

**Dialogue between Jim Marion and Philip St. Romain  
- March 18 - April 1, 2006  
shalomplace.com discussion forum**

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**Overview**

Greetings to all who read these exchanges! I'm sorry we do not allow replies and interaction with you on this forum. The primary reason is time constraints (not enough time to read and respond to too many topics), and a need to focus the dialogue in several specific areas instead of the many that ensue with numerous participants.

Jim Marion and I have both written books to try to appeal to Christians who no longer feel nourished by the kinds of traditional approaches that predominated in Christendom until the middle of the 20th C. (and still do, in many places). His two books are entitled *Putting on the Mind of Christ*, and *The Death of the Mythic God*. You can find them both on Amazon.com and other book-sellers. My own publications can be found on this site (also Liguori Publ., Ave Maria Press, Crossroads Publ.)

I became aware of Jim's second book recently through the recommendation of a colleague, who asked me about some parts of it that seemed confusing to her. Consequently, I purchased *The Death of the Mythic God* and read it, finding myself in agreement with much of what Jim wrote about the inadequacy of traditional formulations of the Gospel for today's Modern and post-Modern culture. I disagreed with parts, but, on the whole, do agree that it's important for the Christian Church to connect better with the Modern/Rational and Post-modern/Pluralistic world of the West (not to mention the Post/post-modern Integral level emerging). Where we disagree significantly, however, is with regard to several key issues pertaining to how we understand the nature of Jesus Christ, and how we humans come to union with God. This will be the primary focus of our dialogue, although it is sure to spin off in other directions as well.

What follows is a key quote from *The Death of the Mythic God* that can serve as an example of the kind of issue we will be focusing on:

quote:

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What is true of a person with Christ Consciousness is also true of everybody else--except that everybody else doesn't realize who they are. We think we need to be saved. We don't. We are *already* sons and daughters of God in exactly the same sense that Jesus was--except that he knew who he was and we don't know who we are. When one realizes the Christ consciousness and "sees" one's union with God, then one sees this truth as clearly as one hears a ringing bell. It becomes obvious. One sees that one is freed from sin or "saved" (and has always been so). One sees one was never under sin's dominion in the first place. May we all come to that wondrous realization, for that is the truth about which the scripture is speaking in saying that the truth will forever set us free. (p. 148)

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In a number of email exchanges, I have taken issue with the idea that we possess divinity innately in the same manner that Jesus did. The exchanges have also led to examining the meaning of what it means to be a child of God.

Stay tuned!

Phil St. Romain

[ March 18, 2006, 10:16 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Deification

Some of the great mystical Fathers of the Eastern Church wrote that, at the apex of the Christian mystical path, the Christian experiences deification in Christ, i.e., that they are "made divine" in Christ. The great Western mystical Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, wrote that, at the apex of the Christian mystical path, the Christian becomes divine by participation with and in Christ in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Both formulations have been allowed by the official Church. However, both could be read to imply that the very being of the Christian is magically or supernaturally changed in that, whereas before the Christian was a human being, now the Christian becomes a divine being. And, of course, "divine by participation with and in Christ in the mystery of the Holy Trinity" is a very typical mythic formulation, one that, while it may be true, has no clear meaning to millions of contemporary Christians.

I have proposed a formulation which is slightly different, one more in keeping with what we today know about the inner evolutionary development of human consciousness, and one that tracks more closely the actual Scriptural language of St. Paul. I emphasize a change in consciousness, not ontology (being). I have written that, at the apex of the Christian mystical path, the Christian, renewed by a transformation of mind (Rom. 12:2), puts on the mind (consciousness) of Christ (Philip. 2: 5) and now, in Christ, i.e. with Christ Consciousness, sees the world the way Jesus did. The Christian consciously realizes his or her divinity. The Christian now sees that the Kingdom of Heaven lies all about us (Matt. 4:17), the world being shot through with divinity. The Christian also sees,

as John of the Cross and the Eastern Fathers said, that there is no separation between self and Christ. There is also no separation between self and God (John 10:30), or between self and others (Luke 6:31). All of creation is an expression of the divine.

Philip believes that my formulation implies that we have always been divine beings, that we just didn't realize it prior to entering into Christ Consciousness. I agree. It does imply that. Philip then expresses concerns that my formulation may have implications for other long-standing officially approved theological formulations. I expect that too is true. One of the purposes of this dialogue is to explore such implications.

[ March 18, 2006, 09:50 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

It's good to see that you laid out the implications so clearly in your closing paragraph, Jim. But I don't have a problem with the idea of creation as an expression of the divine, nor of their being no separation between Christ and self. Just so long as one is holding to ontological distinctions between these, I see no problem.

I don't think you'll succeed too well using St. Paul as your biblical resource re. inner divinity, however. He does speak of "putting on the mind of Christ," but also a great deal about the risen Christ as the metaphysical foundation for our rebirth in the Spirit and adoption into the family of the Trinity. For Paul, the "upgrading" of human consciousness happens in and through Christ, whom he regarded to be the Word incarnate (Col. 1) and first-born of the new creation.

Seems like we're off and running. 

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, your response shows the great difficulty all of us have in transcending (moving beyond while including) the language of the mythic stage of human consciousness in which the Scriptures and the Christian Creed are written. You write, "[Paul also speaks] a great deal about the risen Christ as the metaphysical foundation for our rebirth in the Spirit and adoption into the family of the Trinity." Although you cite no exact Scriptural language for that statement, I accept it as an accurate expression of truth, but one expressed in traditional mythological language/jargon. The question is: what does it mean to the rational contemporary Christian to say that "Christ is the metaphysical foundation for our rebirth in the Spirit and adoption into the family of the Trinity?" Sounds nice. But has no clear meaning. Prior to that you wrote that you had no problem with "no separation" between Christ and the self as long as one preserved an ontological distinction (i.e., separation). Rather confusing. No separation as long as there is a separation? Doesn't seem to compute.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, it almost seems that you're asking me to explain the traditional Christian doctrines of creation, Incarnation, and mystical body. That's a lot work, and when all is said and

done, I'm wondering if you would consider it to be just so much "traditional mythological language/jargon." One could just as easily say that the language of innate divinity is "New Age, Eastern jargon," which wouldn't be helpful, either.

Because how we understand God and creation is such a core issue in theology and spirituality, I have featured a thread on the theology forum:

- [http://shalomplace.com/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get\\_topic;f=2;t=000240](http://shalomplace.com/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=2;t=000240)

The key concept is of creation as "made, not begotten." So we end up affirming God and creatures as ontologically distinct (each possessing their own level/manner of being) while also being vitally and intimately united through God's ongoing act of creation. You interpret this as "separation," and "no separation as long as there is a separation," but that's a mis-characterization of the teaching.

We are separate from God in that we do possess a human nature that is not God; simultaneously, we are connected to God in that we receive our being from God in each moment. Furthermore, we are also able to be connected with God through a relationship of love, analagous to the manner in which two humans are connected in love. My wife and I are connected in this manner, for example, and although we are two distinct beings, I would not characterize our situation as "separation."

The Christian doctrine of creation outlined so briefly above is not merely a "mythical construct," but a deep metaphysical intuition into the nature of reality. It resonates with our experience in the full range of developmental levels -- Purple to Turquoise, or mythico-emotional to global, if you prefer. Whatever the struggles people have with mythical Christianity, I do not think they will be helped much by rejecting the teachings on creation. Better pedagogy is needed, of course, and I'm all for that.

Let's see if this explanation "computes." Without a grasp of the Christian understanding of God and creation, it will be impossible to develop the themes of Incarnation and so forth.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, although I respect your view (though I'm not entirely clear what it is), I am not aware of any article of the Creed that professes our belief in Creation as "made, not begotten." The Creed says that Christ is "begotten, not made" but of Creation the Creed simply says that God The Father is the Creator of all things visible and invisible, no mention of how such creation was effected.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, I share my understanding of the relationship between God and creation in some detail [on this page](#), which was excerpted from a series I presented online last fall on Christian mysticism.

I understand the credal language of "begotten, not made" to distinguish Christ's divine sonship from the manner in which other creatures are related to God. Artists "make"

creations; parents "beget" children. This is elaborated on in depth in doctrines about creation and the Incarnation.

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### **The Question of Innate Divinity**

Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

#### *Does the Idea of Innate Human Divinity Raise Pastoral and Ethical Issues?*

What do you suppose might happen if priests began to teach from the Sunday pulpits that we are, and have always been, divine beings? Might not people then imagine that, being divine, they are free from any ethical considerations and therefore free to break every moral law on the books? Yes, that is a possibility, a very unfortunate possibility, and one about which the Church has always been leery. Even most mystics, of all the traditions, have been careful to be silent on this issue for centuries. (The word "mystic" comes from the Greek *muo*, meaning "I am silent.") Our innate divinity has been one of the closely held secrets of all the esoteric mystical traditions.

The problem is this: The vast majority of Christians, 95 percent plus, have not yet grown enough spiritually to realize the Christ Consciousness, to be "in Christ." Though the divine Christ does live and operate within them, they still identify their "I," not with their divine Christ Self, but with their human personalities, their egos. They cannot say with St. Paul, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me" because their ego has not yet died, i.e., they still identify the ego as their true selves. This presents a huge pastoral and ethical dilemma.

Nor is the dilemma imaginary. Although the historical record is murky, it seems the followers of the Catholic mystic Michael Molinos may have felt themselves excused from ethical responsibility on account of this or similar teachings. The unfortunate Molinos, who by all accounts was a man of great personal holiness, died while imprisoned by the Inquisition. Nor has the problem been limited to Christianity. As the historian of religion, Karen Armstrong, demonstrates in her recent book, "The History of God," the followers of certain Jewish and Muslim mystics, told they were divine, also descended in conduct into ethical chaos.

The same problem also seems to have arisen in the earliest days of the Church – among St. Paul's converts in Corinth. Probably as a result of Paul's own teachings, the converts at Corinth went wild, coming drunk to Holy Communion, engaging in all sorts of sexual excesses, and otherwise demonstrating massive ethical irresponsibility. The result was St. Paul's famous tirade against all these excesses in his second letter to those Corinthians. Yes, the problem is very real.

Why then do I propose this formulation? I do so for three reasons: First, it is a formulation that makes sense to the modern and postmodern Christian and is entirely in keeping not only with the tradition but also with the great contemporary advancements in developmental psychology. The old formulations, while describing the same inner transformation of consciousness, are couched in mythic language that is unintelligible to people of today and/or appear to require a type of supernatural explanation that stretches credibility.

Second, the cat is out of the bag. The fact of our divinity is now openly preached in New Thought and New Age churches and circles throughout most of the Christian world --

North America, Europe, Latin America, Australia and elsewhere. Millions of Christians now follow or resonate with these teachings. Moreover, in the last 25 years, representatives of virtually all the esoteric mystical traditions, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Native American, etc. report being inwardly directed by the Holy Spirit to reveal to the general public what was heretofore kept secret. For two reasons: First, because the world is in such dire spiritual straights, and because the exoteric spiritual traditions, with their semi-rationalized mythic theologies, are floundering so badly in the face of the modern and postmodern onslaught. Both the world and the traditional religions need all the help they can get. Second, because there are now millions of Christians and educated believers of other faiths who are ready to embrace the truth of their divinity with responsibility and full awareness of the ethical dangers.

The third reason I put forward, in plain English, the notion of our innate divinity is very simple. I put it forward because, possible practical ethical problems notwithstanding, it is the truth.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

There are a lot of points to respond to, here -- some of which I agree with -- but let me begin with numbers two and three.

*The third reason I put forward, in plain English, the notion of our innate divinity is very simple. I put it forward because, possible practical ethical problems notwithstanding, it is the truth.*

Well, if you say so. ;-) But simply stating that something is the truth because it is the truth isn't very convincing. One could just as gratuitously reply that the idea of humans possessing inner divinity is false because it's false. That's not very convincing either.

Re. the second point, I agree that many people are in need of new ways of thinking about the Gospel beyond the traditional mythic formulations. I also agree that esoteric or contemplative traditions hold the key for many of these. Where I disagree, as you know, is that this contemplative formulation in Christianity should emphasize what you call "the truth of their divinity," at least in the way you put this. That's never been how the overwhelming majority of Catholic mystical writers understood their experiences.

I know that some might consider this a matter of splitting hairs, but there are huge implications for spiritual practice hinging on these issues. Am I trying to awaken to a divine nature I already possess innately, or am I trying to grow in participation with the divinity of Christ? Big difference!

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I'll follow up with reflections on the ethical issues you raise later today. Got to run.

[ March 19, 2006, 11:41 AM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Responding to the point about ethics and spirituality . . . I wholeheartedly agree that it's

disastrous to separate these. Every mystical tradition insists on ethical living, as this helps us to keep our lives in balance. It also helps to calm the emotions and still one's thinking, thus enabling access to the deeper levels of our being. Once one has begun to experience contemplative consciousness, there is a different sensitivity to ethical living that emerges, with the shift from behavior to identity: what re-intensifies lower egoic states, or helps one to grow in contemplative union? Generally, the answers to these questions seem to pretty much reinforce the traditional listings of sinful and helpful behaviors.

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Returning to your point #2:

quote:

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*Second, the cat is out of the bag. The fact of our divinity is now openly preached in New Thought and New Age churches and circles throughout most of the Christian world -- North America, Europe, Latin America, Australia and elsewhere. Millions of Christians now follow or resonate with these teachings. . . .*

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The "cat" has been out of the bag a long time -- as in the earliest days of Hinduism. But I'm sure that, as an attorney, you know that appealing to numbers does nothing to establish what you are calling a "fact." And, at any rate, I have my doubts about "millions of Christians" resonating with the idea that they're really divine beings.

Here are a few specific objections I have to this point:

1. It really is incompatible with biblical teaching and Christian doctrine, as you yourself acknowledged in the "overview" thread. So while you quote Paul on one point or another, you tend to do "proof-texting" when it comes to the issue of innate divinity, overlooking huge amounts of Pauline theology that speak of the more traditional understanding of human nature being reborn in Christ.
2. Where's the empirical evidence for it? If we really are divine beings, then why don't we see more people manifesting the divine attributes? Why don't we rise from the dead, as Jesus did, for example?
3. If we're innately divine, then why don't we know it? Why should we have deluded egos in the first place? Why should divinity be so confused about its own identity?
4. Where's the human, if we are innately divine in the core of our being? This would make the human something of an extension (not expression) of the divine into the realm of space and time, would it not? That would seem to be a monistic notion in that the human and divine substance would be one and the same.
5. I strongly suspect that what people are calling divine consciousness, here, is really the spiritual consciousness of the human soul. I know this Witness state very well, and do not find it to be other than the "I" who is also the subject of all other states of consciousness I've experienced. Lonergan and Helminiak have spoken of this as the "non-reflecting aspect of human consciousness," and that makes perfect sense to me.

So . . . back to you, now. Lest those who read this think I'm denying any kind of connection between the human and divine, I will share my understanding of this later.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, you have made so many points in your two postings that it is difficult to respond fully to them all. I will try to take them one at a time.

1. Jim: The third reason I put forward, in plain English, the notion of our innate divinity is very simple. I put it forward because, possible practical ethical problems notwithstanding, it is the truth.

Phil's response: Well, if you say so. But simply stating that something is the truth because it is the truth isn't very convincing. One could just as gratuitously reply that the idea of humans possessing inner divinity is false because it's false. That's not very convincing either.

Jim's response: I was simply stating the truth of our divinity as I see it. Keeping in mind St. Thomas Aquinas' assertion that "authority" is the least convincing form of proof, I am not surprised you are not convinced. In fact, the truth of our divinity is not something that can be proved or disproved using rational level logic, the "eye" of reason. It can only be seen with the "eye" of contemplation and, even then, only when one enters into Christ Consciousness (what I propose is the rational-level meaning of "in Christ"). So I invite anyone who wants to know whether we are mere human beings, or whether, as Jesus taught citing the inspired Psalm, "do ye not know that ye are gods?", to go deep within themselves into the Kingdom of God Within, to the place where the consciousness of Christ resides, and to find out the truth for themselves.

2. Phil: "Where I disagree, as you know, is that this contemplative formulation in Christianity should emphasize what you call "the truth of their divinity," at least in the way you put this. That's never been how the overwhelming majority of Catholic mystical writers understood their experiences."

3. Jim's response: I agree that most of the past Christian mystics did not set out the truth of human divinity in the stark terms that I have. Some came close, e.g. John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart, and even the "deification in Christ" language of the Greek Fathers, in my view, lends itself to the interpretation I propose. But, remember, they were trying to "unpack" or explain their mystical experience in a way that would communicate with the people of their times, virtually 100% of whom thought in mythological terms, not in the rational terms of today. Moreover, and this is a matter the philosopher Ken Wilber will discuss at length in his new book on "Integral Spirituality," many of the past mystics, as creatures of their times, may have evolved in consciousness into the highest spiritual "states", namely Christ Consciousness and Nondual Consciousness, while at the same time remaining at the mythological "stage" of consciousness development (as those stages have been elaborated in the last 60 years by modern developmental psychology). In either case, they would naturally have explained their inner experiences in mythological terms. I suggest, time will tell, that the Christian mystics of the future will express themselves more along the lines I am proposing.

3. Phil: "I know that some might consider this a matter of splitting hairs, but there are huge implications for spiritual practice hinging on these issues. Am I trying to awaken to a divine nature I already possess innately, or am I trying to grow in participation with the



divinity of Christ? Big difference!

Jim's response: On the contrary, while the distinction you make may seem important to the rational mind, I don't think it matters a whit re "spiritual practice." If we go deep enough within ourselves we will discover the truth no matter our pre-conceptions at the start. If the Kingdom is the pearl of great price buried ten feet in the earth, it matters not what conceptions of the Kingdom are possessed by the diggers. They will all find the pearl if they dig deep enough. Remember too, that most "spiritual practice" by definition (such things as fasting, meditation, chanting, dancing, manual labor, personal participation in powerful rituals, dreamwork, etc.) are specifically designed to bypass and eventually get beyond the conceptualizing mind. The conceptualizing mind, which knows how to do nothing except make distinctions, is THE single biggest obstacle to realizing higher levels of consciousness. Which is why all the traditions have developed "spiritual practices" to get around our beloved left brains.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I will try to tackle your second posting (anything but tote up what I owe Uncle Sam in my taxes, :-)

1. You write, "It (Jim's view) really is incompatible with biblical teaching and Christian doctrine." I did not realize that, Cardinal Ratzinger having been elected Pope, you were his replacement as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the authority and responsibility for summarily decreeing whose views are or are not "compatible with biblical teaching and Christian doctrine." What you mean, of course, is that my views are not compatible with your views of biblical teaching and Christian doctrine. But we already knew that. Your response, however, does raise important issues of biblical interpretation. Even the very early Fathers of the Church understood that the Scriptures could be understood on many different levels. St. Augustine, for example, distinguished between the "silver" of the more obvious meanings of Scripture and the "gold" revealed by contemplation. And, nowadays, as you know, developmental psychology has shown that human consciousness develops from one level of consciousness to another, and in a definite sequence. Persons at each level of consciousness see the world differently. It can even be said that they see a different world. They are also necessarily going to understand the same Scriptures in a different light. It is one of the classic hallmarks of what the Christian mystics have called the "illuminative way" (what nowadays is often called the subtle level of consciousness) that new meanings of Scripture are continually revealed and seen. St. Terese of Lisieux wrote that she was always finding new meanings in the Scriptures, many of which astounded her in their profundity. It is also one of the hallmarks of the lower levels of consciousness that people at those levels simply assume that they already know what the Scriptures mean. But veteran meditators sooner or later realize why the Church has always referred to the principal Christian truths as "mysteries." The more one probes them rationally the more elusive they become. In the end, as Teresa of Avila testified, only the eye of contemplation can see and understand them clearly (and then one has the new problem of how to explain what one sees to those who have eyes to see but cannot see).

2. Phil asks: "If we really are divine beings, then why don't we see more people manifesting the divine attributes? Why don't we rise from the dead, as Jesus did, for example?"

Jim's response: We see people manifesting every day all the attributes usually assigned to God, among them intelligence, goodness, beauty, faith, hope and, above all, love. Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. I am sure the Father can raise anyone he wants to raise but you'd have to ask Him for his reasons.

3. Phil asks: "If we're innately divine, then why don't we know it? Why should we have deluded egos in the first place? Why should divinity be so confused about its own identity?"

Jim's response: It would take a whole book to try to answer these questions. "Original sin" --however one wants to understand such nowadays, is certainly part of the answer. Moreover, all of the spiritual traditions talk about finding one's true or higher or Christ Self, the Self that is our essential core of identity rather than the human personality we imagine is our self. Humans are the beings in and by which the Universe becomes conscious of itself -- which is another way of saying that, in and by humans, God becomes conscious of Himself through us. We were created out of pure love so that we could share in the life of the Father. Gradually, through the process of the evolution of consciousness, we take on the full responsibilities intendant upon being "joint heirs with Jesus of the Kingdom."

4. Phil asks: "Where's the human, if we are innately divine in the core of our being? This would make the human something of an extension (not expression) of the divine into the realm of space and time, would it not? That would seem to be a monistic notion in that the human and divine substance would be one and the same.

Jim's response: Like Jesus we are human and divine at the same time, the paradox expressed by the Church in the word "homoousion." Again, the eye of reason cannot grasp this so no sense arguing about it. When one enters Christ Consciousness it becomes clear enough (though, of course, almost impossible to explain). Monism, even though Phil dislikes it (seeing it as Hindu rather than Christian), is one time-honored way of trying to express this mystery. How close it comes to the truth will probably be hashed out in future inter-religious dialogues.

5. I do not understand Phil's #5 as I am not familiar with the terminology. The Witness State, of course, is the primary characteristic of the psychic level of consciousness in which the person, no longer identifying the self with the body, emotions or mind, identifies the self with the "inner witness." Both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila begin their spiritual autobiographies somewhere in the psychic level, a level which John calls that of the "beginning contemplative."

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Thanks for taking the time to reflect and reply, Jim. I'll pick a few key points in no particular order and let's see how it goes.

Jim: *So I invite anyone who wants to know whether we are mere human beings, or whether, as Jesus taught citing the inspired Psalm, "do ye not know that ye are gods?", to go deep within themselves into the Kingdom of God Within, to the place where the consciousness of Christ resides, and to find out the truth for themselves.*

I recommend the same. In fact, see <http://shalomplace.com/res/principles.html> where I lay it all out briefly. When I speak of the Christic level, however, I don't mean to refer to

a divinity that is part of my nature, but one that is available to us through Christ's sacred humanity and his union with the human race. I also believe that this Christic level communicates itself to our mind, emotions and even body. We don't necessarily have to go beyond these operations to experience the Christic presence, although that is what happens in contemplation.

*The conceptualizing mind, which knows how to do nothing except make distinctions, is THE single biggest obstacle to realizing higher levels of consciousness. Which is why all the traditions have developed "spiritual practices" to get around our beloved left brains.*

The intellect doesn't simply "make distinctions;" it also grasps and discerns the truth. Mind and spirit are not separate -- as though intelligence and will exist in a realm beneath a kind of awareness that is beyond intelligence and will. The human spirit in its essence (True Self state) is a conscious intelligence in freedom, and its experience of higher states and contemplation doesn't take us to a place where these activities of spirit no longer function. So I do not view reason as some kind of lower, mythical operation of consciousness. And Catholic mystics generally do not speak of the mind as something one must "go beyond" through certain spiritual practices to come to mystical awareness of God's presence. Contemplative graces awaken one to this presence beyond and in spite of the operations of the faculties, and when we sense this, we rest in the divine presence.

*I did not realize that, Cardinal Ratzinger having been elected Pope, you were his replacement as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the authority and responsibility for summarily decreeing whose views are or are not "compatible with biblical teaching and Christian doctrine."*

Well, actually I am a secret operative of the CDF, but now that you've blown my cover . . . :-D

I was responding to what you were calling the "fact of our divinity," which seems every bit as presumptuous a statement as what you accuse me of, here. And while acknowledging your point about how we see different meanings to Scripture as we grow spiritually, I don't think we end up in a place where we say that we're divine in the same sense intended in John's prologue where he writes of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. One doesn't have to be a Pope or CDF agent to disagree with you on this.

*And so: Monism, even though Phil dislikes it (seeing it as Hindu rather than Christian), is one time-honored way of trying to express this mystery. How close it comes to the truth will probably be hashed out in future inter-religious dialogues.*

I suppose, but the Judeo-Christian teaching on creation is equally "time-honored," and is also congruent and coherent with the "fact" of the contingency of creation -- human and otherwise. As I pointed out in a post above, monism also opens another can of worms re. the problem of evil, where, it would seem, God is complicit beyond any hope of salvaging an affirmation of goodness with regard to God's nature.

Getting to the crux of the matter now: *Moreover, all of the spiritual traditions talk about finding one's true or higher or Christ Self, the Self that is our essential core of identity rather than the human personality we imagine is our self.*

Yes to the True Self being more than the personality! (Break out the champagne -- we

agreed on something!) Only, in my understanding/experience, True Self and Christ Consciousness are not the same. One can be awake in the True Self without being in Christ Consciousness; the converse is true as well. For me, the True Self is the spiritual consciousness of the human soul; Christ Consciousness is the consciousness of Jesus Christ, which is available to us in the depths of our being as gift -- not as something we possess.

*Humans are the beings in and by which the Universe becomes conscious of itself -- which is another way of saying that, in and by humans, God becomes conscious of Himself through us.*

I like the first part of this and can go with it. The second part seems to be saying that God somehow needs the universe to become more conscious, which, as a member of the CDF, I must tell you is heterodox. I'm aware of such views being expressed by various process theologians who espouse panentheism, but prefer the perspective of Teilhard de Chardin, here, which affirms an unfolding universe the purpose of which is to enable God to share from God's overflowing abundance of goodness. It is the privileged place of humans to consciously appreciate these blessings on planet earth, and to love God in return.

Later . . .

[ March 20, 2006, 05:56 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Brief addenda. Something I had written but forgot to include.

*2. Phil asks: "If we really are divine beings, then why don't we see more people manifesting the divine attributes? Why don't we rise from the dead, as Jesus did, for example?"*

*Jim's response: We see people manifesting every day all the attributes usually assigned to God, among them intelligence, goodness, beauty, faith, hope and, above all, love. Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. I am sure the Father can raise anyone he wants to raise but you'd have to ask Him for his reasons.*

The attributes you've listed are those of spiritual beings, which the divine is, of course, but not exclusively so. Attributes that belong to the divine exclusively are omnipotence, omniscience, eternity and a few others. Jesus frequently manifested the divine attributes, but we see nothing of the sort in other humans (psychic gifts like clairvoyance and psychokinesis do not come close).

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, just a few thoughts.

1. Re mind, it seems a matter of definition. Unlike the Buddhists, whose definition of mind is usually all-encompassing (reason, subconscious, superconscious, emotions, intuition, etc.) I usually use mind or reason to mean the distinction-making left brain,

which Jesus called Diabolus, a Liar and the Father of Lies, the fork-tongued source of dualistic thinking and human, inherently dualistic, language. Intellect, as you say, usually means more than just mind. It includes what I would call intuition of pure knowingness, the discernment of truth.

2. You want to preserve God's goodness. Why? As Eckhart said long ago (which got him into some trouble) God is not good, God is just God, and therefore fully implicated in all we judge to be evil. In "Putting on the Mind of Christ" I wrote a full chapter on the distinction (that word again) we make between good and evil(as if we were capable of knowing the difference in any ultimate sense). Of course, I am not espousing relativism or eschewing the importance of ethics. But I can't go into it all in this note.

3. You believe the True Self and the Christ Self are not the same. I believe they are the same, which is why we can become fully whole and individuated by inner identification with Christ (which is precisely what is unique about the Christian contemplative path). When Christ speaks in the Gospel of John he is speaking, not as Jesus of Nazareth, but as our True Self, yours, mine, and everyone else's.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Getting a break as an appointment cancelled, so I can get back to this exchange, which is clarifying, in many ways. Regarding your three points above:

1. It helps to know what you mean by words like mind and reason. But can you really be saying that the left brain belongs to the devil? It almost sounds like it. Making distinctions isn't necessarily a bad thing, and neither is language. I know what you mean when you point out that this can be an obstacle to contemplative experience, but I don't think I'd go so far as you have in viewing these operations of the mind to be so negative. Attachment to one's paradigm, self-image, theological presuppositions, etc. can get in the way of contemplative surrender, but the problem is attachment, not the operation of the left brain.

2. Good and evil is a huge and complicated topic, for sure. I agree that we need to be careful about what we consider good, especially when it comes to God. After all, as Isaiah noted, God's ways are not our ways. What I was meaning to point out is that in monistic systems of thought, it's very difficult to extricate God from evil acts as God is, ultimately, the agent who is acting in space and time, with the created form considered a particularization or manifestation of God. In creation theology, that's not the case at all. God concurs indirectly in evil acts by giving existence to the creature who acts wrongly. E. g., God creates a human being with free-will who misuses his/her freedom. Still, theodicy is a complex topic, to be sure.

3. I guess we'll just have to disagree on True Self/Christ consciousness. I don't follow your point about John's Gospel presenting us with the Christ and not Jesus of Nazareth, however. My understanding is that these are one and the same person, and to encounter Jesus is to encounter the Word who is incarnate as Jesus. As we already have a discussion going on Jesus, however, maybe we can take this up on that thread.

Shalom. Phil

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Here's a point I've been wanting to follow up on, but forgot to do above.

Jim wrote: *If the Kingdom is the pearl of great price buried ten feet in the earth, it matters not what conceptions of the Kingdom are possessed by the diggers. They will all find the pearl if they dig deep enough.*

I believe there is a relationship between the exoteric conceptions (doctrines, rituals, etc.) and esoteric experience (hidden, inner mysteries) -- that the former generally (but not always) reflects something of the latter. One can cling to the doctrinal formulations and believe that understanding them is where it's at, which is obviously one-sided. But equally erroneous is the view that it doesn't matter how one approaches the inner world, or that inner experience has no relationship to exoteric formation. Such formation creates something of a "container," as it were, for mystical experience, and configures the kind of receptivity with which we approach the divine. E.g., what exactly are we trying to do, here? Realize our innate divinity? Relate to an an-Other Freedom in love? It's no accident that zen practitioners do zazen instead of lectio divina, nor that what they report about their experiences sounds so very different from what Christian mystics report. They approach the Mystery differently and actually experience it so as well. Exoteric teaching is the proverbial "finger pointing to the moon," and although there is only one moon, the various world religions do not point to it in the same way, nor do they have the same experience of it.

Re. the Christian teaching on the "Kingdom of God," scripture scholars tell us that this term not only refers to an inner union with God, but to God's presence in our midst. There are obvious implications for spiritual practice. If the Kingdom is not only "within," but also "in our midst," then it follows that God is to be found in our relationships with one another, the culture, creation, etc.,; a more kataphatic spirituality is affirmed in addition to the more apophatic approach that Jim has emphasized.

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**Discussing Jesus** Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Christianity begins with the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and affirms that the death of Jesus brought about a new relationship between God and human beings. I know you don't much care for the atonement metaphor, Jim, and I don't either. The idea of Christ's death being required to appease the wrath of an angry Creator is repulsive to me. Fortunately, it's not the only metaphor. In my book, [Jesus on the Cross: Why?](#), I present several other ways of understanding the meaning of the crucifixion.

I'm wondering if you'd be willing to share your own understanding of what was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus. I know you don't consider Jesus to possess divinity in any exclusive way or differently than we do. So how, then, do you view his death and resurrection?

[ March 20, 2006, 08:04 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I believe the preliminary question is: Who was Jesus? My honest answer is that I haven't the foggiest idea. The deeper I penetrate into the mystery of Jesus the more awesome for me he becomes. The Church has declared that he was divine yet also a human being. He was divine from the moment of his conception - both in the Christian sense of being, unlike the rest of us, conceived without sin, and the Hindu sense of being, unlike the rest of us, a divine incarnation, i.e., enlightened before birth. The late Spyros Sathi, an Orthodox mystic, probably spoke for many Christians in saying he believed that Jesus was the incarnation on earth of the Divine Logos Itself. Paramahansa Yogananda, on the other hand, even though he had profound mystical experiences of Jesus, said it would be metaphysical error to think that the fullness of the Divine Logos could ever become incarnate in a single human being, that the energy would literally explode the vehicle, being way too much for any human body, nervous system, or personality to enclose. Nevertheless, I do agree with you (not with your characterization of my views above) that Jesus was "divine" in a special way. I believe the Christian consensus is that he was no ordinary saint. Whether his realization of divinity surpassed that of others the Hindus consider divine incarnations, such as Lords Rama and Krishna, I do not know. To say he did would be (1) to open oneself to the charge of egoistic Christian chauvinism and (2) to speculate about something that none of us are spiritually advanced enough to even render a serious opinion. Some have believed that Jesus was literally "the New Adam," the first consciousness evolved solely on this planet to realize the "fullness" of spiritual mastership. For example, the theosophists seem to believe that Jesus was a full Master, at least a seventh degree initiate (whereas such as John of the Cross are seen as only fourth degree initiates). That is just one possibility among the many that have been proffered to explain who Jesus was. What he accomplished by his death and resurrection, it seems to me, is a question somewhat linked to the above considerations. That he accomplished something that changed the world both externally (even the secular historians would agree) and internally on the spiritual planes of the Universe seems beyond question. But do any of us, with our limited spiritual understanding, really know what that was? More later. Blessings, Jim

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Apologies, Jim, if I had mis-characterized your view of Jesus in my opening post. I was going by what you wrote on page 148 of *Death of a Mythic God*, where you stated that "We are already sons and daughters of God in exactly the same sense that Jesus was-- except that he knew who he was and we don't know who we are." Your reflections above do help to clarify.

You raise many important and intriguing issues, all of which I would like to address eventually. But the first I would like to take up is the following statement:  
quote:

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*Whether his realization of divinity surpassed that of others the Hindus consider divine incarnations, such as Lords Rama and Krishna, I do not know. To say he did would be (1) to open oneself to the charge of egoistic Christian chauvinism and (2) to speculate about something that none of us are spiritually advanced enough to even render a serious opinion.*

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To my understanding, the Church does indeed teach that Jesus' divinity is unique in an

exclusive way (i.e., only begotten Son), so we might as well get that out in the open and deal with the implication of chauvinism that you raise. The Church does not consider its affirmation a speculative hypothesis, nor does its validity rest on the spiritual maturity of those making the affirmation. In the Gospels, this affirmation is made by Jesus himself, and is backed up by his miracles and his resurrection from the dead. If a Christian's affirmation of this gives offense, then that's another matter to be worked out in inter-religious dialogue. But to not affirm this would be to renege on a core conviction of Christian faith.

The other point I'll take up now is Yogananda's objection about a human form being inadequate to incarnate the Logos. He's right, of course, but only with regard to the historical Jesus prior to his resurrection and ascension. What the ascension affirms is the full integration of Jesus with the Logos, so that wherever the Logos is (everywhere), there also is Jesus. This is why the Church affirms that he is "seated at the right hand of the Father." It's also how we can speak of a cosmic aspect of Christ's presence . . . of how he "fills the universe and all its parts," to quote St. Paul. Early Christians were aware of this integration between Jesus and the Logos, and Paul writes eloquently about it in several places, most notably Col. 1: 15-23).

*That he accomplished something that changed the world both externally (even the secular historians would agree) and internally on the spiritual planes of the Universe seems beyond question.*

Amen to that!

Later . . . busy day ahead.

Shalom. Phil

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, good morning. Although I am happy that your teams, LSU and Wichita State, have made the sweet sixteen, I am rooting for my teams, Duke and George Mason, to eliminate them. I hope, however, that this kind of friendly but competitive stance does not carry over to our dialogue which, by definition, should be a non-competitive interaction designed, we hope, to move Christian understanding beyond the mythic level.

That said, I must say I found your latest postings, on this and on the innate divinity topic, frustrating for it seems we are still talking past each other. I believe I understand your position and traditional theological language very well for, as I said, I used to think in those terms myself (except for your idea of Jesus merging with the Logos post-resurrection which, offhand, strikes me as purely speculative and thus the very type of "metaphysics" that postmodern thinkers would reject out of hand because it is intellectual speculation rather than being based upon experiential contemplative data). You, on the other hand, still do not seem to understand my position as when you wrote:

Phil: "I guess we'll just have to disagree on True Self/Christ consciousness. I don't follow your point about John's Gospel presenting us with the Christ and not Jesus of Nazareth, however. My understanding is that these are one and the same person, and to encounter Jesus is to encounter the Word who is incarnate as Jesus. As we already have a discussion going on Jesus, however, maybe we can take this up on that thread."



Thus, it seems to me that you, Phil, have been arguing against my position, sometimes as sort of a "defender of orthodoxy," without first understanding that position, one I believe is every bit as orthodox as your own but, I hope, expressed in language more understandable to contemporary Christians. As in the above quote, and as admittedly has been done ever since St. Paul, you quite consciously and deliberately use the terms Jesus of Nazareth (the human being) and the Divine Christ/Logos interchangeably, making no theological distinctions whatever between the two. This I see as a huge problem for moving Christian speech beyond the mythological. The result of this prior language, it seems obvious to me, has been to create a huge chasm between the human being, Jesus of Nazareth, and all the rest of us humans, Jesus being seen as primarily a divine being and we being seen as not divine in the slightest (except to the degree we are "in Christ" which is a mythic phrase that is never explained and the meaning of which is simply assumed -- and that probably was a good enough "explanation" for a mythic-level Christian). Since I devoted a chapter to this very issue in "Putting on the Mind of Christ," I think I will just paste it as my entry for today in the hopes that you will better understand my position.

PS: I read the piece you referenced on the relationship of God to creation. You seem to believe that monists deny God's transcendence. Though I would classify myself as a panentheist rather than a monist, I believe your understanding of monism is incorrect. It is pantheists who deny God's transcendence.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

## Chapter 18

### THE PROBLEM OF JESUS' LAST NAME

The problem of Jesus' last name is a misunderstanding most Christians have about who Jesus was. Even Pope John Paul II's book of private reflections, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, contains this metaphysical misunderstanding. There is a metaphysical distinction between Jesus of Nazareth, the historical human personality, and the Christ as God's "Only-Begotten Son" (Nicene Creed), the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Ordinarily, when we speak of Jesus, we talk as though Christ were Jesus' last name. We say, "as Jesus said to the woman at the well," or we might say, "as Christ said to the woman at the well," or again, "as Jesus Christ said to the woman at the well." This ordinary usage is convenient but it can create a serious problem in understanding not only who Jesus was but also who we ourselves are.

Most Christians, of course, know that Christ was not the last name of Jesus of Nazareth but a title given to Jesus by the early Christians, meaning the "anointed one" or Messiah. Nevertheless, even though we know the origin and meaning of the title Christ, we still ordinarily use the word Christ as if this were Jesus' last name in the same way that Smith is used as a last name for persons whose ancestors were blacksmiths. Understanding the origin of the last name doesn't alter the usage in either case.

What exactly is the problem? The problem comes when we try, in light of this familiar usage, to interpret the words of the Nicene Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God." What we usually end up mistakenly thinking is that the Creed means Jesus of Nazareth is God's Only-Begotten Son. That is, we mistakenly think that Jesus, and Jesus alone, was God's Son, and that all other humans are therefore less than

Jesus. That is not what the Creed means. To think so is a serious metaphysical error. And this error is so grave that, unless corrected, it can actually prevent us from taking our place with Jesus in the Christ Consciousness, and later in the Kingdom of the Father.

It is the Christ who is God's Only-Begotten Son, not Jesus. True, Jesus of Nazareth knew he was the Christ; that is, that he had the Christ Consciousness (and the higher nondual consciousness of oneness with the Father). He knew that, as Christ, he had been directly begotten by God from all eternity. But Jesus knew and preached that the same was also true for us. We too, according to Jesus, are to become Christ by putting on the mind of Christ, that is, the awareness that we too are directly begotten by God. One of the reasons Jesus called himself the Son of Man was that he wanted us to realize that our reality and destiny are the same as his.

Most Christians make this theological mistake of thinking that Jesus of Nazareth, rather than the Christ, was God's only-begotten Son. I made it myself, and it caused me a great deal of confusion when my consciousness was trying to realize Christ Consciousness. Even Pope John Paul II makes this exact mistake in his book of private reflections, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. The Pope asks why Jesus, "this Jew condemned to death in an obscure province," isn't considered by Christians to be in the same category as Socrates, Buddha, or Muhammad. He answers himself by saying that: "Christ is absolutely original and absolutely unique . . . . He is the one mediator between God and humanity . . . Christ is unique!"<sup>109</sup>

The Pope starts out by talking about the historical personality Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew from an obscure province who was condemned to death. So far, so good. Then, when he talks about the Second Person of the Trinity, the one and only, original and unique mediator between God the Father and humanity (and the rest of creation), he uses the word Christ. No problem here either. But then he combines Jesus and Christ, just as if Christ were Jesus' last name, and begins comparing Jesus Christ to the historical personalities Socrates, Buddha and Muhammad. Naturally, Socrates, Buddha and Muhammad come out second-best.

With all due respect, the Pope's analysis is faulty. In comparing the divinity of Jesus to the humanity of Socrates, Buddha and Muhammad, he is comparing apples to oranges and seeing not only Socrates, Buddha and Muhammad, but Jesus himself, in a one-sided (though opposite-sided) fashion. I don't know about Socrates, but both Buddha and Muhammad, like Jesus, had at least the Christ Consciousness, although they called it something else. Both, in fact, had nondual consciousness, the level above Christ Consciousness. Both Buddha and Muhammad, therefore, are, like Jesus, what the Western Christian esoteric tradition calls ascended masters (as, for example, is the Jewish prophet Elijah, who was "taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot and whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11)). Jesus, however, was born with the Christ Consciousness, while Buddha and Muhammed were not.

Jesus himself, according to the Scriptures, was careful to make the distinction between a great human being understood only as a human personality and any human being understood as a divinely Christed being. That is the distinction Jesus was making when he said that John the Baptist, understood as a human personality, was the greatest man ever born of woman, but that the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e., with the Christ Consciousness, was greater than John (Matt. 11:11).

The same confusion surrounds the mythic doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The Scriptures are

clear that, in accordance with the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth was born of Mary, that his father was Joseph (John 1:45), that his brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude (Matt. 13:55), and that he had sisters as well (Matt. 13:56). But, as Jesus himself stated to Nicodemus, there is another way to be born—in accordance with the Spirit (John 3:3-7). In accordance with the Spirit, Jesus, as the Christ, was born directly (virginally) from the Father, through the Holy Spirit, and out of Mary (the Nicene Creed). The same is true of anyone who consciously realizes the Christ Consciousness as John's Gospel clearly states, "Some, however, did receive him and believe in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children. They did not become God's children by natural means, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father" (John 1:12-13).

Mary, the new Eve, in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth just described, and identically to the Buddha's mother Maya, stands for woman. Archetypally and psychospiritually, woman stands for the womb, the watery baptismal abyss, human emotional depths, the human unconscious, and the belly of Jonah's whale. As Mother (and again identically to Eve and Maya) Mary represents matter (mother is mater in Greek and Latin and has an equivalent meaning in many other languages). She therefore represents the dualism of maya, the physical world, understood as separate and apart from God.

The Christed being is always "born again" directly (virginally) from the Father, and or through the Holy Spirit, out of this "Mary" (womb, matter, unconscious, maya, emotional depths) in the baptism of the Dark Night of the Soul. That is why, spiritually, Mary is the Mother of God not only in Jesus' case but in the case of every person who is reborn into the Christ Consciousness. This is the point the Gospel of John is making in having Jesus, on the Cross itself, say to Mary, "Woman, behold your son," and then to John, "Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27).

I agree with the Pope that Jesus of Nazareth is unique. But his status as Christ is not what makes Jesus unique. Any one who reaches the level of the causal, at which one understands the Trinity as a living cosmological reality in which that person (and all humanity and creation) participates, is a Christed being (John 1:12, Gal. 3:26). Mary was a Christed being from the moment of her conception. All of the Apostles were Christed beings after they were finally baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). So too were the other non-Apostle authors of the New Testament.

St. Paul and St. Teresa of Avila, invoking for herself the words of Paul, said, "For me to live is Christ" (Philip. 1:21). Paul also said, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20)." Neither Paul nor Teresa said "Jesus" lives in me. Nor did they say "Jesus Christ" lives in me. They said Christ lives in me. The Christ, by definition, transcends any human personality identification, including that of the historical personality Jesus of Nazareth. When the Christian passes through the Dark Night of the Soul and enters the first level of divine identity, the causal, all of this becomes crystal clear. Before that time, however, the meaning of Christ will normally seem murky to anyone without Christ Consciousness (that is, anyone who wrongly thinks his or her human personality is the "real me").

By putting Jesus on an unreachable pedestal so that others such as Buddha and Muhammad can't get near him (that is, by understanding Jesus only as divine and the others only as human), we also prevent ourselves from getting near Jesus. We set up a major obstacle to our realization of Christ Consciousness and our own entrance into the Kingdom. According to Wilber, even St. Augustine couldn't get himself past this incorrectly understood uniqueness of Jesus.

This type of reasoning has also driven an unnecessary wedge between Christians and Muslims. One reason Islam has traditionally insisted upon the oneness of Allah has been in reaction to the type of Christian trinitarian theology that seems to elevate a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, into a second God, fully co-equal with Allah. Muslims are very careful not to do that with Muhammad, and can be deeply offended when Christians call Islam Muhammadism. When Christians treat Jesus as though Christ were Jesus' last name, the Muslim criticism is right on the mark. While it is true that the whole of God was incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth (as the whole of God is also present in the Holy Communion and, for that matter, in every grain of sand), and while the nondual consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth was perfectly aware of his oneness with God, Jesus never claimed to be equal to God as transcendent, nor even to be the complete expression of the Christ, God's Son.

When the passage of the Pope's book cited above was recently brought to the attention of the Vietnamese Buddhist spiritual master Thich Nhat Hanh, he reportedly said, "It appears the Pope does not understand the Trinity." Sadly, the Vietnamese master is correct. Nor, from what I can see, does the leadership of any other Christian denomination, none of them having first put on the "Mind which was in Christ Jesus" as we were instructed to do (Matt. 6:33, Philip 2:5).

Paramahansa Yogananda also addressed this problem of Jesus' last name, one he called the problem of Jesusism versus Christianity. He wrote:  
*I am glad that Christianity was not called "Jesusism," because Christianity is a much broader word. There is a difference of meaning between Jesus and Christ. Jesus is the name of a little human body [personality] in which the vast Christ Consciousness was born. Although the Christ Consciousness manifested in the body of Jesus, it cannot be limited to one human form. It would be a metaphysical error to say that the omnipresent Christ Consciousness is circumscribed by the body of any one human being.*<sup>110</sup>

Let us set aside the comments of Buddhist and Hindu spiritual masters, however, and look at what the Scriptures and Jesus himself say. Directly contrary to the idea that Jesus was uniquely the Christ, St. Paul states flatly in his first letter to the Corinthians:  
*Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink. . . . All of you, then, are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it" [1 Cor. 12:12-13,27].*

You couldn't get much clearer than that. Note too that Paul is talking about baptism by the Holy Spirit, the baptism by spiritual "fire" (energy), not baptism by water.

Jesus, quoting the psalmist, asked us, "Do you not know that you are gods?" (John 10:34-35; Ps. 82:6). What sense would Jesus' question make if we too could not claim our own divine heritage? How, for instance, can we be "joint heirs with Jesus of the Kingdom" (Rom. 8:17) if we are not divine by "participation" (to use John of the Cross' word) in the same divine Christhood in which Jesus participated? What is the use of being "baptized with Jesus into his death" (Rom. 6:3) if we cannot fully share, as the "friends" he called us at the Last Supper (John 15:15), in the full glory of his Resurrection, which, for us, is the realization of our Christhood (Rom. 8:17)?

Jesus also said, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I do, and even greater ones" (John 14:12). How can we expect to be able to do such things, and even greater things, if we are not ourselves divine in the same sense that he, the carpenter of Nazareth,

realized he was? And again, Jesus prayed to the Father that we may be one just as the Father and he were one (John 17:11), and that we might live in God just as Jesus lived in the Father and the Father in him (John 17:21). Was Jesus praying in vain? Was he mistaken in what he was asking? Of course not. Jesus knew exactly what he was saying and what he was praying for. From these, and from a host of other Scriptures throughout the New Testament, it is abundantly clear not only that we are every bit as divine as Jesus was, but that our entire Christian spiritual quest consists of consciously claiming our divinity just as Jesus did.

Meister Eckhart, having realized the nondual vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, exulted: *Everything good that all the saints have possessed, and Mary the mother of God, and Christ in his humanity [i.e., Jesus], all that is my own in this human nature. Now you could ask me: 'Since in this nature I have everything that Christ according to his humanity [Jesus] can attain, how is it that we exult and honor Christ [in his humanity, i.e., Jesus] as our Lord and our God?' That is because he became a messenger from God to us and brought us our blessedness. The blessedness that he brought us was our own. 111*

The "good news" of the Gospel is that we, none of us, are mere human beings. We are now, and have always been, divine. All of the doctrinal statements of the early Christian Councils, in which the Church's understanding of Jesus as the Christ was hammered out, are statements about us. They tell us who we are. We are, here and now today, all the things the early Councils said Jesus was. All we need to do to be "saved" is to consciously realize who we have been all along. We need to realize our divinity, own it, take up the responsibility of it, and live it.

There is another reason why many Christians prefer to keep Jesus, seen only as divine, up on a pedestal, why they'd almost prefer to forget that the carpenter from Nazareth was a human being like ourselves. Many Christians like the idea that Jesus did all the work of salvation for them (he being divine after all, and they only human). They find solace in the theory of "vicarious redemption," that, by his sufferings and death, Jesus somehow made up for and appeased God for all of our sins. Such Christians often place heavy emphasis on the "Lamb who was slain for us" (Rev. 5:12), even in the hymns that are sung every Sunday in church.

But, while it is true that Jesus, by his suffering, took upon himself and transmuted a great deal of our negativity (just as does any Christian, to a lesser extent, who takes the Crucifixion Initiation), Jesus did not do everything. Nor can Jesus do what is ours to do (Col. 1:24). God for our own ultimate good would not allow it. It is our responsibility to grow up into our own divinity, paying whatever price we need to in the process. Neither Jesus, nor anyone else, can do the work of individuating our own souls into Christ Conscious wholeness for us. When we all become conscious Christs then, and only then, will all the world's sin be forgiven (1 John 2:2).

The overemphasis on Jesus' divinity has resulted in centuries of enormous practical harm to Christians in their search for God. Countless Christians have not taken to the spiritual path because they've felt either that the divine Jesus did everything for them, or because, since they saw themselves as merely human, and Jesus only as divine, they thought the path impossible.

This thinking has resulted in a huge chasm between the human and the divine, and between the ordinary Christian and Jesus. What this thinking does is to actually nullify in one swift stroke the essential "good news" of the New Testament, that we are divine and

free from sin and death. It throws us back upon salvation by the law, by doing good and avoiding evil, which is no route to salvation at all but a recipe for continued slavery to duality.

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Where did he come from? This question has puzzled Christians for the last two thousand years. To say Jesus was the Son of God does not help much to answer the question because we too are sons and daughters of God in the same sense. To say that he was divine, and shared the substance and nature of God, is another way of saying the same thing. To say he was the Christ, the only-begotten of God, also does not help, for we too are members of the Christ.

To say Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews does distinguish him as unique. But it is the Christ Consciousness, not Jesus as a human personality or even as an individual soul, that is the Messiah, the liberator, and the redeemer from all sin (1 John 2:2). To say that Jesus was conceived and born with the Christ Consciousness, that is, without sin, distinguishes Jesus from the vast majority of us humans (and from the Buddha and Muhammad), but not from other avatars, the Hindu word for liberated souls who are allowed or requested by God to reincarnate here on Earth to help the rest of us. Nor would it distinguish him from Mary, who was also conceived and born without sin.

Some Christians believe that Jesus is distinguishable from the avatars in that he never had a past life on this planet nor has he ever incarnated since. Jesus of Nazareth, they believe, was the one time only incarnation of the fullness of the Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, on Earth. The personal view of Pope John Paul II, cited above, seems to be the same. I suppose this may be a possibility, for "with God all things are possible"(Matt. 19:26), but there are problems with this understanding. First, there is Paramahansa Yogananda's objection that the vastness of the Christ Consciousness couldn't possibly be contained in, or expressed by, one human personality. Second, how could we, as St. Paul says, "fill up what was lacking in Jesus Christ"(Col. 1:24) if, as the fullness of Christ, he lacked nothing? Or how could we, as Jesus promised, "do greater things than" Jesus (John 14:12) if, as the fullness of Christ, Jesus by definition could never be surpassed?

Finally, this understanding edges in the direction of the view that Jesus, though he had a human body, did not have a human soul. The early Church councils repeatedly rejected one form or another of this view; for example, the view that Jesus had a human body and human emotions but not a human mind, the view that Jesus had a divine will but not a human will, and the view that Jesus had a divine nature but not a human one. The councils insisted that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. (cf. Heb. 2:17 "This means he had to become like his brothers in every way.")

So, if Jesus had a human soul, and not only that but a perfectly developed human soul, with perfected emotions, fully developed intelligence, psychic powers, will, etc., how did Jesus get such a soul? Did the Christ, wholly apart from the normal, divinely ordained human evolutionary process bypass this in Jesus' case and create, all at once, a perfect human vehicle? It may be possible but I don't think it at all likely. What would be the point? It would make Jesus, not like us in every way (Heb. 2:17), but a human anomaly. He would certainly be unique, but this uniqueness would estrange him from the rest of us and from human history and evolution. He would hardly be the "new Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22, 45) if he had no connection to the first Adam (except for his body) and no connection to human consciousness evolution. How could he be understood as the Lord of History if his birth was some kind of special, miraculous divine interventionism into our

history?

At least one Western esoteric tradition suggests that the individual soul that incarnated as Jesus was the first consciousness evolved entirely on this planet that had been able to realize the Christ Consciousness. That tradition suggests that prior souls who had realized the causal level of consciousness (Krishna, Buddha, Lao-Tse, and Plato) –originated elsewhere. Because of this colossal achievement, God commissioned Jesus to enact with his life, from birth to Ascension, the entire map of human consciousness evolution, the Way, the Truth, and the Light. In other words, Jesus was the “new Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) the founder of a new race of Christed beings. That seems a more grounded and realistic possibility.

I have tried to set out in this book, in as contemporary a way as possible, the path to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Way Jesus showed to us by his life, particularly by his Death and Resurrection. But the Kingdom of Heaven is only the end of the earthly journey into God, not the entire journey. There is, in fact, no end at all to the journey just as there is no end to God. And I suspect that, however far we journey into God, Jesus, whoever he may really be, will always be there lighting the road ahead.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Good morning to you as well, Jim. LSU vs. Duke; WSU vs George Mason . . . may they all play their best, and may the best teams (LSU and WSU) win. [Smile]

I'm sorry that you feel we've been talking past each other in some of our exchanges. I do want to understand your perspective and respond to it rather than some straw man misinterpretation. I hate it when people do that to me, but we're in pretty deep waters, here, so it's likely that some misunderstandings will take place. We can clarify as we go.

First, your P.S. two posts above. . . I think there are panentheistic forms of monism. Maybe the misunderstanding is in how you use the term "monism?" See <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/monism.htm> for example. I'm hearing the term as a metaphysical assertion to the effect that *allows that only one being or type of being exists*, so it wouldn't really matter whether that one being was both transcendent and manifest. Analogously, my human soul is both transcendent to the space time realm and manifest through my psyche and body -- there is only one principle of life, intelligence and freedom at work, here. I understand panentheistic monists to be asserting something similar with respect to the divine and the universe. Without some kind of affirmation of ontological duality such as we find in the traditional doctrine of creation, it's difficult to affirm real being, freedom and intelligence for the human Jesus of Nazareth or anything else, for that matter. So, I'm kind of stuck there, I guess you could say.

You wrote:

quote:

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*I believe I understand your position and traditional theological language very well for, as I said, I used to think in those terms myself (except for your idea of Jesus merging with the Logos post-resurrection which, offhand, strikes me as purely speculative and thus the very type of "metaphysics" that postmodern thinkers would reject out of hand because it*

*is intellectual speculation rather than being based upon experiential contemplative data).*

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Well, it's not exactly like you've grown beyond an inadequate and inchoherent explanation! And I don't accept that the teaching on the ascension/cosmic Christ is without mystical grounding. The Apostles' experience of the ascension was a mystical revelation, and Paul's teaching on the cosmic Christ seems an expression of mystical graces along the lines of what St. Teresa of Avila called an "intellectual vision." Then there was his own mystical encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus and many other experiences as well, some of which he alludes to only in passing. Other Christian mystics through the centuries have had deep insights and experiences of the cosmic Christ -- e.g. Hildegard of Bingen and the Eastern Christian Churches. Teilhard de Chardin is a good example of a mystic from more recent times who deeply appreciated Paul's teaching on the cosmic Christ. Quoting Robert Faricy on Teilhard:

quote:

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*The Universal Christ is Christ in his cosmic role as Omega. Teilhard sometimes uses as synonyms for "Universal Christ" the expressions "total Christ" and "cosmic Christ." These expressions designate Christ in his cosmic role, not some ideal or archetypal image of humanity or of the world, but the same Jesus of Nazareth who by His resurrection "has become co-extensive with the physical immensities of duration and space without losing the preciseness of His humanity."<sup>32</sup> The point is worth making that "Universal Christ," "cosmic Christ," and "total Christ," are expressions that refer to the individual Incarnate Person of Christ insofar as he has the role and function of Omega, the focal point of universal evolution. These expressions refer to the Body-Person of Christ in His role of uniting mankind and all the universe to Himself by his creative and redemptive power.<sup>33</sup>*

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<http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1967/v23-4-article4.htm>

As for post-modern thinkers, here, I have no idea what relevance that has to this discussion. They pretty much can't agree on anything and, for the most part, consider all truth claims to be suspect, so I simply leave them to their own confusion. ;-)

Thank you for sharing your book chapter in which you reflect on the nature of Christ. I want to read it over and think about what you're saying before responding.

Shalom. Phil

[ March 22, 2006, 10:40 AM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, just a couple points and I have to sign off for today (I guess we'll return to the death/resurrection later). I don't believe God is a being at all. That would limit God and make God a separate "thing" from us (creation). I accept your essay on the Cosmic Christ. It is well done. Even though, as you say, some postmodernists are ridiculously relativistic nihilist deconstructionists, I do think we have to take their critique of purely speculative metaphysics seriously. Blessings, Jim

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Posted by **Jim**

PS: I also liked your nuanced response to my treasure digging analogy. I guess I was too black and white in interpreting the analogy. The "container" does make a difference and I often warn Christian meditators that, if what they are receiving in meditation directly contradicts Christian dogma, it is an insight that should be summarily rejected as false. (the dark side does indeed play these games with advanced meditators)

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

PS2: Phil, your problem with monism seems to be: How can there be One Divine Life and yet many beings, each with free will, etc. It is, at base, the oldest problem in philosophy, the problem of the one and the many and, of course, immediately affects the relationship of God to Creation. My contention is that entrance into what I call Christ Consciousness solves the problem (and entrance into nonduality even more radically so). Based on my own experience, I actually think something happens in the human brain, a re-wiring of some sort that allows us, for the first time to "see" (Jesus' favorite word) with both brains at once. The left-brain continues to see separations and distinctions as it always has, BUT one can now also see the whole, how it is indeed all One Life, how, as St. Paul said, we are all members of the same body. When Mother Teresa saw a beggar she saw Christ. She did not see Jesus. There was only one Jesus. Nor did she treat the beggar "as if" he were Christ. No, she actually saw the beggar's divinity and treated him accordingly (even though he was incapable of seeing it himself). The Trinity, of course, was the early Church's way of trying to bridge the one and the many in philosophical language, but the Trinity, as Thich Nhat Hahn said, has not been understood even by popes. St. Teresa said she understood the Trinity for the first time only when she entered the 7th Mansion, Christ Consciousness. Then its truth was obvious, in front of one's face. Hope this helps.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Thanks, Jim, for your kind words about my reflections re. the cosmic Christ and the nuance about exoteric/esoteric dialectics. I agree with you on the formative importance of dogma in the spiritual life and developed this point in some depth [on this thread](#).

You wrote: *I don't believe God is a being at all. That would limit God and make God a separate "thing" from us (creation).*

I don't follow your point about God not being a being, except that you don't want to limit God, to which I agree. But I understand the term "being" to mean something that exists, so to say that God is not a being sounds like saying God doesn't exist. Also, to say that we are beings but God is not doesn't exactly resolve the issue of "separation" that you bring up. What could be more separate than being and non-being? (Ugh -- feels awfully distant to me.) The traditional idea (dogma?) of God as supreme being (pure existence, being without limitation) seems to address the issue of limitation and separation in that it affirms creation as having its being in and from God. It also resonates the with Judeo-Christian view of God as personal -- i.e., a Being with intelligence and freedom. I know you're familiar with all this, but am wondering why you find it limiting our idea of God and fostering a sense of separation?

As for the post-modernists . . . I think Huston Smith has written some good books to address the issue of religion and post-modernism. Wilber and the Spiral Dynamics people also put post-modernism in perspective very nicely, I believe, and I know you appreciate their work as well.

Still reading and reflecting on your book chapter about Jesus.

Shalom. Phil

P.S. - I see your follow-up post about monism now, and will reply shortly (my web page hadn't been refreshed since early afternoon).

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Re. PS2 above: I'm sure the brain must be re-wired during the course of the spiritual journey. That would go along nicely with Wilber's AQAL top/right quadrant, and even resonates with the early Church's teaching on theosis as the process by means of which we are "deified" (readers unfamiliar with this idea might check out <http://www.answers.com/topic/theosis> ). I also like your explanation of right and left brain cooperatively holding the perception of the one and the many. And it is true that we see the world in terms of the state of consciousness we are in, so the more awake we are to the divine life in ourselves, the more likely we are to see its manifestation everywhere.

Speaking of this is not an easy matter, but because the experience resonates throughout our being, an impression of it is made in the intellect, imagination, emotions, etc. Perhaps the best way to describe the experience is through poetry, parables, or other forms of art, which gives the right brain priority so as not to lose the unitive perspective. The intellect can draw on both hemispheres in expressing philosophy and theology, however, and can even do so in such a manner that reflects something of the vitality of the experience. That would be very good theology indeed! As you know, the early Church made no distinction between theology and mystical knowledge (theology meaning, literally, the "knowledge of God") and I think some of the early Fathers would be shocked to read what's considered theology in this day. Much of it seems three or four removes from mystical experience, if it has any bearing to spirituality at all. I'm not completely opposed to "speculative" or "systematic" theology, however; it has its place. Not very life-giving for me, however.

You wrote: *The Trinity, of course, was the early Church's way of trying to bridge the one and the many in philosophical language, but the Trinity, as Thich Nhat Hahn said, has not been understood even by popes.*

I'm not sure I follow how the Trinity is dealing with the one and the many, so you'll have to help me out a little more with that one. I understand the Trinity to be a very deep insight/revelation into God's own nature -- how it is that God is a Communion of Love that is meant to be reflected "on earth, as in heaven." Maybe you're referring to how God created through the Logos, or Second Person, and how creation and God are connected in and through this expression?

Shalom. Phil

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

OK, I've finally gotten to start in on your Chapter 18, which I printed out, and could not make it past the fourth page. You're saying that the Creed/Christian dogma doesn't really intend to be saying that the Word became incarnate in Jesus in a unique and exclusive manner different from the rest of us, and that to think differently (like Pope John Paul II did) is erroneous -- "a serious metaphysical error." I have no problem with you disagreeing with the teaching of the Church on this matter or anything else, but making it sound as though the Church doesn't really teach what it does, in fact, teach, and that it means to be saying what you put forth is the problem I'm having, here.

In Christianity, we do not speak of Christ consciousness as something other than the consciousness of the Christ, who IS Jesus of Nazareth, the human/divine Person we believe to be the Word incarnate. You write, *I agree with the Pope that Jesus of Nazareth is unique. But his status as Christ is not what makes Jesus unique.* Yes it is -- in orthodox Christian doctrine, that is, mythic level or otherwise. Jesus is not simply A Christ; he is THE Christ. The one and only! Human/Divine. That's what Christianity teaches.

What you are expressing is an admirable attempt to connect a wide range of esoteric traditions (I see theosophy prominently featured) with Christian teaching, but it doesn't hold up. Furthermore, making it seem as though this is what Jesus really meant to teach, what the Gospels really mean, what various Saints taught, etc. will surely confuse many who don't know Christian teaching very well. I'm not doubting your sincerity in writing what you have, but I can tell you with certainty that you are very much mistaken in your understanding of what the Creed asserts and what the Church teaches about Jesus.

I do agree that we become Christed, as you put it, and mentioned above the teaching on Theosis, which describes this process as unfolding in and through the mediation of Christ Jesus and his gifting us with the Holy Spirit. This movement from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo christus* is made possible through the mediation of Christ Jesus and no other. Buddha does not do this for us (he didn't claim to have), nor did Mohammed, Lao Tzu, etc.

Obviously, we have a major disagreement on this point. Major! If you'd like, I would be willing to share with you my understanding of the nature Christ Jesus, but my guess is that you think you've already "been there, done that" and have moved on to higher ground.

[ March 22, 2006, 10:50 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, this is indeed the heart of the matter. You may be right that I have expressed things poorly in my attempt to update the traditional language but I believe John Paul II also expressed things poorly, even erroneously (though he was not writing in any official capacity), in trying set out some of the practical consequences, as he saw them, of the traditional language. I am in no way saying the Creed is incorrect. I am saying that some past assumptions of what the Creed and Scriptures mean may have to be re-examined.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Good morning, Jim. I think what you suggest about re-examining what the Creedal formulae and Scriptures really assert is important work. Christian theological and Scripture studies are quite abuzz with this, and our dialogue with other world religions is also helping us to re-think what we affirm. Exciting times we live in.

Part of what I hear you responding to in your writings is concern that the divine nature of Jesus has been so over-emphasized in the past that his humanity was lost to us . . . we could not connect with him as a human being. Post-conciliar catechesis has taken things very far in the other direction, however. Children during the past three decades have been introduced to a Jesus who laughs, cries, makes mistakes, has acne, snot, bad hair days, and even (I swear I heard this at a catechetical conference) wet dreams! So, OK, he's human! Now what do they know about his divine nature?

I wonder if it might be helpful to think about Jesus' humanity/divinity using the chain of being approach -- how an emergent level transcends and includes the lower, which continues to function as before, only informed now by the higher. This is what we assert for the emergence of humans from our ape-like hominid ancestors. Could we not say something of the same for Jesus -- that a new emergent level was introduced through him, preserving his humanity while informing its operations with divinity. This need not happen with more than one person, as once the emergent potential becomes actualized, it becomes available to the entire race, especially through the resurrection and ascension.

[This little essay about Christ](#) was written last year and expresses my understanding of the Incarnation and restoration of the human race. I, too, am open to considering other ways to understand things, but it seems to me that there are a few non-negotiables to struggle with in the process, the Incarnation being one of them.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I like the idea of Jesus as a new emergent very much and others have suggested the same in other language, e.g., the first human being to have ever realized full spiritual mastership as demonstrated, for example, by what you called his "divine" attributes. I also have no trouble in saying that Jesus was an incarnation of the "divine," even the greatest such incarnation ever, a "World Saviour" as some have said, even THE World Savior of this planet. What may distinguish our species from perhaps any other in the Universe is our emotions -- and Jesus has no peer in preaching and embodying LOVE as the culmination of the purification of the human emotional body so that we come into psychological wholeness, a theme he preached constantly in parables and sayings, e.g., in the Gospel of Thomas where he says, "When the male and female are united (the conscious and the emotions/unconscious, perhaps physiologically the left and right brains) you will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I see his death and resurrection, among other things, as the acting out for our benefit of this passage, the one John of the Cross calls the death and rebirth of the Dark Night of the Soul that ushers us into the unitive way (Christ Consciousness). Jesus described this passage as being born again by both water (the unconscious ?) and the fire of the Spirit. Recent research by such as Dr. Stanislav Grof, who has used many spiritual techniques to guide people through a conscious re-living of their womb and birth experiences, shows that the archetypal imagery, the emotions and the suffering of this incredible passage, done consciously, comports almost exactly with the descriptions of the passage by John of the Cross, Teresa, myself and others. This is absolutely cutting-edge psychology yet it seems Jesus knew all about it 2,000 years ago. As I said, the deeper I go into understanding him the

more awesome he seems.

As you say, a lot of this is new territory. I wrote in "Putting on the Mind of Christ" about the American Catholic contemplative Bernadette Roberts, a former nun and California housewife and mother. Bernadette, for many years now, has lived at the nondual level of consciousness, the highest level that has been described in the West. Yet Bernadette explains her spiritual realization, which is far above the rest of us, in strictly mythic terms, decidedly pre-Vatican II mythic terms, even vociferously holding to the atonement theology both you and I find repulsive. Spiritual realization and the cultural and verbal unpacking of such are not the same. We have to be careful not to confuse the two. It can get very complicated and I think we all need to bear with each other in this process. Blessings, Jim

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I will be away for the next three or four days but I wanted to post once more before I left. After you said you couldn't get through my essay on the theological distinction between Jesus and Christ, you fell right back on the formulation "Jesus was THE Christ" (as if it was self-evident what the word "Christ" means in that sentence; it isn't). You may travel in some rarified post-Vatican II circles where people jabber about Jesus' humanity but I guarantee you: if you were to go out on the street and ask the first 100 Christians you meet, "What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Christ?", over 90% would answer, "It means that he was God" (the unspoken corollary being "unlike us.") It is enough to make a good Muslim gag. For the Trinitarian doctrine, even assuming Jesus was the incarnation of the Divine Logos Itself, is that Jesus of Nazareth was not divine in his own right but ONLY in relationship to the Father and the Spirit, the very same Father who is "Our Father" (the prayer Jesus taught us) and the same Spirit which has been given to us. True, Jesus' level of divine realization was hugely more than our own, even of those of us who may enter the unitive way, but what that level was is anyone's guess. One of the reasons the Buddhists refuse to talk about God and theology and divinity, etc., is because they want people to actually engage in serious spiritual practice, not to speculate about things that we know next to nothing about. I sometimes wish Christians had the same practice. Blessings. Have a great weekend. Will check in next week.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Crud! They showing the Bradley-Memphis game instead of LSU-Duke. So I'll turn the sound off for Bradley/Memphis St. and use the opportunity to catch up on this conversation.

I did finish reading your book chapter and see what you're doing. Again, it's quite a valiant attempt to reconcile a wide range of esoteric teachings with the Christian message. My primary objections stated in a post above remain, however. What the man on the street has to say about this is irrelevant, in my opinion, but it does point up the need for better pedagogy. And now you write: quote:

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*For the Trinitarian doctrine, even assuming Jesus was the incarnation of the Divine Logos Itself, is that Jesus of Nazareth was not divine in his own right but ONLY in relationship to the Father and the Spirit, the very same Father who is!*

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I don't understand why being an incarnation of the Divine Logos isn't sufficient reason to speak of Jesus as the divine/human Son of God.

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Before replying to some of your other points about Baptism, teachings from the Gospel of Thomas, and Stan Grof's work, I'd like to share briefly how I've come to understand our human journey. This is based largely on my own experience as a Christian contemplative (30 years), spiritual director (20 years) and from a wide range of reading and dialogue. What makes sense to me is that, with respect to spiritual development, there are three different lines of growth that often overlap, but are nonetheless distinct. I'll sketch them briefly as follows:

A. Psycho-spiritual: individuation process; integration of intra-psychic polarities (male/female energies, conscious/unconscious, thinking/feeling, etc.); wholeness.

- Dreamwork, journaling, Meyer's Briggs, Enneagram, therapy, Focusing.
- Jung, Michael Washburn's transpersonal psychology, third-force psychologists

B. Metaphysical mysticism: Ascending the chakras; kundalini process; cosmic, non-conceptual consciousness; True Self; Enlightenment; Causal Level; God as hidden Ground of one's Being; compassion.

- Detachment, zazen, dis-identification with self-image; living between extremes; working with guru/master.
- Buddhism, Advaitan Hinduism, Taoism, Wilber's spiritual teaching.

C. Love mysticism: Inter-subjective relationship with God; purgative, illuminative, unitive stage; gifts of the Spirit; grace; Agape.

- Lectio divina, worship, spiritual direction, Sacraments, the Bible.
- Mystical traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

There are all sorts of admixtures of these, of course; E.g., Wilber's "Integral Psychology" blends A and B to the extent that one doesn't know where the boundaries between them actually lie. Also, various esoteric teachings often blend B and C.

It's possible to find people who are well-developed in one of these pathways but not the others. You did a nice job in *Mythic God* pointing out how we sometimes find psychologically unintegrated gurus -- point well-taken. Also, in the Catholic mystical tradition, we find Saints who are in union with God (C), but don't necessarily show much development in A and B. Indeed, what we can affirm about C is that this kind of union with God is possible even for young children; contrast that with pathway B, where union isn't acknowledged until/unless one experiences some degree of non-duality. Finally, we both know, I'm sure, individuals who are psychologically integrated, but who don't have much interest in spirituality.

What I see you doing, Jim, is conflating B and C. You claim to have experienced enlightenment (B) and so when you look at the Christian tradition, you tend to pick up on those parts of the tradition that resonate with your experience: Eckhart, for example, or Teresa's 7th mansion (she speaks of the unitive state beginning in the 4th). T's 7th is probably a good description of B-enlightenment awakening in the context of C; same for some of John of the Cross' writings. It's not as if B is higher than C for the Carmelite Doctors, but that B awakenings enable a deeper experience of C. When you write of their experiences of union in those lofty realms, however, it seems that you interpret them to

be saying that they've finally come to the great discovery of innate divinity and non-duality.

In the case of Jesus, we see A, B, and C beautifully integrated and fully developed. That's the ideal to strive for, and the one to which theosis moves us.

Just thought I'd share this perspective, here, to see if it's helpful. If not, then you can tell me what you don't agree with.

A good weekend to you as well.

Phil

[ March 24, 2006, 09:00 AM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

P.S. I've slightly edited A, B, and C above. Anyone reading this who might be interested in deeper reflection:

A vs. C: *St. John of the Cross and Dr. C. G. Jung, and, Jungian and Catholic?*

B vs. C: *God, Zen, and the Intuition of Being, and Mysticism, Metaphysics and Maritain*

On the conflation of B and C: *Christianity in the Crucible of East-West Dialogue*

All of these are works by my good friend and mentor, Jim Arraj, and are available for free download or paperback (purchase) from <http://innerexplorations.com/>

One final note, is that A, B, and C are found in all the Spiral Dynamics levels. Wilber has a tendency to characterize C as an immature, mythic level of development in the context of B, but he is wrong on this (he seems to understand very little about Christianity, imo). Thomas Keating attempted to use Wilber's AQAL "We" quadrant to describe the states of spiritual development in C, but I don't think it squared up so well. Whole other topic . . .

[ March 23, 2006, 11:01 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I am about to run out the door but a quick response. (1) I can't believe LSU won! Revenge of Katrina? (2) Of course Jesus was the divine/human Son of God. My point, as always, is that we are too, though with a lesser degree of realization. I care deeply about the man in the street, millions of whom have and are leaving the Church in ever accelerating numbers because Christianity, at a deep level, no longer makes sense to them while Rome focuses on idiotic things like gay marriages. (3) I like the St. Romain/Arraj schema very much. I am trying to get Wilber to adopt the same. In his new book he is clearly differentiating 2 and 3 and I am arguing for also differentiating 1, which his draft comes very close to doing. I fully admit that in "Putting on the Mind of Christ" I conflated all three. My only quibble is that I would put "love development" in 1 rather than 3 and would style 3 as "state" development, the graduated mastery of first everyday consciousness, then the psychic/subtle realms, and finally the causal/nondual.

PS: By unitive way I am not talking about Teresa's prayer of union but of the post-spiritual marriage unitive way. Blessings. Have a great weekend.

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, maybe we can explore these different pathways on a new thread? I'd like to hear more about what you have in mind. My distinguishing A from C is that I see A as Intrapersonal development and C as Interpersonal with the focus on relationship with God. Enjoy your weekend, and condolences from the LSU contingency out here. Not Duke's best game, for sure.

Enjoy your weekend.

Edit: forgot to mention that I'll be away Sunday - Wednesday presenting a workshop in Tucson. Will check in on the discussion later.

[ March 24, 2006, 04:01 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

A few thoughts before I leave on my trip tomorrow:

I think monistic perspectives will always conflate line C into something else, as the idea of an inter-personal relationship with God is incompatible with monism. Generally, "God" is considered a projection of the Ego, with the real source of this sense of transcendent numinosity and presence being one's own inner True Self. So monist systems tend to view love mysticism and its talk of a personal, relational God as reflecting more an immature stage of spiritual development rather than revelatory of our ontological situation.

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Something I've wondered about is your use of gnostic and occult systems to inform your understanding of Jesus, creation, God, etc. E.g., where you write, above, that *For example, the theosophists seem to believe that Jesus was a full Master, at least a seventh degree initiate (whereas such as John of the Cross are seen as only fourth degree initiates). That is just one possibility among the many that have been proffered to explain who Jesus was.* Why give such priority to theosophy? Jesus is just a member of a committee of ascended masters in their system -- nothing close to how Christians understand him.

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Bernadette Roberts: I know her and we've corresponded extensively. She even came to Wichita for a week to do workshops, and we had some good discussions. She attempts to explain her experience of non-dual consciousness in a Christian perspective, but there are numerous aspects of her teaching that are problematic. I'm not doubting her experience, only her accounting of it. As Thomas Keating puts it, she seems to be a Christian mystic who had a Buddhist experience -- i.e., the metaphysical line. And



because that came "after" her development in the Christian tradition, she's naturally inclined to view her awakening as a deeper movement rather than another kind of awakening.

Jim Arraj has a great piece on Bernatte's experience: see <http://www.innerexplorations.com/ewtext/br.htm>

There are other good discussions on Christianity and non-duality on his site as well.

What seldom gets mentioned (as it isn't common) is people who go the "other way" -- from the metaphysical pathway to love mysticism. Such happens, and there are several powerful accounts of it on this site. Forum member w.c. comes to mind, here, along with Shasha's testimonies (readers can use the search link at the time to find their posts). I see Teresa of Avila as a good example of both the mystical and metaphysical unfolding to the highest levels in a beautiful, integrated synchrony. Even so, the relational perspective prevails in her writings; same for John of the Cross.

Enough . . .

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Congrats to George Mason. WSU won't win too many games shooting 3 for 21 from 3-point range. Lousy showing.

[ March 25, 2006, 11:21 AM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I wanted to return again to the discussion of God as a being and our supposed mere humanness. I have been reading a new book by a group of young Catholic and high church Anglican theologians called "Radical Orthodoxy." It is a ghastly read as it's written in the dreadful prose that apparently passes for academic erudition these days but it's an attempt at a post-postmodern orthodoxy. Anyway, two young Catholics, Jesuit John Montag and Laurence Hemming have articles saying that we have Duns Scotus (following Ockham) to blame for reifying God by making "being" a universal category of which both God and humans are particular instances, thus driving a conceptual wedge between creation and the divine (I have never been a fan of either Ockham or Scotus.) This was radically different from Aquinas' notion that we can know nothing or say anything about God per se (re God's own esse) except by analogy from what God has manifested, namely creation and especially human beings, the images of God (cf. Jesus' "He who sees me sees the Father."). Writes Hemming, "For Aquinas, being as creation is the place in which God is to be realized and, in so realizing, creation is literally divinised and redeemed" [emphasis added].

Montag, in an article called "The False Legacy of Suarez," notes that Francisco Suarez, S. J. (1548-1617), who established the theology curriculum that was followed throughout Catholicism until Vatican II, followed Scotus in further separating the divine and human by distorting Aquinas' "grace building upon nature." Suarez understood the distinctions between nature and grace and between natural and supernatural as applying to DIFFERENT things and events, some human and some divine. Montag says that Aquinas' view was much closer to my own, that natural and supernatural (or what is nature and what is grace) were simply two aspects or ways of understanding what was happening re

the SAME events and things and that both were understood by Aquinas as subspecies of grace, all beings and events being seen as "pure giftedness" from God by reason of God's kenosis. According to Montag, all the above conceptual distortions of Aquinas have infected Catholic theology ever since. (See my reaction to Arraj's use of the word supernatural in my other post.)

As I asked in an e-letter to you before this forum began, "Is the birth of a baby an act of nature or an act of grace? How about a rain that ends a drought? How about a recovery from an illness? It is both, is it not? And, is the gift of clairvoyance natural or supernatural, or the gift of healing by the laying on of hands, or even walking on water? It is also both, is it not?" It is a question of viewpoint and interpretation, not a question of natural being one "thing" and graced/supernatural being another "thing."

You replied to my saying that humans exhibit divine attributes when they are good, beautiful, loving, etc. by saying that these were not divine attributes but only the natural expressions of a "spiritual being" (seeing God and us as separate spiritual beings). What I was going to say, even before I read Montag, was that Jesus did not see it that way. When people tried to attribute goodness to him, Jesus refused the appellation, asking, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good." And, in at least two places, Jesus said that EVERYTHING he was and had come from the Father, that nothing was his own. He did not say, "I have certain things on my own because I am a human spiritual being and, on top of that, I have other divine attributes that the Father has added to me by grace." If one sees Jesus as the Logos Incarnate this becomes even clearer for the Logos has absolutely nothing, not even existence, except as a gift of the Father who pours out the complete fullness of his own isness into the Son. And, I would argue, if we are indeed created through the Logos, which we are, then the same applies to us. Though human, we are divine through and through by pure kenotic giftedness.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Some responses to your post of March 25.

1. Re what monists believe. I will let a Hindu Vedantist mystic answer your questions and assertions about what monists believe. For myself, I certainly have no problem with an interpersonal relationship with God. Is not the Trinity itself wholly divine while being at the same time the quintessential loving community? Neither do I think that God is a projection of the ego (that would make God a human creation and negate his transcendence or even existence) though I do think that people who are not psychologically whole will necessarily see God in that way simply because they have not yet "owned" their own projections, both positive (God) and negative (Demons). The Dark Night of the Soul takes care of all this. People who are whole have no such projections.

2. Re theosophy and other esoteric systems. I think you are making way too much of my citing the ideas of theosophy, etc. I was merely setting out various ideas that serious contemplatives have put forward as to who Jesus was. Thomas Aquinas was forever citing the views of pagans (Plato, Aristotle) and Muslims (Avicenna, Averroes) and Jews (Maimonides), etc. Doesn't mean he was a pagan, Muslim or Jew. In my earlier post, and in "Putting on the Mind of Christ," I think I made it clear that I myself have no firm position re who Jesus "really" as even though I assent to all official Church dogmas. There are many in the Church, yourself apparently included, who believe, based on the "only-begotten Son" language of the Creed, that Jesus was the one and only incarnation

of the Divine Logos ever to have occurred on earth. But the Church has never specifically declared that as a doctrine. I believe it never will for I believe that the "only-begotten Son," per then standard neo-Platonic philosophy, refers to the Divine Logos per se, Christ per se. The language, standing alone, does not specifically state that Jesus of Nazareth was the sole human incarnation of the Christ although he was certainly the only possible divine incarnation the early Church knew about (with the possible exception of the Theotokos?). They knew nothing, for example, of the Hindu tradition. Nor, as the Greek Fathers said, does the Creedal language preclude us from realizing our own divinity or "becoming deified" in that same Christ. The question of Jesus' uniqueness, in the way that I am posing it, was simply never asked in the early Church. Nor would it have occurred to the early Church Fathers to ask it for their sole concern in the controversies of those days was to establish, once for all, that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, the divine/human Son of God as you put it, and to which I fully assent.

3. Re Bernadette Roberts. Like yourself and Fr. Keating, I see Bernadette's experience of what she calls "no-self" as authentic. She certainly thinks it was a "Christian experience" (if there is such an animal – are the stages of consciousness denominational?) For example, in the unitive way, as the Church has recognized, one becomes united to God. But is God a Catholic? Or a Buddhist? So what is a person united to God? They may be a Catholic, as I am, by tradition, but they no longer identify their beingness with such a limiting personality definition.

Anyway, I have no reason to quarrel with Bernadette's calling herself and her experience Christian and even Catholic. As I recall, she herself has poured through all kinds of mystical literature, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu, trying to find her experience explained. She, to my knowledge, has never found any similar experience that she recognizes, though, honestly, I think her lack of development re the cognitive "stages" of consciousness, she being pretty well stuck at the mythic level, may not have allowed her to see the same experience expressed in other metaphors and language by other traditions. This, her apparent mythic cognitive stage, is a problem I also have with her unpacking of her experience for she is constantly and dogmatically saying that this or that is what the resurrection, ascension, etc. really and definitively means. The closest she's found to her realization, again if I remember correctly, was Eckhart's experience which seems to me exactly right. Eckhart was certainly a Christian and held the same chair of theology that Aquinas held at the University of Paris not long after Aquinas' death.

PS: I just read Jim Arraj's piece on Bernadette's experience. I think Bernadette is right and Arraj wrong. Bernadette writes that some good amount of time after she had gone through the Dark Night of the Soul and emerged into the unitive way (what I call Christ Consciousness or causal consciousness) she found what she was then experiencing in John of the Cross in one of the last things John wrote before he died. That would be exactly right. (As far as we know from their writings, neither John nor Teresa ever got to nonduality). This was long before Bernadette experienced no-self (which I call nondual consciousness and which is indeed described, as Arraj says, by Eckhart and some Zen masters – and, I would add, by many others, e.g. Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, St. Paul of the Cross, Wilber, and the late Bede Griffith, O.S.B., who experienced nonduality in the last three years of his life.)

Nonduality is indeed a higher level of consciousness than unitive consciousness for one sees oneself no longer as united with God (a subtle duality) but as identified with the Godhead as Eckhart explains. Duality is simply gone. And, I expect, it requires still

another re-wiring of the brain. Bernadette has informed me that I did not do justice to her no-self experience in "Putting on the Mind of Christ" because, clearly, she said, I was only in the unitive way. She is correct. I told her, "That's why I was citing you and Eckhart and I apologize if I didn't get it right."

None of us can see clearly above our own levels and it is always perilous, as the Arraj essay shows, to try to interpret a level of consciousness that one has not yet entered oneself (peak experiences don't count). If you try to do so, you get all the subtle nuances wrong and those who are at the higher level can see that. If you are not yourself at that level of state or stage development, all you have are the words/concepts, and you will necessarily, as with Scripture, interpret them from your own level of understanding. Once you are in the higher level the words/concepts become decidedly secondary. You will recognize a friend (the experience) no matter what kind of clothing he is wearing (concepts).

The cross-cultural studies of Beck and Cowan depend on being able to recognize the same level of consciousness stage development in many different guises. The exception might be, as I wrote re Bernadette above, that, if your stage level development remains stuck at mythic, which is a very matterfied level (Piaget's concrete operational stage), the clothes may loom so important that one cannot recognize one's friend. In interpreting the mystics one must keep in mind that it is not a question of getting the concepts right. It is about understanding the underlying experience. Every transformation into a higher level of consciousness, whether state or stage, requires a total transformation of one's entire being, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual, a true death to the old self and a resurrection to the new. It involves far more than getting the words right, "Christian" words, "Buddhist" words or any other words.

This, trying to understand a level of consciousness higher than one's own, is the very problem Benedict XVI has in trying to understand postmodern green consciousness, the mass emergence of which in 1968 scared him badly. He sees it solely and negatively as relativism in the worst sense. It was his speech blasting such relativism at one of the funeral Masses for John Paul II that cemented his election as pope by the old men, each and every one "formed" pre-Vatican II and all but two appointed by John Paul II, who elected him. True, he did yeoman work in bringing the Church from the mythic to the rational "modern" level at Vatican II (what Beck and Cowan label the orange level). But that was as far as Vatican II went as Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J. correctly quipped, "The Council moved the Church forward by several centuries, to the Eighteenth." Exactly right, e.g., the ditching of Cardinal Ottaviani's view that "error has no rights" (still the view of Wahabist Islam in Saudi Arabia), in favor of an acceptance of religious freedom. But farther than that this pope has been unable to go.

PS2: With great respect for your friendship with Jim Arraj, Arraj's bald and astonishing assertion that Bernadette's "mysticism of the no-self as well as Zen enlightenment is not a supernatural mysticism that comes from grace" is just pure baloney and is an insult to Bernadette and, re Zen, Christian chauvinism of an egregious sort. (See my essay on natural vs. supernatural, also posted today, for my view on the words "supernatural" and "grace.") What Arraj apparently wants to see is lots of gushy love language about God a la John and Teresa. Then, apparently, he might see it as "Christian." That is just plain silly. Not every mystic writes gushy love language or even necessarily fills a lot of pages talking about God. The Zen masters, per Buddhist tradition, refuse to talk about God at all. Some mystics, even Christian ones, are pretty hard-headed characters who just don't do gushy. Other mystics, like the great Rumi, go into love rhapsodies at the drop of a

hat. Remember too that John of the Cross and Rumi are two of human history's greatest poets. Arraj expects poor Bernadette, who may not have a poetic bone in her body, to compete with their likes in order to prove that her experience is "Christian"? As I said, it's just plain silly, and very unfair.

And what is the big deal about the experience being labeled "Christian."? As I'm sure you will agree, the Church, by naming John and Teresa its mystical Doctors, has approved their writings, including their assertions that, at mystical marriage, entrance into the unitive way, one becomes united to God. Is God a Christian? Is God a Buddhist? Is God a Hindu? So, what is a person united to God? Have they not transcended their tradition, their "ladder" to God, even though they may afterwards remain faithful to that tradition by spiritual practice, etc.? Earlier, you agreed with me that one must transcend all personality definitions of self to become united to God. Egotism, or "self importance" as the Yaqui mystic Don Juan called it, is thinking that one is "special" or "better than others" because of some human personality definition, race, color, gender, class, wealth, sexual orientation, etc. etc. and, I will posit, because one happens to be a Christian, Muslim, Jew or whatever. Is not the world awash in blood and suffering because of the last type of egotism? The mystical nights of senses and soul are designed by God to strip us of all such egotism until, like Jesus on the Cross, we are naked of ANY personality definition of self, including religious affiliation. Jesus was not a Christian or even a Jew. He was a universal spiritual master, very possibly the greatest who has ever appeared on this planet, who showed all of mankind the way, the truth and the light. So, I will be honest, Arraj's seeming obsession with what experience of the realms of Spirit is Christian and what is not Christian is deeply troubling to me. It seems to show he is still more concerned with maintaining his own personality definition as a Christian than in surrendering completely to the stripping that has to occur before anyone is united to God (Muslim mystics call the Dark Night of the Soul "ana," the annihilation, wherein the personality-defined self dies and the self that is united to God is born.) May we all proceed to that place\ to be baptized with Jesus into this death so that we may be re-born into our divine Christ selves. Many blessings, Jim

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, I've re-read the thread (including your most recent posts) and will share below a few general observations about the discussion as a whole. I'll reply to some of the specific points you raised above later. There are lots of dishes on the table, at this point.

The topics of God/creation, nature/grace, and Incarnation are certainly deep mysteries that can be articulated in a variety of ways. But when all is said and done, I do believe there's clarity in the Judeo-Christian tradition concerning a few of the basic principles and relationships at stake. These flow from the covenantal perspective that is at the heart of the Biblical message, where we find two freedoms, God and humanity, drawing closer and closer, finally coming to complete intimacy (a union between two) in Jesus Christ. Through it all, there can be no doubting that for the Hebrew people and the later Christian tradition, the teaching about creation existing in complete contingency before God and in possession of limited being is a cornerstone of the story -- even a dogma, if you will. There are all kinds of ways of expressing this philosophically, but I don't see how monistic formulations could supplant this traditional perspective, nor even why you think it's an improvement. Also, the idea of God needing creation to become conscious (as you put it in another post) is nowhere to be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and there is much to oppose such a notion.

Another predominant theme (flowing from your monism) in many of your postings is that the early Christians and Paul didn't really mean to be suggesting that Jesus is the incarnation of the Logos to the exclusion of other such possible incarnations. As you might expect by now, I disagree with you on this point. *The traditional Christian understanding of what was accomplished through Christ's death, resurrection and ascension is such that no additional incarnations and revelations are needed to advance the relationship between God and humanity brought by, in and through Christ.* (Not a quote, just for emphasis). So I don't think you'll have much success establishing any theoretical openness in the early Church or at any other time in Church history to other incarnations of the Word besides that recognized in Jesus. If Paul didn't elaborate on this, it's surely, in part, because he did not have conceived of such a possibility. The Jews were expecting only one messiah, and, for Paul-the-Jew, Jesus was the one.. I do believe it is Christian dogma that Jesus Christ is the one and only incarnation of the Word (the only begotten Son of the Father). Yes, I know you don't like how the word Christ is used to express this, but the reference in the Creed is clearly to Jesus; see the Apostles Creed if you think the Nicene is unclear. In addition, there's much more than credal statements to refer to, here -- a vast body of doctrine pertaining to Scripture and Tradition.

What I wonder about in all of this is why you feel a need to make it seem that the Church could believe differently than what it so obviously does and has (about creation and Incarnation) for two thousand years? Why not simply say you believe otherwise and be done with this strained attempt at establishing your understanding as orthodox? That's the part in all of this that I'm not following. I know you don't think some of the traditional (especially Fundamentalist) formulations connect very well with modern, post-modern and integral (Yellow) Christians, and I agree. But I don't think the answer is to turn the doctrine of creation into monism, and the Incarnation into a related teaching that says we possess divinity in a manner no differently than Jesus did. What this basically does is morphs Christianity into a Hindu-like metaphysical and mystical system (hence, Wilber's enthusiasm for your work), preserving some of the traditional language, but stripping it completely of its original and distinctive meanings. That won't work, as there are already magisterial and conciliar documents that have resisted the directions you're suggesting, and would surely do so again if the need arose. Christian theology beyond the mythic level doesn't require the interpretations you're suggesting; numerous modern, post-modern and integral Christian theologians have demonstrated that the traditional message is compatible with those worldviews. And besides, in all of this, there is the assumption that mythic Christians have got it (their doctrine) all wrong. They haven't! How they articulate, celebrate and promote the message is another matter altogether, and that's more what establishes them as Blue/mythic rather than the content of their beliefs.

I wonder if there's any point in continuing to explore the issues of monism and the Incarnation? We seem to be going round and round the mullberry bush on these issues and I'm getting kind of dizzy. What do you think?

Shalom. Phil

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I see that, on another of your forums, some of your readers are having a grand time dissing me and my thought sans actually reading my books. I just want to

respond, however, to two things you posted some time ago on that other forum and which seem to have set some of them off against me. The first we touched on a little earlier:

1. You apparently, on reading my book, thought I was saying some Christians believe that, at the resurrection, Jesus' body was resuscitated but later died *à la* Lazarus. I think I replied earlier that, on the contrary, I believe that no Christians believe any such thing. Some fundamentalist Christians, however, do believe that Jesus' body was resuscitated and then, forty days later, physically ascended into heaven. Before Copernicus a great many Christians believed this for heaven was thought to be, per Ptolemaic astronomy, physically located just on the other side of the vault of heaven, the stars being lights in that vault (ceiling).

2. You also wrote re me, "His comment about why the Catholic Church has such a strong stand on abortion also frosted me." On the contrary, if you read the passage of mine that you quoted, you will see that I said nothing whatsoever about WHY the Church felt so strongly. In fact, I agree with you that the Church is motivated by an intense concern for the unborn. But none of that, *per se*, has anything to do with the public policy issue that has been at the forefront since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The public policy issue is not about whether abortion is moral. Of course it isn't. But courts and legislators do not rule on morality. The public policy question, in *Roe* and ever since, has been whether abortion should be criminalized, whether indeed mothers and doctors and others involved in abortion should do jail time. And it has been the official position of the USCCB for 30 years that yes, it should be criminalized, a view a great many Catholic officeholders disagree with. Do these Catholic lay officeholders, elected by the public, not also have a "grace of office" with respect to the prudent enactment of public policy in a pluralistic society? I would say they do, including the many officeholders who in fact agree with the bishops and do want abortion criminalized. But I think that part of the reason there is now real conflict between some Catholic bishops and some Catholic legislators is that, despite Vatican II, too many of the members of the hierarchy still have little or no regard for the opinions of lay Catholics, officeholders or no, or for the action and gifts of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the lives and views of the laity. Prudence is a virtue conferred by the Spirit. It may well not be prudent at all to criminalize abortion in this pluralistic society -- and Rome, by the way, has never decreed otherwise. Rome has never demanded criminalization. But the USCCB has. Blessings, Jim

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Dear Jim,

I'm glad you discovered that "other thread." There's some good, substantive discussion going on there, and you're welcomed to participate on it.

I disagreed with you via email that *some fundamentalist Christians, however, do believe that Jesus' body was resuscitated and then, forty days later, physically ascended into heaven.* (Could you give us one example of this? I can't think of any. They darn well know the difference between recussitation and resurrection.) I think this way of putting things obfuscates what they actually do believe -- i.e., that Jesus risen body was not merely recussitated, but that he did manifest himself to the apostles in physical form at times. Catholics believe this, too. Besides, the way you kept putting (recussitated) in parentheses left it unclear as to whether you were saying they were equivocating

resurrection with recussitation (recussitated people die again), or whether you were saying that's what happened to Jesus.

Re. abortion and public policy, the way you put things in your book certainly made it seem that the Church's position was mainly punitive and mean-spirited, with little reference to moral principles.

*But I think that part of the reason there is now real conflict between some Catholic bishops and some Catholic legislators is that, despite Vatican II, too many of the members of the hierarchy still have little or no regard for the opinions of lay Catholics, officeholders or no, or for the action and gifts of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the lives and views of the laity.*

I wish I could believe that it was the Holy Spirit at work in the policies re. abortion of some of these Democrat Catholics. My suspicion is that it has much more to do with getting the liberal vote. And while we're talking about where the Spirit blows, I don't think we can exclude policy statements by the UCCB.

*Prudence is a virtue conferred by the Spirit. It may well not be prudent at all to criminalize abortion in this pluralistic society -- and Rome, by the way, has never decreed otherwise. Rome has never demanded criminalization. But the USCCB has.*

It would be ludicrous to have a law without sanctions, however. What those would/should be, I don't know. But it seems to me that passing restrictions on abortion, then doing nothing if such were violated, would pretty much indicate a meaningless law.

Shalom. Phil

[ March 30, 2006, 02:45 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, this quote by you will be the direction I go next, as I think it goes to the crux of another subject we've been discussing:

*Nonduality is indeed a higher level of consciousness than unitive consciousness for one sees oneself no longer as united with God (a subtle duality) but as identified with the Godhead as Eckhart explains. Duality is simply gone.*

I will be focusing, in particular, on your point that nonduality is a higher level of consciousness, especially with regard to how this is described in terms of the "Godhead." Also, that "duality is gone." These are pivotal issues in East-West dialogue, touching on some of the points you made about Bernadette Roberts' experience. You posted some good material for discussion earlier this week, and I want to take my time with it awhile before getting back to you on it. Feel free, of course, to pick any part of my previous posts to reply to in the meantime. I mention this new topic (maybe deserving its own thread?) as it seems we've pretty well covered the creation/incarnation issues.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)



Dear Phil,

Re the fundamentalists and resuscitation, as I think I wrote earlier, it is a question of fact as to what they believe and, I suspect, not all believe the same thing. But I do think (I have no citations at hand today) that some not only believe what I wrote but also believe that they too, in the very physical bodies they now possess, will be raptured one of these fine days, perhaps very soon, into heaven with Jesus.

Re your last long post: Yes, the head does indeed begin to get dizzy and maybe we've about exhausted the topic for purposes of this forum. But you made some important points in your post that deserve a response:

1. You wrote, "There are all kinds of ways of expressing this philosophically, but I don't see how monistic formulations could supplant this traditional perspective, nor even why you think it's an improvement." I assure you, I am not proposing to supplant any traditional perspective, none of which are going to fade away any time soon, but I think that, in this increasingly globalized world, one must also take seriously the theological perspectives of the other spiritual traditions. In the high middle ages, when Christendom reigned supreme and unthreatened in Europe, the Church was comfortable in allowing a host of perspectives and theologies. Vatican II tried to overcome the almost paranoid defensiveness that set in big time after the trauma of Luther and the Protestant revolt. That attempt has not been entirely successful so far. Let us hope it will be more successful in the future.

2. What St. Paul meant in his epistles is not nearly as important as what the Holy Spirit meant in His divine revelation through Paul, something the Church is still unfolding. As for the creedal formulas, which were generally written by committee, it is not so important what any individual Father meant but what the words actually say, albeit understood in the context of those times.

3. You wrote, "The traditional Christian understanding of what was accomplished through Christ's death, resurrection and ascension is such that no additional incarnations and revelations are needed to advance the relationship between God and humanity brought by, in and through Christ." Says who? Does that mean the Holy Spirit was mistakenly wasting His time by His revelations to Muhammad? On the other hand, if you mean to say that "the fullness of revelation was given in Christ," then I would agree, but that's a rather subtle and different thing than what you wrote.

4. You wrote, "What I wonder about in all of this is why you feel a need to make it seem that the Church could believe differently than what it so obviously does and has about creation and Incarnation) for two thousand years? Why not simply say you believe otherwise and be done with this strained attempt at establishing your understanding as orthodox? That's the part in all of this that I'm not following."

Phil, I am glad you are so certain and definitive about what the Church "so obviously" has believed for 2,000 years. Would that the Church herself were so completely certain. She could save a lot of money by closing all the schools of theology.

My "strained attempt" to establish my understanding as orthodox is because, believe it or not, I have profound respect for the Church, its tradition, its Scriptures, its Conciliar formulations, and the writings of the great saints. I would not have attempted a book on spirituality and mysticism otherwise.

I think this is the third time you have suggested I leave the Church. I guess I should be glad you didn't get now-Cardinal Levada's job. :-) Those who have read "Putting on the Mind of Christ" know that, per my own journey, I believe that, by God's grace, I have come to a place of union with Our Lord Jesus Christ. So why on earth would I ever leave the Church?

5. You wrote: "What this basically does is morphs Christianity into a Hindu-like metaphysical and mystical system (hence, Wilber's enthusiasm for your work)." Yes indeed, and the Gospel of the evangelist John, I would argue, morphed Jesus' teachings into a neo-Platonic-like system. And Aquinas morphed the Christian teachings into an Aristotelian-like system. We are all called to do our best, per our own spiritual lights, to interpret the teachings in light of our times, and the times are now increasingly less parochial and more open to all the spiritual traditions. One of the greatest Catholic mystical theologians today is the Spanish priest Raimon Pannikar who overtly proclaims that he is both an orthodox Catholic and an orthodox Hindu. He has written many books and, so far anyway, not the slightest official objection from Rome.

6. You wrote: "And besides, in all of this, there is the assumption [by Jim] that mythic Christians have got it (their doctrine) all wrong. They haven't!" In answer I say: I have no such assumption, never said that, and never wrote that. Each of the levels has its own truth to the degree that those at that level are aware of and can understand the truth. If mythic Christianity were simply false it would never have endured for the long centuries it has (though, century after century, it has been reinvigorated by higher level saints).

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

Jim, it does seem like we're winding things up. I have just a few responses to your post above, however.

First, I never said nor implied you should quit going to Church, nor have I suggested that you do not have respect for Christian teaching. What I did say is that I believe the Church's teaching that Jesus is the exclusive and definitive incarnation of the Word is dogma. This is hardly a controversial issue, in my view.

You write: *Would that the Church herself were so completely certain. She could save a lot of money by closing all the schools of theology.*

You make it sound like the Church is not clear about what she believes on this point, and that theology is about trying to figure that out. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents a good, concise summary of Catholic teaching and has section on this. Chapter Two of Part One lays it all out: E.g., #454.

quote:

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*The title, "Son of God," signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his father; he is the only Son of the Father (cf Jn. 1:14, 18; 3: 16, 18); he is God himself (cf Jn. 1: 1). To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

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Sounds like dogma to me (the Catechism is online, for those who are interested).

In your opening post on this thread, you wrote (about Jesus): *I believe the Christian*

*consensus is that he was no ordinary saint. Whether his realization of divinity surpassed that of others the Hindus consider divine incarnations, such as Lords Rama and Krishna, I do not know. To say he did would be (1) to open oneself to the charge of egoistic Christian chauvinism and (2) to speculate about something that none of us are spiritually advanced enough to even render a serious opinion.*

Your point #1 struck me as having more to do with political correctness than scholarship, and #2 obfuscates the issue by making the validity of the dogma contingent on some kind of spiritual gnosis. As I noted throughout this thread, neither point factors very significantly in the Church's teaching, but seems rooted in Jesus' own teaching (including some of his parables) and the conviction of the Church that what he accomplished leaves no need for additional incarnations. Sorry if this offends anyone, but that's what we believe.

Re. other religions, then: I believe we can learn from them all and benefit from what they have to offer. I have no need to morph them into Christianity, however, nor to glom them together into some kind of syncretism. Each has its own unique witness to give, and this should be respected. Furthermore, I have no need to make Zen the same as Christian contemplation, nor enlightenment the same as theosis. Obviously (to me), there are different kinds of experiences of God -- the three pathways I mentioned earlier are an attempt to say something about this. Putting one type of mysticism higher than another makes no sense to me and I don't know why anyone should want to do so.

You replied to my point about your morphing Christianity into a Hindu-like system by pointing to the evangelist John's supposed Neo-platonism and Thomas Aquinas' use of Aristotle. I think this confuses the message with the form in which it is conveyed, however. Neither John nor Thomas changed the core Christian message; what you are proposing changes not only the form, but the essential message itself. That's my opinion, of course, but check it out with a few bishops and see what they say.

Etc. etc. We could go on, but I think we've laid it all out and we see where we agree and disagree. If nothing else, it's been a depthful Lenten reflection, hasn't it? But I'm feeling close to "done" and wonder if you are, too?

[ March 31, 2006, 02:27 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Hi Phil. Yes ,let's move on. You state, "What I did say is that I believe the Church's teaching that Jesus is the exclusive and definitive incarnation of the Word is dogma." You think that statement is settled dogma (though it says more than the Catechism quote above or the Creed) and I think there is still some question. But, since I am sure we will both go along with whatever the Church officially decrees, let's move on to other things.

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I should have taken a little more time with the last Post. Please allow me to re-word:

Yes,let's move on. You state, "What I did say is that I believe the Church's teaching that

Jesus is the exclusive and definitive incarnation of the Word is dogma." You think that statement is settled dogma. Even though I accept the Creedal and catechismal language, I think the question of exclusivity is still open. I think the Church will probably have to officially rule on it sometime in the 21st Century for two reasons: postmodernism with its debunking of cultural absolutisms and because of the interfaith dialogue, especially with Hinduism. But, since I am sure we will both go along with whatever the Church officially decrees, let's move on to other things. What we are both really interested in are the stages and states of consciousness and how they relate to mysticism, in short, the emerging "science of spirituality" that we and many others are pioneering. Blessings, Jim (I will be tied up most of the weekend. Probably Monday before I can post again.)

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Posted by **Phil** (Member # 1)

(Sorry for the length; concluding remarks, of sorts.)

*Jim, you wrote: You think that statement is settled dogma. Even though I accept the Creedal and catechismal language, I think the question of exclusivity is still open. I think the Church will probably have to officially rule on it sometime in the 21st Century for two reasons: postmodernism with its debunking of cultural absolutisms and because of the interfaith dialogue, especially with Hinduism.*

I hear you, but I don't think the teaching will change. As I've noted, there are orthodox Christian theologians addressing post-modern concerns, and in many ways, I think pm has helped us move beyond a preoccupation with the "reasonableness of faith" to "openness to mystery" -- very good news indeed! That said, there are certain, essential "pre-givens" (dogmas) of a faith tradition like Christianity, and pm struggles much with this notion. For sure, these dogmas need to be articulated in such a manner as to connect with a culture, but the ideas they express cannot be compromised without basically undermining the Faith being transmitted through the tradition (this is true of any Faith tradition, not just Christianity). In short: I don't expect to see a change in how the Church understands the Incarnation, as this is one of those pre-givens that postmodernism will just have to learn to get along with.

Re. Hinduism: it will indeed be interesting to see how things continue to go in our dialogues. What they mean by avatars, for example . . . and how the Church can respect their beliefs while continuing to uphold its view of the exclusive nature of Christ's incarnation. Hinduism would happily resolve the issue by considering Christ to be another instance of divine incarnation -- this one in the Jewish tradition . . . all of which seems very "fair-minded" of them to postmodernists. The challenge does seem greater on the Christian side: how to affirm what we do in fact believe without seeming to put down what the Hindu is saying -- i.e., that their avatars are really "second-class" compared to Jesus. Authentic dialogue needs to go much deeper than these concerns for political correctness, however. E.g., do Hindus understand their Avatars to be incarnations analogous to how Christians view Jesus Christ? That's not an easy question to answer, in my opinion. There are already a number of good books on this topic, and I don't think they resolve the issue. Hans Kung's book on world religions comes to mind, here, and you've already mentioned Pannikar (whose Christian theology is quite orthodox, imo).

At the level of practice, people might well be able abide more ambivalence concerning dogmatic affirmations. Pannikar comes to mind again, here. So do the many Christians today practicing zen, or some form of yoga. I do believe that, ultimately, one must be

straight about what one is doing, and why. As we've both agreed, the "container" we create is of vital importance; it's actually dangerous to open to the depths without some kind of kataphatic formation. And as no mystical experience interprets itself apart from an explanatory tradition of some kind, this further highlights for me the importance of one's intellectual perspective concerning the divine, human consciousness, and the possibilities for their interaction. I've written extensively about this in my books and all over this site; you've been writing on this as well. Our dialogue has brought to light significant differences in how we view things, which would carry over to discussions concerning states of consciousness, mysticism, spiritual growth, and so forth. We've already touched on some of these issues, and can already discern where the agreements and disagreements probably lie. So even though I suggested this as a next topic for our dialogue, I'm not inclined to go there, as I believe we'd probably end up re-hasing topics we've already discussed at length.

I sense my energies withdrawing from this exchange, at this point, which is a good thing in a way, as I have several other projects I need to be spending more time developing. Thank you for the time you've taken to share your ideas and experiences. I've found it helpful and clarifying, even when we disagreed. Hopefully, you have as well. I'll leave the forum open for you to share anything else you wish, and, who knows, maybe we'll have more topics to discuss in the future.

Shalom. Phil

[ April 01, 2006, 02:31 PM: Message edited by: Phil ]

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Posted by **Jim** (Member # 627)

Dear Phil, I sensed in your second last post that you were thinking of withdrawing, the main reason I suggested we move on to the other topics. I accept your choice. I do want to thank you for allowing me to participate in a forum with you. It has been stimulating for me, I hope stimulating for you, and I hope of some worth to your regular readers. As we get closer to the glorious celebration of the Resurrection I wish you and all those who have attended this forum a new closeness to the Risen Christ. Many blessings to you, Jim

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