LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD: DISCERNMENT

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“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:2)

It is increasingly difficult to live the life of Christ in the 21st century. Not to idealize a certain era or a previous generations, but I can personally attest that the world of my childhood was dramatically different from the world of today. This observation is all the more interesting, remarkable and self-evident when the technological changes are considered. Although I touch on the implications or effects of technology, the focus in this article is on Christ, His Teachings, His values, and the moral and the spiritual life that He commanded us to live. I focus on His Church in our lives, on living a life of Christ in the nuclear family, the domestic church (Morelli, 2009), and the interiorization of Christ which we are all called by our Baptism to attain so that we may “become partakers of the Divine Nature.” (2 Pt 1:4)

The generational contrast alluded to above dawned on me after watching the evening news as is my custom, while preparing dinner. In the area where I live, a celebrity gossip program, Thirty Mile Zone (TMZ), comes on immediately after the news. I usually change the station before this program comes on, but this particular evening I was engaged in another task, and in just the few minutes I saw of the program, I heard mentioned and ‘lionized’ a variety of manifestly un-Christ-like behaviors, among them promiscuity, unfaithfulness, and taking advantage of others for various gains.

I am not being unrealistic about the brokenness that occurs and will continue to occur in every generation until Christ’s second coming. People were abused, beaten up, murdered, raped and robbed in the 1950s when I was growing up probably as much as they are now. Adultery, fraud, extortion, fornication and sexual promiscuousness have most likely existed since the first sin of our ancestral parents. Yet the stark difference between past times and the present generation is that we did not have a communication and cyber-technology industry to so extensively report on these offenses and promote deviant activities. In past generations one had to go out of his or her way to be exposed to or put oneself in harm’s way. In today’s society exposure to crime and sin is just a mouse click away or pops up on prime-time television as in my TMZ experience.

Grace builds on nature
The foundation of the synergy of the cooperation of man with God is recorded in the book of Genesis: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over all the earth ...” (Gen 1:26). McGuckin (2004) noted that several Greek Fathers defined the term *image* as “mankind's dominion over the created order.” St. Maximus the Confessor, for example, understood intellect as an attribute of the image of God in man. “Naturally endowed with the holiness of the Divine Image, the intelligence urges the soul to conform itself by its own free choice to the divine likeness” (*Philokalia II*). Based on St. Maximus’ understanding that grace builds on nature and that we, made in God’s image, are required to use our intelligence in healing our infirmities and diseases, this essay presents an overview of the behavioral research that demonstrates that the intellect can be used to foster an understanding of how the synergy between mankind and God can occur (Morelli, 2006). I focus specifically on the influence of modeling—whether live or media—in prompting and shaping behavior (Morelli, 2009c) and point out the moral and spiritual implications for those living in this day and age.

Knowing the power of modeling whether live or media, in prompting and shaping behavior (Morelli, 2009c), I immediately recognized the moral and spiritual implications for those living in this day and age.

### Observational Learning and Social Psychological Factors

#### Modeling

Behavioral research has found strong support for the influence of *modeling* in learning and subsequent performance (Bandura, 1977, 1986). In a nutshell, modeling can be understood as learning by observation. While modeling influences individuals of all ages, children are particularly susceptible to its effects. For modeling to be efficacious four conditions have to be present:

- **Attention to the model.** Paying attention to the characteristics of the model such as: salience; affective valence (strong or weak emotions aroused); functional value and prevalence; along with characteristics of the observer such as perceptual cognitive capability, cognitive set and arousal level.
- **Retention processes.** The encoding processes of the observer: verbal or imagery; cognitive organization, rehearsal skills and memory skills of the observer.
- **Motor reproduction processes.** The ability to replicate the model’s behavior: physical capability and component sub-skills and observation of feedback.
• **Motivational processes.** The external, internal, hedonistic, social, moral, or religious incentives that motivate the observer to perform the model’s behavior.

The original behavioral research indicated no difference in effectiveness between real life models, film-mediated models and cartoon models. By implication, computer-game models resembling a combination of media and cartoon models would be equally effective in behavioral learning and subsequent performance.

**Conformity and peer pressure**

In the 1950s Solomon Asch (1951, 1955, 1956) commenced a series of now classic, repeatedly replicated and highly influential studies on *conformity*. Conformity is defined as the influence of others on an individual’s decision-making. The prototypic experiment has the real subject among confederates (fake subjects) first shown a vertical line of a specific length. All subjects are asked to judge the length of the line imbedded among false alternatives, with the real subject answering last or first. When answering last, the real subjects were highly influenced by their peers. Asch and subsequent researchers interpreted the results as demonstrating the power to conform to group pressure in individual decision-making and attitude formation. They explained that individuals conform for two main reasons: 1) They desire to be accepted by the group; and 2) They assess that other group members have more knowledge and experience.

**The obedience studies**

Another classic series of relevant psychological studies was initiated by Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974). These investigations focus on the obedience of individuals to authority figures. The basic experiment involved volunteers responding to a newspaper advertisement to participate in a “Memory Study to be conducted at Yale University.” When reaching the laboratory, the subjects were informed the experiment was designed to study the ‘effects of punishment on learning.’

Another ‘subject’ (a fake subject; actually a co-experimenter playing the role of a subject) was present during the ‘briefing.’ The subjects were to play one of two roles, teacher or learner, but the role assignment was set up so that the volunteer always became the teacher. The teacher, under the verbal control and authority of the experimenter, was told to deliver increasing levels of shock for mistakes made by the learner during the learning session. The teacher had a shock delivery device with dials labeled ‘Slight-Severe-Danger-XXX’ across a voltage indicator from 15 to 450 volts. The subject (teacher) saw the other subject (fake subject) attached to electrodes and the ‘experiment’ began. In reality no shock was delivered to the ‘learner,’ rather the ‘learner’ with the use of pre-recorded agonizing screams and play-acted pounding on the wall and writhing in response to increasingly severe levels of shock. Most subjects (teachers) although under distress in delivering the increasing level of shock—indicated by groaning, lip-
biting, stuttering, sweating and trembling—continued to be obedient to the experimenter’s instructions.

Milgram interpreted from the results that under pressure from those in authority, subjects will obey even to the point of harming others, and even if their actions can eventually devolve into criminality. He went on to say that even if individuals were inclined to ethical behavior, given the right circumstances, situational pressure can provoke them to do harm. That is to say, individuals can be coerced to act contrary to their morals and values. However, it should be noted that while most subjects (teachers) inflicted the high and full set (30) of levels of punishments to the learners, not all did. In one experiment (Milgram, 1963) 5 out of 40 subjects walked out of the experiment when the learner started pounding on the wall. Fourteen of the subjects stopped before delivering all the shocks. The actual percentage of subjects delivering the full punishment set was 65%.

Milgram suggests two theories to explain the experimental outcome. The first theory is related to Asch’s conformity model. In a situation in which an individual has no experience, the authority figure assumes the role of expert and his instructions are followed. The second model can be labeled the agential theory: The obedient subject merely considers himself an instrument or agent of the experimenter, and forecloses on his responsibility.

Another possible explanation has been proposed by Badhwar (2009). The subject (teacher) may be in a state of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). In other words, after learning that they have no control over the situation, subjects respond by lack of assertiveness, passivity and compliance to the experimenter’s instructions, thereby also abdicating responsibility.

The social role-expectation model

Another line of research related to attitude and behavioral influence was commenced by Philip Zimbardo (1973) and his colleagues. While Zimbardo’s case study fails to meet today’s ethical standards of research, subsequent historical events strengthen the study’s potential explanatory usefulness. The case study in question investigated how social roles can prompt a change in individuals. Those who in their past lives exhibited psychologically appropriate and stable behaviors can display aberrant antisocial behaviors when occupying a role that calls for deviant anti-social behavior.

The subjects in this case study were college students, informed they were going to participate in an investigation of prison life. Twenty-four out of seventy subjects were chosen based on their physical health and psychological stability. The subjects were randomly chosen to be ‘guards’ or ‘prisoners.’ Actual official police cooperation was received from the chief of police and the police department of the City of Palo Alto, California and the director of police of the Stanford University Police Department. The ‘prisoners’ were ‘arrested’ in their homes
under the guise of a mass sweep of college students under suspicion of violation of penal codes 211 (armed robbery) and 459 (burglary). An actual arrest process (handcuffs, booking, stripping, delousing, head shaving, prison, etc.) ensued. The ‘guards’ were dressed in uniforms with batons and other guard paraphernalia and instructed not to use physical force, but they could set rules and consequences as desired. After a period of adjustment there began “a series of direct confrontations between the guards and prisoners.” Push-ups, stepping on ‘prisoners,’ and dousing them with a stream of skin-chilling carbon dioxide from fire extinguishers were among the escalating controls employed by the ‘guards.’ After report of a rumor of a prison break, treatment became more severe. ‘Guards’ broke into ‘prisoners’ cells, stripped them naked, took their beds out, forced the prison ringleaders into solitary confinement, “and generally began to harass and intimidate the prisoners.” The ‘prisoners’ were coerced into doing degrading, unsanitary work, such as cleaning toilet bowls with their bare hands. Zimbardo (2007) reports: “Even going to the toilet became a privilege which a guard could grant or deny at his whim. Indeed, after the nightly 10:00 PM lights out ‘lock-up,’ prisoners were often forced to urinate or defecate in buckets that were left in their cells. On occasion the guards would not allow prisoners to empty these buckets, and soon the prison began to smell of urine and feces—further adding to the degrading quality of the environment.”

Zimbardo made an interesting observation about the ‘guards.’ None refused to ‘resign’ or protest any of the treatment of the ‘prisoners.’ About a third of the guards accounted for the most flagrant abusive behavior. Personality testing before the investigation did not predict who would act opprobriously.

Zimbardo interpreted this case study to demonstrate that an average person will display obedience, even if the behavior runs counter to his or her internalized personal values and ethics, when it is ‘legitimized’ by the perception of being an appropriate and legally-sanctioned social role.

Habituation

Another psychological process which influences acceptance of secularized 21st century values and practices as normative is habituation. Habituation is a gradual, general building of tolerance toward and accommodation to what is occurring around us. Habituation has been used with significant results as a behavior therapy for treating phobic responses (Wolpe, 1990). Unfortunately exposure to un-Godly morally egregious moral acts, which occur in greater frequency in today’s society in media and other venues, also works, in the general population, toward their acceptance, their perception of being ‘natural’ acts.

Spiritual Understanding and Intervention

Spiritual inoculation
To withstand the pressures of the world, St. Paul told the Ephesians (6:11–12) what to do: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against … this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness …” The psalmist (90:1–4) outlines for us what this entails: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’ For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; He will cover you with his pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.” To abide in God’s fortress, to have Him as our shield, we must have a continual sense of His presence.

The presence of God

St. Isaac of Syria presents us with an image of life hazed over by the absence of God: “… just as the radiance of the sun is hidden from the earth by thick clouds … and an unusual darkness falls upon his spirit. … For, as the face of the earth is gladdened by the rays of the sun when the dense atmosphere is torn asunder, so the words of prayer are able to tear away and to remove from the soul the dark cloud … and illuminate the spirit … which is born in our deliberations.” The term deliberate means “to think carefully and often slowly, as about a choice to be made, to consult with another or others in a process of reaching a decision, to consider (a matter) carefully and often slowly, as by weighing alternatives.” (American Heritage Dictionary, 1994) This careful and thoughtful reflection cannot be done in darkness. Prayer is the instrument that can break through the darkness that surrounds us. In the 21st century darkness comes in the guise of light. The enlightenment of the modern society is experienced as secularism, relativism, and political and religious correctness. Deliberation can only occur in the true illumination of the light of Christ, who said to us Himself: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (Jn 14:6).

In the spirit of St. Paul who tells us to “pray constantly” (1 Thes 5:17) and “pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication,” (Eph 6:18), St. Theophan the Recluse (Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1966) also reminds us: “Some Godly thoughts come nearer the heart than others. Should this be so, after you have finished your prayers, continue to dwell on such a thought and remain feeding on it. This is the way to unceasing prayer.” It is also the way to continue deliberating on all we encounter in the light of Christ, with the Holy Spirit’s gift of discernment.

Discernment

St. John Cassian (Philokalia I) writes: “Discrimination [discernment] is no small virtue, but one of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit … [it is] … nothing worldly or insignificant. It is the greatest gift of God’s grace … the ability to discriminate between spirits that enter into him and to asses them accurately.” St. John quotes St. Antony of the Desert who considers discernment the “mother of
all virtues and their guardian,” and describes what is entailed in discernment: “scrutinizing all the thoughts and actions of a man, [distinguishing and setting] aside everything that is base and not pleasing to God [and thus keeping] him free from delusion.”

Jesus told His disciples: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Mt 10:16). St. Peter of Damaskos (Philokalia III) tells us: “For without discrimination nothing that comes to pass is good, even if we in our ignorance think that it is. But when through discrimination we learn how it lies in our power to attain what we wish, then what we do begins to conform to God’s will.” St. John of the Ladder (1982) points out: “Among beginners, discernment is real self knowledge ... it is the spiritual capacity to distinguish unfailingly between what is truly good and what in nature is opposed to the good.”

It can be seen therefore that the practice of discernment is an active process. It does not occur automatically, but must be done in the light of Christ which can only illumine us when prayer and His presence are cultivated. In order to see God’s Will in all we encounter, we must have put Christ at the center of our hearts. The prayers of the Church, the Holy Tradition passed on to us, the Divinely-inspired Sacred Scriptures as understood by the Holy Spirit guided Church must be the measure of all attitudes we have, all decisions we make and all deeds we do. This is exactly to follow the teachings of Christ: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness.” (Mt 6:21–23). The illumined eye leads to an illumined heart that discerns the treasure that is of God from the treasure of this world.

**The Church as a hospital**

The Church is a hospital for the healing of our infirmities and diseases (Morelli, 2006). The model for the synergy of spiritual and physical healing is not only traced back to Christ Who is the physician of our souls and bodies, the Holy Evangelist Luke, and the physician saints of the Church, but also to our two great Church Fathers: St. Basil of Caesarea (370–379) who was trained in medicine and was reported to have worked with the monks in ministering to the ill and infirm and St. John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople (390), who used the wealth of the Church to open hospitals and other philanthropic institutions. This perspective provides the rationale for employing psychological science in understanding and healing the spiritual ‘cancer’ of secularism in the 21st century. However, the spiritual fathers did not make use of the developed terms and concepts uncovered in modern, medical-psychological scientific definitions of healing in their writings. Of course, the Church has as its Divine mission the healing of the total person, and not only in a temporal sense. Healing ultimately leads to *theosis*, the sanctification of the entire person.
**Humility**

Jesus counseled: “… learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” (Mt. 11:29). St. Peter of Damaskos (*Philokalia III*) tells us: “This then is the general picture [preferring one’s own thoughts and wishes to those of God]. But situations and pursuits vary, and one needs to acquire discrimination … through the humility given by God.” Without humility how can we separate our love of self, our myopic focus on self, and our need for approval from acting independently to discern God’s will?

Humility requires developing an accurate perception of self, a perception that is in resemblance of Christ Himself. St. Isaac of Syria (Brock, 1997) tells us: “everyone who is truly clothed in humility will resemble Him who descended from the height, hiding the radiance of His greatness and covering up His glory by means of His low estate.” Humility means separation of self from actions, maintaining a sense of self that is centered in Christ, giving glory to God for success and taking responsibility for lack of success, with the corresponding duty to commence corrective action.

St. Isaac discovered that the core of humility “consists in the heart being purified of all evil, and in gazing favorably on everything, and considering it from God's point of view … which is consistent in the abandoning of everything visible and invisible: visible meaning everything involved with the senses; invisible meaning all thinking about them.” On this we can heed the words of St. Isaac of Syria (Wensinck, 1923): “The humble is never pleased to see crowds and gatherings of people, noise and rumor, nor riches and finery, nor the luxury which is a consequence of them, nor speech and intercourse, rumor and distraction of the senses.”

**Watchfulness**

Consider how the words of St. Peter apply to the secular values and practices which surround us in the modern world: “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8). After citing this scriptural passage, our holy spiritual father St. Symeon the New Theologian (*Philokalia IV*) wrote: “To speak generally, it is impossible to acquire all the other virtues except through watchfulness.” Later St. Symeon developed the point further: “… the intellect repulses all distractive thoughts that encircle the heart, attempting to get in, and it rebuffs them through attentiveness.” The early fathers of the Eastern Christian Church talked about *nepsis* which is vigilance and watchfulness of the mind and heart. For Orthodox Christians, mindfulness not only means the human activity of clear attention and dispelling of distorted thinking, but also cutting away that which is ungodly and
attending to what is Godly. Hausherr (1990) explains that nepsis is “wakefulness, attention, from the Greek verb nepho (to be vigilant, mindful),” that is, being completely present to our thoughts and surroundings. This is not dissimilar to a military scout at the head of a column, or busy parents attending to their newborn infant.

**Liberality**

In the spiritual texts, the virtue of liberality is the opposite of greed. Liberality is the interiorization of the understanding of St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians that we are all members of the body of Christ: “For the body does not consist of one member but of many ... that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together.” (1 Cor 12:14, 25–26). It is a sense that we are keepers of one another. It does not mean mindless helping (Morelli, 2009a), but caring for those unable to care for themselves and at the very least doing what one can to enable that all in the world have a means to help themselves physically, mentally and spiritually.

St. John of the Ladder (1982) tells us: “The miser sneers at the Gospel and is a deliberate transgressor. The man of charity spreads his money about him, but the man who claims to possess both charity and money is a self-deceived fool.” Liberality builds on humility. St. Isaac the Syrian (Wensinck 1923) notes: “connected with humility [is] moderate wants in every respect.”

**Diligence**

Consider St. Paul’s instruction to the Colossians (3:23): “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men ...” St. Mark the Ascetic (Philokalia I) tells us: “even though knowledge is true, it is still not firmly established if unaccompanied by works. For everything is established by being put into practice.” As Solomon tells us: “… but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense.”

St. Diadochos of Photiki (Philokalia I) remarks: “He who loves God both believes truly and performs the works of faith reverently [diligently]. But he who only believes and does not love lacks even the faith he thinks he has; for he believes merely with a certain superficiality of intellect and is not energized by the full force of love’s glory.” It is necessary to have the zeal and fortitude to overcome the vice of sloth (acedia) and engender the virtue of diligence in our lives.

**Patience**

St. John of the Ladder (1982) gives us an understanding of this virtue: “Patience is labor that does not crush the soul. It never wavers under interruptions good or bad.” St. Maximus the Confessor (Philokalia II) writes: “The person who closes
his senses by means of the deliberate and all embracing practice of self control
and patience, and prevents sensory forms from entering ... easily frustrates the
wicked schemes of the devil and turns him back ...” What St. Maximum observed
to be true in the 6th century certainly applies to today's new media technologies.
True in his time, and given the highly advanced technology which amplifies the
senses to extreme levels in our present age, certainly an insight of
unprecedented value in our own time.” Limiting sensual stimulation is a key to
gaining victory over evil impulses. St. Maximus observes that “The way by which
the devil comes consists of material things which seem to be needed for
sustaining the body.” The saint goes on to say: “He becomes perfect because,
through constant obedience to the intelligence, he maintains the conditions that
combat the mutually conflicting experiences of pleasure and distress in the
senses.” St. John of the Ladder sums this up by his reflection: “The final point of
patience is to consider oneself at rest even in the midst of affliction.” Ultimately
the soul is at rest only when relying and trusting in God. In the words of King
David: “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to
the proud, to those who go astray after false gods!” (Ps 39:4)

Temperance

Evagrius Ponticus, in his book on the monastic practice of Talking Back
(Antirhetikos) (Brakke, 2009), refers to the wisdom of Solomon in the book of
Proverbs (14:23): “With anyone who is careful there is abundance, but the
pleasure-taking and the indolent will be in want.” To compel us to work at “not
being conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2) and not comporting our life to un-
Godly secularism and relativism, once again we can recall the wisdom of
Solomon: “A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off
restraint and is careless.” (Prv 14:16). St. John of the Ladder (1982) tells us:
“control your appetites before they control you ... those who have stumbled
headlong into the pit of sin know what I am talking about ... so let us restrain our
appetites with the thought of the fire to come.” The appetite we should have is a
craving for God, not for the delights of this world. It is easy to be ensnared with
the delights of the world and confuse them for that which is the source of our life
and the ultimate end of our existence. The virtue of temperance helps us to
distinguish the two. As Isaiah the Prophet has told us: “Woe to those who call evil
good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put
bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Is 5:20). To distinguish evil from good, we
must be sober and watchful as the Apostle Peter has told us: “Be sober, be
watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking
some one to devour.” (1 Pt 5:8). St. Antony of the Desert (Philokalia I) gives
counsel on how to carry this out: “There is no profit [in anything] unless the life of
one’s soul is acceptable and conforms to God’s will. The cause of evil is
delusion, self deception and ignorance of God. This is not dissimilar to the
ancient Hebrews who were mesmerized by the shining brilliance of the golden
calf and mistook this idol for God, Himself.” vi St. Simeon the New Theologian
(Golitzen, 1995) explains: “... when men multiplied, and from their youth had
turned their thoughts to evil, they were dragged down to forgetfulness and ignorance of the God Who had made them, and worshipped not only idols and demons as gods, but even deified that very creation which God had given them... they gave themselves to every debauchery and unclean activity, soiling the earth, the air, the sky, and everything beneath it by their unnatural practices. For nothing else so soils the work of God and makes unclean what is clean as the deification of creation and the worshipping of it as equal to God the Creator and Maker.”

Likewise, how susceptible we are today to being inebriated with the dazzling lights, images and thunderous sounds of cyberspace as well as to imbibing the stupefying scents of lust and power that are freely available! Modern entertainments have become the created gods worshipped by so many. Just as the ancestral Hebrews followed after false gods, we too are pressured to worship these idols. Like the ancient idol-worshipping Hebrews, we too see the aim of life as sitting down to eat and drink, and [rising] up to play.” (Ex 32:6). But pursuit of pleasures is not our calling in life, not what God calls us to do, and not why God made us. Rather, as St. Anthony tells us: “Concentration on holiness of living, together with attentiveness to the soul, [must] lead [us] to the goodness and love of God.”

The role of spiritual father or mother

Originally a counsel to monks, the words of St. Anthony of the Desert, quoted by Hausherr (1990), can be applied by all who are committed to live a life of Christ, have Him dwell in them and thereby “become partakers of the Divine Nature.” (2 Pt 1: 4): “I have known monks [who] had put their hope in their own works. In their delusion, they did not obey the commandment that states, “Ask your father, let him teach you.” The delusion we are all susceptible to is discussed above—this danger is all the more reason to have a spiritual father or mother in Christ to aid in the practice of virtue and discernment. For spiritual fathers and mothers in the Church, guidance is given with vigilance (nepsis), watchfulness, and guarding the heart. Hausherr (1990) quotes an anonymous old man saying, “When evil thoughts harass you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your Spiritual Father. The more one hides one’s thoughts, the more they multiply and the stronger they become.” As Hausherr notes: “It is the special prerogative of the spiritual man to judge and to discern.”

Along with, and certainly not replacing, the Holy Mysteries of the Church in the healing of our infirmities and diseases is the special charism of the spiritual father and mother. As in the operation of the Holy Mysteries of the Church, this charism occurs through sanctification, “with the power, and effectual operation, and indwelling” of the Holy Spirit.” This is explained by St. Simeon the Theologian (quoted by Hausherr, 1990): “The sign of perfection, thanks to which we recognize the perfect man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ, and entirely possessed by the Holy Spirit, is the unerring knowledge of God, from which,
bestowed from on high by the Holy Spirit, flows the word of superior wisdom, from which derives the aptitude to function as a theologian; to scrutinize the depths of God, to utter good words from the heart in the midst of the assembly; to resolve the difficulty of parables, riddles and concealed words of the Spirit … also derived … the understanding of the hidden beauty of the kingdom of heaven, the discovery of the mysteries of God, [and] the desire to be united to Christ …” The reason for this gift of the Holy Spirit is to provide the spiritual father and mother with the basis for discernment (diakrisis) and to impart this to those who are their disciples. The Fathers knew the importance of disclosure or openness of mind and heart in the process of spiritual direction.

From a modern psychological viewpoint the ascetical spiritual writers seemed to have grasped the connection between thoughts, emotions and behavior. Bishop Hierotheos Vlachos (1994) states, "It is in the intelligent part of the soul that evil thoughts operate which excite desire and attempt to capture man's nous so that sin is committed." While there has been a proliferation of self-help books in scientific cognitive psychotherapy (e.g. Burns, 1980; Beck, A. T., 1988, 1991; Beck, J. S., 1995; Ellis and Harper, 1961; Gottman, 1994), frequently the authors suggest that readers consult trained clinicians in dealing with their problems. Burns, for example, points out it would be unreasonable to expect to improve or recover after reading his book. What is needed is “the additional help of a mental health professional.” How much more so is the unreasonableness of spiritual improvement without Divinely-inspired spiritual direction!

**Personality Variables Enhancing Discernment**

**Locus of Control (Internal)**

An internal Locus of Control is a person’s cognitive assessment of the relation between their actions and the attribution of the causes of the outcomes of their efforts. The locus of control variable is one measurement of the degree to which individuals attribute their actions as due to their own behaviors and therefore being controllable, or conversely, attribute outcomes of actions as the product of extraneous factors such as chance. (Elliot, 1997)

Based on the original research of Julian Rotter (1954, 1966), Dutweiller (1984) developed a statistically reliable measure: the Internal Control Index (ICI). Dutweiller found that individuals with Internal Locus of Control attribute the outcome of their efforts as stemming from their own understanding and actions. Such individuals can be autonomous from outside influences, resist social influences, are self confident and can delay gratification. For an Orthodox Christian, attributing internal control of outcomes is synergistic with a Christ-centered focus and perceived as originating and enlivened by Christ. If Christ is interiorized (Evdokimov, 1998), then He is the source and sustainer of all individual thought and action.
An important practical implication of these findings is for Orthodox Christian education programs: classes and teaching for both adults and children should focus on enhancing cognitive activity, internal mastery and spiritual perception-understanding (Morelli, 2009b). Emphasis is placed on not judging outcomes based on human values, but on viewing outcomes from God’s perspective who told us: “Behold, I make all things new.” He also said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Rev 21:5). In the words of St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (13:12–13): “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” To foster the attribution of one’s actions with trust and reliance in God requires a continuing sense of the presence of God, unceasing prayer and interiorizing (internalizing) the words of Christ: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” (Mt 6: 33–34)

Some preliminary attempts have been made to extend the Locus of Control attribution to the religious domain. One example is the research of Leshner, Cheng, Song, Choi & Frisby (2006). Employing the Spiritual Locus of Control Scale (SLOC), these researchers investigated health concerns and follow-up involvement among Black African-American Woman. The results of the study suggest that the black woman subjects engaged in seeking more health information (regarding breast cancer) than the control group. Furthermore, the subjects rated God as “high in control” and sought guidance from others. The results invite us to consider that an individual’s spiritual orientation aids in appraisal and coping with stress. This serves as an example of the synergy of one’s effort with trust in God.

**Permeability of constructs**

An important precursor to the current cognitive-behavioral clinical model of emotional disorders is the seminal work of George Kelly (1955). Kelly postulated the cognitive process of *constructive alternativism*, namely, that individuals have the capacity of changing or replacing their present interpretation of events that surround them. What facilitates constructive alternativism is that one has an underlying construct that change *can* occur. Kelly labeled this construct as the *permeability* corollary, noting that it enables individuals to distinguish right from wrong and to make moral judgments. One contribution of Kelly’s theory is that role-playing therapy is used in clinical settings, involving acting out different responses to various moral situations. Patients may be given a functional response to try out as a homework assignment in real life. Subsequent sessions monitor and refine the process. Specific pragmatics or paralinguistic areas to focus on include: response speed, volume, inflection (tone of voice) and dysfluency (such as stammering). Eye contact, facial expression, gestures, and posture (direction of leaning: forward, backward, relaxed or stiff, etc.) are
elements that can be practiced as well (Morelli, 2009c). Kelly’s foundational work in this area can be leveraged by religious educators and workshop leaders in teaching how to discern what is Godly from what is un-Godly and how to react to secular-relativistic influences. Learners can practice admitting past wrongs and changing their minds and actions to conform to Christ.

**Anonymity and deviance**

A seminal study in child development demonstrated the effect of anonymity on de-individuation and anti-social behavior. Diener, Fraser, Beaman, & Kelem, (1976) performed a naturalistic observational study on Halloween-celebrating children. Children were sorted into groups, as to whether they arrived alone or in groups. In addition, some of the children were subtly asked their names and addresses. Inside the room were two bowls, one filled with candy, the other filled with small change. All children were told to take one piece of candy, but not any of the nickels and pennies. Concealed observers noted the children’s responses. A significant amount of stealing took place among the anonymous children.

A recent study by Zhong, Bohns and Gino (2010) suggests that darkness aids in promoting anonymity and subsequent amoral, dishonest and self-interested behavior. Study subjects were to play a ‘game’ that was purportedly self-monitored. Experimental conditions included playing the ‘game’ in a bright versus a dimly lit room and wearing clear glasses or sunglasses. The experimenters found that the darkness conditions correlated with increased cheating by the subjects. In interpreting the findings, the researchers suggested that “even the appearance [of the] experience of darkness may induce a sense of anonymity that is disproportionate from actual anonymity in a given situation,” producing increased morally questionable behaviors. The application of these finding may be related to Christians conforming their behavior to Christ’s teachings. Something as simple as taking off a wedding band by those in a blessed marriage, or clergy dressing mufti—not wearing clerical clothing in public—can serve as an excuse for conforming to the values and practices of the world instead of to God’s Will.

**Metacognition**

A good working definition of *metacognition* was given by Flavell (1976): “Metacognition refers to one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data. For example, I am engaging in metacognition if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B, or if it strikes me that I should double-check C before accepting it as fact.” Metacognition is thinking about and thus regulating one’s thinking processes.

Based on the work of Luria (1961) and Vygotsky (1962), Meichenbaum and Goodman (1971) published the efficacious results of a self-instruction training paradigm for the treatment of clinical problems. The paradigm involve four steps:
1) verbalizing the task; 2) focusing attention on the desired responses; 3) coping self-statements made when mistakes occur; and 4) verbalizing the attaining of desired responses (Morelli, 2009d).

Once again the application of metacognitive procedures is appropriate for a Christian adhering to Christ’s teachings. Those baptized into Christ can self-instruct themselves to judge if what they are hearing, seeing, saying or doing (or about to engage in) abides with Christ. They can verbalize to themselves what Christ would have them do, and then self-verbalize the corrections to perform if mistakes (sins) are made. Finally, they can verbalize thankfulness to God for any success in their endeavors.

**A clinical pastoral example**

A clinical-pastoral example may be helpful. A young male teen is at home with an hour of time with nothing planned to do. A habitual sequence of un-thoughtful action sets in. He turns on the computer, scans a porn-chat site, and begins a cyber encounter, with accompanying thoughts and actions. The more he engages in these activities the more he becomes intoxicated by sexual arousal. Judicious use of metacognition can be a precursor of spiritual discernment. Applying Meichenbaum’s metacognitive paradigm, he may begin a self-verbalizing process:

- **Verbalizing the Task**: “I have an hour with nothing planned, I usually find myself going to porn chat rooms. This is not what Christ would want me to do.”
- **The Desired Response**: “What would be an activity that I could do that would be approved by Christ. It could be a Godly activity or just something good and beautiful.”
- **Coping Self-Statements**: “Ok! The computer booted up; I am a click away from my favorite porn site; let me erase my browser history and start out fresh with sites that encourage me to live a life in Christ. Lord, without you, I cannot do this. Help me!”
- **Verbalizing Goal Attainment**: “Lord! Thank you for standing by me and giving me the grace to make the choice to click on, for example [www.orthodoxytoday.com](http://www.orthodoxytoday.com), instead of my usual porn chat website.

**The Abstract vs. the Concrete Christian**

It is easy to be a Christian (in name only) in the abstract. Except for those unfortunate individuals with sociopathic (Anti-Social Personality Disorder) tendencies, most individuals would endorse virtue when presented in the abstract: the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy or the Fruits of the Holy Spirit.
By contrast, it is not easy to be a concrete, true or complete Christian. Yes, this is the calling for all who are the saints of the Church and those striving for sanctity. All of us, by our baptism into the Royal Priesthood of Christ, are called to be concrete Christians, if we are to be true followers of Christ and not to be hypocrites. To employ a current expression: “This is where the rubber meets the road.” May each of us recall, meditate on and apply the words of Christ to discern what it takes to conform to the complete, concrete teachings of Christ instead of the values of our pagan world:

- “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (Mt 12:30)
- “Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:19)
- “…those who hear the word [of God] … but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. … For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Mk 4:18,19,25)
- “Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Lk 9:62)

Applying the Lessons

Personal

Each of us should examine our life to measure whether our values, desires and actions are in conformity to the world or in conformity to Christ. Through a regular discipline of self-examination or preparation for the Holy Mystery of Confession and reception of the Eucharist, we can come to understand the subtle and blatant influences (temptations) we are subjected to in our secular, politically and religiously correct and relativistic society. We can then conform our heart, mind and deeds to Christ and measure our values and actions against Christ. In the words of St. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians we have to attain “the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.” (Eph 4:13–14).

Societal

Permit me a personal reflection. I keep no secret that I eschew politics. For me, the machinations of politics casts an unbelievable darkness over us. Perhaps some consider me naive. While I have never thought about following the saintly
“fools for Christ” that we read about in Christian hagiography, there is one area that I think the fool for Christ model might apply to me, and that is in decision-making. A volatile topic of political debate in Spring 2010 is immigration and I reside near the U.S. border with Mexico. I consider the conservative-liberal, Democrat-Republican ideology and rhetoric on this issue to be the work of the deceitful, disguised evil one, so well described by C. S. Lewis (1961) and which I have written about elsewhere (Morelli, 2009d). The fool-for-Christ’s answer to this issue is plainly and simply found in the parable of the Good Samaritan.\textsuperscript{xvi} It makes no difference if someone is an American, Latino, Mexican, Russian, Hindu, Moslem, Catholic, Protestant, Black, White, male, female, gay, or straight: If someone is incapable of caring for themselves (the beaten man), he should be provided aid (Morelli, 2009a). Modern-day examples of the Good Samaritan—who was considered by the Jews of the time to be a hated outcast—are those who serve suffering and needy mankind throughout the world with no consideration for human institutions: to those working with Doctors Without Borders.\textsuperscript{xvii}

**Discernment and responsibility**

This brings us back to discernment and responsibility. St. John of the Ladder (1982) tells us: "Discernment in beginners is true knowledge of themselves; in intermediate souls it is a spiritual sense that faultlessly distinguishes what is truly good from what is of nature and opposed to it; and in the perfect, it is knowledge which they have within by Divine illumination, and which can enlighten with its lamp what is dark in others. Or perhaps, generally speaking, discernment is, and is recognized as, the certain understanding of the Divine Will on all occasions, in every place and in all matters; and it is only found in those who are pure in heart, and in body and in mouth."

After we discern what is Godly, we pray to God for His grace to take responsibility to carry out His Will. We must heed St. Paul’s words to the Galatians (5:13, 16–17): “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another ... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.” What is required of us is a *metanoia* or change in the direction to have Christ interiorized in all aspects of our lives. The paradox in living the Christian life is that true freedom and responsibility implies and necessitates a dependency on Christ. As St. Paul told the Philippians (3:7–8): “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”
“The joy of this world is bitter. Woe to him who is seduced by it. Vain joy captures it with the illusion of satisfaction. Be Thou my helmsman and steer my ship to Thy harbor in that great morning when the sentence unto eternity shall be pronounced.” (St. Ephraim the Syrian, 1997)

REFERENCES


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1 In a prototypic Conformity Experiment, all subjects are shown the first vertical line card. All subjects (confederate-fake and real) are then shown the card with the three lines A, B, C and asked which matches the first card. In one experimental condition the fake subjects answer first, followed by the real subject. The fake subjects were prompted to answer incorrectly, purposely choosing A or B. The correct choice is obviously C. The real subjects are highly influenced by the answers of their confederates and are more likely to choose the incorrect line: A or B (depending on the experimental group they were in). In another phase of the experiment, the real subject was questioned first, before the fake subjects, in this condition the real subjects were more likely to answer correctly: C.
ii Milgram discussed Nazi war crimes in this context.

iii Case studies are uncontrolled and unverifiable investigations that suggest follow-up experimental research with proper scientific procedures. Case studies generate hypotheses or scientific guesses as to what factors are producing the outcomes observed. Case study researcher observation is subject to bias and alternate interpretation. In the Zimbardo research, because of the severity of the behavior of the guard-subjects and the deleterious effects on the prisoner-subjects, it does not meet contemporary ethical standards for research and cannot be replicated today. Ethical guidelines were different in 1973. When a real life situation occurs that conforms to the case study hypotheses, it does serve, however, to bolster the explanatory model. In the case of the Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse scandal (2003) of the 2nd Iraq War, Zimbardo (2007) discusses this incident with reference to the Social Role-Expectation Model.

iv Zimbardo (2007)
This is similar to the cognitive therapy technique employed by psychologists in helping patients to be mindful and thus learn to control their thoughts.
vi “And [Aaron] received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.’ And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” (Ex 32:3–6)

vii Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation), Eucharist, Penance, Holy Unction, Matrimony (blessed marriage of male and female) and Holy Orders (laying on of hands by a bishop, a successor of the Apostles, in union with the Church, on a person of the male sex to be ordained as deacon, priest or bishop).

viii From the Litany of the Holy Mystery of Baptism in the Orthodox Church.

ix Cronbach’s alpha: .85 level of consistency

x Internal Control Index (ICI)

Please read each statement. Where there is a blank, decide what your normal or usual attitude, feeling, or behavior would be:
A = Rarely (less than 10%) of the time
B = Occasionally (about 30% of the time)
C = Sometimes (about half the time)
D = Frequently (about 70% of the time)
E = Usually (more than 90% of the time)

Of course, there are always unusual situations in which this would not be the case, but think of what you would do or feel in most normal situations. Write the letter that describes your usual attitude or behavior in the space provided on the response sheet.

1. When faced with a problem I _____ try to forget.
2. I ______ need frequent encouragement from others for me to keep working at a difficult task.
3. I ______ like jobs where I can make decisions and be responsible for my own work.
4. I ______ change my opinion when someone I admire disagrees with me.
5. If I want something I______ work hard to get it.
6. I ______prefer to learn the facts about something from someone else rather than having to dig them out for myself.
7. I ______will accept jobs that require me to supervise others.
8. I ______have a hard time saying “no” when someone tries to sell me something.
9. I ______ like to have a say in any decisions made by any group I’m in.
10. I ______consider the different sides of an issue before making any decisions.
11. What other people think ______has a great influence on my behavior.
12. Whenever something good happens to me I ______ feel it is because I’ve earned it.
13. I ______ enjoy being in a position of leadership.
14. I ______ need someone else to praise my work before I am satisfied with what I’ve done.
15. I ______am sure enough of my opinions to try and influence others.
16. When something is going to affect me I ______learn as much about it as I can.
17. I ______ decide to do things on the spur of the moment.
18. For me, knowing I’ve done something well is ______more important than being praised by some else.
19. I ______ let other peoples’ demands keep me from doing things I want to do.
20. I ______ stick to my opinions when someone disagrees with me.
21. I ______ do what I feel like doing not what other people think I ought to do.
22. I_______ get discouraged when doing something that takes a long time to achieve results.
23. When part of a group I ______ prefer to let other people make all the decisions.
24. When I have a problem I ______ follow the advice of friends or relatives.
25. I _______ enjoy trying to do difficult tasks more than I enjoy trying to do easy tasks.
26. I _______ prefer situations where I can depend on someone else’s ability rather than just my own.
27. Having someone important tell me I did a good job is _______ more important to me than feeling I’ve done a good job.
28. When I’m involved in something I _______ try to find out all I can about what is going on even when someone else is in charge.
Appendix
The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale

Please answer the following questions by checking your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>In the future, science will be able to explain everything.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I can find meaning in times of hardship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A person can be fulfilled without pursuing an active spiritual life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am thankful for all that has happened to me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Spiritual activities have not helped me become closer to other people.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Some experiences can be understood only through one's spiritual beliefs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A spiritual force influences the events in my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>My life has a purpose.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Participating in spiritual activities helps me forgive other people.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>My spiritual beliefs continue to evolve.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>I believe there is a power greater than myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I probably will not reexamine my spiritual beliefs.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>My spiritual life fulfills me in ways that material possessions do not.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Spiritual activities have not helped me develop my identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Meditation does not help me feel more in touch with my inner spirit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I have a personal relationship with a power greater than myself.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I have felt pressured to accept spiritual beliefs that I do not agree with.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Spiritual activities help me draw closer to a power greater than myself.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SPiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale

Please indicate how often you do the following:

20. When I wrong someone, I make an effort to apologize:
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

21. When I am ashamed of something I have done, I tell someone about it:
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

22. I solve my problems without using spiritual resources:
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

23. I examine my actions to see if they reflect my values:
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

24. During the last WEEK I prayed... (check one)
   10 or more times.
   7-9 times.
   1-3 times.
   1-3 times.
   0 times.

25. During the last WEEK I meditated... (check one)
   10 or more times.
   7-9 times.
   1-3 times.
   0 times.

26. Last MONTH, I participated in spiritual activities with at least one other person... (check one)
   More than 15 times.
   11-15 times.
   6-10 times.
   1-3 times.
   0 times.

Scoring Instructions

For positively worded items, i.e., items where answers indicating agreement seem more spiritual, item numbers 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22: Strongly agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly disagree = 1.

For negatively worded items, where agreement would seem less spiritual, item numbers 1, 3, 5, 9, 13, 16, 18, 23: Strongly agree = 1; Agree = 2; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 4; Strongly disagree = 5.

For items 24-26: Highest frequency category = 5; Next highest category = 4; Middle frequency = 3; Next to lowest frequency = 2; Lowest frequency = 1.

Note that this version of the scale was used only in the preliminary study. Those planning to use the scale for clinical or research purposes are encouraged to contact Dr. Finch to obtain an updated version and pertinent reliability and validity data.
Secular Political Correctness has introduced the term: African-American to refer to Black-African people. Realistic historical examination indicates that there are Africans of many races. Caucasian North Africans are African, going back to antiquity, and the centuries old Caucasian settlers in southern Africa have a somewhat historical heritage.

Deceitfulness, conning others for personal profit or pleasure, lack of remorse, rationalizing and or indifference (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Spiritual Works of Mercy: To admonish sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, suffer wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, pray for the living and the dead. Corporal Works of Mercy: To feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, ransom captives, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, bury the dead. The Fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Long-suffering, Mildness, Fidelity, Modesty, Continence, Chastity.

"[A lawyer] said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed mercy on him.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’" (Lk 10:29–37)

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international medical humanitarian organization created by doctors and journalists in France in 1971. Today, MSF provides aid in nearly 60 countries to people whose survival is threatened by violence, neglect, or catastrophe, primarily due to armed conflict, epidemics, malnutrition, exclusion from health care or natural diseases. MSF provides independent, impartial assistance to those most in need. MSF reserves the right to speak out to bring attention to neglected crises, to challenge inadequacies or abuse of the aid system, and to advocate for improved medical treatments and protocols. MSF’s work is based on the humanitarian principles of medical ethics and impartiality. The organization is committed to bringing quality medical care to people caught
in crisis regardless of race, religion, or political affiliation. In 1999 MSF received the Nobel Peace Prize. [www.doctorswithoutborders.org/aboutus/?ref=home-sidebar-left](http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/aboutus/?ref=home-sidebar-left)