

When Theology, Philosophy, and Creative Fiction Meet: Exploring Identity, Meaning, and Purpose According to the Writings of St. Teresa of Avila, Soren Kierkegaard, and Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Abstract

What is the meaning of existence? Many people question who they are to be and what they are to do. People often look to religion to find identity, meaning, and purpose. Three branches within Christianity include Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. My aim in this paper was to choose three thought leaders within these movements who lived inspiring lives while serving Christ. St. Teresa of Avila was Roman Catholic, Soren Kierkegaard was Christian Protestant, and Fyodor Dostoevsky was Russian Orthodox. Each was certain their beliefs were right, and staunch critics of each other's religions.

Despite their distinctive socio-cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations, they agreed Jesus was their subjective truth. They wrote from unique perspectives as theologians, philosophers, and novelists. This paper will: 1) explore what each had to say about identity, meaning, and purpose from a sampling of their most religious works 2) correlate this with what the Bible states on these matters 3) reveal seeking God, individual responsibility, humility, faith in Christ, and love lead to a meaningful existence.

Keywords: theology, philosophy, creative fiction, identity, meaning, purpose, seeking God, faith in Christ

INTRODUCTION

What is the meaning of existence? Many people question who they are to be and what they are to do. People often look to religion to find identity, meaning, and purpose. Three branches within Christianity include Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodox. My aim in this paper was to choose three thought leaders within these movements who lived inspiring lives while serving Christ. St. Teresa of Avila was Roman Catholic, Soren Kierkegaard was Christian Protestant, and Fyodor Dostoevsky was Russian Orthodox. Each was certain their beliefs were right, and staunch critics of each other's religions. Despite their distinctive socio-cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations, they agreed Jesus was their subjective truth. There do not appear to be other articles written comparing their three perspectives jointly, although some compare Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. It seemed important to include a woman's perspective on the journey of faith, and St. Teresa of Avila was the first female granted a doctorate by the Church.

Concerned with existence, each writer saw the evil man was capable of. To find purpose and meaning in life as a believer, they felt one should surrender their will to the Lord. They wrote from unique perspectives as theologians, philosophers, and novelists. This paper will: 1) explore what each had to say about identity, meaning, and purpose from a sampling of their most religious works 2) correlate this with what the Bible states on these matters 3) reveal their works agree that seeking God, individual responsibility, humility, faith in Christ, and love lead to a meaningful existence.

BACKGROUND

It seems prudent to share some biographical details for more insight on what shaped these writers to lead such inspiring lives with their missions to know God and share Him with others through their journeys.

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in 1515 in Avila, Spain, and died at sixty-seven years old.¹ A Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun, St Teresa of Avila was the first female granted Doctor of the Church.² Raised by devoted wealthy Catholics,³ her father enjoyed reading books and her mother prayed with her kids.¹ When her mom died at thirty-three, Teresa looked upon an image of Mary and implored her to be her new mother. She was sent to a nunnery by her father to help correct some devious behavior as a teen. This temporary solution turned into a lifelong journey.⁴

In obedience to confessors and dedicated to the One she said waited so long for her – for His glory and praise, Teresa wrote about her spiritual experiences.⁵ When she wondered what she could do for God, she knew she must follow the vocation for a religious life by keeping her Rule as perfectly as possible.⁶ She felt she was stealing time away for writing from shared household duties, but prayed it would be used for the Lord's good purpose.⁷ She commented, "I only wish I could write with both hands, so as not to forget one thing while I am saying

¹ St. Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2010), xxvii, xxxvi.

² Carmelites, "Saint Teresa of Ávila Doctor of the Church," <https://ocarm.org/en/item/5717-teresa-of-avila-doctor-of-the-church> (accessed August 30, 2022).

³ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 10.

⁴ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2003), 6.

⁵ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

another.” Her Majesty was the Book where she found truth and direction.⁸

Teresa spearheaded a movement called the Barefoot Carmelites, symbolizing a path of poverty and contemplative prayer, which became an official order one year before her death.⁹ She voiced concern for all preachers who had too much worldly wisdom.¹⁰ She had choice words to say about the Protestant Reformation and felt much harm was caused by Lutherans.¹¹ Teresa said, “They destroy churches, cause the loss of many priests and abolish the sacraments.”¹² She distressed about all souls to be damned.¹³ To her the only way to God was through Roman Catholicism, and her purpose was to remain a faithful nun, despite chronic health issues.

Born in 1813 in Copenhagen, Denmark,¹⁴ Soren Aabye Kierkegaard died at forty-two years old,¹⁵ after suffering from health ailments throughout life. He came from money and raised Lutheran. His father studied religion and philosophy, and Soren was educated in both. Kierkegaard was a staunch critic of organized religion, including his family’s place of worship, Church of Denmark. He emphasized he could not serve “these legions of huckstering knaves, I mean the pastors, who by falsifying the definition of Christian have, for the sake of the business, gained millions and millions of Christians”¹⁶ when pastors should be witnesses to the truth of the Gospel

⁸ Ibid., 168.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 100.

¹¹ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2012), 36.

¹² Ibid., 235.

¹³ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 217.

¹⁴ Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 188.

¹⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, “Faedrelandet Articles, The Moment” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, eds. Hong, Howard V., and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 2000), 445.

above all.¹⁷ He lambasted Catholic meritoriousness. He said, “To hell with the pope and all his helpers’ helpers, and away with the monastery, together with all your fasting, scourging, and all the monkey antics that came into use under the name of imitation.”¹⁸ He denounced Orthodoxy as fighting to maintain an appearance that all are Christians.¹⁹ Despite being known as a philosopher, he disparaged philosophy, stating it “sheds its skin every step it takes, and the more foolish followers creep into it.”²⁰

He broke off his engagement, albeit remained in love with his ex-fiancée Regine. He renounced it in service to God and cast four diamonds from her returned ring into the pattern of a cross,²¹ only to later admit if he had had faith, he would have stayed with her.²² Soren maintained his God-relationship was the happy love of his otherwise unhappy life,²³ as he worked toward a more inward relation to Christianity instead of being outside of it fighting for its truth.²⁴ His polemical writing aimed to “upset blind habits and overturn easy assumptions.”²⁵ To produce was his life²⁶ and divine calling, despite encountering ridicule and misunderstanding.²⁷ During his excursions or “people baths”,²⁸ he conducted psychological studies of those with distinctive interests and lives to his own. He worked out his relationship to Christianity as someone devoted to Christ

¹⁷ Mark A. Tietjen, *Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 115.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, “Judge for Yourself! For Self-Examination,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 409.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, “The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 415.

²⁰ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 84.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

²² *Ibid.*, 118.

²³ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 29.

²⁴ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

but opposed to Christendom. He realized that nothing in the world profited him if he lost his soul (Mark 8:36).

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in 1821 in Moscow, Russia, married twice, and died at fifty-nine years old. His father had served the physically and mentally ill as a hospitalist and was later murdered by his serfs on his estate.²⁹ Dostoevsky himself was imprisoned and almost executed for being part of a radical political group.³⁰ He suffered from epilepsy and poverty, likely partially due to his gambling addiction.³¹ These experiences could have inspired some of Dostoevsky's character portrayals.

He was devoted to his Russian orthodox faith despite his doubts and stated he would prefer to remain with Christ than with truth if Christ was found outside the truth.³² To him, there was no one like the Savior who was "lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more manly, and more perfect."³³ He criticized Catholics for selling Christ in exchange for power.³⁴ His character Myshkin in *The Idiot* claimed atheism had risen due to Roman Catholicism, which was even worse than atheism because it preached a distorted Christ. Myshskin stated:

"To my thinking Roman Catholicism is not even a religion, but simply the continuation of the Western Roman Empire... The Pope seized the earth, an earthly throne, and grasped the sword... they added to the sword lying, fraud, deceit,

²⁹ Elsa Z. Posell, *Russian Authors* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 93.

³⁰ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 95.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

³² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1962), vi.

³³ Internet Archive, "To Mme. N. D. Fonvisin: Beginning of March 1854," (accessed August 30, 2022).

³⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), 255.

fanaticism, superstition, villainy. They have trifled with the most holy, truthful, sincere, fervent feelings of the people; they have bartered it all, all for money, for base earthly power. And isn't that the teaching of the AntiChrist?"³⁵

To him, Orthodoxy confessed Christ truly³⁶ and was salvation for Russians and mankind.³⁷ Capitalism, the power-greedy Catholic church, and Protestant rationalism were undermining the West, and socialism was a threat to Russia.³⁸ He claimed Catholicism caused atheism, materialism, and socialism.³⁹ For Fyodor, faith consisted of humility.⁴⁰ He did not desire earthly possessions, only books, the possibility of writing, and a few daily hours alone.⁴¹

This theologian, philosopher, and novelist focused on the individual and their subjective relationships with God as most important to their existential lives. This is not an exhaustive study of all their writings, but a sampling of their various religious works about identity, meaning, and purpose in living.

ST TERESA OF AVILA

Teresa learned her soul could not be satisfied with anything less than God. Loving God and neighbor were ways to true perfection.⁴² She believed humility and self-knowledge led to knowing God.⁴³ Surrender in obedience made all things

³⁵ Dostoevsky, *Idiot*, 492-93.

³⁶ Dostoevsky, *Diary*, 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed* (New York: New American Library, 1962), 696.

³⁹ Dostoevsky, *Diary*, 906.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁴¹ Internet Archive, "To Mme."

⁴² Dostoevsky, *Idiot*, 51.

⁴³ Teresa, *Interior*, 49.

possible,⁴⁴ and prayer was the door to God's great favors.⁴⁵ She felt people needed to believe in God's blessings to experience them. Teresa acknowledged "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). When she abandoned prayer, she lost her way.⁴⁶ In her view, good companionship helped eradicate bad habits influenced by bad companionship and brought desires back into eternal focus. She considered all work in vain if God was not in charge, and what He did inside someone was crucial. To reflect on His virtue brought one out of miseries. While fear distorts self-knowledge, setting one's eyes on Christ enhances understanding. Teresa believed the devil makes assaults on one's soul, but the Lord draws someone to Himself through lovingkindness.⁴⁷ If someone wants God, they find Him, just as Jeremiah 29:13⁴⁸ states. His love motivates the soul to love in return. Once someone knows the Lord, they cannot stop loving Him.⁴⁹ Teresa felt love is the measure of how much suffering one can bear.⁵⁰ She exclaimed she needed more crosses, not more rest!⁵¹

She exhorted her fellow nuns to hold to their vocation, although she realized God does not lead all the same way.⁵² She advised them to surrender their wills wholly to their Creator and detach from all else.⁵³ This involved following Primitive rule: pray without ceasing, observe fasts, and keep periods of silence.⁵⁴ To preserve peace and imitate Jesus, people need to love each other. The devil works to fill people with pride, but humility

⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁵ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 52.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 116-17.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁸ "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."
(NIV).

⁴⁹ Teresa, *Way*, 198.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 213.

⁵¹ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 76.

⁵² Teresa, *Way*, 124.

⁵³ Ibid., 215.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

meant being ready and happy to do the Lord's will.⁵⁵ She noted no soul ever became such a giant they would not need to become a child at the breast again.⁵⁶ One should do their best in whatever task because God knows what work each should do for themselves, for Himself, and for their neighbor. She was a pilgrim here and heaven was her true home.⁵⁷

To this saint, most was gained when someone did not try to obtain what they thought was best.⁵⁸ When the body is indulged, it makes one think more things are necessary for it. Instead, people should focus on what endures and learn to suffer without having to talk about it.⁵⁹ God has not given understanding of everything to anyone. The body and will should be subdued to the spirit,⁶⁰ including unlikable tasks. With God, to will is to do.⁶¹ One cannot expect to partake in kingdom blessings without being willing to partake in trials as Jesus did.⁶² They find everything in their true Friend, Spouse, Master, and Teacher Christ, "Who is Truth Itself".⁶³ She called God her Guest, Emperor, Rest, Giver, Majesty, Pattern, Prince of all Creation, King with a Kingdom without end, and Someone who deserved proper respect.⁶⁴

When seeking God to speak through her, she saw a vision of the soul being a beautiful castle with many dwellings, perhaps inspired by John 14:2.⁶⁵ If one made it through all seven rooms past evil spirits, they found their Beloved at the center. The

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁶ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 80.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵⁸ Teresa, *Way*, 127.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁵ "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." (NASB).

foundation of this house was built through prayer.⁶⁶ She believed one could get whatever they needed from God at every stage.⁶⁷ Entry was found to the interior castle through prayer and meditation.⁶⁸ In the second stage He calls believers closer through spiritual inspiration, and through suffering or sorrow. Perseverance is necessary because neither security nor peace are found outside the castle. Worldly entanglements, attachments, and possessions are distractions that need to be surrendered to make progress. The soul grows to desire what God does as they resist temptation. What He thinks is best for each person is up to Him. Practicing prayer helps someone bring their will into harmony with His,⁶⁹ and she encouraged people not to give up on recollection of Him. When communication with Him ceases, friendship and kinship are lost too.⁷⁰ Realize limitations, pray without ceasing, ask for God's mercy, and be grateful to Him,⁷¹ as 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) says: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

In the third dwelling, it is essential to overcome past battles to find sole pleasure in serving God. This comes through practicing virtues, desiring His will, and living in harmony with what God arranges.⁷² Love must overpower reason so one can stop focusing on weaknesses and fears. She encouraged people to live in silence and hope.⁷³ In the fourth room, spiritual sweetness is found in God and the heart is expanded. Teresa emphasized, "If you want to make progress on the path and ascend to the places you have longed for, the important thing

⁶⁶ Teresa, *Way*, 56.

⁶⁷ Teresa, *Interior*, 49.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁹ Teresa, *Interior*, 60.

⁷⁰ Teresa, *Way*, 178.

⁷¹ Teresa, *Interior*, 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 84.

is not to think much but to love much, and so to do whatever best awakens you to love.”⁷⁴ During the Prayer of Recollection, one collects their faculties and withdraws into their Heaven of the soul⁷⁵ to find God. This leads to the Prayer of Quiet. Rather than trying to figure God out by talking to Him, one listens and humbly waits as they persevere from natural to supernatural.

In the fifth dwelling, one’s love melts into His love. In the Prayer of Union, the soul transcends reason and all worldly delights to live fully in God.⁷⁶ In steadfast surrender of one’s will to God’s will, one attains perfect union with Him, and “the soul sees clearly God knows what He is doing better than she knows what she is wanting.”⁷⁷ There is no need to try and comprehend the blessings God gives, only let personal willfulness die. Praise Him, for “He is the dwelling we build to place ourselves inside.”⁷⁸ No rest is found in created things, and there are crosses to bear in earthly life.⁷⁹ Through Him, Teresa lived righteously and generously, and others were ignited through her fire.⁸⁰ She believed the more one loved their neighbor, through compassion and action, the greater one’s love for God is.

One commits to marrying their Beloved in the sixth dwelling. Afflictions become more intense here, but they cannot disturb the soul’s interior because evil’s power is on the exterior and superficial.⁸¹ Peace comes from God, but restlessness and strife are from the Devil. Here a person’s will becomes fully awake to love and what God has for them.⁸² Auditory or transcendental visions may come in this stage.⁸³ A rapture may bring

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁵ Teresa, *Way*, 185.

⁷⁶ Teresa, *Interior*, 121.

⁷⁷ Teresa, *Interior*, 138.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 192.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 179.

knowledge of God's greatness, humility, and a loss of interest in worldly affairs.⁸⁴ Reason is no longer needed when the will is on fire. She determined the purpose of any spiritual journey was to make someone a better servant of God.⁸⁵ He knows and leads believers on right paths. If people realized bad behavior defiles God's sacred space, they would not dare act so terribly.

The soul must be purified by suffering before entering the seventh dwelling where healing resides.⁸⁶ One must come to value their soul as a creature made in God's image. Here a person is called to enter the center of themselves. This is the Lord's dwelling where He prepares the faithful for spiritual marriage consummation.⁸⁷ All is new, and the Trinity is encountered.⁸⁸ There is rest in this divine companionship where the glory of heaven is manifested in permanent peace. Teresa realizes she received a magnificent gift of the Majesty living inside of her. This transformation brings self-forgetfulness and remembrance of the Lord. The soul no longer fears and lives in sustained quietude in His sanctuary.⁸⁹ This correlates with Psalm 26:8 (ESV): "O Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells." Now she wanted to find ways to show Him how much she loves Him. For prayer to be fruitful, one must give up attachment to their way and be open to His divine will. All else becomes insignificant when one is focused on Christ crucified.⁹⁰

Teresa realized her will was in captivity now, and the Lord was beginning to give His kingdom on earth.⁹¹ Jesus is Ambassador and mediator for believers, and The Lord's Prayer⁹² guides

⁸⁴ Ibid., 201.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 252.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 261.

⁸⁸ Teresa, *Interior*, 263.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 289.

⁹¹ Teresa, *Way*, 202.

⁹² Matt. 6:9-13 (NIV).

people in how to communicate their needs, namely, that His will be done on earth as in heaven. The self-interested will should be given to God freely,⁹³ because no amount of work or planning helps fulfill God's will in us.⁹⁴ Anything gained comes from what someone gives and forgives. Once they receive God's Kingdom, they no longer want a worldly one.⁹⁵ She cautioned against becoming too secure, to always be on the lookout for temptation of faults and worldly pleasures.⁹⁶ Those who truly love God love all good, seek, give, and praise it. They join with others who are good.⁹⁷ She claimed:

“His will is for us to desire truth, whereas we desire falsehood; His will is for us to desire the eternal, whereas we prefer that which passes away; His will is for us to desire great and sublime things, whereas we desire the base things of earth; He would have us desire only what is certain, whereas here on earth we love what is doubtful.”⁹⁸

To Teresa, our business is to be on guard against displeasing God.⁹⁹ Instead of fearing man or the devil, one should be saying “God! God!” making the devil tremble.¹⁰⁰ Like Job,¹⁰¹ just as good things are received from God, suffering evil things should be expected. Human desire to serve God is often thwarted due to the body they are exiled in.¹⁰² She exhorted people to keep their minds silent by His side, to look at, converse with, delight in, and humble themselves before Him.¹⁰³

⁹³ Teresa, *Way*, 211.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁹⁸ Teresa, *Way*, 277.

⁹⁹ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰¹ Job 2:10 (ESV).

¹⁰² Teresa, *Autobiography*, 69.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 83.

Grieb explained Teresa's meditations and prayers highlight Jesus as a model to imitate and exhibit a pattern on how to bear trials.¹⁰⁴ Actions of charity and love for the poor can keep one from self-absorbed narcissism.¹⁰⁵ Cooper said Teresa saw the world as sacramental.¹⁰⁶ To be liberated as a servant of love, one should live out the virtue of humility which helps detach one from the world and attach to Christ.¹⁰⁷ Anderson views *Interior Castle* as bearing witness to the formation of human subjectivity as Christological phenomenon.¹⁰⁸ In her view, the Prayer of Union echoes Galatians 2:20 (HCSB): "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." For Teresa, to live was all about Christ taking over her life.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard expressed lives of most are far from what they should be. Despite potential, intentions, or plans, vision gets lost in routine of living.¹⁰⁹ "How terrible tedium is-terribly tedious,"¹¹⁰ he stated. He compared sorrow to being his castle,¹¹¹ life to a bitter drink,¹¹² and wished for constancy and enthusiasm to endure anything.¹¹³ He compared youth to a flower that has a dewdrop that evaporates once the sun rises. Fantasies disappear into questions of whether one will be able

¹⁰⁴ A.K. Grieb, "Teresa of Ávila: The Interior Castle," *Theology Today* 62, no.2 (2005), 233.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁰⁶ Austin Cooper, "St Teresa of Avila: Spiritual Guide for Today," *Australasian Catholic Record* 92, no. 4 (2015), 449.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 453.

¹⁰⁸ M. Anderson, "Thy Word In Me: On the Prayer of Union in St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 3 (2006), 330.

¹⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, "Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 273.

¹¹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Volume I, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 36.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

to produce, but to produce requires soil to grow in.¹¹⁴ On a mission to find himself, he expressed:

“My soul has lost its potentiality. If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility!”¹¹⁵

He understood only God knew what He would make out of him.¹¹⁶ He admitted:

“What I really need to get clear about what I am to do, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find my purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die.”¹¹⁷

He admitted formulating any meaning for Christianity was pointless if it had no deeper meaning for his life. He needed this knowledge to come alive in him.

Exploring what it meant to exist as a human being, he approached life in stages of aesthetic (sphere of immediacy), ethical (sphere of requirement) and religious (sphere of fulfillment).¹¹⁸ He moved from poet, to philosopher, to what it

¹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, “Selected Early Entries from Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Kierkegaard, “Stages on Life’s Way: Studies by Various Persons,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 182.

meant to be essentially Christian. He wrote indirectly through pseudonyms as he explored the aesthetic and ethical, and directly once he made people aware of the religious. To him, pursuits of pleasure and knowledge were vain. To seek and find the kingdom of heaven became priority.¹¹⁹ Existence should involve passion, and a subjective thinker's task is to understand himself in existence. A person needs to get to know oneself before they can know anything else,¹²⁰ "to choose oneself."¹²¹

Possibility reveals ability. Adam revealed his own knowledge of freedom awakened by desire to follow through on his will.¹²² The temporal and eternal are both present in a human,¹²³ which is why anxiety lends itself to freedom's possibility.¹²⁴ According to Vigilius Haufniensis,¹²⁵ this anxiety overwhelms someone until overcome by faith.

When Victor Eremita¹²⁶ tried to figure out what the meaning of life is, he agreed with King Solomon,¹²⁷ work or enjoyment is empty and meaningless.¹²⁸ He advised against romantic love (its eternity is illusory),¹²⁹ marriage, or taking any official post. Instead, one should vary themselves and be able to control their moods.¹³⁰ He chose to laugh at actuality,¹³¹ and claimed

¹¹⁹ Kierkegaard, "Early Entries," 9.

¹²⁰ Kierkegaard, "Stages on Life's Way," 10.

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, A Fragment of Life, Part II," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 81.

¹²² Kierkegaard, "The Concept of Anxiety" in *Essential Kierkegaard*, 141.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹²⁵ Pseudonymous author for "The Concept of Anxiety"; Vigilius Haufniensis means 'watchman of Copenhagen'.

¹²⁶ Pseudonymous author for "Either/Or"; Victor Eremita means 'victorious hermit'.

¹²⁷ Eccles. 1:2, 12-14 (ESV).

¹²⁸ Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, Part I," 41.

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, Part II," 70.

¹³⁰ Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, Part I," 60.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

boredom is the root of evil.¹³² Life appeared to move between recollecting and forgetting, but as long someone hoped, they were unlimited in potential. Having power to forget measured resiliency. He compared this with using scissors to clip away what cannot be utilized.¹³³ What is most beautiful in life should not be acquired through reading, listening, or looking for it, but simply through living it.¹³⁴ This correlates with King Solomon warning how too much study is wearisome since book making is endless (Eccles. 12:12).

Kierkegaard emphasized God should be recollected as man's guide in everything. Through this focus, man could become proficient and joyful in his work, home, and life.¹³⁵ An earnest person should keep death in mind to motivate him in living. A human comes to realize he is nothing, but this gives him the chance to wonder at God.¹³⁶ An individual should learn to be satisfied before God in the essentiality of religious life.¹³⁷ Hilarius Bookbinder¹³⁸ said if one does not recollect completely, their soul becomes a transit warehouse for damaged goods!¹³⁹ Repentance recollects guilt.¹⁴⁰ Sin corrupts humans, so deliverance is needed to will one thing, the good in truth,¹⁴¹ as expressed by James: "Keep near to God, then he will keep near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 1:2-11).

¹³² Ibid., 51.

¹³³ Ibid., 57.

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, "Either/Or, Part II," 70.

¹³⁵ Kierkegaard, "Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 165.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, "Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 260.

¹³⁸ Pseudonymous author for "Stages on Life's Way"; Hilarius Bookbinder means 'merry'.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, "Stages," 171.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴¹ Kierkegaard, "Upbuilding Discourses," 271.

Kierkegaard expressed God is the source of all love, revealed as Savior and Redeemer. Anyone who loves is their true self by being in Him. To be oneself, one must be past what all others are.¹⁴² When eternity is realized, all dissimilarities between people dissolve and they are simply human beings in their identity,¹⁴³ created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). A pagan in the world who sees no need for God can never be satisfied with themselves as they cannot be oneself unless before God. Their care shifts to being something in the world instead.¹⁴⁴ Fatal sickness requires radical cure. Kierkegaard believed God is the only one a person can love more than themselves through obedience and adoration.

The Bible instructs to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Loving one's neighbor presupposes one loves themselves.¹⁴⁵ Christianity dictates one should love all people as their duty, which liberates love to be eternally secured against change and despair.¹⁴⁶ With the commandment to preserve love, this in turn preserves a person when tempted to lose courage or go one's own way. Loving one's neighbor can sanctify someone's union with God since God is Love and humans can be like God only through loving. Christians, as citizens of heaven are God's co-workers in love.¹⁴⁷ In spiritual life, love is the deepest ground, and one must dig a spiritual foundation first (Luke 6:48). Presupposing love in other helps build this love.¹⁴⁸

Imitation of Christ dispels doubts and exhibits an existence-transformation.¹⁴⁹ To be essentially Christian means nothing

¹⁴² Kierkegaard, "Christian Discourses," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 314.

¹⁴³ Kierkegaard, "Works of Love," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 298.

¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, "Christian Discourses," 317.

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, "Works of Love," 278.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 294-96.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, "Judge for Yourself! For Self-Examination," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 409.

has been added or subtracted to what has been eternally concluded.¹⁵⁰ An essential sermon is a person's own existence.¹⁵¹ Christian beliefs should integrate into every area of a believer's life. Humans realize their identity and destiny through works of love before God.¹⁵² "Doubt is thought's despair; despair is personality's doubt."¹⁵³ Despair indicates someone's failure to be oneself¹⁵⁴ and their lack of the eternal.¹⁵⁵ Immediacy causes anxiety despite offering an illusion of security. Sin intensifies despair because one has guilt from their consciousness of existing before God.¹⁵⁶

Faith and obedience make it possible for one to rest in God as oneself.¹⁵⁷ Romans says whatever does not come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Christians find prosperity and joy through adversity, because adversity leads them to eternity's goal, which is to "Seek first God's kingdom."¹⁵⁸ Here "eternity provides feet to walk on."¹⁵⁹ Eternal hope believes good is possible, while fear expects evil. Living in despair instead of hope rejects God's plan for existence.¹⁶⁰ Hope is rooted in love and faith in a loving God. When death comes, it matters if life was spent well in relation to eternity, not what earthly wishes were fulfilled.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, "Adler," 411.

¹⁵¹ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 117.

¹⁵² Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 158.

¹⁵³ Kierkegaard, "Sickness Unto Death," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 350.

¹⁵⁴ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 98.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, "Sickness Unto Death," 364.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, "Christian Discourses," 324; Matthew 6:33 (NKJV).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁶⁰ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 155.

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, "Faedrelandet," 445.

Climacus¹⁶² stated it is not whether Christianity is true objectively, but how a person relates to it subjectively,¹⁶³ since this brings God-fearing solicitude.¹⁶⁴ “God’s governance has no obligation of responsibility in relation to someone’s sagacity.”¹⁶⁵ There is no system for existence or for an existing spirit, rather, existence is a system for God.¹⁶⁶ A subject exists and becomes through existing,¹⁶⁷ tasked to understand themselves in existence.¹⁶⁸ “An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness,”¹⁶⁹ paraphrases faith, since God cannot be apprehended objectively as Spirit, which refutes being able to show physical certainty.¹⁷⁰ Thus, subjectivity is truth, relating an existing person to the eternal, essential truth, in an inwardness awakened to the God-relationship and His omnipresence.¹⁷¹ The object of faith is not a doctrine, but God’s actuality in eternal existence.¹⁷²

Truth is a Person.¹⁷³ John 14:6 (CEB) explains: “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.” Faith is a conviction before God (Rom. 14:22), a reminder He is greater than hearts that condemn us (1 John 3:20). Human greatness of heart comes through mastering itself in love, while God’s greatness

¹⁶² Pseudonymous author for Kierkegaard’s “Concluding Unscientific Postscript”; Climacus means ‘John the climber’.

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript,” 189-90.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, “Works of Love,” 280.

¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript,” 197.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, “Two Ethical-Religious Essays,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 343.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁷³ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 63.

comes through forgiving.¹⁷⁴ This is why one's faith life should express what they profess. Christ asked people to follow Him, not just admire Him. One's only task is to be oneself in God's house.¹⁷⁵ To choose Him always and accept his gracious forgiveness of sins and unchangeable love.¹⁷⁶ Someone must place themselves in personal subjective relation to God's Word, rather than turning it into an impersonal objective doctrine.¹⁷⁷

Johannes De Silentio¹⁷⁸ explained God's will is expressed through duty.¹⁷⁹ When Abraham showed willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, he exhibited this proof of his faith in his willingness to carry out God's command through this spiritual trial. Faith is passion, and Abraham lived this out despite the absurdity of it. Constantin Constantius¹⁸⁰ discovered eternity is true repetition and advises people to read Job repeatedly, where all shades of meaning reside.¹⁸¹ When Job questioned God, He eventually answered Job, telling him to brace himself like a man. God would do the questioning, and man could answer to Him (Job 40:6-7). Job admitted God knew and could do all things and repented.¹⁸²

Socrates believed humans possessed truth, and the condition for understanding this truth is being able to question it. Both condition and question contain the answer and

¹⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, "Christian Discourses," 331.

¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, "Practice in Christianity," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 379.

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, "Two Discourses at Friday Communion," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 391.

¹⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, "For Self-Examination," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 399.

¹⁷⁸ Pseudonymous author for Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling," Johannes De Silentio means 'John of Silence'.

¹⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 100.

¹⁸⁰ Pseudonymous author for Kierkegaard's "Repetition, A Venture in Experimenting Psychology"; Constantin Constantius means 'One who is constantly constant'.

¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard, "Repetition," 112.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 42:1-6.

conditions.¹⁸³ Any untruth is sin,¹⁸⁴ and only a savior, deliverer, and reconciler can provide the condition for freedom from this prison, according to Johannes Climacus.¹⁸⁵ The learner (untruth) must receive this condition from the teacher so they can become a new person through rebirth – conversion by way of repentance. In this moment, a person changes from “not to be” to “to be.”¹⁸⁶ Results are not as important in one’s pursuits as the process.¹⁸⁷ Holding fast to God with reservedness in eternity, one can become contented with being himself, not pretending to be otherwise for anyone else.¹⁸⁸ He must only be faithful to fulfill God’s mission, to proclaim His Word to the world.¹⁸⁹

One should give up what they think their wishes are to learn something higher from life. To be a “truth-witness” requires suffering.¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard did not want to lament the past and advised others to hurry along and not look back like Lot’s wife who became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). Keep in mind all are struggling up a hill.¹⁹¹ True ideality is continuous (the actual), and patience is the only way to contend against time. The Lord is longsuffering with men so they will not perish, so humans should be longsuffering if they want to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:22). The ultimate either/or demands one chooses between good and evil,¹⁹² so they can become themselves. This original choice will show up in every succeeding choice,¹⁹³ as

¹⁸³ Kierkegaard, “Philosophical Fragments, Or a Fragment of Philosophy,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 120.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁸⁵ Pseudonymous author for Kierkegaard’s “Philosophical Fragments”; Johannes Climacus represents a subjective approach to knowledge.

¹⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, “Philosophical Fragments,” 122-124.

¹⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, “Johannes Climacus,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 130.

¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, “Christian Discourses,” 314.

¹⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, “Two Discourses,” 348.

¹⁹⁰ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 176.

¹⁹¹ Kierkegaard, “*Early*,” 12.

¹⁹² Kierkegaard, “Either/Or, Part II,” 74.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

one continues to develop personal, civic, and religious virtues in life as he translates himself from one stage to another.¹⁹⁴

Birds do not sow, reap, or gather. Lilies do not toil or spin. God takes care of them, so there is no need to be anxious in this life (Matt. 6:26-34). To seek God's kingdom first, one must learn to be silent. Silence is inwardness. A person who can remain essentially silent learns to speak and act essentially, too.¹⁹⁵ Here one learns to fear God and how to pray, which is to listen and hear God speak.¹⁹⁶ Self-will needs to expire so someone can discover what God's will for their life is, to submit to necessity in one's limitations.¹⁹⁷ Change will continue, but someone in God's will rests in His changelessness.¹⁹⁸ The solution to disharmony in oneself is to accept Christ and find identity, meaning, and purpose through the Creator.¹⁹⁹ This starts with denying oneself and following Christ (Matt. 16:24). The conflict should be less about doctrine and more about Christianity as existence.²⁰⁰

The highest perfection a human can reach is to need God,²⁰¹ for one's eternal consciousness to be love for God,²⁰² to learn to be content in His grace. To be a faithful follower of Christ should be one's purpose in life. Faith is a task for a lifetime and the person who loves God through faith reflects upon Him.²⁰³ Believers are instructed to run the race set before them with endurance, to look to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2) and do God's will so

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, "Two Discourses," 265.

¹⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, "The Lily in the Field and The Bird of the Air," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 335.

¹⁹⁷ Tietjen, *Kierkegaard*, 99.

¹⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, "The Changeless of God," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 490.

¹⁹⁹ Tietjen, 92.

²⁰⁰ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 210.

²⁰¹ Kierkegaard, "Four Upbuilding Discourses," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 87.

²⁰² Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 98.

²⁰³ Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 94.

they can receive His promise (10:36). Jesus stated not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter heaven, only those who do the Father's will (Matt. 16:24).

Kierkegaard claimed his entire authorship was religious from start to finish,²⁰⁴ so the reader could learn what it meant to become a real Christian.²⁰⁵ People needed to reflect their way out of their other identities. To become human and lovable was to become a single individual before God.²⁰⁶ To him, true Christian conviction²⁰⁷ rested in Romans 8:38-39 (NIV), "That nothing could separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."²⁰⁸ Kierkegaard made it clear he did not think most Christians reflect what it means to be a Christian according to the New Testament. He wanted honesty.²⁰⁹ Just as Jesus' identity was important to Gospel writers, were Christians who identified as such who they claim to be?²¹⁰

He was a hater of habitual Christianity in any form, whether illusionary or via spiritual pride.²¹¹ According to Soren, he "completed the task of reflection – to cast Christianity, becoming a Christian, wholly and fully into reflection."²¹² For him, meaning of life was found through seeking God first (Matt. 6:33). Faith to him was a task for a lifetime²¹³ to be worked out in fear and trembling, since God works in humans to fulfill His good purpose (Phil. 2:12-13). To will this was to die longing for eternity so he could do nothing else but thank God.²¹⁴ He

²⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, "On My Work as an Author, The Point of View," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 450.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 456.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 454.

²⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, "From the Papers of One Still Living Published Against His Will," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 13.

²⁰⁸ Berean Study Bible.

²⁰⁹ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 180.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹² Kierkegaard, "On My Work," 480.

²¹³ Tietjen, "*Kierkegaard*," 12.

²¹⁴ Kierkegaard, "On My Work," 481.

believed God wanted souls in the same business as angels-to praise, adore, worship, and thank Him.²¹⁵ People want to be remembered for different things, but the poem Soren wished to have on his headstone speaks volumes:

“In a little while
I shall have won,
Then the entire battle
Will disappear at once.
Then I may rest
In halls of roses
And unceasingly
And unceasingly Speak with my Jesus.”²¹⁶

Stowikowski interprets Kierkegaard as saying each person must find his individual vocation in God in his interiority (spirituality) where possibility is found. The end point is man’s love for God, the reality of essence.²¹⁷ If man remains in temporality, he will never find what life should fully consist of. Evans interprets Kierkegaard’s view of self as something one must become; they are not simply born or baptized as Christians.²¹⁸ Humans are spiritual beings understood through freedom to define themselves relative to an ideal outside the self. Every human self is a “relation that relates itself to itself by relating to another.”²¹⁹ For Kierkegaard, the ideal is Divine, and man is accountable to Him. A person who receives Grace will want to imitate Jesus. “Faith is that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently

²¹⁵ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 183.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹⁷ A. Slowikowski, “The Reality of Love: An Affirmative Vision of Christianity Based on Kierkegaard’s Interpretation of the Maxim: Love is the Fulfilling of the Law,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 23, no. 1 (2018), 189.

²¹⁸ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability As the Meaning of Human Existence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 14.

²¹⁹ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 119.

before God.”²²⁰ Human freedom allows people to choose how or whether to become the selves God wills them to be.

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Dostoevsky explores human nature, faith in God, doubt, love, suffering, evil, conscience, happiness, freedom of the will, individualism, and redemption in his writing. He believed if a man is happy he is fulfilling the purpose of his existence, because happiness exists in the pursuit of it.²²¹ When the only purpose is to live, one is content.²²² Humans are sinners, and the only solution for them is Mercy and Love.²²³ In his mind, struggle, work, and energy reform someone’s environment,²²⁴ while one longs for freedom, air, and ease.²²⁵ In a letter to his brother, he wrote, “Nature, the soul, love, and God, one recognizes through the heart, and not through the reason.”²²⁶ In *Notes From The Underground*, he established reason only knows what it has succeeded in getting to know.²²⁷ According to him, through Christianity, one recognizes human personality, freedom, and responsibility.²²⁸ To be first in the Kingdom of God one must become a servant to all.²²⁹ Love of mankind was impossible without faith in a soul’s immortality.²³⁰ One should resolute to do everything for active

²²⁰ Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality*, 123; quoting Kierkegaard from *Sickness Unto Death*.

²²¹ Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, 193.

²²² P. Dehnel, “Wittgenstein and Dostoevsky: Happiness and Subjectivity,” *Philosophy and Literature* 45, no. 2 (2021), 470.

²²³ Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, 787.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²²⁶ Internet Archive, “To his Brother Michael, October 31, 1838,” (accessed August 30, 2022).

²²⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Notes From the Underground” in *Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, trans. David Magarshack (HarperCollins, 1968), 286.

²²⁸ Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, 349.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 541.

love's sake.²³¹ Happiness is found when one finds faith in other men's kindness and love for each other.²³² Christ is the Consoler who saves people's souls from despair.²³³ While sin is transient, Christ is eternal enlightenment.²³⁴

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha, a disciple, explained elders in Russian monasteries take your soul and will into their own. He believed his elder, Father Zosima, a monk, was custodian of God's truth. When Zosima conversed with a woman who had little faith, he told her men are made for happiness and anyone who is doing God's will on earth is happy. When she asked how she could regain her faith, he told her through the experience of actively loving her neighbor and self-forgetfulness she would grow surer of God's reality.²³⁵ When another man asked him to decide his fate, Zosima read him John 12:24 (KJV): "Verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And he read him Hebrews 10:31 (ESV): "It is fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

When the elder was about to die, he felt God near and rejoiced. He believed he had done his duty. He wondered why men do not go "into the garden, walk and play there, love, appreciate, and kiss each other, and glorify life."²³⁶The Creator ended each day he created with praise. Mysteries were revealed through Job's suffering, who continued to praise the Lord, raised up again to a blessed life. To believe in people, one needed to believe in God. They are responsible to all for all, and if they knew this the world be paradise.²³⁷ Heaven is within each person, but instead people reach for fullness of life in their own strength, only to

²³¹ Ibid., 622.

²³² Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, 935.

²³³ Ibid., 983.

²³⁴ Ibid., 985.

²³⁵ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 47.

²³⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 262.

²³⁷ Ibid., 270.

self-destruct. Through obedience, fasting, and prayer, one can subdue their will to God and find spiritual joy and freedom.²³⁸ Social solidarity is found through brotherly love and service of humanity.²³⁹

When Alyosha's family visited Father Zosima, he advised his father Fyodor Pavlovich, a buffoon, not to lie to himself. A man who lies to himself is unable to distinguish truth within or around him, and subsequently loses respect for others and ultimately love. He tells him not to be tempted by drunkenness, lust, or money.²⁴⁰ Mitka, Alyosha's passionate brother seemed to be led astray by feelings. He noted all the mysteries and claimed God gave only riddles. He said the battlefield was within man's heart,²⁴¹ which he bid to be silent, patient, humble, and at peace when confronted with vexing trials.²⁴² Even when he could not see the sun, he knew it was there. He questioned who could be good without God.²⁴³

Alyosha's intellectual and atheistic brother Ivan struggled to believe in God as he did not believe virtue or law mattered if there was no immortality.²⁴⁴ Even if he could accept God, he could not accept the world with all its suffering and contradiction as created by Him. He wanted to be healed and believe in all being healed, forgiven, and justified, but he could not accept it. He claimed people who are believers talk about the existence of God and eternity, and those who do not focus on anarchism or socialism. Loving one's neighbor seemed impossible since adults kept sinning despite knowing good and evil. It seemed longing for community of worship was the root of man's misery, and miracle, authority, and mystery oversaw

²³⁸ Ibid., 287.

²³⁹ Ibid., 276.

²⁴⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 35.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 95.

²⁴² Ibid., 435.

²⁴³ Ibid., 550.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

man's happiness.²⁴⁵ Ivan knew man needed something to live for. He wanted to be there when everyone found out what it has all been for.²⁴⁶ He felt life was "not a matter of intellect or logic, it's loving with one's inside, with one's stomach."²⁴⁷ He only wanted to live until thirty and then "dash the cup to the ground!"²⁴⁸ Once someone told him he was wounded by aesthetic feelings and pride.²⁴⁹

Alyosha held onto the hope one day men would be holy and love each other, and usher in the Kingdom of Christ.²⁵⁰ Zosima told Alyosha he should leave the monastery. Christ was with him if Alyosha did not abandon him. He told him to seek happiness even in sorrow, and to work unceasingly. He told him to not to forget prayer as it is an education. Man should be loved in his sin, which resembled divine love.²⁵¹ Man should walk around himself daily to ensure his image is seemly.²⁵² Alyosha plead with God to have mercy on all turbulent souls around him, to save them, and redirect their paths through His love and joy.²⁵³ He took Zosima's advice to heart to care for people as children or as the sick in hospitals.²⁵⁴ He knew there was a Being who could forgive through innocent blood He shed for all.²⁵⁵ He loved people without needing a reason to.²⁵⁶ Roberts sees love as the main theme of this novel. Active and attentive love needs

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 231.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 220.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 208.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 238.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 601.

²⁵⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 25.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 291.

²⁵² Ibid., 292.

²⁵³ Ibid., 143.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 196.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 324.

humility. In the learning process of struggle, love is the teacher.²⁵⁷

In *Crime and Punishment*, the devil appeared to help when human reason failed.²⁵⁸ Raskolnikov's pride led to his fall. His name means "schism" and he was caught between a cruel and compassionate persona. After murdering an old woman for money, he was tortured with guilt. After hearing the story of Lazarus from Sonya, an angel in his life, he admitted to believing in God, which led him to confess his crime and find redemption. When in prison, Raskolnikov wonders if he is only to live to exist, when mere existence had never been enough.²⁵⁹ But as a changed man, who had finally admitted to his crime, he is gradually renewed.

In notes about this novel, Dostoevsky wrote happiness can only come through suffering and felt conviction is the chief thing in life.²⁶⁰ The Lord receives those who are humble, who do not think they are worthy of receiving His forgiveness.²⁶¹ Melcheja explains this is a testament someone can be renewed by God's love, despite what their past has held. While there is a big schism between God and man, His grace is bigger than this schism. Grace can change a man and give him new life.²⁶²

In *The Possessed*, Fyodor explains he attempted to depict the manifold motives leading to villainy conducted by those one would least suspect.²⁶³ His character Verkhovensky compared demons in people to those who begged to enter swine who

²⁵⁷ Peter Roberts, "Love, attention and teaching: Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*," *Open Review of Educational Research* 5, no. 1 (2018), 13.

²⁵⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 65.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 456.

²⁶⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 467.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶² E.D.R. Melcheja and S. Shirly, "From Torment to Redemption: A Reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*," *Language in India* 19, no. 5 (2019), 405.

²⁶³ Dostoevsky, *Diary*, 149.

drown and die (Matt. 8:28-34). But he tells the woman selling Bibles who read him this passage a sick man may recover when he sits at the feet of Jesus.²⁶⁴ At his deathbed, the priest told him faith in the Almighty is the only refuge for humans from all life's hardships and only promise of eternal bliss.²⁶⁵ He admitted he needed God because He was the only One capable of loving eternally.²⁶⁶ Throughout Dostoevsky's novels nihilism led to chaos and destruction, while faith brought redemption.

In *The Idiot*, insane or diseased characters reveal how fragile life is and how sensitive this made them to their own existence. Prince Myshkin displays what it is to be a good person, only to be labeled as an idiot by others who live out their pride as nihilists, atheists, materialists, liars, drunkards, and murderers. He had resolved to be courteous and open with all,²⁶⁷ to never judge anyone.²⁶⁸ He believed God was pleased when a sinner prayed to Him with all his heart and felt religious feeling is not founded on reasoning. Compassion should be the law of human existence.²⁶⁹ He lived humbly and generously and accepted everyone equally. He appreciated how each morning the sun brightly rises and every fly buzzes about with their part in this pageant or chorus called living. He did not know or understand everything as the song continually went forth,²⁷⁰ but once he had faith, he did not waver from it.²⁷¹ He believed God and individuality were losing to atheists who did not realize they put faith into a negation of it.²⁷²

²⁶⁴ Dostoevsky, *Possessed*, 671.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 678.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 67.

²⁶⁸ "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own?" (Matt. 7:1-5) (ESV).

²⁶⁹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 208.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 471.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 495.

Things would always go right for some, and others would always struggle. “But even the most cautious person may sometimes be struck by a tile from a neighbor’s roof.”²⁷³ Ordinary people are essential to human affairs and even commonplace people teach or interest others. Those with limited intelligence are happier than clever ones who are never content to just do their duty and always wonder what they are supposed to discover or originate.²⁷⁴ He felt the only way to reach perfection was to be ignorant of much. To be a leader, one first must be a servant.²⁷⁵

Despite caring only for truth, and not for wealth, pomp, or esteem as other characters in this novel, Myshkin was still influenced by women in his life he tried to help. Aglaia, one of his two romantic interests accused the other, Nastasia, of self-love, akin to madness.²⁷⁶ Through shame of being molested when young, Nastasia manipulated the prince into marrying her instead of Aglaia, then fled her wedding with her other lover who ended up murdering her as suspected. Myshkin finds this murderer, Rogozhin, only to comfort him just as he had Nastasia after his relationship with Algaia was ruined through pity for Nastasia. Through this final act of love, he ruins himself. Through love woes, his life brings a chaotic, sad ending where he is left alone and deranged.²⁷⁷ This ideal man who tried to help everyone ended up self-destructing. His good was manipulated and punished. “It’s no good looking for an ideal being!”²⁷⁸ As Christ loved prostitutes and murderers, Myshkin loved unconditionally.

According to Givens, despite Myshkin having Christlike qualities and embodying Christian love, he appeared more as a

²⁷³ Ibid., 315.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 420.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 501-502.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 515.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 557.

²⁷⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 422.

failed Christ figure who cannot succeed in saving anyone.²⁷⁹ But Myshkin's imitation of Christ through loving others despite how they lacked belief in him, which ended in his own self-sacrifice (by relapsing into idiocy) for the sake of others, mimicked Christ's own mockery from others and self-sacrifice. He takes Rogozhin's cross as his own burden as a demand of higher love.²⁸⁰ Vaškovic states religious feeling was expressed through Myshkin as an act of love towards another.²⁸¹ At the end of the novel, Faith (Vera), the only woman Myshkin kissed (on the forehead) marries Reason (Radomskii). Throughout the story, she had nursed her baby sister in love through being Faith. The reader must choose how they view this novel's ending. Dostoevsky is not shy in making belief a hard choice to make.²⁸² While he wrote his niece his aim in this novel was to portray a perfect man, he also admitted Christ is the only figure in the world of absolute beauty.²⁸³ Dostoevsky asked the question, "Did we remain faithful?"²⁸⁴

FINDINGS

St. Teresa, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky were all concerned with existence, especially as individuals before God. Each of them struggled with health issues, yet remained faithful believers who found purpose in writing. Teresa and Soren compared their spiritual journeys to stages or dwellings. Both recognized one had to become aware to make progress. Teresa made it clear souls in the first rooms are still living for their own pleasures and ambitions, just as Kierkegaard depicted his

²⁷⁹ John Givens, "A Narrow Escape into Faith? Dostoevsky's 'Idiot' and the Christology of Comedy," *Russian Review* 70, no. 1 (2011), 97.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁸¹ P. Vaškovic, "A path to authenticity: Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky on existential transformation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 87, no.1 (2020), 102.

²⁸² Givens, "A Narrow Escape into Faith?," 117.

²⁸³ Internet Archive, "Letter to his niece Sonetchka," (accessed August 30, 2022).

²⁸⁴ Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, 588.

aesthetic stage. To Teresa, pleasures brought trials and discontent. Just as Vaškovic interpreted Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky's works as leading someone from an internally fragmented self into an authentically Christian self.²⁸⁵ Teresa also asked the Lord not to let her soul be dispersed in fragments.²⁸⁶

They all saw the evil man was capable of and focused on the individual's need to come before God. Kierkegaard thought one must come out of the crowd and stand before Jesus away from distractions of the world.²⁸⁷ St. Teresa believed manifest perils arose when following the crowd, therefore, one's eyes should remain fixed on God.²⁸⁸ Their focus continually shifted towards humility and love as the authentic Christianity each of them sought. Their interior lives, recollection, and inward reflection led them to surrender their wills to Him.

Fyodor found this through annihilation of the self²⁸⁹ while Soren and Teresa found this in encounters with the Divine in forms of self-denial, self-detachment, and nothingness, required for neighbor-love.²⁹⁰ Kierkegaard explained the subjective focuses on how while the objective focuses on what.²⁹¹ Both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky utilized irony and humor to communicate truth when conversing with the public to present who an ideal Christian was. All focused on their journey as individuals subjectively and how important it was to encounter the Divine so their lives could model Christ's through love for others. Kierkegaard explained loving one's neighbor is "to will to exist

²⁸⁵ Vaškovic, "Path," 81.

²⁸⁶ Teresa, *Autobiography*, 201.

²⁸⁷ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 163.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁸⁹ Vaškovic, "Path," 96.

²⁹⁰ J.A. Simmons, "Kierkegaard at the Intersections" *The Single Individual and Identity Politics*, *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021), 9.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

equally for every human being.”²⁹² The neighbor is the first one met when one goes out.²⁹³ For the theologian, philosopher, and novelist, these writers determined truth and identity was found through Jesus. Seeking God first, individual responsibility, humility, faith, and love led to their meaningful and purposeful lives.

CONCLUSION

To find purpose and meaning in life as a believer, one should first surrender their will to the Lord. St. Teresa acknowledged her will was not completely free from self-interest, but knew it was best to leave it in His hands.²⁹⁴ Kierkegaard tells us people are not passive products of their experiences, but an authentic individual's choices, commitments, and integrity are essential to his personhood.²⁹⁵ If a human wants to find an authentic existence, they must relate rightly to God.²⁹⁶ The joy of existence is the joy of being oneself, to be with and in God.²⁹⁷ Dostoevsky told a friend he felt all evil was based in disbelief,²⁹⁸ and he told another one would never find anything better than the Saviour anywhere.²⁹⁹ The Bible tells people to make it their ambition to lead a quiet life, mind their own business, work with their hands, and not be dependent on anyone (1 Thess. 4:11-12). An individual should seek God humbly and faithfully and serve through love. “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:12-13).

²⁹² Soren Kierkegaard, *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 47.

²⁹³ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 244.

²⁹⁴ Teresa, *Autobiography*, xxi.

²⁹⁵ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard*, 215.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁹⁸ Internet Archive, “To Doctor A- F. Blagonravov,” (accessed August 30, 2022).

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, “To a Mother, March 27, 1878.”

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