality with their country hinges on a Christianisation of Lebanon,¹⁵ the narrator makes it plain where the man in the book stands.

“My friend considered the idea of a Christian homeland a heresy from a solely political standpoint, but above all spiritually. Through their presence in a Muslim land, the eastern Christians must pursue convivial relations with the Muslims as part of their history and civilization.”¹⁶

It is a firmly held view as expressed in the book, and it is one that is reaffirmed by a later article.

“The follower of Christ, like his master, is born upon a cross and not bearer of a cross against anybody. We are called to be Christians (Christ-like), not crusaders. The “Household of Christianity” is not a self-asserting community as over and against the “Household of Islam.”¹⁷

This is broadened out in a much later article, ‘Ramadan Has Arrived’. Khodr praises the holiness of fasting Muslims – “[w]e embrace Muslims because God has embraced them in the purity of divine worship” – and builds on the fictional man's pursuit of “convivial relations”. Rather than dialogue that targets dogmas, he calls for a relationality based on “the convergence of people who seek God in love and desire that others may transcend with

¹⁵ See Hirst, who claims this was a goal that the ‘pro-Zionist’ Maronites hoped would evolve. (Hirst, D. *Beware of Small States. Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010, p.26.)

¹⁶ TWOC, p.48.

¹⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘I Have Called You Friends’. In: *The Muslim World*, Vol.LXXI, Nos.3-4, July-October 1981, pp.163-177, p.176. Wingate offers another view, suggesting that Islam and Christianity have “an inclusivist strand”, whereby those who earnestly practise their own faith may be saved. He adds that within pluralism, which he describes as an “alternative theology”, there is “little impulse...for seeking conversions. None of us have all the truth or a monopoly of salvation, which is relative to the faith practice.” (Wingate, A. ‘Interreligious Conversion.’ In: *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, p.190.) But see also Khodr's remark in interview, Chapter 5, Fn.21.

them.”¹⁸ The three intertwine to accentuate his existential religiosity: that is, conviviality (authentic relationality) will develop through a shared sense of spirituality, one that is not confined within the borders of Christian enclaves.

Khodr believes in an active relationality, not one that exists in theory alone. He is clear what form this should take and is supportive of interactive co-operation across the religious divide.

“Some Muslims are participating with us in building Churches or schools in order to ask for forgiveness from God through charity. I also know that some Christians help Muslims in their charity projects. This should be the standard.

Do not fall in [*sic*] the heresy of differentiating between Muslims and Christians in charity. You have your own faith and they have theirs, however, the Muslim must dwell in your heart if you wanted God to dwell in it too.”¹⁹

Conjoined with the earlier extracts, Khodr’s uncompromising interreligious, and existential, religiosity is predated by the book, where the narrator makes a further, perhaps provocative, point, which was cited in the last chapter. “He knew very few Christians who were nearer to the heart of God than this chosen group of Muslims. Does the Spirit not blow where it chooses (Jn 3.8)?”²⁰

Khodr, it would seem, has maintained this conviction throughout his life.²¹ In another article, he refers to the ‘impartiality’ of the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit operates and applies His energies in accordance with His own economy and we could, from this angle, regard the non-Christian religions as points where

¹⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Ramadan Has Arrived.’ S. Avakin-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 30 July, 2011.

¹⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Love for Everyone’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 3 September, 2006.

²⁰ *TWOC*, p.53.

²¹ See Khodr’s reference to Christ “existing in the ‘night’ of religions”, Chapter 5, p.206.

His inspiration is at work.”²² This then is a reflection of Khodr’s thinking, a transcendent spirituality that extends boundaries and expresses a belief in spiritual commonalities between Christians and Muslims under the same God, including all those whose religiosity acknowledges an overarching One. It expresses his existential religiosity because the sublimation of the ‘Other’s’ spiritual capacities, as it appears in the book, goes against the grain of Lebanese communal ‘philosophy’, ignoring the communal dividing lines that, in general, distinguish Christianity from Islam in Lebanon. It is a stance that remains with Khodr to this day, as this more recent reappraisal of sociological fealties testifies: “if a person from your family had a conflict with someone from another family, this doesn’t necessarily mean that you should be on the side of your relative.”²³ For those who have offended us, forgiveness undergirds the process of reconciliation.

“...we have to opt for that which brings us together rather than for what separates us, and we have to line up together in whatever unites us, so that we do not burden our minds by history’s contraventions and we do not keep its abominations in our hearts...This means that we should forgive those who did wrong to us in the past, and we should not burden our memory by the misdeeds of the oppressors.”²⁴

Later, the narrator considers relationality on a broader, international front.

“Each person’s ultimate request is for recognition by his peers. It is the same with the life of a nation. The recognition of other nations allows it to affirm its existence and identity, to rejoice in its independence and growth. To accept others, to cooperate with other people despite our

²² Khodr, *Christianity in a Pluralistic World*. This openness to universalism is reflected in the religious thought of others. Stefanie Hugh-Donovan indicates how Clément “sees the dialectics of radical thinkers in the Enlightenment and through modernity as the Holy Spirit’s work blowing where he will.” (Hugh-Donovan, S. ‘Olivier Clément on Orthodox Theological Thought and Ecclesiology in the West’. In: *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 2010:2-3, pp.116-129, p.123.) She goes on to quote directly from Clément: “Modern humanism needs to be openly acknowledged as belonging within divine-humanism, thus revealing Marx, Nietzsche and Freud to be *also* [his emphasis] forerunners of this movement.” (Ibid; Clément, *On Human Being*, p.106.)

²³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Family of the Father’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 19 August, 2012.

²⁴ Khodr, *The New Human Being*.

differences, is a prerequisite of unity. Is respect not the recognition of the other as an inviolate being?"²⁵

It is as if Khodr has taken his thoughts on relationality and openness to the 'Other' and, within the novelistic bounds of the book, given them a novelistic twist. As spiritual beings made in the image of God, we are all the same, Khodr is saying. Recognising this universalism is the basis on which conviviality can find its most hospitable roots.

It is a passage that comes when the man in the book, now employed in the workshop, has joined the union and become its administrative secretary. The disgruntlement of the workers and the ensuing unrest, stem from the right of workers to have respect. It is similar, he argues, to according nations dignity and respect. This is not, the narrator maintains, about financial remuneration. Money "satisfies only biological needs";²⁶ the main reason for the protests that lead to a public demonstration lies in the need for dignity. Relationality with the 'Other' does not depend solely on the barest minimum of rights and privileges, it requires a recognition of the 'Other' as a member of one's own family, an extension of one's *self*. As Khodr expresses it, "every person is your brother, and you should love him exactly as you love your own brother or sister."²⁷ This level of inclusivism is bold and radical, but also expressive of Khodr's existential religiosity. Elsewhere, Khodr refers to the Good Samaritan. "Do not ask therefore about the one you show mercy to...He who is shown mercy by you is loved by you. And thus the "nation" of the beloved is built with love."²⁸ The thread that binds these various extracts – the book, the articles – is Khodr's theology of the 'Other'. In the book, the fictional man, in expounding the theology of the 'Other' and why it is so central to existence, highlights the fundamental, almost visceral, need for recognition, not just amongst individuals but towards other nations. Without the 'Other', the 'I' simply does not exist – or, perhaps more realistically, the 'I's' existence is as translucent, shapeless, and empty as the apparition of a wraith. As a

²⁵ TWOC, p.60.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Khodr, *The Family of the Father*.

²⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Love Your Neighbor As Yourself'. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 19 November, 2005.

consequence, unity cannot be achieved without the acceptance of others – in other words, how can a wraith, lacking substance, be united with anything. In ‘The Family of the Father’, Khodr adds meaning to this by stressing sibling togetherness. If you recognise your own brother, your own sister, you must realise that no one is outside this human family, and everyone is your brother or your sister. In ‘Love Your Neighbour As Yourself’, he adds another dimension by drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan to demonstrate how this can work in practice. These extracts may represent different links in the chain of Khodr’s thinking on relationality, from the book to his articles, but they also confirm a continuity in his vision, his theology of the ‘Other’.

Earlier, the narrator claims that the “encounter of minds reveals an extension of the presence of Christ”.²⁹ This would seem to corroborate the notion, expressed earlier,³⁰ of God being the apex in a meeting of the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’. “If friendship is a way – or even more, a place – that leads to God, then we ought to tend it as we would guard the apple of our eye.”³¹ However, this contrasts with the spiritual development of the man in the book, for it would seem that he distances himself from his group of friends in order to nurture his spiritual core; and later, he increases the distance by imposing exile on himself when he travels abroad. But this may not be a contradiction. If anything, it raises the stakes in the fictional man’s spiritual development – in other words, he is forsaking the presence of friends to deepen his relationship with God here on earth. There is a corresponding commitment in Khodr’s own spiritual development adduced from his periods of self-imposed solitude, his monastic origins, his celibacy. That said, friendship is still valid, for, as the narrator points out, “One brings the other into himself, regardless of whether he is present or absent.”³²

²⁹ *TWOC*, pp.26-7.

³⁰ See Chapter 3.

³¹ *TWOC*, p.28.

³² *Ibid.*, p.26.

If the solitariness of the man in the book, as stated above, mirrors Khodr's own life,³³ there is in the book a great sense of isolation, of being set apart from the rest of society and even his own circle, of solitude, a state of life that has permeated Khodr's own existence. This solitude is the picture existentialism paints of life – we come into this world alone and we leave it alone; we are autonomous beings faced with a reality that is often at odds with this autonomy; and we are prey to all manner of threat and extraneous influences. This is why Khodr, in the book, describes life as a desert and why interpersonal relationships clearly mean a lot to him, as does his relationship with God. When reminded about the description of life as a desert,³⁴ Khodr underlines the importance of his relationship with the Divine by replying that even if life is a desert, it becomes a garden when one waters it with God. And it is in the Trinitarian God that relationality has the eternal paradigm.

3. Relationality Through The Trinity

As was established in Chapter 5, knowing God through ritual observance and meticulously adhering to the Church's calendar of spiritual events are not, for Khodr, as expressed through the book, sufficient demonstrations of authentic religiosity.³⁵ Instead, God, the apophatic, unknowable and distant Deity, wants us to experience him, something he made possible through the Incarnation, through the *person* of Christ. It is perhaps the reason why the existential concepts of 'person' and 'relationality' are so essential to Orthodoxy; they derive from a spiritual recognition that God has chosen to have a human face, and Christ is that face. As a consequence of this bridgehead, human beings can have a communicational relationship with the apophatic God; but there is an additional relationship we can forge and which is based on our response to the love of God exemplified in the Incarnation – we can have a relationship with the 'Other'. This is alluded to in an article, where Khodr discusses the cataphatic God, the world as theophany, and how God can be known in other human beings. "God's face is known only when

³³ For a parallel, and Abou Mrad's observations about Khodr's character and lifestyle, see Chapter 3, Fn.70, and Chapter 4, p.97.

³⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 22 October, 2013.

³⁵ For a parallel between the book and Khodr's own perspective, see, for example, Chapter 5, pp.153 and 155.

projected on the face of human beings.”³⁶ It brings to the fore Khodr’s preoccupation with the face of Christ and how the pious generation marginalised this ‘personification’ of the Divine.³⁷ The importance and numinosity of the face is additionally reflected in the fictional man’s assessment of one of the monks. “The face of this old abbot who has *fought a good fight and finished his course and kept his faith* (2 Timothy 4:7) is more beautiful to me than the entire universe”;³⁸ which, in turn, is undergirded by the book’s statement that “[t]he beautiful face recalls the face of God”.³⁹ Thus is revealed a telling convergence between the man in the book and Khodr the individual. The importance of the face as a kind of spiritual touchstone is also reaffirmed by a discussion, cited in the previous chapter,⁴⁰ where Khodr says of an icon depicting Christ’s face, “When I see this, it is not an image. There is a presence. I would not say a real presence in the Roman Catholic sense, [but] there is some presence in it.”⁴¹ In another article, Khodr differentiates between appearance and iconic imagery. “The important thing when looking at the icon is to spiritually ascend to the person portrayed on it. We don’t have any quest to know about the Lord’s skin or the color of his eyes.” Earlier on in the same piece, he says that “early Christians didn’t care about the Lord’s physical form...It is a theological reading of the person we are drawing.”⁴² All these extracts have the same meaning at their core, albeit expressed in differing ways. It is not the physical contours and complexion of a face that appeals; instead, there is something beyond the physical appearance people can relate to. Hence, the beauty of a face recalls, in an almost Platonic way, the Ideal of Beauty, which, it may be said, insinuates God – other than this, the apophatic God does not have a face. And when Khodr is experiencing a spiritual transcendence when looking at the icon in his study, it is not the image confronting him that causes this experience, but

³⁶ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Face of God’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 26 November, 2011.

³⁷ See Chapter 5, pp.204-5, and interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

³⁸ *TPOC*, p.53, his italics.

³⁹ *TPOC*, p.27.

⁴⁰ Chapter 5, pp.191-2.

⁴¹ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

⁴² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christ’s Visage’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 17 June, 2001.

a mystical presence. No one knows or should care, he is saying, what Jesus looked like.

Yannaras focuses on the Trinity as a basis for human relationships.⁴³ Since God created men and women in his own image, and God is 'expressed' by means of the Trinity, "each with its own personal particularity",⁴⁴ we are created in our own uniqueness, but within the community of human beings. This flows into the issue of the 'Other'. Owing to the relationship individuals have with the community, Yannaras' argument continues, and one might add because of the fact of our *being-in-the-world*, we are constantly facing someone or something. Yannaras uses the Greek words *ops* (face) and *pros* (towards) as etymological constructs for another word: *prosopon* (person). So etymologically and factually, our differentiation – what makes us a unique individual, a *person* – is conjured by means of a relationship with the 'Other'.⁴⁵

As a young person, the man in the book possesses a childlike wonderment about the natural world, but the latter has its bounds and does not encroach on his sense of the numinous. Instead, there is an experiential presence in his relationality with the world. "Heaven, to him," the narrator says, "was not flora. It was a face."⁴⁶ As it is presented to us, the tenor of the fictional man's spirituality and his conception of the Divine have a distinct 'anthropological' overtone: God may be unknowable, but the celestial realm is not without a face, a personhood. At this early stage, Khodr is already flagging up, through the man in the book, a conviction that the Divine is both personal and relational. While suggestive of 'mystical' experience, it bespeaks something personal in his own early apprehension of the Divine. It is too early in the fictional man's development for him to consider Christology or Trinitarian theology, or even the intricacies of Church ritual, but it is redolent of Zizioulas' contention, with regard to the 'known' God, that the 'personal' element of the

⁴³ Payne, p.242.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Payne citing Yannaras, C. *The Freedom of Morality*. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.

⁴⁶ *TPOC*, p.1.

eucharist is the critical link in Divine-human communion;⁴⁷ or as Papanikolaou expresses it, “this [Zizioulas’] understanding of God as Trinity in terms of a relational ontology of personhood is implicit in the experience of the eucharist”.⁴⁸

Indeed, according to Orthodox theology, relating to the ‘Other’ is part of what it means to *be*, to have a sense of personal identity. To have *being* in this world, the ‘I’ must relate to the ‘Other’, an authenticating process that is reflected in the relationality inherent within the Trinity. This triadic bridgehead by which the Uncreated communicates with the created is set out in a *perichoresis*, an interpenetrating triunity of relationships within a unifying framework – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian relationality is representative of a tightly knit unicity, in which one of the hypostases cannot act independently of the other two.⁴⁹ This is not to paper over the issue of diversity within the Trinitarian paradigm. Maximus the Confessor reinforces this when he cites Gregory of Nazianzus. “For as he [Gregory] tells us, God is “divided” yet “without division,” and “united” yet “with distinction.” In this way both the division and the union are extraordinary.”⁵⁰

Diversity within ‘sameness’ is what makes us as a species. We are ‘one’ in our humanity, but not ‘one’ in our individuality, in the sense that we are made up of diverse facets. This is our (unified) identity.

“Our identity...is expressed in our achievements. It is born of the practice of freedom in quest of justice, which affirms against every wind

⁴⁷ “In the patristic, and especially the Maximian, vision of creation, this drive [“towards survival”, pp.95-6] can be fulfilled only in and through the human being. It is this that Christ, as the true human being, has fulfilled, and it is this that is realized and manifested in the Eucharist”. (Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, p.96.) See also his discussion of the mystical: “[T]he Eucharist is the mystical experience of the Church *par excellence*”. (Ibid., p.296.)

⁴⁸ Papanikolaou, A. *Being with God. Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006, p.88.

⁴⁹ “None of the three ever acts separately, apart from the other two.” Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.30.

⁵⁰ Maximus Confessor, ‘The Four Hundred Chapters on Love’, second century, No.29. In: *Selected Writings*, p.50.) In referencing Gregory, Berthold says that this appears “perhaps in *Or.* 39 (PG 36:349CD), as Pegon suggests.” (Ibid., p.92, Fn.87.)

and tide the oneness of humanity underlying every discrepancy, beyond every difference. We must show forth this unity, or else all of humanity's endeavors since its inception will prove fruitless."⁵¹

There is a caveat in the way this assertion is couched. If humankind remains atomised and cannot come together to see what binds them in their diversity, whatever has been achieved in human history will be invalidated. It is a concept that resonates with Orthodox thinking, according to which humankind's role is to bring all disparate parts of the Creation together through humankind – the mediator between the Creator and the created – and thus to restore the whole of creation to God.⁵²

Following on from the dire prediction about “all of humanity's endeavors”, there is an attempt to resolve our predicament. “Unity is a matter of the will. Man is realized through endless spiritual and intellectual labor.”⁵³ This relates back to our identity, who we are, which is “born of the practice of freedom”, and it is ‘will’ that can be synonymised with ‘freedom’, freedom to take up the challenge – of realising ourselves – or to spurn it; and, if we are made in the image of God, we are endowed with freedom.⁵⁴ Yet, this carries a sting in its tail, for freedom, existentially, is a cause of deep anxiety because it harbours a need for action, the Kierkegaardian ‘either/or’ dilemma, his leap into the dark void. For Yannaras, freedom is achieved through self-transcendence, through a personal *kenosis*, whereby we unbuckle ourselves of worldly ties, empty ourselves of worldly influence, and, it may be argued, empty ourselves

⁵¹ The narrator, *TWOC*, p.30.

⁵² See, for example, Nellas, who, using Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua*, encapsulates the role assigned to humankind. “In this way, the multiplicity of created things, “drawing together around the one nature of man”, can be gathered together into one, and the Creator of all things is manifested as one, “reigning over created beings proportionally through the human race”...” (Nellas, pp.56-7; and Maximus the Confessor. *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1092C.)

⁵³ *TWOC*, p.30.

⁵⁴ Ware, for example, gives a clear account of this. “Each of us is nothing less than a living icon of the living God, a created image of God's uncreated infinity. That is why we are free and creative”. (Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, p.37.)

of ‘ourselves’, our identity.⁵⁵ In other words, paradoxically, we become fulfilled, and more who we are, by a *kenotic* expunging of ‘I’. However, another paradox lurks in this assertion, for the expunging of ‘I’ could be an essential condition in which love can thrive; for love emanates from the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, and underpins all relationality; “[I]love,” asserts Zizioulas, “is a *relationship*”.⁵⁶

4. Relationality Through The Aesthetics of Love

If the fictional man’s shyness is a mirror of Khodr’s own personality, the ensuing passages may also reveal something about Khodr and his attitude towards women and sexuality. As discussed earlier, there are parallels between Khodr and the man in the book. Khodr himself, as mentioned above, has never married and there is no known evidence of any extra-familial relationship with women outside his role as a friend and a priest; the narrator implies that the fictional man’s early life entails no experience of sexual relations with a woman, whether a fully consummated physical relationship, superficial physicality, or mere flirtatious associations. “He passed the age of twenty without having encountered woman, other than as a companion in struggles and ideals.”⁵⁷ Neither, it would appear, had the fictional man entertained any notion of developing such relationships. His encounters with young women were on an ‘intellectual’ level and, to some extent, most likely similar to the relationships that he enjoyed with males.⁵⁸ The narrator ascribes some of this to his friend’s bashful nature – “He suffered this shyness in dealing with all people”⁵⁹ – but it may have been more than this. He had, it would seem, a deep respect for women, which transmogrified into an almost idealistic perspective, one shaped by “the gentle stance of Christ towards

⁵⁵ “The thirst for life is implanted in our very nature...and is an unquenchable thirst for *relationship*, that is to say for the reciprocity of self-abandonment and self-offering.” Yannaras’ italics. (Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, p.103.)

⁵⁶ Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.166. Zizioulas’ emphasis.

⁵⁷ *TWOC*, p.69.

⁵⁸ In this disquisition on woman, there is an indication that Khodr believes in sexual equality. He is not alone in this. See, for example, Olivier Clément, who cites a number of patristic theologians with similar views, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. (Clément. O. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p.292.) For more on a form of egalitarianism in the Church of Antioch, see Ignatius IV, p.134.

⁵⁹ *TPOC*, p.25.

women” and by “a kind of compassion towards a universe which he did not wish to violate”.⁶⁰

Khodr’s own attitude towards sexual matters differs somewhat from Augustine’s.⁶¹ It is commonly accepted that Augustine was brimful of, what may euphemistically be termed, worldly experience, prior to his conversion and his dogged devotion to a life of holiness; it may also be legitimate to posit the notion that his previous licentiousness acted as an instigator of his subsequent puritanical frame of mind. Khodr differs because it would seem he has never indulged in any form of sexual relationship; but, unlike Augustine, he is not puritanical about the body and bodily functions, and not opposed to physical relationships per se; his moral stricture on sexual relations is that they should be confined to marriage.⁶² “The body has its place in the scheme of things, but only to the extent that it becomes integrated into the whole person. The body is not an entity in itself.”⁶³ Earlier, the narrator makes an additional comment about Eastern Christianity’s viewpoint. “Love remains incomplete if it does not join with the body in a healthy, fertile symbiosis, a reciprocal participation in life’s ongoing gift. Indeed, spontaneous love is nothing unless it is linked to a promise made before God.”⁶⁴ Thus, love between a man and a woman entails sexual encounter, but within marriage; sexual encounter without love is a violation. The importance of the aesthetics of love for the man in the book is captured by the narrator: “the absence of spiritual qualities transformed even the most

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ O’Donnell makes reference to the “unrealistic extremes to which [Augustine] took his suspicion of marriage, sexuality, and the fundamental processes of the human body.” (O’Donnell, J. J. *Augustine. A New Biography*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005, p.283.) It is, perhaps, worth taking note of Augustine’s ‘libertine days’ and his subsequent treatment of his concubine and of his son Adeodatus. This may have contributed to the formation of a guilt complex regarding sexual matters, one that was converted into a strain of censoriousness laced with moral prudishness. The resultant attitude may also have been reinforced by his mother Monica’s religious ambitions for her son.

⁶² It is clear that he views sexual liberation with disapproval. While acknowledging the oppression that can go on within society – presumably, regarding strict moral codes governing Lebanese (Middle Eastern) society – he is emphatic that “nudity and breaking loose are not the solution.” (*TPOC*, p.25.)

⁶³ *TWOC*, p.80.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

beautiful woman into a mere statue of mere passing interest.”⁶⁵ As for Khodr and the fictional man’s own relevant physical and psychological promptings, one may perhaps assume they are sublimated by Christian idealism.

The reference to “life’s ongoing gift” takes into account an aspect of relationality – there is a giver and a receiver within the concept of a gift – and lends itself to a number of possible interpretations: the body is sanctified, not just through love, but because, being made in the image of God, we are gifted with the promise of theosis, our final destination and our reuniting with God. ‘Gift’ may additionally refer to free will, the divine characteristic⁶⁶ granted to Adam in his prelapsarian state. Equally, it may signify the gift of *verbum caro factum est*, the Incarnation, when God, in his love for humanity, bridged the divide between the unknowable Divine and the earthly, and took on human flesh in the person of Christ. Thus, there may be two important gifts: first, a meaningful relationship with the apophatic God; second, the route to our own theosis as presented to us by the Incarnation.

Khodr may be considered an old-fashioned puritan, as well as an idealist, when he comments on women in the modern world.

“We are not against women’s beauty. But does beauty mean that women have to be provocative for those who look at them? They are certainly aware that they are exposing their beauty, and they are seeking to draw attention as well, which includes causing obscene imagination [*sic*] for men.”⁶⁷

Another article poses the question, “[w]hy a woman does not content herself with the spiritual and moral attraction...in order for her heart to meet the man’s heart, and for her mind to meet the man’s mind?”⁶⁸ This coincides with the fictional man’s observation, as related by the narrator, that “even the most

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.75.

⁶⁶ ‘Divine’ because, theologically, God necessarily has free will; hence, Orthodoxy’s emphasis on being made in the image of God.

⁶⁷ Khodr, *Nude Clothing*. This same article was utilised earlier with regard with the exegesis on identity. See Chapter 4, p.122.

⁶⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘This Summer’. Amani Haddad (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 1 August, 1993. Accessed 26 January, 2017.

beautiful woman [is transformed] into a mere statue of...passing interest."⁶⁹ In another article, he is more direct. Talking, it would seem, about revealing styles in women's fashion, he says, "It is not enough to say that I like this thing; there are a lot of things in life that we like but are harmful for us and others"; and he ends by saying "modesty isn't something heroic. It is enough to decide to be modest as a loyalty towards Christ and as a support to the chastity of the man, your brother."⁷⁰ It is clear Khodr sees appearance as an aspect of relationality – in this instance, how a woman presents herself to the world is how she wants to be seen, how she will be seen. These are views, from different sources, stemming from one person, and, arguably, is affirmed partly on the basis of a common theme, shared by the fictional man and Khodr, the Platonic idealising of women. But, equally, they could be regarded as an archaic, moralising stance that, it might be said, has not been predominant for sixty years. As a result, such idiosyncratic reactions might suggest they are articulated by a single voice. And yet, he is not puritanical, for he has the narrator state quite plainly that, "Lust in itself is natural like desiring food. And Christ has not said that this was a sin."⁷¹ This is not, however, a licence for promiscuity, for lust is not a thing in itself, divorced from love, and love should not be separated from marriage. The narrator criticises the West for making concessions to physicality outside marriage: "the West made concessions to love...which prioritized love over matrimony."⁷²

Khodr, as the extract from 'Nude Clothing' suggests, and the man in the book both relate to women as a symbol of idealised, almost Platonic, beauty, representative of a cosmic Christian power. However, this suggests an idealism lacking in practical experience. Khodr, it might be argued, is not subject, through earthly examples of relationality, to the tensions and pressures that would bedevil other people when they interrelate; and this begs some important questions. Does Khodr, in his detachment, know what it is to interrelate? He is of a contemplative nature and there are reclusive elements

⁶⁹ *TWOC*, p.75.

⁷⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Modesty'. Mark Najjar (trans.), n/p, 8 August, 2004. Accessed 16 June, 2018.

⁷¹ *TPOC*, p.30.

⁷² *TWOC*, p.80.

to his character and daily routine. Does he know what love is on the prosaic human level? Can we say of anyone, who claims that love is the key to our knowledge of God,⁷³ to theosis, that they are referring to the same understanding of the word? Or do they have a different interpretation? It has been said that those who love universally cannot love.⁷⁴ The counterargument to this is that as God loves all equally, so we should, following his example, love all equally; but as love in this context is not grounded in passion,⁷⁵ it must be of an ethereal quality. Such relationality has implications for Khodr's theology of the 'Other' with its intimations of love for the 'Other' and respect for their identity and individuality.⁷⁶

If relationality necessarily implies the 'Other', love is the conditioning factor of any relationship with the 'Other' and central to Christianity, no matter who the 'Other' is. As Khodr points out:

“Since one's love for the other is a commandment, that means that it does not spring from the lovability of the person to be loved. The other might be ugly by all means; still you have to love him. You do not love the other because he deserves your love or because you expect him to reciprocate your love. He might have nothing to offer.”⁷⁷

Loving one's enemies is a constant theme in Christian ethics and morality and Khodr has addressed it a number of times, giving it a Lebanese context. “If

⁷³ The knowledge referred to here is 'gnosis', that is, mystical knowledge/experience of God.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Olson, who claims that Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) “have repeatedly asserted that he who loves mankind does not love at all”. (Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism*, p.50.) For another view, see, for example, Maximus the Confessor. “The one who is not affected by the things of the world loves solitude; the one who does not love anything human loves all men; and the one who takes no offense at anyone, either because of faults or suspicious thoughts, possesses the knowledge of God and of divine realities.” (Maximus Confessor. ‘The Four Hundred Chapters on Love, third century, No. 37.’ In: *Selected Writings*, p.66.)

⁷⁵ See Maximus Confessor, Second Century, Nos.1-50, pp.46-54.

⁷⁶ Olson draws attention to Nietzsche's proclamation that to respect everyone – respect being defined as “by nature recognition of superior merit” – is to respect no one. (Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism*, p.50.)

⁷⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Love Your Neighbor As Yourself’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 19 November, 2005.

our behavior with enemies should be a loving one, then what about our behavior with Muslims that believe in God and were in severe need during the last war?”⁷⁸ Such confrontational questioning of his own community is suggestive of existential religiosity. Elsewhere, he offers a general admonition – “We cannot meet a person except in the depths of the divine tenderness.”⁷⁹ It is a sentiment he applies in another context, utilising the example of parenthood to define how one is to relate through love. “If you had two children, one was nice and kind while the other was naughty; you provide them with the same love.”⁸⁰ Khodr makes the man in the book conform precisely to this notion. “My friend knew that no human being is an ugly monster. For however much an individual may be ugly you make him beautiful with love. That is how a child appears to be beautiful to its mother.”⁸¹ Evidence like this from four different times, four different writings – that is, three articles and the book – points to an inflexible consistency with regard to love. Albeit differently expressed, but encapsulated in the notion of love, they address reaching out to the ‘Other’ across boundaries of ethnicity, personal aesthetics, and religion. Underlying this is an exhortation to push barriers of understanding and, thus, gives vent to his existential religiosity.

Further on in this section, there is an indication that the man in the book tries to transcend the complexities of human relationships, arguing that relationships based on confrontation and domination should not be viewed as *bona fide* relationships. “The relationship between a man and a woman which is based upon jealousy and arrogance and deviousness and ecstasy; the relationship in which egotism and selfishness revel, can never be a human relationship.”⁸² But, it may be argued, this is to be ignorant of, or wilfully to

⁷⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Love for Everyone’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 3 September, 2006.

⁷⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Love Your Enemies’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 3 October, 2010.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *TPOC*, p.28.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.25. There is, it is argued, a difference here between this version and the later translation, which says that such a relationship “can never be satisfying.” (*TWOC*, p.71.) This, it is argued, infers more of a subjective opinion, illustrated by the statement, ‘I am not finding this relationship satisfying within the context of a man-woman (that is, sexual) relationship.’ The earlier translation (*TPOC*) is more

ignore, the realities of human frailties when engaged in interpersonal relationships. While some of the characteristics listed may be justifiably reprehensible, few, if any relationships, have never been sullied by one or other of them at some time. To assert a couple's relationship, which exhibits such behaviour, can never be a human relationship, could be said to be unrealistic. A more empathetic position to take would perhaps be to suggest that it is how the individuals within that relationship deal with a breakdown in relationality and restore calm, harmony, and love.

Love is the cornerstone of Christianity and thus must be the benchmark of every example of relationality. More than this, it is, according to the narrator, the fictional man's *sine qua non* for every action. "My friend knew that love, along with the desire to transform violence through patience, goodness, and meekness, must be the basis of every action. This is what distinguishes the path of the believer from those who do not share such concerns."⁸³

Continuing this examination of love and what it stands for, the man in the book makes a reference to, "One of our eminent poets", the latter questioning the meaning of the word 'love' and purportedly saying, "How do we give it this name when it is always associated with jealousy, with hatred, with domination? Why is love associated with loneliness?"⁸⁴ If a reaching out to the 'Other' in love is to occur, how can it avoid deteriorating into a parody of love, against which the poet railed? The man in the book responds by saying only that which is attached to God can be positive and fruitful – "nothing in the world...can have subsistence unless it is connected to God to prune it and make it bear much fruit." And in a reference, which can be interpreted as

specific and is suggestive of a generic assertion: such relationships can never be considered a human relationship – that is, what it is to be human, and within the context of the book's subject matter, human under God.

⁸³ *TWOC*, p.66.

⁸⁴ *TPOC*, p.36. Khodr was asked whether this poetic allusion referred to Adonis, the renown Lebanese poet, who was born in Syria in 1930. Khodr replied in the affirmative and is said to be an admirer of his poetry. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 24 October, 2013.) Perhaps this partiality towards Adonis is made the more contextual when one considers Adonis' work, *Sufism and Surrealism*. (Adonis. *Sufism and Surrealism*. J. Cumberbatch (trans.). London: Saqi, 2005.). In this book, the two spheres of Sufi mysticism and artistic expression – both close to Khodr's heart – are seen as converging in their search for God.

leapfrogging barriers and reaching out beyond one's community, he adds, "God alone makes you forgiving to the other".⁸⁵

The poet's comment is a stinging indictment of the human incapacity to live up to what love fundamentally means – unconditional, enduring, forgiving, empathising – and how divorcing ourselves from God, in our acts of relationality, can distort our attempts to live a spiritual life and maroon us in an existential bleakness. Not that the alternative is an easy option. Loving anyone can be a bracing, even painful, encounter, often entailing a form of asceticism, and this is allegorised in the text. We are in the garden – not Edenic; rather, one of our own making; for the tree to grow properly and productively there must be recourse to the knife to cut and prune its branches. This is the ascetic side of love, and, as described by Khodr, it does not resemble the superficial masquerade and self-indulgent demonstrations of mutual affection that so often characterise idyllic worldly love, or at least the popular confection of it. And there is an underlying, even subliminal, message here that the efficaciousness of relationality – whether in marriage, interreligious dialogue, ecumenical bridge-building – must perforce depend on God; communication and relationality with the 'Other' must be conducted under divine countenance and in the name of that which stands for love, God.

In response to the poet, the man in the book, says that the true meaning of love can be found within each one of us. "He [the person] must only plumb the depths of his being constantly in order to enter into contemplation, and then reflect upon others the light which is revealed to his eyes. The vision of the Beloved's radiance not only brings humanity together, but also those whose essence is love and whose breath carries the universe to 'the fullness of time.'"⁸⁶ What is being suggested is a supremely mystical experience to acquire a spiritual 'glow', which is then shed on others. Such a demanding feat of spirituality, reflective of existential religiosity,⁸⁷ brings to mind the research question.

⁸⁵ *TPOC*, p.36.

⁸⁶ *TWOC*, p.95.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 1, p.3, and the definitions of existential religiosity.

5. God, Love, & The Language Of Spiritual Relationality

The interpretation of the word 'love' can be problematic. To 'love all equally' may sit uneasily with uxorial and familial responsibilities,⁸⁸ but this may be due to a different understanding of the term 'love'; one that is at variance with another, more generalised interpretation.

To explore usage of the word 'love', perhaps there is a need to broaden the argument.⁸⁹ It could be that in the experience of love, it is the event that indelibly marks. The object of love can fade, the 'I' can fall out of love with the 'Other'; even so, the 'love event' lingers. If this obtuse interpretation has any coherence or veracity, then perhaps our experience of love is a love for something, for love must have an object. "Love," asserts Zizioulas, "is a *relationship*".⁹⁰ The object of our love, of all love, may be God,⁹¹ or some similar manifestation of constancy that is unchanging and sempiternal. The human 'love object' may thus be seen as a mediator or agent of, as proposed here, God's love for us, and it is this that quantifies the importance of relationality and has direct relevance for our relationship with the 'Other'. This tangential aside may have much to do with semantics, but it also makes the theological pronouncement to love all equally an easier concept to process, transforming acceptance of the religious 'Other' from a mandatory stipulation

⁸⁸ He asked during one interview, although this is not verbatim, "How can you love God and your wife?" This, it is contended, indicates either a conflict in his thinking between two objects of love, or reveals a different understanding of the word 'love'. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

⁸⁹ Love and what it denotes is an example of multivariied subjectivity. When discussing courtly love, Netton highlights a contrast by drawing our attention to an erstwhile belief that love, *qua* love, was considered in some quarters a sickness. "The notion that love might be a sickness was not an uncommon one; it was recognised in the Islamic East as well as the Christian West." (Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey*, p.15.) He goes on to say that "*ishq*...is the equivalent of the Greek *éros* or 'passionate love'". He cites Boase, who claims that '*ishaq*, as understood by Avicenna (368/979-428/1037), may connote symptoms of a mental health disorder, resulting from an obsession with "a woman who is sexually unattainable" [Boase's words]. (Boase, R. *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*. Manchester: Manchester University Press/Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1977, p.67; Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey*, p.16.)

⁹⁰ Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.166. Zizioulas' emphasis.

⁹¹ Khodr writes something similar elsewhere. "We know him through love if we lived it". (Khodr, *Christ's Visage*.)

into a more natural compliance, and lending itself, by extension, to the toleration and willing acceptance of dissimilar religious views.⁹² One of Khodr's writings, cited earlier, lends its support to this proposition. "Your identity is that link between you and God; and I think that the word identity – "hawiyya" in Arabic – is derived from the word "houwa" indicating the third person. Thus you know who you are through the Sole Other who is God."⁹³ Interpreting Khodr in this way renders his spiritual thinking inclusive, validating every action as a spiritual rendering of relationality. Even if the non-Christian does not realise it, he may still be "one of Paschal heart and life and being",⁹⁴ but only by prompting will that person become aware they are in Christ.

Reflecting on the fictional man's development, the narrator says that, "Throughout his years of study, his time and affections were invested in religious issues; he never seemed to be romantically linked to any young girl."⁹⁵ There subsequently comes a passage in which it would appear that the man in the book, in his spiritual development, has sublimated the notion of love; for, "after a long absence", he returns with "a new language",⁹⁶ an understanding of love that has been Christianised:

"He began to use terms belonging to the language of lovers, with much discretion at first, then more and more clearly. This new language mingled with the religious discourse he had never ceased to develop. For many years, he used the language of love only to explain or

⁹² Payne, eliciting the aid of Romanides for his argument, implies that Orthodoxy is purpose-built for acceptance of the 'Other'. "Because God loves all equally regardless of social position, the church itself can exist in a pluralist society. Romanides, therefore, is able to articulate religious freedom on the basis of the love of God. He writes, "This universal love of God together with the fact that true Christian faith is a free response to God's grace makes it imperative that Orthodox Christians not only tolerate other religious groups, but also recognize and guarantee their human rights to religious and civil liberties."" (Payne, p.222; and Romanides, J. S. 'The Orthodox Churches on Church-State Relations and Religious Liberty'. In: *Readings on Church and State*, pp.255-64. J. E. Wood Jnr. (ed.). Texas: J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, 1989, p.259.)

⁹³ Khodr, *Identity*. See also Chapter 3, p.80, where this is cited.

⁹⁴ *TPOC*, p.47.

⁹⁵ *TWOC*, p.71.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

express a spiritual stance. He did not speak of human love in itself, but through it strove to reveal the reality of a greater love.”⁹⁷

This may be an example of sublimation, but harnessing the secular language of love to the expression of spiritual devotion is not uncommon, as exemplified in mystical/spiritual writings, such as Solomon’s *The Song of Songs*. It is how mystics come to use the kind of descriptive language traditionally associated with passionate, even sexual love, to describe their more sublime experiences of the numinous. There is a parallel here, perhaps, with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*,⁹⁸ in which Dante is inspired onward in his journey by his exalted, ‘spiritual’ love for the ethereal Beatrice. If, however, the lexicon of love can be employed to articulate relationality both in terms of eroticised passion and experiential spirituality, there comes in the book a statement that secular love and spiritual love cannot abide together within one person, that each will compromise the other. “The passion for God and the passion for the creature cannot coexist in the human soul.”⁹⁹ Relationality, which is grounded in love, is not, it would appear, susceptible to cross-pollination; and, yet, Khodr has stated that marriage – the love between two people – is a taste of divine love.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Dante, Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy, Vols. 1-3*. Mark Musa (Vol.1); Dorothy Sayers (Vol.2); Dorothy Sayers & Barbara Reynolds (Vol.3) (trans.). New York and London: Penguin Classics, 1984, 1955, 1962.

⁹⁹ TWOC, p.72. This echoes Marcel’s and Jasper’s contention alluded to above. See Fn.74. There is another issue here, which relates to Khodr’s possibly contentious view about Muslims. He says, in discussion, that a scholar once told him something which “I did not really accept – that Muslims love God.” He goes on to say that there are some holy Muslims who do love God, but, he maintains, in a doctrinal sense, it does not exist. He believes that in Islamic doctrine there is no real link between God and the human soul, “because a Muslim soul does receive the knowledge of God from the Holy Scriptures, from [the] Qur’ān, but a spiritual, a mystical experience, that is [an] abiding of God in your soul, does not exist in [the] Qur’ān. You receive God by knowledge, by knowing him through doctrine and faith.” (Interview with George Khodr, 15 January, 2013.) Is Khodr’s statement too sweeping or too blinkered? See, for example, Hasan al-Basri (c.21/642-c.110/728), cited by Lings: “He that knoweth God loveth Him, and he that knoweth the world abstaineth from it”. See also Lings’ assertion “that the average Moslem pilgrim becomes, in his practices, something of a Sufi for the brief period of his pilgrimage.” (Lings, M. *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century. Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi. His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy*. Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p.46 and p.91, Fn.2.)

In the relationship between God and the world, the man in the book has a clear understanding of the distinction between secular knowledge and that which constitutes spiritual relationality. “In holy writings, God informs us about himself and his ways, not about his creatures.”¹⁰⁰ These two banks of knowledge – the secular and the spiritual – “do not intersect until the last days, when Christ transfigures all material reality in himself.”¹⁰¹ It is, in part, an eschatological description of God’s relationship with the world until the end of time, when there will be a coming together of all and everything, an *apocatastasis*, when all shall can be reconciled. In the meantime, “[t]hrough his cosmic resurrection, Christ has baptized the whole world”.¹⁰² The man in the book continues with thoughts on how he (the fictional man) relates to the world and what part God plays in this relationship. “The world is a book that I am invited to read as I please.”¹⁰³ This is redolent of the existential emphasis on will and freedom to *be*; we make of life what we will and the world is not imposed. On the other hand, it is argued, this does not contradict the fundamental existential argument that human beings find themselves in a situation not of their own choosing – that is, in existence and in a world not of their own making. That said, however overwhelming the universe is, the man in the book continues, it “cannot distance me from God...God is at once my treasure, my point of departure, and the object of my quest. Once I have found him, I try to describe him and to interpret his relationship with his surroundings, even though my words are incapable of fully expressing the intoxicating richness of the encounter.”¹⁰⁴ This contrast between the vastness of a seemingly intimidating universe and the intimacy of a personal God recalls the Pauline statement that nothing can separate us from the love of God;¹⁰⁵ but it is also suggestive perhaps of a religious freedom to interpret our relationship with God over and above any partisan religious movement. This

¹⁰⁰ *TWOC*, p.101.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.101.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 38-9.)

has echoes with what Khodr has written elsewhere. “I am of the conviction that the discussion of the true relationship between God and man remains one of the most important points in Islamic-Christian dialogue.”¹⁰⁶ Interlaced with this conviction is the belief, as expressed by the man in the book and highlighted earlier, that “Christ has baptized the whole world”.¹⁰⁷ This also finds a parallel in Khodr’s belief that Christ is for Muslims, not just for Christians,¹⁰⁸ and thus together they bring alive Khodr’s central point here about “Islamic-Christian dialogue.”

Our relationship with God is given a specific context in the Eucharist. In his role as the one who officiates, the priest “draws near to the incorruptible offering. A connection is established between him and God, a relationship whose mysterious nature remains unknown to the congregation.”¹⁰⁹ This suggests an almost honorific post, an exclusivity that drives a wedge between the priest and the people. Elsewhere, however, Khodr’s spells out the closeness that should exist between them. “The priest, even if he became a spiritual father, is one with every individual in his parish because they are all together a royal priesthood and a holy nation as Saint Peter says and they have together Christ’s love.”¹¹⁰ It mirrors his conviction that relationality revolves around a central hub, which is God. Indeed, seeing God in other people is not just the template for relationality with the ‘Other’, it tests the relationship we have with God. “[O]ur relationship with God can be tested in its authenticity and trueness only through our relationship with other people. They are God’s face (presence) to us...We encounter Him in people. They are the true altar of our worship for Him. That altar, as John Chrysostom says, is more significant than the altar on which we present the offerings (sacrifice). Love is *the* offering.”¹¹¹ The priest’s relationship with God and with

¹⁰⁶ Khodr, G. ‘The Oneness of God’s Community’. M. Farha (trans.). In: *Religions*. Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ *TWOC*, p.116.

¹⁰⁸ See Avakian, p.122 and Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁹ *TWOC*, p.137.

¹¹⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Priest and the People’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 6 November 2011.

¹¹¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘God’s Love & Our Love’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 24 November, 2012. [Author’s emphasis.]

his parishioners, evinced from from two articles – ‘The Priest and the People’ and ‘God’s Love and Our Love’ – and from the book, where the fictional man paints a similar picture of a deeply spiritual relationship with the Divine, gives flesh to this notion of God as a central relational hub, and harks back to another work from 2010,¹¹² cited earlier in this chapter,¹¹³ where God is the “Sole Other”. It suggests a triangulation – priest as spiritual mediator, people, God – and shows a common thread that runs through his thinking, unfrayed by the passing of time.

6. Relationality: Difference & Denominations

6.1 Reaching Out To Difference

Earlier, and in reference to loving one’s enemies, there was a discussion on the subjectivity associated with the term ‘ugly’.¹¹⁴ This discourse on beauty is now reprised because it forms the matrix of another discussion on reaching out to the ‘Other’.

Beauty, it would seem, is, in essence, irrevocably connected to, dependent on, spirituality. First, the narrator states that refusing “to contemplate a beautiful face is part of a refusal to see the beauty of the soul.”¹¹⁵ Second, and as cited above, the narrator refers to the fictional man’s “conviction that the absence of spiritual qualities transformed even the most beautiful woman into a mere statue of mere passing interest.”¹¹⁶ Having said that, the narrator later acknowledges that, “[n]o aesthetic law can fully express the reality of beauty. A man may marry an ugly woman, because above all there is an experience of communion, as with an icon.”¹¹⁷ As discussed earlier, this is the basis of the argument for loving one’s enemies; but, it is argued, it also refers to those who do not inhabit our credo or our traditions. Reaching out to someone who is aesthetically pleasing to ourselves, or who subscribes to our politics or religion, is not, Khodr would say, genuine relationality. Just as

¹¹² Khodr, *Identity*.

¹¹³ Page 232.

¹¹⁴ See above, p.228.

¹¹⁵ *TWOC*, p.74.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.75.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

beauty comes in all forms and manifestations, so we should develop an aesthetic appreciation of the 'Other' in the context of their inner spiritual being. Placed in a more relevant context, it means that if a Lebanese Orthodox opens their arms to a fellow Orthodox Christian it is not, necessarily, a virtuous act; for the latter is just another version of the former. We should be opening ourselves to difference – to the person who occupies different spiritual coordinates and expresses a dissimilar credo. Thus the term 'ugly', as it is used in the book, is not restricted to physical dimensions; synonymously, it can refer, subjectively, to what is different – different from us, different from our own understanding. In other words, our attitude to the 'Other' can be routine or a virtuous relationality founded on existential religiosity – that is, overcoming barriers – and as such, can have implications for the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

6.2 Reaching Out To Other Denominations

In Chapter 4, Khodr's personal attitudes, which are distilled through the fictional man, are clearly not wholly positive towards ecumenism. In one part, the fictional man readdresses the disparity between the West and East, questioning the relationship between the Eastern Orthodox Church and other denominations collectively identified with the West. With regard to ecumenism, he says that "the non-westerner always finds himself caught between the pincers of an alien language and a foreign mode of reasoning."¹¹⁸ Later, he builds on this, claiming that the division between the Churches of the West and the Eastern Church cannot be attributed exclusively to a disparate interpretation of Trinitarian relationality. The diversity is deeper, implicating, it would seem, a fundamentally different *Weltanschauung*.

"Do we truly have the same vision of the nature of man, the same conception of the role of time or the place of the cosmos in God's design? Do we not form several worlds with different visions? Have

¹¹⁸ TWOC, p.144.

we not become quite different in our approaches to prayer and action.”¹¹⁹

With reference to the difference in temperament, the man in the book dismisses climatic reasons for disparity in hemispheric outlook. “Climate alone explains nothing.”¹²⁰ This distancing of the East from the West in Khodr’s thinking is found much later in an article where he expresses an unambiguous, historically tempered, gulf between the two hemispheres. “We were never the allies of the West in their wars against the East when they terminated Christians, Armenians and Muslims alike. And during the last Crusade which they waged against Constantinople in the year 1204, they destroyed the city and desecrated the Agia Sophia church.”¹²¹ Both these extracts, from the book and the article, suggest the East’s awkward relational fit with the West, but also highlight his sense of a perceived difference between the East from the West, one that is corroborated by Khodr in conversation when he says that the people of the East are not anti-Western, they just do not feel Western.¹²² However, negativity apart, it does not prevent the man in the book from seeing a spiritual consensus. “The Church is not a

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.145. Khodr explains these two different visions of nature by referring to Thomas Aquinas, where, he says, there is “the natural and the supernatural, the realm of nature and the realm of grace. You don’t have that in the Christian East.” Khodr seems to be saying that this implies a divide. God is also in nature and we are, as human beings, in nature. This is what Orthodoxy understands as being made in the image of God, and why there is not, in Khodr’s understanding, a gap between God and humankind. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.) Khodr also mentions this perceived divide elsewhere, when he links asceticism with a ‘Divine-enabling’ that, supernaturally, aided the ascetics in practices, which, “[a]ccording to the laws of Natural Science” would most likely have killed them; “but they did not die.” (Khodr, *Man and Woman in God*.)

¹²⁰ *TWOC*, p.96. But see Howard-Johnston, who, comparing Islam “with the two existing manifestations of monotheism”, finds that “[t]here was a bleakness to its cosmology which accorded with the experience of Arabs, so much at the mercy of a harsh environment.” (Howard-Johnston, J. D. *Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.406-7.) Cf. also Gavriilyuk’s reference to the Eurasian movement, the early twentieth century group, which “aimed at becoming the future ideology of Russia-Eurasia.” The second of their two “theses” stated: “This unique world should be called Eurasia. Peoples who live within the limits of this world are capable of such forms of mutual understanding and brotherly living, which are difficult to achieve in relations to the peoples of Europe and Asia.” (Gavriilyuk, P.L. ‘Florovsky’s Neopatristic Synthesis and the Future Ways of Orthodox Theology’. In: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, p.105 and p.303, Fn.12.)

¹²¹ Khodr, *Eastern Christians*.

¹²² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

perfect society...The truth of God and his mercy transcend the Judeo-Christian era...Christ is the wholly Other and the absolute New.”¹²³ The truth of God is above denominational diversity.¹²⁴

6.3 Unification In Diversity

The man in the book is prompted to wonder whether gender diversity, at the seat of marital relationality, has a unifying purpose that can be traced to discordant opposites. In short, whether only discordant opposites make a harmonious whole.

“This raises the subject of the relationship between sexuality and knowledge of others. True understanding is available only to human couples, not to individuals. It is born from partnership, in the face-to-face meeting of love. Perhaps the differences between the sexes in character and intelligence have no other purpose than to make possible a common interpretation of existence. Such a partnership can then become a source of unity, through a mystery we do not wholly comprehend.”¹²⁵

This strongly insinuates that both parties have a distinct perspective, a recourse to (gender) specific knowledge, that might open the way to a fuller, more comprehensive knowledge. Applied on a broader front, Khodr seems to be implying that only through the ‘Other’ can we hope to acquire meaningful knowledge – “[t]rue understanding...is born from partnership”. Equally, it can apply to interreligious relations, conjuring, perhaps, a hypothesis that may be unpalatable in some Orthodox circles: that intra-denominational Christians and Islamic spirituality can offer a worthy, even valuable, perspective on the numinous, and that Christians may benefit from dialogical exchanges between

¹²³ TWOC, p.146.

¹²⁴ Khodr’s emphasis on the difference between eastern Christians and western Christians may not just have implications for ecumenical harmony, but could be seen as prejudicing interfaith activity. See, for example, Marianne Moyaert, who advocates intra-religious dialogue as a precursor of interreligious dialogue. (Moyaert, M. Interreligious Dialogue. In: *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, pp.209-10, and *passim*.)

¹²⁵ TWOC, p.78.

two seemingly opposite parties.¹²⁶ Transcending communal boundaries, it illustrates his existential religiosity, his readiness to go further than the routine compartmentalisation of people and faiths.

Khodr continues his lauding of the feminine by expatiating on the relationship between Woman and the universe. “He told us that woman is, first of all, a creature bound to the earth. Thus man returns to her as mother, as he returns to the earth from which he came.”¹²⁷ But “the path that leads to woman can also become the road to perdition.”¹²⁸ Women can be used by men as objects of sexual gratification, but Mary, Jesus’ mother, frees woman from this “servitude”, so that “[a]nointed by grace...man’s companion becomes mother in the spiritual sense...as one capable of spiritually giving birth.”¹²⁹ This passage with its cosmic link has a mythological undertone and even suggests a tincture of Solovyev’s Sophiology.¹³⁰ That said, underlying this is a respect for women in general, not in a male proprietary way, but as an equal with many gifts. His reverence for women permeates his view of the body and of marriage.

“I feel offended by the ignorance of those who accuse Christianity of being “against the body” while Christianity only speaks against the wantonness of the flesh and uncontrolled desires. Was not the body first portrayed in Christian art?...The truth is that the Church is against

¹²⁶ Ignatius IV was emphatic about the need for Orthodox to reach out to Islam, to familiarise themselves with the faith of Muslims. See Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. ‘Librairie Asad, Damascus, 25 January, 2000.’ In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.221.

¹²⁷ *TWOC*, p.79.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* This eulogy on feminine qualities with regard to spirituality is not without precedent. Thyret claims that, in Russia (c. sixteenth/seventeenth century), service and charity were said to be “feminine qualities”. But, she adds, women could also exhibit male qualities. St Solomonica “punished the Lithuanian lord who attempted to destroy the town of Suzdal by torturing him”. (Thyret, I. ‘Women and the Orthodox Faith in Muscovite Russia. Spiritual Experience and Practice’. In: *Orthodox Russia. Belief and Practice under the Tsars*. V. A. Kivelson and R. H. Greene (eds.). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003, p.166.

¹³⁰ Although greatly influenced by Russian Orthodoxy and aware of Solovyev, Khodr said he was not interested in Sophiology. He thought it a German construction and not really a part of Orthodoxy. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.)

fornication and adultery and not against the wholesome love that exists between the male and the female.”¹³¹

The themes encompassing first, the idealisation of women, and second, sexual liberation are intermeshed to such an extent that one implies the other. For Khodr, and for the man in the book, sex outside marriage offends the reverence in which they hold Woman. This is conjoined with what Khodr views as the fashion in women’s scanty clothing. Neither of these views, Khodr would insist, has anything to do with puritanical reservations about the body because, he argues, Christian art pioneered use of the body in its depiction of religious subject matter. Similar idealisation and proscription govern his opinions about love. We should love everyone – those who hate or persecute us. He feels sad when told that “some Christian groups preferred to give charity only to Christian emigrants; this means that they loved some people and not all people: This is a behavioral heresy.”¹³² It is, in so many words, a perversion of relationality and of his theology of the ‘Other’. If all of these views seem unjust, lofty, unrealistic, out of date, or reactionary, they are, in addition, expressive of his existential religiosity.

As observed earlier,¹³³ sexual desire, even lust, is permissible so long as it is sanctified within the holy institution of marriage in the sight of God. What is sinful, says the narrator, attributing the thought to Christ, is “the relationship that is built exclusively upon the body and the relationship that excludes the other’s person. The body is not a person.”¹³⁴ This is a permutation of, and in

¹³¹ Khodr, *Man and Woman in God*.

¹³² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Love for Everyone’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 3 September, 2006.

¹³³ See p.226.

¹³⁴ TPOC, p.30. For another perspective, see John Paul II. “The analysis of the Yahwist text also enables us to link man’s original solitude with consciousness of the body. Through it, man is distinguished from all the animalia and is separated from them, and also through it he is a person. It can be affirmed with certainty that man, thus formed, has at the same time consciousness and awareness of the meaning of his own body, on the basis of the experience of original solitude.” John Paul II. *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage (Theology of the Body)*. From the Weekly Audiences of His Holiness, September 5, 1979-November 28, 1984. www.catholicprimer.org/papal/theology_of_the_body.pdf (Accessed 26 August, 2014.)

general concordance with, Zizioulas' citing of the notion that there is a difference between the individual and personhood.¹³⁵ Lust within a blessed relationship is expressive of a desire for the 'Other' as *person*;¹³⁶ lust outside such a relationship is individualistic, objectifying the 'Other', and thus in contravention of Orthodox (existential) relationality. The narrator sums this up. "Although it is biological at first, the attraction between man and woman becomes a manifestation of divine love when it is visited by God. Otherwise, it devours the human being and imperils his or her integrity."¹³⁷

7. Relationality and the World

By dint of the fact of being in the world, we are faced with the potentiality of different kinds of relationship, some of which may be of value, others less so; and it is with this mind that the man in the book makes reference to society's invention of new needs, and how "[society's] desires become its hypostases, its things".¹³⁸ Society then "questions how to establish relationships between its things".¹³⁹ It is an exercise that fails and its failure is manifested by a clash of perspectives: the polarisation of "abundance and poverty"; and the theological premise that the "world does not know that the human being was made for the human being"¹⁴⁰ – in other words, relationality, relating to the 'Other', is what defines a human being. The underlying message here, it is argued, is that materialism and the exalting or fetishising of inanimate objects is antipathetic to the human condition; that a human being essentially ceases

¹³⁵ For Zizioulas, the individual is ruled by nature, the person (personhood) is "unique and unrepeatable". (Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.213.)

¹³⁶ This may be somewhat contrary to other perspectives. See, for example, Maximus the Confessor, who, discussing the use that passions can be put to, states categorically that "the proper use of intercourse is its purpose of procreation. So the one who concentrates on the pleasure is in error as to its use by considering as good what is not good. Therefore such a person misuses a woman in having intercourse." (Maximus Confessor. 'The Four Hundred Chapters on Love', second century, No.17. In: *Selected Writings*, pp.48-9.) In Fn.75, p.92, Berthold quotes Gregory of Nyssa: "...according to the use which our free will puts them to, these passions of the soul become the instruments of virtue or vice" (*Anim. et res.* PG 44:61A; 89A.). Maximus' view seems strangely at odds with Khodr's realism, even worldliness.

¹³⁷ *TWOC*, p.79.

¹³⁸ *TPOC*, p.49. This comes from the chapter that does not appear in *The Ways of Childhood*.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

being human if they are unable to relate to any-body. This, perhaps, has implications for medical ethics – for example, when a person is in a vegetative state and unable overtly to communicate, is it morally acceptable to switch off the life support apparatus? The man in the book, however, appears to have concerns that focus more on a human being's relationship with technology. "Invaded by technology, the historic East will lose its oriental character unless it can preserve its essence through a very deep faith".¹⁴¹

For an illustration of the impact of technology, Khairallah makes the observation that human beings seem engrossed, for much of their time, in a personal cocoon of music and texting, paying little or no attention to others on the street or to the world around them. In his office at the American University of Beirut and referring to the immediate student locale, he makes the point: "Show me three who are not texting on the phone. They're never alone. And you have to be alone – like Khodr – to think."¹⁴² Such a statement highlights the research question – to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? – because part of Khodr's religiosity entails experiential spirituality, which, in turn, requires periods of retreat, quiet, inwardness, to offer room for contemplation and to stimulate 'innate' meditative qualities. Those unable or unwilling to submit to solitude may be spiritually impaired.

This is not say there is no room for material objects in God's world, only that their prioritising may be called into question. In a 1981 article, Khodr tackles the issue of setting up idols that usurp human beings' relationality with God. First, he states that "the concept of all-things-under-God lies at the very heart of Islam and Christianity. According to it all things are right only when they are rightly related to the lordship of God."¹⁴³ Later, in the same article, he expands on this.

¹⁴¹ TWOC, p.98.

¹⁴² Interview with As'ad Khairallah, American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.

¹⁴³ Khodr, *I Have Called You Friends*.

“There is also a *zulm* [“the act of deviating from what is proper in one’s treatment of things, people, property, trust”] against God, *shirk* [idolatry], where God is improperly regarded...But any loyalty that displaces God by claiming a false absolutism of its own is *shirk*. There are idols of trade, race, nation and creed. It is possible even in Islam...to displace in men’s loyalty the very God to whom it witnesses: undisciplined nationalism which becomes an end in itself and economic systems that are absolutized are idolatries.”¹⁴⁴

In this article, Khodr is extending the book’s caveat about technology by drawing on his extensive knowledge of Islam to make a broader point. Neither here in the article, nor in the book does he say technology is bad and should be expunged from modern life. He knows this could never happen. His central admonition is that all belongs to God and that we should desist from making idols of not only sophisticated technological gadgetry, but “undisciplined nationalism”. In short, he is calling for a restrained relationship with modernity. In addition, Khodr has written on other distracting idols, such as fashion,¹⁴⁵ which could be said to represent idolisation of the body, while the suggested idolising of the visual arts, politics, and libidinous behaviour are themes that appear in the book.

This “very deep faith” alluded to above, which the man in the book claims is imperative to combat successfully the feared usurpation of the East’s identity by technology, connects to a spiritual relationship with God, on which the narrator expatiates. “The man who realizes himself through authentic engagement on the earthly plane and arrives at a global comprehension of this reality will have delved deeply into the heart of the divine mystery, without which there can be no vision. In fact, if we live in a true and intense way, the things of this world always shine with what transcends them.”¹⁴⁶ The person who treats products of a technological materialism – and all material objects – as that which is part of God’s world, understands the connectivity between existence and the Divine. This exemplifies Khodr’s attitude. As previously

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Khodr, *This Summer*.

¹⁴⁶ *TWOC*, p.33.

stated, he is not against science and technology; they have their place and one should see them as that which glorifies God.

Above, allusion was made to the linguistic merging of secular love and spiritual devotion.¹⁴⁷ This comes through clearly when the narrator talks about the eucharistic relationship human beings have with God.

“The relationship of the faithful to the Lord is nuptial. After hearing the Word with the attention of penitence, after being nourished, after their souls are recognized and loved by the Lord and betrothed to him, they yearn for perfect union by merging their blood with that of their Savior. For this mystical union, they find no better word than marriage.”¹⁴⁸

It is a description of experiential relationality on a mystical level, but one that is not confined to the church, for this “worship”, and the effect of it, is “transferred to the wider temple of society, to transfigure the universe.”¹⁴⁹

From inside the church, the spiritual happenings are taken by the congregation into the wider world and thus, the man in the book argues, the world is transformed.

In the world, human beings should refrain from using other human beings for pragmatic purposes or for master-slave relationships; on the contrary, we were intended to be with other human beings in the social, loving sense. The narrator argues that this recognition of the ‘Other’ is not a theoretical acknowledgement, acted out at a distance – for instance, writing an article that focuses on a ‘social problem’. He describes the literary profession as aristocratic and that “[e]very aristocratic tendency, even if it is motivated by the desire to be of service, is an isolating factor... To be like the other means to be with him.”¹⁵⁰ Relationality is more than writing eloquently about people’s existential predicaments, it is a face-to-face encounter, a physical immersion in their lives. This may be seen as the difference between pastoral theology and existential religiosity. It explains why the man in the book seeks manual

¹⁴⁷ Pages 232-3.

¹⁴⁸ *TWOC*, p.42.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.54.

work, which he finds in the joinery, and why, when employed there, he dedicates himself to helping his fellow workers to gain the equality that he believes is their (divine) right. The easier alternative would have been to write about their exploitation in isolation from their exploitation.

8. Relationality: Marital & Celibate Destinies

In the final part of what is the sixth letter in *The Pathway of Childhood*,¹⁵¹ the contrasting themes of relationships and celibacy are discussed. If relationality is the hallmark of the human being, what of the monk or nun in their self-imposed solitude? A hermetically sealed interiority that remains solipsistically focused within its cloistered soul, like a kind of aphasia or spiritual ‘locked-in syndrome’, may be considered contrary to relationality; even though it could be said that the monk or nun, through their prayers, interrelate with God and aspire to a high level of relationality with God, to union, through a process of *ekstasis* – that is, stepping outside themselves. However, it has been observed that, within the Orthodox Church, “both roads – both the monastic and the married – are equally revered and considered worthy within the Church, since the goal of them both is the same: Life free from space, time, corruption and death”.¹⁵² Ware is equally emphatic stating that, “The monastic vocation and that of marriage – the way of negation and the way of affirmation – are to be seen as parallel and complementary.”¹⁵³ Orthodoxy, Ware asserts, sees the two states as calling for asceticism, “sin-denying and world-affirming”, both recognising “the intrinsic goodness of the material creation and of the human body”.¹⁵⁴ The man in the book is also mindful to point out that marriage is an honourable state. “Marriage is a stabilization of life and a giving of life.” But it is plain that there is no romanticising of the marital state.

“A person tastes joy in it but he also tastes death as well;
disappointment and the limitedness of the other and the pains of

¹⁵¹ As noted previously, this chapter/letter does not appear in *The Ways of Childhood*.

¹⁵² Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, p.74. As stated in Chapter 4, Fn.175, Khodr is also positive about marriage, saying he often admires married couples as being superior to some monks. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

¹⁵³ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.61.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

successive sins which become even more acute with age or at least its ugliness becomes more apparent to us.”¹⁵⁵

This last extract echoes the existentialist’s lament about other human beings, which finds its gloomiest expression in the much quoted phrase, ‘hell is other people’, uttered by Garcin, a character in Sartre’s play. Just as Khodr emphasises that in marriage there is joy but also death, so Danto, commenting on Garcin’s comment *l’enfer c’est les autres*, claims that even in “happy marriages and happy families”, Sartre’s much quoted phrase is “applicable and applies”.¹⁵⁶ This is not to equate Khodr’s view, as expressed by the fictional man, with the misanthropic flavour of Garcin’s quote, but it is to acknowledge Khodr’s acceptance of human character and its concomitant weaknesses. Sartre concocts a brand of existentialism in which one is fenced in by a relationship with the ‘Other’, necessitating our having effectively to prostitute ourselves in order for the ‘Other’ to respond positively towards us – or as Macquarrie expresses it: “to make the other love me, I have to become an object to excite that love.”¹⁵⁷ This psychological ping-pong where we are obliged by the ‘Other’ to be something that we are perhaps not good at being, or do not enjoy being, can result in miserable failure and disappointment for both parties. Khodr, through the man in the book, may not mean this, but, it is contended, it is nevertheless what he is implying. Sartre captures the psychological tension when relating to the ‘Other’ – and it has to be said that Zizioulas likewise alludes to how the interests of the ‘Other’ have to be accommodated¹⁵⁸ – but where Sartre sees an unmitigated egoistical tussle between two people, Khodr’s Christian context signifies a more benign philosophy of the ‘Other’. Indeed, it would seem Khodr believes there is an

¹⁵⁵ *TPOC*, p.50.

¹⁵⁶ Danto, A. C. *Sartre*. Glasgow: Fontana, 1979, pp.105-6. Danto chooses to refer to the play as *In Camera*, although it has been known by other titles. See also Westphal, who, in outlining Sartre’s interplay between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’, makes an interesting allusion to the tussle between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’. In seeking to combat “the Look” of the ‘Other’, who restricts the freedom of the ‘I’ to *be*, the ‘I’ aspires to ‘become God’, the ultimate ‘Other’. Far from being a demonstration of theosis, the ‘I’ is only using the concept of God as the ultimate ‘Other’ in order to preserve the ‘I’ in its freedom to *be*, and, as Westphal puts it, to become “the absolute self who defines others before they can define me.” (Westphal, p.337.)

¹⁵⁷ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.116.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Zizioulas, J. D. *Being as Communion*, p.43.

interconnecting association between marriage, relationality, and the 'Other': "humanity is complete with both male and female being together."¹⁵⁹ This extract from a 2013 article recalls an observation made by the narrator in the book where he says that, "A man's familiarity with women other than his mother and sisters is necessary for the completion of the feminine image inside him."¹⁶⁰ In the same 2013 article, Khodr makes it clear he believes humanity cannot be so baldly defined as man and woman: "The woman and the man are one, but they are so in the Lord."¹⁶¹ And their "togetherness should be that of love. And love does not proceed from their nature. Love comes from the heart and not on its own. It is planted there by Divine Love."¹⁶² Only when love is filtered through, or overseen by, God does positive relationality take root; only then can it be broadened out through love to include the world at large, a principle Khodr makes clear in this extract, part of which was cited above.¹⁶³

"In Christianity, every person is your brother, and you should love him exactly as you love your own brother or sister. Christ died for this person, and Christ's love is the same for him, for your brother, father or mother; there is no difference. Your brother isn't closer to you than any other human being."¹⁶⁴

The assorted threads, derived from the book and the articles, come together to form a coherent and consistent pattern of thinking. Here, it is intimated that, as discussed earlier, one should not make an idol of 'family' in the sense that it excludes all else. Christ causes this kind of relational exclusivity to implode. And just as masculinity needs femininity to be fully formed, so the man and the woman come together not by way of fiscal considerations or unbridled lust; instead, "[l]ove comes from the heart...planted there by Divine Love." In other words, everything comes through God. Against the traditional and pluralistic backdrop of Lebanon, this level of inclusivity is radical, even daring, but is expressive of his desire to push barriers, extend the boundaries

¹⁵⁹ Khodr, *Man and Woman in God*.

¹⁶⁰ *TWOC*, p.78. See Chapter 4, p.118.

¹⁶¹ Khodr, *Man and Woman in God*.

¹⁶² *Ibid*.

¹⁶³ See p.216.

¹⁶⁴ Khodr, *The Family of the Father*.

of people's understanding, and is a reflection of his existential religiosity. More specifically, and with regard to the 'Other', Khodr's insistence that "every person is your brother" challenges people to push the familial barriers in what is a confessionally demarcated and solidly family-structured society. Yet without these new perceptions, reaching out may be seen as a gesture of attempted hegemony, a perceived threat to the independent existential status of the 'Other', or simply as a coldly indifferent formality that is as empty as it is inanimate. Whether it is in the context of the Lebanese Orthodox community or in a Christian community within the Western world, Khodr's theology of the 'Other', as presented here, tests the Christian's commitment to the fundamental precepts of Christ's teaching and thereby highlights the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

Love is not an easy road for the human being, says the man in the book, but it is the road we should be travelling in our mortal state until we reach the end.

"Love, married or unmarried, is a procession to death. And from this aspect it is a great practice. In the isolation of existence and the bitterness of struggle it brings you glimmers from the Kingdom. You may deduce from it the love of God, human love being a pale image of it. And marital loyalty is but the school of divine love. With generous giving and forgiveness a person gets to know God as a total pouring. And only in affection is the unity of the personality realised."¹⁶⁵

There is in this extract an acknowledgement that life is a personal struggle, a cauldron of existential challenges, including hopes, fears, and the vicissitudes of life, over which hangs, like a Damoclean sword, the sharp edge of our mortality. But within the state of love – that is, love of the 'I' for the 'Other' – there is a dim perception of the celestial world of Divine love. Part of this exercise in love entails giving and forgiving, accepting the frailties and faults in each other, because only by practising relationality with love can we hope to be a fulfilled and complete human being. Furthermore, Khodr's contends,

¹⁶⁵ *TPOC*, p.50.

human beings come ever closer to God in loving relationships. Even if “everything shall fail in the end”,¹⁶⁶ love, the uncertainty that is human love, brings with it an inkling of enduring, heavenly love. “You may deduce from it the love of God, human love being a pale image of it.”¹⁶⁷ Indeed, “we get to know God” through our experience of love for the ‘Other’.¹⁶⁸ Such beliefs support the earlier argument that human objects of love, while being *bona fide* relationships, are, in the end, emulations of our relationship with God, and that the ‘Other’ is a mediator for God’s love.¹⁶⁹

9. The Psychological Dimensions of Relationality

Earlier, parallels were drawn between the fictional man’s shyness or reserve and Khodr’s character. Khodr inhabits a more public persona and regularly, very publicly, shares innermost thoughts on the printed page when he writes his column for *an-Nahar*. In his capacity as something of a national conscience, he is not reticent about making his views known on a number of issues, whether personal, spiritual or political. This may indicate a man possessed of a sufficiently thick skin, or at least one who is sufficiently robust, psychologically, to cope with the backwash and brickbats that may result from oratorical outbursts or literary output. So it might come as something of a surprise that there is, at a particular juncture in the book, a candid, almost intimate, passage that reveals a personal vulnerability and a need for relationality on a personal level.

“When a spiritual connection was established with one of his close companions, my friend was able to bare his soul for the sake of friendship, or to defend himself against slander. He described his interior state with great precision, without causing any embarrassment to the listener or drawing him into the obscure paths of sentimentality. Rather, he led him with great discretion into the innermost depths of his soul. He never asked for pity, only for understanding. For him

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.50.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ See above, p.231.

understanding, lived existentially, was like a form of compassion dissipating every injustice.”¹⁷⁰

In this extract on one-to-one relationality, there comes across a graceful sensitivity to other people’s indulgence, which allows him to express his bewilderment at people’s animosity and to share spiritual quandaries. Apparent in the text is an apprehension about boring people or frightening them away with personal revelations. Instead, the man in the book invites the interlocutor to explore his (the fictional man’s) feelings as an almost objective exercise. But this level of intimacy, the narrator infers, can only be achieved with certain people, and even then it should be done without recourse to self-pity, or arousing the pity of the ‘Other’.¹⁷¹ If there is a primary motivation, it is rooted in a tacit plea for understanding, for understanding is an act of mercy, which mitigates the censure of others. In addition, and as alluded to above, this extract testifies to a vulnerability, an awareness of “the slings and arrows”, not so much of outrageous fortune,¹⁷² but of barbed criticism, which Khodr himself has met with from people who are out of sympathy with his views, whether they be in the Church, on the street, or in politics.

Khodr, for all his contumacy is, can be seen as a sensitive human being, someone who is tough, but can bruise easily. Abou Mrad recounts a time during the Bosnian war (1992-95) when Khodr made remarks about the destruction of churches in the region and about the persecution of Christians and Christianity in general. As a result of this publicised statement, he was placed, by a Lebanese Muslim group, on a hit list of those to be assassinated.¹⁷³ During the Lebanese war, prominent figures like Khodr may have been at semi-permanent risk of assassination, so he, like others, must be comparatively inured to the covert threat to his person; as a result, his reaction was linked neither to fear for his own safety nor to the tedium of

¹⁷⁰ TWOC, p.104.

¹⁷¹ It was stated earlier (Chapter 3, p.85) that, around Khodr, there is a coterie of close friends and loyal supporters. In conversation with Khairallah and others, an impression takes shape of a man (Khodr), who enjoys friendship to its very depths, including the facility for intimacy that true friendship affords.

¹⁷² Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1.

¹⁷³ Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.

having to subject himself to restrictive security. Instead, he was, according to Abou Mrad, shocked that Muslims could respond in this manner: I have been, he is reported to have said, a teacher of Islam, I have written about a theology of Islam, I was the first to establish a serious dialogue between Christians and Muslims.¹⁷⁴ It hurt him that, as a propitiator for Islam and Lebanese Muslims in general – not for political expediency, but because he maintains a deep love and respect for Muslims and for Islam – some Lebanese Muslims could react in this way.

10. Relationality Through Ill Health & The Body-Mind Dichotomy

10.1 Sickness

The narrator tells us of a third letter, which recounts the fictional man's state of health. The latter, now in middle age, describes how his sickness has caused him to remember when, as a young man, he regarded the healing stories of Jesus as superfluous.¹⁷⁵ The prayer for the sick he saw as "lacking in spirituality, since it concerned the physical side of our existence.

"Likewise, I gave little importance to the miracles of Christ except as signs of his power and his privileged relationship with the Father. At best, I saw in them a sign of the Lord's solicitude for human distress and a response to our desire for healing, or a call to faith."¹⁷⁶

There was no ulterior motive to Jesus' acts of healing; they were neither tools to advance his mission, nor a way to convince people to follow him. They were an example of mystical relationality, a means by which God could express his love for humankind. This spiritual rigidity additionally reflects an idealistic religiosity in a developing mind.

When he was young, the man in the book thought of himself as a unity; only when one is sick, he says, does there come a realisation that one's body is a distinct part of oneself. "[S]ickness is dismal because in it you and your body

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. He would have been referring to Christian-Muslim dialogue in Lebanon.

¹⁷⁵ "I did not pay attention to the miracles of Christ save from the point of His superiority and His ability and the revealing of his [*sic*] connection to the Father." (*TPOC*, p.42.)

¹⁷⁶ *TWOC*, p.107. Or, as the first translation expresses it, "telling the story so that we may believe." (*TPOC*, p.42.)

become a pair. Before you were sick you did not set yourself apart from your body.”¹⁷⁷ Now that he is growing older, he sees the significance of the body for human beings.¹⁷⁸ Another possible undercurrent in this extract is that relationality can apply to the human being as an individual; in other words, we can have a relationship with the *self*, particularly through an episode of ill health. Our physical health and the intricacies of our psychological framework – by which is meant the immaterial, spiritual facets of our being, including our soul – are discrete yet conjoined.¹⁷⁹ And this dovetails with the text, for the man in the book intimates that there is a psychosomatic dimension to his condition.

“When sickness worsens and evils multiply, the patient cannot avoid becoming perturbed, in spite of the soothing words of those around him that psychological reactions are involved. Perhaps there is truth in what they say...however, he is hardly inclined to examine the relationship between the psychological and the physical sides of illness.”¹⁸⁰

This episode comes in the third letter after his self-imposed exile, a point of asceticism that may be described as his seeking after a personal desert where he is apart from all that is familiar. As a result, the illness may be linked to the low ebb of his inner spirituality, hence the oblique reference to psychosomatic illness.¹⁸¹ Keeping the balance within ourselves – the soma and the soul – is a perennial (often subconscious) task: watching what is ingested by way of food and drink; coping with inner anxiety; generating thoughts and ideas to

¹⁷⁷ *TPOC*, p.42.

¹⁷⁸ Dionysius the Areopagite imbues the body with equal significance. Referring to our final judgement, he says that, “divine justice links the body with the soul...for the body also took part in the same journey along the road of holiness or impiety.” (Dionysius. ‘The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy’. In: *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, p.257.)

¹⁷⁹ Moods and mental states can affect the physical appearance in powerful ways. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for example, is said to have willed away a tumour in his stomach. See Solzhenitsyn, A. *Cancer Ward*. Nicholas Bethell & David Burg (trans.). London: Bodley Head, 1968.

¹⁸⁰ *TWOC*, p.108.

¹⁸¹ For a discussion on illness and pain as they relate to spirituality, with specific reference to Julian of Norwich (c.1342-c.1416) and the body, see Netton, I. R. *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey*, pp.114-5.

deal with that anxiety; processing extraneous influences on us. This psychosomatic dimension has implications, recalling the Christological controversies of an emerging Christianity when Christian theology was wrestling with the theanthropic constitution of Christ and the admixture of body, spirit, divinity, and humanity. Even though the extremes of asceticism described, for example, in histories of Syrian asceticism¹⁸² – these combined a rejection of worldly values with the adoption of animalistic habits such as eating grass and perching on rocks like birds¹⁸³ – suggest contempt for the material person, the body was, from a Christian perspective, divinely and indelibly ennobled by the Incarnation. Christ’s universality, deriving in part from this union of body with soul, is an essential component of the Christian message – as Ramfos observes, “The union of the biological with the spiritual self lends humanity catholicity”.¹⁸⁴ The Christian conception of human beings is contrary to the Platonic conception; in short, we are not simply souls housed in the relatively inconsequential body. We are a unity of body and soul, of the material and the spiritual, with a theotic destiny based on this combination.¹⁸⁵ What happens to our bodies can have a shaping influence on our spirit or spirituality, and how we relate to our spiritual selves.

The man in the book realises that it is serious illness that tests our relationship with ourselves, with the world, and with God. “He may place his hope in the eventual advancement of science, but above all he seeks his deliverance in the mercy of God. Because he is not cured, he lives his malady not only at

¹⁸² See, for example, Vööbus, A. *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East. Vol.1*; and Vööbus, A. 1960. *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East. Vol.2. Early monasticism in Mesopotamia and Syria*. Belgium: Louvain, 1960. Ignatius of Antioch (c.50-c.98-117) pleaded with the influential Christians of Rome not to intercede on his behalf and deprive him of martyrdom; Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, (69-c.155), was given the opportunity by the proconsul to recant and go on his way, but he steadfastly refused. See, for example, Chadwick, H. *The Early Church*. London: Penguin Books, 1967, p.30; and Frend, W. H. C. *The Early Church*. London: SCM Press, 2003, pp.59-60.

¹⁸³ Vööbus, Vol.2, pp.25-7.

¹⁸⁴ Ramfos, p.181.

¹⁸⁵ That is, our destiny according to Orthodoxy.

the level of the body...but also at the level of the soul, which is left to overcome despair.”¹⁸⁶ It is faith, the man in the book continues, that buoys us.

10.2 Suffering

In the book, there is a sequence that describes the fictional man’s illness and his consequential suffering. Suffering, physical, mental, and existential, is a feature of Khodr’s thinking. He is aware that existence is inseparable from pain, and that Christianity is commensurate with suffering. Suffering from a mental or existential perspective is something that was addressed in conversation and was discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to Gethsemane. When asked whether Jesus ever felt despair, he replies in the negative. But when pressed about the former’s experience in Gethsemane, he highlights Jesus’ sense of abandonment, and, by inference, the pain that this would have engendered.¹⁸⁷ Suffering as a theme is returned to in later writings as an isolating dimension of human experience.

“The person suffering can understand his own pain or he might not due to circumstances. Others might watch or explain and all they can give is compassion and affection. But the other cannot be in the shoes of him who suffers physically or morally because he cannot carry the pain of others.”¹⁸⁸

Khodr can seem frustrating when his apparent contradictions surface. If he says Jesus never felt despair, only abandonment, the question arises whether there is a significant difference. And in another article, he says, “In our physical and psychological sufferings we taste simultaneously the death and the resurrection of the Savior.”¹⁸⁹ This acknowledges the fact that human beings can suffer psychological torment, of which despair may be a component. Yet, Khodr might argue, a sense of abandonment, a breakdown in relationality, does not necessarily lead on to despair; in other words, one can feel abandoned, and experience the psychological agony that might be

¹⁸⁶ *TWOC*, p.108.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Khodr, *Suffering*.

¹⁸⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Passion and Resurrection’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 September, 2013.

induced, but not sink to the level of despair, which could be seen as the nadir of psychological suffering. No one can share or take on the pain of the sufferer, which is why God is the sole comforter, God being the only one who can inhabit our pain. Be that as it may, much, it would appear, depends on our conception of God.¹⁹⁰

“But if your God depended upon the sight of your eyes or the wellbeing of your body or was connected to your success then He will go away with the going of these. If you drew God out of what is within you or what is around you, there is no doubt that his image will fall away with the collapsing of what is in you or around you. But the one who has great faith does not derive God from the universe but he receives the universe from God.”¹⁹¹

This makes it clear that if we derive God from our physical attributes, our sentient existence, or create him from an identikit assembled out of features of our own life (nationality, community, religion, who we are); if our conception of God is filtered through our attachment to the world, through the things of this world and our success in worldly terms – then as these fade or are eclipsed by suffering, so, correspondingly, will our conception of God become evanescent. The one who has faith, however, will know that God is with them because, for them, God is not, as it were, a product of the universe, rather, the universe comes from God and is ‘given’ to the perceiver. To some extent, this parallels the distinction between the cataphatic (the understandable) and the apophatic (that which is beyond our understanding); and yet, in their distinction, they work together, for, through the apophatic comes the cataphatic, the material universe. The sufferer who has conjured God from their own *being*, and from their *being-in-the-world*, has perhaps an erroneous conception because, in their wish to personalise God and thus relate to him,

¹⁹⁰ Cf., for example, Gallaher’s observation: “...the existence of so many ecclesiologies points to their origin in myriad different visions of Jesus, which further points to multiple versions of the one God so that one must ask oneself whether Christians really do worship the same God.” (Gallaher, B. ‘The Christian Church Facing Itself and Facing the World. An Ecumenical Overview of Modern Christian Ecclesiology’. In: *The Community of Believers. Christian and Muslim Perspectives. A Record of the Twelfth Building Bridges Seminar*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013, pp.97-146, pp.131-2.

¹⁹¹ TPOC: p.43.

they are seeing God the wrong way round, limiting him to their own conceptualising. The cataphatic works, this extract is suggesting, from the apophatic; the apophatic does not come from the cataphatic. This chimes with Dionysian theology, which places God beyond our means of comprehension, invalidating every description of God, and rendering every attempt to do so as meaningless. Instead, we realise God through the negation of every descriptor, such as goodness, wisdom, and beauty, which are traditionally associated with the 'character' of God.¹⁹² Through this negative theology, human beings come to 'know' God through their unknowing; and it is perhaps through the fictional man's incapacitation that the relationship between the apophatic God and himself is given new emphasis: "I begin by affirming Him and...He is the One who affirms me".¹⁹³ This declaration reflects the mechanics of relationality, which is so much a part of Orthodoxy's theological heritage, and gives shape to Khodr's theology of the 'Other'.

This disquisition on illness and our relationship with God through suffering additionally refers, as already intimated, to mental suffering, including the mental agonies associated with the existential pressures of earthly life. As was earlier quoted in part, "sorrow can bring one to inner pain and almost to despair. Added to those are worry, anxiety and tension...what we have now is that every rational creature is stricken in soul or body or both at one stage of his life or throughout all of his life."¹⁹⁴ Acknowledging the woes and travails endemic to the human condition interlinks the book – with its reference to the suffering people on the streets – with his later work, and is confirmed by his comments made in conversation when he says that faith itself is hard.¹⁹⁵ Not knowing whether, in prayer, one has a genuine, relational connection with God, that we might be deceived by our own illusions,¹⁹⁶ can have

¹⁹² "And, such a one, precisely because he neither sees him nor knows him, truly arrives at that which is beyond all seeing and all knowledge." In other words, illumination comes from leaving behind all preconceptions of the Divine. (Dionysius. 'The Letters. Letter Five'. In: *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, p.265.)

¹⁹³ *TPOC*, p.43.

¹⁹⁴ Khodr, *Suffering*.

¹⁹⁵ See Chapter 5, pp.180-1.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

psychological repercussions. His frankness and honesty about the existential realities of life and about the spiritual life can be refreshing, but also devastating. It thus emphasises his existential religiosity and the research question.

For the man in the book, suffering can reach its apogee when the sufferer languishes between life and death, wishing at times for annihilation.

“When illness worsens, man seems to be stranded between heaven and earth. His sole desire is to pass into one state or the other... Often, man finds himself attracted to nothingness... at the brink of death, with only weak ties to this earthly life, his relationship with the life above grows stronger. He finds himself facing the One who conquered death and who fills his domain with his beloved presence. A beautiful face awaits him when he reaches the pit of the abyss and feels himself leaving his body. It is enough, then, to attract the attention of that face.”¹⁹⁷

In the last chapter, death was referred to as a gateway to theosis. This passage suggests that it is possible to relate positively to death through Christ, who, it is believed, conquered death through his suffering on the cross.

11. The Oppressor & The Oppressed: Relating to ‘Other’

Towards the end of the book, there is a sequence, which reflects Khodr’s character. As was mentioned earlier, he refused to take sides during the civil war, even though other community leaders were doing so and, by implication, similar may have been expected of him.¹⁹⁸ While being an instance of existential religiosity, it is this theme of refusing to take sides in the midst of violence that is now addressed.

¹⁹⁷ TWOC, p.110.

¹⁹⁸ See, for instance, Khairallah, who refers to Khodr’s criticism of clergy and “their generally aggressive stand” during the civil war of 1975-1990. (Khairallah, A. E. ‘The Way of the Cross as a Way of Life: Metropolitan Georges Khodr’s Hope in Times of War.’ In: *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*. T. Scheffler (ed.). Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg In Kommission, 2002, p.487.)

It precludes with the fictional man's claim that once "pastors held up the monastics as the examples of piety and sanctification. In our day, they must add the outcasts of the earth. Regardless of the violence of their cries and reactions, their blood is that of the Nazarene. God always listens to groanings without seeking to know their origins."¹⁹⁹ Other than being a reminder that the poor have a special place in the sight of God and that God listens to their plight,²⁰⁰ it leads the man in the book to thoughts about violence and those who suffer at the hands of it. The Fathers, he says, rejected violence; some of them even rejecting it when self-defence was at stake. "I personally have acquired this attitude," says the man in the book, and this is in line with Khodr's pacifism. It is, according to the man in the book, the mark of the spiritual person: "anyone who has deeply experienced the spiritual life prefers to die rather than to kill."²⁰¹ This is another sequence in the book that smacks of the confessional, a personal testament on a subject about which he is passionate. Khodr's life has been a deeply spiritual one – his time as a monk, albeit brief, his propensity for solitude, his routine which makes space for prayer and meditation – so it is not unreasonable to connect this passage directly to his own personal feelings.

In the context of violent action and reaction, the importance of relationality, of relating to the 'Other', carries with it, it would seem, an obligation that outweighs the gravity of any sin. For Khodr, and for the man in the book, no matter what act the 'Other' has committed, it cannot warrant or justify violent retribution whether generated by the state in the form of capital punishment or by military operations under conditions of *casus belli*. As described above, this is a part of the book where there is a divulging of personal principles and an uncompromising spirituality that will brook no measure of adulteration, and

¹⁹⁹ *TWOC*, p.158.

²⁰⁰ Cf. the beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 5:3.)

²⁰¹ *TWOC*, p.158. Khairallah remarks that Khodr "seems to refuse violence even in self-defense. This is more than non-violence; it is non-resistance, which differs sharply from the Islamic position on this matter." To those Christians who claim that such pacifism invites aggression, his response is: "True, it is difficult for man to be a sheep. The sheer existence of the sheep is a temptation for the wolf...But your sacred book wants you to be sheep. You have the choice between that and between being wolves yourselves."²⁰¹ (Khairallah, pp.487-8.)

thus can be explicitly identified with existential religiosity. The seriousness of this commitment to non-violence appears further on where the man in the book makes a personal declaration. "I cannot subscribe to a theology of violence nor legitimize the killing of others, even under circumstances which qualify as exceptional."²⁰² The anathematising of killing, whatever the circumstances, extends to society as a whole.

"A nation likewise falls into error when it executes a criminal. So long as the death penalty, reflective of primitive human reactions and the desire for vengeance, is tolerated in a nation's penal code, each citizen bears part of the responsibility for each execution which is perpetrated."²⁰³

At this point, the two translations diverge significantly. In the final paragraph of the last letter, there is an exhortation not to take sides. "When anger seizes a person who has been crushed and humiliated, filling him with murderous madness, we must relate to both the murderer and the victim if we are to lead both sides to repentance and mutual forgiveness."²⁰⁴ In the older, unpublished version, there occurs a grammatical modulation, shifting the first person plural into the first person singular. "But if the one who has been subjugated stood up mad in anger to the point of killing, I have to stand by the one wielding the knife and also by the wounded for cleansing and forgiveness and consolation...in order to lift them together to the hope of the new man who does not oppress and does not become oppressed."²⁰⁵ The change from a confessional (first person singular) to a homiletic tone (first person plural) is, it is argued, important because, by using the latter, it becomes didactic or dictatorial. Khodr wants to stress, through the man in the book, what *he* (Khodr) personally believes; and it is this first person singular, the 'I', that can convey a more personal flavour.

For the committed Christian, the fictional man's categorical rejection of violence extends to condemning hostile judgements or malicious opinionating.

²⁰² *TWOC*, p.159.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *TPOC*, p.68.

“The person who wishes to be a servant of the gospel must become its hostage. He must refrain from judging men, nor does he bless weapons and armies.”²⁰⁶ The continuation of this passage condemns all wars and bellicose actions instigated under the aegis of Christianity. “Therefore I cannot commend a holy man who sent soldiers to achieve national heroism nor can I take pride in the prophet Elijah for having killed the prophets of...Baal.”²⁰⁷ Doubtless, it would also include the Crusades, and the large majority of actions undertaken by states against other sovereign states in the name of religion.²⁰⁸

12. Conclusion

This has been a multivalent approach to relationality because the book’s literary flow alludes to different themes of relationality across a broad front of existential aspects . As such, it fleshes out Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’, contextualising it within a diurnal framework that also has spiritual dimensions. In doing so, it additionally corroborates Khodr’s existential religiosity.

In endeavouring to establish an equivalence of spirituality between Christianity and Islam, Khodr writes that the Spirit blows where it chooses to blow. This was referred to earlier as a form of transcendent spirituality that does not conform to the rigidity of communal boundaries.²⁰⁹ At the core of this transcendent spirituality is the conviction that the Muslim’s spirituality shares common ground with the Christian’s.²¹⁰ However, Khodr also believes that

²⁰⁶ *TWOC*, p.158.

²⁰⁷ *TPOC*, pp.67-8. The citing of Baal and the killing of “prophets of...Baal” arguably refers to Baalbek on the eastern side of Lebanon in the Bekaa valley, a site that attracted early Christians, who, courting martyrdom, attacked and destroyed pagan idols and statues of Baal. See Vööbus, 1960, p.344.

²⁰⁸ On the subject of fraught relationality within the home, Khodr’s touches on violence between husband and wife. “Neither of the two can in any way subjugate the other. Union is not subjugation.” In other words, relationality within a man-woman relationship is not based on subjugation, on one absorbing the ‘Other’. It is an argument that may be extended, perhaps, to include all ‘I/’Thou’ relationships. (Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Domestic Violence’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 2 July, 2011.)

²⁰⁹ Pages 214-5.

²¹⁰ The common ground between Christianity and Islam is alluded to when Khodr discusses the theologian Louis Massignon (1883-1962), whom he met. Khodr says Massignon, pre-1914, had been an atheist, but then discovered God and considered

Christ transcends religious borders and is present in other religions.²¹¹ In conversation, Khodr makes his own view clear. “To put it in a theological framework...my personal position...God the Father...works through the Holy Spirit without coming to us by the Son...By the historical Son. And I truly believe...sincerely believe...a Muslim may be a member of the Church through the Holy Spirit.”²¹² If Khodr also believes that the common ground between Christians and Muslims is mysticism and the mystical experience,²¹³ the bridgehead of ‘mystical experience’ is something he qualifies. “You see, they fear mysticism. Because they imagine that this would lead to the idea of incarnation...God is in man, man is in God...They always fear...a true connection between God and man, an encounter.”²¹⁴ Presumably, this would not, however, preclude experiential spirituality.²¹⁵ Given this, it may be

becoming a Muslim. Remembering he had been baptised, he decided to remain a Christian “because [Massignon believed] it will have the same result, in Islam or in Christianity”; he could “achieve the same goal and still be a Christian.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.) The reality of religious symbiosis, whereby a person’s relationship with God can be re-established and nurtured by Islam and Christianity, is brought out by Griffith. “He [Massignon] attributed his conversion to the intercessory prayers of his mother, Huysmans, and Foucauld, and to the advocacy of al-Hallâj. Thereafter Massignon lived an intense religious life, supported by a rather strict Roman Catholic orthodoxy, purified, as he believed, by the sharp religious challenge of Islam.” (Griffith, S. H. ‘Merton, Massignon, and the Challenge of Islam’. In: *Merton & Hesychasm. The Prayer of the Heart. The Eastern Church*. B. Dieker and J. Montaldo (eds.). Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003, pp.54-5.) In discussing Mahmoud Ayoub, Hirvonen suggests that, “his preference for the Eastern Christian conception of redemption as victory over death rather than the traditional Western Christian emphasis on atonement by sacrifice raises the question of whether dialogue on ultimate human destiny would be easiest between Eastern Christians and mystically minded Muslims.” (Hirvonen, p.223.)

²¹¹ See Avakian, p.122.

²¹² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013. See also Gallaher, who in discussing “the Dominican theologian and ecumenist Jean-Marie Tillard (1927-2000)”, and his “attempt to appropriate the communion ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* for the purposes of a communion with non-Christians”, says, “However, there still exist some who are saved but ignorant of the fact that they are”. [Gallaher’s words.] (Gallaher, *The Christian Church Facing Itself and Facing the World*, p.113.)

²¹³ See Avakian. “Khodr regards the mystic tradition of both Christianity and Islam (the Sufi tradition) as the common ground between both religions”. (Avakian, p.179.) All this should be measured, however, against Khodr’s assertion that there is no other common ground. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.)

²¹⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

²¹⁵ When asked to offer a definition of mysticism, Khodr replies, “The love of God. You go beyond reason, beyond discursive speech. And that way, we Christians, or Christian mystics I mean, do encounter Muslim mystics. They have the same approach.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 24 October, 2013.) This

construed that Christian-Muslim relationality must be founded on experiential spirituality. If this is the case, and Christianity, of which Christ is at the centre, may be considered a mystical religion, it might be possible to say that Christ is the common ground between the two religions. *Prima facie*, this may appear fanciful. However, if Jesus is the mystagogue at the centre of a mystical spirituality, and Christianity is a theology that mystically systematises ritual, celebration, and God-human communication, then it is possible, at least, to conflate Khodr's belief that Christ belongs to everyone with his professed belief that the common ground between Christianity and Islam is mysticism or experiential spirituality. Put another way, Christ can be said to act as the gateway to the common ground of 'mystical experience' between Christianity and Islam.²¹⁶

One of the points where Khodr and the man in the book would seem most readily to mirror each other is when reference is made to their solitary state. As a human being, Khodr is thoroughly personable and amicable. It is difficult to imagine that the man in the book would be any different, and if the contrary were true, the latter would perhaps have not inspired such apparently loyal friendship. Their distancing of the world is reflective of the divide between those who are attached to the material world and those who are detached from it. The former category are arguably more likely to be consumed by material and superficial preoccupations than by spiritual matters, such as faith and personal destiny, which are not integral parts of day-to-day life in the material world. Not only are Khodr and the man in the book detaching themselves for the sake of their spiritual development and identity, they are by definition imposing a form of self-exclusion on themselves through the

commonality of mysticism between Sufism and Christianity is illustrated by the example of the Mawlawiyya, a Sufi order founded by Rūmī (603/1207-671/1273), which is said to have "helped in the reconciliation of certain types of Christians to Islam." (Trimingham, J. S. *The Sufi Orders of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.61.)

²¹⁶ See Schmidt-Lenkel, who cites Justin Martyr (second century) and his assertion that "in Jesus Christ the *logos*... appeared in its fullness, while fragments or seeds of the *logos* have inspired some people at all times and places to live a god-fearing life. Without bearing this name, these people were 'Christians'." (Schmidt-Lenkel, P. 'Christianity and the Religious Other'. In: *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, p.125.)

incongruity of their spiritual focus. While, in the case of the man in the book, this disadvantages him in worldly terms – he exiles himself from his country and his friends, and blights his career prospects – and in Khodr’s case, he is to some extent isolated,²¹⁷ self-exclusion frees them from any worldly affiliation and thus enables them both to make statements that may seem to contravene standards of *politesse*. In Khodr’s case, it also enables his existential religiosity to flourish.

There are other indications of Khodr’s character and of his existential religiosity, that is, a practical religiosity addressing areas which may be considered somewhat adventurous for public airing. As outlined above,²¹⁸ the narrator advises that the man should become familiar with women outside the family circle for “the completion of the feminine image inside him.” The text continues, “Indeed, his personality does not achieve its full masculinity unless it builds upon a femininity which he can imagine and sense in the very constitution of his manhood.”²¹⁹ Although couched in careful language, this is tantamount to saying that males have a feminine side, and is a daring assertion in what is, arguably, a predominantly patriarchal society. But it comes from someone who recognises that the divine image transcends gender, that human beings are not wholly male or wholly female. It is perhaps additionally revealing that the statement does not say for the completion of his male image – in other words, a male needs the feminine side to be complete. Although the core of this assertion is not new, even in the West it may not, in every circumstance, be considered a comfortable topic to air. As it is, Khodr is utilising his existential religiosity to push sensitive issues, overcome barriers, and extend boundaries of understanding.

Later, Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’ is infused with renewed meaning when he uses familial ties as a metaphorical comparison. “In Christianity, every person is your brother, and you should love him exactly as you love your own brother or sister...Your brother isn’t closer to you than any other human

²¹⁷ See Abou Mrad’s comments in Chapter 3.

²¹⁸ Page 248.

²¹⁹ *TWOC*, p.78.

being.”²²⁰ Again, this may be considered something of a goad. Loving the ‘Other’ is not a new message; it is at the heart of the gospel and is the embodiment of pan-denominational Christianity. However, in an environment that is deeply rooted in the traditions of family loyalties, where there is a history of interreligious friction, where intercommunal relations are often politically and sociologically charged with mutual atavistic suspicion, to say that the ‘Other’, who could be a Muslim, should mean as much to a Christian as his/her brother or sister, is radical if not inflammatory. What Khodr is saying is that relationality, reaching out to the ‘Other’, can only be effective if the ‘I’ transcends its own communal and familial identity to engage with the ‘Thou’. Such a stance is both provocative, challenging, and potentially alienates him from those he is addressing, but it also aptly reflects his existential religiosity.

It would, perhaps, be a mistake to yoke his arrant discomfort with ecumenism to his theology of the ‘Other’ and to conclude that this negativity corrodes the latter. However, this supposed discomfort, it is argued, can be seen to reinforce his theology of the ‘Other’. Even if there is some foundation in the above assertion²²¹ that a differing *Weltanschauung* between East and West would act as a barrier to intra-Christian unity, the existential interpretation of his theology of the ‘Other’ might suggest that, nevertheless, it is a Christian’s duty to continue trying, despite setbacks and the enormity of the task, to reach out to the ‘Other’ regardless of the disparity of belief or existential perspective. But even though Khodr offers reassurance – “Whenever we approach [the other] in wisdom and great purity, diversity does not cause enmity since you know that the other is God’s beloved one like you”²²² – the reluctance to reach out may be rooted in a fear of cultural contamination, that is, tradition and beliefs will be adulterated; and Khodr, himself, offers no clue that he is willing to compromise his Orthodoxy for ecumenical unity. However, he might argue, relationality is not about becoming an inseparable, undivided body. Reaching out to the ‘Other’ is a spiritual, almost mystical experience, and, like the

²²⁰ Khodr, *The Family of the Father*.

²²¹ Pages 237-8.

²²² Khodr, *The Others*.

mystical experience, relationality is a spiritual ascent, but one that does not end in total absorption. In the mystical experience, one is united with God as two separate entities. The same, he might argue, applies to reaching out to the 'Other'. We could never become united with the apophatic God, neither can we become united with the apophatic 'Other'. Reaching out to the 'Other', whether they be a fellow Christian or a Muslim, is reaching out as an individual to another individual. The Muslim, Khodr might say, will not become like the Christian, neither will the Christian become like the Muslim. But that is not the point. Diversity is what God created; and even though we may be gathered together, we coagulate as discrete entities – in other words, unicity in multiplicity.

Another illustration of Khodr's existential religiosity may be found in his irenic stance with regard to violence. Once more it must be said that he is not the only pacifist in Lebanon, but it is the unyielding and absolutist nature of his conviction that is striking and reflective of his theology of the 'Other'. In transcending communal, religious identity, he does not, cannot, differentiate between one person and the next. The theory of his theology of the 'Other' reflects his spirituality, its uncompromising application demonstrates his existential religiosity.

What is also apparent is that strands of Khodr's thinking on relationality from across the years – the book, alongside various articles, and in interview – can be interwoven into a coherent pattern, combining personal introspection and theological exposition into an overall vision, which has remained constant throughout his entire life.

This exploration of relationality might seem to represent a form of unbridled optimism with regard to revived spirituality, but absorbing the niceties of his theology of the 'Other' and penetrating the theological intricacies of Trinitarian relationality may be asking a good deal from the laity. Thus, with the research question in mind, the corollary of this is that the Orthodox community may not be theologically equipped for interreligious relations and fall away

from any meaningful 'reaching out'; this knowledge vacuum might additionally suggest a leaching of willingness to engage with the 'Other'.

The chapter on relationality was carried out to explore how this, the third existential criterion, is reflected in various passages in the book, and to lend weight to the hypothesis that Bishop Khodr embodies what is described as existential religiosity. It had, however, an additional task, that of unpacking the theology of the 'Other' and Khodr's deeper understanding of it. In the next chapter, the thesis will seek to discover the ways in which 'alienation' is expressed through the book, how this too is tied in with Khodr's existential religiosity, and how, as the fourth existential criterion, it relates to the research question.

CHAPTER 7

Alienation

In the previous chapter, relationality was examined through its multifarious manifestations in the book. As a general, overarching concept, relationality was seen to imply a linking up with the 'Other' and the active use of a communicational channel. This chapter now advances the opposite notion, that of alienation. Both concepts, relationality and alienation, may be applied to Bishop Khodr and to the man in the book, in terms of their spirituality and their respective individuality.

Alienation includes a sense of exclusion and ostracism, of estrangement and separation from the 'Other' and the world's activities.¹ It implies a deficient, discordant, or defunct communicational channel that either the 'I' or the 'Other' finds inappropriate or cannot use owing to opposing sets of communicational codes or protocol. Whereas alienation may refer to distance between the 'I' and the 'Other', it may also include being at odds with society, or being cut off from ordinary, everyday life. An extension of this application may additionally suggest abandonment, but an abandonment that can work both ways by dint of the fact that the alienating process itself can work both ways; in other words, alienation – ignoring, rejecting, abandoning – can be initiated by either the 'I', the 'Other' (the world), or both.

1. Alienation in a Colonial & Religious Context

It may be pertinent at this point to recall Khodr's personal experience from a biographical standpoint. He was born into a colonial setting, which in itself may have instilled a degree of alienation. Coupled with, and even on the back of, this historical fact, Khodr, and others, felt that some of his teachers, who were often both Western and Catholic, exuded an air of superiority. This is

¹ Macquarrie describes the 'I', the self, as experiencing a distance between "the self as projected and the self where it actually stands". (Macquarrie 1973, p.202-3.) The 'I' regards itself as x, but the world may categorise the 'I' as y. Macquarrie terms this a "discontinuity in existence". (Ibid., p.203) See also Cooper, who asserts that to be human is to feel a sense of estrangement that permeates the human experience of being in the world. (Cooper, pp.29-30.)

reflected in the book where the narrator describes the fictional man's experience.

“He forgave his teachers for their ignorance, which he attributed to the navel-gazing of a West imbued with a belief in the centrality of Europe and its unique role in the history of civilization. His forgiveness grew when he realized that their ignorance was unshakable because it emanated from a dogmatic logic that rejected the possibility of sainthood in the eastern Church.”²

It is clear that there is in Khodr's thinking an *idée fixe* regarding the West. Khodr and others believe the West sees itself as superior to the East, a perception that in part may emanate from colonialism. This perceived self-aggrandisement on the part of the West had the effect of alienating the East, and it is not difficult to see why this was especially so in a spiritual dimension when Orthodoxy was, when Khodr was a pupil, devalued as a faith in the classroom. There is reference by the narrator to “the intellectual terrorism and constraints imposed upon his people for many decades”³, and to the disparaging of Eastern Orthodoxy: “according to his teachers, the East had not produced any saints after its “separation” from the papacy.”⁴ Readers of the book may also discern in the fictional man's second letter a subtle belittling of the West's spirituality. The East, it would seem, nurtured a different calibre of person. “[B]eings who achieved the heights of detachment...filled with grace, they put on Christ, who chose to manifest himself to the world through them by means of charismatic thought and a life consecrated to love.”⁵ The West, by contrast “tends rather to consider man as

² *TWOC*, pp.21-2. This rejection of sainthood in the Eastern Church may have some credibility, but it is a view that may not have been shared amongst all Western (Catholic) teachers. Khodr himself describes the enormous antipathy of Catholic teachers in his school, recounting a time when the teacher, a member of a Roman Catholic brotherhood, told him to stand up and tell him “why the Orthodox Church is neither one [thing]...nor the other”. Khodr remembers the year, 1938. He was fourteen or fifteen and clearly the experience imprinted itself on his mind. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.)

³ *TWOC*, pp.23-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.97.

the center of the universe.”⁶ As stated earlier, the fictional man puts it even plainer: “I am not impressed with the western person in general despite his virtues.”⁷

If these extracts suggest a separation between East and West, Khodr says that although the Orthodox do not feel Western, they are not anti-Western. In conversation, Khodr wonders “how to differentiate between the Orthodox mind and the Western mind.” After pondering this, he answers his own question. “An Orthodox intellectual, although trained according to Descartes...[and] rationalism...would still continue to be a kind of mystic.” For him, the defining factor is that “the vision of God in Orthodoxy is mystical...[it] could never be completely rational,” whereas Western Christianity, by inference, is rooted in a more rationalistic approach to theology.⁸

2. Alienation in a Social Context

Early on in the fictional man’s development, specifically his final year at secondary school, he makes visits to “the poor people in his neighbourhood”;⁹ and, in doing so, a feeling comes across that a gulf opens up between him and the poor, which is based on knowledge, education, and material wealth. He feels that his sociological standing alienates him from the disadvantaged. The narrator makes the point that education above a certain level was denied to all but the wealthy, posing him a number of uncomfortable questions – “[s]uch questions never ceased to torment my friend”¹⁰ – the more so when he reached a realisation that appreciation of the arts was a prerogative of the leisure classes. “Not only knowledge, but also beauty was restricted to those of means.”¹¹ On the other hand, Khodr’s own personal belief is that the poor are blessed by God. “[T]he poor man was among God’s companions. The Evangelist wanted to say that God gives the poor their sustenance and he is

⁶ See Chapter 4, p.140, where reference is made to a description in the book of the West’s purported belief in man, in “his brains and his analysis...in his seeking after a system which, at the peak of its inventiveness, is called technology.” (*TPOC*, p.37.)

⁷ *TPOC*, p.39. See Chapter 4, p.102.

⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

⁹ *TWOC*, p.25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

their aider.”¹² However, he is also keen to stress that no one should feel alienated from the other, that alienation is baseless. “We are one group in the Church and our wealth is God. He who wears beautiful clothes is the same as that who wears rags.”¹³

Khodr is making three points in these extracts from his written work. First, through the book, he makes the observation that the divide in society between the financially advantaged and the poor, which alienates one group from the other, is very real and that it encompasses not only fiscal hardship, but aesthetic deprivation; and, because of his other observations about beauty – “[b]eauty, it would seem, is...irrevocably connected to, dependent on, spirituality” – this has spiritual repercussions. Second, and balanced against this deprivation, is set his belief that the poor are blessed. These are dialectically resolved in the third point – that is, we are all the same in the eyes of God. In another article, he lays stress on this from an interreligious perspective: “Do not fall in the heresy [sic] of differentiating between Muslims and Christians in charity. You have your own faith and they have theirs...the Muslim must dwell in your heart if you wanted God to dwell in it too.”¹⁴ Khodr’s conviction is that through the practice of spirituality, any sense of alienation is eradicated and differences are resolved.

The alienation responsible for dividing classes and which is founded on education and privilege is taken up again later in the book when the fictional man joins the workshop. This has been explored in earlier chapters and is revived here because the fictional man effectively alienates himself from his own background, deliberately discarding the privileges of his upbringing, voluntarily denying himself the opportunities afforded by his background and education, and stripping himself of social advantage. It is as if this move is an ascetic ploy, a *kenosis*, which the fictional man believes he must carry out on his spiritual pathway, and, as such, represents a desire to humble himself

¹² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Rich Man and Lazarus’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 30 October, 2011.

¹³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘From the Sermon on the Mount’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 3 July, 2011.

¹⁴ Khodr, *Love for Everyone*.

within a working class environment. It is not an easy or simple matter, for he would have been seen by the workers as an interloper and worse – a renegade from his own class and hence disloyal to his family. To assume this persona in a society, which is steeped in the conviction that fealty to family and community is paramount, would make this a difficult realignment; and it comes across in the text.

“He felt a little shy upon entering the workshop. What should he say? Would his relative [who runs the workshop] understand his desire to leave the sphere of knowledge and become a manual labourer, when every worker dreams of his children becoming educated so as to find opportunities in the professions? For them, life is nothing but a struggle.”¹⁵

Gradually, whatever sociological gap there is between the workers and himself is bridged by his earnest demeanour in the workplace and, more notably perhaps, by his immersion in Union affairs. His commitment to the promotion of workers’ rights and the amelioration of workers’ conditions, compounded perhaps by his confidence and education, both of which stem from his privileged background and would aid him in his Union role, win him the Union leadership. But, although accepted by the workers, he is now at odds with those of his own background, the ‘ruling class’. Although this is touched on in the book, it is arguably not fanciful to assume the status he now enjoys with his fellow workers is dependent on the success of his Union deliberations; and it is possible he may still represent something of a suspicious character amongst some workers, who see him as ‘not one of us’, an Outsider. Equally, he may have been regarded as a dangerous turncoat by those further up the sociological ladder and whose authority he and the Union were now confronting. As such, it would appear he is set on a collision course. Occupying the middle (mediatory) ground, while speaking one’s mind, can result in not pleasing anyone for most of the time; and so it proved for the man in the book.

¹⁵ TWOC, p.57.

“The quest for truth drove my friend to solitude. On the one hand, the believers who used to gather around him stigmatized his “leftist” tendencies. On the other hand, those on the left were uneasy with his show of concern. In order to trust him, they demanded an exclusive allegiance which he was unable to offer them. He had nowhere to lay his head, neither in the Church nor with the working class. He became isolated, and the labor union did not re-elect him to the board. At the same time, the wealthy voiced complaints about him to the bishop, who rarely stood up to them.”¹⁶

There is in this extract a summing up of his separation and ostracism. Three things stand out – first, it is stated that the man in the book is embarked on a “quest for truth”. This is in keeping with his spiritual development and what is described here as existential religiosity – that is, a spiritual commitment that will not balk at adulteration, however uncomfortable the quest might become. Second, the phrase “nowhere to lay his head” recalls Jesus’ dictum that, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”¹⁷ The uncharitable might suggest that Khodr is attempting to identify the man in the book, and, by inference, himself, with that of Jesus, particularly as Jesus himself was a carpenter. However, it is argued, the connecting link is with what he terms the “quest for truth”. This quest, if pursued by seekers after truth with the uncompromising rigour that defines existential religiosity, will not make them popular, but, on the contrary, will render them isolated and alone. In more extreme circumstances, it may galvanise others to militate against them, if only by dint of the fact that the person is a lone voice, with little or no palpable support. Finally, the demand for “exclusive allegiance” is a telling point, for it reveals the seam of independence from all worldly affiliation, which runs through both the man in the book and Khodr. The sole, unflinching, and immutable allegiance that distinguishes them is of a spiritual nature; they are looking not to this world for its plaudits and rewards, but to the sanctification of a divine destination in theosis.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.65.

¹⁷ Matthew 8:20.

Through this alienating process, the man in the book is now effectively an Outsider, and it has been brought about by both him and other parties. In brief, he has not helped himself. Occupying an intransigent, if not idealistic, position, he alienates those around him. As a consequence, his term as leader of the Union runs out and he is not re-elected; the rich and the powerful regard him as a threat to the status quo and complain to the bishop; his acerbic and swingeing comments on politics, to be explored later, do not endear him to either politicians or to those who regard politics as the necessary, integral cogs that allow society to function.

As a result of his unrelenting stand, the man is, to a great extent, spurned by both camps, organisational spirituality and politics. But neither is dead to him. “The Church, the fine arts faculty, and later the labor union all lived inside him.”¹⁸ Even so, there is a sense of isolation, of being isolated. “He lived this experience [of isolation] with the universe as if he were outside himself, as if he had no anchor.”¹⁹ The reader is then confronted with a psychopathological passage that admits of alienation and intimates personal suffering.

“People usually establish a relationship with their human and material environment which presupposes a divergence of individual opinions, and thus the necessity arises to create a convergence or link between them. But things with my friend were not like that.”²⁰

In its pithy and coldly factual assessment of what it is to *be* in the world, the narrator has made an existential statement. The world, Khodr is saying through the narrator, is a series of relationships, which human beings need to establish in order to negotiate their way through life. This is not confined to

¹⁸ *TWOC*, p.69. For a similar experience along the spiritual pathway, see Vodolazkin’s novel, where the protagonist embarks on the eremitical life. “He was not lonely because he did not feel that people had abandoned him. He sensed everyone he had ever met as if they were present. They continued a quiet life in his soul, regardless of whether they had gone off to another world or were still alive.” (Vodolazkin, E. *Laurus*. Lisa C. Hayden (trans.). London: Oneworld Publications, 2016, p.335.)

¹⁹ *TWOC*, p.69.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

relationality entailing human encounter, but to objects in the world; they too must be taken account of in one's daily dealings. They may be lifeless, inanimate, belonging to the natural world; they may be products of human ingenuity; they may be agglomerations, which exceed the sum of their parts, such as institutions. This multifactual reality of people and things is what the individual has to contend with and relate to; for some, it is a matter of course, for others – those who are withdrawn, introspective, of a contemplative character – it may be problematic. In the case of the fictional man, he can connect neither to the world, nor to people, in the same way as others can or appear able to do.

Here, it is mooted, there is another convergence between the man in the book and Khodr. Khodr's spiritual background has been one suited to a monastic temperament, where time is given over in the day to serve a meditative desire to be alone with one's thoughts and to commune with God. In this sequence, the narrator is offering an illustration of the man in the book that parallels Khodr's character – once again, it is a tendency to seek out solitude, a recognition that the pursuit of the truth may result in isolation, a personality that does not thrive in the framework of interconnectivity that constitutes relationality.²¹ The fictional man internalises creeds (the Church), organisations (exemplified here in the Faculty of Fine Arts and his involvement with the Union), so that they become part of him. It is the same with his Christianity. Whereas others might assume a Christian identity, he lives it through an uncompromising spirituality, seeing it as his duty to personify Christianity in his day-to-day existence. "Christianity is not an institution we join as if it were a club, a party, or a nation...it is an incandescent river that engulfs everything in its path...The Word consumes

²¹ It may be judged that this is assuming too much about Khodr's character. As a bishop, it might be argued, he must be thoroughly versed in the necessary skills relating to the corporate interconnectivity of the Church, as well as the relationality endemic to that. This may be true, but his outspokenness and disregard for protocol means, it is contended, that (a) he does not excel in the skills; and (b) as such, this does not concern him. Hence, another demonstration of his existential religiosity may be identified.

whoever accepts it, calling him to bear sacrifices and sorrows.”²² Recalling Abou Mrad’s assessment of Khodr²³ and Khodr’s own pronouncements about Orthodox hierarchy,²⁴ both of which illustrate his uncompromising Christianity, this passage describes Khodr’s own position. Furthermore, it is the reference to politics (exemplified by the Union) and the spiritual that aptly captures the jarring juxtaposition of the secular world and spirituality.

3. Politics & Spirituality

Khodr’s references to politics in the book are somewhat copious, although the subject itself may not be explored in depth. Politics is treated almost as an aside, but also as an inescapable reality of life. The fact, however, that the man in the book distances himself from political engagement sets him apart – particularly in a country where politics is a constantly shifting backdrop to everyday life. And yet politics is, at the same time, recognised as something of a permanent sociological fixture, making some kind of engagement with it, even if only by way of acknowledgement, unavoidable and ineluctable. For even “spiritual discernment did not acquit a person of his own political responsibilities.”²⁵ In order to “build the perfect city”, one needs the necessary building material; in order to engage at “the collective level, according to the laws of political thought”, one needs “to have a political vision”.²⁶ This is recognition by a realist that processes relating to the sublunar world must be managed according to earthly principles; and yet there is in addition a categorical statement that politics and spirituality are, to a great extent, diametric opposites: “we must never mix the spheres of spiritual action with

²² *TWOC*, pp.124-5. As cited earlier (Chapter 5, p.179), in *TPOC*, p.52, the phraseology is more visceral. “Men of religion’, what an ugly phrase! As if there is a profession called religion, as if you can practise religion as a sector without it being the whole of your life.” (Translator’s note regarding the phrase ‘Men of religion’: “A literal translation of the Arabic ‘*rijal-ud-deen*’ which means *clergy*.”)

²³ See Chapter 3.

²⁴ See, for example, Chapter 5, pp.153-4.

²⁵ *TWOC*, p.32.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

those of politics, nor confuse their methodologies...we must never believe that one dispenses with the need for the other."²⁷

Although there is a tacit admission here that each serves a purpose, there is equally an unspoken need to compartmentalise. It must be remembered that Khodr has an overwhelming hatred of power²⁸ and so any reservations about politics would be understandable; but it is also true that his spirituality overrides every other earthly consideration. That said, as a bishop, he is a realist, who would acknowledge the necessity of politics and sundry other worldly activities, even though his reservations would dissuade him from placing much store by them when set against the more meaningful occupation of how to lead a spiritual existence and how to set our spiritual compass for a theotic destiny. "Death, for him [the man in the book], was the great truth" because it was the gateway to that destiny; and if political affiliation strengthens communal bonds and imbues a sense of belonging, "he [the man in the book] never associated with any political current in his youth, and avoided all partisan engagement...[he] did not despise political action, but he found the subject prone to fragmentation, partial and bewildering. He was convinced of the need to go deeper."²⁹

Confusing politics and the world with spiritual matters is what evokes the narrator's and Khodr's disapproval. First, it is stated that "Christians are fundamentally strangers; they settle anywhere."³⁰ It is a statement that suggests Christians have an innate sense of alienation, or that they alienate themselves from the status quo, because they are (or should be), in important ways, not of this world – "they never get caught up in the forms and limits of politics."³¹ As for living in the world, for Khodr it is, almost by definition, something of an alienating experience.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.32-3. For a recent work that focuses on the separation of religion from politics, see Rubin, J. *Rulers, Religion, & Riches: Why The West Got Rich And The Middle East Did Not*. New York: Cambridge, 2017.

²⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

²⁹ TWOC, p.32.

³⁰ Ibid., p.51.

³¹ Ibid.

“My years run from one disappointment to another. Of course there are consolations, but few of them come from humans...Much of this world is knit with hypocrisy...the goodness of people is little and appears to be mixed with their falsehood. And oftentimes one cannot distinguish between their falsehood and honesty...The loving ones are few and you deal with those few until the Lord takes you to Himself where no lying is heard. The great advantage of Heaven is that God is honest and He sees you as you are...Our life in Christ comes with our tiredness of this world and with our prayer life”.³²

This is expressive of great despair and exasperation, but it is also the tone of the spiritual Outsider, who feels alienated from the social mores and niceties of ordinary people, who recognises the limited extent of their reliability, and who looks forward to being unified with God, who will not dissemble and on whom one can rely for honesty and sincerity. In addition, it pinions together two aspects of existence – the secular and the spiritual – to show the same thought process as a continuity in Khodr’s vision. In the book, he repeatedly states how the world and spirituality are antithetical to each other; in the article, while acknowledging this existential dualism, he asserts that while people’s duplicity can be wearing, the realm of Spirit is the true consolation. His “disappointment” is reflected by comments he made in conversation about people who believe their commitment to Christianity is given extra gloss by their gifting money to the Church, and that they are true Christians because they do not commit adultery or murder.³³ It comes down to authenticity, Khodr might have said, which may not necessarily be dependent on a sinless life, but instead on the repentance of a sinner. Khodr recounts this in an article from 2012 on the prodigal son. He explains how “[t]he older son felt sad towards this reception because his father distinguished the repenting sinner over his son that didn’t commit any sin and didn’t violate any order from his father; so the latter told him: “we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is

³² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Door to Heaven’. Riad Mofarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 30 March, 2013.

³³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.

found”³⁴. The recalcitrant son, once lost to his family, has mitigated his sense of alienation through *metanoia* and redemption; conversely, the elder son has become somewhat alienated through pride and self-centredness.

As for those in authority, says the narrator, whether they be in politics or the Church, “They [Christians] mock authority regardless of whether it is clerical – for example, when clergy become worldly – or secular, as when government puts on airs of eternity.”³⁵ But derision “becomes tragic when heavenly matters are exploited for worldly purposes and sordid interests.”³⁶ And this, according to Khodr, speaking through the narrator, can lead to a prostituting of religion. “We live amidst the hateful confusion found in the mixture of religion with worldly matters.”³⁷ And yet there are those who believe this is the efficacious way to make religion meaningful; they are the ones who “consider it necessary to transform God’s cause into a political cause in order to believe in its effectiveness.”³⁸ To set spirituality to the metronome of politics is seen as absurd; the two fields are tuned to divergent rhythms.

If politics and spirituality are diametric opposites, and spirituality the mainstay of the fictional man’s existence, it does not warrant the disposal of politics as a necessary condition of human life. “[I]t is not possible to remove the influence of politics.”³⁹ It is “thrust upon us”.⁴⁰ There is no illusion about the political world, its *modus operandi*, its corrupting influence. “A party system is enclosed in rational mysticism that seeks to transform a movement into an institution.”⁴¹ It suggests that politics tries to cloak itself in the tantalising mystery of spiritual belief in order to have more gravitas and appear more appealing, but it also recalls the institutionalising of spirituality discussed

³⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Prodigal Son’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 12 February, 2012.

³⁵ *TWOC*, p.51.

³⁶ *Ibid.* In *TPOC*, there is a blunter rendering: “Yet laughter turns into a tragedy when heavenly matters are exploited for stinking worldly purposes and benefits”. (*TPOC*, p.17.)

³⁷ *TWOC*, p.51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.64. In the older version, it is more succinct. “Politics is a must.” (*TPOC*, p.23.)

⁴⁰ *TWOC*, p.64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

earlier.⁴² The narrator continues with a damning appraisal, which labels politics as “canned thought”,⁴³ and as a palpable danger. “Others define you politically so that they can eliminate you.”⁴⁴ Politics is thus not only a falsity, but a trap with the capabilities to destroy.

“My friend wished to work toward the creation of a more humane society in which each person could develop his own gifts. By his actions he wanted to shake up and transform the very structures of society, which he considered to be the cause of moral weakness. An economy founded on mercantilism imposes mercantile behavior on the majority of its members. Only the strong can escape it; the masses are incapable of resisting...Man cannot distinguish and choose between good and evil, unless he distances himself completely from outward appearances and accepts a life of extreme frugality, which may not be obvious if he is the head of a family. Every action that aims to make fundamental changes should be primarily concerned with mankind and never overlook the nearness of the Kingdom.”⁴⁵

This lengthy extract is included because it contains the quintessence of alienation from the societal perspective, enwrapped in Khodr’s existential religiosity. The man in the book is plainly at odds with the way the world is run and has an idealistic vision of fundamental transformation by means of radical upheaval, for the very structures that are supposed to serve human beings are rotten and should be demolished. As the argumentation continues, mercantilism is seen to be not just an objective system, but one that corrodes the judgment of people, who are seduced by the kind of political cynicism that serves up the equivalent of bread and circuses. In some measure, this has a socialistic theme and echoes Khodr’s “liberal conservative theology” identified earlier.⁴⁶ Mercantilism – and, it is suggested, one could substitute the word ‘capitalism’ – is identified with a form of economic intercourse that alienates human beings from their true *self* and

⁴² See Chapter 5.

⁴³ *TWOC*, p.64.

⁴⁴ *TPOC*, p.23.

⁴⁵ *TWOC*, p.66.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3 and Abou Mrad’s assessment of Khodr’s theology.

from their destiny in theosis; on the other hand, humankind is, in part, exonerated, because the mercantile attitude, as the oxygen of society, benumbs the brain as to what is morally right and what is morally wrong, while political obfuscation clouds judgment. The only way to shake off these constraints and re-focus on who and what we truly are is to distance ourselves from the doings of mercantile society. This in turn would entail, the narrator is saying, opting out of mercantilism, but, as a consequence, being denied the basic economic commodities of quotidian existence. It may not be going too far to connect the frugality referred to in the text with the notion of *kenosis*, or monasticism, a retreat into a leaner, yet more spiritually authentic existence. However, for someone with familial responsibilities, this may be difficult if not impossible, a consideration that brings to the fore the research question. What the extract ends with is a sentiment that expresses Khodr's existential religiosity and parallels his "liberal conservative theology" – whatever social or political expedient emerges from the legislative process, it should evolve out of a principal concern with the human person and in the light of our spiritual destiny.

Such a radical position endears him to no side and to no one, just as Khodr's views are often ignored or repudiated. "This vision of things satisfied neither the militants engaged in political struggle, nor the spiritual people who wished to limit eternity to the boundaries of the temple." Instead, the man in the book, says the narrator, followed his personal inclination and "established his own pact...with the eternity he sensed in the mystery of Christ."⁴⁷

4. Self-Imposed Alienation

From an early age, it would appear the man in the book is not overly inclined towards gregariousness and there is a sense in which he courts solitude. "Mountain life increased my friend's isolation."⁴⁸ But he also deliberately distances himself from human contact. "My friend was well known to the people of the village, who used to see him going out for walks with a book

⁴⁷ *TWOC*, p.68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.35.

under his arm.”⁴⁹ There is no suggestion that he interacts with anyone, preferring his own company in order to explore his thoughts and deepen his relationship with God. It is additionally the case that he forsakes his friends (and, presumably, family) to go into self-imposed exile. On the other hand, if self-imposed alienation in the form of isolation is a means to his spiritual development, Khodr himself does not appear to recommend isolation as a general principle. Regardless of the fictional man’s secretive, unannounced and almost undignified departure, friendship, as was observed earlier,⁵⁰ is important to both him and to Khodr, as is relating to the ‘Other’, for, “none of us can live in isolation. Everyone needs integrity and a supportive communion in order that he/[she] might perceive his/[her] existence, not only in his/[her] own characteristics, but also in the Other’s, which support him/[her].”⁵¹ In this article, being with others is given categorical importance, but is also supported by the book. “Friendship...is an admission that the other is as essential as breathing.”⁵² The “essential” role of the ‘Other’, as a pragmatic aspect of Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’, appears in other writings. For example, here it could not be plainer: “You cannot speak of the ‘I’ unless you speak of the ‘you’, since you are delimited by encounter, i.e. meeting face to face. One meets the other, thus both are defined.”⁵³

The paradoxical nature of Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’, when clothed in parochial considerations, becomes apparent when it meets his interpretation of relationality. Convivial and beneficial though friendship and interaction clearly are to him, there is a suspicion that they create a wedge between the ‘I’ and the eternal ‘Other’, God. This was illustrated by his question, referred to earlier, when he asked, “How can you love God and your wife?”⁵⁴ Yet, it is clear in Khodr’s thinking that God is also there in any positive, loving relationship with the ‘Other’; it is thus a sanctified relationship, and hence a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 6, Section 2.

⁵¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Between Friendship and Love’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 26 January, 2008. Insertions made by the translator.

⁵² *TWOC*, p.26.

⁵³ Khodr, *The Others*.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 6, Fn.88. Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

fulfilling event. The possible opposite to this would entail being alienated from the 'Other' through hatred. But Khodr is emphatic about this and the harm that can redound to the well-being of the one who hates.

“Killing another can be physical or moral. Insults swearwords are a form of murder. We destroy the others by crushing and suppressing them or we cancel their inner being through words. My own thinking here is that we annihilate ourselves with that and not the others...What prevents us from coexisting with others is an inner matter of our hearts.”⁵⁵

Khodr's proscription against violence of any sort, whether physical or verbal, is captured in this article from 2012 where he implies that it can alienate the perpetrator from the victim, and vice versa; but Khodr's antipathy to violence is also filtered through the fictional man when he states that he stands by and supports “the one wielding the knife and also by the wounded”.⁵⁶ This should be considered against one of Khodr's more rancorous articles. In 'This Terrible War', and while denouncing Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006, he never strays into a call for violent retaliation. However, the style resonates with tangible fury about Israeli action and, arguably, overstretches the issue at hand. “Beyond Israeli arrogance there shines a clear Jewish arrogance; they hate Christ personally, and especially, hate the Apostle Paul who prevailed over Judaism.”⁵⁷ This, and other denouncements in the article, could suggest Khodr is being hoisted on his own petard, for his words could accordingly be interpreted as “a form of murder”.⁵⁸ In response, Khodr might argue that “insults” and “swearwords”⁵⁹ are visceral reactions spewed forth from hatred and based on neither logic nor fact, whereas his words are rooted in factual assessment. Nonetheless, the 'apparent' contradictory line and the colourful language are both expressive of his existential religiosity.

⁵⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Reviling'. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 13 October, 2012.

⁵⁶ *TPOC*, p.68. This will be addressed more fully in Chapter 9.

⁵⁷ Khodr, *This Terrible War*.

⁵⁸ Khodr, *Reviling*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

Nonetheless, the theme of ‘insults’ has especial pertinence when considering ecumenical or interreligious dialogue, for insults can be manifested through impatience with, or intolerance of, the faith of the ‘Other’, or by repudiation of alternative pathways to God, such as Islam and other forms of Christianity.

Words, the currency by which we communicate with the ‘Other’, are another stick in the spokes of the spiritual wheel because experiential spirituality inhibits verbal or literary expression. Do not think, Khodr is implying through the book, that the spiritual journey is a simple matter of identifying those who may be regarded as monks or ascetics, and subjecting them to benign inquisition about what one has to do. “Those who live in holiness are often incapable of eloquence, or barely speak. Utmost silence, if it is the result of a profound consciousness of the divine presence, can also become a means of expression.”⁶⁰ In spite of these linguistic limits, the man in the book begins by choosing a literary career, and in doing so he reveals another paradox: how does one express something, either in a literary or oral medium, while acknowledging the need for silence, so that words do not get in the way? “[H]e understood that what he wrote should be spread between spaces of silence so that those who read it can see God between one letter and another, so the language does not annihilate thinking nor hide the demure presence of the Lord.”⁶¹ It is both a clash between what is a natural talent and proclivity, and deep spiritual yearning; it additionally reveals a paradox that is intrinsic to the negative theology of Dionysius, where the subject, to commune with God, must scale the mystical heights through negating divine qualities and characteristics to end in sublime contemplation of the Godhead. As such, it was to be “my friend’s greatest problem. How does he reach out when he speaks? How not to let God die between the lines?”⁶²

This recalls the argument laid out earlier relating to the love of art and music,⁶³ which the man in the book shares with Khodr. The gist of this is that

⁶⁰ *TWOC*, p.40.

⁶¹ *TPOC*, p.12.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See Chapter 4, p.93.

appreciation of subliminal messages conveyed by creative skills and artistry does not release the reader or the onlooker from the responsibility to delve into their *self* for similar experiential events. Not letting God die between the lines is a significant observation, for it means that oral and literary communication inhibits personal experience. Silence is the only route that can open the 'I', as an individual person, to an experiential numinous event. Such a realisation, however, has consequences for the man in the book because it must play a part in his spurning of the written word and the abandoning of a career. He is, in short, alienated from that which seems a natural direction for him – a literary career; instead, he is diverted down a pathway, which leads to the silent experience that is the celestial world of God. It is an example of the uncompromising pathway that defines Khodr's existential religiosity.

How we nurture and develop our relationship with God is a question the narrator ponders. He starts by expressing disquiet that in the West humanism is given prominence. "Human nature attains perfection when we transcend the limits imposed by rationalism and animalism".⁶⁴ We are, he continues, made up of a divine heritage, something that the narrator argues is impossible to deny – "as if man could remain himself by emptying his soul of every trace of the divine."⁶⁵ This reference to the divine does not mean a person is alienated from their identity, it is the other way around – alienation derives from those parts of us that besmirch our divine heritage.

"Alienation comes from the passions that man, in his cowardice, considers an integral part of himself.

"When we say we are alienated by God...this alienation is caused by idols: false perceptions of God, or superstitions created by the oppressed and the oppressors. Thus we are alienated merely by our emotions, and by the obsessions aroused in us by such phenomena."⁶⁶

Being made in the image of God, human beings 'belong' to God; we can only become separated from him, and deny our true identity, if we do disservice to

⁶⁴ *TWOC*, p.37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

our heritage or screen ourselves off from it, instead, devoting ourselves to earthly pursuits and the exclusion of all things spiritual. It is when we place greater store by material things, by worldly success, by our fascination with materialistic phenomena, that we distance ourselves from God. Our purpose is to transcend, or at least sublimate, our passions and the material side of our being, to allow the scintilla of divinity to flourish in preparation for our return to God and our eventual theosis.

However, this invariably leads to alienation from the world; but then it is supposedly impossible to serve two masters – the world and the Spirit – a statement attributed to Jesus,⁶⁷ who himself was alienated by both the secular authorities and the institutionalised spirituality of the day. Khodr refers to this theme elsewhere.

“Remember the Lord's saying: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money"...Money has power over you that can make you its slave, as St. John Chrysostom said...: "[the love of money]...dominates all loves and removes from the soul all other desires".”⁶⁸

It is a point of view that is somewhat echoed by the man in the book, who refers to “the mingling of the Church with the kingdom of Caesar.”⁶⁹ And he continues in ebullient fashion.

“The Church...becomes the kingdom of Caesar when she allies herself to Caesar, fearing him and singing his praises. The religious community then sinks to the level of prostitution and becomes an object of scandal. The lies, deceits, and pretenses perpetrated by men of religion make them true prostitutes.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Matthew 6:24.

⁶⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Lust for Money’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 29 August, 2004.

⁶⁹ *TWOC*, p.124.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Apart from making it plain that spirituality should be set apart from the seat of power, the language employed in this indictment could be said to be highly provocative, the forthrightness of the fearless prophet and an indication of existential religiosity. That aside, an alienating process is instigated. First, there is a vehement rejection of worldly authority and power; second, there is a subtle allusion to complicity between the Church and worldly power; and third, the labelling of men of religion as ‘prostitutes’. This is the man in the book talking, but it was established earlier that Khodr is critical of clerical involvement with the rich and powerful;⁷¹ how he is, to some extent, isolated within Church circles and how he has made a lot of enemies.⁷² This singular, Outsider position, which applies to Khodr and the man in the book, alienates the latter from both the secular and the spiritual, and is a causal factor that sets up a divide between him and large swathes of society – all for the sake of cleaving to what he believes is the authentic (spiritual) way. “The truth to which my friend bore witness condemned him to isolation.”⁷³ It is a point where the experience of the fictional man and Khodr merge.

Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to the narrator’s assertion that people may believe “we are alienated by God”, and how we bring this on ourselves through spurious objects of reverence, idols, and by our own false perceptions of God. This in turn begs a question: do we, in fact, alienate ourselves from God, or does God alienate us because of our ailing capacity for (authentic) spiritual life? As described above, the narrator argues that it is our doing: “we are alienated merely by our emotions, and by the obsessions aroused in us by such phenomena.” This recalls, to some extent, Khodr’s statement about Christ in Gethsemane.⁷⁴ “One could say, in a philosophical way, that Jesus felt a kind of atheism. What is atheism? – abandonment by God.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Chapter 5.

⁷² See Chapter 3.

⁷³ *TPOC*, p.23.

⁷⁴ See Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

Similar ideas on Christ's sense of alienation are expressed by Ware. In discussion, he refers to his own belief that Jesus, in Gethsemane, shared the very human experience of being "cut off from God" and of losing hope,⁷⁶ which, arguably, means being alienated from God. This, says Ware, continues to the Crucifixion.⁷⁷ "Here [at Golgotha] is the extreme point of Christ's desolation, when he feels abandoned not only by men but by God."⁷⁸ Christ "enters into," says Ware, "the loss of God",⁷⁹ meaning Jesus shares with us, not only "physical death", but "death as a spiritual reality",⁸⁰ a view that courts controversy. "Some people in the Orthodox Church are not very happy about that approach,"⁸¹ which, says Ware, was developed "in a notable way"⁸² by, for example, Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. In a sermon delivered at Oxford, Bloom says that "death and the loss of God, what one can call etymologically atheism, are inseparably linked." Later, he supposes that, "Jesus nailed to the Cross loses the consciousness of his union with God." Bloom additionally contends that, "[N]o atheist has ever gone into the loss of God, into atheism, in the way in which Christ has gone into it, has experienced it and has died of it".⁸³ In brief, Jesus' very identity is being pulled apart on Golgotha. The consequential searching and suffering that redounds to Jesus, Bloom argues, far exceeds anything an atheist has ever experienced.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January, 2017.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.80.

⁷⁹ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January, 2017. Here, he adds, he is "drawing more on certain modern theologians rather than the Greek fathers." See also Zacharias, who maps a three stage progression along the spiritual pathway, the second stage being utter despair at God's 'absence'. (Zacharias, pp.46-8.)

⁸⁰ Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January, 2017.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Bloom, Anthony, Metropolitan of Sourozh. 'The True Worth of Man'. University sermon preached in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, 22 October, 1967. www.mitrastheology.org/eng/eng_03.htm (Accessed 11 January, 2017).

⁸⁴ Lively debate surrounds the issue of whether Jesus had knowledge of the Father. See, for example, Gaine, who favours the belief that he did, or must have had, just such knowledge. "We should be wary...of driving a wedge between Jesus' identity and his knowledge, as though a reliable claim about his identity will not at least contain within it some further claim about his knowledge." (Gaine, S. F. *Did The Saviour See The Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p.20.) See also Bloom. "When the Lord says 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?', it is a moment in which, metaphysically, in an

The spiritual crisis in Gethsemane may be said to be an apogee in the Christ story, but also the nadir of his human experience; the point in his existence when he is most alone. It may be that, anathematised by the religious authorities, generally misunderstood, with just a small band of true followers, Jesus probably felt alienated from life in the world and from all that was familiar. But does he, in his human nature, feel alienated from God? God does not speak to him and only an angel appears as a form of sole assurance. Is it any wonder perhaps that Jesus experienced a sense of alienation from, or abandonment by, the apophatic God? Khodr himself uses the phrase “abandonment by God”. The man in the book is abandoned by both the political and the spiritual. It is this sense of a void opening up that defines alienation and abandonment, and which can be said to define Jesus in his supreme test, as well as the man in the book at a critical juncture in his spiritual development, the former, however, suffering within a cosmic dimension.

If the experiences of the man in the book affect him extraneously, it could be said that he brings other types of alienation on himself by not being part of a ‘crowd mentality’. For example, he does not subscribe to “the sexist customs of his surroundings”,⁸⁵ preferring to elevate woman to an Ideal; and, as was mentioned before, he denies himself the comfort of a conjugal relationship. This too must have been a difficult choice to make, knowing that it cuts him off from the comfort of intimate female companionship, and from the joys of offspring. Much of this may be linked to the fictional man’s shyness and willing embrace of celibacy; but, even though he argues that you cannot choose the celibate life, rather it chooses you,⁸⁶ it seems somewhat at odds

unspeakable way, in a way for which we cannot account because we can account for nothing in the mystery of Christ, Jesus nailed to the Cross loses the consciousness of his union with God. He can die, because he, free of sin, becomes at that moment fully partaker of the destiny of man, and he also is left without God, and having no God he dies.” (Bloom, *The True Worth of Man*.)

⁸⁵ *TWOC*, p.69.

⁸⁶ “[C]haste celibacy...is a grace. It is from your God above every mind. And however many efforts you put, you will not attain it unless it comes upon you from heaven”. (*TPOC*, p.50.) This comes from a chapter that is missing from the published version.

with the argument that marriage creates an opportunity to change a person spiritually. “My friend discussed at length the great effort required to transfigure the human being through married life, for it opens a door that so far has remained locked.”⁸⁷ What is apparent is that the man in the book believes marriage can be viewed from twin perspectives: first, “marital loyalty is but the school of divine love”,⁸⁸ the experience of married couples seems “pure and sweet, like a door to paradise”;⁸⁹ second, the text further suggests an unrelenting romantically, idealised journey.

“Even the most committed and pure were unable to connect the biological aspects of their married life with the oneness of their being. Influenced by the ascetical literature that confuses the concept of the body with harmful lust, they remained insensitive to this indispensable unity.”⁹⁰

In order for the marital union to be “a way into the Kingdom”,⁹¹ it would seem that a rare degree of spirituality is required to be part of sexual relations, and, it is argued, this is a view that stems from the idealistic. Hence, he alienates himself from a more secular view, which would recognise that the sexual drive is a convoluted pattern of assorted impulses. They “did not believe that sexuality opened the way to the Kingdom”; indeed, “[m]ost of the faithful paid little attention to his ideas.”⁹² On the other hand, it is clear the man in the book does not approve of a kind of “repressive and apathetic chastity practiced by millions of believers”,⁹³ calling it “the absurdity of artificial chastity”⁹⁴ that encourages and gives sanction to those who indulge themselves in a licentious lifestyle. “They [the licentious] assert that unbridled sexuality is...more vivid and less dreary than the platonic asexuality emanating

⁸⁷ *TWOC*, p.84.

⁸⁸ *TPOC*, p.50.

⁸⁹ *TWOC*, p.81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.84.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.85.

from the circles of the pious and self-righteous.”⁹⁵ Once again, the fictional man’s views land him in the middle and alienate him from all sides.

5. Exile: A Greater Alienation

Having experienced alienation from the world of politics and what may be described as ‘institutionalised’ religion, and having failed to convince most people of his ideas, it is equally conceivable that the man in the book felt distant from his friends. “Perhaps my friend felt like a stranger among us.”⁹⁶

The accumulation of events that distance him from people, exacerbated perhaps by his natural shyness with people, and his general estrangement from what is most familiar, he embraces his singular nature by taking the next step towards a greater alienation, that of exile. In doing so, he forsakes a substantial part of his identity, severs all connection with his past, and undermines the relationality that has given him stability and the comfort of the ‘known’. As a result, and to this extent, it is act of *kenosis*, for, by leaving behind his country and culture, his language and tradition, he additionally cuts the ties that he enjoyed with his small network of devoted friends.

Yet, there have been earlier intimations which suggest he has been, in his preparation for exile, creating a bulwark against a deeper despair, for this greater alienation or separation is built on firm philosophical foundations. In brief, he internalises all that he has experienced. As stated above, even in the midst of this alienation, “[t]he Church, the fine arts faculty, and later the labor union all lived inside him.”⁹⁷ The reader is told that when he went to the mountains on his own, he remembered his friends and they too were inside him. “He said, after many years, that they were alive in him. This man was his things or his friends.”⁹⁸ It is a philosophical sentiment that the narrator alludes to early on in the book. “One brings the other into himself, regardless of whether he is present or absent.”⁹⁹ This recalls the argument of the presence/absence of the artist. Zizioulas makes the case that “when we look

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.87.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.249.

⁹⁸ *TPOC*, p.25.

⁹⁹ *TWOC*, p.26.

at a painting or listen to music we have in front of us...a 'presence' in which 'things' and substances (cloth, oil, etc.) or qualities (shape, colour, etc.) or sounds become part of a personal presence."¹⁰⁰ This has direct relevance to Trinitarian hypostasis and the notion of individuality,¹⁰¹ but is pertinent here because it relates to the kind of internalising Khodr is alluding to in the book. Some-one or some-thing can be evoked, enlivened in us, through the mnemonic medium of a sound, or a place, or an object.

This validation of friendship thus makes the manner of his departure seem the more brutal. "He left never to return. His friends did not gather around him on the eve of his departure. He did not inform them of his intentions, for he did not want to mingle his departure with bitterness or forbid any sign of affection."¹⁰² The distancing effect of this unheralded departure is enhanced by the fact that he did not inform anyone of his intended destination. His friends are, understandably, piqued, with some actually doubting his friendship. "Had we not," the narrator writes, "gathered around him like the stars around the sun in Joseph's dream? But even dreamers, although they may be capable of saving the world, are always caught up in the shadows of solitude."¹⁰³ It is a statement of the fictional man's importance to them, but also a recognition that their friend is set apart from others in a place of solitude; it also recalls Olson's citing of Marcel and Jaspers, who claimed that "he who loves mankind does not love at all".¹⁰⁴ The next sentence rams home the point. "No one understood how my friend's fundamental criteria differed from our own."¹⁰⁵ He is set apart by a blend of spiritual virtues and commitment, by a different existential agenda, by his existential religiosity.

After his departure, some days elapse before the first letter arrives, informing the narrator that he is employed in the Arabic division of a radio station.

¹⁰⁰ Zizioulas, J. 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity.' In: *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 28. 1975, pp.401-48; cited in Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, p.143.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 6. But see also Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, pp.155-170.

¹⁰² *TWOC*, pp.88-9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 6, Fn.74.

¹⁰⁵ *TWOC*, p.89.

There is a bald statement: “No one will see me.”¹⁰⁶ The references to being behind the microphone, remaining unseen in a remote studio, is symbolic perhaps of a ‘monastic’ retreat further into anonymity.¹⁰⁷ The inside of a recording studio lends itself to this metaphorical treatment, for there is a distinct impression of being cut off from the world – due in part to extensive soundproofing – especially when studios are sometimes situated below ground, which further insulates broadcasters from extraneous sound. This desire for solitude aptly describes Khodr’s own preferred routine, his apparent need to be alone, silence and solitude being the means for him to commune with God.¹⁰⁸ There is a distinct sense in this, the first of the fictional man’s letters, of being separated from the rest of society, with a tenuous link to the world through the medium of a microphone, but also of feeling alienated from the words that he is speaking into the microphone. “Here I have only to present what someone else writes. I may not like to read what has been dictated to me. I am a prisoner of their writing especially as they may be biased.”¹⁰⁹ That said, he realises he could infuse the words with an intonation to give them new meaning, but then it occurs to him that they will dispense with his services “if my intonation sides openly with my homeland.”¹¹⁰

He consoles himself by saying that, “At least my occupation is not the place where I find my mission.”¹¹¹ The job is merely a relatively amenable way to earn a living and has nothing to do with his true vocation, that of personal, spiritual development. This leads on to a reflection on what he has left behind.

¹⁰⁶ *TPOC*, p.34.

¹⁰⁷ “In the great darkness I will live here, and in the heart of these darkneses I will search for the light.” (*TPOC*, p.34.) See also Maximus the Confessor. “Darkness is a formless, immaterial, and incorporeal state which bears the exemplary knowledge of things. The one who enters into this state as another Moses understands things invisible to his mortal nature.” (Maximus Confessor. ‘Chapters on Knowledge’, first century, No.85. In: *Selected Writings*, p.144.)

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 3 for Abou Mrad’s comments on Khodr’s character; and Chapter 6 for Khairallah’s observation that people are “never alone. And you have to be alone – like Khodr – to think.” (Interview with Nicolas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013; Interview with As’ad Khairallah, American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.)

¹⁰⁹ *TPOC*, p.34.

¹¹⁰ *TWOC*, p.89.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

“I wanted to be part of the majority. I will not be a professor of literature any longer, nor a woodworker and dedicated union member. I will live here in great darkness, in the heart of great obscurity. In the depths of the shadows, I will continue to search for light.”¹¹²

There is presented an alternative, paradoxical, picture: a man, who not only physically distances himself, but involuntarily finds himself cast out, rejected. He “wanted to be part of the majority”, to belong. The spiritual pathway can be, like Christ’s pathway, one of reluctance and agony. It is not a route along pathways that might be considered mainstream, but through retreating from society, from all that is familiar, and burying oneself; it is a painful contradiction in terms, but also conjures an image of someone dying to the world. Through the self-imposed darkness of the studio, the man hopes to find the light; it is language, with its imagery of light and darkness that, in a perverse way, resonates with Dionysian theology.¹¹³

However, it would appear he is not done with commenting on the world he has left behind.

“I sometimes believe that I am called to bear witness among the intellectuals, but this is only a temptation. I experienced their betrayals; their futility is well known to me. Their speeches disgust me, as does every kind of language that does not spring from either great pain or great joy.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² *TWOC*, pp.89-90.

¹¹³ Perversely because Dionysius talks about seeing darkness, which appears to be a contradiction in terms. But it is in line with his theological paradoxes in which one denies all known attributes. Indeed, there is a paradox in the preceding passages where the Divine is associated with light, and then with darkness. “Following that same harmonious law which operates throughout nature, the wonderful source of all visible and invisible order and harmony supernaturally pours out in splendid revelations to the superior beings the full and initial brilliance of his astounding light...” (Dionysius, ‘The Celestial Hierarchy’. In: Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*, p.178.); “But now as we climb from the last things up to the most primary we deny all things so that we may unhiddenly know that unknowing which itself is hidden from all those possessed of knowing amid all beings, so that we may see above being that darkness concealed from all the light among beings.” (Ibid. ‘The Mystical Hierarchy’, p.138.)

¹¹⁴ *TWOC*, p.90.

This could only come from a passionate man, whose passion has been sublimated for spiritual purpose. It is a damning pronouncement on the way language is used, how it can be a vector of falsity and the canker at the heart of community.¹¹⁵ It echoes Macquarrie's comment regarding authentic communality. "Practically all existentialists...are agreed that human social relations, as we normally find them, are sadly distorted...The way in which people are normally together does not deserve the name of community."¹¹⁶

The disparaging of intellectuals referred to above mirrors Khodr's distrust of those who want to intellectualise spirituality – the academic theologians, who, for Khodr, bypass the experiential, and complicate humanity's relationship with the Divine by conceptualising complex schema that jam the experiential channels of communication with intellectual static. It might also bracket mendacious politicians, whose mellifluous, but vacuous rhetoric are designed merely to secure their positions. The more authentic Christians are those who follow, or try to follow, Christ instinctively and with simple uncomplicated faith;¹¹⁷ it is one of the reasons he is so admiring of the Sufi tradition, which abjures rationality and the juridical standards of Sunnism for the poetic, transcendent beauty of mystical experience.¹¹⁸ That said, when asked whether he likes Ibn 'Arabī's mystical philosophy, Khodr replies that he is not so fond of this type of intellectualising.¹¹⁹ For Khodr, religious and spiritual

¹¹⁵ This has contemporary pertinence when the world is coping with a plethora of 'false news' and the contention that we are living in a post-truth era.

¹¹⁶ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.118. See Appendix A.

¹¹⁷ In explaining how the best faith is that which is suprarational, Khodr uses the example of one of his aunts. She was illiterate, a widow at the age of twenty-eight, the mother of two children, and nearer to Christ than he was. She had a perfect understanding of others and a spiritual intelligence. You could, he says, receive Christ from her without discussing anything. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.)

¹¹⁸ Cf. Cleveland & Bunton, who make a cogent observation about Sufism. "In place of the formal intellectualism of the ulama, Sufism represented emotional religious experience, an attempt to attain closer communion with God". (Cleveland, W. L. & Bunton, M. *A History of the Modern Middle East. Fifth Edition.* Colorado: Westview Press, 2013, p.27.)

¹¹⁹ "I don't like this [Ibn 'Arabī's] mixture between philosophy and theology. I don't like also so much this intellectual understanding of Sufism." (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2014.) A celebrated mystic and committed Muslim, Ibn 'Arabī, 560/1165-637/1240, was also a universalist with regard to the other Abrahamic religions. See, for example, Hirtenstein, S. *The Unlimited Mercifier. The*

understanding, must, above all else, and in line with his aunt's religiosity, be always accessible.

These views, from both the man in the book and Khodr, are mirror images of each other. They come from the existential Outsider, someone not accepted by society, someone not accepting society – so long as it cleaves to standards that are inimical to Christ and his teachings – someone not willing to compromise in order to gain acceptance for personal advancement or advantage. And the final reference to speeches that come from “some great pain or great joy”, seems to sum up their (Khodr's and the fictional man's) existential religiosity, for the supposed aridity of the politician's utterances, and the cool, dispassionate deliberations of academic theologians, testify to their lack of poetry – a ‘poetry’ that bespeaks pain, suffering and joy, and comes directly from the heart.¹²⁰ The existential coupling above of joy with suffering – “great pain or great joy” – links the spiritual quest to that of the creative artist, whose works can often evolve an interdependency of the two. For the artist, at the pit face of life, hewing descriptive nuggets to express the pain of existence (alienation, abandonment) in terms of aesthetic experience, joy yielding to suffering, suffering yielding to joy, can be a cyclical existential pattern.¹²¹ This mantra is alluded to in the book when the fictional man

Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī. Oxford, UK: Anqa Publishing, 1999. Khodr is similar to al-Ghazali (1058-1111), who criticised the philosophers for espousing an inanimate philosophising of the head to replace spiritual experience of the heart – what Olson contrasts as “a purely “intellectual” form of metaphysics and...an “existential” form...The former has the dubious quality of being a kind of academic sport”. (Olson, A. M. ‘Jasper's Critique of Mysticism’. In: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, L1/2, 1983, p.256.) Reflecting Khodr's love of Sufism, which he readily professes, see Chapter 5, where the man in the book, scaling down his possessions, rids himself of books, retaining two or three that “dealt with the history of art, a book of modern poetry and some Sufi literature.” (*TPOC*, p.19.)

¹²⁰ “For the ascetic tradition of the Christian East, the heart...is the centre of the human being, the root of the ‘active’ faculties, of the intellect and of the will, and the point from which the whole of the spiritual life proceeds, and upon which it converges.” (Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp.200-1.) See also Allyne Smith, who states that the heart, “can refer to the whole person – body, soul, and spirit – or to the spiritual center of the human being.” (Smith, A. *Philokalia. The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts. Selections Annotated & Explained.* G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, Bishop Kallistos Ware (trans.). Vermont: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2006, p.30.)

¹²¹ Cf., for example, Keats. “Ay, in the very temple of Delight/Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,/Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue/Can

declares that education should be about revealing “God’s mode of being in Christ Jesus, calling us to take up his cross which, through suffering, opens the door of joy to us.”¹²² It also, perhaps, helps to explain asceticism as a methodological necessity in the quest for the experiential event: through suffering, the hallmark of our postlapsarianism, we purge ourselves of sin and worldly attachment to rise above our earthly state in order to experience the transcendent joys of the Divine.¹²³

As discussed in Chapter 5, Khodr touches on the opposing themes of joy and suffering with reference to Passiontide.

“Hope always follows pain. This is our journey, and it is in accordance with the image of the Savior, as His Resurrection day has followed His death. For us, there is no separation between death and resurrection. In philosophical language this is the dialectic between death and revivification...In our physical and psychological sufferings we taste simultaneously the death and the resurrection of the Savior...In our pains the Savior implants His life in us. And whenever we remember His crucifixion, as we suffer, we should not forget that this cross is a window to resurrection.”¹²⁴

This extract from the same article, which was cited in Chapter 5, is reprinted to show how Khodr’s thinking as recently as 2013, corresponds with the fictional man’s admonition to “take up [Christ’s] cross”. The ineluctable reality of suffering, together with the hope for redemption, is given expression in the article and in the book, but finds additional corroboration in his article,

burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine”. (Keats, J. ‘Ode on Melancholy’. In: *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1918*. Quiller-Couch, A. (ed.) London: Oxford University Press, 1957, p.751.)

¹²² TWOC, p.136.

¹²³ See Maximus the Confessor for the interlinking of suffering with joy. Only through suffering – the passion, crucifixion – can we come to the joy of resurrection, of the overcoming of death and our earthly state. “Absolutely no earthly or heavenly power can know these days [the days leading to deification] before experiencing the passion, only the blessed divinity which created them.” (Maximus Confessor. ‘Chapters on Knowledge’, first century, No.55. In: *Selected Writings*, p.138.) See also Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, p.173, Fn.57, where Berthold connects deification with Christ’s suffering (the Passion), stating that, “Suffering is the tropos of deification.”

¹²⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Passion and Resurrection’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 14 September, 2013.

'Suffering': "humanity is a field planted with wheat and tares and God will separate them on the last day. That same admixture is in the human heart also, but it is done away with through true repentance."¹²⁵ It is a clear message that just as death should not alienate us – for "there is no separation between death and resurrection"¹²⁶ – so suffering can be made a positive force when we align it to Jesus' own suffering. As Khodr explains, the Orthodox Church does not focus on the suffering of Christ, for suffering is only a path to the resurrection.¹²⁷ Thus, in the context of existence, pain and joy are two sides of the same coin, and, for the Christian, the mould in which the coin is cast is cruciform.

6. A Singular Man

As was noted above, the reader of the book may find there are sequences when the fictional man's alienation seems to come by means of his own devices, that he brings down opprobrium on his head through self-generated actions and is the author of his personal isolation. Turning his back on his own upbringing and consorting with the working class to champion their rights must have been seen as little short of treachery, if not reckless. "He had, in fact, severed ties with his social class – treason, according to his old friends".¹²⁸ This may be viewed as a deliberate act on his part; but the man in the book also had a character trait that set him apart from others. "Every human being inspired in him a reverent fear, as did beings inferior to him in the order of creation."¹²⁹

At other times, however, it would appear that a fissure opens up between him and the world, brought about by theologico-philosophical asseveration, or the realisation of spiritual truth. This occurs in the passage relating to the rock at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which appears to the naked eye to be suspended in

¹²⁵ Khodr, *Suffering*.

¹²⁶ Khodr, *Passion and Resurrection*.

¹²⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

¹²⁸ *TWOC*, p.71.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.70.

mid-air.¹³⁰ The allusion proceeds from an admission that he is feeling a sharp sense of longing for his homeland, and is accompanied by reflections on the wisdom of his decision to leave. Only time will tell, he concludes, whether it was the right decision. “Man springs from the earth like the rock suspended at Al-Aqsa Mosque, which seems to hang in the air while resting on the ground.

“One day, I said to the sheikh who sat near the rock...’What do you mean when you speak of the rock as hanging, although it appears to you and me to be well-anchored to the earth?’ He replied, ‘It is a symbol of our hearts suspended to God.’ God is our true homeland. Will we not be convinced when our longing comes to an end and our hope is transformed into vision?”¹³¹

Our homeland is heaven, which acts as a magnetic attraction, as represented by the inanimate rock’s irresistible movement towards Muhammad’s celestial destination; it is an existential realisation that, although we come into being in this world and are fashioned by its influences, this is not our home; spiritually, we belong not to here, but to the celestial sphere of Spirit, to God, to whom we shall return at our death.¹³² The Incarnation – the coming of the God-man

¹³⁰ This memory relates to the story of Muhammad’s Night Journey (*al-Isrā’*), when, having travelled to Jerusalem from Medina with Jibril (Gabriel), he went to the rock from where he ascended to heaven (*al-Mi’rāj*) by a lighted staircase. In placing his foot on the first stair, he left a footprint on the rock, which then tried to follow him on his way to heaven. However, Muhammad laid his hand on the rock, preventing it from following and leaving it suspended in midair. Other versions say that it was Jibril who performed this act and it is his handprint that is on the surface of the rock. In rising from the earth in its attempt to follow Muhammad, the rock created a cavern beneath it, which remained once its upward motion had been stayed. www.islamicity.com/articles (Accessed 16 September, 2014). See also Nasr, who gives the Night Journey prominence on the spiritual pathway. “The *mi’rāj* is the prototype of all spiritual wayfaring and realization in Islam, and its architecture even served as a model for Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.” (Nasr, S. H. *The Heart of Islam. Enduring Values for Humanity*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004, p.31.)

¹³¹ TWOC, p.96.

¹³² Cf., for example, Nasr. “[O]ur life here in this world is a journey...We are born, we move through time, and we die. For most of us, without knowing who we really are, we move between two great mysteries and unknowns, namely, where we were before we came into this world and where we shall go after death.” (Nasr, S. H. *The Garden of Truth*. New York: HarperOne, 2007, pp.6-7.) Nasr also makes the point that we are “living in a daydream called ordinary life, in the state of forgetting what Christ called the one thing necessary, that is, the Divine Reality.” (Ibid., p.22.)

– is an act in historical time, which demonstrates that our destiny is outside time, that existence is a temporary experience and the world a temporary home, one circumscribed by time and space.¹³³ Hence, there is established within Christianity a direct link between God and humanity. On the Islamic side, Al-Jīlī (766/1365-826/1423) describes Muhammad as “the Perfect Man because his essence...is the highest grade in the eternal hierarchy of existence and is not of the created world.”¹³⁴

Two observations may be extrapolated from the above: first, that those who are seen as primary instigators of God’s work, who are spiritually advanced and dedicate their lives to him, may not be entirely of this world – in an existential sense, they are misfits and outsiders, who experience alienation; and second, the tenuous connection such religious figures appear to have with regard to diurnal life makes faith for more routine believers a daunting hill to climb and an overall challenging proposition. In practical terms, religious commitment may prove impossible for those whose entire existence ‘necessarily’ depends almost exclusively on secular interests – ‘necessarily’ because of the overwhelming responsibilities that inhere within their secular existence. Such considerations usher in the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr’s existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? An initial observation with regard to answering this question is that there would appear to be a clash between “primary instigators of God’s work”, who practise, it is argued, existential religiosity (uncompromising, detached from the world), among whom Khodr is numbered, and “more routine believers”, who are very much connected to the world; in which case, it would seem that Khodr’s religiosity does present a challenge, not only to Lebanese Orthodox Christians, but to many other Christians. Khodr himself

¹³³ Amir-Moezzi, writing about Imamism, refers to the “divinisation potential in man...[as] the ultimate aim of creation”. (Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi’i Islam*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011, p.261.

¹³⁴ Abun-Nasr, J. M. *Muslim Communities of Grace. The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life*. London: Hurst & Company, 2007, p.72. Such interpretations may prove anathema for some schools of Sunnism, and in particular for Wahhabism, which would question any attempt to elevate Muhammad to the mystical heights of a quasi deified persona, and denounces all worship, other than worship of God.

makes it clear that the spiritual life is difficult in another important sense. He says that “we don’t know, we never know, whether we are near to God or not. We may be mistaken...but we have to try always to go further.”¹³⁵ This sort of experience is frustrating, but equally it makes huge demands on the commitment and patience of the individual believer. It may be rhetorically asked how many are able and willing to go beyond routine observance.

When the subject of relationality was addressed in Chapter 6, the episode of illness, which afflicts the man in the book, was used to illustrate an aspect of the mind-body dichotomy and how we relate to ourselves. The same episode is used here to show that at the time of severe sickness we can feel alienated from our body, which is breaking down before our eyes. Sickness can equally imbue a sense of alienation from others. This was alluded to when it was posited that no one can experience the suffering of the sufferer, and as a consequence, a gulf opens up between the sufferer with their pain, their fear, their inability to function in a ‘normal’ fashion, and the onlooker, who inhabits the world of the fit and healthy, and who will leave the bedside to return to that world to which the sufferer is, at least for the moment, excluded.

Although the man in the book recovers from his bout of sickness, there is earlier reference to death as a means to theosis.¹³⁶ But existentially, death may be seen as the final most profound expression of alienation, for it separates us from all that is familiar; the world of the ‘Other’ ceases to be and we are on our own, separated from all that *is*. “In death, the human being finds himself alone.”¹³⁷ But the fear which death inspires in human beings is not exclusively to do with this ‘aloneness’; arguably, it has more to do with the fact that we cannot relate to our *non-being*; we are alienated from what is perhaps the most significant stage of our existence, our *non-being*. This is similar to Heidegger’s proposition. Death, for him, is something that is one’s own personal ‘possession’. As Blattner puts it, “It [death] is ownmost, non-

¹³⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

¹³⁶ See Chapter 5, p.179.

¹³⁷ *TWOC*, p.113.

relational, unsurpassable, certain, and indefinite.”¹³⁸ Heidegger sees death as a stripping away of all that has made us a person, but in so doing it imbues us with a profound authenticity; *Dasein* is “fully assigned to its ownmost ability-to-be”.¹³⁹ It is, in more parochial terms, a way of taming our terror of death by embracing our finitude.¹⁴⁰ This can be contrasted by hiding from death, by editing it out of our current situation and ‘reasoning’ that, as Montaigne expresses it, others have been worse and survived, or that God can perform miracles. “This happens because we set too much store by ourselves.”¹⁴¹ Such a stance, in contrast to Heidegger’s open embrace of death, may be described as inauthentic.

For the man in the book, death, as was confirmed earlier,¹⁴² is when we emerge from the chrysalis to become our true selves, united with God. “The purpose of death is to allow us to attain this unity.”¹⁴³ And in a semblance of Heideggerian philosophy, the man in the book offers a theological twist. “In truth, this life which comes from heaven is what gives meaning to death.”¹⁴⁴ This belief, as expressed by the man in the book, is, with a modicum of linguistic juggling, directly inserted into a 2004 article, confirming Khodr’s lifelong spiritual conviction that death, rather than alien to our existence, is an endemic part of the life granted us by God. “[Y]ou cannot understand death as part of life if you do not perceive life as bound to what is “above”.”¹⁴⁵ It is a tough, hard assessment of death and dying, and as such is expressive of his existential religiosity. It also indicates a paradox. If death is seen as the ultimate alienation, separating us from all that is familiar and beloved, this perspective, nonetheless, alienates us from the true meaning of death, which is the natural progression of our finitude. In conversation in 2013, the same

¹³⁸ Blattner, W. ‘Heidegger: the existential analytic of *Dasein*’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Steven Crowell (ed.) UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.169.

¹³⁹ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (trans.). New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p.294; cited in Blattner, p.169. [Heidegger’s emphasis.]

¹⁴⁰ See Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism*, p.200.

¹⁴¹ Montaigne, Michel de. ‘On Judging Someone Else’s Death’. M. A. Screech (trans.). In: *The Complete Essays*. London: Penguin Books, 1987, p.684.

¹⁴² Chapter 5.

¹⁴³ *TWOC*, p.113 and Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁴ *TWOC*, p.113.

¹⁴⁵ Khodr, *Death*.

view of death persists. When it is suggested that people ignore death, that it is last taboo, he acknowledges that “we all fear death...but true believers also feel this is a bridge...a door to eternal life.”¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he sums up these feelings about death – as expressed in the book, in his article ‘Death’, and in conversation – with a straightforward, unambiguous proclamation: “death doesn’t scare us after we have become alive in Jesus Christ...his Resurrection gives us a new life.”¹⁴⁷

The unifying factor of our destiny – our return to reclaim our true identity – is only attainable through the cessation of earthly existence. This presupposes another interpretation of death, an almost Gnostic dismissal of earthly, material existence,¹⁴⁸ which, with Camus’ claim that suicide is the “one truly serious philosophical problem”,¹⁴⁹ brings us to the abyss: why continue with a life suffused with woes and travail when release from this material world will gather us up into the realm of celestial reconciliation? Khodr is clear that earthly life, however prolonged or torturous, has Divine intent.

“Yet God, in keeping you in this world, has some wisdom and purposes for you and wants to discipline you in doing what is good...you are not to long for death due to fatigue; for it has become clear to me in my old age that long life is often a grace from the Lord so we can repent further longing for Him more and more.”¹⁵⁰

7. Sociological, Spiritual, & Personal Alienation

It is the fact that death is our own personal experience – no one else can experience our own death – which alienates us from all and everything. Our limited perception sees how in this, our final experience, that which makes us human, we are alone and isolated. However, isolation is not, arguably,

¹⁴⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

¹⁴⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Resurrection’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 24 April, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Ehrman, who discusses the main tenets of Gnostic beliefs, particularly with regard to the earthly domain. “This world...is a place to be escaped, not enjoyed.” (Ehrman, B. D. *Lost Christianities. The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.133.)

¹⁴⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.11.

¹⁵⁰ Khodr, *Death*.

confined to the prospect of death. Isolation and alienation are twin factors of dehumanisation, which the man in the book attempted to address on behalf of the workers when he was in the Union. The man in the book ponders the question, how to “dispel the terrible isolation of modern man?”¹⁵¹ In this lament for the state of human beings, there are echoes of the concern Khodr has about modernity, and which was discussed earlier.¹⁵² The conditions under which human beings live and work, which crushes their spirit and deforms their *being*, bring together two facets of the fictional man’s, and Khodr’s, character; it also conflates Khodr’s supposed radicalism with his “liberal conservative theology” and demonstrates his existential religiosity. If Khodr has compassionate respect for the poor – “if poverty in itself is not a grace, then why would the Lord have said so?”¹⁵³ – it is a thought that chimes with the fictional man’s view of the poor and the illiterate and how “wisdom and discernment could be found in the most humble company”.¹⁵⁴ This concern for the poor is evident in a much earlier article where he makes it clear their plight is a major priority. He describes the poor as “Jesus’ beloved and cosseted ones...The poor are our masters as Saint John the [M]erciful said. Do not stack your money in the banks. This is against the Bible. The Lord wants you to spend your money on the needy.”¹⁵⁵ As discussed earlier, he also has empathy for all who suffer, but he is equally concerned as a theological thinker that people’s spirituality, that which is the real part of them, is stifled by worldly considerations and cannot flourish. In short, he is addressing people’s alienation from their authentic identity. It is a concern that finds a direct parallel in the book where the narrator says, “My friend wished to work toward the creation of a more humane society in which each person could develop his own gifts.”¹⁵⁶ The spiritual energy that drives these principles comes from an optimism that the scintilla of divinity in each human being can accomplish much. “I do not mean to say that the human being is

¹⁵¹ *TWOC*, p.119.

¹⁵² See Chapter 4.

¹⁵³ Khodr, George. ‘Those in Need of God’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 20 April, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ *TWOC*, p.20.

¹⁵⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Parish Councils and the Poor’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 10 February, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ *TWOC*, p.66.

totally egoistic and that he is the center of himself as if his heart is not stirred towards others...The human being is also altruistic and giving and that means that he has the capacity to be moved with compassion.”¹⁵⁷ We have the solution to bridge the alienating gap between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’ and it resides within each one of us.

It could be argued that, realistically, the man in the book, and this would apply to Khodr, are stymied by their self-exclusion. The vision of ameliorating the workers’ conditions and, in Khodr’s case, of placing spirituality at the centre of society, is dimmed by a reluctance to engage in politicking for the sake of mustering support. For the man in the book, politics may be an indispensable part of life, but it is still “canned thought”;¹⁵⁸ for Khodr, he loathes power and disapproves, on a matter of principle, of all those who court the rich and the powerful. The workers’ alienation, and people’s alienation in general, must, it would appear, continue, for the man in the book and Khodr have alienated themselves from the establishment.

It would seem perhaps that if Khodr were to succeed in placing spirituality at the centre of society, this would alleviate, if not curtail, the existential pressures exerted on human beings by the very fact of existing. However, the spiritually minded are no less prey to alienation affected by the quandary of existence than are humanists or atheists. Seemingly, we are all, regardless of our beliefs and the safety net of the divine, landed with involuntary existence, prey to earthquake, flood and famine, subject to the quirks of financial markets and economic rupture, heir to disease, decrepitude and death. In addition, we are victims of a random catalogue of human catastrophes such as war, sectarianism, crime, all the consequence of human freedom.¹⁵⁹ Lastly, we may be said to be harbingers of our own doom through our innate frailties: our mental fragility; our inability to cope sufficiently, to love enough; our propensity for yielding to the excesses of deep-seated passions. Human

¹⁵⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Till Giving Brings Pain (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 6 October, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ See above and *TWOC*, p.64.

¹⁵⁹ Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, p.85.

beings are judged to be damaged, the self “a shadow theatre of neurotic characters”;¹⁶⁰ but how damaged are we in theistic terms?

The purpose of human beings, it is argued,¹⁶¹ is to harmonise the divisions within creation – between created nature and the uncreated God; between the visible and the invisible – but the Fall made these divisions into “fault lines”,¹⁶² which expose “the alienation and unrelatedness of fallen humankind”.¹⁶³ Christ’s soteriological role may afford some existential comfort, but, thanks to these ‘fault lines’, this too can be limiting. Stang comments that, “it is important to note that Jesus the deifying light, while ushering us into the continuous stream of divine work, also leaves us...without words, without understanding, always at a loss”;¹⁶⁴ while Clément observes how in Christ, “the mystery is at the same time disclosed and veiled”,¹⁶⁵ proving perhaps how Jesus can remind us that the apophatic remains outside our understanding and beyond our noetic grasp; and although as created beings we can commune with the Uncreated, the experience may be fleeting. Thus, in theological and secular terms, existential rupture is, it would appear, endemic to the human condition, and, consequently, we possess an innate feeling of aloneness, abandonment, and alienation.

This mood of existential bleakness is bound up with an injunction nonetheless to have faith. “Do you remember how we used the image of a tunnel in our seminars to talk about faith – two apertures of light separated by darkness?”¹⁶⁶ What the man in the book says about faith echoes Khodr’s own existential religiosity. Khodr is anything but a conformist with his views on the universality of Jesus, his belief that Christianity has no roof and is not the sole property of Christians, and his unyielding notion of what constitutes authentic

¹⁶⁰ Clément, O. *On Human Being. A Spiritual Anthropology*. J. Hummerstone (trans.). London: New City Press, 2000, p.9.

¹⁶¹ Louth, A. ‘Beauty Will Save The World. The Formation of Byzantine Spirituality.’ In: *Theology Today*. Vol. 61, Issue 1, 2004, pp.67-77, p.72.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Stang, p.98.

¹⁶⁵ Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p.38.

¹⁶⁶ *TWOC*, p.96.

spirituality in place of mere observance and ritual. Yet, he is committed to the nurturing of spirituality amongst ordinary people, recognising in the metaphor of the tunnel the agony of what seems like dark abandonment and the test that real faith represents. Between the light there is darkness, a darkness human beings have to travel through to the light.

In the midst of these two positions of secular concerns and spiritual needs, there is another existential position, that of plain personal dislocation, of not belonging and feeling alienated from, and by, one's surroundings. This is expressed in the fictional man's loneliness in exile. "I am writing to you to tell you that my longing for my homeland pains me."¹⁶⁷ And it is in exile that alienation has an especial edge.

"Thus our meeting [with fellow (Russian) émigrés] has been brotherly, filled with the warmth we find lacking in the cold and alien West.

"We often ask ourselves if this warmth is nothing but a result of our mutual isolation and our status as refugees."¹⁶⁸

"Many...have broken out of the exiles' ghetto and mixed with the diaspora. They have learned the language of their host country and succeeded...at knocking down the barricades of racism raised around them."¹⁶⁹

These are extracts that describe how any sense of personal alienation can blight our existence, making us feel distant from those around us, and how, in this instance, various alienated and disparate individuals can coalesce into likeminded groups to alleviate a perceived isolation.

Such groupings can be represented within secular society, as alluded to above, or they can be manifested in more intensely spiritual environments. The man in the book is clear, as noted earlier, that monasticism is a "prototype of the Kingdom";¹⁷⁰ and Zacharias is equally categorical when he states that, "Monastic obedience...abolishes the alienation which occurred

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.126.

through the Fall.”¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, these descriptive purviews of monasticism suggest a process by which one wills alienation from an alienated world; an exile from (Edenic) exile, wherein there is a “privileged encounter with God which encourages separation from the world”.¹⁷² In reality, monasticism is, it is suggested, an embalming of the soul, a separation from a cauldron of din and frenetic activity in the outside world that is utterly at odds with the reclusive spirituality and peace of the monastery.¹⁷³ The world relies on verbal intercommunication for its secular transactions, but in the monastery there is, in general, a paucity of speech. In the published version of the book, the opening of the sixth letter from exile is replete with references to “the impassibility of the monks”, how their use of the spoken word “avoids pointless and trivial topics”, how everything in the monastery “invites apophasis”.¹⁷⁴ Monasticism is seen as the complete antithesis of secular life; indeed, it is more. It is the quintessence of spiritual life and as such, within the context of this work, it is portrayed as the ideal life. “Fully extended toward the face of God, I feel that my finger touches the very hub and finds the solution to every problem. Planning, rational analysis, and philosophical considerations are not enough to find this solution.”¹⁷⁵

8. Conclusion

The concept of alienation, as it is understood in this work, is inextricably connected to the other existential criteria – identity, authenticity, relationality, individuality, and the concept of the Outsider. If we aspire to an authentic existence, we must take account of our identity as an individual, which will impact on how we relate to others and to the world. Perhaps the key criterion in the context of this chapter is authenticity, for, it is argued, if we live spiritual lives that are focused on our true destiny in theosis, we are, *ipso facto*, going

¹⁷¹ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.241.

¹⁷² *TWOC*, p.123.

¹⁷³ See, for example, Fermor, who writes of his stay in the Abbey of St. Wandrille de Fontanelle. “The Abbey was at first a graveyard; the outer world seemed afterwards, by contrast, an inferno of noise and vulgarity...From the train which took me back to Paris, even the advertisements for Byrrh and Cinzano...had acquired the impact of personal insults.” (Fermor, P. L. *A Time To Keep Silence*. London: John Murray, 2004, pp.46-7.)

¹⁷⁴ *TWOC*, p.121.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.125.

to experience alienation and take on the mantle of the Outsider. Living this fact in the face of worldly opposition and refusing to be deflected from this spiritual pathway is what constitutes, in part, existential religiosity.

As an autobiographical novel, the book adumbrates two protagonists – the fictional man and George Khodr. The portrait of the man in the book, together with a description of his spiritual development, is painted in an almost ‘impressionistic’ manner, with an aim similar to Paul Klee’s: to make the invisible visible.¹⁷⁶ Monet’s rendering of water lilies can seem blurred in the ‘material’ sense, but draw us into engaging with a deeper ‘reality’; Turner’s seascapes often suggest a befogged image that is a murky mix of sky and water, but in so doing they can connect us with an ethereal presence that compounds our visual perception. In similar fashion, the book creates ‘images’ that do not commit to shapes and certainties; they leave the reader suspended because the characterisation is incommensurate with natural conclusions and confounds our expectations – such that, if a character thinks *x* or propounds *y*, it may surely be natural to conclude they will behave in a particular manner or adhere to a certain belief. In the same way, just when it may seem possible to tag Khodr with something concrete, he slips through our grasp. This mercurial quality may be why it was purported that he is isolated,¹⁷⁷ and might explain his alienation – not being able to categorise someone often makes them suspect. However, this impressionistic methodology, employed consciously or subconsciously by Khodr in his autobiographical book yields, it is argued, a truer account of who he is as a person through the guise of the fictional character, and affords us a glimpse of a deeper spiritual reality. This aside, the one clear and concretised assertion that can pin down both Khodr and the man in the book is that they have an allegiance to the eternal spiritual truth of God in Jesus Christ, a commitment that entails the comprehensive alienation from all things worldly.

¹⁷⁶ Marina Warner’s article on Leonora Carrington includes Paul Klee’s assertion. “In many changes of shape, Carrington fulfilled, over nearly a century of work, the task of art as defined by Paul Klee: to make visible the invisible.” (Warner, M. ‘A Browse Through The Inner Bestiary’. In: *The Guardian Review*, 1 April, 2017.) Paul Klee (1879-1940) was a Swiss-German artist.

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter 3.

The essence of this is captured in the sequence where the man in the book is spurred on the path to exile. “In order to trust him, they [those on the left] demanded an exclusive allegiance which he was unable to offer them.”¹⁷⁸

This encapsulates Khodr’s own position. Whereas institutions and organisations expect, if not demand, blind allegiance for the sake of solidarity, such formal attachment to corporatism is something that goes against the grain of Khodr’s thinking and, thus, almost guarantees his, and the fictional man’s, alienation.

The book is peppered with illustrations of the fictional man’s uncompromising quest for spiritual development, his stripping away of possessions and how he almost deliberately places himself in situations that will assure him of social disapproval: his way of interacting with the world; his life choices; his behaviour towards his friends, which tests the limits of their friendship. Ditching his privileged background, he alienates those who belong to his social standing and even those with whom he chooses to work. The latter accept him, but only to a certain extent. As was posited earlier, it is likely that they did not entirely take him to their bosom, for if they had, he would not have been so comprehensively abandoned by them. When things go wrong with the Union, whatever support he had been able to muster amongst his workmates is scattered by the winds of universal disapproval. Had he been one of their own kind, some at least would have gathered around him, and there is no mention of this.

One of Khodr’s most defining characteristics is his unadulterated honesty, untainted by self-interest, personal vanity, ulterior motive, or worldly deviousness. As an advocate for Christianity, his way of promoting it seems odd at the very least. His assertion that, “Christianity...is an incandescent river that engulfs everything in its path...The Word consumes whoever accepts it, calling him to bear sacrifices and sorrows”,¹⁷⁹ is not perhaps the most persuasive sales pitch. The words suggest a rampant, violent, burning

¹⁷⁸ See above, p.273, and *TWOC*, p.65.

¹⁷⁹ See above, pp.275-6, and *TWOC*, pp.124-5.

that would have more in common with wanton barbarism than a pacific, loving spirituality. In addition, the ones who decide to embrace it are promised a life that is burdensome and miserable.¹⁸⁰ It is more likely to repel than compel. But Khodr is being honest – those who embrace the genuine spirituality that, as he sees it, comes from Christ with no intervening institutionalisation, must expect to be alienated by their fellow human beings and by the world at large. Khodr might argue that this is only to be expected, for the world and Christ will never be conjoined. However, it is this description of ‘genuine’ spirituality with its references to “an incandescent river”, to “sacrifices and sorrows”, and the inference of its alienating consequences, which defines existential religiosity.

Khodr cannot be pigeonholed. To call him a radical is an attempt to do this, but, in mitigation, human beings sometimes tag the ‘Other’ with a descriptive label in order to try and understand them. In discussion, Abou Mrad struggled to find a way of describing Khodr’s thinking and produced a suitably oxymoronic phrase, “liberal conservative theology”. It confuses, but at the same time ‘impressionistically’ defines. “Every action that aims to make fundamental changes should be primarily concerned with mankind and never overlook the nearness of the Kingdom.”¹⁸¹ It is the man in the book who is speaking, but it is also the voice of Khodr, and both inhabit a wilderness depopulated of any partisan political stance and devoid of worldly allegiance.

If it is a wilderness deliberately sought for the sake of spiritual growth, the fictional man also demonstrates his commitment by jettisoning all hope of a literary career and worldly aspiration. It is, in common parlance, an example of burning bridges; and likewise a descriptor of existential religiosity.

Similarly, Khodr was coaxed out of monastic retreat to serve the people and has, arguably and to a great extent, subsequently denied himself worldly advancement by both an unwillingness to compromise and by his fervour in denouncing what he regards as spurious Christianity. He has also turned his

¹⁸⁰ When asked in conversation whether one has to be happy in life to have a real, vibrant spirituality, he replies “no, not necessarily.” (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.)

¹⁸¹ *TWOC*, p.66.

back on marriage, as did the fictional man; however, there is a sufficiency of textual detail in the book to suggest that the latter does so it with a reluctance, but a reluctance he can live with – it is an assertion, which, it is suggested, may be applied to Khodr. It may be argued that in a novel, which is recognised, and confirmed by Khodr himself, as autobiographical, personal matters would not be explored so assiduously unless the author shared, at least in part, the sentiments expressed.

The reference to suffering and joy singles out Khodr's own religiosity, not just through the coupling of two diametric opposites, but, more significantly, in the way it is expressed: "speeches" and all kinds of language that do not evolve from "great pain or great joy", "disgust"¹⁸² the man in the book. The vehemence with which this is expressed transforms it from a mere academic aside into one of personal distaste, not to give vent to any animosity, but because its existential importance springs from a passionate conviction that authenticity is paramount. Thus it is that Khodr again gives expression to his existential religiosity.

Within the pages of the book, Khodr uses allegory to convey the sense of existential loss and dislocation, which is part of the human condition and forms the backdrop to his theology of the 'Other'. An illustration can be found in the discussion of exile. The Russian émigrés, who influenced Khodr in his theologically formative years and with whom the man in the book is united through a shared sense of displacement, embody the existential *topoi* of exile, abandonment and loss. These, it is argued, have a spiritual parallel: exile, theologically epitomised in the post-Edenic experience; abandonment formed by the apophatic God and exemplified in the conjectured brevity of most experiential spirituality; and loss, experienced as an inner individual conviction that we are far from our true spiritual home, but additionally supported by Stang's assertion that Jesus "leaves us...without words, without understanding, always at a loss".¹⁸³

¹⁸² Ibid., p.90.

¹⁸³ See p.306, and Stang, p.98.

These are primary existential themes to which Khodr is alluding and which are so much a part of his spiritual lexicon. And yet in the face of exile, abandonment and loss, the thrust of Khodr's argument is that we must live in and with faith, for there is purpose to our earthly lives, which may be summed up in the single word, theosis. This determination to be unflinching in the face of existential bleakness and worldly challenges is another manifestation of his existential religiosity. Even though the world may deride such commitment, strew obstacles in the path of spiritual development, and may even persecute those who follow it, we must steadily maintain our progress along it. It is this higher reality, which Khodr, in his 'impressionistic' manner and with his existential religiosity, is indicating should be the sole preoccupation of humankind.

It also precludes discussion of the fifth and sixth criteria, that of individuality and the Outsider; for, to take the kind of stand Khodr adopts is an act of individuality, while exhibiting such uncompromising faith in the face of all opposition, is, as an individual, to be marked indelibly as an Outsider. But in the natural sequence of this exposition, it is to individuality that the thesis now turns.

CHAPTER 8

Individuality

The preceding chapter covered the existential criterion of alienation with a view to linking it, through the book, to Khodr's philosophico-theological perspective – that is, his existential religiosity. It included a number of ways in which alienation is manifested from self-imposition to the demands of secular and spiritual interests by which, it was purported, experiential alienation occurs. It additionally highlighted a supposition that alienation is a two-fold process, in the sense that the alienating agent, at any time, can be either the 'I' or the world/'Other', or indeed both.

1. Introduction: Dealing with a Concept

This chapter concentrates on individuality and will identify references to the individual; it may also be considered quasi tautological for two reasons. First, it is the contention here that the five other existential criteria relating to this work – identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, and the Outsider – can only be applied to, or expressed by and through, the individual, owing to the experiential nature of the criteria. As a result, the sub-textual content of the other five chapters relates, and can only relate, to the individual. However tautological this might be, this chapter, nonetheless, has value in that it illustrates how the various criteria are interconnected, which in turn will feed into a demonstration of existential religiosity. Second, this work focuses on an autobiographical novel, in which one of the characters uses the first person singular; consequently, individuality is at its core, while the contents are layered with personal experiences and perspectives.

The concept of the individual,¹ it is argued, has a unique relevance to philosophy, and to existentialism in particular, because individuality is integral to the philosophical consideration of *being*. Platonic philosophy may be dealing at times with abstract notions, but the methodology employed by Socrates is arguably an individualistic understanding of philosophical notions

¹ For more on the concept of the individual, see Appendix A.

through a dialectical process of discussion with individuals. This is not to say that the contemporary concept of the individual was current in Plato's day, but Socrates' method is akin to parturition, whereby the latter brought forth ideas from individual interlocutors as if they were newly born realisations.²

In sifting the book for illustrations of individuality, additional and interchangeable terms may occasionally be used: individualism, individual, individualistic.

2. Individuality: Philosophical & Theological Perspectives

Individuality, as a general principle and as understood by the Orthodox Church, is not wholly endorsed by Orthodoxy, and it would appear that Khodr, through the narrator, is also uneasy about individuality.³ While eulogising about friendship, he goes on to say that:

“The encounter of minds reveals an extension of the presence of Christ, in whom we embrace the universe. Individuality, by contrast, divides and separates, because it confronts each person with his differences and his stubborn attachment to what he knows, says, and does. Such individuality leaves us suffocated in sterile pride.”⁴

Rather than a concentration on the individual qua individual, church rites, ritual, and a strong sense of community means Orthodoxy appears to focus on unity and a form of collectivism seen in church gatherings, particularly the eucharist. Ramfos, as it has been seen, makes a clear distinction between individualism and individuation.⁵

“The individuation I am discussing is not the same thing as the individualism that has bedevilled our nation since ancient times. Our acknowledged individualism is an egoism, in the midst of the group and in the spirit of the group, that lacks individuality....Individualism without

² See Plato. *Complete Works*. John M. Cooper (ed.). Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

³ One possible manifestation of Orthodoxy's less than total endorsement of individuality may be found in the Church's stance on human rights. See Chapter 4, Fn.196.

⁴ *TWOC*, pp.26-7.

⁵ See Chapter 1, Section 8.11.

individuality includes that which must be transcended by individuation and not that which characterizes it: unity with ourselves as self-awareness.”⁶

Khodr makes a similar point. For him, most people wrestle with the challenge of loving one’s enemies “because of their concentration on the solitary ego, in which there is no space for the other. The ego is proprietor of existence.”⁷ Ramfos, differentiating between the West and the East, writes, “In very schematic terms, in Greece a group psychology prevails; in the West, an individualistic psychology.”⁸ He goes on to trace the development of the concept of the individual within philosophical and theological schools of the West, taking in, amongst others, Thomas Aquinas and David Hume, up to the modern era where, he says, “prolific speculations...have piled up a mountain of works in an effort to see the modern human being through the lens of the concept of the person.”⁹ He then goes on to add, “By contrast, in the Orthodox East there was no further development of the topic for centuries after the Cappadocians [fourth century] until it was taken up at around the beginning of the last century by Russian religious philosophers under the influence of European – especially German – thought.”¹⁰

⁶ Ramfos, p.145. See also Buss, who discusses two different forms of individualism – ‘outworldly’ and ‘inworldly’, the former relating to an anchoritic mode of life, the latter more connected to the world. (Buss, ‘The Individual in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition’.) He additionally cites Walicki’s understanding of Khomyakov. “Truth is inaccessible to isolated individual thinkers who are condemned to partial knowledge, or to ‘rationality’, while the organic fellowship of *sobornost*’ makes true understanding possible.” [Buss’ words.] (Ibid.:56; Khomyakov, A. *The Church is One*. Berlin, 1867.) Papanikolaou adds another observation, courtesy of Father Calinic Berger. “It is this presence [of Christ and the Spirit] in the *individual* believer that is the foundation for the unity of the Church in faith.” [Papanikolaou’s words, author’s italics.] (Papanikolaou, ‘Integrating the Ascetical and the Eucharistic: Current Challenges in Orthodox Ecclesiology.’ In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol.11, Nos.2-3, May-August 2011, pp.173-187, p.181; Berger, C. ‘Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Staniloae and Zizioulas’. In: *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 51, No. 1, 2007, pp.23-70.)

⁷ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Others’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 28 July, 2012.

⁸ Ramfos, p.4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. See Chapter 1, Section 8.11.

Humankind as a theological anthropology, made in the image of God – “Each of us is a ‘living theology’”¹¹ – is linked to Trinitarianism by way of relationality. As Papanikolaou observes, if God is Trinity, three *persons* that are in communion, “then human ‘personhood’ must be defined in terms of relationality and communion. In other words, humans are truly persons when they image the loving, perichoretic communion of the persons of the Trinity.”¹²

When dealing with the concept of the individual and hypostasis from a Trinitarian perspective, Lossky argues that “the theological notion of hypostasis in the thought of the eastern Father means not so much *individual* as *person*, in the modern sense of this word.”¹³ The gist of Lossky’s argument is that the human person cannot be described by concepts like ‘individual’, the attributes of which can be shared by all other human beings. The human *person* on the other hand has attributes that make each of us unique – that which can be expressed, for example, in art. This is where he uses the examples of Mozart and Rembrandt; the piece of music by Mozart, the painting by Rembrandt, is what makes them, as *persons*, unique. Harrison refers to the freedom that inheres in our uniqueness. “Yet as human beings we are also *persons*...As persons we are free and unique, we each become different”.¹⁴

It is important to stress the difference, as it is understood here, between an individuality that is detrimental to communal activity as well as to the development of the individual person – both in secular and spiritual terms – and an individuality that can positively enhance awareness of the ‘Other’ and advance inward potentiality. The latter can, within the context of spiritual

¹¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p.220.

¹² Papanikolaou, ‘Personhood and its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p.232.

¹³ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.53. Lossky’s italics.

¹⁴ Harrison, Sister Nonna Verna. ‘The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, pp.80-1. For a supporting view, see Appendix A and Turcescu’s airing of Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s argument that an individual person “cannot be defined only in relation with others”. [Turcescu’s words.] (Turcescu, L. “Person” versus “Individual”, and other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa. In: *Modern Theology*. 18:4 October, 2002, p.534.)

development, aid personal experiential spirituality and, subsequently, augment and benefit congregational unicity. Ramfos asserts that there is nothing wrong with acting as an individual, but that one acts as an individual within, and in accordance with, the group.¹⁵ Individuation is the means by which we transcend selfish forms of individualism to make just that connection. Khodr says something similar.

“The others are not a dark mass. Every person in the others’ group becomes lighted whenever he/[she] knows the others as persons interlaced through love, or at the least through the vigilance of each soul, as the Orthodox say in their liturgy. Thus, everyone is in the heart of the other and therefore is distinguished from the congestion of the mass in order to perceive each person of the group as unique. This is the difference between a group of people and the flock of sheep...None of the flock differs from the other and in case you want to distinguish any of them you need to stamp it on the skin. As for human beings, each is unique and there is not another identical person to anyone.”¹⁶

It may be argued that, early on in the novel, Khodr rebuts the notion of individuality – “individuality divides and separates us”.¹⁷ But this is to confuse the distinction between the individualism and individuation of Ramfos, which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Later in the novel, Khodr makes it plain how individuality is a healthy component of his theology of the ‘Other’. “The first request an individual has is that those around him should recognise him, just like the life of a nation depends on other nations seeing it, and that it should be able to prove its existence through this and rejoice for asserting its identity through its independence and growth.”¹⁸ Here, Khodr makes it clear he is in accordance, in essence, with Ramfos and with the understanding of individuality as it is propagated in this thesis – that is, while the individual progresses towards fulfilment as a unique person through their relationality

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, Section 8.11. Russell claims Ramfos urges us not to take on the identity of the group, but instead we should develop a unified self prior to our aspiring for union with God. (Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, pp.168 and 172.)

¹⁶ Khodr, *The Others*.

¹⁷ *TPOC*, p.7.

¹⁸ *TPOC*, p.21.

with the 'Other', each unit of humanity is a distinct person, a unique individual that cannot be duplicated. This is the value of humankind as individuals *within the group*. Khodr conveys this in another article from a different period. He talks about individual actions, and calls upon people to act according to Paul's exhortation to help the 'Other' – "Paul wants you to put your shoulder under the burden that the other is carrying." This is the love of the individual towards another individual; but this becomes the individuation of Ramfos when he refers to the concerted love of the community. "We are members of the one body of Christ and...Holy Communion is not the end. It is the beginning, and the end is to actually become one in social life and appear to people as one through love."¹⁹ This is where the fictional man's reference to the individual and to nations has a distinct resonance.

3. Uniqueness & Community, God & the 'Other'

A similar view is reflected in the book when the narrator refers to the one who would deny God just because they witness people's daily wrongdoings. Such a person, insists the narrator, "does not have the least idea of the existence of souls who shatter this law of numbers, for he believes only in sociology."²⁰ In other words, they see human beings not as individuals, but as numbers, an anonymous conglomeration of people that cannot be differentiated and who only exist by means of impersonal, scientific studies, which corral them into abstract concepts like 'the crowd', 'the mass', 'the people'.²¹ This sentiment

¹⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Carrying the Other'. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 20 January, 2002.

²⁰ *TWOC*, p.27. See Berdyaev, who claimed that, "The transformation of man into a thing, of labour into a commodity, must be something unbearable for the Christian conscience." (Berdyaev, N. *Christianity and Class War*, 1931, pp.54-5. Cited in Lowrie, *Christian Existentialism. A Berdyaev Anthology*, p.250. In a later edition, this quote is somewhat revised: "the turning of man into a thing and of his work into a commercial commodity, are intolerable to the Christian conscience." (Berdyaev, N. *Christianity and Class War*. D. Attwater (trans.). London: Sheed & Ward, 1934, p.51.)

²¹ See Arjakovsky, who cites Berdyaev, amongst others, who "believed that the solution to the problem of the social and national among individuals was the awareness that the person was more important than the collectivity." (Arjakovsky, A. *The Way. Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal, 1925-1940*. J. Ryan (trans.); J. A. Jillions, M. Plekon (eds.). Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p.260.)

about the value of individuality is reflected in his article, 'The Others', where it is clear Khodr believes this can be applied within a spiritual context.

“Uniqueness is a human attribute and God sees everyone as unique not only in the face but also in the heart. God does not have patterns for human souls, and it is not the case that the one soul dissolves in the other in order to unite with it.”²²

Such uniqueness is not to be confused with the negative qualities of individualism as described by Ramfos, where uniqueness would more easily correspond to egoism. Khodr situates individualism within a Middle Eastern context. “A spirit of individualism dominates the dispositions of the Arabs to such a degree that...no value is given to social solidarity...even when the tribes struck alliances between one [an]other in the desert ...this did not produce any fundamental integration between them...The extended family is predicated on tribal solidarity which however does not strip anybody from [sic] his or her individualism and egoism.”²³ Familial solidarity thus has much in common with the “law of numbers”, the sociological impersonalism, which the man in the book decries.

Hitched to this acknowledgement that our relationship with God is based on the Divine recognition of each individual's intrinsic uniqueness, there is an element of reassurance for those who fear occlusion of their own identity when relating to the 'Other', and that relationality somehow foreshadows the dissolution of their own unique individuality. 'Union' with the 'Other' is not, Khodr is saying, about absorption in the 'Other'; one always retains one's individuality in the same way that, within experiential spirituality or the mystical ascent, one does not merge with God. In the book, the narrator expresses a similar view to Khodr's, but more succinctly: “Eternity is not composed of stereotypes, for each person is unique.”²⁴

²² Khodr, *The Others*.

²³ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Trust'. Mark Farha (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 15 October, 2005.

²⁴ *TWOC*, p.68.

This is not to say that every manifestation of individuality is positive; and it is here that the West, once again, comes in for critical appraisal with regard to conceptual individuality.

“The West tends rather to consider man as the center of the universe. He has faith in his possibilities, his reason, his analysis, and his critiques. Setting aside myth and legend, he never stops working to perfect his technological systems, which represent the peak of his creativity.”²⁵

It is a strong indictment of individuality as conceived and practised by Western society and, in addition, questions the West’s fundamental spiritual capabilities. It suggests an inability to suspend disbelief, and to favour materialistic phenomena, the offspring of its own fecund technology, over and above matters of the spirit – in short, a flagging spirituality and misconceived priorities. It is this kind of individualism to which Ramfos, it is argued, is opposed. Not simply as an egoistical inwardness, but as a purview that distorts the ‘Other’ in its relationality with the world. The ‘not-I’ becomes something suspect until proved otherwise. As the narrator comments in the second letter from exile:

“He did not become any more transparent in the eyes of his new European associates, who were by nature more secretive and less trusting because of their civilization’s individualism. At any rate, his [the fictional man’s] eastern demeanour remained an unfathomable mystery to them.”²⁶

If the theology of the ‘Other’ is comprised of an ‘I’/‘Thou’ paradigm, it is perhaps not unreasonable to conclude that individuality belongs to both sides of this relational equation. In the above extract, it would seem relationality is thwarted by a supposedly warped paradigm whereby individuality and the perception of individuality are corrupted.²⁷ This is counter to Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’ and, it would follow, to his understanding of individuality. In his

²⁵ Ibid., p.97. See also Chapter 7, pp.269-70 and Chapter 4, p.109.

²⁶ *TWOC*, p.105.

²⁷ This verges on Sartrean perspectives of the ‘Other’. See Chapter 6, p.247.

universe, the 'I' would be spiritually enlivened and consolidated by relating to the 'Other'.

This distinction between the concept of the individual and the contrasting phenomenon of the community is brought to light in the book.

“Each believer stands empty-handed before the Lord. But when they gather together in the holy presence of God, the faithful become the Body of Christ in the Spirit, a mystical extension of him, at once an historical reality and a foretaste of the Kingdom.”²⁸

It is at once an acknowledgement of the believer as an individual in the single individualistic act of standing before God, and of the individual within the community of the church, as part of communal worship, a group of individual believers who have come together in order to form a body. At this moment, it could be said, the individual suspends their individuality; but, it is argued, this might be to miss the point – that the community of believers exists as an agglomeration of *individuals*. If there are x individuals in the congregation, there are x number of *unique* beings, each one different from the rest. So this is not to discard individuality, but to contextualise and enhance its importance in the same way Khodr expressed it above: “The others are not a dark mass. Every person in the others’ group becomes lighted whenever he/[she] knows the others as persons interlaced through love”.²⁹ The dominant themes here – individuality, identity, the importance of the 'Other' to the 'I' – are brought out in a 2007 article. “I do not exist alone. I exist whenever another loves me...you unite your 'I' with another 'I' and you become one...maintaining forever the person and the individuality [of each] as independent and enduring”.³⁰ These extracts plainly show there is a consistency and clear alignment between Khodr’s thinking on individuality as expressed through the man in the book and in other of Khodr’s writings.

²⁸ TWOC, p.41.

²⁹ Khodr, *The Others*. Translator’s insertion.

³⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The 'I' and the 'Other'’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 22 September, 2007. Translator’s insertion.

The concept of the individual and individuality within the context of church community can be extended to include monasticism. As has been noted before, the man in the book is much taken with the monastic retreat he experiences, regarding monasticism as “a prototype of the Kingdom to come”.³¹ He goes on to declare, “I need this endless silence and the nourishment of fasting and abstinence, which makes the monks here look like walking skeletons.”³² This is a clear parallel between the man in the book and Khodr, bearing in mind Khodr’s own brief stay in a monastic environment, and his view on Athonite monasticism, cited earlier.³³ With its individual monks, monastic life mirrors a gathering of individuals within the church, who, together, constitute a body. For all the austerity in monasticism, however, the individual is not disregarded. Within the coenobitic system of monasticism, individual monks are counselled by the abbot or spiritual father. That said, while the solitariness of eremitism may be discouraged – and, it is posited, this discouragement may have less to do with discipline and more to do with the dangers of dealing with spiritual matters entirely on one’s own; until, that is, one has advanced sufficiently along the spiritual way – the solitary monk, standing alone before God, could be said to have advanced significantly along the theotic pathway. In discussing Theodore the Stoudite’s monastic reforms, Louth claims that what he (Theodore) learned from St. Basil “was an understanding of the coenobitic life as valuable in itself, and not just a preparation for the “real” life of asceticism, represented by the stylite or hermit.”³⁴ This suggests that individuality, as spiritual action, is itself not to be discounted, and, indeed, that the solitary represents the apogee of spiritual development on the journey towards theosis.

4. Politics & Organisational Bodies

It may be supposed that relating to the world is an action of individuality, and that how we relate may be described as a ‘taking part’. Politics is a ‘taking

³¹ *TWOC*, p.126.

³² *TWOC*, p.121.

³³ See Chapter 5, pp.160-1, and the extract from Khodr’s article ‘Mount Athos’.

³⁴ Louth, A. *Greek East and Latin West. The Church AD 681-1071*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007, p.117. Basil the Great (330-379); Theodore of Stoudios (759-826).

part' and, as addressed earlier, the narrator reflects that, "[a]ccording to my friend, political action remained the duty of the community...without ceasing to be an individual choice for every person."³⁵ It recalls Dannaoui's assertion made earlier that politics has changed since the civil war.³⁶ Whereas, he argues, political parties could once claim support nationally rather than on a confessional basis, this has now changed and parties had become more confessional, in the sense that they were being identified more with a particular religion. Here, the narrator is making it clear that his friend regards politics as a matter for individual choice untrammelled by external influences. But it is also linked to one of the book's motifs – in this case, subliminal – that the individual has a part to play in society. "The important thing is to have a political vision and, when the occasion presents itself, never to hesitate in assuming responsibility and commitment."³⁷ As an individual, we must, each one of us, make our contribution to the democratic system of politics; the alternative is to open the way to tyrannical rule, which snuffs out individuality. As noted earlier, this attention to politics does not, however, supersede spiritual responsibilities.³⁸ "Next to the union with God that we seek in the spiritual quest, men's encounter according to the manner and themes of politics is irreplaceable."³⁹ The earlier translation holds to different phraseology: "But other than the solitude that you look for as you seek God nothing excludes you from human practices according to the ways and sayings of politics."⁴⁰ With the word "solitude", this latter version emphasises the individuality of the spiritual pathway, but also how the individuality inherent in prayer and the mystical ascent does not, and cannot, excuse one from engaging with the activities of the world.

While it would appear that engagement with politics has, ostensibly, no intrinsic spiritual value, willingness to belong, with others, to organisational bodies is not, for Khodr, the same as positive relationality with the 'Other'.

³⁵ *TWOC*, p.67. See Chapter 5, pp.201-2.

³⁶ See Chapter 2, pp.66 and 68.

³⁷ *TWOC*, p.32.

³⁸ Chapter 7, pp.276-7.

³⁹ *TWOC*, p.32.

⁴⁰ *TPOC*, p.10.

“People, aggregated together in space and time, are not necessarily united. Unity comes forth from hearts which seek closeness and the greater the closeness the greater the unity obtained...When the favor of the Lord is poured down on people, He inflames them with love and they become one despite the multiplicity of their bodies...Organization, any organization, does not make unity of being or unity of communion; it is coercive in its nature because it is imposed...Political or military groupings function by receiving orders. This is false obedience that is propelled by fear.”⁴¹

This extract shows traces of Khodr’s hatred of power – militaristic, political – which is illustrated in the book. The narrator talks about the fictional man’s past when a French tank drove into a crowd of peaceful demonstrators and killed some of his friends – “[s]ome of his comrades lost their lives, crushed by tanks”.⁴² It is an incident Khodr raises in conversation and in relation to power.⁴³ However, the central point in this article refers to organisation; as such, it recalls the fictional man’s indignant statement, cited in Chapter 5, that, “Christianity is not an institution we join as if it were a club, a party, or a nation”.⁴⁴ In the above article, Khodr extends and unpacks his suspicion about organisations as a concept because, for him, organisations eclipse individuality and the uniqueness of the human person. Organisations exert power and power can be used in destructive ways, as with the French tank. These are views that would not endear him to authority; rather, they reaffirm his radicalism, while underlining his existential religiosity. In another article, Khodr’s suspicion of worldly power is given greater depth. “The person that feels that he has power and is able to do a lot isn’t usually charmed by God’s power unless he or one of his children became sick...There is also...power for women and it is the power of beauty...her beauty gives her wealth and power on earth...There is also another kind of authority and it is that of the educated, cultured and intelligent people. Knowledge is a power over the half-educated

⁴¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Inner Unity’. Riad Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 2 March, 2013.

⁴² *TWOC*, p.63.

⁴³ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

⁴⁴ *TWOC*, p.124.

and the simple people”.⁴⁵ The thoughts of the fictional man come straight from Khodr: “Excessive wealth leads to power, and power inclines the soul toward tyranny.”⁴⁶

Another overlying inference that can be drawn from the article is that political parties, militaristic organisations, and corporatism in general are not conducive to ‘natural’ unity; instead, they present a front that might seem united, but their cohesion is wrought by adherence to a common cause – it is imposed, and, by belonging, the person signs over their individuality. It is similar to the parliamentary system where politicians are expected, in crucial votes, to suppress their own individual consciences for the sake of party. It also infers that ‘community’ *can* be individually transcended for the sake of more universal, spiritual considerations and to preserve authentic spirituality. However, this may be resisted by fellow group members in the interests of what may be perceived as tradition and cohesion; in which case, defiance in the face of group consensus, whatever the sphere of activity, risks scuppering the individual’s personal aspirations, making enemies, and, more generally, rupture and isolation. On the other hand, such valiance in the face of negative reaction may be described as existential religiosity; and, viewed from this perspective, the transcending of communal spirituality implicates the research question, for it would require considerable commitment and strength of purpose to transcend traditional community in order to relate to the ‘Other’.

That said, if the Lebanese Orthodox community engages openly and honestly with the Muslim ‘Other’ and the Christian ‘Other’, they can eradicate inner feelings of prejudice and substitute ‘destructive’ or negative impulses with creative interpersonal relationships, ones that are grounded in mutual love and understanding. These relationships will supplant an inward looking collectivism, which is exclusively biased towards a communal solidarity, and in its place develop an inward looking *individuation*, wherein resides the scintilla of divinity that underscores our being made in the image of God. From this

⁴⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Possessors of the World’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 25 November, 2001.

⁴⁶ *TWOC*, p.61.

inward looking individuation, there may arise a universal vision of shared values that transcends a single community to become part of a united, multi-communal, Lebanese society. Similar would apply to intra-Christian relations, allowing, in theory, for a more open attitude to, and a more holistic perspective on, other forms of denominational Christianity.

5. Introspection & Its Impact on Self

In an autobiographical novel, which would also be confessional, there are inevitably moments in the book that are personal and, thus, entail individualistic perspective. One such example comes within the second letter from exile. The narrator explains that, “[w]hen a spiritual connection was established with one of his close companions, my friend was able to bare his soul”.⁴⁷ A little later, the narrator says that his friend is “pained”⁴⁸ by the way he is perceived by others – the fictional man believes they see him as irascible, “a troublemaker, an outrageous man”.⁴⁹ These indicate spates of introspection on the part of the man in the book – possible only as a facet of individuality – but also a plea for understanding, for tolerance; it has nothing to do with theological or doctrinal issues, and can have nothing to do with spiritual interiority or the state of contemplation associated with prayer. It is purely confessional, an individual statement about the fictional man’s psychological and existential state, interlinked as it is with relationality, as he delves into his own ‘personhood’. Chirban defines ‘personhood’ as that which “asks each of us the fundamental questions of our lives: Who am I? Where am I going? How do I attain my goal and help others?”⁵⁰ Ware augments this by saying personhood depends on how open we are to the ‘Other’. “I become truly a person only when I look into your eyes and allow you to look into mine.”⁵¹ These two explications about personhood are inextricably linked to individuality; as such, they give way to a deeper, existential understanding of what it is to be human and what *being* entails. Introspection, inwardness, has

⁴⁷ *TWOC*, p.104. But see Chapter 6, pp.250-1, for the full extract.

⁴⁸ *TWOC*, p.104.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* See Chapter 4, p.94.

⁵⁰ Chirban, J. T. ‘Introduction’. In: *Personhood. Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul*. J. T. Chirban (ed.) Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1996, p.xiii.

⁵¹ Ware, ‘In the Image and Likeness: The Uniqueness of the Human Person’, p.4.

a value in so much that it underlines the individuality, the 'I'; but if it is exclusively focused on, or locked into, the 'I', it is detrimental to the individual.⁵² As a result, introspection can additionally pose supplementary questions. How am I being received by the 'Other'? What effect am I having on the 'Other'? Do I agree with the 'Other's' perception of me – and, if not, how can this gulf between us be bridged? In short, how do I relate to, and interact with, the world?

These interpretations of personhood and the subsequent questions they pose about one's own existence, give way to a recognition that individuality is a real and 'necessary' attribute that supposedly defines humankind in contrast to other living creatures and inanimate objects. We do not act in this world as androids, operating wholly as one-dimensional stimulus-response mechanisms;⁵³ we are conscious entities that process information, aware of our uniqueness, the precariousness of existence, and our proneness to hurt, whether physical or psychological. But the very fact of our uniqueness, which includes our identity, our authentic *self*, and how we relate to the world (the 'Other'), potentiates alienation. Even though the man in the book exudes a level of intellectual and artistic sophistication, even though he has embarked on an individual and independent pathway of spiritual development, he is, nonetheless, concerned about how others might see him, and about how his individuality affects people, his friends, and the world in which he lives. This is an example of Khodr's theology of the 'Other' transposed from theory into the potentially jarring reality of functional relationality.

It is perhaps not unreasonable to assume the man in the book cannot, and refuses to, help himself – he is what he is, people can take it or leave it; so this is not a matter of modulating his behaviour or the tone of his language. This is similar to Khodr's attitude. What if, it was put to him, speaking one's

⁵² See Chapter 1, Sections 8.11 and 8.12.

⁵³ But see, for example, the review of Sapolsky, R. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. London: Bodley Head, 2017, in which Steven Poole sums up Sapolsky's position: "every human action is inescapably caused by preceding events in the world, including events in the brain. So there can be no such thing as free will." (Poole, S. 'Review'. In: *The Guardian*, 10 June, 2017.)

mind results in people becoming upset? His reply was terse: “That’s their business.”⁵⁴ However, this still leaves the man in the book with the problem of how to bridge the gap between himself, as an individual, and the ‘Other’, or more generally the world. Much of this is a replication of Khodr’s own life, according to accounts of those close to him; others’ perception of Khodr as difficult, contrary, unpredictable, or just plain obstructive are reflected in the fictional man’s character. And it is here that the nub of the predicament, for the both the man in the book and for Khodr, can be identified. For being ourselves sometimes means flying in the face of the ‘Other’ if, that is, we are to lead authentic lives. A significant example of this is the fictional man’s desertion of his friends when he goes into exile. For him, there can be no compromise on his spiritual pathway, no amendment of his spiritual commitment – you cannot, he would say, bargain with God. It is this that can create the Outsider.

In Khodr’s case, his individuality is seen through the prism of his existential religiosity, for he himself ventures no compromise on authentic spirituality. This is clearly apparent in some of his writings where he is not diplomatically selective about those whom he believes falls short.

“It makes me sad to see some leaders in the Church here on Earth, who do not care about God’s word that governs every speech or action or organization; they have adapted to the décor and have exchanged the wisdom of God with that of this world. This reminds me of a story in the ascetic literature about one of the novices to the monastic life who lives with an elder who trains him in the spiritual life...the novice died a year after he joined the monastery and the elder saw him in his dream in a fire reaching to his knees. He told him: “I have trained you in holiness, what did you do to yourself that made you go in the fire?” The novice answered saying: “Be at peace my father for I am standing on the shoulders of a bishop.” No comment. The meaning is clear.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

⁵⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Christ and the Christians’. Riad Moufarrij. In: *an-Nahar*, 16 May, 2009.

The tenor of this piece is similar to the fictional man's denouncement of priests, who, he feels, fall short of what is demanded of spiritual leaders – for example, “many...priests] are unaware of their responsibilities within the Church, but are content to bask in a decadent clericalism.”⁵⁶ It is additionally paralleled by Khodr's comments in conversation where he decries what he sees as a cosyng up of bishops to the rich and powerful.⁵⁷ The common denominator that underpins these three examples of Khodr's thought – the book, the article, his views expressed in conversation – is not just authenticity, it puts the onus on the individual to act with spiritual authenticity. The sub-textual implication also suggests that an uncompromising authentic spirituality can mean calling the 'Other' to account by using language that might cause offence. This extract from Khodr's article represents someone who thinks and acts as an individual, and who is not likely to 'toe the party line'. This demonstration of existential religiosity may suggest an uncomfortable fit with conventional protocol, which can cause ructions; but there are positive aspects of individuality as well as negative aspects.

6. Relationality & The Theology of the 'Other'

6.1 Positive Spiritual Encounters

Regarding people as if each person is fundamentally the same, as if all they needed was prescribed teaching or gentle coercion, and blanket responses to universal questions, are what Khodr seems to avoid in his general validation of diversity; rather, he demonstrates a Christian empathy that is synchronised to a spiritual commonality in God and to the struggles and sufferings of his fellow human beings. The importance of empathy and individual encounters with the 'Other' is given graphic illustration in the book when the fictional man, now in exile, walks in the streets late at night.⁵⁸ He has just finished work and, to him, the people milling around seem spiritually lost. “I am obsessed with the idea that the world has become estranged from its God.”⁵⁹ Sensing their inner pain, he says how he would like to engage them in conversation. The

⁵⁶ *TWOC*, p.123.

⁵⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

⁵⁸ This passage is richly pertinent with regard to the six existential criteria. See Chapter 4, pp.133-4, and Chapter 5, pp.171, 174 and 176.

⁵⁹ *TWOC*, p.119.

newer translation insinuates the plural – “I wanted to start a dialogue with them”⁶⁰ – but in the older version the emphasis is on the individual and one-to-one contact. “I would have liked to greet this person or that of those in the road; to attract him into a dialogue that may lead into his taking me along into his misery or my taking him along into my Christ.”⁶¹ It is emulating Christ’s own style. Jesus did address the crowds, but it could be argued that some of his more momentous dialogues are encounters with individuals or small groups. The meeting with the Samaritan woman is on this level, and it is one Khodr believes has special significance. “This conversation is the most important part in today’s Gospel.”⁶² As an encounter between two individuals, one in which Jesus manages to change the Samaritan woman, it has echoes of the fictional man’s desire to meet and talk with people. Khodr describes the meeting with the Samaritan woman as “one of the most beautiful conversations of the Lord.”⁶³ It is an account of Christ relating to the ‘Other’, one-to-one, outside their respective communal boundaries. The desire of the man in the book to meet with those who are, in a similar sense, strangers, reflects a biblical encounter that breaks through conventional barriers. The fictional man’s avowed wish, derives from a love that springs from the fundamental precepts of Christianity, universalist spirituality, and the ‘humanism’ of his individuality. It also represents his existential religiosity..

The fictional man’s desire to help strangers and Christ’s positive encounter with a woman from another social group are gathered up in another article Khodr wrote on spiritual counselling. Both the man in the book and Christ are presented in the guise of a teacher, and in this article he focuses on the role of the spiritual father – that is, one who embodies individuality in their one-to-one relationality – insisting that it requires a particular person with special skills. “How does the spiritual father move from what he has read to what he must say?...We wouldn’t benefit people if we just repeat what we found in books... No counseling [sic] could be done by simply saying ethical and social

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *TPOC*, p.48.

⁶² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Samaritan Woman’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 13 May, 2012.

⁶³ Ibid.

words such as: “Why did you do that? This is wrong”.⁶⁴ The man in the book is not armed with textual aids when he wishes to reach out to strangers; and Jesus was actively defying traditions, whether grounded in text or social mores, by talking to a Samaritan woman. Love, compassion, empathy, common to both the fictional man and Khodr, are what govern the latter’s spiritual attitude to the ‘Other’ and explains why he is so taken with the story of the Samaritan woman.

Marriage may be considered a worthy example of relationality, for it requires two individual beings to relate to the ‘Other’ within what may be regarded as an especial loving union. More than this, it is seen in the book as a way of tutoring the individual along the spiritual pathway. As the narrator observes, it is “a school where we are educated in divine love...the generous attitude of giving oneself and the practice of forgiveness initiates the human being into divine humility.”⁶⁵ This is another instance of how Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’ moves from an abstract academic construct and is brought to life by concrete examples of conventional human experience. In the book, the importance of marriage is measured in terms of its relevance to the spiritual pathway. That said, it is its importance to the development of the individual that is stressed here. “The wholeness of the person is realized in the practice of affection.”⁶⁶ By declaring this, it aligns itself with the existential themes of the ‘Other’ and the importance of relationality. “No longer dispersed, the human being begins to unify in the meeting of solidarity with the desire for personal growth.”⁶⁷ It is an existential anthem that proclaims the individual is only fulfilled as a real and cohesive entity when our relationship with the ‘Other’ is understood as the indispensable element of personal development. In general terms, the individual cannot grow unless they are in a meaningful relationship with the ‘Other’; marriage is seen as a perfect exemplar of how such a relationship can underscore this existential reality.

⁶⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Spiritual Counseling’.[sic] Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 15 July, 2001.

⁶⁵ *TWOC*, p.73. Marriage as a schooling in divine love was touched on in earlier chapters with regard to identity, relationality, and alienation, reflecting the interconnectivity of the six criteria.

⁶⁶ *TWOC*, p.73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

6.2 Negative & Positive Encounters

Recognition of individuality as an inherent attribute of humanity, something that defines us, is evinced, paradoxically, by the fictional man's struggle with 'togetherness'. To explicate this, it is necessary to return to the point in the book, referred to above, where he is walking the streets at night amongst the revellers, and wondering about humanity, how the relationship between God and human beings has broken down. People, it is inferred, are searching for something to plug the gap. "All are seeking to fulfill themselves. All wish to achieve a completeness they imagine to be outside of themselves, without seeking and finding God, without even trying to return to him."⁶⁸ These are the lost souls who douse their frustration with alcohol or drugs and are prey to what is seen as an inferior spirituality that stalks the streets. The people who dole out this spirituality are "on the plane of emotion, closer to the surface of the skin than to the depths of the human being."⁶⁹ Thus described, it is a spirituality that ensnares the vulnerable, those who are at a low ebb and caught in the web of their own failings and self-pity. It is not a spirituality that addresses the deeper concerns that go beyond an individual's own state of introspection to embrace humanity through a shared sense of alienation and loss. "The person who joins them [bogus spiritual groups] is usually preoccupied with his individuality, health, and well-being, and with what he calls his 'experiences'."⁷⁰ It stands as an illustration of the difference between Ramfos' individualism, an egoistical self-possession, and individuation.

It has been observed how technology is seen as a possible obstacle on the spiritual pathway.⁷¹ What has unfolded in years subsequent to both the book and Khodr's article corroborates, it is argued, Khodr's prognostications. Sophisticated and personalised technology has meant that marketing campaigns now target the individual. A washing-machine may be a technological imperative in the home, but it is an impersonal, domestic unit of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.118.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Chapter 4, pp.111-2, and Khodr's article, *Idols*.

technological pragmatism, designed to carry out a chore; a mobile phone, on the other hand, becomes a personal possession that is an extension, and expression, of *self*. The 'selfie' encapsulates this. A washing-machine may influence lives, but a mobile phone could be said to change lives, diverting individual attention from interaction with the 'Other' to a processing and subsequent interiorising of the world. This represents the detrimental aspect of introspection discussed earlier with reference to Ramfos, and is made explicit by Khairallah's observation. "Show me three who are not texting on the phone. They're never alone. And you have to be alone – like Khodr – to think."⁷² The key word is 'alone', for it is aloneness that implies individuality, but it is an 'aloneness' that is akin to the individuation of Ramfos, whereas the individualism technology is encouraging is, continuing Ramfos' argument, an egoistical activity that is virtually oblivious of the 'Other'. As a consequence, and as has been posited, what Khodr feared might happen as a result of technology, has happened: technology is threatening to engulf matters pneumatological, both within and without the person, and is rendering adequate spiritual observance less likely. Thus, Khodr's spiritual message, in which his theology of the 'Other' is grounded, withers; a correlation that brings to mind the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular?

7. Towards Resolving A Dilemma

It could be argued that the suspicion Khodr and the Church share with regard to individuality is based on semantic interpretation. To reiterate, the concept of individuality, as it is presented here, must be balanced against what Ramfos was referring to above – the difference between individualism and individuation. On the basis of this argument, the individual is not inimical to community or to the notion of group, neither is the group antithetical to the individual. However, in order to resolve the dilemma of individual versus group, there is a need to recognise the essential symbiotic relationship between the two.

⁷² Chapter 6, p.243. Interview with As'ad Khairallah, American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.

Within the context of eucharistic worship and celebration, it is possible to reconcile the individuality of the unique person with the communal experience of the group within the church. In the book, the narrator gives an indication of this when he talks about the celebration in the church.

“They [the faithful] participate in their own [*individual*] salvation through an action in which words, chant, incense, fire, fruit, flowers, water, wine, oil, and myrrh mingle and complement each other. Through these elements and their mediation, God gives them what their hearts desire: the grace of his Spirit.”⁷³

This demonstrates the individual's relationship with the group, how individuality can blend with the group and become a holistic experience represented by and in the group, and illustrates the role of the Holy Spirit. The group is thus not only comprised of its atomised parts, but is itself enlivened by elements of individuality. Set apart, these discrete individual entities are materialistically simple, together they constitute a complexity, stronger for the agglomeration of the individual elements, which enables the mystical nature of the eucharist to be fulfilled. The above extract is thus something of an analogue that explains the current running through the eucharistic celebration, one that underscores the twin virtues of individuality and congregation.

Looking at the group-individual dynamic in the world, and from the fictional man's point of view, the kernel of the problem is one of communication, trying to get through to people. From a spiritual standpoint, the man in the book lays the responsibility at the doors of churches (and, by implication, the Church), which “refer to a civilization now foreign to most people. They share no common language.”⁷⁴ It leads to his wondering how to restart dialogue between young people and their parents, an illustration perhaps of the individual-group tension on a prosaic level. Perhaps, however, the man in the book is being simply naïve; there has always been, and will always be, a generational gap, which, to succeeding generations, appears uniquely wide,

⁷³ *TWOC*, p.42. Author's insertions.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

deep, and unbridgeable. Nonetheless, it seems he wants unification, two sets of people working “to forge the same future”, one that is “alien both to the death of the older generation and the oppression of its offspring”.⁷⁵ However, these hopes now crystallise around a spiritual purpose: “[h]ow do they learn to glorify together the One who alone is able to strengthen and consolidate their relationship”;⁷⁶ in other words, to restore, through the Father, family life, which, for the man in the book, is “moribund”;⁷⁷ how to “dispel the terrible isolation of modern man”.⁷⁸

Here again, the man in the book is lamenting the attrition of community, microcosmically exemplified in the nuclear family, and he appears to place the blame for this on lack of a common language between the churches and the people, and between a younger generation and the older generation. But another root cause appears to be an atomised humanity, fragmented by self-interest – and perhaps compounded by a technology designed to enhance that self-interest – which is inwardly fixated on resolving superficial personal issues and frustrations, and on the yearning for self-aggrandisement. A few lines later, the man in the book encapsulates the dilemma in a question.

“How do we face a multitude of people closed in upon themselves...so as to reconstruct a community of persons, each with his own world and particular destiny? How do we make it so that each human being becomes a cosmic harmony, living love in great simplicity, always ready to give and receive?”⁷⁹

In this passage, the man in the book appears to be suggesting a breaking down of the crowd into atomised units of individuality – “each human being” – before rebuilding them again, as ‘individuated’ units, into a cohesive whole, a community. The previous translation makes it more plain.

“How do we go...to a lost multitude of people, and break it down so as to restore it into individuals each of whom has a world and a future?”

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.119.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

How can every person become a universal tune, great in his simplicity, in a love that he gives and a love that he receives?”⁸⁰

Here, the reference to individuals is clear, but the meaning remains the same. The inference in the earlier passage, particularly with reference to “cosmic harmony”, is a realisation that we grow as a cohesive societal body, and as individuals, through intercommunication with the ‘Other’. Echoing Ware, cited above,⁸¹ who speaks about looking into the eyes of the ‘Other’ and having the ‘Other’ engage with the ‘I’ in a reciprocal manner, Khodr writes about a similar social symbiosis.

“You do not exist by affirming yourself. You exist through perceiving the Other and you are being formed through this perception. You exist through your departure from looking at your face in the mirror, and through perceiving the Other as God perceives him/[her] in love. Anything other than perceiving the Other in love is laying hold of him/[her].”⁸²

This is mirrored in an article, cited earlier, where Khodr states, “I do not exist alone. I exist whenever another loves me”.⁸³ It is clear that such statements, appearing in the book, together with the observations made in later writings, are all cogs that drive the thinking behind his theology of the ‘Other’ – rooted, it is argued, in individuality; the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’ are individual entities – and underscore the book’s role as a siphon for Khodr’s spiritual understanding. It also reaffirms the fictional man as the mouthpiece for Khodr’s own, very personal, views. What is being conveyed in ‘The New Life’ is that individuality, as individuation, is an essential part of *personhood*, but realising, fulfilling our individuality must be a prelude to a reconstitution, by individuals, into a community in which we relate to the ‘Other’, giving and receiving. The implicit alternative is a society where individuals are locked into self-contained functionality in which every action emanates from *self* in response to *self*, potentiating a clash of opposing interests; or, as Ramfos observes,

⁸⁰ *TPOC*, p.48.

⁸¹ Page 327.

⁸² Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The New Life’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 3 August, 2013. Translator’s insertions.

⁸³ Khodr, *The ‘I’ and the ‘Other’*.

inauthentic individuality can turn one against the 'Other'. "Individuals with an atrophied self develop an ego in a permanent state of antagonism toward any environment not consisting of their own relations and friends."⁸⁴

8. Individuality: Semantics & Limitations

In Chapter 6, the passage where the fictional man is "gravely ill"⁸⁵ is construed as an example of relationality and how it is possible to relate to our bodies as a physical component of our being. It is when the physical body breaks down through illness or age that we are most consciously aware of this relationship. However, illness also underlines our sense of individuality.

It is while being in this state that the man in the book starts to think about the problems of life. "How do we develop a sensitivity to the presence of the many problems around us? How do we bear them all with the same intensity?"⁸⁶ They overwhelm him, and he wonders how we can see "the unity, beauty, and richness of existence" through them.⁸⁷ Only, he concludes, by means of a dialectical relationship with Christ, which infers an action of individuality, can we "address knowledge and action in a thoughtful, energetic, and creative way, without compromising our fidelity to God or man."⁸⁸ Without Christ, "we are incapable of feeling equally affected by every problem we encounter and then giving each one its rightful place, in a harmonious ranking of priorities."⁸⁹ The way to this harmony, says the man in the book, "is not the result of rational comprehension."⁹⁰ If we think it possible to circumvent Christ by resorting to reason, by seeking to rationalise our predicament, we shall find it inefficacious. The problems of life are multifactorial, and they could drag us down into a bottomless pit of despond if we fail to instigate a dialogue with

⁸⁴ Ramfos, p.305. See also Yannaras. "But the rupture [the rejection of relationality], in all the degrees of its intensity, is a blind...attempt at egotistic self-assertion that automatically transforms the person opposite into a threat." (Yannaras, *Relational Ontology*, p.110.)

⁸⁵ *TWOC*, p.151.

⁸⁶ *TWOC*, p.151.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.151-2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.152.

Christ. Prayer, which is a one-to-One, *individual*, spiritual exercise, is the only method.

Apparent contradiction lies between first, seeking an individualising of the crowd, that is, breaking it down into its constituent parts prior to rebuilding it, as discussed above; and second, recognising the importance of community and of relating to the 'Other', which runs like a vein through the book and through Khodr's writings. Its resolution may be found in his statement that, "[a] community is not a crowd, it is the meeting, since we exist through meeting. The meeting characterizes and confirms each of us, since no one exists unless with others and through others."⁹¹ The individual is an essential component put to the service of relating to the 'Other'; but, equally, without the 'Other', the individual simply does not exist. As cited in Chapter 6,⁹² the fictional man has precisely the same perspective – "the other is as essential as breathing."⁹³ A harmonious community is structured on the piece by piece assembling of a philosophico-theological jigsaw, which interconnects individual pieces to create an overall image. Remove one piece and the whole is flawed.

But this is not to suggest that the resultant image is that of a unified religious nation state. "The citizen finds it hard to live under religious ideologies. Religion...[is] for the individual as my friend, the great Shiite master, once said."⁹⁴ In this extract, there is lurking beneath the surface an inference, similar to the observation made above, that organisational bodies, corporate institutions and even countries can be, in some ways, obstructive in the individual's engagement with religion, and that this is detrimental to the true meaning of the term 'religion'. Theocracies may thus be categorised, and indeed, Khodr, in the same article, queries whether the terms 'religion' and 'nation' can meaningfully be brought together.

⁹¹ Khodr, *The New Life*.

⁹² Chapter 6, p.212.

⁹³ *TWOC*, p.26.

⁹⁴ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Religions, Denominations and Secularism.' R. Moufarrij (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*. 11 February, 2012.

“[T]here cannot be a “religious nation”. Logically, the term has no real meaning since it is the individual who is the one to believe in a religion and not a nation. It is the individual who is clad with a heart and a mind while the nation is not a being and as such, it is impossible to say that “a nation ‘believes’ in a religion”. ”⁹⁵

The man in the book strikes a similar stance with regard to theocracies – “[the idea of] the Christian homeland was a fad not only politically but also spiritually”;⁹⁶ and again, “Christ’s purpose does not authorize any nation to invoke his name.”⁹⁷

If theocracies are antipathetic to authentic spirituality, meaning that nations should not be identified with a particular religion, this is underscored by Khodr when considering historio-cultural identity. Fearing the emergence of a new colonialism that will appear in the guise of commercialism – that is, sophisticated technology – Khodr wants to situate the Eastern Christian firmly in the Arabist camp, for both practical and historical reasons. “In the shadow of a renewed colonialism that is coming...great powers might treat Muslims and Arabs in a bad way, and this will harm us, the Christians of the East, in our relationships with the Muslims that still believe that the West is Christian.” Here, there is a call to indigenous Muslims not to identify Eastern Christians with the West. We are, Khodr is inferring, a sizeable spiritual grouping within a larger cultural heritage, which encompasses both Muslims and Christians, and which has nothing to do with the West. “We want to remain witnesses for Christ in the Arabian civilization as we have always been where we gave a lot and took a lot too.”⁹⁸ At root, this is about individual identification, whether as individuals (including groups) or as individual nations. Just as Khodr

⁹⁵ Ibid. See also Demacopoulos & Papanikolaou. “It often goes unnoticed by the Orthodox that the very idea of “nation” is itself a Western construct of imagination that was imposed on formerly occupied Ottoman territories so as to better integrate Eastern Europe into Western Europe.” (Demacopoulos, G. E. & Papanikolaou, A. ‘Orthodox Naming of the Other: A Postcolonial Approach’. In: G. Demacopoulos & A. Papanikolaou (eds.). *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, p.11.)

⁹⁶ *TPOC*, p.16.

⁹⁷ *TWOC*, p.52.

⁹⁸ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Globalization’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In : *Raiati*, 15 September, 2002.

maintains it is an illogicality to use the term “religious nation” because it is the individual who believes not the abstract concept ‘nation’, so, he is implying, individuals and nations cannot be categorised on the basis of their religion. In other words, do not bracket someone of a certain religion with those from another part of the world, for the principles which invite this kind of neat categorisation are bogus. More specifically, do not conflate Lebanese (Orthodox) Christians with a geopolitical entity such as the West, for the former have an Eastern identity, which is Arab.

This is an argument in favour of individuality and, as such, may be extrapolated from its reference to nation states to include, if only tentatively, ecclesiological institutions and organisations. Dogmatic structures of worship may inhibit the individual’s understanding and appreciation of what it is that is being said, and what it is that is being worshipped. If this is accepted as a possibility, it suggests that churches may hamper some people’s spirituality. This is to recall the fictional man’s dictum cited above that the churches “refer to a civilization now foreign to most people. They share no common language.”⁹⁹ It is also to reiterate some of the criticisms about priests that appeared earlier – for example, “many of them [the priests] are unaware of their responsibilities within the Church, but are content to bask in a decadent clericalism”;¹⁰⁰ “nothing can justify priests whose total lack of initiative suggests either a lack of faith, or an apparent disinterest in Christ and the spiritual life”¹⁰¹ – referring to the inadequacies of some priests when fostering spirituality and to their putative and occasional preference for siding with the world and consorting with the rich and powerful. “The Church seems to have lost the means of addressing the heart of mankind today.”¹⁰²

That said, it is hard to deny the possibility, as was stated earlier, that, without any form of organisational structure, it may be equally difficult for an individual to engage with their religion, validate their spiritual needs within a framework

⁹⁹ *TWOC*, p.118.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 5, p.153; *TWOC*, p.123.

¹⁰¹ Chapter 5, p.153; *TWOC*, p.123.

¹⁰² *TWOC*, p.118.

of systematised worship, and create a sufficient niche in which to nurture their spirituality for the sake of their own theotic destiny. The paradox may be that each one of the two realms – the Church and secular society – inevitably uses language that meets with little understanding by the other.¹⁰³

In calling into question the validity of the phrase ‘religious nation’, Khodr expresses another aspect of his existential religiosity, for he is transcending religious boundaries, and sending a positive message to Muslims. This ramification recalls the research question because it challenges Lebanese Christians to do likewise and reassure the Muslim ‘Other’. It additionally acts as a restraint on any Christian hankerings to turn Lebanon into a Christian homeland, which, at the time when Khodr was writing the book, appeared to have been a vague, and often unarticulated, aspiration in some Christian quarters of Lebanese society.¹⁰⁴ On this subject, Khodr has the narrator make an unequivocal statement. “My friend considered the idea of a Christian homeland a heresy from a solely political standpoint, but above all spiritually.”¹⁰⁵ That aside, by stressing the relevance of individuality when spirituality is the context – “the individual...is the one to believe in a religion and not a nation” – he is shifting the responsibility for personal spiritual growth from community, via worship by rote and ritualistic observance, on to the individual. Thus, through these assorted extracts which dare to call into question the Church’s efficacy, highlight supposed sacerdotal inadequacies,

¹⁰³ For an example of the paradox caused by the conflicting interests of the secular and the spiritual, see, for example, Louth, who describes monasticism in the East, and how it found itself often “on the side of the powerful. Monastic lands needed to be looked after; this could lead to compromise for the ascetic life of the monks”. (Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, p.234.)

¹⁰⁴ This was briefly touched on in Chapter 6, p.213. Now see Hirst, where reference is made to the Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, Ignace Mubarak, who, along with others pre-1948, had a positive attitude to Jews and Zionists, simply because they were non-Muslims, and thereby could “tilt the inter-communal, demographic balance back in favour of shrinking Christian Lebanon.” Hirst also claims the buffer strip, which was stretched across southern Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, was created not only as a security zone between Israel and its enemies, but “it also looked very much like the first great practical step towards...the creation, at long last, of the ‘Christian Lebanon’, allied to Israel, of which Ben-Gurion and his generation of interventionists had dreamed.” (Hirst, D. *Beware of Small States. Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010, pp.40 and 120.)

¹⁰⁵ TWOC, p.48. The fuller extract can be seen in Chapter 6, p.213.

and infuse individuality with spiritual significance, Khodr demonstrates his existential religiosity and challenges the religiosity of the Orthodox community.

9. Conclusion

As alluded to above, there is a parallel between Khodr and Ramfos in the sense that Khodr might well concur with Ramfos' distinction between individualism and individuation. While individualism may be deemed egoistical and thus undesirable, he would, it is argued, accept the individuality Ramfos describes as individuation because it coincides with what he (Khodr) believes is expected of each one of us. In brief, we are each responsible for our spiritual development and singular theotic journey. Theosis is not something that is foisted on us, it is similar to a covenant struck with God, by which we willingly and consciously accept the prospect of our divine destiny, and it is with the grace of God we proceed. This process – the action of acceptance – can only ever be an individual decision.

What Khodr is opposed to is the kind of individuality that is inward, selfish, and which sees the 'Other' as a threat; the same individualism which earns Ramfos' disapprobation. Even though Khodr values solitude – "you have to be alone, like Khodr, to think"¹⁰⁶ – his own individuality is validated by a loving reaching out to the 'Other'. This is his theology of the 'Other' in practice, but also in tandem with his individuality; and it is this sense of individuality which can be seen in his contemplation of the face of Christ, a continuing act of individual devotion in contrast to the pious generation's preoccupation with liturgy and the Scriptural word. When Khodr indicated the iconic image of Christ in his study,¹⁰⁷ he was inferring a two-way process: to contemplate the face of Christ requires an act of individuality on the part of the perceiver; this is balanced by the representation of Christ, the individual, who reflects the cosmic unification of everyone and all created being in the Oneness of God.

Individuality is manifested in the book by the fictional man's sense of relationality and more specifically through his own quirky relationship with his

¹⁰⁶ Interview with As'ad Khairallah, American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 5, pp.191-2.

friends. The reader can see what Khodr makes plain elsewhere, that we are, each one of us, unique, and this applies to the fictional man. But it is the latter's unique way of expressing himself and his thoughts and fears, which jars with the world. The same may be said of Khodr. For the narrator, his friend's passionate belief in friendship stems from an individual's sense of being in a harsh world. "Life is a desert," but friendly faces are our "oases."¹⁰⁸ The fictional man is said to have "lived in the warmth of friendship...it continued to be his greatest consolation."¹⁰⁹ But if this book is a manifestation of Khodr's theology of the 'Other', thinly clad in fictional narrative, friendship must be more than relief from the world, it must yield greater depths. This it does in its affirmation of friendship, cited earlier, as a spiritually instructive experience. "Friendship is humility, because it is an admission that the other is as essential as breathing."¹¹⁰ This mirrors the views expressed throughout this work, and echoes the existential precepts of philosophers like Buber, that the individual depends on the 'Other' for existence; without the 'Other', the individual becomes just an 'is', an entity that, although animate, is unfulfilled and incomplete.

While Khodr may adhere to the principle of group spirituality, he is, it is argued, advocating an individualistic perspective, for he insistently makes the existential declaration that one must live authentically,¹¹¹ a commitment that involves a personal, individual experiencing, firsthand, of the buffeting that comes from life's exigencies and 'dramas', feeling the pain directly, suffering as Christ did for us.¹¹² Even with the unequivocal declaration by the fictional

¹⁰⁸ *TWOC*, p.26.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* The same applies to the book's affirmation of marriage. See Chapter 6, p.249: "marital loyalty is but the school of divine love."

¹¹¹ Palamas equates salvation not only with immortality, but with "the disclosure of authentic humanity". (Pelikan, p.263.) Authenticity, arguably an existential term, is thus built into the Orthodox principle of *bona fide* or true existence.

¹¹² Archimandrite Zacharias emphasises how Christ showed the way for us, the way that, it is argued, would lead to an authentic existence. "The Way He revealed upon earth, by putting Himself at the bottom of the inverted pyramid, is the way of "going down", the way of descent." (Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.201.) This echoes Khodr directives about the authentic life. See also Victor Turner, who discusses how, in some tribal societies, prior to acquiring high positions, "he who is high must experience what it is like to be low." (Turner. V. 'Liminality and

man that individuality is detrimental to the human condition – “Individuality...divides and separates, because it confronts each person with his differences and his stubborn attachment to what he knows, says, and does”¹¹³ – the book is locked into an individualistic style; it is an individual’s understanding of the spiritual way and his growing awareness of what that entails, a repudiation of crowd mentality and worldly gain, superficial popularity and personal ambition, to follow our divine destiny. It is a universal message, but delivered from an individual’s perspective.

Human beings are suspended within a dark fathomless cosmos and immured within a unit of ‘aloneness’ that defines our uniqueness. Khodr, it is argued, fully acknowledges the existential sense of fear, loss, and abandonment that affects each and every human being. However, the gist of his theology of the ‘Other’, which the book stages as human drama, is that if the world is God’s creation, manifested by God’s *ekstasis*, a ‘going out of himself’, our ‘going out of ourselves’ – to experience the world and other people – is the means by which we can communicate with an apophatic God. The alternative is to remain locked within our own individuality and condemned to the darkness of solitary, ‘Godless’, confinement.¹¹⁴ Relationality is the means by which our existential condition can be ameliorated; relationality that transcends not only our egoistical individualism, but, as existential religiosity, transcends our communal, cultural, and religious boundaries. This is the building block of his theology of the ‘Other’, a transcendence, based on existential religiosity, which inculcates the realisation that there are no borders, for we all belong to God.

Relationality springs from an experiential personhood – that is, an awareness of ‘self’. In other words, relating to the ‘Other’ can only flourish if a human being has a developed sense of who they are, and who the ‘Other’ is, even

Communitas’. In: *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion. Second Edition.* M. Lambek (ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p.328.)

¹¹³ *TWOC*, p.27.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p.158, who follows this line of argument.

though the 'Other', like God, will forever remain ultimately unknowable.¹¹⁵ Returning to a Trinitarian matrix, Zizioulas makes it clear that God represents 'personhood',¹¹⁶ and it is only through personhood that the Son and the Spirit can *be*. In other words, the Trinity demonstrates that one can only become truly what one is through a relationship with the 'Other'; the corollary of this is that we as human beings can only become truly authentic human beings if we relate to, commune with, the 'Other'. Friendship, interrelating with others, has clearly been a vital part of Khodr's character and of his *being-in-the-world*; and it is this – the joint concepts of individuality, experiential spirituality, relationality, friendship – that have fed his regard for Muslims and helped him to formulate a workable construct for positive interfaith and intra-Christian relations.

Community and individuality are not, it was posited earlier, antithetical to each other. Neither, it would appear, is there a contradiction between, on the one hand, our own individuality, and, on the other hand, relating to the 'Other' through a transcending of community. When the human being transcends their '*self*', it is individuation that retains our uniqueness as individuals – our unique physiognomy, our own unique psychological hard-wiring.

But does this exalting of relationality necessarily lead to the subordinating of individuality to communality? The significance of individuality is underwritten by its inextricable link to experiential spirituality, which is an essential element of Khodr's theology, typified by his focusing on the face of Christ; for experiential spirituality implies individuality. Otherwise, the one who experiences is experiencing vicariously through a communal experience and whatever personal sense of redemptive spirituality gleaned from the

¹¹⁵ See Ware's Chapter 3, 'Apophatic Anthropology', in *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*. See also Berdyaev, who writes that "The mystery of each individual is only found through love, and in this mystery there is always something which doesn't let itself be discovered completely, in its ultimate depth." (Berdyaev, N. *L'idée russe*. H. Arjakovsky (trans. into French). Paris: Mame, 1969, p.5; cited in Arjakovsky, *The Way*, p.443.)

¹¹⁶ Papanikolaou addresses the Trinitarianism of both Lossky and Zizioulas, the former cleaving very much to an apophatic understanding of the Trinity, while Zizioulas emphasises the relationality and communal aspect of it. (Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, pp.49-90 and 129-161 *passim*.)

community is diffused or vitiated. In this instance, the spiritual experience does not belong to the 'I', it is owned by an extraneous body of 'Others'. Such a view parallels Khodr's own statement that, "Religion...[is] for the individual".¹¹⁷ Seen from another perspective, the man in the book talks about the 'lost' crowds in the street at night – "All are seeking to fulfill themselves. All wish to achieve a completeness they imagine to be outside of themselves, without seeking and finding God, without even trying to return to him."¹¹⁸ This suggests the importance of inward contemplation – with the proviso that it is conducted on the basis of individuation, rather than individualism – and thus is a recognition of individuality. This is compounded by the inferences from the book and from Khodr himself that the spiritual journey is individualistic – because it can only ever be so. It is not something that can be carried out as a group exercise, even within a coenobitic environment. The onus is on the individual.

As established elsewhere in this work, Khodr, through the man in the book, is ambivalent about politics. He (Khodr) regards it as a necessary activity, similar to Nellas' "garments of skin" that accompany our postlapsarian state,¹¹⁹ but it can also represent the negative individualism to which Ramfos is so opposed. "Politics is always based on ego, and the ego denies the other's ego."¹²⁰ Nonetheless, the man in the book is adamant that each should play their part with regard to politics, and he acknowledges how, ideally, "[p]olitics should be a servant to spiritual life".¹²¹ The fictional man and Khodr are saying the same thing in a different way. Politics may be bad, but like the passions they can, as was established earlier in Chapter 4, be put to good use.¹²² By channelling politic action in this way – it is how each one of us uses politics – there is implied individuality. In another article, Khodr makes it plain

¹¹⁷ Khodr, *Religions, Denominations and Secularism*. See above, p.340.

¹¹⁸ *TWOC*, p.118.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 4, p.131, for Nellas' argument that God equips us and makes allowances for our earthly state.

¹²⁰ Khodr, Bishop George. 'Ramadan Has Arrived'. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 30 July, 2011.

¹²¹ *TPOC*, p.37.

¹²² See Chapter 4, p.96, and Ware's observation that the passions can be redirected for virtuous purpose.

what leadership should entail. Discussing James and John and how they exhibited their love of power by asking Jesus to make them “ministers” in the new kingdom, Khodr says, “[Jesus] didn’t come to create a state on earth but to change everything through the bible. The disciple of Christ shouldn’t look for serving him through politics; we have another language and different methods.”¹²³ As was noted earlier, the fictional man is emphatic that “[t]he important thing is to have a political vision and, when the occasion presents itself, never to hesitate in assuming responsibility and commitment.”¹²⁴

Society is made up of unique individuals with a developed sense of their own identity, rather than an anonymous mass of impersonal sociological units. The individual is equally important within a spiritual setting. The congregation worships together as a body, but, as stated earlier, Khodr, through the book, is unequivocal – it is individuals who comprise that body. “They [the faithful] participate in their own salvation through an action in which words, chant, incense, fire, fruit, flowers, water, wine, oil, and myrrh mingle and complement each other.”¹²⁵ So convinced is he of the significance of the individual that he makes the man in the book ponder on how to do the reverse and break down the impersonal crowd into individuals. “How do we go...to a lost multitude of people, and break it down so as to restore it into individuals each of whom has a world and a future?”¹²⁶

The theme of this chapter is that the individual and the group are a symbiotic reality brought about by a spiritual relationality; and it is that which encompasses Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’. The gist of this theme is contained in his own writings.

“The singleness of love makes the two as one in that realm which is invisible and indescribable. Love is the only logic or argument with which you transcend countability (the world of numbers) so that the saying “We are two souls in one body” becomes true...what is important is that functionally you and others can see that you (the two

¹²³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Passion for Power’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In : *Raiati*, 10 April, 2011.

¹²⁴ *TWOC*, p.32.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹²⁶ *TPOC*, p.48.

of you) have become one mind in the dynamism of spiritual oneness.”¹²⁷

The reference to the transcending of “countability” is similar to the fictional man’s protestations about the one who, denying God, “merely because he sees such people [those who commit wrongdoing] fall into sin again day after day...does not have the least idea of the existence of souls who shatter this law of numbers...he believes only in sociology.”¹²⁸ This subtle integration of individuality with others is caught in an article where Khodr describes how each one of us is unique and yet the product of numerous influences. “You are merged unity, however, it is a unity that has received different fountains, and thus, it also has to become a fountain. The one human being is humanity, though he/[she] is not a crowd.”¹²⁹ Similar to politics, which will occasionally necessitate engagement, individuality – that is, the personal affiliation and commitment spirituality requires – comes across through Khodr’s fictional man and in assorted literary output, enjoining the individual to connect in their individuality to the ‘Other’.

This understanding of individuality as a unit of “singleness” can be traced back to a ‘monastic’ need for solitude, which preludes union with God. Khodr writes that the Arabic word *إِسْتَوْحَدَ* (Istawhada – that is, to be alone), “linguistically and idiomatically, means to seek unity with God.”¹³⁰ This experience, not just of unity with God, but the process of actively seeking it, insinuates an advanced state of spirituality, an unremitting and focused routine of experiential spirituality, which is identified here with existential religiosity. In describing patterns of worship from the fourth century, Louth claims there was, in ecclesiastical circles, a move away from ordinary lay experience towards a concentration on the experience of the saints, something Louth says, that represented “an ideal unattainable by ordinary

¹²⁷ Khodr, *Inner Unity*.

¹²⁸ *TWOC*, p.27.

¹²⁹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘I, Who Am I?’ Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 25 March, 2011.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*.

people.”¹³¹ The calibre of religiosity so described by Louth, chimes with Khodr’s own existential religiosity as described here. As such, this level of religiosity would remain beyond the scope of most people’s spiritual capabilities and directly challenge the religiosity of the Lebanese Orthodox community – and, indeed, most Christian communities. Let it be clear: this is not to say that his theology of the ‘Other’ is his existential religiosity and thus beyond ordinary people; it is the aggregation of all aspects of Khodr’s spirituality, including, among other facets, his theology of the ‘Other’, his delineation of the Christian life, his unadulterated commitment to it, his straightforward manner of expression, his discounting of people’s opinions, and his overall attitudinal stance that together comprise his existential religiosity. All, the aforesaid characteristics necessitate individuality and underscore the reality of individuality – that is, being an individual is often difficult, lonely, controversial, and generally testing.

Having said that, Khodr’s theology of the ‘Other’, when applied to quotidian life, and apart from implying an individual-to-individual encounter, is not an inadequate reflection of his existential religiosity, for it is extensive and radical, an inclusion of all and everyone, and compounded by his conviction that Christ’s significance is not confined to Christianity. As an idealistic vision, it transcends community, but at the same time, paradoxically, pushes at communal boundaries, challenging people to extend their understanding as individuals. It is additionally linked to his concept of relationality with its emphasis on seeing God in the ‘Other’.

The totality of this theology may be too much for some, if not the majority, requiring, as it does, an individual to engage in a ‘reaching out’ to the ‘not-I’, an act that goes beyond the secure borders of community and tradition, and could be perceived as threatening individual as well as group identity. Khodr might respond that this is to forget the one defining element of relationality – love. Zizioulas’ statement that “Love is a *relationship*”¹³² would very much

¹³¹ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, pp.193-4. He also claims that around this time (from the fourth century), “the clergy...came to constitute an elite.” (Ibid., p.193.)

¹³² Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, p.166. Zizioulas’ emphasis.

accord with Khodr's own thinking, that to relate is to love. It would also have some accordance with the claim made earlier,¹³³ that all love is re-rooted back or through God; meaning that when we love a person, that person becomes the mediator of our love for God and becomes God's love for us mediated through that person; equally, the love we express for that person is an imitation of our love for God. Taken as a template of relationality, any relationship with the 'Other', whether it be with other Christians or those of other faiths, thus entails higher stakes for Lebanese Orthodox. For it is not simply that inability or reluctance to reach beyond one's faith and communal boundaries might be considered pluralistically antisocial, those who fall into this category risk failing on a far wider canvas. They are in effect turning their backs on God and unwittingly undermining their very faith.

This argumentation implicates, along with individuality, four of the other existential criteria: identity, authenticity, relationality, and alienation, and brings the research question into focus. As stated earlier in this chapter, it was asserted how experiential spirituality depends on a sense of one's own authentic individuality, that is, standing before God, aware of our own unique identity, and experiencing relationality with him, as part of the group. Just as the 'I' is transcended to become part of the group, so the group itself must be transcended in order to relate to the 'Other'. However, if we fall short at any stage in this process, relationality with the 'Other' is stymied and we thereby experience both an incompleteness of identity (the 'I' needs the 'Other' to exist), and a rupture in our relationship with God – in a word, alienation. As an expression of his existential religiosity, the ramifications of Khodr's theology of the 'Other' present a steep, ascetic, learning curve that necessitates profound spiritual challenges along the way. So it is that Khodr's overall existential religiosity does challenge the religiosity, or spiritual capabilities, of the Lebanese Orthodox community, and does have an impact on interfaith and intra-Christian relations, affecting as it does, a community's readiness and ability to interact in a positive way with the religious 'Other'. Khodr's existential religiosity, manifesting itself in such uncompromising

¹³³ See Chapter 6, p.231.

spirituality, thus accentuates his unique individuality, but also transforms him into an Outsider, the subject of the next and final chapter of Part II.

CHAPTER 9

The Outsider

In Chapter 8 on 'Individuality', it was asserted that individuality was embedded in the other five criteria because each one can only be interpreted in terms of personal human experience and thus seen through the prism of individuality. Similar could be said for this chapter on the Outsider with, however, an additional difference. Whereas this work has posited an interconnectivity between one criterion and the other, the thesis has now reached a juncture, where, it is argued, a confluence becomes apparent by which the other existential criteria coalesce in the personification of the Outsider. In other words, this chapter will flesh out an archetypical 'person', called the Outsider, in which the other criteria cohere, and demonstrate the link between the (spiritual) Outsider and existential religiosity.

1. Defining & Contextualising the Term 'Outsider'

As a quintessential individualist, and alluded to above, the criterion Outsider distinguishes itself from the other existential criteria by the fact that it is not a philosophical abstract; instead, it is a concept which entails some-one rather than some-thing and, as such, the term 'Outsider' has infiltrated the world of human exchange and discourse. There may, however, be another explanation for how the term entered the lexicon of human experience. The Outsider has populated certain works of fiction, allowing readers to become acquainted, through a cadre of fictional characters, with the various traits universally associated with what it means to be an Outsider. Succinctly, the Outsider may be described as someone who experiences a disconnect with society; that said, there can be multifarious ways this disconnect can be manifested, hence multifarious Outsiders.

Camus' *L'Étranger*, published in English as *The Outsider*, depicts a man who seems at odds with society and what may be described as an aberrant form of

normative social behaviour.¹ He seems to observe others from afar, experiencing events with little emotion, and going through life as if in a dream. When he is arrested for killing an Arab, there is an air of detachment to the unfolding sequences of arrest and looming execution. Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* is another Outsider who does not behave like others.² In fact, his troubles start when he fears he might be like the rest of the herd, rather than an exceptional person. He does not believe in God, and from this he deduces “all values of good and evil are relative, man-made, and therefore fictitious.”³ To try and prove he is an exception, he defies a basic law and commits murder. “Yet no sooner has the crime been committed than something strange begins to happen...He had murdered the old woman physically, but he himself was spiritually murdered by her.”⁴ These are clearly examples of people who may be psychopathological, but there are other Outsiders who are victims themselves, such as K. in Kafka’s *The Trial*, who experiences acute alienation from a faceless system when accused of a nameless crime.⁵ Winston Smith in George Orwell’s *1984* is also made to feel an Outsider when he deviates from what is considered the norm, even though that ‘norm’ is representative of a tyrannical state.⁶

Wilson, in the introduction to his book *The Outsider*, describes a time when he felt he was “in the position of so many of my favourite characters in fiction”, citing, among others, Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov, and adding that, alone in his room, he (Wilson) felt “totally cut off from the rest of society”.⁷ In his book, he

¹ Camus, A. *The Outsider*. Stuart Gilbert (trans.). London: Penguin Books, 1971; *L’Étranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.

² Dostoevsky, F. *Crime and Punishment*. David McDuff (trans.). New York: Penguin Classics, 1991.

³ Lavrin, J. *A Panorama of Russian Literature*. London: University of London Press, 1973, p.136.

⁴ Ibid. See also Williams, who says that Raskolnikov’s “obsessional fantasizing about murder...is variously presented as an exercise in transcending ethics, appropriate to a superior (Napoleonic) kind of human being, as a practical measure to secure the finances for a future befitting a genius and benefactor of humanity...a thoroughly muddled appeal to diabolic temptation, even diabolical responsibility for the murder”. (Williams, R. *Dostoevsky. Language, Faith, and Fiction*. London: Continuum, 2008, p.115.)

⁵ Kafka, F. *The Trial*. London: Penguin Books, 1980.

⁶ Orwell, G. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin Classics, 2004.

⁷ Wilson, C. *The Outsider*. London: Picador, 1978, p.9.

goes on to categorise a range of other Outsiders, who differ in character and elicit sympathy or censure, but who all share a sense of experiential alienation, which, arguably, is an apt delineation of the Outsider. A further example of actual people, as opposed to fictional characters, who may be so described, is Evelyn Waugh. Waugh, who relied on the Catholic spirituality of his inner self and the flow of events in his own life to feed his novels, and who additionally created a cast of Outsider characters, was not universally liked by part of the establishment and thus, to a large extent, stands outside.

Evidence for this is adduced by the rough handling he received in a series of BBC interviews and by the publication of sharp and, apparently, unjustified criticism. Part of this may have been due to his manner, which was adjudged pompous and severe. This awkward fit with society followed him into the army, where he was deemed in some quarters to be difficult.⁸

More generally, an Outsider may be seen as a loner, as someone who occupies a position outside the main consensus, expressing views that do not accord with that consensus. An Outsider can physically live apart from others in self-imposed exclusion; they can be a radical, political or otherwise, expounding ideas considered extreme or unacceptable by the majority. While this is not to say that every radical is an Outsider, it is to argue that, almost by definition, the Outsider is an individual, and individuality is a central core of their being.

An Outsider may not necessarily see themselves as an Outsider; on the other hand, some may have made a conscious decision to remove themselves from mainstream society owing to a deep-seated divergence from accepted or 'normative' opinion, whether this be based on moral, political, or spiritual grounds, or because they seek their own authentic identity. Whatever the cause, the Outsider is someone who will not drink at the wellspring of social

⁸ This assessment of Waugh comes from Slater, Ann Pasternak. *Evelyn Waugh*. Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2016. See a study of his book, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, which is semi-autobiographical and charts a mental breakdown, while also representing a character profile of a 'difficult person', that is, Pinfold and Waugh. In: *ibid.*, pp.200-224. For his unhappy military experiences, see pp.225-232. (*ibid.*)

conformity, and is more likely to be defined by entrenchment – impervious to compromise and all manner of cajoling, whether it be threat, flattery, or financial gain. They are, in short, their own person, the authentic person *non pareil*.⁹

Khodr's character, it is argued, coincides with that of the Outsider; hence, the book, as an autobiographical novel, adumbrates the Outsider and does so according to a number of assorted characteristics, some of which have been alluded to above. However, the following exposition of the Outsider, which will use material culled from Khodr's book, is roughly broken down into a series of subheadings that address thematic issues in the book and reflect one of its leitmotifs of spiritual development. They are as follows: first, sociological and political; second, the Church; third, priesthood; fourth, spirituality; fifth, character and persona. The chapter will thus use this schema as it trawls the book for incidents and illustrations of the Outsider.

2. Sociological & Political Dimensions

Even if the Outsider is disenchanted with the general nature of society, and vehemently opposed to its values, priorities, and sociological structures, this does not necessarily mean they disdain the 'Other'. The man in the book may be vitriolic about the Church as establishment, but this does not prevent him from exuding love for God's creation, which includes his fellow human beings, nor does it dissuade him that the church is the place in which people should congregate to express spirituality. "Paradoxically, his analysis of the sad reality of church life strengthened my friend's belief that the Church is the place of our salvation."¹⁰ So it is not that he is against institutions *per se*, but that he is against what happens within them. On the other hand, it is the uncompromising quest for truth that impels him to spurn his background and its concomitant middle-class advantages to enter the joinery and, by doing so, become an Outsider. Yet such a person can never successfully 'jump ship'

⁹ For a fuller description of the Outsider and how they can be contrasted with an Insider, see Appendix A.

¹⁰ *TWOC*, p.47.

and, will, it has been argued,¹¹ never become totally one of the workers because he cannot erase his background. In addition, while working with diligence and becoming leader of the Union, his single-minded and unyielding spiritual quest induces an inflexibility which alienates him from all sides, the political, the social, the institutionalised Church, and he is left ostensibly locked out and alone.

It may be that because of his character as an Outsider, he cannot understand the way that society works. His joinery colleagues, on the other hand, not only know how society works, they know their opponents; they recognise how the power of the state can be exerted to cower the underclass, they know when it is judicious to retreat in order to retrench. He, on the other hand, is unaware of – or even disinterested in – secular authority's response to challenges; he can only be unflinching in the face of opposition.

It has been mooted in this work that Khodr may be something of a left wing radical, while Abou Mrad's assessment, that Khodr propounds a liberal conservative theology, has also been noted.¹² Earlier, reference was made to Khodr's mercurial quality, such that it would be hasty to slot him into any 'political' pigeonhole.¹³ As was previously asserted, it is clear he feels uncomfortable about politics and ill at ease about politicians in general. Khodr is more a spiritual person and it is to the world of Spirit that he is committed. This unpartisan position sets him apart in a country located in a region prone to extreme volatility, a situation that places politics on the breakfast table, so to speak, and fosters political affiliation. Yet he does not absolve himself from commenting on sectarian or international violence. His article on the 2006 war with Israel is testament to that.¹⁴ Although this piece contains religious elements, it is nonetheless unashamedly political, polemical, and rousing in its nationalistic fervour. This may not bear the stamp of the Outsider, but it is cited to show that Khodr can become the mouthpiece of general outrage.

¹¹ See Chapter 7, p.272.

¹² This is fleshed out in Chapter 3.

¹³ Chapter 7, p.311.

¹⁴ See Chapter 4, p.96.

In Chapter 5, Khodr's suspicion of politics is given voice through the man in the book, who claims that standing on the sidelines and not taking part in politics does not guarantee safeguard against attack. "[W]e do not need to practice politics for them to fight us."¹⁵ There follows, however, a biblical quote that predicts dire consequences awaiting those who pacifically withdraw from politics and take little or no part in society. It could be, it is argued, a description of how the Outsider is viewed by the world.

"He is a burden to us and rises above our conduct...He is a living reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; his matter of life clashes with others, and his ways are eccentric...Let us try him with cruelty and torture, so that we may know his mercy and put his patience to the test. Let us condemn him to a shameful death...(Wis 2.14-20)."¹⁶

This would appear more a case of stalemate. In the book, Khodr seems to be saying different things at different times – involvement in politics is unavoidable, it is a treacherous sphere of activity, but, according to Khodr and the man in the book, it is acceptable, although it should be segregated from spirituality with the proviso that spirituality is the more important of the two.

One of the Outsider's defining characteristics is that they defy expectations and stand outside traditional spheres of political and social expression. In his role with the Union, the man in the book eschews political factions because he abhors the supposed manipulation that might ensue. He also questions the logicity behind the workers' association with political parties.

"Why should the working class seek to join with a single political party? Parties always indoctrinated their followers; they created a convenient

¹⁵ *TWOC*, p.64. See Chapter 5, p.202, where the *TPOC* version is used. In discussion, Abou Mrad is quite specific about how Khodr is viewed by political factions. "Politicians don't like him." (Interview with Nicholas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013.)

¹⁶ *TWOC*, p.64.

synthesis of mystical illusions. If there had to be a mystical element at all costs, then let those who intimately knew God prevail.”¹⁷

Not only is the man in the book turning his back on political support, which, it might be supposed, would afford him and the workers significant support to pursue their cause, he flagrantly discounts political input with a disparaging remark that political parties “always indoctrinated” those who joined them. This is bolstered by another accusation, that political parties weave “mystical illusions” for their followers. It is not clear how or why the term ‘mystical’ is employed here, but it enables the narrator to add that, if a “mystical element” is essential, then far better for this to be dealt with by those who know God. In other words, rather than embracing a spurious spirituality, one should retreat from all political involvement and seek out the real spiritual pathway in Christ. It is a statement of defiance, but one which may have alienated the man in the book from his coterie of workmates, poisoned his relations with political parties, and, instead, advocated something that may have been beyond their comprehension or at odds with their worldly priorities. Such an outcome would make the term ‘Outsider’ appear an inevitable appellation for the man in the book.

2.1 Breaking New Boundaries

Some of this may appear as a negative rendering of the Outsider, but the Outsider is advantageously placed because they feel unbound by the usual restraints of tradition, communal censure, or loss of personal stature; as a consequence, they are ‘at liberty’ to express themselves and act in ways which others, who might be in thrall to corporate bodies, political parties, or organisations, would avoid if they value their livelihood or social standing. It additionally presents to the Outsider the opportunity to test the limits of people’s tolerance and understanding, to invite people to see things in a different light and to consider new propositions – in brief, to push barriers.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The fictional man's stand on anti-violence is an example of pushing barriers and extending the frontiers of tolerance and accepted tradition. In a pluralistic society like Lebanon, which has experienced a history of internecine conflict and unrest, this resonates within both a political and a sociological context. The passage on anti-violence was cited earlier and is used here as an instance of the Outsider's stance.¹⁸ It comes at the end of the book and includes a wholesale and passionate condemnation of violence in whatever form it takes. At one level, opposition to violence is not, for Christianity, an unusual position to adopt. The man in the book, however, will allow no adulteration of the Christian message, no mitigating circumstances, that will permit violent action *in extremis* – “we must relate to both the murderer and the victim if we are to lead both sides to repentance and mutual forgiveness.”¹⁹ In contrast, the natural human response may be informed by vengeance or for punitive retribution according to a legal scale of justice. In this instance, however, by saying where he stands, readers might wonder where the fictional man does actually stand.

“But if the one who has been subjugated stood up mad in anger to the point of killing, I have to stand by the one wielding the knife and also by the wounded for cleansing and forgiveness and consolation...in order to lift them together to the hope of the new man who does not oppress and does not become oppressed.”²⁰

This declaration, which, from the superficially vernacular, may seem tantamount to switching sides, could be confusing. In the example given by the man in the book, conventional justice may deem retaliatory violence as justifiable homicide.²¹ Through the fictional man, Khodr, who in the unpublished version uses the first person singular and thus underscores the confessional aspect of the book,²² is insisting that in the case of attack where

¹⁸ See Chapter 6, pp.260-1.

¹⁹ *TWOC*, p.159.

²⁰ *TPOC*, p.68.

²¹ David Hare quotes Georges Simenon as saying, “the criminal is often less guilty than his victim. (Hare, D. ‘The Crimes and Genius of a very Ordinary Man’. In: *The New Review, The Observer*, 25 September, 2016, p.36.) This, nonetheless, inevitably insinuates proportionality of guilt.

²² See Chapter 6 where this argument is fleshed out.

there might be two victims of violence, both need the indiscriminatory succour that is motivated by Christian love. Such a statement tests people's compassion, pushing their boundaries of understanding with regard to Christ's salvific message, and his insistence of turning the other cheek. It is a Christianity that cannot be moulded to personal prejudices, nationalistic vengeance, or human penal codes, and thus represents an existential religiosity that does not baulk at what it sees as Christianity's core principles. It is also Kierkegaardian in the way it will sacrifice everything for the sake of saying what it believes to be correct spiritual action.²³ Such an uncompromising position is pertinent to the research question –to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? – and suggests that, here too, his interpretation of Christianity does indeed represent a challenge.

3. Theological

3.1 The Church

Towards the end of the book, there is an episode where there is a link between the fictional man's expostulations against the ecclesiological status quo and his supposed Outsider status.

“We generally hear talk in church defending the political regime in power, without necessarily addressing its negative aspects or the various forms of greed and exploitation prevailing there. This...is the source of an objective alliance between the preachers and those who benefit from the system. Under these conditions, any preacher who calls on his listeners to struggle against exploitation, discrimination, and injustice...is going to poison his relationship with much of his flock...He runs the risk of becoming a voice in the wilderness, nothing more than a battered, rejected, and banished prophet.”²⁴

It is a passage that impugns some of the priesthood, while focusing on the causal nexus between standing out from the crowd and the consequential

²³ Kierkegaard sacrificed personal happiness for his uncompromising interpretation of Christianity.

²⁴ *TWOC*, pp.155-6.

Outsider status imposed on the speaker. And it is here where the man in the book and Khodr converge – both share a hatred of power and are committed to purifying spiritual messages from the pulpit and to raising the spiritual life of the community. As such, this again relates to the research question.

Khodr's grievance with the Church is that it has got its priorities wrong. Far from courting the rich and powerful, it should be helping the poor.

“Only her [the Church's] immersion in the problems of the world will give the Church, whose usual jargon seems so out of step with reality, the necessary power to speak intelligently about her social and political positions, and also about her theological issues.”²⁵

This berating of the Church may seem unnecessarily antagonistic to those on the inside, who would argue that the realities of life in the world impose restrictions, obstacles, and even compromise. But for Khodr and the man in the book, this is irrelevant – one is compelled to act despite the challenges; and compromise is out of the question. It suggests there is a disconnect between what the Church stands for and what it *is* in reality, something that encapsulates Khodr's own personal thoughts and was cited earlier. “The terrible thing is for the intelligent Orthodox to see the gap between Orthodoxy as an idea or an absolute and the real situation of the Church. How this wonderful Church in principle is so weak here and there.”²⁶ There is a note of despair in this statement. When it was made, he had had a long, active life promoting spiritual awareness and disseminating spiritual education through a tireless commitment to the Orthodox Youth Movement. Approximately thirty-five years prior to this statement, however, he has the fictional man proclaim a similar feeling, “A tragic gap continues to widen between our theological discussions of the nature of the Church and its fallen state in our own day.”²⁷ This relates to his criticisms of the structure of agendas and organisational concerns. In a more pugnacious tone, he has the fictional man make a pessimistic judgment.

²⁵ TWOC, pp.156-7.

²⁶ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013. See Chapter 5, p.168.

²⁷ TWOC, p.153.

“I expect nothing from those cautious institutions – secure in their wealth, their universities, and the charm of their rituals – that we call the Church...The Church must once again become capable of changing men and consoling them through the exemplary lives of saints who are their contemporaries.”²⁸

There is, in the above, a clear convergence between the views of the fictional man and Khodr with regard to the Church, and gives an indication of their unified character. First, the man in the book, like the Socratic gadfly, criticises not only the Church, but the institutions which are part of it. Second, with the reference to consoling humankind, there is an implicit recognition of the existential pressures exerted on human beings. Third, the opening words suggest someone who is in a state of exasperation and utterly at a loss about what to do about the Church. On the one hand, all of these sentiments can be traced to Khodr and his character – in other words, his existential religiosity – while, on the other hand, the combined, often caustic, statements represent the lament of the Outsider, who does not wield the necessary authority to affect change because he is ‘outside’ and largely kept at bay from the means to do so. All that is left for him is to cajole from the outside, to push the boundaries of understanding, and to encourage others to do so as well.

The tacit rule with regard to institutions, it is argued, is often for those on the inside either to couch whatever criticism they might have in moderate language, or to maintain a discrete silence on matters that cast the organisation in a bad light. When bad news seeps out, those on the inside tend to close ranks. The Outsider will often ignore such constraints and speak plainly. It is this type of reaction that defines the statements about the Church, whether made by the man in the book or by Khodr himself. Elsewhere in the book, the Church is reminded, through the fictional man, of Khodr’s views on Christ and his universal revelation. “No law encompasses

²⁸ Ibid. In the first translation, the same extract opens with, “I have come not to expect great goodness from this establishment...” (*TPOC*, p.65.) It is an arguably more emotive assessment.

Christianity and no creed limits it, even when we seek to define it as a symbol of faith. Christianity is a building with no roof.”²⁹

The reference to Christianity as a faith system that is not limited to a creed, or to symbols, could be said to have another interpretation. For Khodr, Christianity is not just for Christians. If Christ and Christianity are universals, restricting beliefs and *praxis* to a short expository edict is largely counterproductive; one cannot capture or codify, Khodr might argue, such an important message in all its manifestations. Neither can you exclusively resort to imagery and symbolism, for both images and symbols become redundant. This is redolent of Evagrius of Pontus and his treatise on the various stages of prayer;³⁰ and, of course, it reflects Dionysian apophatic theology in transcending, in our ascent to union, all manner of devices, which are used to package our religious expression.³¹ But it has an additional implication for interreligious and intra-Christian relations because it insinuates that behind appearance, we are all, spiritually, identical.

The aspect of Khodr’s Outsider persona that may appear radical is illustrated by a sequence referred to in Chapter 5 and relating to the commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.”³² Khodr has the narrator report how the man in the book wondered deeply about this particular commandment. “In the case of robbery, who is the true thief? Is it the lowly person who steals, or the powerful person from whom he has stolen?”³³ No one, it could be argued, who wishes not to affront authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical, or to

²⁹ TWOC, p.124. See Chapter 5 and Avakian, pp.118 and 122.

³⁰ In explicating Evagrius’ (Evagrius Ponticus, 345-399) description of prayer as a series of ascending stages, Louth cites Evagrius’ “contemplation of the Holy Trinity. In this state the soul returns to its original state of being without a body, of being naked (a state presumably only possible after death). Contemplation is here absolutely simple, absolutely imageless.” (Louth, A. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.105; the *Gnostic Chapters* of Diadochus of Photice (fifth century), who was describing Evagrius’ spiritual *praxis*.)

³¹ “My mind was not permitted to dwell on imagery so inadequate, but was provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world.” (Dionysius. ‘The Celestial Hierarchy.’ In: Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*, p.153.)

³² The same passage was used to elucidate the existential criterion of authenticity.

³³ TWOC, p.61.

confuse public opinion, would openly question a fundamental principle of social cohesion, for fear that it would be misunderstood, alienate people, and even compromise their own standing in society; but Khodr, in writing this, has no similar compunction. Such utterances, albeit through a fictional character, lends weight to Khodr's status as an Outsider and, in its spiritual context, emphasises his existential religiosity.

This is ostensibly a literary record of the fictional man's developing spirituality, but it would appear that the narrator's thoughts are in perfect accord with those of his friend. The narrator says that "[t]he ambiguity with which the clergy address this commandment ["Thou shalt not steal"] from one sermon to another is amoral and indecent on the part of religion."³⁴ The narrator goes on to call "edifices constructed...to convince humanity to follow certain codes of morality...nothing more than houses of prostitution."³⁵ There could be, he continues, no "more honourable act than to strike down this type of morality."³⁶ This will cause outrage, he freely admits, but the reader is instructed to ignore these cries; they are, in general, "the result of campaigns orchestrated by preachers in the pay of the "haves"...Alas, there are many false references to the Creator inspired by the devil in various places of worship. Preaching often goes courting the demons."³⁷ Returning to the man in the book, he says that, "My friend freed himself from this false religion, distancing himself from the prominent figures in his community who defended it. He realized that certain kinds of religion, which he rejected with all his might, could truly become an opiate for the people."³⁸

It could be said that this diatribe is unusual for its origination. If it came from the pen of an openly atheistic, anarchic critic of the Church, it could scarcely be more acerbic; that this is written by a leading Lebanese Orthodox theologian and religious thinker gives cause for wonder. First, the narrator questions a basic pan-historical, pan-cultural ethical proscription that helps to

³⁴ Ibid., pp.61-2.

³⁵ Ibid., p.62.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

undergird all human societies, describing those “edifices”, which have compelled people to subscribe to “this type of morality”, as nothing more than houses of ill repute. Then, in tones resembling a call to arms, he exhorts people to “strike down” this morality. This is preceded by a blatant accusation that some priests have played a part in shoring up an immoral interpretation of the commandment and are paid to do so by those who are comfortably endowed. He further claims that there are many bogus references to God that are inspired by the devil, presumably to support equally bogus arguments. Finally, he declares the man in the book broke away from this type of false religion, avoided prominent members of his community, and implies it was at this point the fictional man realised some religions, echoing Marxist ideology, are there just to offer contrived comfort and to numb the critical senses.

The purpose of this broadside is not simply to shake up the complacent masses, but to rupture traditional and establishment thinking, to disturb the convictions of the self-righteous, and to puncture the pomposity of those emboldened by rank and secular success. In short, to push barriers. As such, it may be considered slighting to the established Church, as well as radical and anarchic in its call to action. The section under discussion comes around the middle of the book. Towards its end, it is apparent the fictional man’s spleen has not abated. “I am in no doubt that God will send revolutions that would demolish this coquettish and proudly swaying church”.³⁹

3.2 The Priesthood

In Chapter 4, reference was made to Dannaoui’s claim that, since the civil war 1975-1990 ended, religion and politics are sufficiently intertwined that political affiliation can be surmised through religious identity and *vice versa*; and, it was argued, this tends to produce a religiosity that is more readily expressed through ritualistic observance than spiritual commitment. It was mooted that, in theory, the priest may be the best placed to correct this imbalance, but Khodr’s criticism of some priests, colourfully recounted in the book, questions

³⁹ TPOC, p.65.

whether this is possible on anything more than a modest scale. If this is the case, it will have an impact on the religiosity of the laity.

To criticise the Church is one thing, but the fictional man's criticism of the priesthood may be considered a more personal slight. Khodr's argument would be that humankind's true destiny, and the concomitant necessity to improve people's spirituality, is too vital a prospect to duck responsibility; as a result, a flurry of provocative statements appear in the book.⁴⁰ These references, which may include not just priests, but laity, additionally imply a need for the priest to educate his parishioners, but Khodr, through the man in the book, gives no quarter when it comes to calibrating priestly abilities. When responding to critics (most probably lay critics) of monks and monasticism, he says that their (the critics') idea of religion is not his. "They found in front of them some preachers' prattle, a description of a heaven and a hell that befit [*sic*] dwarfs."⁴¹ The man in the book is quite specific about what he finds below standard. "Many of our sermons, and the wishful thinking which accompanies them, are generally little more than chitchat."⁴² Collectively, these barbed comments about some of the priesthood suggest a vein of lacklustre spirituality in the Church and a low level of ability to correct and nurture the ill-informed spirituality in others.

These views, expressed in harsh terms, would more generally emanate from someone outside the Church. As it is, the criticism might engender three possibility reactions: first, it could create resentment in the Church hierarchy; second, attempts could be made to attribute such statements to an embittered individual, an Outsider, 'not one of us', thereby belittling or invalidating their content; third, it could marginalise the person who expressed it. On the other hand, Khodr, in his role as bishop, could be said to be very much part of the establishment with a responsibility for priests working under him. In this

⁴⁰ See, for example, Chapter 5, p.163, where the man in the book makes the statement that the Church can become a club for the simpleminded and a refuge for the mentally unstable.

⁴¹ *TPOC*, p.55. See Chapter 4, where the extract is slightly extended.

⁴² *TWOC*, p.157.

guise, he has dispensed advice to priests in softer tones. That said, it is clear the words spring from the same passionate source.

“Beware not to get used to worship until it becomes a routine repetition with its words on your tongue and without any flame behind these words...the depth of a person isn't in what he works and teaches. His depth is in his heart, and work flows from the heart...The heart often becomes lukewarm and the person becomes a victim of his appearance, of his speech or of his church social life or sometimes of his earthly things. Sometimes he might make Christ drown in the masterful rituals...You cannot continue the journey being lukewarm. Remember that the Lord spits the lukewarm out of his mouth...People always differentiate between the person that recites a lesson and another whose words come from a loving heart for his Lord.”⁴³

It is curious to reflect that, although the man in the book is not a cleric – or, indeed, has any overt connection with the Church beyond his being an assiduous Christian possessed of a profound spirituality, unswerving faith and an ascetic disposition – the critique which priests are subjected to in the book, could perhaps only have been composed by a fellow member of the clergy, in this case, a bishop. Hence, it is more straightforward to draw parallels between the views expressed in the book, which have already been highlighted – see, for example, “Many of our sermons...are generally little more than chitchat”⁴⁴ – and Khodr's own theories as they are presented here in an article from 2003. In addition, however, it is clear from another source that Khodr believes the spiritual qualities of priest is a process towards which parishioners have a responsibility. In it, he exhorts parishioners to act in an almost parental, let alone proprietorial, role. “Push him into education...Encourage him to continue studying until he masters his job...Push him into piety”. But, if you load him with “a heavy burden”, do not complain, they are advised, should he turn out to be not the greatest priest. Without such burdens, he could ascend to the heights of spirituality “and then

⁴³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘To The Priest’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 27 July, 2003.

⁴⁴ *TWOC*, p.157.

descend to you with the greatest love.”⁴⁵ Everyone, it would appear from this article, is ripe for goading and the target of blunt language with no consideration for any offence caused. It is the stance of the Outsider, who has no wish to curry favour with anyone, and thus it expresses his existential religiosity.

The berating of priests for inadequacies is only one perspective of priesthood. In the book, references are made to priestly diligence, how steadfastly the incumbent priest accommodates his parishioners and their incessant demands, so it is clear the fictional man does not paint all priests with the same brush. “I fear I have not said enough to you of the good things I know about the priests of this great Church of the East”.⁴⁶ This comes in the seventh letter,⁴⁷ in which the man in the book tells us of his involvement with Russian émigrés by means of the faith that drew them together in a common bond. He proceeds to tell of a priest from his homeland, his own spiritual father, who died in exile. He was a man of “great simplicity...he had never received a grand education...His speech was unrefined”.⁴⁸ And yet, it would appear that he was able to communicate effectively with intellectuals as well as “ordinary people”.⁴⁹ The man in the book is searching for what it is that defines the priest and his role. He finds it at the funeral of a priest (not, it seems, his spiritual father), and this epiphany enables him to realise that “the priest, at the end of his earthly course, is called to become himself a *prosporon* – an offering acceptable to God.”⁵⁰ In the same way, his spiritual father had become “the one who offers and who is himself the offering. Completely emptying himself, he gave himself to nourish his flock.”⁵¹ In this act of *kenosis*, the priest is the consummate Outsider, but, at the same time,

⁴⁵ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘Dispraising the Priest’. Mark Najjar (trans.). In: *Raiati*, 28 January, 2001.

⁴⁶ *TWOC*, p.134.

⁴⁷ This applies to the published version, *The Ways of Childhood*.

⁴⁸ *TWOC*, p.135.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.137. Translator’s italics. A *prosporon* is leavened bread, consumed as part of the eucharist within the Orthodox Church.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

is the one who is an integral part of the spiritual community. And with some similarity, the treatment of him is that of the Outsider in the world.

“A parish...can be tyrannical and unjust. These are the rules of the game: after they had proclaimed him king, the soldiers led Jesus to his death. Men slay those who serve as their kings...The priest thus becomes an object to be consumed.”⁵²

It was noted earlier how Khodr describes the priest as a central unit within the community. “The priest, even if he became a spiritual father, is one with every individual in his parish because they are all together a royal priesthood and a holy nation as Saint Peter says and they have together Christ’s love.”⁵³ In the above extract from the book, however, the priest is an Outsider, objectified, used and abused. Both, it is argued, can be true, especially as Khodr himself is, to some extent, a living embodiment of these two apparently contradictory positions. Khodr is, for many, a cynosure, a central figurehead, active within the community, hosting all manner of national and international visitors, much loved and respected; but there are also those who do not understand his spiritual language and judge him, perhaps as a result, an irrelevance, Christians who distance themselves because of his positive views on Islam as a religion, or because they consider him a loose cannon – ‘you never know what he is going to say next’.⁵⁴

While Khodr, in *The Priest and the People*, paints a picture of a priest united with the laity in their faith, the man in the book intimates a degree of separation caused in part by the irregular spiritual commitment of the people. It is made clear that the priest is sometimes alone in the church – he is said to be “[o]ften the only one inside the temple”⁵⁵ – and that he “becomes a companion of the holy books and icons”.⁵⁶ This sketch of the priest administering to those who have become secularised, attending church

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Khodr, *The Priest and the People*. See Chapter 6, p.235.

⁵⁴ For confirmation of this, see Chapter 3, pp.85-6, and Abou Mrad’s observation: “they want in all sorts of ways to get rid of him.”

⁵⁵ *TWOC*, p.138.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

irregularly for the sake of perfunctory ritualistic performance, highlights the possible level of religiosity in the Lebanese Orthodox community and brings to mind the research question. And yet, it would seem the priest, according to the man in the book, is well received in the community, comprehensively resorted to, and valued for his priestly functions. When he goes out into the world, he tends to all “he meets along the way: the sick, the needy, those suffering from mental illness of every sort.”⁵⁷ However, the people are seen as almost parasitical, feeding off the energy of the priest. “Woe to him if he [the priest] shows the slightest haste, impatience, or inattention! Every person considers himself the center of the universe and expects the priest to treat him as such.”⁵⁸

These extracts insinuate a confusing, but not wholly discordant image. The priest is sometimes presented as a man whose spirituality has become routine, who ministers to a lay community that is more likely to cleave to the secular denomination of Orthodoxy than its spiritual implications. But he is also seen as one who is central to communal life, who attends to the minutiae of sacerdotal responsibility within his community, and does so to the point where he is almost depleted of strength and energy. In some ways, such a man belongs; in other ways, he is an Outsider. This again would apply to Khodr, who is, to reiterate, part of Church establishment, and in other important ways outside it, excluding himself, consciously or otherwise, by the fervent nature of his denouncements and by the warp and weft of his existential religiosity. Such swingeing literary descriptions could, it is argued, only come from someone who is not fearful of retribution by earthly powers, because they have little or no hold over him – no one can sway the Outsider by bribe or threat to his standing. To suggest that the community’s spirituality may be lackadaisical may demonstrate perception and a desire to rectify, but the language, unmitigated in its harshness – accusing parishioners of sucking the life out of their priests, for example – is hardly flattering and sufficiently inflammatory to court controversy. The Outsider, however, does not care about the consequences of his speech or his actions if they are in the service

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of authentic spirituality. Kierkegaard suffered verbal attacks in print and physical assaults on the streets, but neither persuaded him to desist from criticising Christianity as it was practised. To refrain from this type of reaction is seen as compromising one's message, and to compromise is to accept and be accepted by the unacceptable; to do either, it is argued, is to relinquish one's role as a gadfly.

3.3 Spirituality

Khodr believes that, although the spiritual quest can be pursued in this world, spirituality and the world are nonetheless polar opposites. Follow the spiritual pathway, he might argue, and you will become alienated, an Outsider.

“I wanted to be part of the majority. I will not be a professor of literature any longer, nor a woodworker and dedicated union member. I will live here in great darkness, in the heart of great obscurity. In the depths of the shadows, I will continue to search for light.”⁵⁹

This passage was utilised earlier to illustrate the process of alienation.⁶⁰ However, as was asserted earlier, an inevitable consequence of alienation is to acquire the status of an Outsider.⁶¹ The passage depicts one who seeks out, not only exile from his homeland, but, once ensconced in a new home, an anonymous existence in the cavernous insularity of broadcasting. It could be said there is, in the opening sentence, an overt desire not to be an Outsider – “I wanted to be part of the majority” – and thus raises the question of whether an Outsider is born or made, whether being an Outsider is an innate disposition or whether the Outsider is formed by their beliefs. The man in the book wanted to be part of a majority, but fails at both ends of the social spectrum – a literary career at one end; at the other, a blue-collar employee dedicated to improving workers' rights. As was seen earlier, his vision of a better society was perceived by those with a political agenda to be conditional and to have validity only by a commitment to the party, by signing over spiritual autonomy; his vision also proved unacceptable to those “who wished

⁵⁹ TWOC, pp.89-90.

⁶⁰ Chapter 7, p.294.

⁶¹ This is not to suggest it is *the* inevitable consequence.

to limit eternity to the boundaries of the temple.”⁶² Having cut himself free of these ties and proved to himself that nothing now can make a claim on him apart from spiritual truth, he will remain buried in the recording studio, connected to the world through the microphone, but unconnected through anonymity and obscurity.

The retreat from society and from all that is familiar culminates in the fictional man’s eventual periodic seclusion in monasticism. “I need this endless silence and the nourishment of fasting and abstinence, which makes the monks here look like walking skeletons.”⁶³ Renouncement of the world reaches its apogee in monastic routine and in the monks’ physical appearance; it is these vessels of spirituality, who, through their renouncing of all things worldly, not only deny themselves the secular, but actually take on the physical embodiment of those who do not belong. They are, in brief, quintessential spiritual Outsiders.

Khodr’s formative student years in Paris were greatly influenced by the Russian émigrés and their thinking formed a developmental basis for his own theology, particularly of the ‘Other’;⁶⁴ yet, atypical of Outsiders, it sometimes appears difficult to identify him exclusively with any theological mode of thinking or to categorise him with any movement. The liturgy is an overarching feature of Orthodox worship; to deny its prominence is almost to deny a central beam of Orthodoxy. As if to prove his mercurial quality, how hard it is to predict his views, Khodr says “I am not always in agreement with the Russians, who so emphasised the importance of liturgy as a source of spiritual life.”⁶⁵ For him, the spiritual life is engendered, fomented, from within by means of the individual’s experiential spirituality, and only then is it ‘shared’ amongst the community. Khodr is, however, consistent, for his statement echoes his reservation about the pious generation’s concentration on

⁶² *TWOC*, p.68. See Chapter 7.

⁶³ *TWOC*, p.121.

⁶⁴ “I was attracted by the Russian mind; it was different from the French mind in which I was educated.” And again: “I loved Russian Orthodoxy.” (Interviews with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 and 26 October, 2013.) See also Avakian, pp.105 and 106.

⁶⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

scripture at the expense of focusing on the face of Christ, the “personal Christ”.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, by questioning a significant facet of Russian émigré thinking and Orthodox *praxis*, he proves he is very much his own man. Khodr’s reservation about the pious generation’s focus on the liturgy rather than on the face of Jesus, and his emphasis on the “personal Christ” as an experiential event governing the foundation of the spiritual life, resonates with assertions elsewhere. In writing about the Spirit’s role in energising the Church, von Balthasar cites II Corinthians 3:6. “The...new..covenant...is not in a written code, but in the Spirit, for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.”⁶⁷ Von Balthasar goes on to say that, “Just as Christ is not his own word, but the Father’s, so what the Spirit addresses to us in Scripture and preaching is not the literal word of Christ but Christ’s word in the language of the Spirit.”⁶⁸

4. Character & The Making Of An Outsider

A distinct sense of who the man in the book is comes across quite early. There are allusions to his singular nature and his fondness for solitude in the mountains – “Mountain life increased my friend’s isolation.”⁶⁹ Khodr’s book is about spiritual awakening, but, at the same time, its attested style is autobiographical, so a legitimate assumption would be that it relates to Khodr’s own spiritual journey.

A reader of the book will soon discern that the fictional man senses a difference between himself and others; and this affects the way he interrelates with others and the world, the more so as he progresses along the spiritual pathway. But even the common denominator of religion cannot, it seems, be relied on to manoeuvre him into some form of contiguity with others.

⁶⁶ Ibid., and see Chapter 5, pp.204-5, and Chapter 6, p.219.

⁶⁷ Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.261. The biblical reference is expanded here for additional clarity: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; // Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” (II Corinthians 3:5-6, Authorised Version, italics in text.)

⁶⁸ Von Balthasar, p.262.

⁶⁹ *TWOC*, p.35.

“My friend was sure of one thing: If men of religion are numerous, the people of God are few.⁷⁰ His nearness to God distanced him from his own, and even from many of those who, although they worked alongside him for the sake of the gospel, turned out to be people of the world.”⁷¹

The phrase about the fictional man’s nearness to God and how it distances him from “his own”, that is, making him an Outsider, is revealing because, other than underscoring the fictional man’s belief that spirituality is a difficult and demanding commitment – “God should be the air we breathe; he should fill us with his presence”⁷² – where only a “few” succeed, it brings into focus the research question and suggests an answer. The spirituality which is being subliminally intimated in this extract entails, it is argued, existential religiosity; for, to pursue and dedicate oneself to God in this way, implies a firm, inflexible, high-octane spirituality that questions one’s identity, requires existential authenticity, demands relationality, invites alienation, can only be individualistic, and imposes the nomenclature ‘Outsider’. Bearing in mind the autobiographical nature of the book, the passage reflects Khodr’s innermost thoughts,⁷³ and thus is expressive of his own existential religiosity. As such, incorporating the above facets, which embody the status of Outsider, it would indeed challenge the religiosity of the Lebanese Orthodox.

Khodr himself does not disguise the complexities of the spiritual journey; the way is not straightforward. “You see, the difficulty with the spiritual life is that we don’t know, we never know, whether we are near to God or not. We may be mistaken. But we have to try always to go further.”⁷⁴ It was put to him that

⁷⁰ This is not, of course, unique. Samsel, for example, cites St. Paul who “speaks of men having “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom 12:6)”. (Samsel, P. ‘A Unity with Distinctions: Parallels in the Thought of St Gregory Palamas and Ibn Arabi’. J. S. Cutsinger, (ed.). In: *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*. Indiana: World Wisdom, 2002, p.217.)

⁷¹ *TWOC*, p.46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁷³ “The author does not merely give us his opinions or present a position, but rather he reveals his vision”. ‘About This Book’. In: Khodr, *TWOC*, p.7. See Chapter 1, p.7.

⁷⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

this seemed tough. He concurred. “Yes, of course it is tough.”⁷⁵ Following a pattern of devout religious observance does not, in his view, guarantee success: “who knows whether he is received by God. You pray, fast, you do feel you are near to God, you are received by him, but it’s not really true.”⁷⁶ Later on, he talks about the true mystics of Islam teaching us “to approach God in himself and not through theology. I’m not against theology. I deal with it in my professional life, but there is the danger of knowledge in general...To speak of God is one thing, to know God is another thing.”⁷⁷ Highlighting Muslim mysticism as an instructional spiritual benchmark, while questioning accepted (Christian) routes to God and the ‘purpose’ of theology, places him outside traditional modes of Christian thinking.

Khodr’s own spiritual way suggests that religion can be crudely divided into two camps: those who practise it by rote at preordained junctures in their routine; and those who subordinate all else to a search for experiential spiritual truth – “Truth must prevail above everything else, because only truth proves truly effective.”⁷⁸ Such commitment might include martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer,⁷⁹ or it might mean simply those who, by their spiritual inflexibility, distance themselves as Outsiders. Either interpretation, it is argued, epitomises a faith that is described here as existential religiosity. Those who are close to Khodr⁸⁰ intimate a man who is possessed of an unflinching commitment to Christ, and a fierce attachment to his faith. Even the threat of assassination has not deterred him from speaking out and expressing his views. It is a religiosity and a religious position to which the descriptor ‘Outsider’ is more than apt; but it also represents a faith that once again questions the religiosity of the Lebanese Orthodox community. If his Outsider status, as an integral part of his existential religiosity, places him outside the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *TWOC*, p.67.

⁷⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor, who dovetailed his work as a theologian with concerted opposition to Hitler. He was hanged by the Nazis in Flossenbürg concentration camp.

⁸⁰ Abou Mrad, Khairallah, Wehbe are cited as the ones with whom this work has had correspondence.

boundaries of establishment Orthodoxy and beyond establishment Christianity in general, then it can mean he is perfectly positioned to relate positively to interfaith and intra-faith communities. The statement, “If men of religion are numerous, the people of God are few” suggests a meta-community that pushes at barriers, but also transcends conventional religious boundaries. In other words, a community of people who practise their spirituality in the vein of existential religiosity. All this suggests that the few would be, by definition, Outsiders. It could be argued, however, that there are not many who would happily subscribe to being labelled an Outsider, whether in the Lebanese Orthodox community or elsewhere; as a result, and with regard to the research question, religious communities, whether Orthodox or of another denomination, are fundamentally challenged. As if to corroborate this supposed divide between those authentic “few” and the majority of other believers, the man in the book comments how the Christian community “often exhibits extreme weakness; entire generations of Christians remain hopelessly sterile.”⁸¹ It echoes Khodr’s sadness at how “this wonderful Church in principle is so weak here and there.”⁸²

If the flagging commitment of the Christian community suggests the need is ripe for spiritual revival, a revival similar to that of the Orthodox Youth Movement, Khodr expresses uncertainty about the efficacy of such an endeavour, implying that the success of revival is tentative and of doubtful durability.

“There is no spiritual revival on earth that is certain for good. There are those that awakened and stayed awake all their lives and others who went out. No one knows the mystery of the presence of the spirit or the mystery of the “death” of...sensitiveness to the Spirit.”⁸³

⁸¹ *TWOC*, p.152.

⁸² Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.

⁸³ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Spirit and the Blood’. (Unaccredited translation.) In: *an-Nahar*, 30 October, 1999. In discussion, Khodr agrees that there is a current need for a form of spiritual revival. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 22 October, 2013.)

This somewhat pessimistic, or realistic, assertion is a natural extension of one of the book's themes: "everything fails in the end. The achievements of history wilt like grass in the desert...Christian utopias, from the Middle Ages to...the Second World War, have practically all disappeared."⁸⁴ In discussing the impact of his writings on people, he is asked whether the role of the Christian is to shock people and he agrees that it is; when asked whether the Church is doing enough of that, he replies no. Pressed for an explanation, Khodr says this is because the Church wants to keep things as they are.⁸⁵ This suggests that renewal – which can sometimes be radical – and conservatism, while being polar opposites, do not necessarily cancel each other out; it also fleshes out Abou Mrad's description of Khodr's theology as "liberal conservatism" and gives vent to his existential religiosity – that is, a vision that is seemingly contradictory, but is yet an apposite representation of the Outsider. Later in the interview, it is suggested to him that there might be a need today for a spiritual revival because the one instigated by the OYM has not endured. He agrees, adding weight to the view that nothing lasts and that "[t]here is no spiritual revival...that is certain for good."

In another article, entitled 'Spiritual Renewal', he asserts that a branch of the Baptists posit the notion that "God comes to a person only once during his life and saves him and this way he becomes saved forever." Khodr disregards this, and instead argues that our relationship with Christ, the Saviour, is jeopardised if we cleave to sinful desires. He describes how "Paul tells us: "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling". We are saved through hope, but salvation is not a passport that lets us enter the heavens automatically." Thus, renewal comes through permanent asceticism, and salvation promises a steep climb, during which we are buffeted by the storms of our wrongful desires. As well as being an example of Khodr's existential religiosity, this brings to the fore the research question – to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? When measured against the steepness of Khodr's spiritual ascent – a

⁸⁴ *TWOC*, p.67.

⁸⁵ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 22 October, 2013.

steepness that, on its own, places him outside what might be regarded as standard spiritual praxis – the response clearly suggests that it does present a challenge.

Khodr's criticism and castigation of the Church have already been cited, as has Abou Mrad's assertion that he is still, even today, making enemies. The autobiographical facility of the book grants Khodr (the person), through the narrator (a fictional character), the opportunity to speak out unhindered and with scant regard for people's feelings.

“The church is always catching her breath. Anxious not to abandon her members who are spiritually lagging behind, she neglects the times and remains filled with confusion on account of the disgrace of supporting her children.

“The weaklings had become the norm, and my friend learned to expect the worst abominations in the most trivial matters from the priests and their flocks. Troubled by the spread of cowardice among the leadership, he considered the petty-minded and their rise to power to be the fruit of a deliberate will, a satanic manipulation.”⁸⁶

The Church, it is inferred, is caught in a double bind: similar to the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*,⁸⁷ the Church is rushing about trying to keep up, but nonetheless always seems a few steps behind where it wants to, or should, be. The implication is that, faced with the task of nurturing their flock, the Church hierarchy, including some of the priesthood, dither where they should be decisive. The passage also suggests the Church indulges the laity, rather than providing strong leadership, and, an additional extrapolation, it suggests individuals are preoccupied with careerist ambitions. The reference to “satanic manipulation” is typical of the radical Outsider determined to unseat the complacent.

Over and above these considerations, such an outburst corroborates Abou Mrad's belief that Khodr is seen as “a burden on the Church; and they want in

⁸⁶ *TWOC*, p.47.

⁸⁷ Carroll, Lewis. *The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll*. London: Chancellor Press, 1982.

all sorts of way to get rid of him.”⁸⁸ Khodr, through the narrator, once again launches into a tirade that indicts the priesthood, the spiritual flaccidity of the laity, and a Church hierarchy too focused on personal advancement. For someone who feels they are in his firing line, it may inspire resentment and even anger. This is the character of Khodr the Outsider, but it is not intended to hurt and instead comes from a passion for spiritual rectitude, as he sees it. The gulf that opens up between Khodr and others finds literary expression in the statement, alluded to earlier, and made by the narrator when he describes the fictional man’s character. “[T]hey would interpret his enthusiasm as anger and his anger as animosity. They did not always realize that it hurt him to throw the truth in their faces. They would say that he was a troublemaker, an outrageous man.”⁸⁹ When asked in discussion whether Khodr has ever felt he does not fit in, he replies that he has felt “misunderstood...not agreeable to many people.” Asked why, he says that he believes many people “are not surrendered to truth,” and that he himself was “a defender of truth”.⁹⁰

Khodr’s perception of women may appear outdated, and it can be seen that the fictional man’s experience of women traces a similar pattern. And yet, in other ways, their regard – that is, Khodr’s and the fictional man’s – for women has a modern vein running through it. For the man in the book, and for Khodr, the image of women coincides with the Platonic Ideal of Beauty, in which respect and reverence play major parts when relating to Woman. Transposed from lofty ideals into general application, this could be said to run counter to a tradition in both the East and the West of objectifying women, a tradition that feminism has in more recent times set out to amend and resist.⁹¹ Across many parts of the Middle East, a predominant patriarchal society could be said to hold sway, a tendency which might explain the subordination women sometimes experience. This, according to the narrator, would seem to be not the case with the man in the book.

⁸⁸ Interview with Nicholas Abou Mrad, University of Balamand, 29 October, 2013. See Chapter 3.

⁸⁹ *TWOC*, p.104. See Chapter 4, p.94, and Chapter 8, p.327.

⁹⁰ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.

⁹¹ The ‘romanticised’ view Khodr and the man in the book have of women could be said, however, to be another example of objectifying women, albeit from an idealistic perspective.

“He had considered women his equals [*sic*] since his early youth, social conventions of the East notwithstanding. No philosophical theory underpinned his refusal to submit to the sexist customs of his surroundings. His behavior was instinctive and originated in his childhood home, where he naturally rubbed shoulders with his sisters’ friends.”⁹²

It is a statement about an individualist who stands outside the prevailing current; it is also an attitudinal stance that does not, it would seem, derive from an eclectic mix of academic social theory and gender politics. Rather, it grew out of his experience of life in the domestic home; nonetheless, it suggests that he was prone to behaving differently and risking the disapproval or derision of his peers. It also reiterates the question whether nurture or nature incubates the development of the Outsider.

There comes a passage in the book where the fictional man is described as an Outsider in all but name.

“Perhaps my friend left like a stranger among us. Here and there, he was indeed treated as such. First he distanced himself from literature, then from the world of labor. He did not hold any bitterness. Wherever he went, he had no expectation of being welcomed. A man torn between an environment which oppresses him and the celestial world – his true homeland – from which he comes has no choice; he can only watch the beauty arising from the heart of dawn.”⁹³

It sums up the Outsider status. Not only is he regarded in most social settings as someone who does not fit in, the narrator believes the fictional man felt a stranger amongst his closest friends. The narrator surmises a cause for his friend’s failure to make a connection with people and, in general, seem ill-suited to the world: it is because, spiritually, he believes that this world is not his home, that he belongs to the celestial realm, and thus, the inference follows, he is thoroughly out of place and at a loss in society. It is clear that the spiritual pathway, seen through the lens of social etiquette, is not easy.

⁹² *TWOC*, p.69.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.87-8.

In parts, the fictional man is described in some psychological depth and, bearing in mind its autobiographical quality, the character breakdown takes on a confessional tone blended with a strong sense of self-justification. Such behavioural quirks as have already been cited – his perceived ‘anger’ that is merely passionate enthusiasm; his inability to fit in even with friends – emphasise social waywardness and a general ‘clumsiness’ when it comes to social interaction. Deracination in the form of self-imposed exile, however, proves not to be a panacea. “He did not become any more transparent in the eyes of his new European associates...his eastern demeanour remained an unfathomable mystery to them...They did not perceive my friend’s dreamy, lyrical tendencies”.⁹⁴ This descriptive thumbnail offers further confirmation of the fictional man’s character – he has a ‘poetic’ way about him, which probably lends him an air of detachment. It is a description that coincides with Khodr, not only with his temperament and character, but with his own writing style, which, even in translation, possesses a poetic tonal rhythm, together with passionate and esoteric phraseology that, similar to Paul Klee, tries to make visible the invisible.⁹⁵ It is the style of the Outsider, the detached man, who does not belong.

5. Khodr & The Man In The Book: Character Conflation

It has been demonstrated above how the man in the book and George Khodr share a number of common character traits; this prompts a series of questions about Khodr the man. Why is he such a loner and why so difficult to tie down? Why is this book so fiery in parts and suggestive of intolerance? Why is he possessed of a character that is at once kaleidoscopic and, at times, contradictory? This is not a formal biographical study, but attempting answers will perhaps give greater depth to an understanding of him and his spirituality.

To say that Khodr stands outside the core establishment may appear at first to be an unhappy consequence of his perceived waywardness and unpredictability. However, it has been argued here that such independent thinking may be viewed as a positive. The uniqueness of Khodr was

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.105.

⁹⁵ See Chapter 7, p.309.

something Khairallah was keen to stress. While acknowledging that there are others, who are open-minded and tolerant, Khairallah says there is something distinctive about Khodr's style. He (Khairallah) has met Hans Küng and admires his work and his openness; bearing in mind his admiration for Khodr's writings, he nonetheless praises Küng's literary eloquence. And yet, for Khairallah, Khodr has some additional quality that sets him apart.⁹⁶

This is not to say Khodr is somehow endowed with a congenital and especial spiritual quality, which is void of the doubt and spiritual weaknesses that plague other people. Khodr himself has been subject to the vicissitudes of human faith. When newly ordained, and in the middle of celebrating the eucharist, he suddenly had doubts about the very act of eucharistic consecration. Suppose, he wondered, the consecrating of the bread and wine is simply a matter of gestures, symbolically carried out, but with no actual transubstantiation. This doubt had a profound effect and he was unable to celebrate mass for two weeks.⁹⁷

This episode was given cursory acknowledgement by Khodr when it was raised with him,⁹⁸ and, while admitting the event, he dismissed its significance, strongly implying that it was over in an instant.⁹⁹ Whatever the

⁹⁶ Interview with As'ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.

⁹⁷ Khairallah, A. E. 'The Way of the Cross as a Way of Life: Metropolitan Georges Khodr's Hope in Times of War', p.484; and interview with As'ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013. Khairallah interviewed Khodr in Geneva in November 1993 and it was during the interview that Khodr told him of his experience. This compares to other instances of crises of faith, or spiritual watersheds, such as St John of the Cross and his *Dark Night of the Soul*, his commentary on the poem *En Una Noche Oscura*. Another example is Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, who experienced a circuitous route before fully embracing Catholicism, spirituality, and, eventually, the life of a recluse. See for example, Merton, T. *The Seven Storey Mountain*. London: SPCK, 2009.

⁹⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 22 October, 2013.

⁹⁹ Khairallah expresses doubt as to whether Khodr has ever written about this event in his life. (Interview with As'ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.) It may be that Khodr viewed the incident as a sign of personal weakness, and, as such, does not wish to draw attention to it. Wehbe believes that, as a young man, Khodr experienced atheism. (Wehbe, p.44.) When this was put to Khodr in discussions, he gave the impression that this was not full-blooded atheism and more an intellectual experience. He attributes it to the French way of thinking,

reason for Khodr's underplaying of the event, the indisputable fact of its occurrence is of fundamental significance here when piecing together a theological profile, for it reveals the existential doubt which can afflict clergy as well as congregants. Existential doubt, enervated faith – these are, it is argued, natural accoutrements of the human condition.¹⁰⁰ The assertion that doubt inheres within the human condition is relevant to the discussion of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane that was raised earlier,¹⁰¹ doubt, it is argued, being what Jesus was wrestling with as he prayed.

Earlier, Khodr was referred to as an artist, and it is clear he is a master of the poetic idiom.¹⁰² It is perhaps the artist in him that forms his temperament and gives him an edge; it fuels his passion, for passion is what drives the artist. Artists, it is contended, are often given to passionate outpourings, which can be at odds with conventional behaviour. The reasons for this are arguably manifold, but the following may have credence. Dealing with the depiction of an ethereal reality can be at once frustrating, troubling, or, when it is successful, as disturbing as a seismic tremor. McGowan, in writing about E. L. Doctorow, says that for him (Doctorow), “art...is about discovery.”¹⁰³ This could be said to underscore the element of uncertainty in art and, it is

whereby one explores everything. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 10 January, 2013.)

¹⁰⁰ As recorded earlier, (Chapter 7, Fn.119), there is perhaps a parallel with Khodr's doubt in al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the pre-eminent Islamic theologian. The latter underwent a spiritual crisis – Watt uses the term “breakdown” – which was a watershed in his spiritual development, causing him to realise the limitations of philosophy and to give greater credence to the Sufi, mystical dimension of religiosity. The “psychological or spiritual crisis” led to “an inability to utter words – [and] forced him to abandon lecturing.” (Watt, W. M. *Al-Ghazali. The Muslim Intellectual*. Chicago: ABC International Group, 2002, p.127 and then pp.133-143, *passim*.)

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 4.

¹⁰² It is difficult to read his writings, allowing for translation, and not to admit the poetic tendencies of his word pictures. “Our task is simply to follow the tracks of Christ perceptible in the shadows of other religions.” (Khodr, *Christianity in a Pluralistic World*, p.128.) While effulgent with his belief in the value of other faiths, the turn of phrase is stylistically captivating. These literary skills are lauded elsewhere. Khairallah cites the example of Ihsan Abbas, his erstwhile professor, whom he met in Amsterdam in 1978. Abbas, a Palestinian, said that whenever Khodr writes about Palestine or about Islam, “it shakes me to my bones” (Khairallah's words.) Not one of us, Abbas added, can write like that. (Interview with As'ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October, 2013.)

¹⁰³ McGowan, ‘Ways of Worldmaking: Hannah Arendt and E. L. Doctorow Respond to Modernity’, p.169.

maintained, similar can be applied to religion and the spiritual quest.¹⁰⁴ In both cases, capturing the ‘will-o’-the-wisp’ presence can be exhausting and exhilarating. The precariousness of the artist’s endeavours – whether they can plumb the depths of what it is they wish to depict; whether they can trust unique, inspirational, intuitive ideas that lead them tangentially off the beaten track into the undergrowth of contradiction and illogicality; to make visible, as Klee asserts, the invisible – can make the artist (poet, painter, writer, composer) a difficult companion.¹⁰⁵ The spiritual person can face similar challenges,¹⁰⁶ and can often be similarly flawed.¹⁰⁷ Reaching out, on one’s spiritual pathway, to the apophatic God, to describe the ineffable, can be difficult and problematic;¹⁰⁸ prayer, spiritual commitment, doubt exacerbated by apparent contradictions, awareness of inner failings on the road of asceticism, can all dog the saint as well as the sinner, and can wear the patience thin.¹⁰⁹ Khodr appears, in some ways, to straddle both the artistic and the spiritual.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ An allusion to this is made in Chapter 4, p.95.

¹⁰⁵ There is the example of the often tempestuous relationship between Gauguin and Van Gogh.

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix A, Fn.80, for literary examples of suffering and experiential spirituality that include *The Dark Night of the Soul* by John of the Cross (1542-1591), *Interior Castle* an account of the spiritual journey by Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), *The Night* by Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), and *St Agnes’ Eve* by Lord Tennyson (1809-1892).

¹⁰⁷ It may be pertinent to add that Van Gogh initially trained for the priesthood.

¹⁰⁸ Bulgakov claims that Orthodoxy is “bound up with visions of the other world”. (Bulgakov, S. N. *The Orthodox Church*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988, p.145.) See also Meyendorff, who explores the Byzantines’ theological conception of Truth. “The really important implication of this attitude concerns the very notion of Truth, which is conceived, by the Byzantines, not as a concept which can be expressed adequately in words or developed rationally, but as God Himself – personally present and met in the Church in His very personal identity. Not Scripture, not conciliar definitions, not theology can express Him fully...No human language...is fully [his emphasis] adequate to Truth itself, nor can it exhaust it. Consequently, Scripture and the Church’s magisterium cannot be considered as the only “sources” of theology...the true theologian is free to express his own immediate encounter with the Truth. This is the authentic message maintained most explicitly by the Byzantine “mystical” tradition of Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory Palamas.” (Meyendorff, J. *Byzantine Theology. Historical trends and doctrinal themes* London: Mowbrays, 1975, p.11.) Personal experiential spirituality is thus justified and prioritised.

¹⁰⁹ Describing monastic spirituality, which he finds so uplifting, the fictional man says, “This experience can be apprehended neither by science nor by philosophy, since it can never become an object of analysis. It resembles delirium or insanity.” (*TWOC*, p.128.) As such, it opens the way to suffering.

¹¹⁰ It is perhaps not fanciful to correlate the theatricality of the artist with some expressions of religiosity. The author, Kate Saunders, draws attention to this in her

But it is the artistic temperament as well as the artistic processes that offer a causal nexus to his existential religiosity as it integrates with his understanding of relationality, in particular his theology of the 'Other'.

Not only does the narrator talk about the natural beauty of Lebanon, and of his friend's love of painting and music,¹¹¹ Khodr too is an 'artist' in the way he sees God in the world,¹¹² although it is a dissimilar process. For the *bona fide* artist, the material world of reality and the ethereal world of imagination conspire to feed the artist's appetite for the poetic expression of recreated images. For Khodr, the natural world and the human world of the 'Other' are suffused with a divine presence and become manifestations of the living God; like shafts of sunlight, they enter his consciousness, enlivening his spirituality, enabling his re-creation of Christ in the world and within himself, and carrying him along the theotic pathway. Both the artist and Khodr the Outsider are possessed of the creative germ; the artist must create in order personally to *experience* a deeper reality; Khodr must *experience* the divine energies within the world because they are the pabulum on which his own spirituality feeds, bringing alive within himself a vibrant sense of the numinous.¹¹³ One can only create art by experiencing something; one can only appreciate or understand a work of art by entering somewhat into the experience of the artist. Equally, Khodr might say, one can only experience God, by opening oneself to him as

Lent talk. She provides a connection between the pomp and ceremony of artistic performance with Anglo-Catholicism and the Oxford Movement, or Tractarians, of the nineteenth century, with which Cardinal John Henry Newman was associated. She also traces the colourful vestments that were adopted by the Anglican Church to this lavish nineteenth century display of Anglo-Catholic theatrical spirituality. (BBC Radio 4, Lent Talks, first broadcast, 4 March, 2015.)

¹¹¹ This was seen in Chapter 4 – the fictional man's appreciation of landscapes, reflected in his love of Lebanon, and his love of Gauguin and Wagner. The latter two represent artists who are clearly favoured by Khodr. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.) In Chapter 6, allusion was made to a poet, confirmed by Khodr to be Adonis, the Syrian born Lebanese poet. (Ibid., 24 October, 2013.)

¹¹² God has been seen as the ultimate Artist in his role as Creator. See, for example, Archimandrite Vasileios. "One comes to live and believe that God is love and perplexing beauty, that the unveiling of His love is a revelation of beauty, and that His beauty is an offering, freely given from the bounty of His goodness. In this way one comes to know God the Creator as Benefactor and Artist." (Archimandrite Vasileios. Abbot of Iveron Monastery, Mount Athos. *Beauty & Hesychia in Athosite Life*. Montreal: Alexander Press, 1999, p.12.)

¹¹³ It could be said that the artist experiences first; this event then stimulates and inspires their innate creativity to re-create. The point is, arguably, the same.

he is manifested in the world, by acknowledging the presence of God in the 'Other', and by utilising one's own inner divinity personally to experience this witness; in whatever communication we have with God, it is, to use common parlance, a two-way street: we must 'talk', but we must also listen. Just as individuality means we cannot instruct someone else to love a work of art and we cannot hope to love, feel, a work of art vicariously, so we cannot communicate with God unless we personally, through a process of experiential spirituality, experience God through communion with the 'Other'.

Such a rendering is important for intra-Christian understanding and for interfaith dialogue. The common denominator, and key element, in both spheres of activity (that is, with the artist and with the seeker after experiential spirituality) is a recognition of the value of diversity. When comparing different painters, the onlooker can be confronted by dissimilar techniques and visual interpretations. There is, for example, an artistic divide separating the style of Gainsborough from the style of Van Gogh. Are they demonstrating different skills or are they seeing something different? Whether technique or deliberate action is responsible; or whether technique stems from an unconscious inclination (for instance, a 'troubled mind'), or individual physiological conditions,¹¹⁴ are considerations that lie beyond this study. However, these contrasting styles suggest there is more than one way of interpreting or processing reality and Reality. And so it is, for Khodr, with (experiential) spirituality. His conviction that Christ is not just for Christians affirms this sentiment. "Does the Spirit not blow where it chooses?",¹¹⁵ asks Khodr, and it is not so much a question as a *challenge* to Christians. Maybe the artists are seeing the same reality, but from dissimilar perspectives and interpretations; if so, each differing style is validated, important, even essential for a fuller, rounder understanding, an understanding that stems from a pushing of barriers. It is similar to what Williams is arguing.¹¹⁶ This is why Christians,

¹¹⁴ Monet's impressionist technique has been attributed to his bad sight, exacerbated by cataracts; likewise, and to some extent, Turner.

¹¹⁵ *TWOC*, p.53 and John 3:8.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 1, Fn.51, where, in the discussion of Williams' book, reference is made to our search for truth, and how "we cannot leave our superficially clear and definitive perceptions alone...but elaborate and reconfigure, looking constantly for

Khodr might say, do not have the monopoly on truth and cannot ring-fence spirituality or ghettoise Christ; in short, they do not exclusively man the switchboard to God. The Truth, he is implying, can be written on different vellums and can come bound between different covers.

Towards the end of the book, there comes a *paraenesis*, urging people, if they wish to be “sincere and authentic...to demystify the situations confronting us.

“...Every aspect needs to be studied, without exception. Inspiration may come where we least expect it, for sociological knowledge is not the exclusive domain of the specialists. We must...[be] ready to accept even what is expressed by rebels, often in curt language lacking refinement, far removed from the philosophical and intellectual categories popular in what we too hastily call ‘polite society’. Such a confrontation may disrupt our emotional equilibrium...But we must make the effort if we are to remain honest with ourselves and our convictions.”¹¹⁷

It is a call to understand the world from a Christian perspective within the framework of spirituality. The extract shows the man in the book encouraging people not to combat modernity, but rather to see its relevance to beings made in the image of God. It is also a plea to listen to those who may be Outsiders (“rebels”), who defy compartmentalisation and may speak in forthright language – “I am in no doubt that God will send revolutions that would demolish this coquettish and proudly swaying church”¹¹⁸ – but do so for entirely honourable reasons. The extract above comes straight from Khodr’s heart and echoes his own rebelliousness and feelings on modernity. Although issuing the caveat that the lauding of technology and science in general is a new religion, Khodr is clear that “technology...is good in itself”¹¹⁹ and

new relations that make new and enlarged sense of what we perceive.” (Williams, R. *The Edge of Words*, p.122.) Williams emphasises the importance of different perspectives: “critical engagement with the meanings of texts seeks ‘not truth but difference’; if everyone agrees with you, there is nothing more to do or say.” (Ibid., p.91.)

¹¹⁷ *TWOC*, p.154.

¹¹⁸ *TPOC*, p.65

¹¹⁹ Khodr, *Idols*.

“[k]nowledge is not a danger”.¹²⁰ Khodr has written about adapting to the new, albeit in a spiritual context; and, by doing so, he demonstrates an acute understanding of people’s natural attachment to the past and, in some cases, their almost instinctive aversion to what is novel. “Every human being is inclined toward the old, since the new disturbs as it requires responsibility, namely the will to change, similar to being born anew”.¹²¹ In ‘Globalization’, while indicating there is potential danger in the advance of Western generated modernisation, he is, nonetheless, positive about technology. “Christians were afraid...[of] modern science and thought that it contradicts the Scripture. Now, they [are] reconciled with science. We are not technology’s enemies; we adopt it as long as it is ethical.”¹²² The key word here is ethical. Khodr welcomes the new, but not on any terms. Modernity should not occlude individuality and must conform to spiritual strictures. It is an accurate reflection of the fictional man, who welcomes technology, but is mindful of the possible negative repercussions – the ‘colonialism’ of Western commercialism, the overshadowing of individual spirituality. It is a fine balance and, once more, Khodr may be said to be fulfilling the characteristics of the Outsider by defying categorisation and belonging neither to the modernists nor to the traditionalists.

6. Conclusion

As was stated at the outset of this chapter, the other five existential criteria – identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality – flow together in a confluence to be subsumed in the character of the Outsider. Identity is established by the theological assertion that we are made in the image of God, but also as an asseveration of our individual uniqueness in the ‘eyes’ of God. This realisation of being made in the image of God sets each one of us on the spiritual pathway to theosis, our authentic personhood; while our spiritual progress on the theotic journey is gauged, in part, by our relationality with the ‘Other’. By recognising our authentic identity and the need to

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Khodr, Bishop George. ‘The Old Has Passed Away’. Sylvie Avakian-Maamarbashi (trans.). In: *an-Nahar*, 7 February, 2009.

¹²² Khodr, *Globalization*.

progress towards it, however, the person must turn their back on secularism and secular ways, which leads to self-imposed alienation augmented by a sense of being alienated. The result potentiates the Outsider.

At this point, however, it must be emphasised that what is being discussed here is the *spiritual* Outsider, that is, someone defined by their existential religiosity, who is compelled to stand outside secular activity because the secular pathway diverges from the spiritual pathway. The Outsider, as has been recorded throughout, is uncompromising, and it is this that defines existential religiosity, a religiosity that is not so much about someone's piety, but about how they exercise piety and faith. The Outsider, as a practitioner of existential religiosity, will not shrink from making what might be perceived as unpalatable observations, or from speaking out against established institutions like the Church or government; neither will they remain silent on core principles, if they believe these principles are being misinterpreted or misrepresented. They are, in secular terms, like a remorseless journalist ferreting out facts that may upset vested interests or, generally, the establishment. The fictional man's occasional castigation of the priesthood and the Church are illustrations of the Outsider's compulsion to speak out regardless.

This sketch of the Outsider suggests a figure at once difficult, volatile and unpleasant. Why is the (spiritual) Outsider like this? An answer was posited above when Khodr was compared to the artist, but it may also be conjectured that the cause of the Outsider's awkward character lies, partly, in their conviction that too much is at stake spiritually: our identity as human beings and as individual persons; our authentic uniqueness to God; our relationship with the 'Other'; our need to alienate ourselves from worldly distractions for the sake of our theotic destiny. Vociferously speaking out, when others might be more reserved, or even silent, is what partly constitutes existential religiosity, and hence the Outsider openly condemns what they see as spurious spirituality or spirituality that is weak and flaccid, using extreme language to press their point. On the other hand, it is in this context that the Outsider shows an empathetic strain, acknowledging that existence is replete

with existential pressures such as anxiety, fear of the unknown, abandonment, and loss. Neither do they hide the fact that the authentic spiritual pathway is a hard road to follow. Khodr acknowledges this,¹²³ but also refers to the simplicity of Christian faith as exemplified by unsophisticated followers of Christ. Equally, he implicitly recognises that closeness to God can be fleeting, uncertain, almost will-o'-the-wisp. Sometimes, Khodr says, you “feel you are near to God, you are received by him, but it’s not really true.”¹²⁴

The spiritual life in general would seem to be suggestive of Outsider status, advocating, according to Khodr and the man in the book, a rejection of worldly values and shining a light on the often dark, existential reality of faith. It is at this point Khodr intimates that Sufi mystics practise an authentic spirituality, teaching us “to approach God in himself and not through theology.”¹²⁵ Again, it is the Outsider, who, as a deeply spiritual and committed Christian, feels it is perfectly legitimate to point to another religion as an example of authentic spirituality, thereby effectively marginalising traditional Christian practice. In summation, Khodr’s openness to Muslims and to the Islamic faith, his love of the Qur’an, and his lauding of Muslims’ spirituality; his hatred of power and suspicion of politics; his criticism of the Church, priests, and lay spirituality – these pronouncements set him apart from the mainstream and demonstrate his existential religiosity.

The Church is seen as an organisational body of institutionalised Christianity, not a fact that is necessarily bad in itself, and, indeed, as intimated earlier, it would be difficult to administer Christianity, and minister to the people, without a framework of formalised administration. But the paradox is that once an organisational administration has been set up, the potential for spiritual sclerosis is high. The man in the book and Khodr both rail against what amounts to the (inevitable) secularisation of the Church and hierarchical

¹²³ “The Word consumes whoever accepts it”. (*TWOC*, p.125.) See Chapter 7, p.311, also Fn.180, and Khodr’s confirmation that happiness is not necessarily correlated to authentic spirituality.

¹²⁴ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 15 January, 2013.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Orthodoxy; but the counterargument is that the Orthodox Church has to exist in the world and that means sharing platforms, literally and metaphorically, with legitimate secular government and their executives. For better or for worse, existential religiosity would make no such allowances.

If this presents a caricature of the Outsider as a nuisance factor, someone who cavils and carps just for the sake of it, it would be an erroneous image, for the Outsider has positive value. By standing outside, they can be the conscience of society, the one who dares to stand above the crowd and cry that the Emperor has no clothes.¹²⁶ The uncomfortable views about stealing attributed by the narrator to the man in the book – “In the case of robbery, who is the true thief? Is it the lowly person who steals, or the powerful person from whom he has stolen?”¹²⁷ – and echoed by Khodr,¹²⁸ are the kind of views that an Outsider would make, fearing neither sanction nor opprobrium. It is another example of existential religiosity, whereby the Outsider fearlessly questions a core principle. With no vested interest in the world and impervious to the blandishments of respective secular or spiritual establishments, what have they got to lose?

As has already been said, the Outsider, by dint of their position, can more precisely push boundaries of understanding and tolerance.¹²⁹ An illustration can be found where the man in the book makes a stand against violent retribution.

“I have to stand by the one wielding the knife and also by the wounded for cleansing and forgiveness and consolation...in order to lift them together to the hope of the new man who does not oppress and does not become oppressed.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of the little boy who, unlike others in the crowd, dares to point out that the Emperor is naked. (Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Complete Illustrated Stories of Hans Christian Andersen*. H. W. Dulcken (trans.). London: Chancellor Press, 1983, pp.60-4.)

¹²⁷ *TWOC*, p.61.

¹²⁸ See Chapter 5 and Khodr’s article, *Stealing*.

¹²⁹ This is not to say only an Outsider can push barriers. What is being suggested is that they can do so more often, more effectively and without fear of reprisal.

¹³⁰ *TPOC*, p.68.

This is a natural extension of Khodr's theology of the 'Other'; but, by implacably pushing barriers and extending boundaries of understanding on sometimes sensitive issues for the Lebanese, it also demonstrates his existential religiosity. In a country that has been scarred by historical inter-sectarian strife, it additionally has implications for the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? The difficult path of spirituality as described by Khodr, and the book's reference to the (Lebanese Orthodox) Christian community and how it "often exhibits extreme weakness; entire generations of Christians remain hopelessly sterile",¹³¹ suggests Lebanese Orthodox Christians, like most communities, stumble on the steps of tolerance and compassion, burdened as they are by tradition and atavistic, intercommunal suspicion of the 'Other'. The above passage is consolidated by Khodr's own heartfelt call to reach out to the 'Other', whether they be Muslim or Christian: "the Muslim must dwell in your heart if you wanted God to dwell in it too";¹³² "we do not burden our minds by history's contraventions and we do not keep its abominations in our hearts",¹³³ a view that resonates with the fictional man, who has, says the narrator, "an amicable relationship with the Qur'an", who refused "to denigrate the Islamic faith; he loved certain Muslims...[and] knew very few Christians who were nearer to the heart of God than this chosen group of Muslims."¹³⁴ However, in a pluralistic society like Lebanon, where communal loyalty is paramount, where history can stain relationality with prejudice, this rallying call to take no side, except every side, risks serious rebuke, if not ostracism. Thus it is that Khodr practises his existential religiosity.

For all the invective cast on the priesthood, it is the priest who sometimes appears as the Outsider. It is not uncommon for him to be alone, "[o]ften the only one inside the temple",¹³⁵ "a companion of the holy books and icons".¹³⁶

¹³¹ TWOC, p.152.

¹³² Khodr, *Love for Everyone* and Chapter 6.

¹³³ Khodr, *The New Human Being* and Chapter 6.

¹³⁴ TWOC, p.53.

¹³⁵ TWOC, p.138.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

He is seen at the mercy of his parishioners, and “[a] parish, like a child, can be tyrannical and unjust.”¹³⁷ They torment him with their demands on his time and, like a child, expect nothing less of him. Paradoxically, the man in the book is saying that in some ways the priest is the hub of the community; in others, he cuts a lonely figure, ostensibly apart from the community. He is one of them, but not one of them. This description aptly fits Khodr. As a bishop, he is part of the community, indeed, part of the establishment, if only, in some senses, nominally.

Exile is quintessential alienation; so it is that the one who is an exile is *de facto*, even *de jure*, an Outsider. The man in the book places himself in an alien environment and then accentuates that alienation by working within the insularity of radio broadcasting. The reference to monasticism was included above because it is almost like an exile within an exile. It comes at a juncture in the book where the fictional man goes into retreat and finds the renunciation of the world profoundly appealing: “I need this endless silence and the nourishment of fasting and abstinence”.¹³⁸ It was this extract which earlier stimulated the notion that, in some ways, monks physically embody those who do not belong – that is, the Outsider. In addition, it was posited earlier that monasticism is almost a matter of willing alienation from an alienated (Edenic) exile, wherein the individual finds a “privileged encounter with God which encourages separation from the world”.¹³⁹ However, such separation also incurs curtailment of some of the joys of innocent earthly pleasures, and in this sense resonates with the earlier assertion that the spiritual pathway can be arduous. Mother Maria Skobtsova is said to have seen monasticism as an opportunity, but one with a caveat. “Everyone is always faced...with the necessity of choosing between the comfort and warmth of an earthly home, well protected from winds and storms, and the

¹³⁷ *TWOC*, p.137.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.121.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.123. See also Chapter 7, p.308.

limitless expanse of eternity, which contains only one sure and certain item...the Cross.”¹⁴⁰

If alienation and suffering are the hallmarks of Christianity, it could be said that Christ is the archetypal Outsider. As such, he experienced alienation from his own religious establishment and defied contemporary conventions. He spoke up for, and to, those members of society considered socially beneath Jewish society, and, in similar vein, broke socio-religious barriers, exemplified by his conversation with the Samaritan woman,¹⁴¹ an act which transcended protocols governing gender and sect. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he experienced suffering when praying to the Father, feeling a sense of abandonment and alienation, while, at the same time, questioning his own identity and solitary destiny.

The Outsider, who lives their spiritual life through existential religiosity, is one who fails to fit the mould, while recognising the limitations of secular worldly existence. Khodr writes that “My years run from one disappointment to another. Of course there are consolations, but few of them come from humans”.¹⁴² Such a mindset, in which gregariousness has minimal attraction, reaffirms a conflation of Khodr and the man in the book, for both have a

¹⁴⁰ www.pravmir.com/the-challenge-of-a-20th-century-saint-maria-skobtsova/ (Accessed 6 June, 2017.) Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945) was one of the Russian émigrés. She herself comes across as an Outsider, someone who does not fit the traditional mould. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Anthony Bloom) is quoted as saying, “She was a very unusual nun in her behavior and her manners. I was simply staggered when I saw her for the first time. I was walking along the Boulevard Montparnasse. In front of a café, there was a table, on the table was a glass of beer, and behind the glass was sitting a Russian nun in full monastic robes. I looked at her and decided that I would never go near that woman. I was young then and held extreme views.” (Ibid.) Louth says of St. Maria of Paris, as she became known after her canonisation, “Her theology is, it seems to me, very simple, but pursued in a dramatically radical way.” An assessment that again puts her on the margins of conventional theological thinking. (Louth, A. *Modern Orthodox Thinkers. From the Philokalia to the Present*. London: SPCK, 2015, p.116.) Similar to Khodr, she too had a ‘theological’ vision that was “radical, uncompromising, demanding”. (Ibid., p.126.) She died in Ravenbrück concentration camp, having voluntarily entered the gas chamber in place of another. Cf. also Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941), a Conventual Franciscan Friar, who, in Auschwitz, voluntarily went to his death to save the life of a total stranger.

¹⁴¹ John 6:6-42.

¹⁴² Khodr, *The Door to Heaven*. See Chapter 7.

propensity for solitude and aloneness;¹⁴³ the former's time as a monk;¹⁴⁴ the fictional man's eulogy to monasticism;¹⁴⁵ his time spent on his own in the mountains as a youth – “At the end of secondary school, my friend took refuge in a mountain village”;¹⁴⁶ his life in self-imposed exile. It is clear that his friends did not quite know what to make of the man in the book; he did not, even with them, fit into any neat, identifiable slot, a characterisation that has much in common with Abou Mrad's overall profile of Khodr, how the latter does not fit, and how, almost as consequence, and as a classic Outsider, he alienates so many in the Church. More widely, the fictional man cannot, it seems, allow himself to be identified with either secular or spiritual movement – those engaged with politics; those “who wished to limit eternity to the boundaries of the temple.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Khodr is politically non-aligned and propagates a kind of pan-religious spirituality, in which Christ is not just for Christians. As such, he cannot be neatly defined, defies expectations, and still has the capacity to surprise, particularly with regard to *outré* observations typical of the Outsider. To suggest that Christ felt abandoned by the Father is one thing, but to declare that “Jesus felt a kind of atheism” in Gethsemane¹⁴⁸ is quite another. Even with Khodr's qualification that atheism is a form of abandonment, the choice of word is arresting, and could, it is argued, only be said by someone who does not care about people's reactions, but does care about spiritual truth, and will venture into the deepest, darkest depths to explore its multivaried manifestations. This is also existential religiosity, a *modus operandi*, which, emulating Williams' argument, describes Khodr's attempts to burst through the barriers of conventional religious interpretation and spiritual understanding.

Khodr's unpredictability also shows itself in his assessment of Russian émigré thinking. Considering his closeness to them, his reservations about their

¹⁴³ See Chapter 4 and Abou Mrad's account of Khodr's typical day.

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix B, p.437.

¹⁴⁵ *TWOC*, pp.125-8.

¹⁴⁶ *TWOC*, p.29.

¹⁴⁷ *TWOC*, p.68. See also Chapter 7.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.

emphasis on “the liturgy as a source of spiritual life”¹⁴⁹ suggests someone who will not join a ‘club’ for the sake of closing ranks and presenting a unified front, a unicity of theological thought. As the man in the book says, “Christianity is not an institution we join as if it were a club”.¹⁵⁰ It is also in keeping with Khodr’s prioritising. For him, experiential spirituality, motivated and substantiated by existential religiosity, is the key to eventual theosis, a spirituality gleaned from, and inspired by, the face of Christ, in contrast to the pious generation’s concentration on the liturgy. It may be a spirituality that sets him apart from the mainstream, which defines him as an Outsider, but it is also one that reflects and is sustained, in part, by his existential religiosity.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ *TWOC*, pp.124-5.

PART III

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion: Implications of George Khodr's Existential Religiosity

The use of artistic expression in the form of an allegorical tool has been occasionally resorted to in this work, partly because it was considered appropriate for 'creative' illustrations in a work of a theological nature,¹ and also because it fits with the subject, George Khodr, whose interest in painting and music sits alongside his recognised literary skills as a poetic writer of some renown. Thus, in the same vein, the six existential criteria of identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, and the Outsider, may be described as discrete idiosyncratic components and character traits that have been dovetailed to create a composite profile – one that reveals more than the sum of its parts.

The purpose of this was to fulfil an aim of the thesis, which was to offer, over and above extant works, a more rounded, in depth portrait of an important Lebanese Orthodox theologian and thinker, who is also an influential figure in contemporary Lebanese society. Previous works – and here particular note has been taken of Avakian, Hirvonen, Sharp, and Wehbe² – have focused on facets of Bishop Khodr within a specific context: Avakian in a work that contrasts the theology of Khodr with that of Karl Rahner; Hirvonen in a study that concentrates on interfaith dialogue; Sharp, contextualising Khodr within a broader thesis that surveyed Orthodoxy's thinking on Christian-Muslim encounters; Wehbe, focusing on Khodr's role in the Orthodox Youth Movement. Each one has proved worthy in its own right and a valuable building block for this study, which has sought to add another dimension, specifically to create, in a synthesis, a study that not only draws on these works, but utilises Khodr's book, other writings of his, and one-to-one interviews, to reveal a more personal account, one that encapsulates his character, spiritual vision and innermost thoughts. And while the book does

¹ See Chapter 9, pp.385-6, where a link is made between the work of the artist and the spiritual quest.

² For Avakian, see Chapter 1, p.23; for Hirvonen, see Chapter 1, p.24, for Sharp, see Chapter 1, pp.24-5; for Wehbe, see Chapter 1, pp.40-1.

not record a linear progression of the fictional man's spiritual development, one marked out by concrete realisations, there is, across the book, a perceptible stream of deepening spirituality that takes the fictional man from childlike awareness towards a gradual withdrawal from the worldly influences of personal friendship, career, and uxorial ties. In the process, it is also an approach that reanimates Khodr's theology of the 'Other', enabling it to be seen situationally or 'applied', rather than confined to theoretical appraisal. Lastly, it advances an overarching hypothesis – that Khodr practises existential religiosity, which implicates both his spirituality, his socio-philosophical outlook, and his character, not as discrete factors, but as interwoven, interdependent facets. This identifying of a particular strand of religiosity offers a fresh assessment of spirituality – where it springs from and how it is sustained. In addition, and through the research question, it assesses the possible impact of his existential religiosity, not just on the Lebanese Orthodox community, but on diverse communities of Christians throughout the world.

The system of analysis, as outlined in Chapter 1, has relied on Khodr's book, supported by his other writings – in which can be found traces of the six existential criteria – and the interviews conducted with him, to show a uniformity in his theological thinking, in his spiritual vision, and in the idiosyncracies of his opinions and mode of expression. It is clear that these have not changed across the decades and that the book, which is regarded by him and by others as autobiographical,³ accurately reflects his own spirituality, his own character, and his own mindset. In short, through this amalgam of different literary resources one relevant factor emerges: the man in the book is Khodr.

Each chapter in this thesis represents an element of Khodr's existential religiosity as reflected in the core existential criteria of identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, and the Outsider. Identity, the opening chapter of Part II, established Khodr's call to recognise our spiritual identity,

³ See Chapter 1, pp.4, 6-7.

made in the image of God, and what this demanded – a transcending of communal or secular identity. The following chapter on authenticity explored authentic spiritual life, including mode of worship, and authentic secular life, which was exemplified by his attempt at reform in the workplace. Relationality, Chapter 6, focused on how Khodr's theology of the 'Other' worked in practice. By exploring love, Trinitarianism, difference, and diversity, it showed how his theology of the 'Other' demonstrates a pronounced openness to other faith traditions.⁴ However, an embrace of authentic spiritual identity, while implementing authenticity and relationality, would not be an easy path to follow. The world, it was made clear, will put obstacle and objection in one's path and it would lead to alienation, which was examined in the next chapter, Chapter 7. At this point, it appears that authentic Christianity, according to Khodr's existential religiosity, proves to be neither simple nor inviting.⁵ Chapter 8 argued that individuality was inferred by the other five criteria and that the impulse to push boundaries and reach out to the 'Other' can only derive from individuality. The final chapter in Part II on the Outsider examined, through the book, what being an Outsider entails, but also shone a spotlight on Khodr's character as an Outsider. It additionally emphasised how the five abstract criteria are subsumed in the sixth criterion, that of a real person, Khodr, and linked this to his existential religiosity.

It was additionally made apparent that there is an interconnection between all of the criteria, despite the first five representing a cluster of differing *abstract* concepts; while the Outsider, rather than being an abstract concept, relates to the personification of all existential criteria. This interconnection was demonstrated by showing how each criterion contains elements of, is implied by, or is dependent on, the other criteria. However, over and above this interconnection, there emerges an overarching triadic paradigm consisting of

⁴ By way of example, see also Chapter 3, p.84, for his understanding of Hinduism.

⁵ Khodr's confirmation, in discussion, that the spiritual pathway is not easy, that "we never know, whether we are near to God or not" (Interview with George Khodr, 15 January, 2013 and Chapter 9, p.375); that spiritual authenticity is not necessarily correlated to happiness (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013 and Chapter 7, Fn.180); and references in the book to the demands of Christianity, such as, "The Word consumes whoever accepts it" (*TWOC*, p.125 and Chapter 9, Fn.123), corroborate this.

existential religiosity; the cluster of abstract criteria; and the Outsider. For, if existential religiosity is the overarching hypothesis, and all six existential criteria feed into the hypothesis, it is the Outsider that subsumes all of the other criteria and personifies the concept of existential religiosity.

Khodr's book has acted as a vital resource. No one has to date utilised this work in the same way, and yet, because it provides an opportunity for Khodr, through the fictional man and the narrator, to engage in an exercise of profound introspection and reveal a less adulterated version of his innermost thoughts, the book is an essential tool if a fuller portrait of Khodr is to be painted. Over and above showing, through a comparative study of his varied literary output, how the fictional man *is* Khodr, the book's autobiographical status is attested by those who know him personally – for example, Bishop Ephraim, who contributed the book's preface, is a longstanding friend and spiritual colleague – so there can be little doubt that the pages in the book, covering his vision and innermost thoughts, constitute seams of valuable personal material that were waiting to be mined.

As established earlier, the book has been utilised, alongside numerous examples of Khodr's writings, and one-to-one interviews with him, and others, to yield responses to the research question: to what extent does Bishop Khodr's existential religiosity challenge the spiritual aspirations of Christians in general, and the Lebanese Orthodox community in particular? In essence, this refers to the practicality of his religiosity, his existential religiosity, and whether the Orthodox community in Lebanon, and Christians in the wider world, can fulfil his call for what amounts to a revived spiritual life, one that is in accordance with what Khodr believes is our destiny – theosis.

Khodr's lofty spiritual heights are at an extreme remove from the experience and spiritual capabilities of 'ordinary' people. And while his theology of the 'Other' is expressed in unconditional love for his fellow human beings, be they Christians or Muslims, it would also appear that his fundamental spiritual position, grounded in existential religiosity and his Outsider character, is not

necessarily suited to the bridging of ecumenical gaps in the Christian world,⁶ neither is it a blueprint for positive inter-*religious* dialogue. Earlier, there was a reference to comments he made in interview, when he categorically stated that, in his opinion, Muslims are not disposed to dialogue because they feel they are (spiritually) complete, Islam being regarded as the last word of God. When challenged that this is what an Orthodox would say, he laughed and agreed.⁷ This exchange is significant because it shows him as someone wholly committed to his own Church, and as a propagator for what Orthodoxy regards as its unique position in the Christian world and beyond. For him, there is little to be gained – certainly at the moment – from ecumenism; while progressive interfaith dialogue cannot be driven by theological exchanges. That said, Avakian has highlighted Khodr's belief that Christ is not just for Christians;⁸ and he is a fervent believer that common ground does exist for Christians and Muslims, although this is to be found in the mystical dimensions of experiential spirituality,⁹ which are mainstream features of neither Orthodoxy nor Islam. However, Khodr might say, nothing should dissuade from reaching out to the 'Other' – indeed, he might add, it is beholden on each one of us to reach out in our diversity and difference, beyond our own communal borders and our own spiritual boundaries, towards the 'Other'. Put prosaically, Khodr is more interested in the *person* than what that person professes or religiously represents.

As for his own Church members, at various junctures in this work, attention has been drawn to his sometimes explicit assertions in the book that Lebanese Orthodox Christians appear neither to be synchronised to his theological thinking nor adequately equipped spiritually to embark on the

⁶ For his reservations about the ecumenical enterprise, see, for example, Chapter 5, pp.147-50, where his views and those of the man in the book are expressed in unequivocal terms. This is supported in interview, where Khodr tacitly acknowledges that ecumenism is little more than a theoretical exercise. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 26 October, 2013.)

⁷ Chapter 5, p.151, Fn.21.

⁸ Chapter 5, p.207.

⁹ See Chapter 6, pp.262, 263, and Avakian, p.179.

theotic pathway.¹⁰ Considering that his existential religiosity is the fulcrum of his actions, it follows that it is this, his existential religiosity, that represents a challenge. As a spiritual leader, the bar of his religiosity may be perceived as too high for most people to aspire to, whether Orthodox or not, while his views can often seem baffling and unrealistic.¹¹ As for fitting into neither one category nor the other, this may further distance others from him. That said, he is a radical prophet and reformist, and these are, arguably, people who do not think in categories. He seems at once exclusivist *and* inclusivist; a conservative traditionalist *and* a radical, one bent on the most sweeping reform.

The Church, which is somewhat upbraided in the book, may, in the end and when compared to Khodr's religiosity, be the more practical, more accommodating of human frailty, for it realises perhaps that Christianity cannot be so inflexible, that rules and practices cannot be so diligently applied or strenuously enforced, for Christianity must compete in the modern world – with demands of career and family, the pleasures and distractions of contemporary life, not all of which are to be condemned. To insist Christians stringently follow an arduous spiritual routine is not just to be viewed as out of touch, but to risk haemorrhaging congregants. Consequently, the Church knows it must, to some extent and in some instances, adopt a process of compromise.

Compromise, however, is not something Khodr would condone. For him, Christianity is a way of life that brooks no competition; the very idea that Christianity has to accommodate modernity is antithetical to his religiosity. He would never condemn those who cannot comprehensively commit, this would

¹⁰ See, for example, *TWOC*, p.152 and Chapter 5, p.191. “Another great danger is that the Christian community often exhibits extreme weakness; entire generations of Christians remain hopelessly sterile.” And again: “Generally, a parish does not devote much time to prayer.” (*TWOC*, p.138 and Chapter 5, p.173.) In conversation about icons, and when asked whether the Lebanese Orthodox pray, Khodr replies, no. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 24 October, 2013.)

¹¹ For example, his assertion that a man-woman relationship, based on “jealousy and arrogance and deviousness and ecstasy; the relationship in which egotism and selfishness revel, can never be a human relationship”, may be seen at odds with the reality of human relationships. (*TPOC*, p.25.)

be at odds with his character and beliefs, but Christianity, he would say, must be one's life; and it must entail a degree of asceticism that will bring one to the mystical heights of experiential spirituality. It must be pursued in the face of all else, whether that engenders ridicule, unpopularity, ostracism, loss of social status, vehement persecution. This is what his existential religiosity means. But there is purpose to this regime, for at the root of this adamant conviction lies a dualistic exigency, incorporating both spiritual and sociological dimensions: first, there is our spiritual journey of theosis; second, our relationship with the 'Other' that includes both interfaith and intra-Christian encounter.

His idealism represents a learning curve that is too precipitous for a large proportion of those who live in the world, whether East or West. Even though Khodr, and others, claim that not everyone has to follow the ascetic path of monasticism, that a life of equivalent spiritual devotion and commitment can be lived in the world, there are many who do not share Khodr's depth of spirituality because they do not possess a natural propensity for spiritual reckoning.¹² What then does it take to be, and to be recognised as, a Christian? Khodr prefers simplicity of faith, but in reality it is a faith that harbours a Gordian Knot of spiritual complexities that the modern lay mind may find difficult to digest, let alone confront. There again, to be a Christian, perhaps, does not necessitate having a thorough knowledge of Christian theology. There are no ecclesiastical prerequisites that Orthodox Christians demonstrate an understanding of either theosis, the intellectual intricacies of Trinitarianism, or transubstantiation. Blind acceptance of profound theological issues may be sufficient requirement. Failing to live out Jesus' precepts may not mean one is no longer a Christian, although Khodr would probably disagree; instead, they could remain an ideal for which people may aim.

Khodr's assorted literary output, in writings that flow from the pen, and in the book where, on occasion, his feelings flow more poetically from the heart, are all saying similar things, albeit in different ways and from different

¹² "If men of religion are numerous, the people of God are few." (*TWOC*, p.46.) Dionysius the Areopagite has been cited as another who holds similar opinions.

perspectives. If an article strays into an area not covered by the book, it is clear upon closer analysis that this tangential extrapolation is a spur coming straight out of the mind of the fictional man. In other words, it is often the case that the article or articles are only broadening the application of a particular personal idea or notion. This gallimaufry of ideas and notions, many of which may be described as unconventional if not radical, can be collated under the umbrella phrase 'existential religiosity'. If, on the evidence already assembled, it can be argued that this existential religiosity does challenge the Lebanese Orthodox community – and, it has to be said, challenges other Christian communities throughout the world – it does not, on the surface, augur well for interfaith and intra-Christian relations. Khodr's existential religiosity necessitates defying convention and tradition, transcending prohibition and communal boundaries, to reach out, on an *individual* basis, to the 'Other', whoever the 'Other' might be. If his existential religiosity will enable and empower only a fraction of those who might be spiritually capable, interfaith and intra-faith gestures, within the fractured Christian world and beyond, may remain just that, gestures frozen in a stasis of good intent, and devoid of the necessary spiritual marrow.

For Khodr, relating to the religious 'Other' would, in general, accord with his existential religiosity, allowing as it does for him to think and act beyond the boundaries of his own communal and spiritual borders. However, on the basis of promoting interfaith congeniality, this type of religiosity may be especially challenging for the Lebanese Orthodox community, where familial and communal boundaries are atavistic, structural elements of a complex society. For the wider Christian community, where demarcations are, generally, not so rigid, and where societal structures suggest more porous boundaries, the challenge nonetheless remains, for Khodr has set down spiritual milestones along the ascetic pathway that represent an almost impossible standard to emulate. And whether it be East or West, existential pressures prevail. See, by way of example, the sequence in the book when the fictional man, a member of the Lebanese Orthodox Church, expresses a wish to approach Western crowds on a European street. They appear to him as lost souls wandering aimlessly and harbouring existential fears about their

identity and their destiny.¹³ Suffering has also been seen, throughout this work, as something of a Christian meme, a universal spiritual concomitant as well as a trait inextricably bound to the human condition.¹⁴ As for the spiritual pathway, this has been projected as a difficult road to follow, thus necessitating a high degree of ascetic commitment.¹⁵

In addition, the uncompromising nature of Khodr's character, a central element of his existential religiosity, means not only does he project a Christianity that is demanding, he can also be inflexible on matters relating to his own Orthodox Church, and consequentially, become the gadfly within the Church's hierarchy. Note must be made of Abou Mrad's remarks where he states how Khodr suffers a degree of ostracism at Synods; how he is not a popular figure in the Orthodox Church in Lebanon,¹⁶ how he is "very controversial in his way of thinking, in his way of understanding the Church, and in his way of acting as a bishop";¹⁷ how he is regarded as "a burden on the Church...they want in all sorts of way to get rid of him."¹⁸ Abou Mrad also describes him as being possessed of an emotional personality. This character assessment does not, *prima facie*, suggest someone naturally disposed to diplomatic negotiation and bridge-building. But the temptation to link his identity as an Outsider with an ability to empathise with the downtrodden or the marginalised should be resisted, for, just as there are figures who would fit into that category, there are examples of Outsiders, who, far from looking out beyond themselves, practise what Ramfos would describe as individualism.¹⁹

¹³ See Chapter 4, pp.137-8; and Chapter 5, where Khodr alludes to the prevalence of existential pressures. "We can never rid ourselves of the fear of the future or the fear for our health". (Chapter 5, pp.170-1.)

¹⁴ See Chapter 7, p.298, where Khodr's article on suffering is cited. For his article 'Passion and Resurrection', see p.297, and also Chapter 5, p.184.

¹⁵ For the less than simple conditions of the spiritual pathway, see Chapter 9, pp.375-6, and Khodr's comments made in interview.

¹⁶ Chapter 4, pp.93-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.95.

¹⁹ See Chapter 8, pp.315-6.

Such judgements, when considering how Khodr's existential religiosity can influence interfaith and intra-Christian relationality, may appear unduly pessimistic. But calibrating its effect on the Lebanese Orthodox community, on Christians worldwide, and the possible impact on interfaith and intra-Christian relations, only implies a pessimistic outcome to the extent that it is assessed exclusively through a religious lens. For, if the essence of Khodr's spiritual criteria for reaching out to the 'Other', which are scrupulously set within a religious framework, are secularised – similar to the way Buber's 'I/Thou' paradigm is rooted in an a-religious philosophy²⁰ – there is opportunity for a more modest spirituality to flourish, thereby instigating a positive interreligious relationality. This is not to invalidate Khodr's existential religiosity. It has true value and true worth, but it is a regime that only a few can follow. Rather, its lofty spirituality is an ideal that can inspire, just as theosis can be understood as a spiritual ideal. By setting the bar lower, spiritual qualities can be seeded and allowed to develop, rather than scorched in the hothouse of Khodr's uncompromising existential religiosity in which only comparatively few spiritual constitutions may flourish. With more modest spiritual goals to aim for, Khodr's call to prioritise experiential spirituality, part of existential religiosity, over ritual observance may be more easily understood and internalised by the many; while the internalising process would, in turn, initiate an understanding that it is beholden on the individual, within the community as a whole, to transcend one's communal boundaries to reach out to the 'Other' whatever their own spiritual tradition might be.

Just as theological profundities and Christic perfections should not intimidate or preclude, so Khodr's existential religiosity should not disincentivise, but instead become a source of inspiration. Through trust in his integrity and acceptance, in spirit, of his existential religiosity, a sufficient model may be fashioned for reaching out to the 'Other', and for constructing an enduring relationality rooted in, and acclimatised to, both worldly and spiritual perspectives.

²⁰ See Chapter 3, p.79, and Appendix A, p.413.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Being & Existence: An Existential Perspective

What follows is an overview of the ‘existentialistic’ implications of *being-in-the-world*, couched within a socio-theological context. It is intended to be neither an exegesis of existentialism *per se*, a critical appraisal, nor an apologetic. The objective is to encapsulate a particular perspective, which will act as a supplementary aid to understanding the phrase ‘existential religiosity’ and as a background to the thesis as a whole.

1. Exploring Existential Concepts: An Introduction

Despite our own personal identity and our situation in life, there are certain commonly shared human characteristics, which would appear to be intrinsic building-blocks of human nature, and without which it would be questionable whether we would qualify as fully human. Indeed, it may be argued, everything we achieve, for better or for worse, is generated by an awareness, whether conscious or subconscious, that our existential state can be troubling.¹ Owing to its concentration on the individual responsibility of existence – in other words, how we as individuals are to live; and, because we cannot be certain of our destiny, how we cope with that uncertainty – existentialism arguably comes to the fore when events in the world are *in extremis*, when circumstances are exiguous, and when disorder corrodes our sense of purpose. As Jeffrey Fisher points out, “[h]uman beings simply are not equipped to handle raw meaninglessness”.² As a consequence, its predominance and vibrancy in France during and after the Second World War may be accounted for by social and political upheaval: a country under the heel of Nazi brutality and re-emerging after occupation; the self-imposed sense of guilt about how individuals within the population behaved towards the Germans during that occupation – like a rape victim who wonders, albeit

¹ These existential characteristics would seem to cover those of all faiths and none, and to bestride religious divides. See Chapter 7, Fn.121, and Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, pp.6-7.)

² Fisher, J. ‘The Theology of Dis / similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius.’ In: *The Journal of Religion*. Vol.81, No.4 (October), 2001, pp.529-548, p.546.

irrationally, whether they subconsciously colluded in their attack. Yet it is not only war that can kindle feelings of estrangement and alienation. In more recent times, the pressures of modernity and the market create other causes.³ Maalouf observes how, “The ever-increasing speed of globalisation undoubtedly reinforces, by way of reaction, people’s need for identity. And because of the existential anguish that accompanies such sudden changes it also strengthens their need for spirituality. But only religious allegiance meets, or at least seeks to meet, both these needs.”⁴ But this is to tie existentialism, or at least the rudiments of existentialism, to historical foundations or periodical quirks. The human condition is, arguably, innate and has existed for as long as human beings have been able to rationalise. The questions ‘why are we here?’, ‘what is my purpose?’ are in themselves articulations of the human condition. If group identity is relatively more straightforward to delineate and describe, it could be argued that personal identity and the sense of *self*, is less accessible.⁵ However, personal identity may be said to differ from group identity in the way that the individual has, in theory, comparatively more control over it. That said, personal identity is arguably more protean, whereas group or other forms of mass identity, tend to be more fixed and subject, in some senses, to less mutation.

When grafted on to a set of theological beliefs, existentialism can refer to the concept of God, the communicational relationship between God and humankind, and our purpose in his cosmos. But it would be a misapprehension to assume that theology is an extension of existential philosophy or *vice versa*; theology and existentialism may not be natural bedfellows, but, it is argued, bedfellows they are on occasion. Paul Tillich (1886-1965), who will be cited later, is one example of a *Christian* existentialist.

³ See the literature review in Chapter 1, where Payne refers to the “existential dilemmas of modern life”. (Payne, *The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Contemporary Orthodox Thought*, p.263.)

⁴ Maalouf, p.93.

⁵ See Stang, who, citing Bernard McGinn, points to Eriugena as corroboration of the view that self-knowledge is murky in the extreme. “For Eriugena, because the human self is the only true *imago dei*, like the God of whom it is an image it does not know *what* it is (that is, does not know itself as a *what*).” (Stang, p.156.)

2. Individuality, Relationships, and the 'Other'

2.1 Individuality

Before relationality can be addressed, it is necessary to explore briefly individuality, which is interconnected not only with relationality, but with the other four criteria. For example, it may be argued that the existential criterion 'identity' can have scant plausibility without individuality; for individuality is the skeletal framework, on which is hung, like clothes from a wardrobe, the accretions of identity, acquired first through sociological categorisation, and second through a mix of conscious and subconscious processes by which a human being presents him/herself to the world throughout the various developmental stages of their life. The existential criterion 'alienation', along with other existential characteristics such as 'fear' and 'anxiety', have little meaning without a self-reflecting entity and *individual* experience; while 'authenticity' can, arguably, only be meaningfully comprehended when individuality is accepted as a *sine qua non*. With regard to the Outsider, to be examined later, the whole concept of what it is to be an Outsider is rooted in individuality.

This is not to say that 'the individual' as a concept, and as the term may be generally understood today, has derived by way of a quasi Darwinian evolution – that is, similar to the manner in which biological prototypes of humankind have developed over millennia. Ramfos asserts that the individual evolved around the tenth century, a development that culminated in the Renaissance.⁶ For Louth, however, a recognisable concept of the individual looms somewhat earlier in the sixth century. He links this to the Dionysian concept of hierarchy, claiming it is used "to explore the inner depths of the individual. In this way we can see how Dionysian notions...contributed to the 'discovery of the individual'."⁷ Individuality as an *existential* factor of human existence transcends, it is argued, the egoistical, and egotistical, aspirations that are seemingly inseparable from human character.

⁶ Ramfos, p.6.

⁷ Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, p.124.

In contrast to individuality, collectivism (the aggregation of human beings) can often lead, within some existential quarters,⁸ to 'bad faith' – that is, living according to the ways and dictates of others, rather than in tune with one's own potential and sense of purpose.⁹ Russell cites Ramfos, who believes we must learn not to take on the identity of a group, but, on the contrary, must strive for a unified *self* before we strive for union with God. This involves going deeper into ourselves.¹⁰ In discussing the group and the individual, Ramfos makes an important distinction. He categorises two manifestations of the individual: 'individualism' and 'individuation'. If Ramfos accepts the functioning of 'groups' as a reality, he is opposed to what may be described as 'group think'. And just as someone may not be wholly 'this' or wholly 'that', Ramfos makes the observation that "[t]he person is simultaneously an individual and a social being".¹¹

In contrast to the three reasons cited by Papanikolaou to explain Orthodoxy's discomfort with individuality, and Zizioulas' endorsement,¹² Turcescu offers an alternative viewpoint. He highlights Catherine Mowry LaCugna, who makes the case that 'person' "cannot be defined only in relation with others (heteronomy), but that a person has her or his intrinsic value (autonomy) apart from the relations with others." [Turcescu's words.]¹³

2.2 Relationships and the 'Other'

The interplay between existentialism and theology is brought to life in the philosophy of Martin Buber (1878-1965).¹⁴ Buber argues that we cannot make statements such as 'the universe is good,' because we cannot possibly know whether this is true or not. We have instead to be satisfied with what we

⁸ For example, in Sartre's existential philosophy.

⁹ See, for example, Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.104.

¹⁰ Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, pp.168 and 172.

¹¹ Ramfos, p.108.

¹² See Chapter 4, Fn.196.

¹³ Turcescu, L. "Person" versus "Individual", and other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa. In: *Modern Theology*. 18:4 October, 2002, p.534.

¹⁴ For more on this interplay, particularly from the perspective of his 'I'/'Thou' paradigm, see Buber, M. *I and Thou*. W. Kaufmann (trans.). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970. For discussion of Buber's philosophy, see Roubiczek, *Existentialism. For and Against*; also Macquarrie, J. *Existentialism*. London: Penguin Books, 1973, pp.108-10.

can personally experience; and, in the case of Buber, this can be found more precisely in personal relationships, which can offer a degree of certainty and satisfaction. And it would seem that his argument is, to some extent, persuasive. We interact in the world and by doing so we form relationships with other people, whether temporary or otherwise, in an *I-Thou* paradigm. But Buber elaborates on this, advancing the theory that we also relate to objects in an *I-It* dynamic, suggesting, by way of example, that one can have a 'relationship' with a tree.¹⁵ Here, theists might interpolate that this implies the contrasting reality of a relationship between humankind and God, but Buber does not get drawn into such considerations. While he refers to God as an eternal *Thou*,¹⁶ he steers clear of divine discussions, believing philosophy is not appropriate for such deliberation, for, similar to the example given above ('the universe is good'), God cannot, realistically, be known.

Sartre's concept of the 'Other' is perhaps less benign. The Sartrean epigram "hell is other people" is arguably not an accurate reflection of his existential philosophy,¹⁷ springing as it does from Sartre the *littérateur* and not Sartre the philosopher. However, from a man like Sartre it would be reasonable not to expect comprehensive contrariness so it may be assumed there is some pertinence to this apparent misanthropy.

In Sartre's world, it would appear there is a constant struggle between the 'I' and the 'Other', in which each tries to 'contain' the other. There is also my own reaction to the 'Other'. The 'I' is aware that it is being formed by the 'Other' – in other words, I am moulding myself in accordance with how I believe the 'Other' sees me.¹⁸ Sartre sees the 'Other' as something of a

¹⁵ For a discussion of this, see Macquarrie:109. Buber is not advocating this as a reasonable proposition. Cooper points out that, in Buber's view, anyone who lives in an *I-It* relationship exists in a state of alienation. (Cooper, p.32.)

¹⁶ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.109.

¹⁷ From his play *No Exit*. First performed in 1944, the phrase may possibly be misunderstood. Supposedly, it is not meant necessarily as an existential damning of the entire human race, but relates to the sentiment expressed by a character in the play towards fellow characters.

¹⁸ See, for example, Sartre, J-P. *Being and Nothingness*. Hazel E. Barnes (trans.). London: Routledge, 1969; and *Existentialism and Humanism*. Philip Mairet (trans.). London: Eyre Methuen, 1973.

threat, causing the 'I' of individuality to mould itself into that which will secure the 'Other's' approval. Coupled with the fact that the 'Other' sees the 'I', whereas the 'I' cannot see itself, a relationality potentially evolves into a Hegelian master-slave paradigm in which a form of control over the 'I' can then develop.¹⁹

Warnock cites a robust example of the 'I'/Other' tension, which she takes from Sartre's book on Jean Genet.²⁰ Genet was placed with foster parents by an orphanage, at which point he began to steal. When the young Genet was found out, he was told that he was a thief. This launched him on a criminal career because, reasoned Genet, if that is what I am labelled, that is how I should behave.

Sartre goes further with the concept of shame. By reflecting on ourselves, we become aware of shame – manifested, for example, in a sense of inadequacy; but this sense of shame is there purely because of our awareness of the 'Other'. The *self* is only really ashamed when it considers what it must appear to be to the 'Other'. I cannot see myself in this respect, only the 'Other' can see me as an object in the world; it is this phenomenon that produces awkwardness and, thus, my sense of 'shame'. Transplanted into a social setting of interpersonal exchange, this can translate, it is argued, into a sense of failure within a context of expectations. The 'Other' may expect the 'I' to be something, to achieve something – to pass examinations, to have a successful career, to be a pillar of the community. When these expectations founder on the incapacity of the 'I' to fulfil these expectations, there is shame.

Even though the 'Other' presents him/herself as different and brings to the encounter with the 'I' a whole new universe, there are, it would seem, commonalities, which surface in what might at first appear to be surprisingly

¹⁹ See, for example, Weiss, F. G. *Hegel. The Essential Writings*. Frederick G. Weiss (ed.). New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974, pp.74-8.

²⁰ Warnock, M. *The Philosophy of Sartre*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965, p.63; Sartre, J-P. *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. B. Frechtman (trans.). New York: New American Library, 1964.

incongruous convergences. When Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) met Muhammad Khatami (b.1943), the erstwhile President of Iran, in the Vatican in 1999, the latter declared that “all religions are “not quintessentially different.”²¹ Bill and Williams additionally cite a Roman Catholic, A. R. Cornelius (1903-1991), who, between 1960 and 1968, occupied the post of chief justice in Pakistan and “played a central role in the development of the Pakistani constitutional system.”²² Possessed with a thorough knowledge of Islamic law, “Cornelius synthesized Islamic and Christian values”, was “[e]steemed by Christians and Muslims alike”, and “[d]espite his personal commitment to Catholicism...was referred to by a Muslim colleague on the bench as “more Muslim than the Muslims.”²³ These two examples of relationality within a secular setting, albeit with religious undertones, suggest that relationality is not only essential for personal fulfilment, but important in a global context where it can bridge seemingly impossible gulfs.

Sartre was an atheist, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), considered by some to be the founder of modern existentialism,²⁴ was unequivocally theistic. Passionately anti-Hegelian, Kierkegaard did not subscribe to Hegel’s abstract concept of a world spirit,²⁵ nor was he in sympathy with the *zeitgeist* of the age, the overriding supremacy of reason, for reason contradicted his understanding of spirituality. However, this was not because Kierkegaard personally found reason inimical, but because he believed Christianity to be

²¹ Bill, J. A. & Williams, J. A. *Roman Catholics and Shi’i Muslims*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, p.1.

²² Ibid., p.4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For example, see Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.118; also Kaufmann. (Kaufmann, W. *Existentialism From Dostoevsky To Sartre*. New York: New American Library, 1975, p.83.)

²⁵ Baldwin, T. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. T. Honderich (ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.257. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 1770-1831. See also Roubiczek, who describes existentialism as “a reaction against the Age of Reason.” (Roubiczek, p.1.) Khodr’s, and Orthodoxy’s, disquiet with rationalism, thus legitimises existentialism within an exploration of Christian religiosity. See, for example, Roberts, who is categorical: “Existentialism began...as a frankly Christian mode of thinking”. (Roberts, D. E. *Existentialism and Religious Belief*. R. Hazelton (ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.3.) However, for an alternate view, see Sartre. “Existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions from a consistently atheistic position.” (Sartre, p.56.)

intrinsically irrational and absurd. Paul Tillich does not conform to Kierkegaard's assertion that Christianity is absurd. If Kierkegaard embraces the paradox of Christianity, Tillich unequivocally states that the "theological paradox is not "irrational"...[it] is not nonsense."²⁶ Indeed, he seems to be opposed categorically to those theologians who support the proposition "divine truth is above human reason".²⁷ "Divine truth," insists Tillich, "cannot be expressed in meaningless propositions",²⁸ which, in some ways, contradicts Dionysian theology – that is, God, the *beyond-the-beyond*, is unknowable, and cannot be 'contained' by descriptive names.²⁹ Thus, if meaning comes through nomenclature, then God becomes, in this sense, meaning-less. If Dionysius indicates the apophaticism of God, Kierkegaard cleaves to the 'absurd' and proclaims himself a committed Christian. The question that must be asked is, why did he (Kierkegaard) hold this paradoxical position?

3. Being and Absurdity

Existence, in Kierkegaard's eyes, fills humankind with dread; it brings on a degree of spiritual vertigo, as one would experience if one looked over an abyss; he also developed a theory of 'either/or',³⁰ the dilemma of having to choose how to act when only a leap in the dark could, for him, suffice. In short, there is no rational answer, no proven intellectual formula that neatly

²⁶ Tillich, P. *Systematic Theology. Part III: Existence & The Christ*. London: SCM Press, 1978, p.91.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, the *Corpus Dionysiacum (CD)*, were said to have been authored by St. Paul's Athenian convert. They cover relatively complex theological issues with an especial reference to apophaticism, the unknowability of God. The widely accepted provenance of the *CD* enjoyed authenticity for some centuries before it became clear they were far more likely to have emanated from a fifth or sixth century Syrian monk. It is said that he had been part of a group of Severian Christians, who had retained their Monophysite propensities. (Meyendorff, J. *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975, p.92.). It has been additionally mooted that he was a Neoplatonist, who was seeking to preserve the Neoplatonic tradition by dressing it up in Christian clothes. (Louth, A. 'The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor'. In: *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Coakley, S & Stang, C. M. (eds.). UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p.43).

³⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Alastair Hannay (trans.). London: Penguin, 1992.

packages life and adequately offers consolation for the irrational, absurd condition of finding ourselves in the world. For Kierkegaard, the only response to “the paradox of human existence is a still greater paradox”.³¹ Christianity’s tenets, he believes, are irrational and, as a faith, it cannot give a *rational* account of itself; in addition, it is clear, from Kierkegaard’s perspective, that any religion promoting the idea of God’s becoming man, then being put to death as the “poorest of men”, is off to a tricky start in the age of reason.³² But Kierkegaard insists that it is because of its absurdity that it requires such a firm commitment of faith. This is its valorisation.

For Kierkegaard, as it is for Camus, life is essentially meaningless.³³ Given this bleak outline of humankind’s existence in an alien world, another question raises itself: how to live life and not succumb to a desire for self-destruction?³⁴ For Sartre, the responsibility is placed firmly within the hands of the individual.³⁵ Existence is something the subject makes for him/herself, it is like dough in the hands of the baker. However, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), a theistic existentialist, would have stressed the requirement to choose

³¹ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.217. Macquarrie’s words.

³² Roubiczek, p.9.

³³ Albert Camus (1913-60). “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it.” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.51.) See also Unamuno. “And all this tragic fight of man to save himself, this immortal craving for immortality...all this is simply a fight for consciousness. If consciousness is, as some inhuman thinker has said, nothing more than a flash of light between two eternities of darkness, then there is nothing more execrable than existence.” (de Unamuno, M. *Tragic Sense of Life*. New York: Dover Publications, 1954, p.13.)

³⁴ Camus claims that suicide is the “one truly serious philosophical problem”. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.11.) Cf. Ignatius IV’s comment on this phrase from Camus. “Whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, we do not escape the implacable dilemma of each minute of our existence: whether to commit suicide or to rise again.” (Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. ‘The Resurrection and Contemporary Man’, Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland, 1969. In: *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, p.191.)

³⁵ See Arjakovsky’s *The Way*, in which he cites Adolf Lazarev (1873-1944), who, in an article for *The Way* on Jules Laquier, the nineteenth century French philosopher, said that the latter situated “creation...above knowledge”, and made the existential, and Sartrean observation: “Make, do not become, and in making, be made.” (Lazarev, A. *The Philosophical Project of Jules Laquier*. 57:8-10/38, 1938, pp.27-47; Arjakovsky, *The Way*, pp.446-7.)

“the right kind of self”.³⁶ Herein lies not only the contrast between a lived authenticity and its obverse, inauthenticity, but the stress engendered in avoiding the latter.

4. Authentic and Inauthentic Existence

The right or wrong way to live one’s life has occupied philosophers since the ancient world.³⁷ A prosaic example of inauthentic existence might be where the ‘I’ follows a particular career path in order to please the ‘Other’, who might be a parent, a partner, society at large. However, human beings, it would seem, cannot attain an authentic life without the ‘Other’, meaning that authenticity is linked to relationality. Buber’s notion of relationality is one that leans heavily on an authentic encounter with the ‘Other’, which he dubs “a personal meeting”.³⁸ We have, emphasises Buber, to be “so completely absorbed in the meeting that any other consideration disappears.”³⁹ To bring out the difference between a conventional encounter where the ‘I’ is superficially dealing with the ‘Other’, and a more authentic, dynamic meeting where the ‘I’ is engrossed by the ‘Other’, Roubiczek likens Buber’s notion to three scenarios: reading a book; attending a lecture; having a conversation. The first, he argues, is a communication, but it is limited. “[O]ur thoughts can wander, we can be distracted, interrupt the reading...we can fall asleep while reading.”⁴⁰ A lecture is a move towards authenticity, “but our thoughts can still wander and we can still fall asleep.”⁴¹ Only through the physical presence of an interlocutor is there the possibility of what Roubiczek calls a “true

³⁶ Young, N. J. *History and Existential Theology*. London: Epworth Press, 1969, p.135.

³⁷ An early example would be Socrates, “perhaps the first existentialist philosopher”. (Westphal, p.22.)

³⁸ Roubiczek, P. *Existentialism. For and Against*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p.141. Buber’s phrase cited by Roubiczek. No reference.

³⁹ Ibid. Roubiczek’s words. Buber expresses the importance of encounter with the ‘Other’ – with, as he puts it here, the ‘You’. “The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one’s whole being.” And elsewhere: “The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.” (Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.54 and 56.)

⁴⁰ Roubiczek, p.142.

⁴¹ Ibid.

conversation”.⁴² But then it is what that conversational exchange is based on which makes it true. “We must really try to understand and to make ourselves understood, try to convince and to allow ourselves to be convinced...[we must] neither hide our true opinions nor endeavour to refute our partner”.⁴³

Macquarrie, using a negative marker, underlines the importance of authenticity from an existential perspective. “Practically all existentialists...are agreed that human social relations, as we normally find them, are sadly distorted...The way in which people are normally together does not deserve the name of community.”⁴⁴ This feeds into the theological understanding of the ‘Other’ in Orthodoxy and encapsulates Khodr’s own theology of the ‘Other, which, in the light of the above, implicitly calls for existential authenticity.

Authenticity within the theological framework of the Orthodox Church could be said to revolve around deification and the theotic pathway; as such, the *Philokalia* is a book that guides the reader towards the authentic life. As human beings, we are made in the image of God, and to realise our authentic identity and unite with God after our postlapsarian fall, our existence should aim for reconciliation, for theosis. Nellas tacitly recognises that in this pursuit of theosis and authenticity, there is conditionality, entailing the surrendering of our independence; and this can be painful for human beings, whose minds are clouded by preoccupation with rationality and earthly concerns, because “it [the process of theosis] eradicates even the slightest tendency towards the vindication of autonomy.”⁴⁵ But, Nellas implies, straying into the tangled weeds of autonomy is to veer from our true pathway as Adam and Eve did. God, he argues, is not external to our being; made in the image of God “man [humankind] has a theological structure. And to be a true man [authentic human being] he must at every moment exist and live theocentrically. When he denies God he denies himself and destroys himself.”⁴⁶ According to Nellas’ argument, to be authentic means living according to one’s own true

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Macquarrie 1973, p.118.

⁴⁵ Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p.42.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

‘theological’ structure. This is the Christic salvation inherent in the Incarnation. Palamas equates salvation not only with immortality, but with “the disclosure of authentic humanity”.⁴⁷ Authenticity, an existential term, is thus built into the Orthodox principle of *bona fide* or true existence.

Whereas the *Philokalia* offers us spiritual guidance on how we should live,⁴⁸ Heidegger asserts that human beings have an existential propensity for “seeking to be”,⁴⁹ a striving to *be*. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) has been credited with introducing the term ‘authenticity’ into the lexicon of existentialism.⁵⁰ For Heidegger, existence is unique to human beings. “Man alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist. Horses are, but they do not exist. Angels are, but they do not exist. God is, but he does not exist.”⁵¹ Heidegger’s religiosity is ambiguous – as that last sentence almost playfully suggests – but perhaps it would be rash to label him atheistic. Authentic existence is partly recognising that human beings alone exist in the sense that they have a self-awareness of existence; they are not *in* the world in the same way as inanimate objects are *in* the world, they are ‘present-in-the-world’, which suggests that human beings, unlike inanimate objects have ‘infinite’ possibility. Inauthentic existence is living according to the demands and expectations of the world, a mode of existence that is self-limiting and self-restricting.⁵² In this sense, human beings alone have a ‘built-in’ facility for potentiating meaning in existence.

⁴⁷ Pelikan, J. *The Christian Tradition*, p.263.

⁴⁸ “The *Philokalia* is an itinerary through the labyrinth of time, a silent way of love and gnosis through the deserts and emptinesses of life, especially of modern life...revealing a spiritual path and inducing man to follow it.” (Palmer, G. E. H., Sherrard, P, Archimandrite Kallistos Ware. Introduction. In: *The Philokalia*. Vol.1. G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (eds.). London: Faber & Faber, 1977, p.13.) Nasr also makes the point that we are “living in a daydream called ordinary life, in the state of forgetting what Christ called the one thing necessary, that is, the Divine Reality.” (Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, p.22.)

⁴⁹ Steiner, G. *Heidegger*. Glasgow: Fontana, 1978, p.106.

⁵⁰ Olson, R. G. *Existentialism*, p.134.

⁵¹ Heidegger, M. ‘The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics’, 1949. W. Kaufman (trans.). In: Kaufman, p.272.

⁵² A sentiment entirely in accordance with the *Philokalia*.

Freedom in the context of authenticity, it is suggested, entails identity; but it comes with a responsibility, which is to preserve and promote the freedom of the 'Other'. Cooper, citing Fichte and Hegel,⁵³ argues that "for me to have a proper appreciation of my own freedom as a rational being, I must recognize a like freedom in others."⁵⁴ Thus, to extrapolate, the price of our own identity is conditional on our recognition, and sustaining, of the 'Other's' individual identity.

Transposed to a religious context, a coherent identity presupposes an authenticity that derives from both group identity and personal identity, the two, it is argued, symbiotically conjoined in a union to reach out to the divine. However, it is, perhaps, the Church, or ecclesiology, that may be identified with group identity; and theosis with personal identity. This is because theosis is governed by an 'autonomous' personal identity. Personal identity connotes free will; and theosis itself depends on free will, the consent of the individual human being to embark on the theotic pathway.

4.1 Concepts of Meaninglessness, Alienation, & Abandonment

One of the enduring themes of existentialism is the quandary of finding ourselves unwittingly in the world, which can engender a feeling of displacement. But a displacement from what? This reaction, which can have no satisfactory, verifiable response, can imbue a sense of alienation that, because of the vagueness cloaking our existence, and, it has to be said, the prospect of death, our non-existence, can lead to anxiety.⁵⁵ And when this existence is populated by the 'Other', by war, by factionalism,⁵⁶ by economic

⁵³ Johann Gottlieb Fichte 1762-1814; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 1770-1831.

⁵⁴ Cooper, p.46.

⁵⁵ Kafka's *The Trial* has a sense of dark foreboding when someone is accused of a crime, which he is not told about and of which he has no knowledge. (Kafka, F. *The Trial*. W. and E. Muir (trans.). London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1953. See also Chapter 9, p.354.) The plays of Harold Pinter (1930-2008) often carry a similar theme: a character feels he is threatened for motives he finds neither reasonable nor identifiable, and by a person or persons who are total strangers. These literary expressions can imply or parallel the fear of our own demise, the date of which is generally uncertain.

⁵⁶ Maalouf, a Lebanese author, talks about Christian minorities in the Middle East and their sense of insecurity. "At no time since the birth of Islam have they felt themselves as marginalised, oppressed and even forced out as they do today in Iraq

hardship and uncertainty, by political instability, the sense of anxiety and alienation is compounded.

Existence presents each human being with a common quandary: that of creating conditions for developing and nurturing *self* – to define who we are and what our destiny might be. There may be many ways to achieve this, but it could be said that forging individual identities in the fire of community may be either insufficient or an evasion of responsibility to *self*. It is the kind of behavioural trait that Sartre describes as ‘bad faith’. In elucidating his theory, Warnock encapsulates the essence of ‘bad faith’ as “this peculiar kind of insincerity...half self-deceiving, half deliberate, the playing of parts in one’s life.”⁵⁷ The tactical motivations behind ‘bad faith’ may often be pragmatic: to lay the foundations of a career; to create the best possible conditions for one’s family to survive; to safeguard the community; to please parents or superiors. However, in doing so, the individual can become dislodged from the ‘I’ and experience a sense of alienation. In the same way, ‘bad faith’ can derive by way of modelling the development of *self* on others, especially those closest to us. While not being wholly misconceived, it could be seen as setting up a wedge between the *self* and its natural potential, or blight the growth of *self* as an autonomous being. Paradoxically, the inauthentic action of either denying *self* for the sake of others, or denying others for the sake of *self*, can both induce a sense of alienation. In the first instance, the individual is alienated from their true self; in the second, they may feel alienated from their community.

Rotenstreich offers another illustration. “When societies are controlled by individuals or by corporations interested in profit-making, rendering individuals

and some other countries.” (Maalouf, A. *Disordered World*. G. Miller (trans.). London: Bloomsbury, 2011, pp.16-7.)

⁵⁷ Warnock, p.51. Sartre uses the example of the waiter going about his business, how he ‘acts’ the part of a waiter. He broadens this to include other ordinary people, “tradesmen”, and how their role is perceived by the world. “A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer...Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer”. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.59.)

subservient to this objective of profit, alienation occurs.”⁵⁸ As an extension of this observation, it is argued, human beings can become alienated when tied to a job that offers little or no satisfaction, but which they are required to keep in order to support themselves and their families. The curdling of necessity with unfulfilled or repressed potential can result in alienation.

Transposed on to a spiritual level, and as discussed above, those following a spiritual pathway can feel that the world offers little when compared to a greater reality; that their real home is not in the earthly realm but in a celestial dimension where union with the Divine has a claim on their true destiny. This too can engender alienation, albeit a positive alienation, from the secular world, which, according to the theoretical theotic construct, is superfluous to our authentic nature.⁵⁹

From an existential perspective, existence could be likened to a hermeneutical diptych: on one panel, there is represented a fresco of the human condition, which relies heavily on the humanistic and highlights our aloneness in an empty cosmos, void of meaning and purpose. But this is not necessarily negative. Individual human beings can take life into their own hands and forge their own purpose, their own reason for being here. On the other panel, there is a panoramic view of an almost entirely different kind. Life may seem meaningless, its activities futile and ultimately without substance;⁶⁰ human beings may even feel out of place, that this is not their home.⁶¹ But

⁵⁸ Rotenstreich, N. *Alienation. The Concept and its Reception*. Leiden: Brill, 1989, p.80.

⁵⁹ “We find ourselves...in a state contrary to nature, and far from that which God preordained for us in the beginning. We are without God in the world”. (Zacharias, p.27.) Cf. also Wordsworth: “...trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home”. (Wordsworth, W. ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’. In: Quiller-Couch, A. (ed.) *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1918*. London: Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 626-633.)

⁶⁰ “It is true that sin is the cause of all this suffering, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” [Christ’s words.] (Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. London: Penguin Books, 1998, p.80, Chapter 27, ‘The Thirteenth Revelation’.)

⁶¹ See, for example, Zacharias. “We find ourselves...in a state contrary to nature, and far from that which God preordained for us in the beginning. We are without God in the world”. (Zacharias, p.27.) Cf. also Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), the Spanish poet, who likens our experience of living in the world to waking in the early

this is only natural, say proponents of the argument. Human beings belong to God and it is to God that they return.⁶² And if the uncreated, apophatic God appears, to mortal minds, beyond comprehension, he is not beyond the spiritual reach of created beings.

Being liberated, however, from the angst of existence by means of either theistic or atheistic principles, can bring scant comfort when human beings may be consumed by dread of an unknown future, in which they may be victims of natural disaster, the vicissitudes of financial markets, sickness, or 'man's inhumanity to man'. There is, in addition, the characteristic flaws common to all humanity, including mental health problems and innate passions.

The role of the 'Other' in our worldly existence is given an interesting and alleviating significance when looked at from a theological perspective. While we have seen in Sartrean philosophy that the 'Other' can play a subordinating role, in religious terms it is through the 'Other' that we find ourselves. And, it is contended, God is not excluded from this interpretation – for, while it is a theme within theology that God created the world in order to be known, it may be posited that God created human beings in order to 'know' himself.⁶³ This

hours of the morning and finding ourselves at a railway station that is not our destination.

⁶² The Qur'ān makes this exact statement. See Q.2:156. "We belong to God, and to Him we shall return." (*The Qur'ān. A New Translation by Tarif Khalidi*. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.)

⁶³ For example, see Corrigan where, in reference to mystical union, he draws a comparison to friendship. It is only "through the discovery of "another self" one discovers one's own self". (Corrigan, K. "Solitary" Mysticism in Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius.' In: *The Journal of Religion*. Vol.76, No.1, 1996, pp.28-42, p.35.) The contention that God created human beings in order to be known is not limited to Christianity. In a similar Islamic vein, God, according to a *hadith*, wanted to be known and thus created humankind. "I was a 'Hidden treasure'; I loved to be known; therefore I created the world so that I would be known." (Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, p.42.) Nasr points out that the word *ahbattu* in the *hadith*, meaning 'loved', is often translated as 'wanted' or 'willed'. (Ibid., p.43.) See also Chiddick, who discusses this very same *hadith*. He picks up on the reference to love, drawing attention to the Sufi belief that love and mercy together are the "cause of creation". (Chiddick, W. C. *Sufism. A Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2000, p.11.). This observation, interwoven with the above, suggests a profound intimacy in God's relationship with humankind. And, for Sufism, this is precisely the point. For Sufis, the world is a theophany and Siraj Ed-Din emphasises

suggests an interesting perspective on apophaticism or negative theology. While exploring this, Stang discusses the notion of negative theology and negative anthropology,⁶⁴ referring to Eriugena's belief that they complement each other, only because, for Eriugena, "negative theology and negative anthropology are grounded in the conviction that divine and human subjectivity are one and the same in essence. One important conclusion of this conviction is that God is the subject in any and all human knowledge of God – that is, God comes to know God through humans knowing God."⁶⁵ The corollary of this is that the human *self*, like the God of which it is an image, does not know *what* it is.⁶⁶ Stang claims McGinn is correct to attribute this 'unknowing' to Dionysius.⁶⁷

The concept of *selfhood*, central to the existential argument, is important for Orthodoxy. Kallistos Ware⁶⁸ acknowledges that each person is utterly unique, but that each individual is only fully human when they commune – first, with God; second, with human beings. There can, he says, be no 'I' without a 'Thou'.⁶⁹ But, one may ask, of what is the 'I' comprised? While acknowledging the apophysis of God, Ware argues that we are, each one of us, unknowable, to each other and to ourselves.⁷⁰ But, Ware says, we do have self-awareness, a factor of our character linked to our participation in the divine image, and it is this that facilitates "reflection".⁷¹ As a result of our ability to reflect, we can make moral choices, something unique to humankind; but, unlike God, our freedom is not "absolute and unconditioned".⁷² What

how "there is absolutely nothing that does not owe its existence to the overflow of the Divine Nature in Its Will to manifest Itself." Thus, he claims, the same *hadith* "may be said to sum up the cosmogonic doctrine of all mysticism." (Siraj Ed-Din, A. B. 'The Nature and Origin of Sufism.' In: *Islamic Spirituality. Foundations*. S. H. Nasr (ed.). New York: Crossroad, 1987, p.232.)

⁶⁴ Stang, p.156.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.156-7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.156.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.157.

⁶⁸ See Ware, 'In the Image and Likeness: The Uniqueness of the Human Person.'

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.4.

⁷⁰ "As human beings we are formed in God's image and likeness; since God is incomprehensible, so also is God's image, the human person." (Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, p.33.)

⁷¹ Ware, 'In the Image and Likeness', p.10.

⁷² Ibid.

Ware means by this is that we know, and often consciously know, our choices are informed by an array of conditioning elements such as upbringing, cultural background, social position, which can shape and mould this decision-making process. Even, it might be added, when we are consciously unaware, these influences are often psychologically intervening on a subliminal level to bring about a choice that is more in harmony with our personal or sociological profile. This suggests another example of (Kierkegaardian) existential anguish: are we making apposite or misjudged moral choices in our lives?

5. The Absurd: Existential Precepts and the Unknowable God

Dionysius the Areopagite emphasises the impossibility of knowing God, the impossibility stemming from apophasis, from God's existing far beyond anything we can ever know. Using terms such as 'mighty' and 'strong' do not offer anything in the way of a mental picture of the Divine, for God is beyond anything we can conceive; any label we employ is veritably pointless. It is, in some ways, like describing a painting as 0.25 – it may have relevance, but we have no idea what; and it does not succeed in conveying anything meaningful. In the end, it is not so much meaningless, but supremely limited as a description.

In *Letter Nine* to Titus the hierarch, Dionysius unravels a stream of 'absurd' attributes used in Scripture to convey what God is.⁷³ In the case of inebriation, it is used to convey "the measureless superabundance of good things which are in him as Cause."⁷⁴ It is as if, in order to reach out for some linguistic aid, we invert the conventional use of language – similar to the Dadaists, who contorted reality so that they could, perversely, communicate a finer clarity.⁷⁵ The term 'absurdity' itself is not supposed to mean what it infers

⁷³ "God is clothed in feminine adornments or in the armor of barbarians...He is put on horses, on chariots, on thrones...He is represented as drinking, as inebriated..." (Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Letters*. 9.1. 1105.A-1105.B, in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p.282.)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; p.287.

⁷⁵ Williams describes the process by which we use language in manifold ways in our attempt to make sense of the world. "We cannot easily imagine human speaking without the risk of metaphor, without the possibility of error and misprision, without the possibility of fiction, whether simple lying or cooperative fantasy." (Williams, *The*

colloquially. For Dionysius, it refers to the use of language, absurdity as quasi symbolism in the Scriptural context, and thus limited. Symbols, observes Yannaras, are used to refer to “the divine existential event, [and are] unable to define the ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ of God”.⁷⁶ Indeed, Dionysius makes this explicit within the *CD*.⁷⁷

Conscious admission of absurdity is a common denominator amongst theistic and atheistic existentialists alike; however, as stated earlier, the presumed existence of a deity does not necessarily bring consolation.⁷⁸ Indeed, the opposite may more readily be applied. The apophatic God of transcendence can be suggestive of abandonment, a dark void acknowledged by some committed Christians. Another common denominator that unites theistic and atheistic existentialists is a realisation that daily existence is suffused with philosophical absurdity, spiritual disenchantment, and a sense of Sisyphean hopelessness. It is this realisation that is personified in one who may cleave to faith in another, perhaps more ethereal, ‘Reality’, while ignoring the Siren calls of worldly distractions – the Outsider.

Commonalities, both poetic and intangible, can be found in existentialism, apophaticism, and the spiritual reality of experiential mysticism.⁷⁹ Existential authors, in order to convey feelings of alienation and the angst of existence,

Edge of Words, p.60.) Later, he refers to how the object (of the knower) has a multitude of interpretations. “We could say that the object is consistently ‘proposing’ more than any one account of itself will capture – metaphorically, that it continues to ‘give itself’ for new kinds of knowing.” (Ibid., p.62. See also Chapter 1, Fn.51.)

⁷⁶ Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, p.73.

⁷⁷ See for example, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 2.1. 137.A-137.B, pp.147-8. (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*.)

⁷⁸ Inadvertently, and ironically, Sartre, from an atheistic position, makes a theistic point. While defining and exploring the pertinence of existentialism, he compares theistic existential thinkers with atheistic existential thinkers. Whether a Divine exists, says Sartre, is immaterial to the problem posed by existence: “even if God existed that would make no difference from its [existentialism’s] point of view...the real problem is not that of His existence”. (Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p.56.) In other words, theism does not necessarily extricate us from the philosophical conundrum of existence, nor is it a preliminary to assured spiritual sublimity. On the contrary, the apophaticism of God only goes to place the potential prospect of either even further beyond our attainment.

⁷⁹ Cf., for example, Stang, who points out that there are scholars who have “discerned the fact that apophatic or mystical theology has a corresponding anthropology”. (Stang, p.156.)

often resort, as did Sartre and Camus, to literary illustration; those who experience mystical events – or at least, a profound sense of spirituality – employ the symbolism of poetic and religio-poetic expression as an attempt to create a communicational channel;⁸⁰ and there are others still, who try to convey an interpretative glimpse of the celestial realm using, not only the written word, but artistic imagery – for example, utilising various forms of symbolism and iconography.⁸¹

As for this world, it might be a cauldron of misery and woe, but focusing on it as a theophany, it can be seen as a means to communicate with, relate to, God, through experiential existence. Renunciation, therefore, is not an option for “the wretched world is the means by which we are related to God”.⁸² However, this is not to deny that the experience of existence is absurd; rather, from Orthodoxy’s perspective, it is absurd experience alleviated by the sanctifying sacrifice of the cross and resurrection.⁸³

⁸⁰ *The Dark Night of the Soul* by John of the Cross (1542-1591), which, as Bernard McGinn implies, is popularly perceived as an exposition on suffering, also acts as a “treatise commenting on the poem “En una noche oscura”...[providing] a basic description of the effect of this night on the soul.” (McGinn, B. (ed.) *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York: The Modern Library, 2006, p.384; St John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*. E. Allison Peers (trans.) from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. New York: Dover Publications, 2003.) See also Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) for a sharp, highly lucid account of the spiritual journey. (Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. E. A. Peers (trans.) Indiana: Christian Classics, 2007.) An example of secular poetic aspirations can be found in *The Night* by Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) (In: Quiller-Couch, pp.410-1.); for what appears to be an unambiguous account of experiential mysticism, see *St Agnes’ Eve* by Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), although possibly not experienced in actuality. (Ibid., pp.850-1)

⁸¹ Louth explains the legitimacy of imagery in Byzantine spirituality, citing for instance, John Damascene’s argument that the Incarnation is justification alone for the use of imagery, for it is the Incarnation that made visible what is invisible – that is, God. (Louth, ‘Beauty Will Save The World’, p.74. See also Chapter 5.)

⁸² Rubenstein, M-J. ‘Dionysius, Derrida, and the Critique of “Ontotheology”.’ In: *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. S. Coakley, C. M. Stang, C. M. (eds.). MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p.204.

⁸³ “...the joy of the resurrection becoming consciously ours, and breaching the absurd and nothingness...” (Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p.245.)

This courting of the absurd, surrendering oneself to it, is Kierkegaardian, but is discernible in others,⁸⁴ while Dionysius' divine descriptor "drunkenness" and his reference to the 'absurdities' that abound in scriptural texts – "God is clothed in feminine adornments or in the armor of barbarians...He is put on horses, on chariots, on thrones..."⁸⁵ – is in the tradition of the absurd.

The 'Theatre of the Absurd', once a popular dramatic medium in the latter half of the twentieth century, employed similar devices to convey existential dilemmas and anxiety. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a typical piece, in which two tramps, stranded in the middle of nowhere, are encouraged to linger for the arrival of Godot, a mysterious figure, who never appears, but who seems to hold sway over them, paralysing movement and activity as they wait for the commanding saviour, who will make all things right again.⁸⁶ This may be seen as an allusion to the bleakness of existence and an apophatic, transcendent God, who is 'beyond', out of reach, incommunicable; the two tramps, it might be supposed, know only too well that Godot will never come, but, for all his cosmic insouciance, he is nonetheless omniscient and the two men can only ever play out a kind of blind, unthinking subservience like puppets on strings.⁸⁷ Another view might be that this is a theatrical witness to the death of God, to the absence of God, and the subsequent abandonment of humankind to God-less existence. Theists, agnostics, and atheists can respectively identify with Beckett's perspective on absurdity, a concept that inhabits Sartre's novel, *Nausea*, where the protagonist, Roquentin is haunted by the absurdity of existence, that he is superfluous, that he exists as a contingent

⁸⁴ "...for Chestov acceptance of the absurd is contemporaneous with the absurd itself. Being aware of it amounts to accepting it, and the whole logical effort of his thought is to bring it out so that at the same time the tremendous hope it involves may burst forth." (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.37.) By Chestov, Camus is referring to Lev Shestov (1866-1938), an existential philosopher, who was a member of the Paris school of Russian émigrés.

⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius. The Letters. 9.1. 1105.A-1105.B, in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p.282.

⁸⁶ Beckett, S. *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber and Faber, 1965.

⁸⁷ Webb would offer us a bleaker vista. Discussing the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, he says: "They are faced with a choice between illusory meaning and a vision of meaninglessness." (Webb, E. *The Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974, p.134.)

entity.⁸⁸ In this latter example, however, Christians, including Kierkegaard, would counter Sartre with an insistence that we are saved from the abyss, from the sensation of existential nausea, by a loving God, who, through the Incarnation, validates our existence with a spark of divinity in each one of us.

5.1 “The Elimination of God”

The ‘death of God’ and apophatic theology, it would appear, are inextricably linked through existential anguish; both leave us with a sense of absence, often expressed within the language of the absurd. Even for the atheist, one may contend, there is little consolation in feeling ‘right’, for the result is the same for the atheist as it can be for the theist: to be alone in an involuntary existence; to live out life in an infinite and meaningless cosmos leading to unavoidable death. There is, however, a difference between the two. The ‘death of God’, certainly according to Yannaras and his analysis of Heidegger, is the consequence of allowing (Western) rationality to run rampant; God is objectified and rationalised out of existence.⁸⁹ The West, argues Yannaras, developed a thesis from as early as the ninth century whereby metaphysics, while erecting belief systems based on the Divine, was paradoxically marginalising God.⁹⁰ God is, he continues, one of two things: either a first cause; or he is an absolute reference when considering moral and ethical issues.⁹¹ Either way, God’s existence is safe and secure within a battery of precise logical proofs; however, he becomes, as a result of this human manipulation, irrelevant to historical experience and “the existential condition

⁸⁸ Sartre, J-P. *Nausea*. R. Baldick (trans.). London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1965.

⁸⁹ Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*. See also Macquarrie. “The medieval antecedents of existentialism are to be sought...in some of the intellectual currents that began to flow in opposition to the prevailing rationalism. I refer especially to the rise of a new style of mysticism that turned again to the depths of human life.” These depths, it could be argued, refer to individualistic experiences of existence. (Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, pp.48-9.) As for this growing distrust of rationalism, Macquarrie speculates later in the passage on the possibility that the presence of existential themes can be attributed to the spate of “plagues, wars, political and ecclesiastical ferments [that shook] confidence in rationalism...” (Ibid., p.49.)

⁹⁰ Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, p.22.

⁹¹ Ibid.

of human beings”.⁹² By contrast, apophatic theology requires us to negate all concepts of God in order to gain, through unknowing, knowledge of God. In talking about God, Dionysius, presents a succession of descriptions of the Divine, his argument rising “from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters”,⁹³ eventually turning silent when it is with one “who is indescribable”.⁹⁴ Yannaras identifies this Dionysian apophatic God as “the elimination of God as an entity”.⁹⁵

Such positions might delineate a theistic malfunction whereby God transmutes, to all intents and purposes, into an irrelevance – meaning, he either *is*, or *is not*; and if he *is*, he is, according to existential apophaticism, so beyond understanding human beings can have nothing meaningful to do with him; and perhaps, in accordance with Aristotelianism, *vice versa*. As Yannaras says, it might seem that “an existential rift...[is set] between God and the world”.⁹⁶ This is very much the existential position, the agony of a possible irrelevance to a distant Divine, which is often most keenly experienced in the fissure that exists between God and the ‘I’, the individual.

6. Outsider and Insider: Distinguishing Between Two Concepts

The term ‘Outsider’ has been used as a philosophical, existential descriptor, finding expression within the novels of certain ‘existential’ writers, who bring forth characters with a sense of alienation and of not belonging. The term ‘Insider’ is less philosophical or existential as a term and more perhaps sociological, idiomatic of someone who belongs to, is identified, or in unison with, a group or corporate body. As a result, it may be argued that the terms can initially revolve around the concept of belonging.

However, having categorised two discrete character types, branches of psychology tend to indicate that, as individuals, we exhibit behavioural fluidity, and are neither wholly one type nor wholly another. For example, instead of

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* 3, 1033C. In: *The Complete Works*, p.139.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, pp.76-7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.77.

being wholly extrovert or wholly introvert, we manifest gradations of both, while favouring a predominance in, in this case, either extroversion or introversion.⁹⁷

Colin Wilson's seminal work, *The Outsider*, published in 1950s Britain, was essentially a study of individuals, historical 'existential' figures, who were the intellectual and artistic building blocks of, mostly cultural, human achievement, but who nonetheless did not fit into 'conventional' society.⁹⁸ Throughout the book, Wilson describes the lives of these social 'misfits' whose philosophical ingenuity or artistic inspiration isolates them, voluntarily or involuntarily, from mainstream society, which, as a body, tended on occasion to misunderstand them, mistrust them, and even fear them. Prophets could be said to be regarded in similar fashion and were often shunned by society. Misfit or prophet, both can suffer ostracism and worse. Kierkegaard was physically attacked on the streets of Copenhagen for arousing public attention.⁹⁹ In all, he lived an unconventional life, draining both his financial resources and his energies, and finally dying at the age of forty-two.¹⁰⁰

A counterargument might suggest that the Outsider is a specious term in that it has no foundation in evidenced based reality; that those who bring on themselves the mantle of 'Outsider-ship' do so as a result of a combative or curmudgeonly nature; or it is brought about by reaction to a traumatic event in their life, which, consequently, stultifies the person's capability for social interaction and behavioural decorum. Hannay argues that "Kierkegaard's focus on the individual had autobiographical origins. The topic of exceptionality was generated by events surrounding the breaking off of his

⁹⁷ See for example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, developed by Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, a test for assessing how a person is predominantly one or the other. See also, Susan Cain. Referring to the difference between the more inward person and the more outgoing "sociable" type, she says, "Few individuals identify fully with only one or the other." (Cain, S. *Quiet. The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. London: Penguin, 2013, p.269.)

⁹⁸ Wilson, C. *The Outsider*. London: Picador, 1978.

⁹⁹ Roubiczek, P. *Existentialism. For and Against*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p.108.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.109. See also Macquarrie, who describes Kierkegaard's "passionate hostility to the conventional and, as he believed, degenerate forms of Christianity". (Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p.19.)

engagement to Regine Olsen.”¹⁰¹ Doubtless, someone can be transformed by specific events into an Outsider— because, clearly, human beings can be partly moulded by the external world – but, it is argued, this does not necessarily invalidate the term ‘Outsider’: such an event can trigger previously covert or dormant tendencies and place them ‘outside’ society.

Wilson poses a question – “What is Reality?”¹⁰² – and has a number of existential characters (fictional and real) respond through his own imaginings. The answers range from abject despair as in the case of Van Gogh,¹⁰³ to nihilistic meaninglessness, via some slender consolation snatched from Fate. The closest any come to an acknowledgement of a theistic ‘beyond’ is Nijinsky,¹⁰⁴ who, according to Wilson’s imagination, says: “God, at one extreme. Misery at the other. The universe is an eternal tension stretched between God and misery.”¹⁰⁵

When considering the meaning of ‘Insider’, the conceptualisation of the term arguably follows a similar, but converse pattern. An ‘Insider’, while being someone who exists on the ‘inside’, may not necessarily agree with everything that is said and done by an organisation of which they are a member, and may not mould themselves to every intricate fold of the corporate landscape; and yet, it is maintained, they may be defined as an establishment figure and very much a part of the organisational structure. For instance, an ‘Insider’ can be an influential hierarch within a corporate body, a cog in its administrative apparatus, even a propagandist for its fundamental proclamations and overarching ethos; however, this does not necessarily mean they would never make enemies within or without the corporate body, would never make waves within the organisation. Neither does it prevent the ‘Insider’ from generating fresh, perhaps controversial, ideas and theories, which may progress or radicalise discussion, which may enliven debate, or,

¹⁰¹ Hannay, A. ‘Kierkegaard’s Single Individual and the Point of Indirect Communication’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, p.74.

¹⁰² Wilson, p.125.

¹⁰³ Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), Dutch post-impressionist painter.

¹⁰⁴ Vaslav Nijinsky, 1889-1950, Russian dancer and choreographer.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, p.126.

indeed, set scholastic cats amongst theological pigeons. That said, whatever degree of controversy an Insider might foment, it rarely, it is contended, constitutes rebellion, for the 'Insider' is not at heart a rebel, whereas, it may be argued, the 'Outsider' is. The scholar may thus resort to another label, that of 'rebel', wherein lies a fundamental distinguishing characteristic that sets a wedge between the 'Outsider' and the 'Insider'.

7. Existentialism: A Summation

This account of existentialism is plainly not exhaustive; instead, it offers a perspective and constitutes a brief summation of some major elements. However, it additionally shows that existentialism in all its manifestations, even in its more rarefied version as a philosophical 'system', is more a generic term for the human condition, and an expression, through art, culture, and, it is argued, spirituality, of what it means to be human.

The six existential criteria used in the thesis – identity, authenticity, relationality, alienation, individuality, and the Outsider – have been drawn from the foregoing exposition on existentialism. Identity, for example, is at the root of Genet's behaviour when he embraces the role of a thief, but it also underscores what it is to be human – the seeking for purpose and a role. Authenticity was covered in Section 4, 'Authentic and Inauthentic Existence', while relationality, which entails the 'Other', was addressed in Section 2. Alienation is referred to throughout, but specifically in Section 4.1. Individuality, likewise, runs through the other criteria, which imply individuality. The terms 'individual' and 'existentialism' are intertwined in an almost a synonymic bond, for if existentialism relates to the human person and what it means to be human, *ipso facto*, it refers to the individual. Finally, the Outsider is a theme which runs through existentialism, uniting all the other themes, but epitomised perhaps in the spiritual individual who, as was stated earlier, ignores worldly distractions, to cleave to faith in another, unworldly, 'Reality'.

APPENDIX B

A Biographical Sketch

At time of writing, George Khodr, at the age of ninety-four, is fulfilling his diocesan role as a bishop in the Orthodox Church and still contributing a regular column to *an-Nahar*, the Lebanese newspaper.

He was born on July 6, 1923, in Tripoli, north Lebanon, not long after the end of the First World War when Lebanon was under the French mandate. Tripoli was a far smaller urban centre than it is today, with a population of approximately 70,000.¹ His family was rooted in the area known as Harat El Nasarah and enjoyed a modest social status, before an equally modest elevation, courtesy of his father's standing. This allowed them to move up the social scale to become part of the middle class.² His schooling was confined to Tripoli, but he transferred to Beirut for his final school year,³ a new location, which may have opened his eyes to the wider world; but he was also maturing and starting to form impressions of life in a larger setting. Already, he had firm views about his exclusively Catholic schooling, which were coloured by a resentment not only of authority – customary amongst many adolescents – but of the colonialism with which it went hand in hand; perhaps his antipathy towards Catholicism was additionally buttressed by the fact that he was from a family that was pious in its observance of the Orthodox faith.⁴

Even though Tripoli may have been little more than a provincial town, it was not untouched by the world beyond its borders. In 1943, when he was only twenty, he joined a peaceful student protest, which took place on a street that runs from Tripoli's al-Tal road, in the centre, down to the port of al-Mina.⁵ A French tank drove through the ranks of demonstrators, shooting at the

¹ Azar, J. 'George Khodr: The Poet Bishop'. At al-Akhbar English, 31 August, 2012. Accessed 5 May, 2014. (<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/george-khodr-poet-bishop>)

² Wehbe, p.44.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Khairallah, p.483.

⁵ Azar, *George Khodr: The Poet Bishop*.

demonstrators and killing eleven people,⁶ many of them Khodr's friends. This was to have a lasting effect on him, firming up his hatred of power and violence, and souring his attitude to colonialism.

When this was discussed with Khodr, he was quick to emphasise that it did not persuade him to hate France.⁷ As if to emphasise the point, his educational experience at the Collège des Frères by French monks seems to have been a positive one.⁸ Other than learning a great deal, he was generally impressed by the way the monks interrelated with the students.⁹

With early sensitivity to the plight of the poor and the powerless, he had ambitions to enter the law, graduating in 1944 with a License in Law from the University of St. Joseph, Beirut,¹⁰ but he was also deepening his interest in theology and, perhaps as a reaction against his Catholic education, actively promoting the Orthodox Church. In 1942, with the help of other fellow students, he was instrumental in starting the Orthodox Youth Movement.

In 1943, Lebanon was granted independence from France; this, however, was in somewhat unusual circumstances. The Second World War was at its height, which may have imposed restrictions on both international movement and the capitalising of newly won sovereignty. Following his graduation, he succeeded in practising law, but in 1947, he travelled to Europe in the company of Albert Lahham and Gabriel Sa'ade.¹¹ During their sojourn, they met Father Lev Gillet (1893-1980)¹² in London, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Youth Movement in Switzerland, and, on their return, the Greek Orthodox Youth Movement in Athens.¹³

⁶ Ibid and Avakian, p.104.

⁷ Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2016. With somewhat abstruse reasoning, Khodr attributes this to his French education.

⁸ Azar, *George Khodr: The Poet Bishop*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *TWOC*, p.5.

¹¹ Wehbe, p.45.

¹² Gillet was a Roman Catholic priest, who converted to Orthodoxy.

¹³ Wehbe, p.45.

This was not, however, Khodr's last contact with Europe. His deepening faith and growing attention to the spirituality of the Orthodox Church led him to become, along with his friends Elias Morcos, Habib Hazim, and Spiro Jabbour,¹⁴ a theology student at St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. This college was co-founded by Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), a leading Russian émigré and theologian, who helped to shape Russian Orthodoxy in Paris. It was Khodr's time in Paris and his work as a student at the Institute that deepened his interest in Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian theologians, an influence that moulded his spirituality.¹⁵ Apart from his academic work and his developing spirituality, Paris opened the door to a wider world, imbuing him with a life-long love of art.

Following his return to Lebanon, he took monastic vows, changing his name to Yuhanna.¹⁶ This is significant because it indicates a state of mind that was focused more on spiritual retreat and renunciation of the world, however measured that may have been, than on becoming directly involved with a secular community. It was Patriarch Alexandros Tahan (1868-1958), however, who persuaded him to renounce monasticism and become an active priest.¹⁷ In 1954, at the age of thirty-one, he was ordained and for the next sixteen years was parish priest in al-Mina near Tripoli.¹⁸ Parallel to this, he was a committed leader of the Orthodox Youth Movement, only relinquishing

¹⁴ Morcos, p.37.

¹⁵ "It is to this period of study that Khodr owes his deliberation and engagement with Russian theology." (Avakian, p.105.) One of the reasons Khodr was drawn towards the Russians may be interpreted as a reaction against his colonialistic past. He says, for example, that he was attracted by the Russian mind because it was different from the French mind, which he was exposed to in his education. And again: "the Russians of Paris were particularly important for me because they were Europeans without being Westerners." (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 23 October, 2013.)

¹⁶ Wehbe, p.46.

¹⁷ Ibid. In conversation, Khodr offers another version of his early religious vocation. He says there was not, at that time, an established monasticism as there is today; instead, a so called monastic vocation had to be lived out as parish ministry. Khodr felt he could live his monastic vocation in this manner. (Interview with George Khodr, Broumana, 25 October, 2013.)

¹⁸ Wehbe, p.46.

his role when he was appointed Metropolitan Bishop of Byblos and Botrys in 1970.¹⁹

Khodr has managed to combine his work as a practising priest with that of a teacher, working extensively within the educational system, teaching Islamic philosophy at the Lebanese University in Beirut, and pastoral theology at the University of Balamand in north Lebanon.²⁰ This academic interest in Islam and Arabic culture is not an intellectual stance, for Khodr has a deep and abiding respect for the Qur'ān and Islamic culture, as well as a genuine love for Muslims.²¹ Neither has his activity been restricted to Lebanon and the Lebanese stage. He has used his membership of the Middle East Council of Churches to promote interfaith dialogue and to air his spiritual interpretations of the faith.²² He was President of its Theological Commission (1976-82) and from 1984 was a member of its Faith and Unity Commission.²³ Closer to home, he was appointed president in 1979 of the Synodal Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, and a member of the Mixed Commission for Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue.²⁴ Running alongside all this, he was an active player in Christian-Muslim dialogue.²⁵

Khodr has been described as a multifaceted person: “spiritually poetic, idealistic, hot tempered and intelligent”;²⁶ and it was the strength of his character that may have served him well in his work of interconfessional, interreligious bridge-building. During the civil war (1975-1990), he resolutely remained impartial, refusing, even under pressure, to favour one side or the other. Partly as a result of this unambiguous position, he has gained the respect of Muslims as well as Christians.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See, for example, Sharp, pp.177-8.

²² Khairallah, p.481, Fn.3.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wehbe, p.46.

Khodr is someone who has strong views, hates power, is reluctant to treat earthly authority with unconditional deference, is often disapproving of those who do, and is not willing to compromise his endeavours to fulfil what he believes to be Christ's message. He inspires a high level of loyalty amongst his followers, but, equally, his repudiation of worldly values and his habit of not mincing words, have earned him disapprobation, if not outright hostility, in some quarters of Lebanese society, whether within the Orthodox Church, the Orthodox community, or amongst the general populace. Nonetheless, as a mark of his international stature in the Orthodox Church, he has been awarded two honorific titles – Doctor of Divinity Honoris Causa from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York in 1968; and in 1988, he received a similar accolade from the Faculté de Théologie Protestante de Paris.²⁷

²⁷ *TWOC*, pp.5-6.

APPENDIX C

Lebanon: An Overview

This short, additional appendix will sketch a contextual backdrop to Khodr's life by offering a snapshot of Lebanon, a summary of its more recent history, and a glimpse of its confessional patchwork.

1. Sects, Boundaries, & The 'Other': An Historical Overview

Lebanon is a country that occupies approximately 10,000 square kilometres of territory, 200 kilometres of which stretch alongside the eastern Mediterranean littoral. Its population could be said to be a cornucopia of regional religions and ethnicities, and, perhaps as a consequence, the Lebanese constitution officially recognises eighteen different religious communities.

During the Middle Ages, the region, predominantly under the sway of Islam, was caught up in the Crusades, which gave rise to surprising alliances. The Maronites of north Lebanon, for example, were not as unwelcoming towards their fellow Christians as others might have been,¹ illustrating perhaps how groups or sects within Lebanon were not always united behind a common cause or sense of nationalism. Robert Fisk adds another perspective. As a journalist, his observation of 1976 suggests this characteristic of the Lebanese can appear confusing, contradictory, and in defiance of any reasonable explanation other than, perhaps, personal survival. He describes being in Hazmiyeh, a suburb of Beirut, and watching when Syrian tanks rolled through the streets to be showered with rosewater and rice, the traditional welcome; and, again in Hazmiyeh just over five years later, when the Israelis were treated to similar displays of welcome.²

Intermittent invasion and an almost perennial threat from extraneous forces may have helped to encourage the Lebanese to develop other forms of

¹ Salibi observes that when the Crusaders arrived at the end of the eleventh century, "...the main body of the Maronites in northern Mount Lebanon rallied around them..." (Salibi, K. *A House of Many Mansions. The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, p.13.)

² Fisk, R. *Pity the Nation*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1990, p.53.

survival technique, including the consolidation of familial and tribal groups for the sake of communal protection. This, together with, in some parts, the rugged landscape and mountainous terrain, which were not only remote but difficult to traverse, reinforced this tendency and allowed a sense of community to flourish, thus embedding identity and nurturing group loyalties.³

2. Seeds of Sectarianism

This supposed Lebanese inclination towards group loyalties, compounded by the Ottomans' political machinations, helped, it is argued, to rigidify community borders and develop sectarianism. This was to have rabid expression in the Christian-Druze debacles of 1860 and foreshadow the more widespread inter-communal disasters, which bedevilled the country in the twentieth century. Undergirding the simmering animosity of 1860, and historically embedded in the sociological landscape, was a pronounced suspicion and distrust of the 'Other'.⁴ Having heard that the Christian communities were intending jointly to embark on a campaign to deracinate the Druze, the latter had their *casus belli* and initiated pre-emptive action. It was like lancing a long suppurating boil. The ensuing violence was horrific, with whole communities slaughtered and villages razed.

3. Preamble to Apocalyptic Civil War and Beyond

Soon after Lebanon became independent, the Jewish State of Israel was founded and a flood of Palestinian refugees moved into Lebanon, ratcheting up the tension with regard to intercommunal relations in Lebanese society. From the early days of modern Zionism, Jewish leaders were keen to strike up an accord with the Maronites because, as Hirst observes, they believed prior to and post-1948 it was in Israel's interests for Lebanon to become a Christian state.⁵ This *quid pro quo* could be explained as a mutual fear of

³ Salibi describes the Maronites as "...more...a tribe or tribal confederation with a special church than...a purely religious community". (Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, p.41.)

⁴ Salibi cites an account of a Druze family that had been watching and waiting fifteen years, since the civil war of 1845, to avenge the murder of one of their family members. (Salibi, K. *The Modern History of Lebanon*. New York: Caravan Books, 1999, p.92.)

⁵ Hirst, p.40.

Islam and the Muslim 'Other', but with contrasting emphases. There was the "...Maronites' historical fear of, and antipathy for, Islam...",⁶ and the enmity, perceived or otherwise, of Arab states to emergent Israel.

This "historical fear" of Islam, which Hirst points to, is an example of how tradition and memory serve to mould people's perception of the 'Other'. Although not unique to Lebanon, it is a factor that has highlighted a specific phenomenon within Lebanese society: a disposition in some quarters to distrust the (religious) 'Other', a centuries old disposition that has been passed on from one generation to the next. Children are born and the fear or reservation is somehow inculcated, either deliberately or by some osmotic process. Thus it is that tradition and collective memory are mutually reinforced, while both are interwoven into the fabric of a people's historical existence within an experiential present.⁷

In 1958, another inter-communal civil war was resolved with the intervention of the United States, but the problems did not go away. Indeed, they could be said to have been incubated, ready to be revived and to come forth in an even more terrible conflagration seventeen years later, when the combustible cocktail of Palestinian presence, Christian unease, and Muslim defensiveness, finally exploded into apocalyptic conflict. In 1989, the Taif Agreement provided the groundwork for a peace settlement and official closure in 1990, although exhaustion and stalemate may also have played a part.

More recently, eddies of violence from the Syrian war have leaked into Lebanon, along with a deluge of refugees, which threatens security, national demographics, and the economy. All of these influences continue to offset the country's relative stability, hamper its economic growth, and keep it in an open-ended state of tension and uncertainty.

⁶ Ibid., p.10.

⁷ This phenomenon is not unique to Lebanon or to the Middle East. Arguably, Northern Ireland's 'troubles' can be ascribed to a bitter intra-Christian rivalry with roots that go back hundreds of years.

APPENDIX D

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Byblos & Botrys

BROUMANA - LIBAN TEL. : 04 - 961647 , 04 - 961209

M. Miles Elwell,

Dear M. Elwell,

I the undersigned Bishop Georges Khodr, holding the copyright of 'The Pathway of Childhood', allow you to give a CD version of the book to the examiners of your PhD thesis, provided you get it back after the examination and keep it strictly confidential.

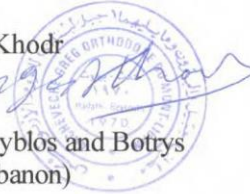
With blessings.

November 4, 2015

Georges Khodr



Metropolitan of Byblos and Botrys
(Mount Lebanon)



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Formal Interviews

University of Balamand

- Father Porhyrios Georgy:** Associate Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Dean of the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology
- Dr Nicolas Abou Mrad:** Associate Professor of Old Testament
- Father Bassam Nassif:** Assistant Professor in Pastoral Theology
- Dr Elie Dannaoui:** Research Fellow
- Georges Nahas:** Vice-President of the University of Balamand

American University of Beirut

- Professor As'ad Khairallah:** Department of Arab and Near Eastern Languages

Other Interviewees

- Riad Moufarrij:** Teacher, author
- Bishop Kallistos Ware:** Metropolitan of Diokleia, and Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford

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