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Thesis Statement

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. -I Peter 4:10 NIV

Introduction and Overview

As an artist I am very interested in life and finding my purpose here on earth. I believe in "life after death" and that if I am obedient to the word of God I shall have "everlasting life." *Spirituality* is a path that enables a person to discover the essence of his/her being; or the "deepest values and meanings by which people live." Through *spirituality* one has the freedom to choose their own path towards enlightenment and ultimately, recognition of our Divine selves.

Since 2011, I have been creating a body of work that describes my journey to be closer to God. I have used motifs that thematically represent eternal life, including the butterfly, peacock, and jellyfish. The American Indians consider the butterfly a symbol of eternal life. In Christianity, the peacock is a symbol for eternal life. Biologists have found that the *Turritopsis dohrnii* (immortal jellyfish), is a particular jellyfish that once they have reproduced, "don't die but transform themselves back into their juvenile polyp state."¹

Within my paintings I have developed different ways to form the figure of a labyrinth. Christianity adopted the labyrinth to signify a complex and long path to reach God. Its winding form represents the spiritual journey of life.

In medieval Europe the labyrinth was used as a symbol of Christian faith, the true path to eternal salvation... The labyrinth design clearly symbolised the tortuous path that the good Christian followed towards redemption at the end of the road, and also the pattern of Christ's own preordained life and inevitable fate, and in this role they would have served a contemplative purpose, an allegory of medieval Christian life (Seward).²

During my undergraduate Thesis, I created a series of labyrinths that I titled, *Spiritual Journey*. The series includes twelve different labyrinth designs, each having their own titles and their own shapes to represent the diverse paths of life. The spiral is an ancient symbol that has been used to describe “the journey of life,” thus it is a common shape for labyrinth designs. In this series there is a group of double labyrinths, triple labyrinths, and quadruple labyrinths. I used the double labyrinths to represent the butterfly, the triple labyrinths to represent the peacock, and the quadruple labyrinths to represent the jellyfish.

Also included in this series are biblical scriptures. Biblical scriptures are the basis for my conceptual framework, so in juxtaposition to each labyrinth design there are sets of scriptures that are embossed in braille. This is my way of incorporating language and text as a semiotic device while creating interactive pieces of art that can involve all people, including those who are blind or visually impaired. My *Spiritual Journey* series led me to my research about spiritual symbology, which eventually led me to my own personal work.

Most art institutions discourage the touching of art. Signs stating; “Please Do Not Touch the Artwork” are common within museums. Although this is mainly to preserve and protect the art, there are specific artworks that naturally compel us to touch them, such as sculptures or other tactile-oriented surfaces. Eventually, I wanted to take my labyrinth designs from the wall to the floor. Using five canvas rolls, each 6ft x 18ft, I produced *Resurrection: A Spiritual Journey* so that people were able to literally walk the labyrinth’s path.

I find the tactile quality of braille dots very interesting. I desired to continue the use of braille in my artwork. I also wanted to raise the walls of the labyrinth design so that the visually impaired could easily navigate via touch through the path. Without everyday access to an embosser or Braille writer, I needed a way to create Braille on my own. Using modeling paste,

Crayola modeling clay, and matte medium, I produced large Braille dots called “Jumbo dot Braille.” I formed raised walls of the labyrinth with clay coils.

In order to give the blind and visually impaired a sense of the content and message of each painting, I created a poem to correspond with them. Once the poem is typed up in a word document, I use “Braille Translator” found online to transcribe the poem into Braille. I then trace each Braille dot onto paper and transfer the dots onto my canvas. In order to have the textural element of Braille in my paintings I make small clay dots and attach them to my canvas with matte medium. Hand sculpting each clay dot is a long process, but once done it is very aesthetically pleasing to the viewer.

Not wanting to fully rely on Braille as a textural element, I have been exploring different ways to make relief forms. Besides using clay coils for my labyrinth designs, as I mentioned earlier, I have produced a few paintings where the imagery is transparent and, depending on the lighting, can only be viewed by touch with the use of Plexiglas and an acrylic paint by Deco Art called “Texture Glass.” I have also been experimenting with woodcuts and other wood carving techniques, making a tactile representation of my current paintings. All of these techniques create a sense of independence for those viewers who are blind or visually impaired because those individuals are able to experience, participate, and engage with the art on their own and without the aid of someone else.

Roy Nachum is an artist who has influenced my work. Through his work he “explores the boundaries between visual and non-visual perception.”³ Nachum often paints figures whose vision is obscured. His work is meant to be inclusive, as he often utilizes the participation of people who are blind. He incorporates poems or messages in Braille to “evoke sensations in the blind ‘viewer’ or participant akin to those felt experiencing a painting through sight.”⁴ He

encourages touch and interaction through his work “believing that human interaction keeps the work alive and breaks barriers between the viewer and the ‘sacred object’.”⁵

Color Choice

My recent thesis body of work is executed primarily in shades of grey. This is a French technique known as *grisaille* and mainly used to mimic sculpture as it gives a three-dimensional effect. The achromatic color scheme throughout each painting is utilized to emphasize a dreamlike state. White symbolizes purity and innocence. It is also a symbol of “faith and peace and represents cleanliness, reverence, and humility.”⁶ Presley Love, writer of an article “Color Meaning & Symbolism: Spiritual Color Meaning” suggests “for cleansing of mind-body-spirit—meditate on White Light.”⁷ Hints of chroma are introduced in the motifs to accent the theme of eternal life.

Number Symbolology

Throughout the creation of my thesis body of work I have discovered that the meaning of Biblical numbers is imperative in understanding the design of God’s Word. Much like God utilized mathematical laws and numbers to design and create the universe, I have been applying the significance of numbers to design and create my paintings. My main focus has been on the numbers two, three, four, seven, and eight. Each number has its own spiritual meaning.

In his book *Symbols in Arts, Religion, and Culture: The Soul of Nature*, Farrin Chwalkowski states, “Number two means kindness, balance, tact, equalization, and duality. This number reflects a quiet power of judgment, and the need for planning.”⁸ Tenzin Gyurme, author of *The Sacred Numerology of Thoth*, reports the number two as representing “duality, diversity, conflict, dependence, balance (two sides), stability, and reflection.”⁹ According to Tony Warren, the number two is also “the numerical symbolism of a faithful (truthful) witness or testimony.”¹⁰

The number three is described by Pastor Stephen Kyeyune as representing “that which is solid, real, substantial, and something in its completeness.”¹¹ In his book *Shaping The Society Christianity And Culture: Special Reference to the African Culture of Baganda, Volume 2,*” Pastor Stephen declares “In the Old Testament: It is the first of the ‘4’ perfect numbers which are 3 (divine perfection); 7 (spiritual perfection); 10 (ordinal perfection); 12 (governmental).”¹² Three is the triad as it not only “contains the beginning, middle, and end; but it is birth, life, death as well as past, present, and future.”¹³

The number three also represents the soul. As stated by Gyurme “three is the heavenly number, representing soul.”¹⁴ Gyurme also proclaims “the power of three is the triangle.”¹⁵ This statement led me to the article “Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Significance” written by E.W. Bullinger that reads “three signifies Divine perfection, with reference to the Trinity: Father (one of sovereignty), the Son, 2nd person, in incarnation and salvation, delivering from every enemy, the Holy Spirit, 3rd person, realizing in us and to us divine things.”¹⁶ The triangle is one of the first symbols used for the Trinity.

Much like the number two, the number four reflects stability. In his article “Number 4 Numerology: The Salt of the earth,” Master Neurologist Hans Decoz makes mention of the number four “reflecting strength and stability.”¹⁷ He also lists four of its main characteristics: “dependability, productivity, punctuality and obedience.”¹⁸ Gyurme refers to the number four as “the heavenly number, representing body”¹⁹ while Georgy notes it as being “the creation number.”²⁰ Georgy is the writer of “Biblical Numbers: 1-10,” an article giving in depth biblical descriptions of the numbers 1-10. In the text he makes a claim that four “has special significance to the earth and that it is symbolic of earthly completeness.”²¹ He follows this claim with the statement “On the fourth day, all materials for the earth were created.”²²

I was most intrigued by Georgy’s details of number four in this passage:

The number four indicates universality. This means that from one point to the next point, everything is included such as in the scripture above. It is universal participation. All people will come from all four corners of the earth to enjoy the kingdom of God as is illustrated in the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.²³

The scripture he is referencing is Luke 13:29: “Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” This scripture and passage are important to me because they each promote unity and all-inclusive participation. Lastly, “The number four is the value of the Hebrew letter *dalet*:ד, meaning *door*; the door through which the humble enter into the realization of God’s dwelling place below,”²⁴ Greg Killian writes in his essay “The Significance of the Number Four.” Near the middle of his essay Killian points out that four “is also the final stage of development: sanctification, deliverance, redemption, completion.”²⁵

The number seven symbolizes spiritual perfection. As reported by Georgy, seven means “divine fullness, completeness and totality. It constitutes a complete cycle.”²⁶ Georgy also informs his readers that number seven “comes from a Hebrew word meaning ‘to be full,’ ‘to be satisfied,’ and ‘to have enough.’”²⁷ In his opinion “Our desire should be that the Holy Spirit will rest within us in the same seven ways referenced in Isaiah 11:2, “the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus in seven distinct ways: Spirit of God, wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge, and fear of God.”²⁸

Last but not least is the number eight. According to the Bible Study Site, “The number 8 in the Bible represents a new beginning, meaning a new order or creation, and man’s true ‘born again’ event when he is resurrected from the dead into eternal life.”²⁹ The number eight is a symbol of regeneration and the number of salvation. Theopedia, an encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity defines *regeneration* as a “spiritual transformation in a person, brought about by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is another way of speaking about the *new birth* or the *second birth* or

being *born again*.”³⁰ In other words the number eight symbolizes the ‘spiritual rebirth’ of a person’s soul or spirit.

Analysis of Motifs within My Paintings

My painting *Contemplation with Expectations* (fig. 1) is a narrative approach to the concept of a spiritual journey. In this painting I reference again, labyrinths, peacocks, and mosaic floor design. I also make reference to the *Ouroboros*, which is an ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon eating its own tail. It represents self reflexivity or cyclicity, in which the *circle* represents perfection or life everlasting.

The figure in *Contemplation with Expectations* (a triptych) is in a state of contemplation, seeking information from God. She is surrounded by seven peacocks. My concept behind this piece is that God has given the figure depicted within the piece a message and it is now her duty to relay the message to the world. Around the figure is a purse in the form of a “messenger bag.” The messenger bag represents the Breastplate of Judgment. The Breastplate of Judgment is “a breast piece for making decisions—Exodus 28:15.” According to the book of Exodus, the Breastplate of Judgment is the breastplate of the High Priest, Aaron, who wore it when in the presence of God. The jumbo Braille dots, incorporated in this painting, are a poem that I wrote and transcribed into Braille with clay dots.

In my diptych *Regeneration* (fig. 2), the figure is submerged in water and surrounded by eight jellyfish. As previously stated, the number eight is a symbol of regeneration. According to a German marine biology student, Christian Sommer, jellyfish (‘*Turritopsis*’) are able to regenerate.³¹ The word *water* is referenced in the Bible in a variety of symbolic ways. As mentioned on the Bible Study Tools website:

water is used to symbolize the troublesome times in life that can and do come to human beings, especially God’s children. In some contexts water

stands for enemies who can attack and need to be overcome. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word “water” is used for salvation and eternal life, which God offers humankind through faith in his Son... Following along this same theme, water sometimes symbolizes the spiritual cleansing that comes with the acceptance of God's offer of salvation.³²

The term *water* is also used as a metaphor for the word of God. In his article “What Does Water Represent In The Bible? A Christian Study,” Jack Wellman states “The word of God is often referred to as water in the Bible because the Word acts as a cleansing agent which explains what Paul meant when he wrote concerning Jesus’ cleansing the church ‘that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish’ (Eph 5:26-27).”³³ In his conclusion Wellman adds “so water in the Bible represents the cleansing of the sinner by the washing of the water of the Word of God.”³⁴

In my piece *Visitation* (fig. 3), another diptych, there are butterflies present. To Christians, butterflies are a symbol of eternal life and Resurrection because of their metamorphosis or transformation from caterpillar to cocoon to butterfly. Along with the Ancient Greeks, Christianity considers the butterfly as a “symbol of the soul.” In Japanese culture, butterflies are viewed as “souls of the living and the dead.”³⁵ Sharon Peregrine Johnson compiled a list of other cultures that also associate the butterfly with the soul:

- Greek and Minoan
 - Aristotle gave the butterfly the name *psyche*, the Greek word for soul.
 - Many cultures relate butterflies to human soul. In ancient Greek the word for butterfly is “psyche” which means “soul,” and was also the name of Eros’ human lover.
- Roman Culture
 - Coins—butterfly as the symbol of the soul.
- Native Americans in Mexico
 - Aztec – “associate the morning star with the butterfly, which represents the soul of the dead” [Manos-Jones].
- Mexico – A small town in Mexico also sees butterflies as souls, and it is to that town that the monarch butterflies migrate every year on and around the holiday

known as the Day of the Dead. They are seen as the returned souls of the deceased. [Coconut Creek].

- Russia – A form of the Russian language refers to butterflies as “dushichka” which is derived from “dusha”, which means “soul”.
- Germany – Butterflies are thought to be souls of children [Manos-Jones].³⁶

Butterflies are also symbolic after death communications—“signs that affirm a deceased family member or friend survived physical death and continues to live in another dimension of existence.”³⁷ In these paintings, I reference the Bible for the meaning of the numbers 2, 3, and 8 and I utilize their significance.

Visitation is a depiction of a day that my children and I visited my grandmother and my brother’s grave. They each passed away in the year 2000, two months to the date of their birthdays. My youngest daughter, who was about two-years-old at the time, just laid down in the grass, began to look up at the sky and smiled. To me she looked so calm and peaceful and she seemed to be in a state of contemplation. As a mother, I wanted to capture that moment, so I took two photos of her. I had not planned to create a painting from them.

I kept referring back to those photos I had taken of my daughter some two years ago and began to see that something powerful was there. The look in her eyes was so captivating. Was she communicating with our loved ones? Were they communicating with her? The research that I had been doing on butterflies, a two-winged creature, came to mind. As previously stated, butterflies symbolize after death communications. They also stand for new life, new birth, and new beginnings.

I was only going to create an image from one of the photos of my daughter but I realized I needed to continue the theme of the number two, so I decided to create two paintings. I did not want the images to be displayed the same way, so I decided to flip one of the images, creating a mirrored affect. Once I did that, I took a step back and noticed the way the figure’s body and dress was displayed in each painting mimicked the shape of the butterfly. The two gravestones

that appear in the center of the two paintings then began to represent the body of the butterfly, which tied the entire piece together.

In addition to my painting *Visitation* are two headstone pieces that will be presented on the floor and are, again, my way of creating art that is accessible to those who are blind and visually impaired. The Braille work that appears near the top of each headstone represents the names of my grandmother and my brother, Rosetta Lee Lee and Richard Roy Sheridan Lee. The Roman numerals symbolize their dates of birth and dates of departure. My grandmother was born April 6, 1947 and passed away June 6, 2000. My brother was born August 15, 1995 and passed away October 15, 2000. The headstones were created from MDF board and wood panel and painted in acrylic.

The Theme of Confrontation, Transformation (Metamorphosis), and Conversion

The actions of confronting and being confronted are very important factors throughout my work. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary “confrontation is the act of confronting: the state of being confronted: a face-to-face meeting.”³⁸ In her article “When God Confronts Your Heart with Holy Ghost Conviction” Senior Pastor Reina Olmeda states, “Confrontation makes us uneasy. It stirs and brings to surface the areas of our lives we would rather ignore—areas that, if we had our way we would live just fine without ever having to deal with face-to-face.”³⁹

My painting *Confrontation* (fig. 4) showcases the uncomfortable feeling of being confronted by the Holy Spirit. The figure in the painting stands while facing a white peacock perched on a banister. There is another peacock walking towards the figure in a kneeling position, as if it is bowing. Much like in *Contemplation with Expectations*, the scale of the peacocks in comparison to the figure has been altered. The peacocks are much larger than life-

size to emphasize their symbolic hierarchy as God-like figures. In total, there are four peacocks present. There are also four doors.

Transformation (Metamorphosis) (fig. 5) is reminiscent of *classical art*, an art of ancient Greek and Rome and is influenced by Loie Fuller, an American dancer who was a pioneer of modern dance and theatrical lighting techniques. This painting is a study of a girl who has been in her cocoon allowing God to shape and mold her mind, body, and soul. The figure is bursting out of her shell (cocoon), shedding her old ways and letting her inward spiritual transformation manifest itself on her outward appearance. The figure is mirrored to reflect this change. In the first image the figure is looking down, which can be a sign of fear, doubt, or uncertainty. In the second image she is awakened, looking out at the viewer. She now possesses the confidence to embrace her change, for she has been made anew and can now effectively serve her divine will in the world. I created two laser cut images (fig. 6) of these paintings so that the blind and visually impaired are given the opportunity to “see” what we see.

The final piece of my thesis is *Conversion* (fig. 7). Conversion is a spiritual process of transformation that begins with repentance. To repent is to turn away from sin and turn to God for forgiveness. In their essay “What is Conversion?” Florante Siopan and John Foster write, “God requires that we leave our former ways and change direction by turning to God. We must turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. As Peter said in Acts 3:19, ‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.’”⁴⁰

Conversion is a depiction of a girl undergoing a spiritual transformation. The girl appears twice in the painting to showcase this depiction. In one image she is not only covering her face but it is turned away from the viewer. She is ashamed of her sins and does not want them to be revealed. This also indicates that she has turned away from God. Realizing that she is weak she

begins to speak to God and repent, asking him for forgiveness. In the other image, much like *Transformation (Metamorphosis)*, the figure is looking directly at the viewer. Her faith has made her stronger; strong enough to turn away from the many temptations of the world and turn to God. She is freed from sin and born again. She is victorious.

In Conclusion

Through my journey I have learned that the Lord has given us gifts, and He not only expects but requires us to develop those gifts. According to Pope John Paul II, “Artistic talent is a gift from God and whoever discovers it in himself has a certain obligation: to know that he cannot waste this talent, but must develop it.”⁴¹ Therefore, it is my obligation as an artist to improve my God given gifts one artwork at a time. I also realize that “I am a manager of the gifts He has given me”⁴² so it is my duty to give back to God and to share my talents with the world. I intend to continue uniting visual and tactile art as well as the sighted and unsighted into a spiritual path that can be experienced as one. I believe that art should be obtainable and enjoyed by everyone.

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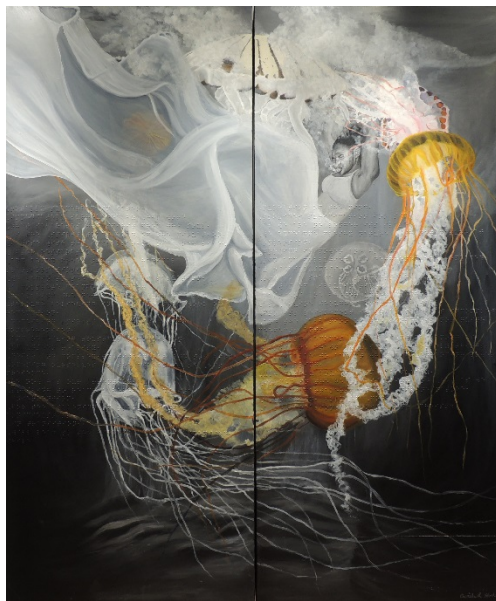
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Referenced Images



Contemplation with Expectations, Oil over acrylic on panel. 80" x 120", 2013. (fig. 1)



Regeneration, Oil over acrylic on panel. 72" x 60", 2014. (fig. 2)



Visitation, Oil on canvas. 36" x 96", 2015. (fig. 3)



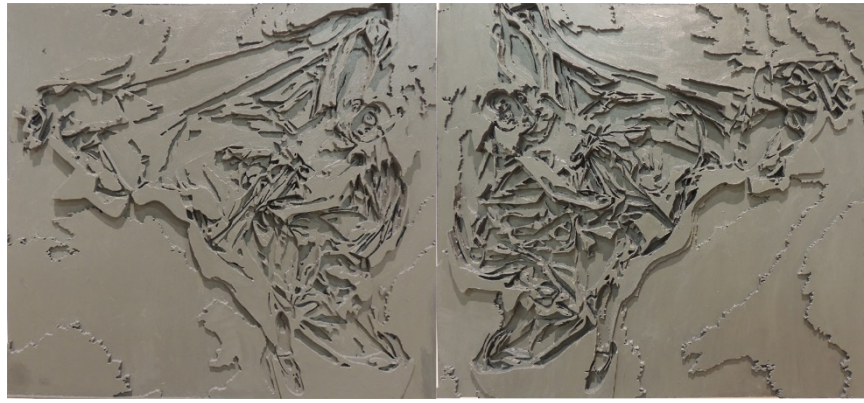
(fig. 3)



Confrontation, Oil over acrylic on panel. 80" x 120", 2017. (fig. 4)



Transformation (Metamorphosis), Oil on canvas. 36" x 96", 2016. (fig. 5)



Transformation (Metamorphosis), Laser Cut Images 7 layers of Masonite. 22" x 24" each, 2016. (fig. 6)



Conversion, Oil on panel. 72" x 60", 2017. (fig. 7)

Poems included in braille

Contemplation with Expectations

By Chakila L. Hoskins

Through contemplation,
We seek further information,
Which requires total concentration,
And thoughtful observation.
The meditation on spiritual matters,
Notably, as a form of devotion,
With the notion,
That meditation, serves as a foundation,
On which the contemplative life stands.
Sitting patiently waiting,
Anticipating to hear His word,
For His word is profound,
As He surrounds me with a vision of eternal life,
I am enlightened,
My interest is heightened,
Examining within,
So my faith is proven, while
Cultivating a clear mind
By letting go of thoughts
So logical thinking is transcended,
Sound is ended, and deep insight follows,
Although my mind is not hollow, it is empty
Free of negativity
For it is in your mind that Jesus speaks to you
And you, begin to
Reveal the secrets of the heart,
Focusing and offering
Self to be purified and transformed,
Not the norm, but a new form
Uniting with Jesus Christ,
Whom my soul loves.

Regeneration
By Chakila L. Hoskins

Totally submerged in water,
Immediately surrounded by His word
That separates the spirit from the soul,
As the Spirit takes hold of the situation,
I rise with the implantation of a new life.
After restoration,
And being freed through a radical transformation,
We begin to see the light of salvation,
A complete change has come.
Preparing the new heart to turn to God,
Through believing in His finished work of redemption,
Deceiving spirits are rejected with comprehension,
And receiving trustful recognition,
Of unseen reality,
Depth and complexity within our own totality,
Opening ourselves to the awareness of His presence
He now has our attention,
Striving to reach a level of Divine Intervention,
For the awakening of transcendental consciousness,
In transitions,
Will lead to the highest level of ascension, while
Purgation of the mind,
Provides purification for sin,
As we are no longer its slave.
We exchange fleshy nature with new nature at conversion,
Growing in power and grace
Sin and pollution are dethroned and replaced by righteousness.
Now in a state of progression
By way of Illumination,
Passions are better under control,
As Divine thoughts occupy the soul,
For its refinement is still somewhat incomplete,
And the salvation of the senses is not quite perfect, until
The word becomes flesh and dwells among us,
Minds are drawn away from all worldly things,
Thus, able to accept what life-enhancing power has to bring,
Ultimately loving Him habitually,
Formed in the hearts is faith and He, as we
Are new partakers, of the Divine nature,
Born again, born of God,
A new creation beginning with Christ.

Confrontation
By Chakila L. Hoskins

Transitioning from the darkness
Into the light,
The self-conscious emotions of shame and pride
Are now in sight,
No longer able to run and hide
But face our transgressions,
Escaping evil desires
And chase godly affections,
Permitting time for the Holy Spirit
To convict and convince,
While drawing us closer to God
Who is our help and our strength.
Although prayer and counsel
Are continual necessities,
Being quiet, righteous, and teachable
Showcase maturities
Of a meek and humble soul,
Ready to seek instructive correction
Through self-examination, by
Submitting to God's conviction through confrontation,
Allowing His word to stimulate a revelation,
That leads to a transformation
Of the heart
And is the start of the awakening that takes place.
Now face-to-face with truths we would rather ignore,
We acknowledge and repent so that He can restore
Our soul,
That has now been purified
By obeying the truth,
Sin can no longer take root,
For our heart is now cleansed
And filled with the Holy Spirit,
Who provides the guide to fulfill
Our God-given assignment.

Conversion
By Chakila L. Hoskins

Hiding behind a shield,
Ashamed and afraid to reveal,
The countless layers of sin,
Firmly and deeply embedded within
The soil of the soul,
That is subdued and controlled,
By flesh and its selfish desires against the Spirit.
Now defiled and corrupt,
The body is no longer pure but made weak,
However as we begin to seek his face,
Our real growth in faith becomes stronger,
For we no longer,
Have the impulse or the hunger
To chase after worldly things,
But after Christ,
He who sacrificed His life,
For us to be freed from sin,
And born again to a righteous way of living,
As He is a trusting and forgiving God.
Opening our hearts and minds
To receive His word,
Which was hard to perceive,
Because our vision was blurred,
But since we have placed ourselves in position
We are now ready to begin the spiritual transition, by
Becoming exposed and vulnerable
To the light and the truth,
The key ingredients needed
To repent and rebuke,
The transgressions
That must be erased and replaced,
With marks of new birth
That will illuminate and trace,
Our spiritual growth and change.
Cleansed from the inside out,
We without a doubt have been transformed,
And informed to receive the Holy Spirit,
Separated from Him no more,
For we dwell in His presence instead,
Dead unto sin,
Alive onto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.