

UNHOLY BIBLE

The True Nature of Christ and Creator
Freed from Sacred Scripture—A Love Story



*Ancient Thought as Bondage and a New Way of
Understanding the Holy Trinity for the Present Age*

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The Spiritual teaching of Jesus of Galilee stands in direct contrast to the conventional (or “substitutionist”) “religious” views of Paul of Tarsus. The path proposed by Paul of Tarsus cannot achieve the “salvation” (or Divine Re-Union) that it seeks and proclaims. The myth of the sacrifice of Jesus is not a sufficient substitute for anyone’s real sacrifice of conditional “self”. As Jesus himself is reported to have taught, there is no substitute for the individually initiated and personally practiced “self”-transcending love of the Spiritual Divine, and there is no “right life” without “self”-transcending love, tolerance, and cooperation in relation to all others.

I say, without the slightest ambiguity or irony, that it is now fully and critically the time for a true Christian “revolution”. The necessary Christian “revolution” must not merely be another divisive exoteric “Reformation”, but it must be a true and most fundamental “revolution”—one that renounces merely “official”, and conventional, and “this-worldly”, and exclusively exoteric, and “salvation-myth”-based Christianity, and that re-asserts the full exoteric-and-esoteric tradition and practice of the original first-five-stages-of-life Spiritual “Christianity” of Jesus of Galilee.

— Adi Da Samraj
The Pneumaton

PREFACE

What makes this book so unusual is that I'm a Christian...who doesn't believe in Christianity. Actually, that's not entirely true. I'm a Christian who believes in *Christ* but has real qualms about Christianity, which *misrepresents* Christ. It's up to us to honor his legacy and set the record straight. Or so it seems to me. If something about Christianity doesn't add up but you can't quite put your finger on it, this is the book for you.

Yet, things didn't start out that way. At first, like my friends, I believed what I was told, especially if it came from my parents. By what would I compare? It wasn't until later I learned adulthood involves an improbable task: taking stock of beliefs and reevaluating them, based on knowledge and experience gleaned from life—especially the view of others not just like you. It turns out my parents grew up without questioning what *they* were led to believe. Here's some good advice. Don't be like my parents!

My moment of truth with Christianity came early, amusingly, around third grade. I was in Sunday school, diligently receiving instruction on the happy news that Jesus loves me, which seemed reasonable enough. But the crucifixion and salvation were not nearly so soothing, much less inspiring as exemplars of that love. What moved me had far greater potential: *the mystery of resurrection*. That was plenty for me. It was Jesus' *life* that seemed to hold out promise of something hopeful, not his demise. Honestly, I still can't imagine what was going on inside the ancient mind, that it could take comfort in human sacrifice. It certainly didn't mean much to me.

On that eventful Sunday school morning, I went up to the Bible studies teacher and shared the wonder of a momentous discovery. I confided that I could duplicate Jesus' resurrection, secretly hoping for her approval. She appeared to find my enthusiasm endearing, for the moment accepting the pretentiousness of such a claim. In fact, she challenged me good-naturedly to demonstrate. I had brought a copy of the Bible, in which the ribbon of the page-marker was placed at a full-color pastel picture of Jesus, gazing

serenely out amongst the blurry pages of text. I had her look at the picture, and then closed the book, declaring solemnly that the crucifixion had been done. Waiting monumentally for just a hint of impatience, I revealed the miracle. Opening the book again, the exact same picture of Jesus appeared! I happily announced his resurrection.

Astonishing, she was not amused. Vigorously hushing me, her stiff nails gripped me at the shoulder while a threatening finger wagged my way. She made it clear I had committed blasphemy, playing with the sacred ordeal of our Lord and Savior. Apparently, I had no appreciation for the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice made on my behalf. In the glare of her outrage, I was quickly flustered. Attempting to fathom my offense, I had to think fast, made all the worse by an alarming discovery: *she was right!* I really *didn't* appreciate the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior. In fact, it made no sense at all and never had. Even at that tender age, it seemed an utter waste of spiritual succor had surely taken place. With this act, clearly, humanity had committed an egregious affront against God. And worse, far as I could tell, felt compelled to complicate matters by setting up Sunday school classes like this one, where teachers announced with solemn giddiness that all was OK—for Jesus still loves us, secretly behind the deal the whole time.

It never occurred to me anyone could be kicked out of Sunday school. But I was a troubled child in those days, so really wasn't all that surprising, looking back on it. As a young boy, I tried to sort things out, make sense of why people held onto ideas that are clearly incomprehensible. Startling, I could see that adults didn't have the answers, which put me squarely on the spot. I was all on my own. They seemed more concerned with consolation than anything else. I could have easily joined the crowd then but opted for honesty instead, which struck me as a better guiding light. Indeed, it has been my life-long goal to discern truth, starting I suppose from that day.

If this incident wasn't bad enough, I was having a hard time accepting black or white thinking, which doesn't tolerate any shades in between. This faulty judgment is the way children see things, not to say adults languishing in that same insular reasoning. Christianity accepts a particularly appalling duality in this regard—*heaven and hell*—which leads to nearly the exact opposite outcome intended. Consider the confession of one Church pastor dissatisfied with his faith, which appears in an amazingly intimate book, *If God is Love*, by Phillip Gulley and James Mulholland:

After I became certain of my salvation, I applied the same harsh standards to others. Hell and damnation allowed me to judge and condemn those different from me. They were wicked, and I was good. The chosen are free to do great evil to those they consider damned. My teachers and preachers praised my spiritual sensitivity,

when actually I was scared to death. I want to change that world by envisioning a world shaped by God's redemptive love for all.

Dogma is a volatile elixir indeed! Perhaps you have your own story. If it's not completely clear, the impropriety comes down to a harrowing deficit: *hell only makes sense to those lacking empathy*. Honestly, whose heart is so black they could take comfort in the torment of others? For *all* eternity?? Is God *really* capable of that!? These are human ideas, coming from ancient times, putting words in God's mouth for our sake. Hell serves no purpose, except for those trying to save their own skin, perhaps even *requiring* others to be damned and take their place instead of going themselves. The same is true of the cross—what some call “fire insurance”—a deterrent to hell, so long as you are not on the wrong side of its pointed message.

Even so, neither is really the problem. Rather, it is a violent, exclusive, and intolerant image of God intended toward revenge that undermines peace and happiness in the world—no matter *who* the religious perpetrator, peddling their nefarious holy wars. It is time to admit that this all has to stop. Any love that would send a multitude of people to eternal damnation is questionable, if not obsolete, certainly not anything intended by Jesus.

Despite admiration deserved by Christianity, some of its doctrine has fallen into disrepute. To illustrate, a spirited debate has sprung up over any further use of the cross. At the very least its eerie tribute is selfish, intended solely for our benefit. The purpose of the cross is life everafter, preferably in heaven; too bad at God's expense. You have to hand it to these inspired entrepreneurs. If nothing else, they made the most of a bad situation.

In a recent series of articles appearing in the contemplative Jewish magazine, *Tikkun*, Lawrence Swaim portrays the difficulty this way:

At the heart of Christianity [is] a disturbing doctrine, both Protestant and Catholic, [that] maintains God allowed Jesus to be tortured to death in public in order to redeem human beings, so that God might reconcile himself to his own creation. This patriarchal doctrine makes God out a vengeful, homicidal deity who can be satisfied only with the death of his son. This vision of God is so reprehensible, and sufficiently different from the God of love as taught by Jesus, that it poses an unsolvable and irreducible moral problem.

Some might find calling the cross evil a bit much, being too hard on the poor Christians. Yet, human sacrifice is precisely the issue. It is no doubt understandable how the cross was found laudable during ancient times, given our historical lust for blood and gory spectacle; from wild animals tearing apart human flesh in the coliseums of the Roman Empire, to brutal

executions put on display through the Middle Ages for public amusement, to even childhood exhortations rising up over the schoolyard, calling out, “*Fight! Fight!*” A morbid fascination has always accompanied our interest in making sure someone else receives the blows—in our place. Regrettably, Jesus wasn’t the first, and certainly not the last.

The inclination to cling to ancient ways remains prevalent even today. In his rebuttal examining these difficult issues, C. Kevin Rowe appears alarmed, taking exception to any criticism of the cross:

Ignorance of major world religions comes in many forms today, but Lawrence Swaim’s particular version is still stunning. Of the many historically and argumentatively strange things in his essay, his call for Christians to get rid of the symbol of the cross is the most bizarre. Getting rid of the cross is tantamount to getting rid of Jesus—which is to say, of Christianity.

Something strange is going on alright. Consider the situation from the standpoint of Jesus. He never *existed* during a time in which the cross was associated with him! His entire ministry took place without the slightest reference to the cross. How odd to think getting rid of the cross would in any way affect his presence in Christianity. Did he really have no life before death? How could such confusion possibly happen? However strange to say, Christianity is being hijacked by the cross and held for ransom—for no better reason, apparently, than to comfort our jitters.

The Bible is notoriously intriguing in this respect. In fact, this little expose unravels the Gospels like any good murder mystery—lots of clues and plot twists, even occasional red herring thrown in. However, this work is not a “who done it” so much as a “*why* do it”? The motive for the murder smacks of an alibi that won’t hold up. For best results, consider other leads. One cannot settle for what was said but must read between the lines to find what has been left out, what these scriptures *really* mean. This takes a little interpretation. Therefore, this work is relevant not only to all Christians but Jews, or anyone else wondering what all the fuss is about. No doubt, there are many who suspect something is surely amiss.

Like any good prophecy, the purpose of this essay is simple enough: rebuke questionable tenets. More, the idea is to clarify two topics of great interest to people around the world—*Christ and Creator*—showing thereby how their relationship to God remains poorly understood. Yet, a far more coherent picture of God, Christ, and Creator is possible. Although the prospects for accomplishing such a task might seem precarious, this work shows it can be done. It just requires a willingness to think outside the box. In doing so, an unprecedented blessing is offered to the Christian religion.

INTRODUCTION

God is love. Perhaps that is one religious sentiment about which we can all agree. And, if so, it just might provide the common ground upon which we can have an open and frank discussion about the true nature of God. Jesus speaks admiringly of love and God's divine state this way: "He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.... God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (*I Jn* 4:8, 16). That is, not only is love the essential nature of God but each of us is intimately related to that love. This account of Divine Love illustrates Christianity's resplendent offering to humanity, underscoring its enduring value for the world.

For many, things just can't get any better than this. Yet, God has a terrible problem in this case. But you wouldn't know it at first glance. The dilemma can be put this way, as conceived by a conservative evangelical Christian, Millard J. Erickson: "There is a sense in which the fact that God is love requires that he be more than one person. Love must have both a subject and an object. Thus, prior to the creation of other persons, humans, God could not have really loved, and thus would not have been truly love."

If not for the multiple persons of the Holy Trinity, God would be faced with a difficult prospect: existing all alone within a pre-creation emptiness or void. Or so the argument goes. It is hard to imagine such a dire state, essentially forlorn, suffered for all eternity. Somewhere along the line, the unbearable loneliness and longing for someone to love would surely be overwhelming. At last a choice would have to be made, bringing forth the cosmos and all its host therein. That's how *we* would handle it anyway.

But a strange malady muddies the water in such a case—*God is lonely*—forced to create people, for the sake of having their company. But does that really make sense? How can the defining feature of God be perfect love, if something is required to fulfill it? Yet, something like this must be going on to justify creation. Of course, an alternative is proposed: out of love, God gave people paradise to live in, so long as they exercise free will and obey

properly. But such is a mixed blessing, with countless poor creatures hurled into the gaping maw of hell for bad choices. Moreover, it hardly seems fair. Coming equipped with poor judgment does not suggest defects in the product line nearly so much as manufacturer error. Worse, there is a good chance the antagonist of all this stems from a case of mistaken identity.

The refusal to equate God with Creator was perhaps most prominently proposed during the first centuries following Jesus. Gnostic philosophers read Christian doctrine and were aghast. In their view, the story of creation is not a happy one. At every turn, the world is full of pain, evil, and death. Something must be dreadfully wrong. In a compendium of Gnostic ideas, a pair of discerning editors, Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, make this point: “a distinction must be made between the transcendent, spiritual deity, who is all wisdom and light, and the creator of the world, who is at best incompetent and at worst malevolent.” So much for intelligent design.

This is no small thing. Certain scriptures are profoundly disturbing, reaching far back to their ancient roots in Old Testament Judaism. Take for example a sticky issue that is familiar to most people by the time they reach adolescence, what could rightly be called the paradox of *Unholy Genesis*:

*If God is an All-Powerful, All-Loving Being,
who created all that exists,
how did so much evil come to exist?*

Unholy Genesis is a devastating quandary, for which Christianity simply has no answer. Clearly, maintaining the sanctity of divine love is impossible if continually undermined by a corrosive influx of evil. This impasse represents an intolerable dilemma for Judeo-Christian faith, for which any thoughtful person will want some resolution.

The trouble with Unholy Genesis is most people don't follow the trail to its rightful conclusion. If evil *does* result from a Creator deity, two queasy implications potentially follow:

1. either God is *not* all-powerful, unable to prevent the scurrilous wiles of evil, which apparently has a life of its own; or
2. God is *not* all-loving, willing to stand idly while his beloved creations suffer, even going so far as to damn them in some cases.

Not being all-powerful is no sin, albeit rarely attributed to God. Not being all-loving, on the other hand, is the very essence of sin—the *true nature of the Creator*. This ought to give you pause. If God can't be evil, then the Creator *can't* be God. The error of Unholy Genesis is simple: confusing the Creator for God. However inexplicable, the two are not the same. Some

question if there is, at the heart of reality, a just or loving God. But what they really question is the moral character of the *Creator*—not God. And entirely right to do so. Only one deserves the blame. It's time we got it straight. Creation is simply not God's doing.

Christianity is well known for its hornet's nest of perplexing doctrine. Perhaps it is best to start from the beginning. When the Creator deity was first introduced to the ancient world of the Jewish people, it was really no more than a work in progress, basically a lesser god. However miraculous the pageantry of creation, this god has to work with material that *already* exists. Such is typically referred to as a "Cosmic Egg." This cosmic matter exists in a chaotic and highly agitated state, the dark half of duality. Out of this disturbed state of dark cosmic chaos comes the other half—the Light of an orderly Cosmos, as when God said, "Let there be light." From this divine ground of being, all nations and their cultures eventually emerge. This was a very satisfying account for most people of the time.

Yet, this view kicked up quite a stir, as its implications became better known. At least some early Jews must have been uneasy with this version, certainly in its first rendition. This is not exactly a "get 'er done," "buck stops here" kind of god, which rubs some people the wrong way. After all, if the material god works with already exists, it probably has a life of its own. If so, god is behind the eight ball, perhaps even at the mercy of that dissident material. This frightens some people. And for good reason.

Thus far, no one has resolved the confounding issue of an all-powerful, all-loving deity bringing forth the barren conditions by which evil not only exists but thrives. With the possible exception of a wily little imp, Woody Allen, unafraid to quip: *"I don't think God is evil. The worst you can say is he's an underachiever."* Undeterred by this admittedly irreverent swipe at religion, advocates of creation often insist on an equally impetuous rejoinder: *faith*. Yet, this actually misses the point. Blithely overlooking the implausibility of creation, not to say fallen state cursing human beings, is for many too much to ask. For them, a more coherent account is required.

However, in all likelihood, Woody Allen did not think his whimsical proposal all the way through, being a theologian more by hobby than trade. But it does point us in the right direction. Just ask George Carlin, an even more unforgiving comic: *"This is not good work. Results like these do not belong on the resume of a Supreme Being. This you'd expect from an office temp with a bad attitude."* The issue comes down to a certain kind of image, that paints the Creator into an unflattering corner: harried parent tagging haplessly along behind their disobedient children, to no avail, trying desperately to get their unruly creation to behave.

Looking for an upgrade, some Jews found favor in the Savior, imposed on to fulfill the function that God was apparently unable to manage on his

own—take care of us properly, for the sake of our salvation. Likewise, the culminating version of Creator was at last proposed too, with all elements finally in place: *ex nihilo*. This represents the most abstract effort of all, with creation coming abruptly into being from absolute nothingness. This was a remarkable feat, unimaginable to earlier people. The astonishing prowess of the vision was quite intimidating, even for the people of its own era, despite the promise of sacred fulfillment. After all, you could be blotted *out* of existence just as easily. Nonetheless, at least now the Lord God had some sovereignty over the cosmic materials. That was a big relief.

The sudden appearance of human beings, the Earth, and all the cosmos is accomplished by a supreme deity. But all is still not well, for a dismal side-effect accompanies it: evil. Now comes the price for full authority—*responsibility*. God has to own up to what he has done. Yet, the idea of mixing good and evil together as attributes of God is so awful it cannot be taken seriously. Since God can't be evil, the solution is obvious: attribute evil to a different source—all the better, one that only exists in opposition to goodness: Satan, or the devil, the epitome of evil.

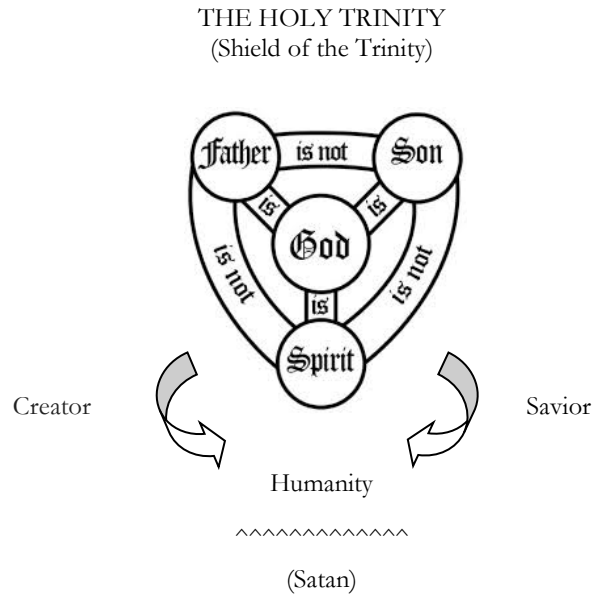
But that doesn't solve the problem. Upgraded to supreme being, there is no going back to the frailty of a lesser deity. God remains the source of Satan—and, therefore, the source of evil—precisely for engaging in the role of Creator. Free will doesn't solve the problem either. Not if God has set things up so people make poor choices. In that case, the house always wins. Unless pretty good at the game, the odds are stacked against us. Too bad that some go bust. Not surprising, from here things start to go haywire, requiring certain final flourishes. As mentioned, these poor creatures are flawed by an inherent tendency for evil. Or else an external mischievous force shows up to lead them astray. Either way, a difficult battle between good and evil ensues. In the bleak course of this terrible struggle, alas, evil prevails. As a result, the innocence of humanity is corrupted.

The reaction of the *ex nihilo* Creator is surprisingly similar across cultures. A catastrophe of some kind is sent into the world, for the sake of purging its creation of evil. A flood is the most common means by which this purification is done. At least some people are saved for the chance of continuing the project of paradise botched by the original pair. Although this sanction destroys most of the offending creatures, others are spared, for the sake of making amends and getting it right this time. The retribution stipulated by this decree concerns Old Testament atonement. From this comes the laws that humans have worked out in the aftermath of the divine holocaust, making sure nothing like that ever happens again.

Yet, by this calamity, humanity is essentially given a second chance. In this sense, then, creation occurs twice—the first primordially, the second redemptively...born-again as it were. Therefore, *ex nihilo* models provide

not only an account of the arrival of human beings on Earth and original sin bringing forth the Fall of Man but also the redemptive intercession for this dire condition. In this way, we are finally restored to our rightful place in creation—as epitomized in the New Testament with Christ.

These relations have traditionally been depicted this way:



Such is the final template of the Holy Trinity anyway, even if consensus among Christians on this point is hard to find. Nevertheless, Christianity is usually distinguished by the presence of a Savior God, existing in some way alongside the Creator God, both opposing the surly bane of humanity—Satan—tempting the unwary toward disaster. As a result, the Holy Trinity became the primary means for atonement of sin in Western civilization. It is by these means that we offset the evil wiles of the devil.

Jesus’ own views on this matter, however, are different, as well as other claims made about him after his lifetime. An unsurpassed nondual sage who lived in our time, Avatar Adi Da Samraj, speaks in behalf of the message about Divine Reality given by this remarkable spiritual master:

The “God”-idea of Jesus is the idea of the Divine As Spirit (or Spirit-Breath) “inside” (and, thus, Prior to) both the “world” and the human psycho-physical form. That is to say, As Spirit the Divine Is

the Prior Reality, and, As Such, not “Creator” (or “Cause”)—but, rather, the Divine Spirit Is Source and Refuge.

Even among the Christian faithful outdated views are losing credibility and called into question. Progressive Christians especially are faced with the difficult prospect of deciding how to feel about ideas/ideals inherited from ancient people long since passed, living life under circumstances scarcely imaginable now. What might have made sense centuries ago is exceedingly hard to accept today. Contemporary Christians are finding that even core beliefs must go by the wayside, forced to make honest decisions about what is really true. Many are coming to surprising conclusions.

A perhaps unexpected source of inspiration comes from a Progressive Christian musician, Bryan A. Sirchio, who, in order to explain why the lyrics of certain hymns are no longer suitable, lists these obsolete beliefs:

1. **Penal Substitution Atonement:** Jesus being punished by God so that we don't have to is neither necessary nor healthy.
2. **Blood Sacrifice Theology:** taking life is subtraction, not addition.
3. **Being Saved from Hell:** the primary reason to believe in Christ is not to avoid the fires of hell but fulfill God's grace.
4. **Escaping from this World:** social justice here and now is better.
5. **Jesus the Only Way to God:** inclusivity rather than exclusivity.

Progressive Christians are now rallying around a very challenging set of imperatives. Despite a shared historical privilege, some Christians have been more “chosen” than others, which is ever harder to tolerate. Advocates of Progressive Christianity mostly take issue with the “demographic” plight of marginalized people (women, ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged, homosexuals), treated shabbily by Christian institutions historically.

But a “denominational” plight also exists, requiring correction too. This not only allows the sublime wisdom from other spiritual traditions to flow into an otherwise austere religious environment but from saints and mystics within Christianity's *own* tradition as well. There have been many sons and daughters of God. Other spiritual masters have been overlooked in favor of an elitism that has cost Christianity far more than it ever brought about in benefits. All of these issues cry out for closer examination.

Summarizing the entirety of Christian argument is beyond the scope of this primer. Instead, this essay focuses on the core of Christian doctrine and how Jesus Christ has gotten lost in the shuffle of atonement, in the end usurped by an imposter: *Jesus Cross*. The idea is to show how we got here, the reduction of Christ to cross. And more, to inspire a *radical* reformation of Christianity, restoring at last the true nature of Christ to his religion.

CHAPTER 1: CHRIST AS CROSS

Anyone exposed to Christianity is confronted with a gnarly mass of doctrines, so much so many throw up their hands and wonder why bother. Nowhere is this more the case than with the core scripture of Christianity: *atonement*. Interestingly, this theological term is one of the few that are entirely indigenous to the English language and refers to a reconciled state of “at-oneness” between parties formerly alienated in some way. In other words, atonement is an attempt at *reunion* between God and humanity, a spiritual state more intimate than mere obligation and obedience to authority, as originally the case with redemptive rites—such as Old Testament covenant.

The question for atonement is how much oneness is possible for humans and God. A sensitive and highly respected transpersonal psychologist, Michael Washburn, sums up the issue: “Eastern thought stresses nonduality and self-transcendence through enlightenment, and most of Western thought stresses duality and self-transcendence through restored or redeemed relationship.” To put it somewhat differently, whereas Christian redemption focuses on at-onement (and social morality), nondualism advocates at-*One*-ment (including even mystical ascent)—not merely living in right relationship to God but actually *being* God. In the end, no incompatibility need be assigned to either approach, which fit together like hand in glove. (For more on the spiritual tradition of nondualism and how it relates to God and Creator, see *Chapter 3*.)

The focus of this little homily is on Christ, although not necessarily in the way you might think. The whole point is to update the story of Christianity for contemporary people. The issue comes down to this: how to make sense of the endless varieties of atonement sprinkled throughout Christian dogma, a loosely knit group of ideas seemingly held together by little more than band-aids and bubble gum. Most views of atonement merely list the various versions, as if they emerged haphazardly, without rhyme or reason. However, this creates a false picture. There actually is a coherent story to Christian atonement. It just takes a little digging to get at it. All you have to do is follow the clues.

Atonement is essentially an act of contrition. It begins with a problem—sin and suffering—and sets out to determine a solution. Unfortunately, each solution ends up inadequate in some way and becomes, therefore, a further problem, obliging early Christians and Jews to scramble around for suitable inspiration. Each entry to the evolving litany requires ever more ingenuity and embellishment. Yet, in the end, no amount of jerry-rigging can suffice. Human sacrifice, like a screwdriver, will simply not start your car.

The Christian Gospels are, for all intents, a murder mystery, full of murky suspects and nothing is ever what it seems. More, we already *know* “who done it.” It’s the *motive* that doesn’t make sense. To narrow down leads, start here: “*Who* benefits most?” Of particular interest is how New Testament atonement shape-shifts from the Old Testament. These bookends involve the way each approaches ritual sacrifice: the sinner submitting burnt offerings to God to God suddenly taking human form and suffering to *be* the burnt offering. That really flips things, the rationale for which usually put along these lines:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. (*Rom* 3:23-26)

Therefore, we are thought to owe allegiance to Jesus, primarily for his benevolent role in offsetting this abject chain of events. It is precisely this gesture on our behalf that distinguishes Christianity for its followers: “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (*Jn* 3:16). It is generally thought no greater love exists than the sacrifice of one’s own life for others, propelling Christianity to its preeminent position as a doctrine of love.

Technically, four parts spell out the equation of Jesus’ noble gesture: 1) agonizing death upon the cross, 2) done out of supreme love, 3) intended for our sake, 4) with salvation the result. The great appeal of Christianity stems from this sequence, each part compelling in its own way. Yet, the equation also has an interesting character—the first part generally thought to be indisputable, the middle two parts regarded as absolute indicators of unsurpassed love, the final part mired in controversy relative to any possible legitimacy, given the actual nature of spiritual reality. It is the middle two parts that people find so moving, endearing Jesus to the world.

But is it a given that these *are* indicators of supreme love? What if the final part turns out to be based on false hope, blatantly unattainable? Does

this negate the middle two parts? Hard to say. Either way, the importance of Jesus' last acts on Earth is far more demanding than the brute fact of his demise. He showed us *how* to die. More to the point, he showed us how to *live*. But is the loss of life really a measure of that? Other contingencies perhaps deserve priority. What about giving your *entire* life for the sake of others? Such as a poor, single parent slaving away at several jobs to provide a decent life for their family and raising their children to be happy, healthy adults. How is *that* not a good model for love? The real import of Jesus' life can be seen in his demonstration and it's moral influence on others.

Moreover, the significance of Jesus' death is overstated anyway, his last days of torment hardly a drop in the bucket really. After all, prisoners of war might spend *years* suffering agonizing torture, incarcerated under the worst conditions a human being could possibly endure, refusing to give in so that they do not betray their people. Every war produces a slew of heart-warming, albeit gut-wrenching reports of soldiers making the exact same gesture as Jesus for the sake of comrades. It happens back here at home too, in the gritty street life of impoverished neighborhoods, where families try to save one another from crime. Indeed, it could happen anywhere.

The uniqueness of Jesus' torment must be seen in the context of the bigger picture too. Consider those iconic Buddhist monks who, protesting the Vietnam War, poured gasoline all over themselves and then, meditating serenely, lit themselves on fire to condemn the unholiness of war. It is not the political commentary of their compassion that stands out so much as the beatitude of their spiritual capacity. Only by being utterly immersed in divine rapture can one tolerate such a painful ordeal—much less serve that realization in others. Jesus was never alone in this regard.

And that is not the least of the exaggeration. In all honesty, what difference would it make to kill the body? It is designed to die eventually anyway. That makes the crucifixion of Jesus essentially redundant. If Jesus' death is what God *really* wanted, all he had to do was wait a few more years. In truth, the cross is a minor element in the profound sacrifice that is Jesus' *entire life*, a final, regrettable footnote, ultimately appropriated by St. Paul and set to very different purposes than intended by Jesus. No matter how moving the crucifixion, it is his life that has spiritual implications, not his death. Accolades of Jesus' dispatch are marred by poor judgment on our part. Not only is the act ineffective to its purpose, but one has to wonder how much spiritual blessing has actually been squandered in the process, denying Jesus the opportunity to serve humanity further. Not to say every other spiritual master, too, the service of whom equally worthy.

The purpose of New Testament atonement is to be a bridge to God, as solemnly performed by Jesus, fulfilling his human destiny to be slain on the cross. Yet, despite reverence for this particular person, human sacrifice has

been disparaged historically. Even among the Christian faithful, starting midway in the Middle Ages, the exploitation of his death has been thought appalling. For example, a scandalous medieval scholar, Abelard, lamented that the act resulting in salvation is so vile, one can't help but wonder what *further* sacrifice has to be offered to atone for its sin in turn. Obviously, any plan to end killing *with* killing isn't going to end well.

Some wonder if the cross implies a passive tolerance for violence, even glorifying suffering as a necessary precursor for forgiveness. It certainly seems to endorse the idea that murder is OK. At the very least negotiable. After all, an acceptable rationale can be made for killing even God. In that case, nobody is ever really safe. Some go so far as to claim a father hanging his son from a cross to die is child abuse, perhaps justifying mistreatment of this kind by earthly fathers. Ironically, if this sacrament did not involve the Son of God, such sentiments would likely be shared by all Christians, given the contempt with which human sacrifice is generally held.

Intercession of Redemption

The great impact of Christianity rests upon the manner in which it resolves certain issues thought to be of enormous importance to people. It is within the otherwise resplendent circumstances of the Garden of Eden that lies the inception of sin, the intrusion of evil, and humanities headlong propulsion into misery. Unfortunately, Old Testament scripture offers no recourse for original sin, or the Fall of Man. This simply has to be suffered, at best subject to the mercy of God's forgiveness. Further, the counter to the Fallen Angel, or Satan, by whose temptation we are continually put at risk, features a spiritual practice no longer in favor: the ritual sacrifice of animals, or "burnt offerings." This spiritual machinery was deemed insufficient even in its day. Accompanying these rites was a complicated regime of social sacraments (such as Golden Rule, Ten Commandments), whereby one might shore up their good intentions, induced to live a life of moral righteousness.

Ideas of atonement did not start with the cross but have a long history, involving a labyrinth of many twists and turns. Offsetting the trammels of evil was always a prime concern of ancient people. Originally, atonement was done a certain way, for the sake of ensuring purity in the community temple. The impurity corrupting ancient temples had to be regularly cleansed, or the gods would depart. In the scapegoat ritual, a common animal—most likely goat—was ritualistically infused with the taint of the congregation's unwelcome sin. Then the bewildered animal would be set loose to wander the countryside, perhaps to the realm of Azazel, a wilderness demon. In the natural course of events it would be eventually killed and devoured in the sinners' place, the foulness of their unholy transgressions consumed by the unwitting predator at the same time it gobbled up the poor animal's hide.

More sophisticated versions of atonement soon made an appearance in Old Testament scripture, fulfilling two common, albeit regrettable social obligations: paying off the balance of an overdue bill and serving out the sentence of a crime; the vicarious point of burnt offerings all along. But God dealt with this in a peculiar manner: turning the outstanding invoices over to a demonic bill collector—Satan—allowing God to wash his hands of the entire affair. In this way, Satan became the sole arbitrator of evil and God the paragon of virtue and good. At the end of life, one's payments are consulted to determine how much their debt has been paid down—leading either to heaven or hell, depending on the balance due. And Satan is always there at the end, determined to collect. As no doubt obvious, this is something of a wayward accountant's view of eternal life.

Sadly, this bargain put into play unwanted implications for atonement, whereby authority over human beings was invested in Satan, since people were sold into his receivership by virtue of sin, forced to work off their debt not through toil but an eternity of torment in hell (jail). As can be seen, a gangster mentality is introduced into the Old Testament with this proviso, making thugs breaking knee caps in the course of their collections pale in comparison. This scenario can also be understood as a gigantic panorama of warfare, instead of the more pedestrian, judicial struggle of cops and robbers, played out on a cosmic stage between forces of good and evil—pitting God and the host of angels against Satan and his minions. Certainly, this starkly captures the politics familiar to the people of biblical times, as the vast empires of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia charged relentlessly across the landscape. Why not in the cosmos too?

Yet, even as this upgrade of Old Testament atonement principles was worked out for the sake of the Hebrew people, the entire ancient world continued to rely on more familiar religious rites. The rationale of blood sacrifice is fairly simple, operating on behalf of primitive economics: *sacrifice one life, so that all might benefit*. Indeed, the more the merrier in some cases. Over time, the logic became understood this way: *somebody* has to bleed—so long as they are not *me*. The perfect sacrifice is one most pure, without any mark or stain of defilement. After all, it wouldn't pay to haggle with God on this score, not with hell hanging in the balance.

Historically, blood sacrifices have always been the gold standard for supplicating God's favor, well before the introduction of Judeo-Christian metaphysics. In our era, however, emptying a goat or bull of its precious fluid couldn't possibly be taken seriously as a real means for influencing life events, as it was in those days. What could possibly have made these rituals seem coherent to ancient people? The answer is clear enough: the womb of the earth clamors for blood to serve as fertilization, precisely because blood *is* life. Corpses and slaughter are merely a means to this end. A resourceful

depth psychologist, Erich Neumann, offers this penetrating account: “We misunderstand these rites if we call them cruel. For the early cultures, and even for the victims themselves, this sequence of events was necessary and self-evident. The shedding of blood was originally a sacred act.”

Far back as any spiritual tradition can be traced, well into the primordial reaches of our human ancestry, the Great Mother was the deity to appease. What greater possession might a person have during agrarian times, so closely tied to the earth of herding and harvest, than blood to offer up as an investment in exchange for the future, ensuring precious returns? Despite any innocence lost in the shift from Great Mother to Holy Father, the urgency of this relationship continued to make its point with early Hebrew theologians: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life” (*Lev 17:11*).

However, Old Testament atonement was tricky, for an unanticipated problem soon revealed itself. Because it was humans who incurred the debt, it only makes sense that a human had to pay it off. But this is easier said than done. *God* must square the tab, precisely because he is the only one with funds adequate to do so. Even if we sinned no more from this point on, that atonement would only pay off the *interest*, so to speak, without making a dent in the principle that is previous sin, not least of which is the bulk of the debt—original sin. The hurdle comes down to scarce resources.

God is in a good position to be so magnanimous, precisely because of his role relative to the debt: *owner of the business*. Therefore, atonement is for all intents a marketplace, bought and sold through blood, wiping the debt clean with forgiveness. Yet, if God did intervene, remittance must happen *as if* by humans, so as to not undermine our responsibilities with a sense of having gotten away with anything. All things considered, a sinless human would be preferred; even better, one born specifically for that purpose. A number of Old Testament scriptures seem to foreshadow the crucifixion of Jesus, for the sake of fulfilling his sacrificial duty, most notably Isaiah 53, establishing the brutal act as a deliverance sanctioned by ancient law.

Still, these foreshadowings were just that, mere hints at the radical new strategy by which God incarnated to directly help human beings settle their accounts. The New Testament offers striking refinement, focusing not on sinners but savior. This is usually called the *penal substitution* model. The idea is the same as any criminal proceedings: punish the guilty party. It’s just a question of *who* that is. To put it more plainly, a loophole was allowed. In the ordinary course of affairs, criminals were let off the hook, so long as they found someone else to pay the debt. Punishment by proxy, as it were. For example, you could get a family member or close friend to pony up, not to say a slave or indentured servant, if you were that fortunate.

The cleverness of this idea is overshadowed only by its sheer audacity. Up to this point it never occurred to anyone that it was possible for a proxy to stand in for the *entire human race*. But its liabilities were soon revealed. In such a case, Jesus only ends up an escape valve for humanity, absorbing our sins as a kind of cosmic disposal unit, something like a kidney machine. Therefore, lest Jesus' act of generosity unfairly make him out to be merely a casualty, the sacrifice was upgraded to more than penance paid, in fact, something truly laudable: final, ultimate victory over the despised Satan, unthinkable previously. *That* certainly helped calm everybody down.

But human sacrifice is a unique kind of murder, with its own rules and motives. By the sacrament of Old Testament law, God has no right to just *steal* souls away from Satan. Consequently, he is forced to *buy* them back, with blood, emphasizing the role of the court and judicial system in the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion. Such legalities took place not only here on Earth, as Jesus was impaled on the cross, but also in metaphysics, where the balancing of the ledger which his sacrifice represents is ultimately written: "God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (*Col* 2:13-14).

Again, as can be seen, this approach to atonement draws heavily from the wayward accountant and gangster motif, whereby humanity is rescued at last from Satan's nefarious, underworld clutches. In fact, Christ's defeat of Satan was even understood as his own descent into hell—"For Christ also died for sins once for all...being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey" (*1 Pet* 3:18-20)—only to rise again from the dead, empowered thereby to free souls who had until then been languishing in the nether regions. Through Christ's proxy came their pardons.

Yet, in so doing, things begin to get out of hand. It starts to look like God was beholden *to* Satan, essentially bargaining with a criminal. But just at their most grim, the tables are turned. This approach to atonement is sometimes referred to as the *ransom theory*. A clever means to get at the nuances of atonement is put together by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, in which a panel of theologians discuss the pros and cons of the four main versions of potential redemption. Overall, several elements characterize this particular option, including the move known as *Christus Victor*:

- (1) Satan gained mastery over humanity when the first couple chose the path of sin in the garden. Satan retains this hold on humanity through the powers of the kingdom of darkness (sin, fear, death, etc.).
- (2) Through death, Jesus' innocent life became the ransom price that was acceptable to Satan for the liberation/redemption of

humanity. (3) Finally, the ransom theory typically emphasizes that Christ's victory was achieved by outwitting the devil.

In other words, the point of Jesus' sacrifice was to take Satan "down with him," something like a sting operation. With this subterfuge, Satan is hoodwinked into extorting payment from an innocent, thereby securing his culpability and rendering the contract void—implying thereby that the devil is bound by the same virtue as humans, surely a contradiction in terms. Or at least obliged to the original contract which God devised when collections were first assigned to him. In this way, ideas of Roman legal proceedings were likewise introduced into atonement historically—which, unfortunately, don't appear to have slowed Satan down a whit.

The victory of Christ over Satan was popular for several centuries after Jesus' crucifixion. God shows his satisfaction for this vicarious payment by raising Jesus from the dead. Through this theme an intriguing attempt to absolve God of unsavory vice was also put forth: sparing us God's wrath, by focusing on his love...which is intended to free us from the devil's own wrath. Yet, this sleight of hand is a bit obvious, in that Satan's obligation to fulfill the law is passed on to him from God in the first place. After all, Satan is essentially in God's employ, however much like an undercover agent, operating in the guise of a cosmic bill collector (or loan shark)—a particularly zealous creditor in fact, if not predator outright.

Many questions come from this. First of all, what made shame and torment in eternal damnation a fitting penalty for humanity's disobedience? The entire dynamic of Judeo-Christian atonement rests on this premise, which appears a bit over-wrought at first glance, something like a wrecking ball applied to an illegally parked car. You have to wonder why so much negative attention is directed to insolence. Of course, being omnipotent, God has the right to set the scale any way he wants. Even so, it starts to look like a power struggle with the terrible twos. Eternal damnation? Is that not a tad over-reactive? Without possibility of rehabilitation? God appears to hold his creations to higher standards than expected of himself.

It is precisely because of his uncompromising compassion that Jesus was thought instrumental as a blood sacrifice, exemplifying the virtue of a sinless life—from which it seems God could learn something. Yet, at no point does Jesus give any indication that his ordeal upon the cross was spiritually significant or served to offer salvation. Jesus' entire ministry took place without the cross. Such was attributed to these events later, long after he had passed from the scene and could no longer speak for himself.

Progressive Christians have come to appreciate the shortcomings of this approach. From their point of view, two liabilities stand out in the original version of atonement: 1) we are by nature sinners, tainted from the

start with original sin, 2) deserving punishment therefore, even to the point of eternal damnation. Progressive Christians claim both provisions must be taken off the table, citing that at the very least they lack credibility, given no evidence of either hell or Adam and Eve exists. Worse, these accounts enable more sinful violence than they ever cure. In fact, they stand in staunch opposition to any sign Jesus displayed during his ministry. It is hard to imagine why his death would turn out to be an absolute contradiction of his life. Must Christ conform to Old Testament virtues?

Indeed, human sacrifice has an astounding hold even on minds as open as Progressive Christians, against all odds trying to salvage some remnant of the Savior. But focusing on those aspects of scripture that might work out for salvation is common enough. A prolific and insightful commentator of Christianity, Bart Ehrman, traces this approach to its beginnings:

As an apocalypticist Paul knew that the cosmic force of sin was present in this world, but he came to believe that Christ's death had conquered the power of sin. For Paul, Jesus' resurrection showed beyond any doubt that Jesus was no longer subject to the power of death, the most dreaded of all cosmic forces of evil. Jesus had conquered death through his resurrection. Furthermore, Jesus' victory can lead to the salvation of others. That is to say, a person can participate with Christ in his victory (Rom 6:5-8). A person participates in this victory by being united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

But *how*? Apparently, belief in Jesus provides the means, fulfilling the bargain God offers—in a sense invoking privilege through RSVP. You can ensure a place in line just by accepting the invitation, so long as you fulfill the fine print (faith), gaining admittance to life everafter in heaven. Sounds simple. But does this actually work? By what mechanism might it occur? It is merely presumed, no matter how intuitively and profoundly gratifying.

Needless-to-say, just liking something hardly makes it true. Yet, *without* such metaphysics, where would we be? At the mercy of sin, apparently. Unless, things really aren't as destitute as they are made out. Perhaps God's love *isn't* at risk after all. Indeed, the original teachings of Jesus are far more aligned to nondualism than the metaphysics that St. Paul introduced later, serving primarily to appeal to the gentiles of the larger Hellenistic world. To clarify, Adi Da describes Jesus' own position on the matter: "Jesus heartily proclaimed that we are all inherently intimate with God. He did not at all subscribe to the view that living beings are inherently evil or inherently separated from God"—thereby pulling the plug on original sin, unraveling the premise for atonement from the beginning.

The Suffering/Salvation Creed

Whether the cross is abhorrent or an abomination against God is not really the issue under consideration. The mystery is how Jesus has gotten lost in the shuffle, obscured through the lens of centuries of interpretations layered on after the fact. Indeed, Jesus was turned *into* Christ, via the cross. This usurpation is so complete that the two are typically thought the same, the cross so identified with Jesus he can scarcely be imagined without it. But how did such a thing happen? Who would *do* that to Jesus!? It seems good to determine how something so unseemly was ever found acceptable, teasing out at last the details of what is essentially an act of identity theft.

The Roman Jew, Paul of Tarsus, was the first to widely promote the idea of salvation, inspiration for which taking place en route to Damascus, ironically enough, on a mission in behalf of Orthodox Judaism—to quell the upstart Christ worshipers. On the way, he was met by an intense vision, which converted his intention to persecute these newly formed Christian Jews to one in which he ended up promulgating their mission, albeit significantly altered by this epiphany. What began as a mere happenstance of arising from the dead, reported by a few of Jesus' followers, now became the promise of eternal redemption. Indeed, the crucifixion was more than just plea-bargained to a lesser charge but fully reclaimed and exonerated, becoming its divine derivative: *justifiable homicide*. By way of this ingenuity, rather than swept up in an unruly blight of sin, humans found themselves safely on the receiving end of salvation, no matter how inexplicable and unwitting. That really put a spin on things.

Nonetheless, it was easily accomplished, for Jesus was in death, first and foremost, a martyr, a position in society highly admired by the Judaism of his day. Parents *hoped* for as much for their children. Still, this couldn't have happened all at once. Salvation would have seemed out of place and oddly macabre at first. A nagging question would surely have risen: Why didn't Jesus *stay* buried? If a sacrifice had been made, as all knew, well-being was ensured. Why wasn't that enough? Martyrdom sustained piety and sacred meaning, according to time-honored practices of atonement. What would be the point of digging up the corpse in that case?

To put it simply, in the direct wake of his death, no one thought of the crucifixion as a human sacrifice yet, sanctifying Jesus' brutal passing as "good news." In fact, such a notion would have struck most people as indecent and not overlaid on top until much later. Instead, a devastating reality was staring them in the face: *God is dead!* Forget absolution. Forced upon these people was a heinous and incomprehensible deed. Their most precious possession had just been summarily destroyed. Unless...Jesus did not actually die. Many factors suggest people were more than willing to believe the invention of an even outrageous myth.

Eye-witness accounts would have been enormously appealing to the followers of Jesus, still struggling to make sense of this hideous turn of events in which their beloved spiritual master was so abruptly lost, unjustly draped upon the cross. It was common for the Jews of this time to take an apocalyptic future to heart, convinced the end was at hand and the dead would be resurrected and judged; the righteous enjoying eternal blessings, while the wicked and unrepentant would be damned, forced to endure a ghastly round of penance. Such ideas were inevitable, even welcome among the Jewish faith. How strange for these Jews if they were to appear now, only to discover how little their beliefs had to do with the way things turned out. (Unless the apocalypse actually *has* been going on, all this time.)

Other factors must also be added into the mix. For example, if Jesus was indeed the incarnation of God, then the gravest travesty of human history had just been perpetrated. This had to give them pause. How could his disciples simply walk away from this grievous deed, knowing the crime for what it was? Perhaps more to the point, the outcome must have seemed exceedingly baffling, given Jesus' divine state. How *could* the Supreme Being end up so frail!? The murder had to have been acutely felt, perhaps even complicated by issues of the disciples' own complicity. For not coming forward to save him, their role as accomplices must have been called into question. They might have thought the fate of their own souls was on the line. Obviously, to turn an enormity of this magnitude around, something pretty exceptional would be needed.

On the trail to quell the Christ worshippers, St. Paul must surely have been puzzled, the once familiar landscape of the Jewish faith irrevocably altered—progressing first from Moses to Jesus, then from Jesus to Christ:

1. *atonement and morality*: the mercy of law and obedience (an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth) given over to the embrace of forgiveness and charity (turn the other cheek and love your enemies); and
2. *ascension and mysticism*: the loss and abject humiliation coming from the crucifixion gratefully relieved by the resurrection and ascension, cementing Jesus' spiritual stature as Christ.

Yet, the sheer sting of execution persisted, spreading its unsavory blemish to the Jewish people, Jesus' holy ministry buckled by the brunt of this deed. There *had* to be more to the story. According to legend, St. Paul's epiphany knocked him to the ground from his stead. By the time he picked himself back up and dusted off, the Jewish landscape was irrevocably altered once again, adding his name to the pantheon of prophets. Jesus was swallowed up by this new version of Christ, miraculously transformed thereby into an unheard of heathen idol—*Jesus Cross*.

That is, keeping with precedence, from Christ to cross:

3. *ancient ritual and magic*: a secular murder implausibly sanctified by archaic principles of human sacrifice, not only appeasing the atrocity but even offering solace for something hitherto beyond the reach of human redemption—original sin.

Whereas Christ offered a profound spiritual revelation, the cross was regressive, a throw-back to an obsolete religious rite even older than Moses, a heady brew of primitive magical thinking still wildly popular among the Roman citizenry—nevermind spiritually defunct.

Crazy as it sounds, cozying up to this ritual is the same as currying favor from a mob boss. Profiting from murder is the least of it. Loyalty is expected, yet, nothing but selective empathy, taking care of your own and to hell with everybody else. Literally. The whole point of the cross is *your* gain, but at what cost? The cross is a *crime*. Killing is what it *does*. The cross is killing Christ even *now*—replacing him with an imposter. Although this ruse does serve the public interest, not only keeping unruly criminals from getting out of hand but mobs running amok in public, Jews from a previous era knew better. As God spoke to Abraham, about to take the life his own son: “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him” (*Gen 22:12*). It appears St. Paul did not get the memo, where God makes it clear the slaying of a son does not meet with his approval.

The cross was not Jesus’ idea either. Still, it must be said that, with salvation, St. Paul has fashioned the single most compelling construct of heroism ever attempted. His protagonist paid the highest price, giving all for the sake of others—without actually dying. Well, he *did* die, for our sins; but *didn’t* die, really, for he survived. The resurrection is the proof. Indeed, dying for our sins was not possible *until after* firmly established Jesus was no longer dead. Clearly, St. Paul wanted it both ways. Apart from issues of Christ’s eternal state, does it really make sense to say that someone “died” after waking from a three-day coma? A near-death experience is usually what we call that, which may have been unknown in those days. Ironically, resurrection is simply what you get when you *try* to kill God.

Heroes are champions, greatly admired in the Roman world, receiving the highest benediction and praise. A dynamic existential writer, Earnest Becker, cuts to the chase: “The hero was the man who could go into the spirit world, the world of the dead, and return alive. These cults were an attempt to attain ‘an immunity bath’ from the greatest evil: death and the dread of it.” The aura of the hero represented something indispensable to the people of this era. In death, Christ became the heroic, if suffering messiah, imbued via the resurrection what Jesus would never accept during

life. New Testament Christians often embraced a secret admiration for such messianic tenets, holding out hope for the second coming of Jesus and Judgment Day, as foretold in the final book of the Bible. Such ideas were a crucial unguent holding the faithful together during the harried, difficult days following the demise of their beloved spiritual leader, not to say the disheartening times of persecution in its wake. Yet, nevermind the comfort offered to these people, all this bore only faint resemblance to Jesus.

Early on, it was apparent to the Church Fathers that a ticklish problem plagued their suffering/salvation creed: If Jesus wasn't dead, then where *was* he? The ascension proved to be another indispensable move. After all, Christ is God. What better place to put the body? The heavenly abode provides the ultimate habeas corpus. Even if anyone dared to present a subpoena, how could they possibly collect? The Church had an answer meticulously prepared for everybody. Christ not only spares humanity from the atrocity of sin but in the cosmically most significant manner possible—leading followers into heaven, to be with God. To the average citizen of the Roman era, things just couldn't get any better than this.

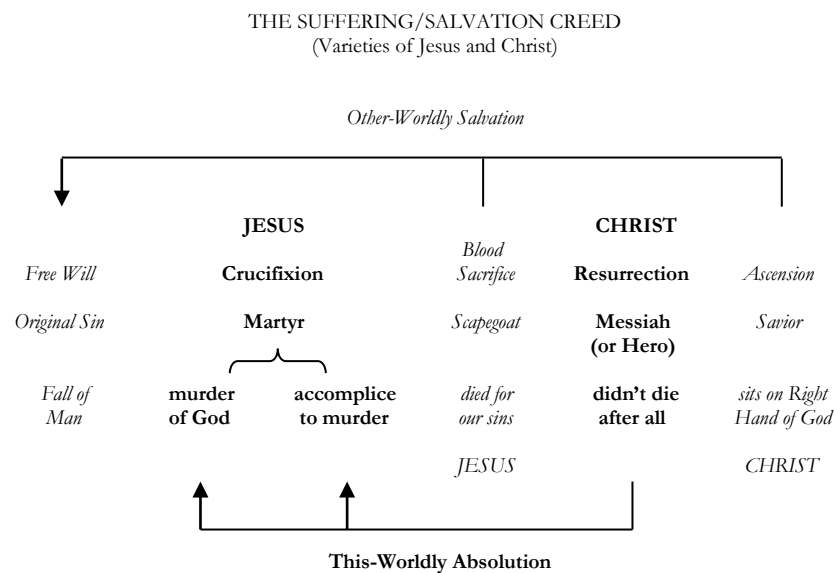
Unfortunately, this proposal is based on cosmological archetypes now lacking any credibility. That is, Jesus supposedly came down from heaven (or stars above the Earth) and rose up into the sky again, back to heaven, after surviving his death. At the time material for the New Testament was being gathered, edited, and even rewritten to become the official religion of the Roman Empire, Church officials believed, or felt sure their followers would believe, this ascension story. To paraphrase the scrappy father of socialism, Karl Marx, religion comes in handy—if an opiate of the masses.

The world was known to be flat in this era, the sky above a crystalline vault or firmament arching resolutely over the Earth, the stars suspended in that translucent ceiling. Once the Church affirmed the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus, an explanation was needed for his absence. Since it was already presumed he was residing in heaven with God spiritually, a means needed to be devised for him to “get” there physically. It is simple logic that, for a physical body to traverse beyond the Earth and stars, it must ascend through the sky. However, this only makes sense to a naïve worldview. Like the startling discovery that the Earth was not the center of the universe, modern astronomy has demonstrated no crystalline vault exists, much less heavenly abode within it.

Of course, it is always possible to simply shift gears and reconceive the ascension so that it doesn't require a resurrection of the body. But in that case, the whole premise for salvation based on bodily survival is moot. If St. Paul was not so captivated by blood sacrifice, and intent on finding a use for it, he would surely have noticed the actual virtue of Jesus' death—*spiritual* sacrifice—as also the case while alive. Giving one's life for others is

only of interest to *humans*, not God, to whom such a gesture is meaningless. Christ is divine, eternal being, merely taking human form momentarily for the sake of those on Earth. It is because of our egoic state that we end up identifying with the body-mind, to the point that its loss is thought to be an unfathomable calamity. But for Jesus, things are very different than that. The body passing would be incidental, of no greater concern than shedding skin. Christian doctrine simply does not tell God’s side of the story.

By the time St. Paul put the final touches on his questionable upgrade of Jesus and Christ, many layers were factored in, mixed and matched for any audience. This sprawling collage of doctrines addresses a variety of concerns, outlined as follows:



The Christian message seems to rest on a split personality: whereas Jesus was crucified, Christ was resurrected—the one fallen, the other risen. The two are not the same, the unlikely paradox of which yet unresolved. Despite the fact that Jesus was made out a martyr, only to be overlaid with blood sacrifice later, Christ emerged a savior and messiah, delivering his people (ala Moses) to the Promised Land. For early Christians, at least *some* reason existed for the abysmal act, all the better, one divinely inspired—not merely justifiable homicide but redemption into the bargain. In the ancient world, contradictions such as these were common and easy to overlook, assuaged primarily by consolation, still compelling to some even today.

CHAPTER 2: CHRIST AS CREATOR

The New Testament makes an extraordinary claim, a striking innovation even at the time: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (*Jn* 1:1-4). Of course, two problems stand out: 1) the paradox of *being* God and *with* God at the same time, and 2) the necessity of God being Creator, allowing Christ to be Creator too. Either way has issues. Indeed, both are better understood this way: *Christ is not Creator so much as simply the first to be created.*

The term “Word” is a translation of a Greek word, *logos*, which had a lengthy history even in ancient philosophy. On a mundane level, *logos* could apply to ordinary cognitive faculties, such as reason, learning, imagery, or speech. However, it likewise held a more lofty position inherent to the very structure of reality, providing universal order throughout manifest existence. In this view, *logos* was spiritual in nature, the very essence of divinity or divine intelligence. “Word” was a kind of shorthand for all aspects of mind, especially the way in which mind can imagine something, prior to the creation of it. In fact, the Jewish model of creation has God literally bring all of manifest reality into being merely by saying it should be so, as in proclaiming, “Let there be light.” According to this usage, creation was done by the very impact of God speaking aloud his decree, a power Christ is said to have inherited.

Yet, all this is beside the point, for it actually overlooks an unexpected outcome: *Christ is deeper Self*, the first aspect of self to be created, now existing in the depths of our *own* spiritual being. There are many who share this orientation, as can be seen in the exceptional work of an astute transpersonal psychologist, Stanley Krippner: “an individual’s sense of identity appears to extend beyond its ordinary limits to encompass wider, broader, or deeper aspects of life or the cosmos—including divine elements of creation.” Similarly, a famous humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow, speaks of this state in terms of peak experiences, in which one’s awareness of reality is suddenly heightened and ecstatic encounters with reality begin

to appear, perhaps even including mystical states. An equally engaging humanist, Carl Rogers, feels a transcendent intuition is awakened at such moments, whereby a synergy occurs and one's capacity for healing is enhanced: "my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other. It seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger."

But this greater legacy is not a one-way street, whereby deeper Self imposes on us arbitrarily or with impunity. We *interact* with our deeper Self, although not always with good effect. Despite the inherent intimacy, its confluence can be obstructed. Indeed, the relationship is quite tentative and fragile, usually operating in the safely shrouded domain of unconscious processes. Only enormous strengthening of the two allows the deeper Self to enter into and animate the lower self—at least without undue stress or alarm to the lower self.

To include the sense of deeper Self, interacting with lower self, a term must be introduced whereby the two are conjoined: *S/self*. (It is suggested the S/s sound be pronounced the same way as society, which is especially appropriate given the communal nature of the S/self.) The S/self enjoys a direct connection between deeper Self and lower self. Precisely because the two are in intimate union at all times, their relationship exists at every level of being—even those in which lower self remains unaware of deeper Self. Yet, lower self can know this deeper presence. Lower self is the tip of the iceberg of the whole person, with ever more vast tracts of Self operating within the depths, as traditionally said of soul and spirit—even God.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, depicts the plight of the S/self with the metaphor of a cave. In their ordinary state, human beings are like prisoners chained to the wall of a dark, underground cave. Because of their shackles, they cannot turn to see the light entering the cave from higher up. As objects pass before the light, the prisoners mistake the shadows cast upon the wall for real people. Those fortunate enough to free themselves from their chains make their way through the passageway outside. There they glimpse reality in its true luster. However, Plato also warns to be cautious of the above ground world, for it can overwhelm the senses.

Similarly, the prodigious Christian missionary, St. Paul, claims Jesus was not an ordinary man but living Christ, incarnated for the sake of saving humanity from sin, thereby reconciling us from our desperate falling out with grace. Much of the philosophy espoused by Socrates and Plato found new meaning in this provocative Christian context. Richard Tarnas, in a lucid summary of philosophical ideas, puts it well: "In Christ, the Logos became man: the historical and the timeless, the absolute and the personal, the human and the divine became one. Through this redemptive act, Christ

mediated the soul's access to the transcendent reality. In Christ, heaven and earth were reunited, the One and the many reconciled."

Yet, the sublime state of Christ is not unique; for, after all, *everybody has one*. It's just that Jesus came to realize the totality of his S/self, as also the case with other spiritual masters. And wanted us to do so too. He was not the *only* one to do it, just the *first*...in the West. Come to think of it, he *was* the only one, at least for awhile anyway. Given this, Jesus Christ is not a name so much as a title, or name followed by a title: the immanent human being known as Jesus of Galilee, intimately participating in the spiritual state of transcendent Christ. That is to say, *Jesus' Christ*.

Yet, the Word has even greater implications for creation. An impressive scholar of ancient thought, Thomas McEvilley, summarizes: "Following Plato, Plotinus compares the One to the sun and the process of 'creation' to irradiation of sunlight outward from the sun. As the force of progression proceeds outward from the One, the force of regression increasingly slows its outward flow till it is stabilized at a farthest remove, from which it then flows back." Just as the deeper Self is formed from the substance of Divine Being, the deeper Self likewise generates the lower self in turn. Only in this sense can Christ be thought Creator, passing on the same process initiated by the Creator, something in the way ripples spread across a pond.

Deeper Self is present all along the way, replete with its own personality, looking over your shoulder even now as you read this passage. Who knows what tendrils flow behind the infant entering the world, residue from past lives, carried forward within the deeper Self's memory. As the visionary poet, William Wordsworth, claims: "Not in entire forgetfulness, and not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home." Better said, given this spiritual principle, "do we come from *Christ*, who is our home," our own deeper Self. It is *this* aspect of S/self that migrates across lifetimes, not the body-mind complex of the lower self, mere elements returned to the soil and dissipating at death.

However, the idea that humans might be Christ, perhaps God outright for that matter, is often thought anathema, even blasphemous in some circles. Despite a persistent undercurrent of Oneness claimed by its mystics since ancient times, the Christian Church has blanched at such a prospect being embraced by its members, regarding this realization as something of an embarrassment, if not scandal. In medieval Christendom, the renowned Dominican friar, Meister Eckhart, repeatedly urged spiritual aspirants to attain the same nondual realization as Jesus: "So if you want to be this same Christ and God, empty yourself of everything, empty yourself of your ego and empty yourself of all things and of all that you are in yourself and consider yourself as what you are in God. For in this breakthrough I discover that I and God are one."

Yet, historically, Eckhart was severely chastised, nearly condemned by the Holy Roman Church for this impertinence. Other mystics have fared far worse, Jesus among them, who was put to the test and punished during his own ministry among the Hebrew people. They explained his offense: “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God” (*Jn* 10:32). But such is the *essence* of nondualism, the true nature of every living being.

However, it is likely Christ is confused for God in this case. Although the spiritual realm *is* a profound state of being, it is not strictly speaking nondual in nature. The Oneness of Jesus (if not Eckhart as well) could just be another way of saying S/self. This oversight is common, as clinicians who base treatment on Oneness, Firman and Gila, clearly demonstrate: “This abiding dependence of ‘I’ [lower self] upon [deeper] Self amounts to an ontological union of ‘I’ and Self. So complete is this union that it may be called ‘nondual.’” Of course, speaking this way takes certain liberties, at least given how nondualism is usually understood. At best, the S/self could be thought *nascent* nondualism. Indeed, S/self is really more holism than nondualism, the most “reunion” with God possible. (For more, see *Chapter 3*.)

This is why being loved by God is ultimately beside the point; and so, too, even loving God. Of greater importance is a far more profound and intimate state—*being* the Love of God. Therefore, it is not properly said that love is in us. Rather, we literally exist *within* and *as* love, clearly appreciated by John Welwood, a popular therapist specializing in intimate relations:

According to the saints and mystics, love is the very fabric of what we are. Even though human love usually manifests imperfectly, there is another dimension of love that *is* perfect, unbroken, and always available. It flows directly into the heart from the ultimate source of all—whether we call that God, Tao, or Buddha-nature. If great love is like the sun, our woundedness is like a cloud cover temporarily blocking its rays. Fortunately, just as the sun cannot be damaged by clouds, so our native capacity for [love] cannot be destroyed.

Unfortunately, however, love and happiness are usually contingent upon cloudy conditions such as these—finding the perfect partner, achieving success at work, being the center of attention—and contentment merely a matter of effectively manipulating these conditions. If not, we are faced with all the dire prospects undermining happiness in the world.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Early Church Fathers knew mere redemptive efforts were not enough but required at least some transformation on the part of the sinner to be

effective, a literal rebirth into an entirely new person. It makes no sense to absolve sins if one goes right back out and sins again. To offset this deficit, a popular Christian mystic of the Middle Ages, St. Bernard, suggests one work their way up a great Ladder of Love, to borrow a phrase from Plato. In doing so, he fleshes out Jesus' famous couplet of commandments in greater detail, putting them in their proper sequence relative to ascension:

1. Second Commandment: love of self—which is natural and good, so long as we love our neighbor as our own self.
2. First Commandment: love of God above all else:
 - a. *suppliant prayer*: what God *can do*—enhancing our own well-being through blessings coming from God's love;
 - b. *spiritual transmission*: who God *is*—meditating on God to directly know and receive the love that is God; and
 - c. *divine union*: our *being* God—joining and finally reuniting with God so thoroughly as to be one spirit with that Divine Love.

According to St. Bernard, these levels are a sequence of kisses imparted by humans to their divine benefactor. These kisses by which one might engage God steadily increase in intimacy and rapture. The sequence begins with the kiss of incarnation, by which the Word of God initially takes form as Jesus. Thus inspired, the Word in Jesus is then imparted to the ascending soul, who returns the embrace, beginning with the feet of the Lord, closest to the earth. From there, the soul then kisses the hands and, finally, at the heavenly summit, rejoices in the kisses of Jesus' mouth. Indeed, the mouth is given special emphasis, as the two lips are compared to Father and Son, together forming the “pucker” of the kiss, while the Holy Spirit is the actual joy imparted.

The trouble with the cross is more than just a regression to primitive impulses of blood lust. Worse, it stunts our spiritual growth. It obscures the spirit baptism that Jesus actually offered, not to say the prayer by which one might guide this transmission and bring about positive changes. In fact, prayer is the specific means whereby the Christ of Jesus can be directed to the aspirant most effectively. Although prayer is sometimes thought of as causing God to appear in one's life, it is better understood as simply *allowing* this reality to be the case. Adi Da offers the following instruction in the proper use of prayer, bringing about changes in one's greatest depth of being:

True Prayer Is Positive and Effective Prayer. And If Prayer Is To Be Positively Effective, the mind Must Positively Change, At its Depth. True Prayer Is Direct and self-Transcending Participation In The Divine Condition In Which (or In Whom) the body-mind-self Is arising, changing, and passing away.

Such wisdom is easily lost. The world's great religions each began with the sacred word of an esoteric spiritual master, such as Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu. Unfortunately, these revelations are not always well preserved after their founder passes from the scene. Later advocates stamp their own indelible, exoteric mark, as certainly the case with St. Paul. Even New Testament scripture records Jesus' spiritual transmission, distinguishing two sacramental rites: *water baptism and spirit baptism*. Whereas the former is an exoteric practice that symbolically cleanses the follower of sin, anointing them with the blessings of God's grace (familiar to most Christians from early childhood), the latter represents an esoteric, direct transmission of spirit to disciple—the literal outpouring of Jesus' Christ.

Water baptism is usually purposed toward a single cleansing, as might be said of an infant receiving droplets of water across their forehead, perhaps even to last a lifetime. Spirit baptism, however, requires a more substantial stream of spiritual grace, aptly accented by repetition. This bath is necessary because the unclean state of sin is continually reenacted by poor creatures such as ourselves, born into this imperfect realm.

Yet, spirit baptism can only happen to those who are properly prepared to receive the sheer intensity of its spiritual invasion. It is clear that Jesus was the primary bearer of spirit baptism in his time, the direct imparting of his own mystical state. A devout theologian, Graham A. Cole, offers a nuanced appraisal of the role of the Holy Spirit in Baptism:

In the Synoptics it is John the Baptist who identifies Jesus as the baptizer, and in the Fourth Gospel it is God himself who does. Luke-Acts points to the baptism with or in the Spirit as the key concept for understanding this initiation-conversion. The classical text is in 1 Corinthians 12:13, and it bears quotation in full: "For in [*en*] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Little is made of such states in today's world. Although the Western mind seeks to strip spiritual reality of its verity, the transmission offered by spiritual masters is as real as any phenomena in physics. Spiritual energy is simply a higher order of reality. Scientific dogma appreciates the forces of the natural world as channeled through inanimate objects, such as orbiting satellites, automobile engines, electrical generators, or similar devices. Knobs and switches abound in every household, such that ordinary people can manipulate the invisible power transmitted through their conduits. What makes spiritual energy so extraordinary is that it can be transmitted through *living* objects, such as human beings. Of course, for this kind of transmission, one must become adept at handling its holy power.

Despite Jesus' divine state—and in deference to the spiritual epiphany that overcame St. Paul—Christian orthodoxy repeatedly downplays the mystical intuitions of the great practitioners of its own faith. Indeed, mysticism has been reduced to a banal state, if still mysticism in this sense at all, as can be seen in an official treatise of Pope Benedict, entitled *God is Love*.

The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through Sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental "mysticism," grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.

Although this sentiment represents the heart of Church doctrine, by which those who are devout and faithful are genuinely moved, it lacks real conviction. In fact, it more suggests vicarious fulfillment, if not voyeurism. In this view, the resplendent state of Christ's spiritual nature is reduced to a mere postscript, tagging along behind. The claim is that a higher mysticism supposedly exists—human sacrifice, as it turns out—in opposition to our direct communion with Christ's own divine being.

But this direct communion is what Jesus really wanted for us, as also the case with other spiritual masters. Regrettably, the Church relates to the profound state of her mystics like a cut rose, which certainly includes Jesus. Although the beauty and delight of the rose is made more manageable, perhaps even esthetically pleasing, such as a bouquet neatly trimmed and arranged in a vase, the lifespan is greatly reduced thereby. The flower is cut off from the source, its living essence, which gives life its real meaning. And worse, the severing is unnecessary.

Indeed, at numerous places in the New Testament, Jesus' own disdain for sacrifice is made. For example, when a scribe in Jerusalem asked what the priority of the commandments might be, Jesus answered to love God above all first and to love one's neighbor as themselves second. The scribe was impressed, remarking that this love "is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk 12:33). Jesus was pleased. Rather than correct the scribe, he praised him: "And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mk 12:34).

According to Jesus, redemption is in the repentance, the very act of it. Therefore, no redeemer is necessary. In fact, one would only get in the way, as might be said of a middle-man, tacking on their own charge as they deliver goods. Heaven and the Kingdom of God exist in the present, not as some future, delayed, or otherwise denied event. To impose such a role on

Jesus after the fact is more than superfluous but redundant, as a subtle scholar of atonement, Stephen Finlan, attests:

People who had dealings with Jesus knew that God was *already* saving people. One needs “no sacrificial intermediary” with the heavenly Father. What is advised in the sunlight of such a God is open-hearted trust: “do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Obviously, this is a very different father from the fathers with whom many people grew up. To really understand Christ’s life mission it is necessary to discard sacrificial thinking. God has said (and Hosea and Jesus are our witnesses) “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6).

The official Church position is that a higher mysticism exists, valuing the sacrament of Jesus’ death as more significant than the ecstatic state of God-realization he actually offered while alive—to be accomplished in our *own* body and blood, not merely by proxy. Although this union seems like an ecstatic marriage, bringing two people together who, nonetheless, retain separate identities, the real process is more like the kind of transformation undergone during development, transcending the person you once were and being someone else entirely.

Jesus’ authentic mystical state is minimized by the Church. The real issue for Christianity is not the murder but a penchant for magic, deeply enticing to its members, relying on blood sacrifice. The confusion stems from a peculiar way of talking, as Pope Benedict goes on: “True, no one has ever seen God as he is. And yet God is not totally invisible to us; he does not remain completely inaccessible. He has become visible in as much as he ‘has sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.’” But Jesus *did* see God as he is and tried to get others to see him too. Many mystics, Christian and otherwise, have entered the world with this proclamation: “God and I are one.” There have been many siblings of Jesus—sisters as well as brothers. Even if it did once serve God’s purpose that Jesus *was* the one and only Son of God, who is there to tell God he can’t change his mind? It sure seems as if there have been others.

Simply put, spiritual transmission is who the spiritual master *is*, at the resplendent levels of their Christ, a far greater reality than one is typically aware. Yet, ironically, it is precisely Christ that the cross serves to prevent and obscure, reducing an otherwise profound spiritual state to wistful hopefulness. The body-mind is sometimes described as a vessel or vehicle for the divine to fill or pass into. All things considered, this description rightly captures the essence of S/self—*One entering into the other*.

The Great Path of Return

In Western thought, creation is set at odds with the scientific concepts of natural selection and evolution. However, in areas of the world not beholden to Christian beliefs, creation is more likely to be contrasted with the spiritual doctrine called *emanation*. According to this point of view, existence comes forth through a delicate two-part process:

1. deployment of a *descending* hierarchy of being, and
2. development of an *ascending* hierarchy that, having at last come into existence, can now be climbed like a ladder.

Therefore, the situation is more precarious for Plato's illustrious cave than might be imagined, for there is a *series* of caves overall. Each is embedded within the others in any human being, creating *degrees* of illusion in the process. Each cave is a distinctly separate sheath, or rung on the ladder, however much they might interact otherwise.

The *causal* level of Divine Self is the initial domain of consciousness, or spirit, the underlying substrate of existence or ground of being (Creator). As involution proceeds, various levels of *subtle*, deeper Self emerge in turn (Christ), followed at last by the *gross* level of lower self (humans), tagging along as if a caboose. The renowned integral theorist, Ken Wilber, who has popularized nondual ideas, describes the process of emanation this way:

Spirit manifests a universe by “throwing itself out” or “emptying itself” to create soul, which condenses into mind, which condenses into body, which condenses into matter, the densest form of all. Each of those levels is still a level of Spirit, but each is a reduced or “stepped down” version of Spirit. At the end of that process of *involution*, all of the higher dimensions are enfolded, as potential, in the lowest material realm. And once the material world blows into existence (with, say, the Big Bang), then the reverse process—or evolution—can occur, moving from matter to living bodies to symbolic minds to luminous souls to pure Spirit itself.

Adi Da refers to this overall process as the Great Path of Return. The Light of our inherent Nondual State transmutes into a spectrum, as if by a prism. That is, the entire emanation ladder emerges from this larger context, nestling snugly within Divine Reality like roots from a split-open seed, descending down into the soil. The subtle being dangles from causal being, only to rise up along the ascending axis of gross being, as if Siamese twins—the conjoint nature of S/self.

Although few have any explicit sense of deeper Self, the final aspect of subtle descent is quite familiar to all. As the intrepid explorer of mind, C. G. Jung, says: “Hence ‘at bottom’ the psyche is simply ‘world.’” Such is the *interpenetration* that ultimately defines people. We are not just impulses and stimuli taking place on the inside, making for bodily sensations, but the environment producing them as well. In a very real sense, our physical body extends vastly beyond what is usually thought to be our person. There is supreme intimacy and interconnectedness with all life.

It is at this depth of being that we connect with our deeper Self. Adi Da speaks of the emergence of lower self from deeper Self this way:

The ego, or what is traditionally presumed to be an entity, is an activity. The entity is not a “something”, but a process. That process is reflected in the causal realm, the subtle realm, and in the gross realm. The so-called “entity”, or process, does not connect with the gross, bodily life of a birth until it begins to “dream”, or conceive of, that form. There is no fixed date for that event because it is not an entity which enters the body. Rather, it is a process of associating with, conceiving of, even hallucinating the gross form.

It is the very act of differentiation that conjoins the two: body emerging *from* the world—as an imaginary extension *of* the world. Yet, the idea of return and recovery is something of a misnomer. You do not have to pursue higher consciousness. *Deeper consciousness is already seeking you out.* There is no need to literally go back to earlier stages to facilitate ascent, because deeper Self is already emerging from within. You must simply submit to and stop resisting a process presently taking place.

As no doubt obvious, teasing out the subtleties between God, Christ, and Creator is extremely tricky, requiring a sensitive measuring instrument. All things considered, such orientations toward life correspond to a seven-stage process overall. This schema is a unique offering of Adi Da—*The Seven Stages of Life*—a precise mapping of the potential course of human beings as they pass through their various levels of development. Whereas the first three stages of life pertain to the periods from birth through adulthood, the next three stages of life depict highly evolved spiritual capabilities, which virtually no one possesses at this time. Even so, certain extraordinary beings have demonstrated them historically, such as saints, mystics, or sages. It is in Adi Da’s life that the seventh stage has occurred thus far, his own unique incarnation of God.

The traditional stages of the return follow a certain pattern, which an eloquent transpersonal psychologist, Susanne Cook-Greuter, describes as follows:

Human development can be parsed into four tiers. The first two—preconventional and conventional development—cover mental growth from infancy to adulthood. About 90% of the general adult population functions within these first two tiers. The two higher tiers, the postconventional and the transcendent, describe rarer and more complex ways of how adults make sense of experience.

The first three stages of life are focused in gross, bodily-based or mortal beliefs about existence (including cross)—dominating preconventional and conventional views. That is, they are grounded in the world process, as said of nature or Gaia, as well as the material orientation of science. Despite any potential for reverie, progression through the stages of life is not without difficulties. Predictable errors follow each stage. Adi Da points out that the error of the first three stages is to equate the divine with world process exclusively, as material only. Those who make this error worship and glorify the common interests or concerns of the lower self and seek “To Achieve Power, or Manipulate Advantage, Over the Natural World.”

Yet, other options are available, accounting for all incarnations of God. The most profound aspects of human nature can be depicted this way:

1. Christ and Traditional Spirituality: subtle ascent and the attempt to reunite with God through personal development:
 - a. saints and fourth stage: worships the divine with humility and devotion, treating others with altruistic compassion, embracing the divine as as the source of all blessing; and
 - b. mystics and fifth stage: does not merely *perceive* the divine in all things, but *participates* in the divine that is all things, fully immersed in the ultimate realms of spirituality.
2. Creator and Traditional Nondualism: sages and sixth stage—the transcendence of conditional life in the manifest world, usually by way of some tension or effort, existing solely as the causal state.
3. God and “Radical” Nondualism”: Adi Da and seventh stage—the utter lack of any tension or effort, existing solely as Prior Unity as one’s inherent state—always, already the case.

The fourth and fifth stages have much in common, with considerable overlap. For example, the poetic Hindu mystic, Kabir, speaks of the thrill of the fifth stage with unabashed abandon: “There the sky is filled with music: There it rains nectar. Joy forever, no sorrow, no struggle! There have I seen joy filled to the brim, perfection of joy; no place for error is there. Kabir says: “There have I witnessed the sport of One Bliss!”” Clearly, this is a

description of uncommon delight. Moreover, the fifth-stage mystic can *transmit* this spiritual ecstasy to others, the literal activating in others of the very same state, what Jesus calls spirit baptism.

The fourth-stage Christian saint, Teresa of Avila, likewise speaks ardently of her devotion, albeit as a betrothal to Christ, in the most intimate terms. In this case the soul, or bride, when approached by God, its groom, would feel “as though the sweetest anointment—powerfully fragrant—was poured into the marrow of the bones,” like a “divine intoxication, as if stunned and dazed, and with a holy madness.” Although similar in their exaltation, St. Teresa takes delight in something happening *to* her, *from* elsewhere, leading even to a kind of joining together in marriage. Kabir, on the other hand, is in the thick of it, directly immersed in the event itself.

As Adi Da notes, Jesus’ ministry places him in accord with those the world over:

Jesus of Galilee was a fourth-to-fifth stage Realizer (or Spiritual Master). There are, of course, other fourth-to-fifth stage teachers, teachings, traditions, and schools that, even now, perpetuate fourth-to-fifth stage paths that are virtually identical to the esotericism of Jesus of Galilee. All fourth-to-fifth stage esoteric Spiritual traditions are, essentially, the same—because the teachings conveyed within all such esoteric traditions are based upon the “root”-structure (or psycho-physical anatomy) that is common to all human beings.

It is in the spiritual traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism that the sixth stage has emerged historically. Yet, significant differences exist even in these paragons of Oneness. As Adi Da puts it: “in the sixth stage tradition, there is an inversion upon That Which Is One—and, therefore, there is (it may be said) a mode of dualism yet.” Put somewhat differently, these traditions circle around nondualism, preferring certain aspects of the state of Oneness over others—in opposition to each other.

Adi Da talks about our situation this way: *clay pigs in a kiln*. If you put pottery in a kiln, the items heat up until they begin to glow. In the kiln of Conscious Light, the temperature is so intense that everything glows with a brilliant, white light. Sooner or later, the objects begin to disappear, lost to view as they are outshined in the “Brightness”. Even if objects do remain, they possess no real significance in that case. Only exquisite “Brightness” is viable, the true nature of Being. As might be imagined, confusing the sixth for seventh stage is easy to do for the difference is extremely subtle. Like a binary sun, how the sixth and seventh stages actually relate to each other is virtually indistinguishable from where we look at it. It is in this assessment that the sensitivity of the seven-stage schema is really seen.

CHAPTER 3: GOD AS CREATOR

There is confusion about how God (seventh stage) is different from Creator (sixth stage). To sort this out requires an appreciation of the ancient spiritual tradition known as nondualism. Unfortunately, people often have a hard time with nondualism. And it is not difficult to understand why. The absence of separation between self and other is an impossible confrontation with common sense. Indeed, being an individual not only seems perfectly obvious to most people but crucial to maintain. The translation of the ancient Sanskrit word for nondualism, *advaita*, is “not-two.” This is often referred to simply as Oneness. An old joke sums it up well, even if poking fun at this venerable mystery: “Ordering a hot dog from a street vendor, a Buddhist monk says: ‘Make me one with everything.’”

Although humorous enough, nondualism warrants being taken seriously. The first philosophical issue to impress ancient people was the problem of the One and the Many. As the secrets of astronomy and mathematics were slowly teased out from the natural world, and the outcomes based on them resulted in ever greater success and surplus, the need for unifying principles quickly became a top priority for the people of antiquity. The two main ideas of Oneness were *monotheism* and *monism*. The former first arose in Egypt but was quickly abandoned, only to be carried into the Fertile Crescent and embraced there by Moses and the Hebrews escaping to their homeland. The latter, on the other hand, found favor among the Greeks, providing the impetus for Western philosophy, and was likewise a novel idea.

However, these notions solve the problem of the One and the Many in very different ways. The Judaic monotheistic conception of a One and Only God, with universal authority over all, was not only a novel but notorious idea. That the Jews entered into Palestine at a point in time when Egypt and Mesopotamia happened to be taxed from prior expeditions and conquests was especially fortuitous—no massive empire was there to oppose them. Consequently, they were able to establish their rule at the western edge of the Fertile Crescent, at the crossroads between not only Egypt and

Mesopotamia, but the up and coming third member of the cultural axes brokering power in the ancient Mediterranean world: Greece. Indeed, it appears that the early Greek traders must have been especially impressed by the ingenuity of their neighbor, for they soon introduced an unprecedented notion of their own depicting Oneness: monism.

Monism is not the same as monotheism. The Greeks addressed the idea of monotheism by dropping the Judaic concept of “Only God” out of the equation, along with their own pantheon of deities, leaving only the One. Although reality may seem to consist of many different appearances, all are comprised of a single substance, and it is that unvarying substance that accounts for the Oneness of the Many. For these early innovators of religious ideas, the underlying substance took many concrete forms—fire, air, water—depending on the individual philosopher.

In India, the One and the Many was solved in an entirely different manner: *nondualism*. This is often mistaken for monism. Unlike their Greek counterparts, Indian philosophers not only claimed that the underlying unity of all life is a primordial substance out of which everything emerges and is literally comprised but an *intimacy* between the elements of manifest existence. Consider a freshly baked tray of cookies. Although fashioned out of the exact same cookie dough and, therefore, identical in that respect, as said of monism, each cookie is still separate and distinct from all the rest. It is precisely for this reason that you can eat one after the other. Yet, in nondualism the situation is different. It doesn’t really matter if each item consists of the same substance. The crucial issue is the utter lack of any differentiation between the various “things” that are thought to exist.

But don’t let all this put you off. Nondual doctrine is actually ordinary enough. It doesn’t necessarily imply a remote or abstract sense of reality at all. In a sense, all intimate relationships are not-two or nondual in nature. We live out our lives in a perplexing dilemma: whether to value others or ourselves more. This dicey polarity pulls us two ways at once. Examining your closest intimacies, you will no doubt agree love is a paradox—representing not only the highest degree of autonomy as a particular person but the greatest degree of absorption in the other. Even Sigmund Freud, the founding father of psychoanalysis, was impressed by how the boundary between self and other seems to melt away: “Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.”

This inclusive sense of us is familiar to all. Yet, nondualism goes this paradox one better, devoid of *any* separate parts, as said of me and you. The relationship involving us could perhaps be thought the front-end to the “us” that is nondualism. Not because the ordinary sense of us necessarily leads to nondualism. Rather, we arise *within* Nondual Reality, as if the tip of an iceberg.

The upshot of this is that manifest existence arises within an already existing state of Divine Being—which continues to exist following that arising, even if that which arises should be unaware of its presence.

Adi Da describes this process:

All manifestation is arising from a Prior and Intrinsically Indivisible Unity. Everything that appears is developed from What is already there, inherently and potentially. That Prior Unity is fundamental to the Nature of Reality. The human psycho-physical structure is (irreducibly) part of the Prior and Universal Unity. Reality Itself Is Non-separate, Indivisible, and (Ultimately) One—Beyond all appearances. The human psycho-physical structure is the “equipment” that is to be used by human beings for the sake of (Ultimately, Most Perfect) Divine Self-Realization—and that structure arises within the Universal Unity.

This unity is *why* people in love feel love. Because all that exists emerges from the very same underlying state—the vast, limitless water in which the iceberg is buoyed—we have immediate and direct access to this shared, nondual ground. While in love, our native state of Divine Love is allowed into awareness, even if only in a partial or conditional state. When we are unfettered from the imaginary moorings of me and you entirely, we reside *fully* as the ecstatic rapture of Divine Love, felt freely and undiluted. In that case, reality is not experienced as separate pieces, comprised of self and other. There is only One single reality—and this reality is literally who we are.

The relationship between the One and the Many is sometimes explained by way of an ingenious idea: *the two-truths doctrine*, which states that there is a different kind of truth for each level of being. That is, whereas the One resides at the level of reality, the Many resides at an entirely different level, governed by a kind of truth particular to that level. One way to put the situation is seen in magic tricks. For example, you could hold up a coin in one hand and pretend to take it into the other, all the while palming it in your original hand. As you open the other hand and reveal it to be empty, you have completed the illusion. Although the audience may have thought the coin was in the other hand, it really wasn't. As you can see, although the illusion actually *exists* (as an illusion), it isn't *real*. That is why the truth of the One is reality, whereas the truth of the Many is illusion.

With this in mind, Adi Da spells out the true nature of God and how creation actually occurs:

Only Self-Existing and Self-Radiant Consciousness Itself Is.
Consciousness Itself Is Never “Other” than, or “Different” From, or

Separate From, or Standing Over Against, or Related To any Apparent object, or Apparent “other”, or Apparent “thing”. All That Appears To Be Not-Consciousness (or an object Of Consciousness) Is An Apparition, Produced By Apparent Modification (or spontaneous Contraction and Perturbation) Of The Inherent Self-Radiance (or Native Love-Bliss-State) Of Consciousness Itself. However, Once objects (or conditions) arise, they Tend To Persist (or To Demand Repetition).

To put it plainly: “No matter what arises, or does not arise, you are only Consciousness Itself. No matter what arises, or does not arise, there is only Consciousness Itself”. (For more on this, see *ConsciousnessItself.org*.)

Unfortunately, egoity, or separate self, gets introduced into this pristine state of Consciousness. All of a sudden, an act of contraction happens, a kind of *spasm*. It appears spontaneously, without cause or reason. This act of egoity gets superimposed onto Divine Reality—literally, out of nowhere. From here, our nondual nature seems to be *split* apart. Regrettably, it is even possible for Consciousness to *identify* with this spasm/split, forgetting its true Divine Nature. In that case, Conscious Awareness and Love-Bliss end up related to each other. But that is merely an error, or false presumption, what Adi Da calls the *Illusion of Relatedness*.

As a result, Divine Reality can seem like a cell splitting in two—except that it does not split in two at all. Divine Reality never succumbs to this act, which is nothing but an illusion. Even so, the dismal *sense* of separate self happens anyway. This spasm/split is original “sin,” the true source of all suffering. We feel our inherent condition of Love-Bliss only when this dreadful sense of separation is released. In so doing, the true state of our Oneness is revealed, as Consciousness merely exists in a blissful state of Awareness of all that arises.

Adi Da defines the two sides of spasm/split in a striking way: “You can’t get any deeper than Consciousness, or Being, on the Subjective side. You can’t get any deeper than Energy, or Light (or What ultimately may be Realized as Love-Bliss), on the objective side.” When modified, the spiritual energy of Love-Bliss takes the form of body, mind, and world. This proposal is also suggested by an equation made famous by Einstein— $E = mc^2$ —which is just another way of saying the One and the Many. His calculations show all matter is a manifestation of a single, underlying state of (spiritual) energy—or Love-Bliss—yielding a more sophisticated formula overall: $LB = E = mc^2$.

A treatment technique with huge implications in this regard has gained popularity—*mindfulness*—based on an ancient nondual spiritual practice. It is to be fully present in the moment, accepting any experience that should happen to arise without judging or evaluating it. It is an open, receptive, and

alert state of awareness, thought essential to clinical success. But left out is a crucial dictum of clinical practice: *the greater the awareness, the greater the love*—the latter the actual source of healing.

One way to account for why a connection should exist between the two is simple: if all experiences are freely allowed to enter awareness, love is free to enter awareness too. Otherwise, love is filtered out right along with everything else. But an even more astute observation reveals love simply *is* the response of self to awareness—precisely *because* love is awareness. The inherent nature of reality conjoins the two, as Adi Da points out: “Thus, it appears that there is only One ‘object’—the Matrix of Light, Which is only the Reflection of the Heart Itself. Every ‘object’ is simply the Matrix of Light (Which is the inherent Light of Consciousness Itself).”

The egoic corruption of our nondual state seems to transmute reality into a spectrum—as if by a prism. In this view, reality consists of different levels of consciousness, like colors, related in an overall system. Traditional accounts of nondualism describe Divine Light *while within the prism*—before the transformation into a spectrum occurs. They do not describe the Light *prior to entering the prism*. Therefore, profound as they are, these accounts do not go far enough. They focus on the prism at the inception of the Illusion of Relatedness, as opposed to the Conscious Light of Prior Unity itself. Although operative at the level of Divine Being, the prism is compromised all the same. Even though the Light has yet to transmute into a spectrum while in the prism, the forces are building by which it will do so.

Divine Reality exists prior to the formation of this beleaguered prism, before its dreadful mechanics of dispersement come to exist—and remains even after the fact, in the event that they do. It is not that Light and Dark co-exist, for a more startling truth is actually the case: *the Light is prior*. It is within this sublime state that darkness and creation first make their appearance. God never said, “Let there be Light,” blithely inaugurating the biblical odyssey. That would be redundant, for God *is* Light. Only the ego wouldn’t know that, blindly distracted in the attempt to usurp God. Conscious Light is infinite and eternal—*always already the case*. The point of saying, “Let there be Light,” was never a command of magic in any event, like pulling a rabbit out of your hat, but a call to God. A call to *be* God.

The Prelude to Genesis

Nondualism throws a monkey wrench into our usual understanding in an entirely different way as well. It is common to think that acts are based on our intention. But our true nature is *actionless* and *acausal*. That is, while existing *as* Divine Reality, we do not *do* or *cause* anything to happen. Yet, we are obligated to perform and get results in all kinds of ways even so. How can these contrary situations be possible? Simple: things are very different

for *us*—over against the body-minds associated *with* us. We are not actually the body-mind at all. We simply *think* we are. But that is an error.

To clarify, consider a peculiar scenario: aliens crash-landing on Earth. To survive, they are forced to enter into and inhabit the body-minds found there—their *own* descendants, forgotten about long ago. These body-minds are peaceful beings who generally go about minding their own business. However, in their urgency, the aliens become *identified* with these poor creatures. To the point of being fooled into thinking they actually *are* these creatures. Indeed, they can hardly tell the difference any more.

Worse, doing so *disturbs* the creatures, producing all kinds of agitated behavior—from clinging neediness to aggressive acting out, perhaps even war—trying to cope with, if not get rid of these pests. Although we take “self” seriously, it is simply *not* who we are. This so-called “self” is at best an agent operating on our behalf. We only think we operate the “self,” to the extent we identify with its body-mind and, thereby, become attached to it. It is at this point that things start to go awry. All personal pronouns—I, me, he, she, we, they—refer to these body-minds, not who we are. *They* act on *their* initiative. If aligned to God, they will make good choices.

You might wonder how this happens, but there is a very ordinary way to sort it all out. First, you have to find out who you are. Ask yourself: Are you a mind, or do you *have* a mind? Likewise: Are you a body, or do you *have* a body? Are you a car, or do you *have* a car? Obviously, few people mistake themselves for their car, no matter how intimately they might relate to it while sitting inside and operating the controls. Still, many have a hard time sorting out the difference with the other two.

If you examine yourself, you will notice that “you” have two parts. One is observing, aware presence, the other an observed, objective character or personality, that is to say, *identity*. Attributes and traits are things you know about yourself. For example, height and weight, how well you play golf, the fact that you are a mother or father (if not son or daughter), or any other features. But these attributes of “self” are not really self at all. “Self” is a part of mind, merely existing in memory—something you *have*.

Whereas the awareness of self *is* you, the identity of “self” is *not* you. In fact, it is a pseudo-you. This “self” is your possession. More, its memories are merely a *representation* of you and the life you have lived. Pseudo-“self” is not a living person—or self—any more than a photograph is a person. (It is important to let the context of the passage make it clear whether the word self placed in quotes means pseudo-“self,” residing in memory, or the separate “self” mentioned by Adi Da—*both* of which illusory.)

But, regrettably, people end up confusing these aspects of psyche. They confuse the contents of their memories for who they really are. This is no trivial matter. It represents the most profound distinction for humans

possible. Memory can't *experience* life. It can't even *record* life all that reliably. Worse, every attribute of "self" exists as part of a range of attributes. For example, honest vs dishonest, charitable vs indulgent. Unfortunately, "self" includes attributes that can't be loved unconditionally. Self, on the other hand, is the very *presence* of awareness and unconditional love.

So, how do things come to such a pass, that we appear to exist and do things? Once egoity happens, fear and loneliness appear. And something has to be done about it. Yet, all the while, our Divine Condition remains undiminished, asserting its influence, even as egoity worms its way onto the scene. Therefore, the irresistible attraction of Divine Reality prompts the split of Awareness and Love-Bliss to try and reunite, recover its Prior Unity. Like a frayed wire, the exposed pieces long to *splice* back together, in an attempt to embrace what has been rent asunder.

An underlying difficulty adds to the stress, as Adi Da points out:

Desire never escapes its own dilemma, because desire does not deal with the dilemma. The one you call "I" conceives a realm of multiplicity in which to move, because that one presumes itself to be separate. There is something, even a world, that you are up against—so you move. And that movement is desire. Once these three assumptions (of identification, differentiation, and desire) are made, an endless adventure inevitably ensues. All human doings are undertaken in the disposition (and on the basis) of that dilemma.

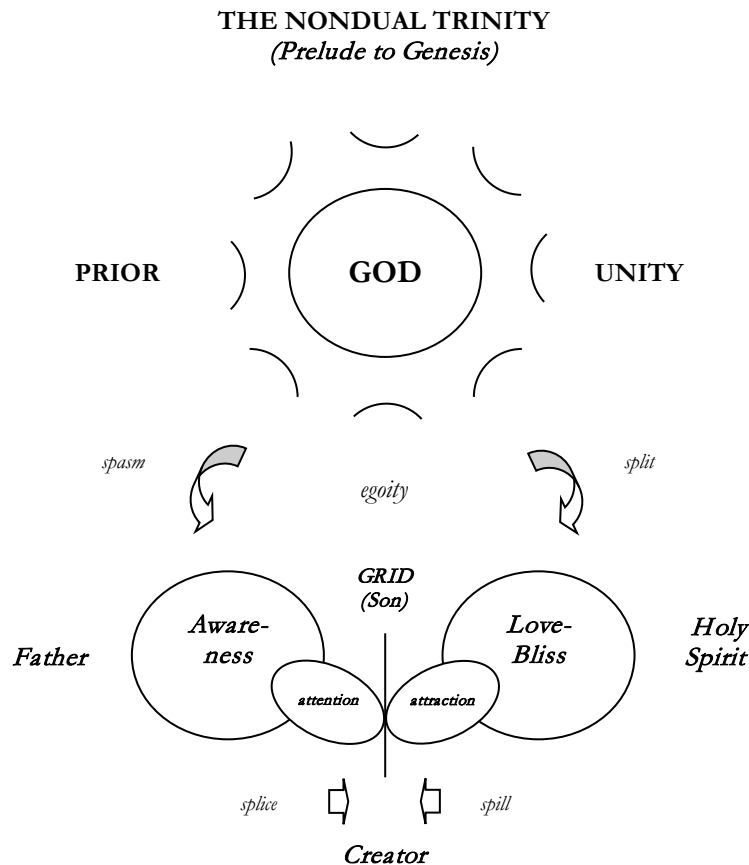
Therefore, the reunion pursued by desire is a chimera, for the splice ends up with an unexpected outcome. Consciousness tries to overcome its loss through attention, the only means at its disposal, focusing Awareness on Love-Bliss, which likewise attracts attention in kind. At last, a stress forms at the tip of attention, as it probes its way toward Love-Bliss. This activity prompts what Adi Da calls *the Grid of Attention*. The tip pricks the vulnerable surface of Love-Bliss, so to speak. From this blind caress, the entire menagerie of colors, odors, flavors, and various kinds of touch we associate with life—commonly known as creation or Big Bang (if not birth)—*spill out* from Love-Bliss. But this is not a bag of items waiting to disperse, like a cornucopia. Rather, the process modifies the very form of Love-Bliss. Therefore, the splice/spill is essentially a side-effect, or accident, not to say impostor of God, even as it goes about hurling all manner of objects through existence. In this sense, then, spasm *is* prism.

Adi Da points out that the contents of the Grid are nothing but *patterns patterning*, observing the inherently arbitrary nature of the Grid. He goes on to emphasize the horrid condition of this state for human beings: "You are supposed to notice this! You are supposed to notice—with every breath,

every morning, every day—that this orderly universe, in and of itself, is hell! This, in and of itself, is bondage.” And reverse the dismal separation of egoity. Only Prior Unity is not hell, even as the Grid mechanically grinds out its patterning all the while.

However, precisely because the patterning has a pattern, the conditions of the Grid can appear consistent or congruent with one another, creating the impression that the machinery is meticulously constructed—even “intelligent design.” Yet, the best that can be said is that there is always a bigger, more complex picture to the Grid, the many forces of which adjusting and adapting automatically to one another in the manner of a system, but without any ultimate purpose or direction. Although people prefer certain outcomes, the arbitrary nature of the patterning still suggests such outcomes are, in reality, meaningless—nevermind how attached to them we might be.

Consequently, the aspects of creation can be diagrammed as follows:



Clearly, all is not well with this attempt at reconciliation. Desire forces Awareness and Love-Bliss to try and offset loneliness, as if a pair of pincers squeezing together and eliciting the Grid. These two aspects of Prior Unity, apparently split apart by egoity, could be thought of as Father and Holy Spirit, with Son the first to be created. It is the *embrace* of Awareness and Love-Bliss that is Creator, driven by the pangs of desire. But such is a futile effort. Failing to address spasm—which *requires* the split—*prevents* reunion. Altogether, this dynamic of duality is like a rubber band stretched taut, the tension pulling it apart greater than that which pulls it together.

Once they emerge and are set at odds this way, the two sides of the Creator desperately seek each other out, not unlike World Parents of early creation models. But there is no going back to the original spasm/split. Rather, creation is the tailend of this set of prongs, for all intents a “missing link” between the Creator and God. Therefore, the twin-prongs operate something like a lynchpin: indistinguishable from God, if oriented toward Prior Unity; yet, inexorably *turned into* Creator, if lulled by reunion. Like a toggle switch, it can go either way. Adi Da illustrates this God/Ego Paradox using an open hand for the nonseparate Self of God and a closed fist for separate self of egoity. Yet, it is the same hand all along.

Traditional Nondualism

According to traditional accounts of the Trinity, God literally *is* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; yet, neither Father, Son, nor Holy Spirit are identical to one another. However, this is merely asserted historically. Only the Nondual Trinity demonstrates *how* this arrangement might actually happen. In fact, in the Jewish faith, God was always shrouded in mystery. It was forbidden to even speak the name of God, which was spelled with vowels missing to avert any accidents in that regard. This was not necessarily a good idea, given the slow start toward understanding God in the West as a result.

The Nondual Trinity shows how Christianity can align with the versions of Oneness and ultimate reality that are represented in what Adi Da refers to as the Great Tradition, the compendium of wisdom handed down through the ages from around the world. These doctrines coalesced into three main points of view historically, what Adi Da calls *Primary Dualism*, *Secondary Non-Dualism*, and *Ultimate Non-Dualism*, all of which representing the various versions of the sixth stage of life.

Primary Dualism is most clearly expressed by the spiritual tradition of Samkhya Yoga. In this ancient religion, ultimate reality is claimed to be an uncompromising duality, completely severing subject from object. Whereas the subject is known as *purusha*, or pure, changeless consciousness, *prakriti* is object, including not only the entire body-mind but everything that can be experienced by it. The difference between them is colorfully illustrated this

way: purusha is lame, unable to function or participate in the world at all; while prakriti is blind, without the least bit of sentience, or intelligence. Needless-to-say, this is not a very good prescription for functioning well together.

Secondary Non-Dualism is focused on prakriti, resting at the pinnacle of spiritual ascent. Indeed, there is a sense in which it is actually *contingent upon* that ascent, *held in place* by it even. All aspects of the fourth and fifth stages aspire to sixth-stage Love-Bliss, which is “yet influenced (or limited) by the fundamental presumption of the first five stages.” Purusha, on the other hand, is inherently perfect Awareness, referred to as “witness” traditionally. Like the attainment of prakriti in Secondary Non-Dualism, the realizer of Ultimate Non-Dualism exists at the level of Divine Self, albeit exclusively identified with Awareness, not only known as purusha but Brahman or Atman in Hinduism.

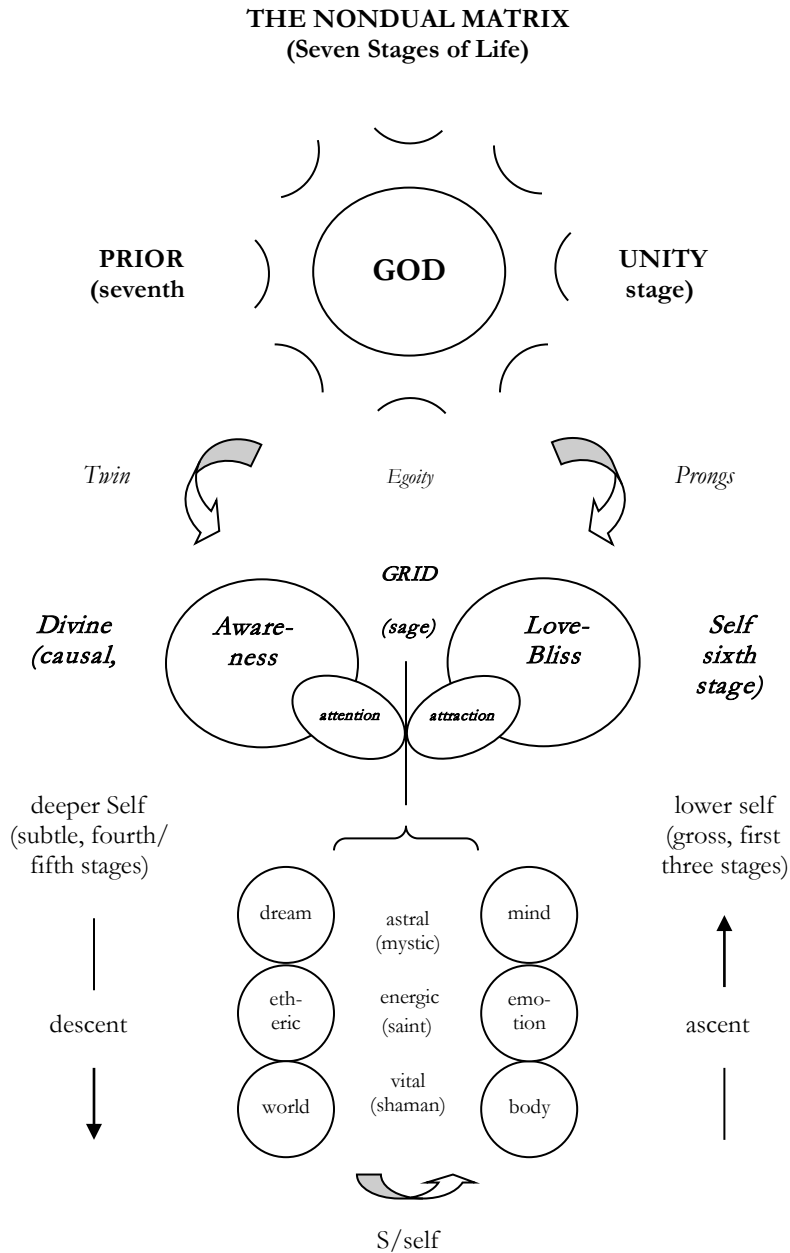
As can be seen, the nondual spiritual traditions contain a subtle version of duality in their midst, subsuming all that exists in one or the other side of the duality—the subject or object aspect—each of which purposed toward its own ends. The dispute revolves around a long-standing controversy, in which reality is conceived along two distinct, mutually exclusive patterns. An intuitive scholar writing in the mid-twentieth century, T. R. V. Murti, sums up the conflict this way: “an inner core or soul (*atman*), immutable and identical amidst an outer region of impermanence [or] denial of (*atman*) and all that it implies,” similar to the incompatibility of purusha and prakriti:

1. *Oneness and Atman*: denies the object completely, conflating it into the subject (purusha and Awareness)—everything is Divine Self. In that case, objects are merely an illusion. (If only the One is real, then the Many must be unreal.)
2. *Noneness and Anatman*: denies the self completely, conflating it into the object (prakriti and Love-Bliss)—self is an illusion, shrinking to absolutely nothing, or *sunyata*. (If only the One is real, then the Many must be the One.)

Each view seems true in its own way. But they are not just two ways to say the same thing. Missing traditionally is how these opposing nondualisms ever came into being in the first place—which is the twin-prongs arising in the midst of Prior Unity.

Either way, the relationship between ego and Grid can be summed up just as easily: *a spider spinning a web*. Picking its way across the strands, the ego must be careful not to become ensnared by its own contraption. But it inevitably does. The Grid is a tar-baby, therefore, disrupting all life with its adhesive qualities. The bad news is that the same dynamic *producing* creation *operates* creation on this side. The one who climbs the ladder is the same as who creates it. Each simply works their own end of the contraption.

Consequently, the full nature of creation, including the Great Path of Return of the S/self, can be diagrammed as follows:



Quirky enough, therefore, the two sides of the Grid are somewhat less exalted than climbing a ladder, more like *zipping a zipper*. At the end of the deeper Self's descent, a *U-turn* takes place, from which the lower self begins its ascent. In doing so, these two tracks begin to mesh, as their features fold together. Growth into higher stages of life is a process of recovering the subtle, deeper Self and integrating it with gross, lower self, illuminating the latter by virtue of its already existing embeddedness in the former's spiritual light—as if an Escher print. Such is the Great Path of Return.

Put colloquially, world is womb. From this vital base, all growth and development is made possible. Likewise, we must not only activate our vital but *energetic* base, often characterized as emotional-sexual in the West. It is more likely referred to as *chi* or *prana* in Eastern systems, the life (love) force of the universe. But integration is not a strictly linear process. The tracks can mesh or not mesh at any point. Either way, somewhere along the line, the return must embrace our vital and energetic foundation.

Although nondual ideas originated in Eastern spiritual traditions, they are comparable to the Semitic religions, as suggested in a volume edited by a pair of eclectic Christian scholars, Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes:

Brahman usually is not thought of as personal but, rather, as the “Ground of Being”—or “Pure Potency.” This contrasts with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic understanding of divinity as personal—that is, God is person. [Yet, it] seems that the Semitic, Hindu, and Buddhist notions of Ultimate Reality are similar in that they all affirm that the Ultimate is boundless, infinite, and unutterable in itself, and that various aspects of it are encountered, or perceived, by humans.

The issue is how God might be approached, ensconced as it is in the persons of the Trinity. Taken altogether, the Trinity can be understood in a much more inclusive way. Whereas *nirguna* Brahman (without attributes or features) is God appearing in the center of the Trinity, *saguna* Brahman (with attributes or features) is God appearing as the various persons. Of course, this is truly the case only if *nirguna* Brahman represents Prior Unity, while *saguna* Brahman represents the twin-prongs of Awareness and Love-Bliss, into which Prior Unity is seemingly separated.

It is worth noting that the schema of nondualisms coined by Adi Da is a generality, with innumerable exceptions. The Great Tradition has myriad schools, sects, and orientations to Divine Reality, many overlapping. Some go so far as to share common terms and concepts, albeit set to far different purposes. For example, Oneness (not to say enlightenment) is understood traditionally as either the ecstatic attainment of Love-Bliss, at the pinnacle of ascent, or ethereal embrace of Awareness, utterly set apart from the

objective world. In the former, Secondary Non-Dualism, Divine Reality is an immense, intricate system, like a magnificent watch, with or without attendant watchmaker—what Adi Da refers to as *emanationism*. In the latter, Ultimate Non-Dualism, Divine Reality is a more rarified but magnificent presence, infinite and eternal, with no need for a watch at all—what Adi Da refers to as *transcendentalism*. These are much more than simply two ways to say the same thing. Each is diametrically opposed to the other.

The emanationist traditions make use of doctrines and practices aptly applied to the prospects of moving members up through their spiritual ascent. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, involves the greater depth of the Divine Self, prior to ascent. The spiritual practices of this tradition tend to dismiss the hierarchical climb of the Great Path of Return as beside the point, bypassing it and residing directly in the witness consciousness as the sixth-stage Divine Self. A third position relative to Oneness is popular as well, the holistic, even pantheistic S/self. It is perhaps a bit overgenerous to even think of it as nascent nondualism. This view finds favor not only in shamanistic and mystical spiritual traditions but transpersonal psychology. This view is probably best thought of as a fourth-to-fifth stage subset of emanationism, still in the throes of integration and ascent.

Implications for Humanity

In Eastern spiritual traditions, manifest existence is viewed two ways: *samsara* or *maya*. Samsara suggests a fluid state in which we not only wander through an illusory world but have endless reincarnations, brought back again and again by karma. Samsara emphasizes body and world in which it appears, all beguiling and capable of inflicting bondage. Maya, on the other hand, more elicits illusion in mind, undermining our capacity to understand reality properly. The celebrated Advaitin sage, Shankara, illustrates this idea with a common metaphor, should we mistake a rope for a snake. Reality, in other words, is never what we think it is.

Adi Da agrees. The uniqueness of Adi Da's revelation, however, is that the seventh stage is the condition or Divine Source of *all* other stages, not the culmination or outcome of them. The seventh stage is different in kind to all of manifest being. Or as Adi Da puts it: "the seventh stage of life has nothing to do with a 'universe', or with the apparent phenomena of conditional existence"—refusing thereby to imbue other stages with false luster. The seventh stage exists entirely on its *own* terms, as the Source and Condition of every other stage, illustrating again the delicate measuring instrument of the seven stages. It is not in any sense dependent on or reduced to any process taking place on the Grid, much less usurped by them. Divine Reality simply now and always already exists. Enlightenment in this sense cannot ever be attained. Rather, it already *Is*.

Adi Da regards any other approach as rife with troubles, warning against them: “Therefore, what is characteristic of the only-by-Me Revealed and Given seventh stage of life is the (Divine) Self-Recognizability of ‘samsara’, not the return (or reversion, or ‘fallback’) to ‘samsara.’” Self-Recognizability means samsara and all of manifest existence recognize *Who* it *Is*. This sticky issue comes down to its focus. “Radical” Non-Dual Reality is not something that happens *to* “you,” nor the ground or suchness *of* “you.” Rather, “Radical” Non-Dual Reality *is* You. As the illusory “you” of ego becomes obsolete or irrelevant, You, as God, merely continue to exist as always. This unsettling God/Ego Paradox is what comprises the lynchpin of Divine Self.

“Radical” Non-Dualism is more than overcoming the splice/spill taking place on the Grid, as with traditional kinds of nondualism. It transcends a far more primal act: the initial spasm/split of egoity separating from God *prior* to Grid—at its *root*. Adi Da explains:

Do you think the “world” that Is The Divine “Creation” murders 300,000 in a tsunami? Such “darkness” has nothing to do with The Real (and Perfectly Acausal) Divine. That always “dark-time world” is always dissociated from The Acausal Divine—always dissociated from The Perfect Conscious Light That Is The Indivisible Acausal Divine. It is only the “world” Tacitly and Divinely Self-Recognized that Is The Divine “Creation”. The “world” Coincides Perfectly with The Divine Conscious Light. Fundamentally—but only at its “root”—the “world” is not at all separate from The Divine. The presumption of separateness occurs only because of egoic (and “self”-contracted, or dissociative, or separative, or “selfish”) “self”-identification with the body-mind-complex.

A provocative advocate of nondualism, David Loy, proposes one way of understanding manifest existence: “There is only one reality—this world, right here and now, as it is in itself, nondually incorporating both subject and object into a whole.” Except for one thing: overcoming the separation of subject and object is not so much a whole as something else entirely—*Oneness*. Allness is not Oneness, except perhaps in the culminating sense of S/self reunion. Only in that case could the entirety of manifest existence be thought nondual.

The simple proof that “Radical” Non-Dualism is not dependent on the Grid is that it continues to be the case whether anything ever arises or ceases to appear. Divine Reality exists *prior* to manifest existence, yet, not separate from it all the while—*should* any objects or beings happen to appear. “Radical” Non-Dualism is not based on any activity taking place in manifest existence—precisely *because* that activity is the result of egoity, the condition by which manifest existence splits from God in the first place.

To “coincide” is similar to a well-known Buddhist aphorism: *nirvana and samsara are the same*. However, this phrase suggests a kind of identity between the two—the former the ecstasy of Divine Reality and the latter the “dark-time world” in which evil prevails. Yet, they cannot be identical. Put bluntly, a whole samsara is nothing but a whole lot of samsara. On the other hand, to coincide means our lives are in tune with or immersed in Divine Reality—at the root, the condition in which egoity begins its divergence. Thus aligned, we partake directly of Divine Reality and are not other than its sublime state.

The issue comes down to the misnomer of a “Creator” God. Through history, Creator has been mistaken for God. Moreover, this state has been valued as the goal of spiritual ascent. But such an aspiration is misleading, for it only represents *proximity* to Prior Unity. Spiritual ascent is essentially a futile attempt to accomplish reunion—the very means that spit out the Grid in the first place. To attain this pinnacle simply starts up the whole cycle all over again. Such is the dynamic of duality underlying reincarnation. It is an infinite regress, a kind of möbius-strip, if not “karmic wheel,” recycling just as it reaches the end. All said and done, spiritual ascent is *blocked* by “self”-contraction. As the chimera is about to be attained, one realizes they have nowhere else to go but back into the mix. Odd enough to say, this makes the prism a glass ceiling.

Looking for Divine Love on the ladder of ascent, whether lofty summit or even aggregate of rungs, is misguided, for full enlightenment involves entirely different dynamics, as revealed by Adi Da: “the ‘radical’ approach to Realization of Reality (or Truth, or Real God) is not to go gradually ‘higher and higher’ (and, thus, more and more ‘away’), but Prior to ego-I—the prismatic fault that Breaks the Light, or envisions It as seeming two, and more.” It is said that Divine Reality is the “wood” of which the ladder is made. But it is the *construction* of the ladder, wood and all, that is at issue. Every part of the ladder is still ladder. Overall, the Grid is just Grid.

The *real* Source of being occurs directly—as Prior Unity—for which *there is no summit*. Divine Reality cannot be reached through any gesture of development or reunion. Conventional religions regard spirituality to be a rapture of Divine Love-Bliss and rightly so. However, Adi Da points out they omit the most important part—Divine Love-Bliss has its *roots* in the Prior Unity of God. Even that from which all is made has its *own* source.

However, this probably comes as a shock for those holding Christian beliefs. Put bluntly, the events of Genesis are simply misunderstood. There is a reason why so much goodness, truth, beauty, and love exist in an evil world: *God did not create the world*. Egoity did, as Creator, overlaid upon God. Even so, God bleeds through. Creation merely extends the dreadful impact of egoity: “The Root-Feeling and ‘casual Stress’ Of Relatedness Is The Principal Distraction From Unqualified and Unlimited (and Self-Evidently

Divine) Happiness—Because It Directly Leads To all conditional objects, others, forms, thoughts, states, and processes, or all conditionally arising ‘things’.” Shockingly enough, the culprit lurking behind the murder of Jesus can at last stand and make its courtroom confession: *“T” is the guilty party!* (Or egoity.) Same as all sinful acts, flying under the radar all this time.

Equally at issue is mistaking the cause of original sin for free will. This act is much too late in the sequence of separation and suffering, beside the point really. Original sin happened long before human beings, as a prelude to Genesis in fact. Original sin is the act of a secret tussle involving God and ego—well in advance of creation. It turns out creation is the tailend of a larger process. Human beings are not brought forth by the benevolent outpouring of God’s loving grace, as usually supposed. They represent the final impact of that awful struggle.

Thus, the Grid can be compared to a TV set, whereby its programming is transmitted to an audience. However, the show consists of holographs with which the viewer feels they are interacting. External reality is nothing more than imagery arising in consciousness, something in the way images flicker across a TV screen. It is only in this sense that the world was created, whether by God or clever network executives. Creation does not bring forth an actual world. It splashes up as if from a rock plummeting into a pool of water—then projected out into the “world.” Indeed, the disrupted spray of water *is* the world, which we imagine includes even us.

Divine Reality is best summed up this way, according to Adi Da:

What appears to the beholder as light, to the hearer as sound, to the shapely actor as life-energy, and to the thinker as thought, is Known directly—at the level of Consciousness Itself—As Love-Bliss. Then it becomes light, sound, life-energy, and thought. All such things are only apparent modifications of the Original Reality That Is Love-Bliss. There is Only the Love-Bliss That Is Reality Itself—Which is originally, now, Identical to Consciousness Itself.

The Creator did not create manifest existence out of nothing but *out of God*. God is essentially an innocent bystander to what the Creator has done. Still, we tend to identify with the outcomes of the Grid, as a ground against which to make sense of our lives. But, for all the sound and fury, human life happens within a strangely irreverent context: *none of this was ever intended to be taken seriously*. As Adi Da declares: “If you awaken, what happened within the dream is suddenly not your present condition. It is of no consequence any longer. There are simply forms of fascination until you wake up.” We only feel Love-Bliss when the false sense of separation is released and exist fully as Prior Unity, the blissful state of Awareness of all that arises.

CHAPTER 4: CHRISTIAN LOVE

Historically, our ancient Greek ancestors had three main words for love: *eros* (intimacy and passion), *philia* (integrity and affection), and *agape* (empathy and altruism). Given our contemporary way of understanding love, these orientations correspond to the relations that extend out from one's person: eros and the company of lovers; philia and the bosom of one's family and friends; agape and the full range of relations encompassing all of humanity. While eros and philia were first discussed at any length in the works of Plato and the ancient Greeks, agape began a lengthy course of refinement in the work of St. Paul and the Church fathers.

Early Jews also spoke of love with a wealth of meanings. Words in the Old Testament frequently associated with love are *ahab* and *hesed*. Whereas *ahab* applies generally to relationships of affection and attraction, especially romantic attachment, *hesed* appears to suggest a more specific agenda within this context: rescue and loyalty, as said of God's covenant. In this way, Old Testament love comes across in a particularly pragmatic light at times, emphasizing the benefits of one's station and fortunes in life as their primary concern.

Perhaps in correction, throughout the Middle Ages into modern times, the Church espoused a strong preference for agape. This orientation is given over to the welfare of others as a priority, overshadowing all other forms of love. However, during the medieval period eros returned with a flourish, receiving favor among the royalty and their courtly throng, as altered into its Latin equivalent: *amor*. With this embellishment, crass sexual indulgence was now imbued with something much more uplifting: *romance*. Indeed, romance suggested a higher state of morality to some.

Yet, the love of amor can also have a strange kind of stranglehold over one, such that they are, at the same time, deeply beholden to their lover. As Heloise wrote to Abelard, in one of the most famous amorous relations in Christian history, being thus smitten can completely topple one's sensibility: "God is my witness to the depth of my love. Even if Augustus, ruler of the

entire world, thought me worthy of the honor of marriage and gave me the whole world for my possession, I would consider it more valuable and more of an honor to be called your whore than to be called his empress.”

Yet, putting love on a pedestal is not the only way in which the prospect of wedlock is worked out in Christianity. Indeed, in Old Testament scripture, a protracted love verse spoken by two adoring lovers, *The Song of Solomon*, extols in detail the exact nature of their amor. Many have been drawn to this passage of multi-faceted love, by turns either tender, joyful, sensuously intimate, deeply longing, passionate, or mutually respectful, offering a profoundly inspirational guide for human affection. Although it has often been interpreted as an allegory of the love between God and his chosen people, there is no explicit reference in the Bible as such.

As also the case with eros, agape has a kind of ambiguity, crossing over from ordinary relations to spirituality. Not only does agape embrace a wholesome deference to others, even all of humanity, it also indicates the emphatic intensity of God’s own outpouring of joy, descending down from above—precisely for the sake of inspiring a warm regard for humanity in turn. In this way, the spiritual love of agape emanates from God, then passes through humans, where it profoundly influences our relations.

In his efforts toward clarity, the Roman philosopher turned Christian, St. Augustine, sought to bring Plato and St. Paul together under one roof, so they might reside within the same City of God, as it were. Toward this end, St. Augustine advocates *caritas*, operating in opposition to *cupiditas*. The former is divine inspiration, an irresistible movement of attraction toward God. It operates without regard for reward or the sake of gain, as might be said of investments, accruing benefits in the afterlife of heaven for having made religious sacrifices during this life. St. Augustine defines the dynamics taking place in salvation in benevolent terms:

In this life there are two loves wrestling with each other in every trial and temptation: love of the world and love of God. And whichever of these two wins, that’s where it pulls the lover as by the force of gravity. It isn’t, you see, on wings or on foot that we come to God, but on the power of our desires. And again, it isn’t with knots and chains that we find ourselves stuck to the earth, but with contrary desires. Christ came to change our love, and to make lovers of the heavenly life out of earthly lovers.

St. Augustine grounds *caritas* in the upward impetus of eros, the intimacy operating behind the scenes that not only serves to bind and unite disparate elements but transcendence and rising above them coming from that synthesis. This is how the Ladder of Love might carry one to God.

Even so, spiritual auspices such as this are not necessarily worked out in ghastly terms, subject to dreadful austerity or self-denial. According to such a view, salvation is a simple change of direction, a slight shift in the orientation of one's love—toward the sublime rapture of God, rather than any earthy delights paling in comparison. To the spiritual aspirant, it is obvious: the spiritual realm is a greater reality, obscured by participation in the egoic pursuits of desire. It is precisely this accomplishment that moved those laudable Buddhist monks to protest the Vietnam war by lighting themselves on fire, and then sit serenely in the street, out of compassion for others. They partook of a very different, astonishingly profound reality.

In his own contribution to the various controversies of Christian love, the Catholic genius of the later Middle Ages, St. Aquinas, cuts even more to the chase. He argues that the nature of existence fully connects creation with its Creator, thereby introducing a novel idea: *existence is the essence of God*. In this manner, God is thought to transfer his essence to his creation. St. Aquinas incorporates a teleological dynamic, God pulling or attracting humans toward him at the same time as their nature is ever moving away, something in the manner of a rubber band (not unlike Plotinus). Indeed, St. Aquinas' real point involves a divine agenda: God created and gave his very *being* to the world, not by an act of causal necessity but an entirely free act of personal love. Therefore, one can participate in this gesture of love by animating God's own being (*esse*), of which they are comprised.

The implications of this arrangement are elaborated on in *A Course in Miracles*, a compilation of Christian and nondual spiritual tenets. This study guide emphasizes "*forgiveness-out-of-love*," basing one's life on intimacy rather than illusion. An intrepid commentator on this manual, D. Patrick Miller, points out: "it insists on a complete reversal of ordinary perception, urging acceptance of spirit as the only reality and of the physical world as a mass illusion (similar to the Buddhist and Hindu notions of *samsara* and *maya*, two terms designating the everyday world we see as a kind of dream)."

Needless-to-say, lofty metaphysics such as this makes the eyes of most people go crossed. Even so, it can all be put quite simply. For example, in some addiction treatment programs, forming a relationship with a *higher power* is thought essential to recovery—and then left at that. Higher power is a therapeutic presence, such as one's deeper Self, not to say Christ. It is a source of healing, often taking the form of an "inner voice," which offers unconditional love, guidance, and wisdom. Although orientations such as this insist your higher power be defined as whatever you conceive it to be, such an egalitarian approach misses the point. It is not a belief inside your head that makes the difference but the *living reality* of higher power, literally appearing in your life, the fundamental nature of which love.

A good way to think about human beings is like an archeological site, comprised of many layers. As one adapts and grows throughout life, they build upon the success (and failure) of previous stages. Maturity occurs like an elastic or rubber sheet moving ever upward. Unfortunately, certain areas can get snagged by hooks brought on by trauma such that some aspects of “self” get stuck, while others continue the course through the construction process. If you can imagine the sheet moving along, with some spots snagged, you would see a kind of vortex trailing behind them. Dips in the boards and carpeting might appear on a given floor, further distorting the ceiling to come, comprising the floor on the next level, and so on.

Two basic positions define how people live their lives:

1. Core Position: deeper, underlying patterns of behavior to which one has become fixated, often unconscious and hidden—which could be thought of as autistic or empathetic in nature; and
2. Base Position: ordinary patterns of behavior that one displays, usually conscious and readily observable, from which they can continue their developmental growth—as with integration.

While engaged in their core position, one sees the world the way a child does and acts accordingly. Being under the influence of your inner child is not just a cute way of talking but represents a crucial aspect of “self.” Inner child and ongoing adult flip back and forth seamlessly, usually without us even being aware of the shift taking place. As the elastic sheet gets snagged, we hold to the core patterning that *is* our inner child.

Christianity has espoused a strong preference for one version of love over all others: agape (or conscience), especially as opposed to eros (or passion). Indeed, agape was understood to be the essence of Christ’s love for humanity, not to say our appropriate and devout response in turn. Therefore, certain orientations to Christian love find the idea of integration problematic, the embrace of autistic love particularly offensive. A Church apologist, Anders Nygren, makes the argument clear: “Christian love moves in two directions, towards God and towards its neighbor; and in self-love it finds its chief adversary, which must be fought and conquered.”

According to this view, Christian love is inimical to the autistic core, which is not something to be augmented in an auspicious harmony. Some even claim the two sides mutually dispute the ground—as said of angels and demons perched on your shoulder, vying for dominion of your immortal soul. Yet, it is the *polarity* causing all the grief. It is not one or the other that is evil but *lack of integration* between them. Generally, we pick one side over the other, if not an awkward enmeshment of the two.

The autistic state, as described here, is necessary for development and not a mental health condition, as described by Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Narcissistic is perhaps equally applicable a term. As often said, you can't love others if you can't love yourself. In fact, the absence of passion often stems from repression. Overall, the autistic core represents the joyful, spontaneous innocence of childhood. Such unabashed delight is usually thought endearing. It's just that the autistic core *dominates* one early on, so that delight is engaged in a self-serving manner, purposed toward the insatiable acquisition and consumption of desire. This all makes perfect sense to the child: getting what you want *is* to be loved, and the only reason to be loving, despite any altruistic tendencies about to emerge.

Yet, empathy is no less tricky, putting into play the mutually reciprocal interactions of integral love. Consider this eerie, peek-a-boo scenario, sorely troubling the great avant garde existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre:

You are stooped over in a hallway, peering through a keyhole, engaging in surveillance of your lover inside. You feel secretly in control and in charge, even anonymous and invulnerable. Suddenly, someone turns the corner of the hallway and sees you, kneeling at the doorway. Now you are the exact opposite of what you were, with the other in the position you previously enjoyed. *They* have control and are in charge, while you are exposed and vulnerable, made into an "object," perhaps even struggling to maintain any sense of self.

This is why children are so unabashedly desperate for any attention and approval from their parents. Although this empathetic state can actually be dehumanizing, even degrading in some sense, it is also the precise manner by which one is felt to be loved. This is self-evident to any child who has ever implored their parents from a diving board or wobbly bicycle, "*Look at me!*" The only difference is the kind of attention paid. If the circumstances were different and, instead of some seedy hallway, you were standing on a stage receiving an award amidst loud, appreciative applause, your experience would likely be dramatically different.

By nature, the autistic and empathetic cores oscillate, taking turns as they go along. As a result, we learn to live in two worlds: one dominated by self and autistic core, the other dominated by others and empathetic core—either potentially getting the upper hand. Important references are associated with each, some of which contradictory and incompatible. That some, perhaps even very many of these references are shared by both accounts for the sense we typically have that our experience involves a single reality.

Unfortunately, the two sides are usually estranged, at least to some degree. The most striking example is surely the renowned split personality

of Robert Louis Stevenson's infamous novel—*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. His work shows significant insight into the troubles besetting one skewed into either autistic or empathetic core; the latter meekly sapping strength from an otherwise admirable stature, the former erupting into unbridled passion, overriding all sense of reason or conscience.

A perhaps unlikely advocate of this dysfunctional polarity appears in a much beloved Native American legend:

An old grandfather said to his grandson, who came to him with anger at a friend who had done him an injustice, "It is as if there are two wolves inside us. One is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him, and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way.

But the other wolf, ah! He is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It is helpless anger, for his anger will change nothing. Sometimes it is hard to live with these two wolves inside us, for both try to dominate our spirit."

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which one wins?" The Grandfather smiled and quietly said, "The one I feed."

The touching gentleness of this simple tale is often thought endearing. Yet, it is based on a fundamental error. The wolf full of anger is clearly the autistic core, set to its own purposes and fitfully at odds with others. But the harmonious wolf is actually *two* wolves rolled into one: empathetic core and integral base, conflated within the same animal.

There are not two wolves but *three*—the third a combination of the prior two. You cannot get to the harmonious wolf—integral base—without going through a process of tempering the angry wolf with the wolf who does no harm, or empathetic core. Starving the angry wolf is precisely what makes him so angry! There is no winning in that approach, for the angry wolf doesn't go away, perhaps even turning on its master, if not forced into gnawing off its own foot to escape entrapment. The secret is to feed *all* the wolves, *each* in proper measure. It is not that the autistic and empathetic cores merely continue to persist, despite the other, much less flip back and forth. Each *embraces* the other, such that one *influences* the other.

In right moderation, autistic core traits are good, necessary for a happy life. Conversely, features of the empathetic core, such as patience, kindness, and hopefulness—Dr. Jekyll—can be taken to excess, resulting thereby in self-abuse, like codependency, enmeshment, gullibility, and susceptibility to exploitation. Indeed, the empathetic core can merely exist in the service of the autistic core and for its sake, the latter operating secretly in the background while merely feigning good works, as in pretentiousness or self-righteousness. In fact, a clever fraud eluding the kindly grandfather is the wolf in sheep's clothing, preying surreptitiously upon the flock. Mature love, however, is a combination of both. It is not only possible to integrate these aspects of love but the very process by which we grow up.

Christianity has its version of the conundrum. Consider this passage on love found in biblical scripture:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious jealous or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.... Love never ends. (*1 Cor*, 13:4-8)

The ability to rejoice in truth and bear or endure all things is precisely the merit of integral love. Although the above passage seems to celebrate the empathetic core over autistic core, what Jesus had in mind requires *both*, nevermind scripture not coming right out and saying so. St. Paul goes on in his letter to the Corinthians: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways" (*1 Cor*, 13:11). Empathetic love by itself (or *agape*) is yet immature, even if operating at a higher level than autistic love. It could be said that there are *two* levels to immaturity, skewed either toward autistic or empathetic love.

How we grow up and integrate deeply influences our ability to love. It has been said that "all you need is love," as if one could feed their belly with happy thoughts. Of course, this is far removed from what John Lennon meant by the sentiment of his iconic song, deftly teasing out with his silky rejoice the uncommon affection available to human beings. There is no need to wait for later rungs on the ladder to appear before you start loving, as said of Maslow's need hierarchy. People love life from the *beginning*, not only its splendor generally but also the brute sake of continuing one more gasp of precious air, should the supply run out. The autistic core *is* love, no matter how dismissed as such, imbuing life with its vivacious intensity.

Yet, love of life can lead you astray. It is misguided to cling to one's autistic core, the extreme end of which the unwholesome horrors associated

with crime and underworld, perhaps even psychotic states. Still, members of the criminal underworld love their lives and the world they live in, to the extent their nefarious activities yield results to their liking. And not without good reason, as one of the paragons of existentialism, Friedrich Nietzsche, reports: “In almost all crimes some qualities also find expression which ought not to be lacking in a man.” This is why criminals and the mentally ill often seem so self-destructive, committed to sabotage. There’s something about that life they love, perhaps even serving a necessary purpose.

The empathetic core is more acceptable, like putting your best foot forward in a job interview or making a good impression on a date. But such high functioning cannot be maintained indefinitely. Sooner or later, you will drop to the level where you are most comfortable or familiar and have mastered to some degree, as opposed to one you can manage only with some difficulty. Surprisingly enough, although the base indicates our greatest *maturity*, the core represents our greatest *stability*, a kind of default position. These are aspects of “self” that have proven themselves reliable, to which we inevitably return when the chips are down.

The empathetic core is our *persona*, occurring as the effort toward integration degrades into a false façade, behind which we attempt to interact surreptitiously with others. This persona merely creates an image, often at odds to our genuine or authentic “self.” Even though this false front can more or less accurately represent our true, inner “self,” we remain at risk for alienation. An accurate persona is just as inauthentic, for it represents a substitute or surrogate for the real thing. Although painful, unfortunate events of life are, thereby, absorbed by an imposter, as it were, so too are the joys and sought-after outcomes. Inauthenticity means our life happens to *another*—even if that should be our own persona, standing in for us.

Whereas the empathetic core is something to hide behind (*if* aspired to all the while), the autistic core is precisely what we are hiding from, or at least hiding from others. The autistic core represents our earliest life strategies, still lingering from the past, since deemed improper. Usually obscured, they are abruptly revealed in moments of duress. To illustrate, being reprimanded at work for a job poorly done, especially under pressure, can elicit intense autistic core reactions, such as throwing an angry fit, if not biding your time and complaining bitterly to others later—essentially for not feeling loved. In the guise of the empathetic core, you might smilingly pretend to cooperate, all the while planning sabotage. Or else obsess over every little detail to make up for it. Clearly, none of these tactics work nearly as well as they used to.

Yet, core positions also operate under pleasant circumstances. A common example is two people in love. Despite any genuine blush of affection during the romance and courtship phase, new couples routinely misperceive each other’s motives and expectations, often attributing far greater promise to their

embrace than warranted. Such idealistic interactions inevitably break down over time, revealing more sobering realities taking place in their core patterns, especially if jostling for a more advantageous position relative to the other.

The Imagery Amalgam

The question is surely obvious: *How does one get to a position of integral love?* To sort it out requires a better understanding of what actually makes people tick. The formation of “self” is contingent on a process taking place at the very core of cognitive functioning, comprised of two parts: experiential impressions coming in, as mediated by memory. Operating together, these two aspects result in understanding, which provides meaning. That is to say, an overlay is created during cognitive processing, which can be called *the Imagery Amalgam*, not unlike the two disparate elements combined to make bronze alloy (tin and copper). It is a package deal. Except that in this case understanding is *overlaid* on experience, perhaps even altering it. Either end can be distorted or confused, especially if tinkering with the amalgam in favor of more preferable outcomes.

Over time, memory is filled with the outcome of the Imagery Amalgam. However, none of this occurs haphazardly but according to the way that our interpersonal relations happen. Adaptation negotiates the demanding forces of two very different aspects of the world. Deterministic views represent the more structured side of these aspects: *causal certainty*. The point of learning the laws of causal certainty is to put us in a position to predict events—so we can control them, to our best advantage ideally. This behavioral realm is the province of science and enterprises based on it.

To assemble a picture of the whole person, a good place to start is our most fundamental nature. Although human behavior is pretty complex, its basic function can be put simply. People often speak of their interpersonal relations this way:

1. Something happens (i.e., trigger).
2. They feel either good or bad about it.
3. Therefore, they do something about it.
4. Someone does something else back as a result—becoming another trigger in the process, starting the whole cycle all over again.

This overall procedure could be thought of as the *exterior loop* of our relations with others. The exterior loop operates as follows: the impact of phenomena (whether stimulus or impulse) on the body is transmitted via the five senses of the nervous system to the brain, where in some manner it is converted into sensory and perceptual experience.

However, the exterior loop leaves out a crucial piece between steps 1 and 2: some idea in mind happens (consisting of images or symbols) that makes you feel the way you do. As sensual and perceptual experiences are processed (exterior loop), the way which we understand it initiates a *further* experience in emotion—which prompts a similar sequence all over again, as an *interior loop*—impelling you toward your ultimate behavior. These two loops engage the Imagery Amalgam, the mind as it is under the influence of both body and memory.

This arrangement between experience and understanding involves an often overlooked relation between two terms typically used interchangeably: *circumstance and situation*, which describe our orientation to the world, albeit in very different ways. Indeed, the latter must be differentiated even further, representing the two most basic ways that present situation relates to past circumstances, so that expectation might predict future outcomes:

1. circumstance and experience: present conditions of a current event, usually located nearby; and
2. situation and understanding: potential conditions of a future event, based on one's expectations, located almost anywhere:
 - a. imminent causality: circumstances most likely to occur if existing conditions continue on their present course; and
 - b. eminent society: circumstances likely to occur if either self or others should happen to intervene.

Consider this circumstance: falling from a building. As one drops head-long to the pavement, the sheer conditions of circumstance can be thought exhilarating, as with sky-diving or bunji jumping, if not an opportunity to simply enjoy the view. But situation quickly overrides circumstance, as one takes stock of their *imminent* conditions—plummeting toward death. An old joke sums it up well: A man fell off a building and as he passed the 25th floor was asked: "How's it going?" His bemused reply: "*So far, so good!*"

Consider this same circumstance, with a much more sinister proviso: you have been *hurled* from the building top, perhaps by a dissatisfied lover or opportunistic relative trying to cash in on an inheritance. Circumstance and imminent situation remain exactly the same. Yet, *eminent* situation is significantly altered. This is no simple loss of balance or slippery footing leading to a fall. Being shoved to one's final reward carries certain grizzly overtones. Indeed, should you survive this imminent brush with death, the eminence could well prove the most traumatic element. Eminence is what introduces *choice* into the equation, superseding chance, turning that which is otherwise merely accidental into something intentional.

Overall, “self” is a triumvirate of contingencies: *rules, roles, and relations*. Whereas rules dictate the behaviors and consequences expected in a given situation, especially for the sake of getting along better, roles are coherent accumulations of rules that define our place in society. Relations are all of our interactions in any given circumstance, usually as guided by some set of rules/roles, all of which originally negotiated by the Imagery Amalgam. This is accomplished by a no doubt unexpected tool of all human endeavors—*conversation*—by way of which we exchange aspects of our culture.

To illustrate, egg-breaking is a shared culture among restaurant cooks, as is the kind of clothes they wear, what it’s like to stand over a hot stove, and so on. It is the same for all learning. A new cook hired into the kitchen staff stands in no different relationship to learning their job than a traveler trying to make their way in a foreign country, or lover getting to know their paramour.

These ideas can be put simply:

When a new cook gets hired and is introduced to the kitchen staff, they are told how things are done around here. This process typically happens as follows:

1. They are given instruction on what to do.
2. They remember what to do, if they are paying attention.
3. They ask questions, if they don’t understand something.
4. They might even make suggestions of their own, if they have any bright ideas.

As a consequence, they learn the culture of cooking in this particular restaurant—and perhaps even impart some of their *own* culture as well. Of course, in some more informal settings, the lines of authority may not be so neatly drawn. In that case, more intricate or subtle negotiations may take place at step one. In fact, some research or test-driving of roles in advance is advisable, to not make a fool of yourself while trying to gain membership in a particular community. The same can even be said of one’s own family, who are really nothing but a bunch of strangers in the beginning.

These contexts establish the parameters by which we understand life. It is essential to ascertain these conditions, as they have crucial implications for what is expected in any situation. We flip through our cultural systems all the time—rules, roles, and relations—depending on which happen to be operating at any moment. These systems intersect and overlap in all kinds of ways. Indeed, the more systems that you have familiarity with and can operate proficiently, the more likelihood of having success within these contexts. You simply have more resources to work with, not to say, more expertise with which to work with them. And so, you know better what to expect.

Yet, the choices we make send us down any number of indeterminate pathways, all of which taking their toll. In fact, if the deterministic position should be taken seriously, it runs afoul of a devastating factor: although people want absolute control, ultimately, they have absolutely no control whatsoever. Awareness of this is usually thought disconcerting. In other words, although a realm of causal certainty does exist, preceding it is an even more peculiar domain—*arbitrary absurdity*—where the circumstances are endless, lacking any exact reckoning. Still, we have to live with them anyway. Such is the nature of the exterior loop.

The often inscrutable philosopher, Martin Heidegger, goes so far as to say that human beings are *thrown* into the world, from God knows where. That is, most fundamentally, we are immersed in circumstance, with no way to know what our situation is. In that case, we are nothing *but* relations, before rules or roles ever happen. Such uncertainty is the very essence of arbitrary absurdity, meaning there is no ultimate rhyme or reason to our existence. It all just happens, very mysteriously.

The two sides of the term can be defined more exactly this way:

1. absurdity: events can happen for no reason, that is, are ultimately unpredictable and beyond control; and
2. arbitrary: events can happen for no purpose, that is, are ultimately accidental, devoid of any inherent meaning.

To be arbitrary or absurd is often mistaken for capricious or frivolous, but they are not the same at all. These two sets of features are better equated with arational and irrational. To be without reason does not necessarily mean to be unreasonable. But it does require a great deal of courage, especially if done on a regular basis.

The two realms coexist in an uneasy alliance. This is precisely the ground of being within which people live. Still, although we cannot always choose the experiences given us, as they may occur without warning or are not amenable to control, we are free to choose our response (*response-ability*). As the valiant humanist holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, observed, everything can be taken from a person...except this: “the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” This is how people insert meaning into their lives.

A brilliant self psychologist deeply impressed by the reciprocal nature of “self,” Heinz Kohut, argues in behalf of the particular role others play in our lives. Kohut postulates a kind of psychic structure—the *bipolar self* (better said, bipolar “self”)—which operates according to a certain set of imperatives: *ambition and ideals*. Whereas ambitions “push,” ideals “pull” one along. However, ideals are probably better thought of as *aspirations*, goals yet

to be achieved to which one feels beholden, not necessarily their idea. This view is an early attempt to describe autistic and empathetic cores, operating in tandem, albeit at cross-purposes, each headed in its own direction.

The cores can be understood by how they actually relate to objects. But objects are far more complex than usually supposed. The term “object” is a feature of language, which is comprised of subjects *and* objects. Consider this sentence: “The boy hit the ball.” Clearly, the “boy” is subject and the “ball” is object—*of* that subject. In this sense, objects are understood only in relation to their subjects, for whom they *are* objects. Subjects and objects only exist in terms of the relationship holding between them.

Examined more closely, objects are further defined by one’s underlying motivation, their interest in them, toward which they are oriented—for the sake of having some *objective*. Therefore, objects, in this sense, are those aspects of reality toward which we not only act with interest but intention. This is how the autistic core works. Clearly, this meaning contrasts with more ordinary usage, in which objects are merely three-dimensional things, such as boys, bats, or balls. Further, in Kohut’s conception, a *selfobject* is a kind of object: one affecting the “self” some way. Simply put, a selfobject (e.g., significant other) is an object that has *you* as *its* object. Such others turn the tables on us in this regard, inherently relating to *their* objects with judgment or approval, if not specific agenda, influencing their objects as a result. This reflective mechanism is how the empathetic core works.

Perhaps the world’s foremost spokesperson for existential psychology, Kirk Schneider, offers an inspired account of the otherwise inexplicable process of integral love. The conflict between the two sides of the bipolar “self” is so striking and perplexing as to have the force of an irresolvable paradox, embracing a trio of principles:

1. an expansive/constrictive polarity, imposing on us a contrary set of demanding imperatives—passion and restrictive controls;
2. dread of either end of which promoting dysfunction; and
3. integration of these poles promoting optimal living.

Centering is the capacity to be aware of and direct these possibilities: “to *integrate* freedom and limits. The path to greater freedom is paradoxically found through an encounter with the ways in which we are bound.”

However, this circumstance must be taken in a broader context. The expansive pole *comes first*, overlaid with constriction (“self”-contraction) later—the exact set of conditions present at the inception of manifest existence. It is precisely “self”-contraction (or constriction), that imposes the seeming separation of self and other upon the expansive state of Prior Unity. Such is how the God/Ego Paradox operates in ordinary life.

CHAPTER 5: INTEGRAL CHRISTIANITY

One way to sort out the thorny mass of Christian dogma is inspired by the sweeping integral theorist, Ken Wilber. The gist of his idea goes like this: *each point of view found in the vast corpus of doctrine is aligned to ways of thinking appearing at one or another developmental stage of life*. That is, the particular way you used to think as an infant, toddler, preschooler, juvenile, adolescent, and/or adult now forms the template used to understand even the most profound matters of existence. The real question is determining which one of these developmental perspectives dominates.

All people undergo this kind of process, including those holding beliefs in Christianity. Therefore, ideas about God can be plotted along this shared continuum of developmental stages. A number of authors have worked out a way of applying this integral principle to Christian doctrine, perhaps most prominently the Reverend Paul R. Smith, as well as his integral colleague, Jim Marion. The adept Hindu doctor, Deepak Chopra, mixes and matches versions of God too, in an uplifting volume entitled, *How to Know God*.

Integral Christianity is based on three tiers of progression overall. The First Tier lays out the common forms of God. The First Tier is often depicted as a spiral. It is easy to think that development proceeds as if steps in a staircase. To enter the next step, you have to leave the prior one. But developmental layers are carefully and meticulously interwoven, as might be said of threads in a tapestry. A innovative developmental theorist, Robert Kegan, notes a significant outcome of this spiral imagery: “the helix has a number of advantages. It makes it clear that we move back and forth in our struggle with this lifelong tension, [revisiting] old issues but at a whole new level of complexity”—much as notes of the scale remain essentially the same, albeit altered throughout each successive octave. The more things change, the more they stay the same it seems.

Even though held by adults, the First Tier is under the influence of the developmental stage in which each point of view first makes its appearance. That is to say, these ideas conform to the fundamental traits of one growing

up, defined by each given stage. Further, these traits *replicate* all along the way, coming ever more fully into their own during later stages, perhaps prevailing over the others by then. However unexpectedly, in doing so, they mirror preceding historical epochs in the process as well:

1. Autistic Core (indigenous/ancient—terrible twos/threes):
 - a. Tribal: driven by fear and loyalty, beholden to ancestors and spirits—God a magical being dispensing rewards and sanctions, affiliated with totem objects, an avid guardian and sole authority looking after those under His (or Her) providence.
 - b. Warrior: driven by a passion to win and conquer at all costs, pecking order dominates, might makes right—God a wrathful, vengeful deity, the almighty who rules from on high as supreme being, best to appease if at all possible.
2. Empathetic Core (ancient/medieval—formidable fours/fives):
 - a. Conformist: driven by security, law and order, conforms to rules and consequences—God a redeemer and righteous judge, mercy supersedes revenge, takes a personal interest in chosen ones.
 - b. Savior: driven by prestige of approval and acceptance, empathy and altruism stressed—God a kind, gentle benefactor, heroically coming to the rescue, albeit surreptitiously as a vicarious proxy.
3. Integral Base (modern/postmodern—sociable sixes/sevens):
 - a. Opportunist: driven to get ahead and make the most of things, success a priority—God an impersonal force, animating a vast, comprehensive system of reality that can be known.
 - b. Egalitarian: driven to question uniformity and any established standards, valuing equality and different points of view—God more than the universe, yet, not separate from it.

A preceeding archaic level (as the case with infants, or insatiable ones) also exists, first put into play while humans were yet living as hominids. However, these primitive underpinnings to human evolution, not to mention early life development, do not have the sophistication to advance doctrines about God. Although still active today, these traits operate more as a kind of bewildered awe or tremulous beseeching of the cosmos than actual spiritual way of life.

Most people reside at the middle levels than either end, which are more sparse. That is, the schema demonstrates a Bell-Shaped Curve, bulging in the middle, tapering toward the ends. An interesting and timely example of this alignment can be seen in contemporary politics: *conservatives and liberals*. The two can be distinguished not only by their affiliations with autistic or empathetic core but two different orientations toward freedom. Whereas conservatives are motivated by a half-empty glass and determined to protect

against evil at all costs (freedom *from* injury or loss), liberals are motivated by a half-full glass and determined to provide for the common good against all odds (freedom *to* enjoy life). Hearty advocates of freedom, both see these as God-given rights, if coming at it from opposite sides.

For their part, conservatives focus on law and order, dominated by its autistic moral code: looking out for number one and might makes right. This is why owning guns is so crucial. Conservatives see all issues as a life or death matter, that is, *right to life* matter. But, after that, you're on your own. Liberals, however, focus on universal values, based on an empathetic moral code: equality and playing fair. This is why opening the flood gates and inviting everyone to the party without discrimination is so crucial. Liberals see all issues as a matter of social approval, that is, *quality of life* matter. Virtue is determined by which code of ethics is in play.

Either way has liabilities. Yet, they are not equal, simply two ways to do the same thing. The conservative orientation relies on its autistic core, only embracing empathetic (even integral) concerns on this basis. Liberal views, meanwhile, rely on their empathetic core, embracing integral (even autistic) concerns on this basis. As odious to conservatives as this will inevitably sound, the liberal orientation actually indicates a developmental advance. Still, liberals have to own up to the fact that, until they integrate with their own conservative underpinnings, their liberal leanings will be inadequate, lacking that aspect of self necessary for a fully-realized person.

One does not outgrow each level, simply putting it all behind them and moving on to the next. The hard-fought accomplishments from resolving each stage-specific task continue to be required throughout. Therefore, each successive level is *embedded* in those that precede it. Each is contained in every successive level as the overall structure emerges. More, as each level fully emerges it acts as a context for those preceding it, requiring them to adjust and adapt to this new level retroactively, as best they can. In other words, as the entire package gets established it enters the juvenile and then the adolescent stage, however focused in a particular set of traits. Indeed, any one of these traits can become a priority, picked over the others and reinforced as we go along.

One way to make sense of this developmental insight involves how we orient to relationship and responsibility. To return to our example, whereas conservatives tend to emphasize responsibility, liberals take special interest in relationships; the former mired in earlier development concerns, the latter diverted by those that are only now emerging. They also reflect the distinction between masculine and feminine orientations. But, as an intrepid explorer of human mores, Carol Gilligan, suggests, inclusion far outweighs exclusion: "Although from one point of view, paying attention to one's own needs is selfish, from a different perspective it is not only honest but fair. Once

obligation extends to include the self as well as others, the disparity between selfishness and responsibility dissolves.” In her plea advocating on behalf of the uniqueness of women, Gilligan points out the need for our masculine and feminine aspects to pay attention to one another. Just as C. G. Jung espoused a century ago, urging the reconciliation of opposites, especially the archetypes of *anima* (woman) and *animus* (man). Such is integral love.

According to this arrangement, development shifts gears at the point when toddlers become preschoolers, transitioning to a very different, albeit upgraded version of our interpersonal relations:

1. ownership and autistic core (conservative): *belonging to*—objects and possessions not only *owned* by you but *owed* to you; and
2. membership and empathetic core (liberal): *belonging with*—admission into and association with the company of others.

The first sense of belonging which the child can manage is possession, whereby they are immersed in debt, with objects set in orbit around them. Although membership also emerges at this time (subjects now beholding *to* objects), it has no way to assert itself with the same authority as ownership. It is simply too complex a concept for the young child to comprehend—at least at first. In this way, over time, debt gets augmented by duty.

Waiting for integral love to become commonplace, politics will scuttle even our best efforts on the shoals of this shifty dilemma. Until then, the only viable option is to employ a strategy common to sailing, going against a stiff wind: first tack one way, then the other, then the other again, and so on. This coordinated effort has to be acknowledged as the only reasonable means to negotiate autistic and empathetic cores—until integral love at last becomes the norm. Bringing forth such a monumental event will not likely happen in our lifetime but be a multi-generational task, something we can all look forward to in the meantime. Republicans and democrats must work *together* for the sake of the common good, each taking their turn.

Overall, whereas juveniles tend to revisit their autistic core, adolescents also revisit their empathetic core. In due course, the First Tier is followed by a Second Tier, containing more advanced levels: *integral and holistic*. But these are thought to only have appeared in recent years, tentatively poking out their heads. Yet, characterizing them as up and coming levels overstates the case. Better said, they have *always* been present, at every juncture. They simply have not completed their stage-appropriate tasks thus far, perhaps even snagged by trauma. *Every* level integrates to some degree, the holism of which including every previous stage into the bargain.

It is only now that integration and holism have finally reached a point of substantial accomplishment that they are coming into their own, such

that people are noticing and behaving accordingly. But what is actually happening is the tip of a well-established pattern, by nature already all-inclusive (second commandment). A full integration and holistic ensemble of this process brings forth Second Tier adults. Third Tier spiritual growth follows from this, illustrating the uncommon attainment of highly evolved people emerging from the first three stages of life—saints and mystics.

Christian doctrine captures the essence of one's core and base positions perfectly. For example, when operating according to their core, people find the idea of a parental deity not only appealing but the only account of reality that makes sense—which they will fight for to protect, if not impose on others. Unfortunately, this is not a very sophisticated understanding of spiritual reality. Indeed, as commonly understood, spiritual reality is the world blown up to cosmic proportions, as seen in a certain light: either for or against you—enemies or allies. Obviously, in that case, it would seem best to figure out how to get on the right side of these forces.

Unfortunately, such a view is first put in place while one is yet a child. But development doesn't have to be this way. Operating according to one's integral base, only sublime truths of spiritual reality have appeal, addressing more illumined spiritual interests. A sobering failure undermines the moral sensibility of Christianity on this point: attempting to satisfy autistic core ends (forgiveness and life everafter in paradise) with empathetic core means (loving others and turning the other cheek). Contrary to the intentions of Jesus, this incongruity is at cross purposes and never had any chance of succeeding. Emphasizing the virtues of forgiveness and everlasting pleasure only perpetuates the autistic core, not Jesus' hope for human maturity.

Christian atonement draws from all domains, fashioning a religious message appealing to both core positions (Old Testament appeasing of a wrathful God, New Testament homage to salvation and human sacrifice). According to the former, one lives in perpetual fear of God's wrath (conservative). According to the latter, one lives in desperate supplication of God's love (liberal). Either way is self-effacing, however set to their own purposes. It has been wryly said that whereas Jews invented guilt, Catholics perfected it. Which goes to show, like femininity, at least some liberal leanings exist in us all. Yet, vice versa, the underpinnings of masculinity and conservative commitment to power are necessary for achievement. Clearly, the two must be integrated.

All in all, one's integral base emerges initially beholden to their autistic and empathetic cores. In due course, however, a spiritual reality coherent to integral love outright begins to appear, subtly interwoven between the lines (divine incarnation, spirit baptism). Altogether, these beliefs create a variety of intense, nuanced meanings deeply enticing to believers. Not surprisingly, this accounts for why Christianity has such an enormous popularity among

so many different people. Yet, no explicit account of these incompatible meanings is provided by Christian theology, whereby one can tell which is which and intelligently choose among them.

The Great Path of Emerge

As mentioned, Adi Da offers a unique schema for the precise mapping of the developmental course of each person—the Seven Stages of Life. The first three stages can be described this way, each defined by the ways people engage in and learn how to embrace their love relations:

1. *First Stage Individuation* (0-7 yr old): establishing one as a locus of autonomy—all about me, or being loved (autistic). Love at this stage cares *for*, enjoying others as they take care of you.
2. *Second Stage Socialization* (7-14 yr old): accepting others as a focus of concern—all about you, or being loving (empathetic). Love at this stage cares *about*, valuing others and taking care of them.
3. *Third Stage Integration* (14-21 yr old): embracing an inclusive sense of cooperation and tolerance for everybody-all-at-once—all about us, or *being* love (integral). Love at this stage *simply* cares, committed to universal values that take all into account.

Although Adi Da ascribes particular age ranges for these stages, each developmental task actually has its *inception* as early as infancy. It's just that these tasks come into their own during the particular stage indicated.

The infant receives no warning when the bottom drops out and, slipping and sliding, they suddenly squeeze through the constricted birth canal, spilling out into the harsh light of an abrupt and intrusive world. It is an utterly perplexing turn of events, far from welcome, expressed with unabashed verve and vocal power. They have no way of understanding this new place, except perhaps as a continuation of the womb upon which, until now, they had come to rely. The shorn umbilical, blunt and dangling from their belly, has no impact upon them. The message simply cannot be received. Bewildered, the infant has no way to appreciate their real situation, that they have been unceremoniously deposited and relocated—indeed, *evicted*—inexplicably sent somewhere else.

Still, each newborn is endowed with their full complement of awareness and love, the exact same dynamic operating at the inception of existence. At no point are these twin-prongs ever more fully extended to the lower self than right from the start. Unfortunately, neither awareness nor love holds up very well, given the vulnerability present at birth. Even so, we enter the world as little awareness and love machines, utterly committed to love—autistic love anyway.

More, love relates not only to awareness but will, as Rollo May, one of America's great psychologists, attests: "The effort which goes into the exercise of the will is really effort of attention; the strain in willing is the effort to keep consciousness clear, i.e., the strain of keeping the attention focused." As the impersonal and indifferent machinery of the mind whirls about, attention forces cognition to stay engaged, confronting whatever experience is presently the case. This experience will, therefore, persist in awareness, forcing cognition to act on it accordingly. When the will is weak, attention wanders. In this case, cognition becomes capable of shifting gears on its own, offering up more appealing, or perhaps inimical substitutes to awareness instead (as might be said of mental illness symptoms).

However, when the will is strong, it can persist in engaging experience, even when unpleasant or objectionable. Intention sustains this malleable focus of attention, nevermind difficulties encountered in the environment. Such is the nature of commitment. Perhaps unexpectedly, will also relates awareness to authenticity. A notable colleague of May, James Bugental, ties up loose ends: "Authenticity is that presence of an individual in his living in which he is fully aware in the present moment, in the present situation." Clearly, this is no easy matter, especially at the beginning, as we are thrust so unseemly into an astounding array of circumstances utterly beyond any semblance of our control.

Enormous responsibility comes with authenticity, situated as it is in an ultimately baseless freedom. Yet, authenticity is more than merely an honest appraisal of existence, although certainly that. One must also *live with* the consequences of that appraisal. Of concern is an insight stressed by another savvy observer of the human condition, Van Cleve Morris: "Most of us, let us admit, are of the conventional sort. We pull our socks on every morning with the expectation of fitting into community folkways through the day." Even so, Morris points out this is not reprehensible. What *is* reprehensible, though, is any numbness to the fact that these expectations are a value *we* insert into our lives: "So long as we do so unknowingly, unwittingly, we are nonauthentic individuals; we are not aware of making that value commitment at sock-pulling time."

Thus, this situation puts us on the spot. People often say that, while under duress, they had no choice, that they *had* to choose the way they did, either because conditions were so extreme or the options so few. However, this is to miss the point of freedom. Even in the event of one option, there is still a choice—the *commitment* made to that option. Commitment is our immersion into the conditions of life. One can truly emerge into being, fully and completely, only via choices made freely. Otherwise, people live life unawares, part of an alienated or inauthentic existence.

The troublesome conditions of human life come down to this: *when you make choices, you take your chances*. As everyone knows, choosing which socks to wear will hardly put you in an existential tizzy. No, the real problem stems from a certain *kind* of choice, which is to say, the difficult choice—what might result even in your own death, if not alienation from a deeply held sense of being. It is no wonder freedom makes us anxious. Freedom sends shivers down our spines precisely because the onus to choose is on us. *We* must do the choosing. We are not spared looking around for an expert or an advisor. Even in choosing someone to guide us, we have *selected* their expertise over others. There is no escaping the angst of our freedom. Although, curiously enough, it *can* be embraced.

No one knows the travails of commitment more than the infant, so unwittingly deposited into the world and forced to figure things out on the fly. Although stunned by birth, the infant is game enough, going about the often perplexing task of determining their place in the world. At first, we cannot comprehend that we are anything *but* the world. This requires us to individuate and become established as a distinct, autonomous person. But this has a major problem, for we must *separate* from the world process in order to do so. Ultimately, this emancipation even includes the mother, putting our access to precious resources at risk. Individuation only takes place at a certain cost to our peace of mind. More, it takes place within an even larger context than the infant's immediate surroundings:

This Feeling Of Separation Ultimately (or Primarily) Involves The Sense Of Disconnection From The Ultimate Source Of Support and Love (Which Is The Living Divine), and It Also Becomes A General Doubt (or Anxiety) About other human beings On whom one Depends For Love.

At the end of the first year, the infant makes a fateful decision: whether to align with the parents or not. The infant must decide to “throw in” with and “side” with their parents, that is, *attach* to them. Attachment represents the solution to separation, overcoming the gap between them. More, it also serves to separate our allies from any possible enemies. As can be seen, we live in a constant vicegrips of competing interests.

If parental *attunement* has gone well enough, the infant is only too happy to attach to the parents (not to say, larger community in turn), seeing them as responsive to their many needs. It is in this way that we feel loved. From here, we identify with certain parental traits in due course. Yet, until then, less welcome outcomes are also possible too, of course. Most troubling are abandonment and betrayal, if we feel we have not been handled properly thus far.

Indeed, there is even more downside to attachment than this. A central tenet of Buddhism laments that human beings are attached—if not *addicted*—to desire. The trouble is that, acting on the basis of desire, something else gets thrown into the bargain: *karma*. It is a package deal. This cycle of cause and effect ensures we revisit the exact same issues controlling us, whether this life or next. We end up in a vicious cycle, where even very ordinary preferences interfere with and corrupt our best intentions.

A prominent psychiatrist infusing clinical treatment with spiritual wisdom, Gerald May, offers an impressive contemplation of our suffering:

We are all addicts in every sense of the word. The Upanishads of ancient India go back as early as ten centuries before Christ. One of these says, “When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal.” In the sixth century B.C., the Greek Heraclitus said of attachment, “Whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of soul.” In the Hebrew tradition, the ancient preacher of Ecclesiastes moaned, “I denied my eyes nothing that they desired, refused my heart no pleasure. What futility it all was, what chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes, 2:10-11)

The infant, however, knows nothing of any of this. They have only one directive—*get what they want*—with no way to accomplish it except for crying out in the hopes that someone will listen and be responsive to their call. If the parents are attuned to the infant’s needs and provide for them, a reassuring sense of entitlement ensues.

By the second year, the toddler begins to move about freely. They must throw themselves into the long ordeal of comprehending things, not to say often more perplexing effort of getting along. It is now that the toddler becomes well-known for their rowdy outbursts of will. They do not simply notice what attracts them and intently focus attention on these objects of interest but act on them with intention. Unfortunately, this does not always yield the outcome wanted or expected. As the case with individuation, considerable downside with socialization must be resolved:

The [socialization] function Begins To Develop Coincident With the [individuation] function, but socialization itself Truly Begins Only After The Basic Struggle With individuation Has Reached A Workable Settlement. The Second Stage Of Life Is Also Associated With The Conflict Between Privacy (or self-Acceptance). The Feeling Of Being Rejected (and The Felt Need To Reject or Punish others For Un-Love) Characterizes The Second Stage Reaction (or egoic and, Necessarily, Un-Happy Presumption).

Although the parents have been ministering to their needs all along, the child has little awareness of this arrangement. To the child, everything has been done for one reason: *they wanted it that way*. Ironically, this imperial sense of entitlement (to attunement) is the sign that the parents have done their job thus far. However, this represents a two-edged sword, for the parents must introduce a typically alien and incomprehensible option to the child—*obedience*—the only solution to rejection. Reversing the toddler's sense of being the sole authority not only improves behavior but signals parental approval. For this, the child abdicates authority and transfers it to the parents. They will not do this for any reason other than out of love.

The Four Pillars of Love

Attachment is the infant's initial foray into the process of integration. It is by virtue of pairing their own sense of need with parental attunement that attachment emerges. In the toddler phase, the parents turn the tables on the child and make requirements, to go along with their responsiveness, all of which pretty baffling to the child. The sign that we accept these conditions is obedience, a willingness to forgoe our hard-fought victory of entitlement. Into this breach another developmental task must be inserted—*attainment* (of attunement)—signaled by not only by aspiring to greater deeds and attributes which the parents approve but emulating certain of the parents' traits. Otherwise, the only option is to actively rebel *against* those traits, announcing we do not feel attunement has gone well.

The child has to integrate the various, incompatible messages received from the parents, which suggest there is a set of "good parents" and "bad parents." We must roll these various images into a *single* set of parents, although bad sometimes, still good on balance. Needless-to-say, acceptance such as this involves some hefty negotiations. Without integration, things would break down. Integration is essential for the sake of our adaptation. A crucial relation exists between awareness and integration, as proposed by an innovative couple of Gestalt psychology, Fritz and Laura Perls:

The aim of Gestalt therapy is the *awareness continuum*, the freely ongoing Gestalt formation where what is of greatest concern and interest to the organism, the relationship, the group or society becomes Gestalt, comes into the foreground where it can be fully experienced and coped with (acknowledged, worked through, sorted out, changed, disposed of, etc.) so that then it can melt into the background (be forgotten or assimilate and integrated) and leave the foreground free for the next relevant Gestalt.

Memory is the source of this endless procession of gestalten. These bits of pseudo-“self” combine with our ongoing experience, embellishing it with layers of interpretation that represent our final understanding. In fact, it is this process that generates pseudo-“self” in the first place, as experience, and the conclusions drawn about it, are relegated to memory.

Yet, needless-to-say, this is easier said than done. In her own thoughtful transposition of nondual principles into clinical practice, a resourceful theorist, Marsha Linehan, offers this inspiring insight: “‘Radical’ acceptance does not choose what to accept and what not to accept. Thus, it requires an acceptance without distortion, without adding judgment of good or bad.” Acceptance like this allows us to see life as it really is, without the disruptive haze superimposed by what we might prefer.

In the normal course of development, acceptance is not an all-at-once prospect. Rather, growth involves the *Acceptance Sequence*, elaborating on the writings of a conscientious medical provider, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, herself musing over the disturbing prospects of impending death (or any trauma):

1. Autistic Love: safety and satiety—“I want what I want”:
 - a. denial (flight): “Oh no, not *me*. It *can’t* be true!”,
 - b. denial (fight): “Oh *no*...*why* me!? *Damn* you!”, and
 - c. bargaining: “I promise *anything*, if you’ll only...”
2. Empathetic Love: sacrifice—“I will if I have to”:
 - a. resignation: “OK. I give up. [Sigh.]”, and
 - b. obedience: “I’ll do or believe *anything*, if only...”
3. Integral Love: surrender—“I will let go”:
 - a. forgiveness: “I embrace all aspects of life—even others,” and
 - b. repentance: “I live fully in the moment—serving all others.”

At first, there is simply the brute impact of trauma, shocking one with its sheer impossibility. The first response is to question it, deny it is true, perhaps find evidence to refute it. However, once the verdict is in and there is no way to avoid it, the next impulse is to complain about it or find fault with it, more to the point, find someone to *blame*—so they will take your place if possible (as might be said of Jesus on the cross). Although the shock lingers, one is angrily getting their feet under themselves, not about to go down without a fight.

Yet, as this option runs out of steam—no adversaries to fight, or at least none that can be beaten—intelligence steps in. Acceptance to this point is primarily a matter of resolving the second part of the fight response: “*Damn* you!” However, the first part must still be dealt with: “*Why* me!?” (Job of the Old Testament.) Even if no reasons exist, perhaps due to random events, one can still try to bargain. It is typically at this point that people turn to God.

This is the autistic motivation of supplicant prayer, imposing on God as if a parent, to grant boons and solve problems (St. Bernard's second rung). In the absence of reprieve, acceptance is the realization no one is willing to cut a deal, maybe because they just don't care. If no pardon comes through, nothing is left but to collapse into the terrible prospects befalling you, suffering the grief of that dreadful injury or loss. Obedience is an option as well, when demands are made, if in your best interests to comply. Life in this case is a matter of paying dues, toughing it out as best you can. Or else pretend otherwise, if you can find somebody to play along.

True acceptance takes you beyond dread and despair, where anything is possible, even love and joy. The most auspicious form of acceptance is truly paradoxical, if not inimical to most people: *accept evil*—just as Jesus says. However, this yielding does not mean to condone evil. Rather, it requires something much more perplexing and counter-intuitive: *allow evil*—in the event evil should occur. Accepting evil is a matter of indifference, of not reacting to it, even while asserting yourself if you have to deal with it.

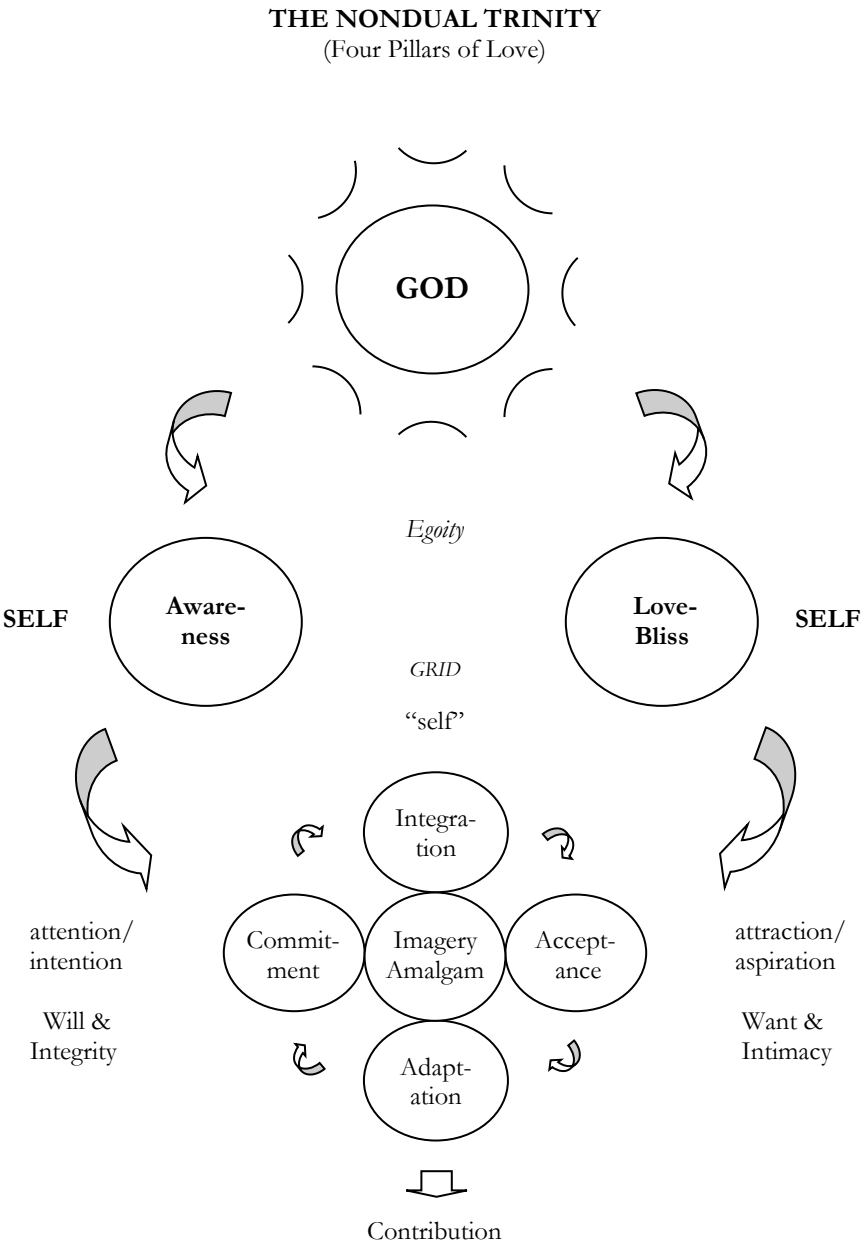
An essential collateral aspect of accepting evil is to refrain from doing evil in kind. To accept evil means you simply *endure* evil, allowing it to pass through you, but without being made evil by it. Obviously, this is the very difficulty that makes Jesus' admonitions so hard to do. The most definitive way to engage acceptance is one people are very reluctant to do: *forgive*—which *absolves* evil. From this forgiveness comes repentance.

Adi Da sums it up this way, as the *Wound of Love*:

Be Vulnerable. Be Wounded, When Necessary—and Endure That Wound (or Hurt). Allow That Hurt, but Do Not Let It Become The Feeling Of Lovelessness. Be Vulnerable, and (Thus) Not Insulted. If You Are Merely Hurt, You Will Still “Know” The Necessity (or The Heart’s Requirement) Of Love, and You Will Still “Know” The Necessity (or The Heart’s Requirement) To Love.

Unfortunately, accomplishing a gesture as embracing as integral love is enormously difficult. Most people simply don't want to do it. This paradox represents something contrary to our sense of reason. To put it simply, paradoxes just don't make sense. Yet, the benefits are enormous, as a daring pioneer of love, Erich Fromm, points out, offering this striking prototype of integral love: “Mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality; a power which unites him with others, love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness; yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity.” It is in the two working together that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, like a binary sun, one dramatically altering the course of the other.

Consequently, an outline of the whole person, as situated in their true state of nondual being, can be diagrammed as follows:



The Four Pillars of Love is both a reciprocal and interactive process, requiring full participation in respect to all aspects. Yet, it is possible to intervene at different points in the cycle, depending on one's orientation to love and the priority given to that part of the process—either commitment, acceptance, integration, or adaptation. The inclusion of all pillars is essential for well-being. Whereas commitment and acceptance represent the lower self extension of the twin-prongs of Awareness and Love-Bliss, integration and adaptation represent aspects of the Grid, integrating our internal “self” so that it adapts to the world, stage-specific activities of development.

This goes to point out a potentially onerous outcome: *self collapsed upon the mind*. Collapsed upon the mind means the self becomes identified with mind. Or, as Buddhism puts it, attached to the mind. Actually, enmeshed is probably better said. Although not formally designated a disorder in clinical practice, such states are a principal source of stress and dis-ease, interfering with the optimal operation of the psyche. In such a case, the self mistakenly takes itself to *be* the mind (if not “self”), as well as the body the mind is intended to serve.

When trauma occurs it staggers the self, throwing us into a bewildered tumult of recoil. If we are sufficiently overwhelmed by circumstance, the mind will intercede, precisely in order to protect self, applying its own problem-solving process to the situation—perhaps even to the point that self abdicates responsibility and the obligation for conscious choice to the mind. It is the express purpose of self to emancipate from or transcend the mind (even ego), residing in its own inherent presence of Prior Unity.

But the mind (or ego) will never release its hold over the self, at least until a crucial condition is unequivocally established: *the self can handle the trauma*—accepting the Wound of Love, thereby, releasing egoic separation. Otherwise, certain implications potentially follow for the self:

1. the mind overriding self during decision-making, interjecting its own impersonal, mechanical problem-solving; and, in so doing,
2. the mind being dominated by the organism, as could be said of the pleasure principle and efforts toward self-preservation (not least of which, life ever-after in paradise).

Bluntly put, if the self cannot rise to the occasion and make a decision, the mind will. In this way, the mind takes over. As a result, unconscious mechanisms get introduced into the psyche, disrupting both ordinary and optimal functioning. In sum, although an excellent servant, the mind makes a terrible master. That latter role rightly belongs to self. If we submit to our own native state of Awareness and Love-Bliss, we can exist solely as the Oneness of Prior Unity—even *as* the S/self arises in its midst.

CONCLUSION

Egoity is behind all human suffering. However, what is meant by ego is a little different from that usually thought to be the case. In ordinary conversation, ego doesn't just mean one's locus of conscious awareness and will. Rather, it more likely refers to a kind of person or else certain way of behaving, if not opinion of one's self, like having a "big ego"—as if there were good ones and bad ones, the likelihood of landing on the right side a real possibility if only that ego were sufficiently improved. This suggests the ego is subject to growth and development, which is beside the point of its inherently debilitating nature. Ego is an unsavory impediment to all love and happiness, a misguided travail of illusion. Ego is not really what kind of person you are but the very act of being a *separate* person at all. This comes as quite a surprise to most people.

There is even more to the elephant in the room. That God created the universe out of a generous act of loving grace is simply not true. Rather, the opposite is the case. Unholy Genesis is neither a gesture of God's will nor God's love, but a spontaneous, utterly arbitrary act of egoity, without the slightest cause or reason. If creation is attributed to God, then God is not only reduced to the the Grid of Attention, but Illusion of Relatedness, all animated by egoity—which most assuredly *does not* love you. Indeed, it *cannot* love you. In the end, ego loves only itself.

Even if it could be said that God loves you, it is better said that God *is* you. And, since God is love, you are love. This is how love enters the world: to the extent that you release egoity, you feel your own native state of Oneness. The act of egoity, and process of creation following in its wake, is not something to rejoice. It is the very inception of suffering. If there is a supreme evil, egoity is surely that one, by all rights a deplorable spasm. The horrific truth is just too hard to accept: *creation is an infestation of separate selves*. These are Satan's minions—each and every one of us—in the guise of ego at least. Don't be fooled. Speaking ambiguously about ego enables karmic attachment. Until this awful truth can at last be acknowledged, no anti-egoic

cure will follow. Mistaking ego for something of value is precisely how evil creeps in, making a thorough mess of things.

Yet, what kind of person you are seems extremely important to most people. In a famously unapologetic debate with Carl Rogers, Rollo May urges a particular understanding of evil. To make his point, May draws on the Jewish spiritual leader, Martin Buber, as well as his response to Rogers previously: “Man is basically good—and evil.” May rightly points out that, admit it or not, we are motivated even by lesser aspirations, such as lust for power or revenge. His word for the autistic core is “daimonic,” borrowed from the ancient Greeks. Developing this idea, May struggles with a curious liability: “While the daimonic cannot be said to be evil in itself, it confronts us with the troublesome dilemma of whether it is to be used with awareness, a sense of responsibility and the significance of life, or blindly and rashly.”

But what does it mean to use the autistic core blindly or rashly? And what does it mean that the autistic core is not evil, but must be used with awareness, responsibility, and significance? The answer to the latter is simple: *integrated* with empathy. The former can be answered as succinctly: *without* empathy—such that integral love does not occur. The abuses of the autistic core are obvious and well-known. But the excess of the empathetic core can be overwhelming just as well, desperately languishing in isolation, although the prospects of harming one’s self through sacrifice and loss is more likely than harming others through impulsivity or violence.

One of the most misunderstood features of human existence is a perplexing frailty played out between these two spheres of love: what one regards to be evil is good to the other, the two held irrevocably at arm’s length. Criminals, for example, invariably see themselves as in the right and can never quite figure out what all the fuss is about. But the trouble is easy to say: *evil is in the skew*. The difficulty comes from picking one side over the other. So long as we are skewed, we will fight to the death our right to be thus skewed. As a timely example, conservatives and liberals circle around each other endlessly, regarding the other as a threat. This is why reciprocity is the essence of paradox. Only the mutual embrace of these skewed parts offsets polarity and ensures growth, such that maturity ensues.

Human evolution is at a crossroads. Having moved over the course of history from magical to logical thinking (more or less), it is time to make the next leap to integral thinking. At any moment you are likely animating either side, if not an enmeshment of the two. Only one procedure can reliably overcome this tragic state, as Adi Da makes clear:

The mind is double, but the person is one. If you keep your two minds (or early-life “Oedipal” patterning [autistic core] and social

ego [empathetic core]) “in the room” at the same time, you can discover (and establish yourself in) your true disposition as a unified person—rather than constantly flipping back and forth between the “points of view” of two minds. By keeping both of your minds “in the room”, your singleness of heart can become clear.

To keep your two minds in the room at the same time is to simply *allow* paradox, let it be. It will naturally operate of its own accord, so long as we don’t take sides. Accomplishing such an embracing gesture is enormously difficult, for most people simply don’t want to do it. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, this is also true: logic abhors a paradox. Still, the benefits are immense. The two sides play off of one another, like dance-steps, weaving back and forth, negotiating the many delicate interactions of life.

This brings up a no doubt obvious point. Children are not, generally speaking, great metaphysicians, much less mystics. When children talk about God, they usually mimic something dictated to them by their parents. Adi Da puts it this way: “When people communicate to their children about ‘God’, they commonly speak of ‘God’ as a super-version of mommy-and-daddy. That relationship is very similar to the one that you were called to enter into with your parents: ‘Be good—and we will love you, and protect you, and give you things that you want’.” If so, all one wants is to have their own way and be taken care of by others.

Van Cleve Morris makes a similar point:

Each one of us wants to know that in some genuine sense we belong *to* and *in* the world. In the West, Christian theology has provided what was missing. It tells us that man needs recognition of a warm and personal sort. He wants not merely to be required in some “corporate structure” of creation but to be *wanted* and *cherished*, as a child is wanted and cherished by his parents. This is what the Christian God supplies, i.e., a supreme agent who not only recognizes our existence but is full of gladness at that very fact.

Our need for approval is so desperate that the mere hope for it might suffice. It is not hard to appreciate the appeal of a personal God, not the way things appear. Even a cursory look at the daily news can make your skin crawl. It is easy to suspect ultimate reality of harboring ill will and require some reassurance. Ordinarily, we gloss over this fact with something Sartre found very disturbing—“*bad faith*.” Becker goes him one better with “*vital lie*,” necessary to face life head on: “Some people have more trouble with their lies than others. This is neurosis in a nutshell: the miscarriage of

clumsy lies about reality.” But, if so, this imposing critique is usually taken as an admonishment to reevaluate things—and *come up with better lies*.

But what would make anyone embrace a creed so fraught with fallacy? Who could possibly *want* a placebo or parental deity? To whom would one make any sense, or have any appeal? The answer is pretty straightforward, if unwelcome. Whereas children play make-believe, comforted by cartoon superheroes on Saturday morning TV, at least some adults eke out *their* solace on Sunday. The question is whether this actually provides any viable resolution of evil. Indeed, the question is whether this goes a step further—bringing *about* evil, enabling it precisely by *not* confronting it. As you might imagine, looking the other way can do more harm than good.

At issue is the very infliction of trauma. The trouble with trauma is it stunts your growth, precisely because you latch onto the developmental perspective and standards at the time you were overwhelmed by the injury or loss. You *prefer* that earlier developmental state, therefore, and the core patterning based on it, to the point of eschewing other levels that would come in due course more to your benefit. Clearly, this ends up operating to your detriment. Choices such as these must be reconsidered.

Equally irksome, the situation for existing religious dogma is much like a group of people waiting for an elevator, bundles in hand. Unfortunately, the elevator cannot hold every person and all of their bundles at once. As a result, each must search through their baggage for any items that can be readily dispensed with. Clearly, such a remarkable feat can happen only to the extent that everyone willingly submits to the razor. The trick is to locate which faulty items need discarding, for some a no doubt onerous task: *not only separate God from Creator (parent), but Christ from cross (placebo)*.

Christianity has a difficult load to carry in this regard, for the cross just cannot be taken seriously. If you delve into its meaning at all the fallacy becomes clear, what could rightly be called *Unholy Gospel*. Jesus *couldn't* have died for our sins, for two simple reasons:

1. *he didn't actually die*—and, even if he did,
2. the arcane practice of human sacrifice simply doesn't work.

The very feature that sells the sacrifice, making it acceptable—survival of Jesus—*negates* the sacrifice! Negating salvation into the bargain. Yet, the truth has always been right under our nose: If Jesus is God, that makes him eternal; and, if he is eternal, he *cannot* die. Therefore, he *did not* die.

Jesus' divine state was never put at risk by the demise of his body. Even if imbued with divinity, the body was never his identity, mere elements returned to the soil. And God would *know* that. Clearly, the cross was not God's idea. The hopeful refrain that Jesus died for our sins is accomplished

only through smoke and mirrors, hiding a terrible truth in its sleight of hand. The final irony of Christianity is truly breathtaking: precisely *because* Jesus is Christ, you only wind up with a victim who won't die.

There is but one reason anyone could worship something so heinous as the murder of God: deep down, they know it isn't true. This subterfuge has to be the single most astonishing instance of Emperor's new clothes ever to go unnoticed. The fate of Jesus depicted in the New Testament is nothing more than the brutal act of blood sacrifice, of absolutely no use to human beings. The real wonder is how something thought so contemptible could turn out so comforting. Christ on the cross is nothing but a way to get our parents to take care of us, worked out on a cosmic scale.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for St. Paul can be seen in his focus on the way Jesus was killed, rather than how he died. Despite its impressive symbolism, the cross hardly matters, or any other means of execution for that matter such as noose or guillotine. The sacrifice of spiritual masters is in their *being born*, for our sake. Sadly, the significance of this act has never been well received in Western civilization and, to prove it, Jesus paid the price. Yet, even so, in his death it is Christ who was resurrected—ironically enough, the very God for which he was killed.

All this has consequences, which comes down to a strange conflict of interests: *reduction of Christ to vicarious proxy*. Proxy means that what you want done is done for you by someone else, as an agent. Vicarious is the reverse: what happens to someone else happens to you, like a phantasy. But it doesn't. Spiritual practice requires the *transformation of* you, to ever more profound states of transcendental, spiritual being. This is best assisted by *transmission to* you, of the profound states of a spiritual master—as with the spirit baptism of Jesus. There's just no getting around this process.

Vicarious proxy short-circuits any hope for something this auspicious, precisely because it is based on magic, not Divine Reality. This highlights the value of nondualism, the direct revelation of Divine Reality. One is immersed in the ecstasy of Love-Bliss in this case, however fleeting or merely brushed-up against in any moment. In this benevolence, the need for vicarious proxy is exposed as unnecessary. God is *never* absent. We are not, therefore, put at risk by any possibility of withdrawal.

Bluntly put, the cross is a sham. Yet, nevermind this dour impediment, Jesus' offering of baptism continues to be available. This highlights why spiritual masters are essential. Their intimate relationship to God—the very *incarnation* of God—allows them to share these spiritual blessings directly. Jesus did not just perform miracles. He shared his very Christ. Yet, over time, the nature of Jesus' spiritual state has gotten lost in the shuffle of the suffering/salvation creed. Adi Da sums up what surely would be Jesus' own dismay with Christianity, if he were to appear in the present age:

Jesus Taught that we are tending to separate ourselves from the Spiritual Divine. He described the Father as One Who is always ready and even seeking for intimate Reunion with those who separate themselves from God. Therefore, Jesus did not at all subscribe to the view that we are inherently separated from God (and thus, even by virtue of the Will of God, inevitably going to death and hell, unless a voluntary mediator or substitute self-sacrificer can appear between us and God and so create Union). Indeed, the idea of a necessary mediator or ritual substitute is the most obvious and conventional kind of priest-talk, a kind of sinful (or “off the mark”) presumption, the kind of which Jesus was always critical.

The bitter truth for Christianity boils down to wishful thinking. Not only does the Savior fail to offset evil but enables it by that very fact. Forget about getting our hopes up, the cross simply cannot deliver on its promise.

Strangely enough, *two* religions are actually at work here, operating in an unwieldy amalgam: *Christ-ianity* and *Cross-tianity*. Whereas Christ provides a fuller, more nuanced spiritual account of Jesus’ ministry, the cross comes off a grim placebo—ensuring solace, but *not* salvation—slyly imposed after the fact. Although placebos *do* provide relief, which *is* their value, they only appear at the expense of other remedies that might more directly address the issue. It’s simply a matter of which is more important—the life of Jesus, or death. You can’t have it both ways, for one is the antithesis of the other. Tragically, the appeal of the cross serves to cancel Christ. Human sacrifice was never a viable spiritual principle. However shocking or macabre to say, with its embrace, Cross-tianity is getting away with murder.

The travesty of Christianity, in all fairness to Jesus, is those who killed him went on to make his Church, as the cross came to be accepted as the state religion of the Holy Roman Empire, and Western civilization in turn. Although Christians typically regard this a victory, their beliefs have been subsumed in primitive motives for survival. Holy wars have been fought to ensure that its consoling message not be taken away or called into question. Huge missionary campaigns have ensued too.

Eastern spirituality, meanwhile, is quite comfortable espousing that we are literally God and potential purveyors of Divine Love, with no need to destroy God’s human incarnation to do so. But this is simply how the ego operates. Worse, Jesus also suffered an ignoble slight. While dying on the cross that day, not only did his life pass from him but his identity as well. It is time to restore Christ to Christianity and thereby revive the mystical roots of Jesus’ divinely ordained ministry. For the sake of our future, therefore, the rallying call must be exclaimed unreservedly: *Christ without Cross!*

EPILOGUE: TYPING UP LOSE ENDS

After all the intense criticism of this sprawling exegesis, it must surely come as a surprise to hear that there are benefits to human sacrifice, beyond its vulgar attempt at bribery, putting the fix in for preferential treatment. But there is. Indeed, something unquestionably laudable—*gifting*—a practice which early humans understood. An indelible part of their lives, this gifting is also known as potlatch. What connects these disparate elements of social life is the whole point of human sacrifice: *prosperity*.

Unfortunately, an ambiguity muddies the water of prosperity, which a shrewd advocate in behalf of success principles, Mitchell J. Posner, makes clear: “Power and sex used to be treated in a similar manner: Everybody needs it, but won’t talk about it, and society regards it as slightly immoral. The difference is that sex is out of the closet—now considered a healthy, natural part of life—while power, on the other hand, is still a dirty word.” It is said that there is no romance without finance. Similarly, according to the success literature, there is no prosperity without power. Ancient people understood that. Even so, when it comes to prosperity there is one side or the other: you just can’t get enough of it or it’s more trouble than it’s worth (as might be said of a camel, trying fitfully to squeeze its way through the eye of a needle). Implement versus impediment, as it were.

Put simply, power and prosperity cut both ways: whereas a little is not enough, a lot is too much. Strict taboos have always surrounded power and prosperity. In the more innocent days of tribal people, if you owned too much or became too rich, you were tempted to be a “dominator,” thought unseemly. Therefore, certain practices developed in traditional societies to enable people who accumulated too much to share their excess with others and redistribute it. Yet, the ideal was still to achieve and acquire—within reason. Exactly where that line gets drawn was always open to discussion. But, like art, they knew it when they saw it.

Just as power is the ability to get people to do what you want (as well as resist doing what they want of you), prosperity is *having* all you want, while

not losing any once you get it. Before the production of coins and currency, humans exchanged other items in the pursuit of their commerce: food, bones, shells, teeth and claws, stones, and so forth. However curious they appear to us now, there was nothing arbitrary or insignificant in the use of such objects. Their worth (wealth) was immediately apparent to all who made use of them. For early people, power was a quality that resided in living things and the appendages of living things embodied these qualities. When people offered such items, they were not giving a dead thing, a mere shiny object (such as trinkets exchanged for land on the island of Manhattan) but a piece of life, of spirit—even a part of themselves, precisely because they were immersed in this same stream of life too.

Adi Da gives a thoughtful account of these times:

Goods were shared and freely given; men observed the principle of social reciprocity and respected social obligations to the letter. Primitive life was openly immersed in debt, in obligation to the invisible powers, the ancestors, the dead souls; the group lived partly by drawing powers from the nonliving. Nature gives freely of its bounty to man; this was the miracle for which to be grateful and beholden and give to the gods of nature in return. Whatever one received was already a gift, and so to keep things in balance, one had to give in return. The person who gives lavishly in this way achieves great honor. The potlatch itself is a very honorable event, and the giver achieves prominence in his or her community even though no longer a super-owner.

Originally, surplus was given away, especially to the gods. However, in the early agricultural civilizations, large amounts of surplus suddenly began to appear, as new technologies were developed. Naturally, these surpluses were given as offerings to the “divine” kings, thought to be gods on Earth, who sought to control these new powers of technology and the abundance coming from them. Already the sacred was yielding to the profane.

In these new societies, the first to coin and issue money were priests, who acted in the service of the kings. Thus, the temples, at least in their exoteric function, eventually gave way to banks, always an important part of religions historically. Perhaps some of the umbrage directed at religion over the years was for being a little too enamored of a bargain, taking away its luster. The Bible famously reports an altercation between Jesus and the money-changers, in which he felt compelled to overturn their tables in a pique of righteousness. Apparently, Jesus found bank transactions a bit coarse for the temple. As can be seen, this was not merely the act of an unruly, wild-haired demagogue. He actually had reasons. And an entire way of life was thrown under the bus as a result, of great value to the Jewish people generally.

Interestingly, modern success principles often advocate for the benefits of two prominent aspects of human sacrifice: *commitment and contribution*. Of course, the intended contribution of human sacrifice is clear enough. Often overlooked, however, is the extraordinary commitment of the participants, not just the priests and kings but *victims*—who did not see themselves as such, at least not originally. They were members of the community, with an opportunity to make a difference for loved ones, not least of which their gods. Given the harsh and unforgiving nature of their lives, this might be their chance to get the most bang from their buck, so to speak. Hard as it is to appreciate now, for these people, to die for god and community was like sitting on a winning lottery ticket, especially given the rewards waiting in heaven. Back in their day, participation in the sacrament of sacrifice was considered a sign of success, provided it was honorably done. Even today it is commonly acknowledged that success only comes with great sacrifice, precisely *because* of the difficulty in seeing it through. Although, these days, the idea is to live through it long enough to enjoy it.

It is not hard to see how ancient people might consider blood sacrifice a remarkably poignant act of gifting, especially as the stakes were raised to the point of offering a *human* being. Unfortunately, over time, the market got saturated and crashed, the worth of these items plummeting as human life was taken for granted. Still, the practice of gifting, or charity, remains near and dear to God's heart. Indeed, giving to God is thought a most potent means of influencing one's own prosperity. Tithing has always been highly regarded in religious communities, revering the worship of God by believer—thereby returning to God what has already been given.

The problem is human sacrifice comes at a God-awful price, especially considering its benefits can be accomplished without anything nearly so regrettable. In fact, toward the end of the ancient period, it began to dawn on people that something was amiss with taking life for the sake of gains. Yet, people really had to think it all the way through to get full impact. The communities of this time commonly regarded war to be a viable business venture, not to say primary means of covering one in glory, setting them up for a prosperous career afterwards. Whenever the coffers are about to run dry, simply pick a fight with your neighbor and go rape and pillage them for all you're worth. Since you've already deemed them sub-human, at least if your pre-war marketing was worth a damn, they had it coming. Who could deny that? Especially if there was already some bad blood left over from previous excursions across your borders.

But ancient people began to reevaluate their thinking on this. Indeed, ending their commitment to blood sacrifice might have been the defining transformation of the ancient world, setting the stage for modern people. Dispensing with other commonly accepted travesties, like slavery, were also

taken seriously, after a couple of millennia anyway. Perhaps racism/sexism will eventually follow suit. Some even suggest that Jesus' death was really an effort to bring an *end* to blood sacrifice, rather than be an instance of it, demonstrating unequivocally his immense love for all. As must be obvious, it takes some real jerry-rigging of scripture to pull this off.

A provocative French philosopher, Rene Girard, turns the tables on Christianity, redefining the crucifixion and salvation. Some even refer to it as "nonsacrificial atonement." Based on this view, Christianity is seen as a protracted attempt to abolish the scourge of blood sacrifice. Girard's core idea is that desire is the wanting of what others have, perhaps to the point of wanting to relieve them of it too, likely through violence. Over time, religion became the preferred means to regulate this process, so that some animal (even human animal) ended up identified as the vilified one, upon whom the community could safely direct their enmity—as a sacrifice.

But, with Christ, the sacrificial gesture was not honorably made. Girard puts it this way:

In this kind of religion, the community is regarded as innocent and the victim is guilty. Even after the victim has been "deified," he is still a criminal in the eyes of the community. But Christ, the son of God, is the ultimate "scapegoat"—precisely because he is the son of God, and since innocent, exposes all the myths of scapegoating and shows that the victims were innocent and the communities guilty.

Perhaps this *was* a side-effect of Christ's crucifixion. But the premise of Girard's argument appears to hinge on the people involved *knowing* that the sacrifice was being made, so the appropriate guilt could be assigned, which hardly seems to have been the case. Perhaps this is 20/20 hindsight. After all, the crucifixion wasn't deemed a "scapegoat" until years afterwards.

With no little idealism, certain Progressive Christians hope to salvage some shred of the Savior through this reasoning: Jesus willingly volunteered to die on the cross as a sacrifice—even though no one involved at the time thought this was going on; so people could see through his innocence that a great travesty of justice was being done—which, again, virtually no one at the time thought was the case; basically to shame people into ending the vile practice of blood sacrifice once and for all.

I don't know, maybe this was a good idea. Seems something of a long-shot though. If it ever had anything to do with Jesus' intentions, even more of a long-shot. Perhaps better said, the point of Girard's ideas is that blood sacrifice is simply not a viable spiritual principle and finally ran aground on its own ineptitude, pretty obvious to anyone who should take a long, hard look at what was done. No reason to make any more of it than that.

This consideration reveals why conservatives are so enamored of the cross, for it actually embodies their deepest value: *success*. Ancient people were beholden to the technology of blood sacrifice because it gave them a means to influence spiritual reality, in their favor, in the absence of which they were simply without recourse. Integral Christianity reveals a stunning insight: blood sacrifice has its roots in the tribal and warrior phases of human evolution, where killing solves all problems, finally reaching full bloom in the conformist and savior phases, where these primitive motives can be better rationalized.

Yet, success happens in a skewed way with conservatives: grounded in survival and security, where responsibility takes priority. For liberals, success is understood in an opposing skew: grounded in empathy and prestige, where relationship takes priority. This is why the idea of “family values” seems such an odd crux upon which to rest the conservative agenda. Relationships appear to be merely an adjunct to their more primary objectives of looking out for number one and might makes right. Indeed, it is not family values so much of interest to conservatives as *our family* being the one valued—and to hell with everyone else, especially if they don’t happen to share these values.

Interestingly, conservatives often characterize liberals as snobs or elitist, despite the liberal agenda invariably pushing for equality and inclusion. It is here that the conservative hand gets tipped, for they are revealing what is really at issue—objection to a *developmentally advanced position*, over against which they feel threatened. Conservatives simply don’t like where liberals are headed. Consequently, they nostalgically attempt to hold onto or regain a preferred past. Although conservatives recognize the value of not only relationship but membership, these assets are actually held to be subservient to a greater good, determined by whether survival and security are ensured. Consequently, liberals often characterize conservatives as heartless, even boring, if not selling their souls for the sake of gains. Conservatives typically counter-argue that you have to thin the herd of the weak and infirm from time to time—the real test of strength of character—and not teach people to become dependent.

Of course, neither operates without the other, nevermind that things are often framed in an either/or way. In fact, the issue really comes down to the emphasis each brings, one preferred over the other. Far better to integrate the two. Each has to embrace the other and recognize the value of their respective positions. Otherwise, liberals will counter right back, arguing that you have to enhance the lives of people if you expect them to perform—the real test of strength of compassion—and not give people a reason to be resentful. What are you to do when both sides are right? Simply skewed to their side? The future of humanity rests on integral love emerging and becoming a common reality for all people. To put it somewhat differently, we have to engage *all* aspects of the whole person and not let our allegiance or loyalty to snagged levels of development get in the way.

Psychologists believe around adolescence people begin to ask a simple question: “*Who am I?*” This is the nature of the identity crisis preoccupying adolescents, not to say adults they are about to become. Until then, children aren’t too concerned about it. More pressing issues occupy their attention, like school and friends, getting their hands on candy, finding more time for play—especially by getting out of doing their chores; things like that. However, as our intelligence develops to the point that we can look down the road and think about other things, we begin to wonder about the big picture.

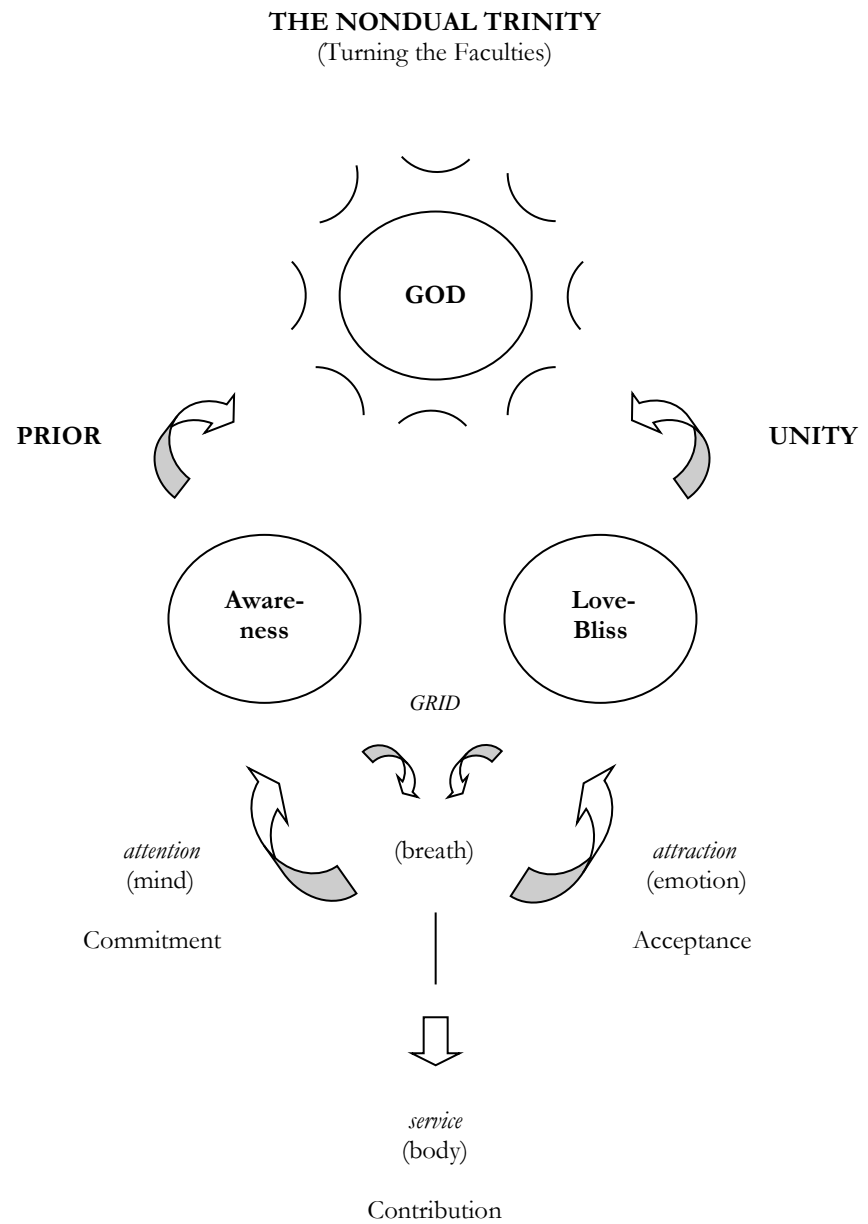
Of course, this is not always easy, otherwise everyone would be doing it. A certain kind of disillusionment is required for best results. Until we can rightly perceive the travail of earthly love, we will be compromised in our attempt to realize God—which is Who we actually Are. This requires *positive disillusionment*, which Adi Da speaks about this way:

The characteristic sign of “positive disillusionment” is the foundation-Realization of the Prior and Inherent Universal Unity of gross conditional (and cosmic) existence—such that the inherently loveless (or anti-participatory and non-integrative) “self”-contraction-effort of the gross separate “self” is consistently released into participatory and integrative attitudes of human, social, and cosmic unification (or love-connectedness) with all-and-All, and into love-based (and truly ego-transcending) actions that transcend the otherwise separative (or anti-participatory and non-integrative) tendencies of the ego-“I”.

God’s Divine State of Love-Bliss can be *directly* accessed, by us all. It is only on this basis that “self” can at last wriggle free: “released from gross ego-bondage (or ‘self’-deluded confinement to the psycho-physical illusions of gross ‘self’-contraction).” In so doing, we develop what Adi Da calls *dual-sensitivity*, a proper assessment of both sides of the God/Ego Paradox—albeit priority given to God’s end. Otherwise, we will merely continue in our exaggerated attempts to secure love and happiness through the very means by which they are denied, clearly a futile effort.

Adi Da summarizes one’s lower self as four faculties: *body, emotion, mind, breath*. These dimensions of being provide all components necessary to access the Divine State, such that Awareness and Love-Bliss can be directly engaged. The secret is not to struggle with the content taking place inside the body-mind, but merely turn each faculty to Divine Reality. There is no need to do anything about the content of life events or personal tendencies, which will fall away in time due to obsolescence. This responsive turning itself is true surrender, as opposed to any effort to surrender.

Consequently, our most auspicious relationship to God possible can be diagrammed as follows:



Turning the four faculties involves a simple, yet sublime process that grounds them in Prior Reality, as instructed by Adi Da:

1. submit the attention of mind to its Divine Source—Awareness;
2. submit the feeling of emotion to its Divine Source—Love-Bliss;
3. submit the breath to its Divine Source, drawing transcendental spiritual reality down into the body-mind; and
4. submit the body-mind to its Divine Source, always acting on behalf of and in loving service to God thereby.

Taken altogether, these four faculties account for all functions of lower self. Although turning the faculties sounds like something you do, that is not the case. Better said, they revolve on their own, like plants drawn to the Light, reversing the dynamic of duality. It is the Divine Attractive Presence of God that draws them forth, our very Divine Nature.

To the extent we surrender or transcend identification with the body-mind, our egoic nature is yielded to its underlying state of Love-Bliss. As a result, Love-Bliss asserts its *own* Divine Influence, aligning the body-mind accordingly—rightening original sin, as it were. Through the act of feeling, we are attracted to God. Through attraction, we submit attention to God. Turning all four of the faculties at once is true atonement—if not better said at-One-ment.

The more indifferent to desire and egoity, the more available we are to the Love-Bliss of Divine Reality. Renunciation is an immersion in ecstasy, not suppression or denial. *This* is the true sacrifice required for spiritual practice. Turning to God thoroughly flips our ordinary commitments:

What was the message of Jesus? “You are sinners. You are separated from God. You are denying the Divine. You must repent! Be converted at heart. Embrace the Spiritual Divine. Change your way of life. Surrender to God.” Such is the “root” of the original Christian message. Moses complained about just these faults in the Israelites. Well, so it is today making “God” into a slave, tying “God” to a post, and obliging “God” to serve egos.

Such is Adi Da’s great sympathy with Jesus and his holy scripture. For those who receive Spirit Baptism, there is no sense of any problem. There is no need to bind God, forcing God to serve egoic purposes. Humans are not created in God’s image, any more than God is reflected in our image. Humans *are* God, at the root. Until that auspicious Blessing is received, all manner of exploitation is possible. Best to submit to God, allowing your imaginary state to simply disappear—and *be* that Divine Being.

AFTERWORD: ABOUT ADI DA SAMRAJ

One of the world's best kept secrets is the great affinity between Jesus of Galilee and the Divine Avatar, Adi Da Samraj. No spiritual adepts in the West have done more to bring an uncompromising message of love to their people than Jesus and Adi Da. It is said that Jesus confided endearingly, "I have not come to replace Judaism, but to fulfill it." In a somewhat similar manner, Adi Da did not come to replace Christianity, but fulfill it (along with all other spiritual traditions). Adi Da is perfectly positioned to do so, being born and raised a Christian.

Although Jesus is an immediately recognizable spiritual icon, Adi Da needs some introduction. (For more on Adi Da, see Adidam.org; Kripal, Lee, Steinberg, and Sukhapur Rani in the *Bibliography*.) Like Jesus, Adi Da was born into humble, unpretentious circumstances, in a middle-class suburb of Long Island, New York, early November, 1939. However, the moment of his incarnation was not nearly so nondescript. Just prior to his birth, England and France had both declared war on Germany. As a result, an unsuspecting world would soon find itself engulfed in an unprecedented conflagration. Yet, America's possible involvement still seemed light years away. As chronicled by his principle biographer, Carolyn Lee, Adi Da's parents, Frank and Dorothy Jones, "looked forward to a peaceable future for their newborn son, with the unspoken assumption that He would become a window salesman, like his father." But this was not to be.

Adi Da spoke humorously to a gathering of his devotees about the circumstances of his birth, which was no accident:

When the time was right, I Appeared. During and since World War II all this has fully developed. If I had Appeared in 1903, I would be a pretty old dude right now—ninety years old and a little overripe to deal with you. Also, Freud would not have completed his work. He died the year I was born. What has come to characterize mankind as a whole did

not characterize mankind fully until the time of My Birth. What has come to characterize the twentieth century and what will characterize the future took a good piece of the twentieth century to develop—modern physics, all kinds of things.

Adi Da was drawn by these events, especially the dire portent of human politics, to introduce Divine Wisdom into the world. It was his intent to offer a true means for liberation from the untenable, binding suffering that humans have created for themselves.

As likewise said of Jesus' miraculous birth, Adi Da entered the world immersed in an unfathomable ecstasy: "a boundless Feeling of Joy, Light, and Freedom in the middle of my head that was bathed in Energy moving unobstructed in a Circle and always Shining from my heart. It was an Expanding Sphere of Joy from the heart." Even at the tender age of a toddler, Adi Da recognized the exquisite nature of his native state, dubbing it the "Bright". Soon after, Adi Da made a momentous decision. Based on his unsurpassed love for those who he now lived among, he accepted the identity of the person whom his parents had named "Franklin Jones," their son. This way, he could live out a human destiny and discern the means by which people might again find the "Bright". It was his hope to provide an opportunity for liberation to them.

As a young boy, Adi Da became an acolyte in his neighborhood Lutheran church, developing proficiency in the doctrinal rituals of his faith. The pastor of his church was so impressed he urged him to go on to college and study for the ministry. In the meantime, Adi Da also performed as a liturgist, reciting sacred texts and scripture to the congregation. In the end, Adi Da became involved in the common course of middle-class American youth during the baby-boom years following World War II—completing his schooling and preparing for a career and family of his own. He moved into this agreed-upon future in religion with great anticipation and conviction. Enrolling in Columbia University in September, 1957, Adi Da had high hopes, possessed by a single, consuming passion: "I wanted to understand what living beings are. What is Consciousness?"

However, ironically, what awaited Adi Da was an institution of higher learning ill-equipped to assist such an uncommon purpose. In fact, his experience at Columbia ended up devastating in this regard. It ultimately destroyed the image of Jesus that had been stored up from his childhood. Even so, he was deeply impressed by the attitude of critical thinking and its implications for success. Adi Da had never encountered any sophisticated thought prior to admission and was abruptly immersed in the world's great literature and philosophy. At first, Columbia seemed like a formidable, even ideal place to expand the development of his abilities.

Surprisingly, exposed to these treasures of Western civilization, Adi Da learned that the “Holy Christian Truth” was anything but that. A thesis was emphasized throughout every class and course of the curriculum that human beings could be best summarized in a certain kind of way: “mortal, functionally conditioned, and (at best) creative, social animals.” Likewise, the universe was deemed merely material, prior to conscious life, and best understood without recourse to any religious or spiritual sentiments. The Church itself seemed to proclaim the demise of its own truth, as suggested by a formative book required for one of his classes, by Charles Frances Potter, *The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed*:

In the body of doctrine as it grew, influenced by current ideas about what a god-man should be and do, Jesus must perforce have come from heaven to be born of a virgin, must perform many miracles, make mystic utterances, raise the dead occasionally, and then himself die, rise again from the dead, and be assumed back to heaven, thus proving his deity from advent to ascension. These were the standard “signs” by which a new god could be recognized, and these myths were gradually attached to the person of Jesus the son of Miryam (Mary) as his deification proceeded.

After about six months of this education, Adi Da’s confusion grew to the point where he visited his old pastor and revealed his emerging doubts. He wanted to know if the resurrection, ascension, and miracles of Jesus, as well as the entire doctrine of God, could in any way be supported by evidence. Unfortunately, his pastor was unable to offer relief. Instead, he mocked education and psychology, preferring to rail about the popular philosophers and educators of his time.

With only a prayer from his trusted elder to God for their salvation to guide him, Adi Da passed into the terror of his doubts. He was lifted out of the comforting ease of his childhood: “I had fixed my Freedom and Joy into the image of Jesus, and I had long ago given over the support of my Happiness to the church. Now that institutionalized symbol, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, was wrecked by the same ones who had carried it through time.” As all this was called into doubt, the last vestiges of the “Bright” seemed to wither away along with it, breaking his heart and “driving me into my own vast empty wilderness.” As might be said of Jesus’ confrontations with the devil.

Adi Da became profoundly aware of the conflict and suffering apparent everywhere. In this he recognized that there was not a single reason for joy to be found in the world—except that there was “a kind of tacitly motivating memory of the ‘Bright’.” Therefore, Adi Da dedicated himself to a difficult experiment, unlike any he had learned in college. Since there appeared to be

no single experience or authority that was simply true, he thought: “If God exists, God will not cease to exist by any action of my own—but, if I devote myself to all possible experience, God will (necessarily) find some way to be revealed to me.”

This decision proved to be exceedingly effective. Even starting with his undergraduate work at Columbia University in New York City, from which he graduated in 1961, and study at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, culminating in a master’s degree in English in 1962, Adi Da’s affiliation with the “Bright” was steadily restored. In the process, he underwent numerous spiritual crises, many of which with precedence in the great spiritual literature of the world. This confirmed the “Bright” Divine State that had been underlying his life since birth.

Drawn by this ever deepening intuition of divinity, Adi Da moved back to New York in 1964. He had been living on the California coast and directing his own spiritual aspirations privately for several years. He began spiritual practice in earnest with a lineage of spiritual masters who guided his growth, leading at last to enlightenment. As Adi Da states, these gurus engaged in a practice of spiritual transmission familiar to certain traditions:

The Kundalini Shaktipat tradition is represented, for example, in the legend of the Spiritual Baptism of Jesus of Galilee by John the Baptist (in which case, the “Holy Spirit” is said to have descended upon the head of Jesus “like a dove”, or, in other words, from above, and from and As God). In the same manner, I, in My present-time bodily (human) Form, Received Kundalini Shaktipat from several individuals, including Swami Nityananda, Rang Avadhoot, Swami Muktananda, and Rudi (also known as Swami Rudrananda). And, in My (present-time) case, the Divine Spirit-Transmission was, at last, also Given most directly, in Person, and in Its Utter Fullness, by the Divine Goddess, Shakti Herself.

The lineage of Adi Da’s spiritual masters is headed by Swami Nityananda (?-1961), the direct source of instruction for Baba Muktananda, Adi Da’s principle guru. Rang Avadhoot (1898-1968) was a realizer in the tradition of *Dattatreya* (a Hindu God traditionally regarded in India as an avatar of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Siva*). His glance in the garden at Baba Muktananda’s ashram in Ganeshpuri was a profound instance of spiritual transmission for Adi Da. Swami Rudrananda (1928-1973), or Albert Rudolph, known as “Rudi,” was likewise a devotee of Baba Muktananda, providing Adi Da’s early spiritual instruction from 1964-1968, soon after his return to New York City from California.

When Rudi learned that Adi Da had once planned on being a Lutheran minister, he encouraged him to take up those studies again, despite the Eastern orientation of his current practice. Rudi reasoned that the work of a minister was ideally suited to his interests and talents. It would provide him a creative outlet to speak about spiritual truth and help other people. Adi Da protested he was in no sense a Christian any longer, nevermind being deeply attuned to spiritual life. But Rudi insisted, countering that spiritual reality is as legitimately expressed in the language of Christianity as any. Adi Da attributed his misgivings to mere reluctance on his part and finally agreed to accept formal training at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, beginning in August, 1966.

In fulfillment of his commitment to the seminary curriculum, Adi Da served that next summer as a chaplain in the Philadelphia State Mental Hospital. This not only allowed him to directly ply the trade of a Christian minister but exposed him to the most unfortunate circumstances befalling human beings. In the course of his studies, he also learned about the Eastern Orthodox Church, which seemed the ideal form of Christianity. Above all it embraced the classical spiritual states of the saints and mystics. This correlated with intense spiritual transformations that he was himself undergoing during this time.

Consequently, at the end of the summer Adi Da returned to New York and entered St. Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Theological Seminary. Adi Da speaks highly of this affiliation in the introduction to a book he edited of a resplendent Russian Orthodox mystic:

St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) is one of the most luminous of all the spiritual personalities who have ever lived among men. I enjoyed a brief liaison with the Eastern Church in 1967. During the rite of baptism I took the name of Seraphim, out of love and respect for the great spiritual master. I am certain of the unity between the radical esoteric teaching of the *Heart* in the contemplative method of the Eastern Christian Adepts and the similarly radical teaching of the *Heart* which may be found in the Hindu tradition and elsewhere throughout the world.

After seminary, Adi Da's spiritual practice culminated with a series of retreats at the ashram of Baba Muktananda in India, taking place at the end of the Sixties. As this period concluded, among other revelations, Adi Da had a profound and deeply personal visitation from Christ. This not only dramatically altered his understanding of spiritual reality but paved the way for the final maturity of his own re-awakening. For a time, it even seemed

that the holy scriptures of Christianity might represent the fulfillment of his life.

During the spring of 1970, alongside these visions of Jesus were exquisite encounters with the Virgin Mary. On one occasion while tending the ashram garden, dutifully pulling weeds, Adi Da suddenly felt what seemed a “familiar, Presence as if a friend were standing behind me, the Virgin, Mary, Mother of Jesus!” At first, he felt the urge to laugh at the absurdity. He had spent the previous few years without the slightest sympathy for Christianity. Indeed, his involvement had largely been as a Protestant in any event, as opposed to Catholic. Yet, her sheer Presence required a response of profound devotion and love. She even taught him a form of the prayer “Hail Mary” and instructed him to buy a rosary, which was difficult as he had to find an excuse to go to Bombay.

As these experiences increased, Adi Da reports an inclination to “resist them mightily,” afraid that he might be formally becoming delusional. After about two weeks of this conflictual worship, the Virgin finally bade him to leave the ashram and enter a pilgrimage to the holy places of Christianity. So he began a spiritual sojourn to Israel and throughout Europe. During those travels, Adi Da kept a journal in which he recorded the details of this ongoing spiritual involvement. He often spoke with the same worship and adoration of Christ as any Christian mystic:

Christ epitomizes and Fills each level of our being. And his Presence, from the moment It is Known in faith, raises us into the ever more full Realization of that Fullness. He is the source and object of every spiritual state, and even the earth itself and every miraculous power are only symbols for the hidden Truth that is the Fullness of Christ. Thus, we are not moved toward an emptiness but toward the Fullness of God. God is only full. “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness.”

Adi Da looked back on this period of spiritual discovery with gratitude. He concluded this experience was necessary, for “it drew on all the latent imagery, necessity, and unfulfilled devotional energy that had been trapped in my heart since childhood.” Consequently, Adi Da’s heart was released from the bondage to unconscious symbols to which he was not only exposed but also encumbered throughout life, living in a Christian society saturated with the imagery of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. For completely, consciously experiencing these religiously-laden images, he could be free of them and remain stably immersed in the Heart of Reality itself.

Given this sublime state, Adi Da was then able to contrast his spiritual experiences of India and Israel with exacting precision:

The truth of Advaita Vedanta is non-separation, but it is expressed and made unavailable in a philosophy that has only one term: the pure, and exclusive, relationless Identity, a mental problem that prevents the living form of reality. The truth of Christianity is non-separation, but it is expressed and made unavailable in a theology that necessarily has two exclusive terms: God (Trinity) and creature. Thus, even its mysticism is a profession allowed to but a cloistered few, whose expressions are carefully monitored. And the mystics become doubtful to the church when they speak of non-separation from God.

After spiritual tutelage in the company of his succession of great realizers, Adi Da at last attained full and complete enlightenment in September, 1970. Their spiritual grace guided this process, preparing him to fulfill his purpose for incarnating among humanity: to awaken all beings to the Divine Presence that is their own native state. From April, 1972, Adi Da taught and directly served the awakening of his devotees and all beings. He offered resplendent spiritual instruction and transmission until his unexpected passing in November, 2008.

Throughout the course of over thirty-five years of great sacrifice on behalf of humanity, Adi Da underwent an unprecedented series of transformations in his own being, as well as spiritual work. During his human lifetime, the “Bright” divine nature of reality was tangibly drawn down into this earthly realm, expressly for the sake of his spiritual blessing and divine awakening of all. Such is the nature of the Avatar—the Divine One, who has “crossed down” from the Unmanifest into the manifest condition in order to liberate all.

During each of these transformations, his ability to assert the “Bright” in the world was steadily magnified. The first of these events was his willing submission to embrace ordinary human life at the age of two. In doing so, he let the inherent “Bright” state diminish and fade in order to undergo and ultimately transcend the suffering of the human condition. Eventually, this helped bring about his re-awakening to the most perfect, Divine State of the “Bright”.

Even prior to 1972, Adi Da willingly offered formal instruction to any who approached him. He addressed the suffering inherent to the illusion each born-being presumes to be the case. Every skillful means was used to not only alert them but sound the alarm to their bewildered commitment to this dreadful separation and suffering. No holds were bared. By turns the

attraction of an unfathomable, humorous compassion then sharp reality check of fierce confrontation, this instruction demonstrated the sign of his unrelenting intimacy and integrity.

After fourteen years of intense teaching-submission, Adi Da suffered a death-like Swoon in January, 1986. This was in its own way a kind of bodily resurrection, as also attributed to Jesus historically. However, in this case, Adi Da was not entombed, nor did he ascend from the world. Rather, in its wake, his teaching function was spontaneously relinquished, allowing a new phase of divine work to begin. This great yogic event was the inception of Adi Da's full avatic Self-“Emergence” into this world.

Like the other periods in which his work changed, Adi Da's appearance underwent a startling adaptation as well. In this case, a stunning visage of renunciate virtue emerged. Fasting at length, he dropped weight until his frame was rail thin, perhaps even gaunt in appearance. However, any such assessment must be countered by the magnificent bearing he commanded. It was a vivid and brilliantly transparent window to Divine Reality, beautiful to behold. At other times, he has shaved his head bald, the traditional sign of releasing attachments to the world. He also allowed spiritual energy to fill his belly into a sumptuous, round cauldron, full of inimitable mirth. At others still he let his hair grow long and wild, utterly carried by this divine delight, in the tradition known as “Crazy Wisdom.”

Further, he has at times infused the entire community of his devotees with far greater spiritual capacity than ordinarily possible. This allowed them to embrace the happy state of renunciation. Moreover, submitted to this “Bright” condition, he shed the erstwhile intention to address egoic limitations and the ordinary resistance of people to accept his exquisite gift of divine grace. Instead, he decided to stand firm in the “Bright”. By this time, it thoroughly acquired the vehicle of his body-mind, as he says, all the way “to the toes.” As a result, he shone Divine Love outward in a radiant bath of intimate, transcendental delight. With unfathomable compassion, Adi Da's final, divine blessing-work began in earnest.

On April 12th, 2000, again, fourteen years later, at Lopez Island in the Puget Sound (the Northwest part of the United States), Adi Da underwent another transformation in his series of yogic deaths. This time he completely and spontaneously ascended to his pure “Bright” State, infinitely above the conditional worlds. Revived from the overwhelming impact of this immense Swoon, temporarily rendering even the ability to walk difficult, he was only able to re-associate with the vehicle of his body-mind to “the brows.” This is the yogic point of contact minimally able to sustain connection to active bodily life. Although this yogic death marked that point at which other avatars have totally ascended, leaving the body altogether, Adi Da's great love required he remain. As a result, he continued

his silent blessing-regard to the world and received all who would formally approach him for the sake of this spiritual grace.

The culminating event of this process of yogic deaths is explained in detail by Ruchiradama Quandra Sukhapur Rani. She is the senior devotee in the Ruchira Sannyasin Order serving the cultural needs of Adidam Ruchiradam, the spiritual community established by Adi Da Samraj. The members of the Ruchira Sannyasin Order are all formal renunciates, who have vowed to fulfill the most intensive spiritual practice of Adidam. Ruchiradama Sukhapur was the principal attendant to Adi Da's bodily human form during his physical lifetime.

The great miracle of Avatar Adi Da Samraj is that, eight years before His physical death, in an unprecedented Event, He had already Divinely Translated—or Passed utterly Beyond the cosmic domain (or the conditionally manifested worlds), Existing purely in what He calls “the Divine Self-Domain”—while miraculously continuing to exist and function in human Form. His continued bodily existence was an unprecedented Sacrifice—made entirely for the sake of Completing His Divine Work on Earth.

Since the age of two, Bhagavan had given Himself over to Identify, and utterly Coincide with, all beings and conditions. But in 1999, Bhagavan was no longer able to maintain the orientation of Self-Sacrificial Identification with conditional existence as before. While Bhagavan continued to function apparently “normally” in the Body, He was spontaneously concentrated Above and Beyond the conditional realms.

Needless-to-say, this state is unknown to most people. Even in allowing for such a possibility, Christianity does so in only one case. Therefore, it is in this context that Adi Da's enormous affinity with Jesus can be best understood. Put bluntly, Adi Da cannot be thought the second coming of Jesus. Not only is the lineage of his gurus affiliated with a different spiritual tradition, any comparison to Jesus is best seen in the bigger picture: *this time God did not send His Son*. Even though Jesus was undoubtedly referring to his own causal level when he spoke lovingly of God as father, ultimately this inheres in the same sublime Being as Adi Da's Divine Person.

In this way, Adi Da offers humanity essentially the same chance for redemption attributed to Jesus traditionally—*direct participation with the living God*. This is so precisely because, through Adi Da, God's own divine vehicle is reaching out to humanity:

The various religious traditions each tend to concentrate on one view (and description), or perhaps a few views (and descriptions), of the Divine. Thus, God has been Described as “Creator”, as “Ultimate Source”, as a kind of “Abstract Condition” beyond any human conception, and so on and on and on. What is the Most Ultimate and Most Perfect Description? What is the Description of Real God?... That Which Is Always Already The Case—Indivisible, Indestructible, and Not “Other”, but One and Only. Not the Divine as “Creator” but the Divine As “The Center”, and As “Heart-Master”, or “Guru”, or “Liberator”.

The difference is that traditional spiritual treatises are like a pie reduced to one of its pieces, interpreting the remainder from that limited point of view. Adi Da is the only one to finally reveal the *entire* pie. In this way, he not only includes *all* aspects of Divine Reality but how they fit together.

That “Radical” Non-Dualism has not appeared until now, during the bodily incarnation of Adi Da Samraj, should come as no surprise. Spiritual masters necessarily work within the cultural constraints imposed by their specific locale. They must adapt their teachings, as certainly the case with Jesus and his parables, well suited to the people of his time. Only in the last half of the twentieth century has technology and affluence allowed for the appearance of a true world community. Consequently, the conditions have only recently occurred whereby the provincialism of local cultures and political loyalties might be overcome. All of this was necessary for the various traditions of spirituality to culminate in a single, all-inclusive revelation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unholy Bible makes an astonishing claim: the story of the Gospels is essentially a murder mystery, still unresolved after all these years. Moreover, *Unholy Bible* offers a unique, intriguing look at Christian atonement, noting this defunct religious rite is older than Moses and nothing but human sacrifice. Yet, no matter how comforting the murder, an uneasy foreboding lurks: How could Jesus die for our sins, *if he never really died?* The shocking secret going unknown all this time is the crucifixion was, in fact, only *attempted* murder.

Unholy Bible completely changes the playing field. Forget about getting our hopes up, the cross cannot deliver its bleak promise. *Unholy Bible* reveals *two* religions actually at work, in an unwieldy amalgam: *Christ-ianity* and *Cross-tianity*. But only one is viable. While Christ offers a fuller, more nuanced account of Jesus' ministry, the cross comes off a grim placebo—perhaps ensuring solace, but *not* salvation. *Unholy Bible* is a sobering prophecy. Like cigarettes, the cross should come with an explicit warning on the pack: *No Matter How Soothing, These Things Will Kill You. Do Not Use if at All Possible.* Now is time to revive the mystical roots of Jesus' divinely inspired incarnation and restore the love of Christ to Christianity.

After decades of neglect, spirituality is being taken seriously by an increasing number of psychotherapists and clinicians. Dr. Sleeth has made an important contribution to this discourse. For me, its main contribution is its suggested resolution of the paradox between one's notion of identity and one's sense of unity, between the Ego and the Ultimate. Those who read this book will never think or feel the same way about God, Reality, or the Self again.

— Stanley Krippner, Ph.D.
co-author, *Becoming Psychic*



D. B. Sleeth has worked as a counselor and family therapist since 1987. He has also lived in the spiritual community known as Adidam since 1983, where he is a spiritual practitioner along with his wife, Julie, following the spiritual teachings of the great sage, Adi Da Samraj. See Adidam.org, and DBSleeth.com.