

A Force of Nature

Biography of a mystic/heretic/saint

Phoenix Kennedy___

You probably won't believe me when I say you are about to read the life of possibly one of the greatest and most important mystics of all time. Most people don't. It's because you've never heard of Bernadette Roberts, right? I say "possibly" because there is another alternative I invite you to consider. Maybe she was just brain damaged. She only wrote for advanced contemplatives, and never bothered explaining it all this spirituality stuff even to her family, so none of them really got her either. But she did explain it in her books. In your hands is a brief outline of most of her major spiritual experiences in chronological order. Because she had no self, her writing was a little unorganized and she writes about her experiences all over the place. Since a few other people quote her liberally, and since her books are all downloadable for free, I have taken the liberty to compile all her experiences in one place, in order.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will understand the major milestones and hurdles of entire spiritual journey from beginning to end, and beyond. It doesn't matter if you are Christian. While her mom was Protestant, and she referred to her father as "the Pope", her experiences all point to a reality that is universal. She didn't think that any of her experiences were just for her. She knew her experiences were part of a big plan, a plan that I suspect has not yet been completed.

You are about to read the remarkable story of an ordinary tomboy who was crushed to learn that she couldn't become a sailor because she was a girl and it was 1936. After struggling with Christ and Christianity her entire childhood, she had a conversion experience and became a Carmelite nun as soon as she possibly could. That is the period of her life covered by her autobiography. While there are quotes here from all seven of her books, they mostly come from her autobiography, then her book,

The Path to No Self, then from The Experience of No Self. Just as a heads up, you are being prepared throughout this biography to consider a radically new idea. It is an idea that springs from the life of Bernadette Roberts. That's why she's so important. She was living proof of the truth of an idea devastatingly large, and whose time has come. As we know, there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

Bernadette has been widely misunderstood. Since I am relying heavily upon her autobiography for the first part of this book, I thought I would give you an example of how easily and universally she is misunderstood. Here is a review of her autobiography, Contemplative:

"This autobiographical sketch makes an interesting psychological study. Bernadette interprets all her unusual psychic and psychological experiences as an indicating an increasingly close relationship with God. Viewing her self-reports objectively, however, my impression is somewhat different.

Bernadette's self-description reveals a stubborn, narcissistic, unpleasant child who doesn't seem to mature out of these traits. Her resentment of female authority figures is palpable and consistent: her mother, the teaching sisters, her principal, and finally, the conventual mother superior. Her relationship with males is more complicated, but she seems to retain bitterness towards her father in spite of a sprinkling of verbal band-aids throughout the account that briefly enthuse over how holy and wonderful her parents were.

I was struck by her antagonistic relationship with food, and reminded strongly of the case studies in Bell's excellent exploration, "Holy Anorexia." Roberts certainly has much in common with Bell's examples of strong-willed, youngest-child, pampered teenagers raised in overly religious homes who grapple with one or more parents for the right of self-expression and freedom using food as a battleground.

On the one hand, I felt that many of the incidents Roberts reports suggest an early, spontaneous awakening of the Kundalini energy. I'm really surprised no one has mentioned that in any of the commentaries I can find about her life.

However, these psychic events did not seem to have any effect on increasing her virtue, humility, kindness or consideration of others. On the contrary; the more she develops a relationship with whatever is going on internally, the more immune she seems to feel to any external correction or input. She flatly states that she is not a sinner and her interpretation of Jesus, Christ, and the doctrines of salvation is in complete opposition to the dogma of the Catholic church. This type of self-aggrandizement and ego-mania is rampant in literary accounts of heretical mystics throughout the history of the church.

In this book and the following one, "The Path to No-Self," I searched in vain for an expression of human warmth or relationship but found little evidence of either other than a couple of friends she was close to in high school. (Incidentally, her battle with authority did not end at home and school, but according to her second book, continued with her novice mistress and at least two bosses—she reports her employer's dissatisfaction with her work and being fired twice. Her report of her detachment during one of her children's tantrums is also especially disturbing.)

Her final entry reveals a telling fact: she was a "blue baby," meaning an infant who suffered oxygen deprivation at birth. I think this early injury may have had profound consequences for her intelligence,

learning ability (she states in several instances that she “never learned a thing at school, never,” and repeats this concerning her first two years in college) and personality. Indeed, I suspect some sort of brain damage or deficit may even have been involved in her “contemplative” experiences, especially her tendency to “go blank” and her increasing dissociation from her personality.

As to the book itself, it was the most poorly presented book I have ever encountered. Poor grammar, incorrect use of words, a complete lack of punctuation and errors in typesetting made it a struggle to finish. Throughout most of the book, commas are routinely used as periods for pages at a time.

While I was interested in learning of Bernadette’s experiences, the glaringly dysfunctional personality issues she displays in this book and in the following one make me extremely cautious about using anything she says as a guide or goal. There is a strong incidence of religiosity in mental illness. In my opinion, Bernadette could have used a good therapist, a good dose of humility, and especially—a good editor and publisher!”

Well, at least he **read** the book! Some people don’t even bother to do that before reviewing the book and, more often, the author. Anyway, except for the part about poor grammar, punctuation, etc., every sentence above is false. This isn’t the place to go into it. Don’t take my word for it. Read it yourself and decide for yourself.

The part about her suffering some type of brain damage from being born a blue baby I found hilarious at first, but then I got to thinking...Even if that was the case (and I don’t think it was) would that necessarily invalidate her experiences? Are people with perfectly healthy brains the only ones eligible to receive and know divine wisdom? As you read you can decide for yourself. Were these revelations from God, or was she just brain damaged?

If your thinking cap is on, and your heart is open, when you are finished reading this book you will have seen how an ordinary schoolgirl in the forties and fifties from Santa Monica became the greatest contemplative and mystic of all time. Spoiler alert: She didn’t do it on her own. She was bombarded excessively by graces from God. Her life was fraught with challenges both physical and spiritual but her indefatigable will to God won out in the end (and in a shocking way). You will have expanded your view of what a saint is. (Hint: It doesn’t mean being “Shirley Temple”.) You will have gained valuable spiritual insights and considered things you never considered before. Most importantly,

you will have a clear direction of the path ahead for you and every human. Bernadette Roberts lived fully the human predicament, avoided all the spiritual traps and pitfalls that befall most, and wrote eloquently about a type of existence beyond anything you have ever imagined. This story is about a girl who had the courage to question her beliefs, and who trusted God enough to eventually “bear the vision”, and was swept away into the Glory of God, “without missing a beat”.

Table of Contents:

- Chapter 1 - Birth to 9 “No Shirley Temple” and “Interior Power”
- Chapter 2 - Age 10 to 15 “Struggles” and “Conversion”
- Chapter 3 - Age 16 to 17 “Monastery” and “Unitive State”
- Chapter 4 - Age 18 to 24 “Acclimation” and “Turning Outward”
- Chapter 5 - Age 24 to 42 “More Doubts” and “Marketplace”
- Chapter 6 - Age 43 “Burning out the Powers” and “Archetypes”
- Chapter 7 - Age 44 “No-Self” and “Descent into Hell”
- Chapter 8 - Age 45 to 46 “Resurrection, Ascension, Kenosis, Pentecost”
- Chapter 9 - Age 47 to 67 “What is learned beyond Self?”

Abbreviations:

Co = Contemplative (her autobiography)_

Ws = What is Self? A Study of the Spiritual Journey in Terms of Consciousness

Ens = Experience of No-Self

Pns = Path to No-Self: Life at the Center

Rc = The Real Christ

Ecc = Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey

Ff = Forcing the Fit

Chapter One: (birth to age 9) “No Shirley Temple” and “Inner Power”

Bernadette’s father, partly because he was a “big-wig” Catholic lawyer, partly because he was a good man, verbally fought his way into the delivery room at a time when this was not allowed. You can imagine the anguish of both parents, when baby Bernadette was born blue and not breathing. This had already happened to them once before, and twice was too much to bear. The doctor plunged her back and forth between tubs of warm and cold water while the priest baptized her.

Co p. 194 [her father] *“prayed ‘Oh God, take her for yourself, I give her to you, I give up all the joys of having her and accept the sorrow of losing her, only take her to yourself!’ Just then you cried out and I shouted for joy, ‘She belonged to God before she belonged to this world!’ (His meaning, of course, was that having been baptized before I breathed, I belonged to God first, and only secondly, to this world.”*

Bernadette was always offering things to God to prove her love, sometimes almost bargaining. She learned it is one thing to offer something to God and something else entirely for God to accept it. Her father offered her to God before her birth. Was the offer accepted? You're smart. Keep reading, then you tell me.

Co p. 195 *"When he said, 'Take her, she is yours, not mine' God did just that, He not only took the child, but raised her every step of the way - a difficult way since it was not her way by nature. So, the answer to 'why me?' was the working out of a covenant between God and a father, a covenant that worked both ways: the father gave his child to God and, in turn, God gave the child everything. Although this child could have been any child in the world, the same could not be said of the father. Not just any father could enter into such a covenant, only one who truly and deeply valued eternal life with God above life on this earth could be party to such a contract. This was not a last-ditch plea or prayer of an anxious father, rather it was his whole belief system, his Faith, his life of faithful practice, all brought to bear and put on the line before God, who alone can enact such a covenant. Had God not accepted, I would not be here to tell the story. Would that every child was the product of such a covenant between their earthly and heavenly Fathers. My life, then, has just been the working out of this covenant; and as a middle term it could be said, I am this covenant."*

What does the human/Divine covenant between and earthly and heavenly Father look and sound like? You are about to find out. Firstly, young Bernadette had a lot of questions about God, baptism, Mary, etc.

Co p. 12 *"The idea of living my whole life with unanswered question was unacceptable. I felt my whole future depended on finding out, right now; without answers my life was on hold, a matter of continuous waiting. Then and there I determined to keep at the questions, keep thinking about them over and over, because if I didn't figure things out for myself, nobody was going to do it for me. From the beginning, then, I put my whole heart*

and soul into a quest for answers, a quest that would become the driving force of my life - I wanted to know!"

Bernadette could hear the waves from her bedroom and see the reflection of the waves on her wall. She often visited the beach to play with dump trucks or just sit alone. When she was three, she "saw" something nonvisual emerge from the sea in front of her. It stared at her, making sure she had seen it. Then it vanished back into the sea and never returned again. Yet she knew what she had seen, and often went back to that spot to see if she could see it again. Just knowing it was there and that it knew she was there was enough to put a smile on her face. She spent many hours there, pondering the mystery in the sea and posing her questions to it.

Co p. 12 "The sea played a large part in the development of my spiritual life, it had a magnetic attraction, almost a physical pull. I was sure this personal attraction was on both sides, a kind of mutual bond I would come to know as 'love'."

Interesting that she knew the attraction was on both sides. How many people do you know who grew up from the age of three feeling attractive to God?

Sneaking into her father's study to sit on his big comfy chair, feet hanging over the edge, she became focused on a painting of a monk on the wall. The monk was standing in a white robe looking out the window over a hillside. She waited for her dad to look up at her and smile before asking her question.

Co p. 13 "Me: Who's that?"

Dad: He's a monk.

Me: What's a monk?"

Dad: He is someone who had dedicated his whole life to God.

Me: What's he doing there?"

Dad: He's contemplating.

Me: What's that?

(Dad leaned back in his chair and thought a moment).

Dad: To contemplate means to gaze, to look.

Me: What's he looking at?

Dad: That monk is looking at God - contemplating God.

Me: That's what he's doing?

Dad: Yes."

So, she decided to try it for herself. Since her sister's room was the only one with a window low enough for her to see out of, she went there. Assuming the same pose as the monk by propping herself against the side of the window, she looked out and, after a while, determined, *"The monk is right, I see God too."* Of course, she was not looking at anything in particular (that would have been many gods) but at a "presence" in nature.

Thinking back on her experience of "seeing" God in the ocean, she began to make the distinction between seeing things visibly and with the eyes of her soul. Perhaps the monk was seeing something different in the trees just as she had "seen" something in the ocean.

Co p. 13 "Somehow I knew God was what I did not visibly see in nature. From then on to see God I had only to look out the window, or, if I was already outside, just stand quietly for a while and look - 'gaze', as dad put it."

So here we see her from the age of three knowing God was in nature and that she was able to see it anytime she was quiet enough to "gaze". But she only knew this because God in the sea had unexpectedly revealed Himself to her.

Co p. 14 "I took the seeing at the beach as a kind of proof that 'what' I was looking at (contemplating) in nature, was God. Had I not first 'seen' God, I don't know that by merely 'gazing' at nature I would have known I was seeing Him at all. It seems one

first has to see God before they can contemplate God, otherwise, they don't really know what they're looking at."

Could this be why the vast majority of us have a hard time contemplating God? Because we have not first seen God. The door was opened for her at an early age and, thus, she often wanted to walk through it.

As the youngest of five, she was always being told white lies, like she would have to eat cat's eye-balls to get into her big brother's club and "wait until you're older" before you understand. This was not acceptable. She learned how to let some things go in one ear and out the other, but the problem was with the things that stuck. These could make her sad or happy. So, rather than believe something that might not true, and which might make her sad, she decided to decide for herself if she could believe something she was told, or not. In other words, she decided to think critically and test. So, by age four she became a skeptic. This attitude solidified as she became older. Besides, you can't force belief.

Co p. 18 *"But if I was not a believer, I was also not a disbeliever. Between the two lies the tester, someone who has to find out the truth for themselves, and this was me."*

Her mom was always saying, "Now, be a good girl or nobody will like you." Her reply was, "How can I be anybody other than myself?" Her mom said, "I just want you to be your best self, your true self." So, she looked within herself and besides realizing that it was "kinda dark in there", she didn't see two selves, one good and one bad. She only saw herself. Then, her mom said to her something that she knew was important because it stuck. "You will never find your true self until you find God."

She didn't understand at the age of four, but did later. She figured that since God had made herself, that if He didn't like it, He was the only one who could change it.

Because of all this arguing with her mom about true self and false self, she became acutely aware of when people were being

phony, putting on airs or a façade. She refused to be shaped by others or their opinions of who they thought she should be. She sought integrity and authenticity.

Co p. 24 *“And to think that all this was sparked by Popeye’s profound words, ‘I am what I am and that’s all what I am’! For sure he had it right. Knowing ‘what’ we are (our self) is a thousand times more important than merely knowing ‘who’ we are (Popeye), or what we do in life (be a sailorman).”*

The following incident she describes as “the day I was born.” The neighborhood boys were apparently o.k. with being told what to do by a five-year-old girl. After chasing down a few neighborhood dogs so she could baptize them, they decided to play cops and robbers. A sea breeze grew chilly, so she ran inside to grab a sweater.

Co p. 28 *“So I ran to the back door, grabbed my sweater off its hook and bounded down the back stairs. I turned left to run through the side garden and around to the front when, a few steps beyond the stairs, suddenly from somewhere within myself, I felt a powerful rush like the swift blowing up of a balloon, I seemed to be expanding in all directions. I stopped, looked at my arms and legs to see if I was actually growing, yet I saw nothing unusual. Still, this powerful air - or whatever it was - kept expanding in all directions. For a moment I was seized with fear and thought to myself ‘I’m gonna bust!’ While I had no idea what would happen then, I suspected I might not be around to find out. Short of this happening, however, the expansion suddenly stopped. I waited in suspense, when, across my mind came the words, ‘You’re too big for yourself!’ after which the air diffused itself into a wild joy - wild because it was beyond me, uncontainable, not mine. (It was as if this ‘air’ had burst into laughter). After this, I felt it subside or draw back whence it had come - seemingly from somewhere in my body’s mid-section.”*

Co p. 29 *“Following this experience I was always aware of this Power, which seemed to have its own space within myself.”*

Co p. 29 *“A few years down the road I would refer to this experience as ‘The day I was born’ because it was so pivotal to everything that followed, indeed, the experience opened up a whole new dimension in myself.”*

The sense of an interior dimension was emphasized to the point of her feeling she “was gonna bust”. This new dimension that was opened up to her at this young age was the interior, spiritual dimension.

Bernadette often spoke of a light going off in her head or somehow being notified that she should pay attention to something that had just been said. Her spiritual intuition must have been extraordinarily sensitive and active. She was so well educated in her faith by her parents that she didn’t really learn anything from the catechesis given by the sisters to prepare her for her first holy communion. In fact, sometimes she would get irritated when the sisters got something wrong. But sometimes they got it right.

Co p. 30 *“At one point she said, ‘Although God is already present in you, yet when you receive Holy Communion, God will be Present in a special way...’ Whatever she said after that, I don’t know, because the instant she said, ‘God is already present in you’ I felt a sudden leap within- something like what a mother might feel when the babe in her womb, suddenly kicks her. Instantly I knew: ‘that’s it! That’s what I had experienced, it was God!’”*

She realized that the power that had expanded within her was God. One time she was sent to her room for mouthing off and felt pretty glum. She was worried the family might forget to call her downstairs for dinner. Even looking out her window at nature did not help to uplift her.

Co p. 33 *“After a few minutes, however, from within myself came a strong leap, a burst of what could only be called ‘laughter’ - felt something like a belly laugh. Though I did not laugh (there was nothing funny), yet it instantly swept away my*

gloom and problems as if they counted for nothing, as if they were even humorous. Not only was the gloom instantly dispelled, but in its stead was great joy. Indeed, life was beautiful! The message was clear and certain: It, the mysterious Power, was the only thing that mattered in my life, everything else didn't matter, wasn't worth the slightest concern. That's what It wanted me to know, to learn, to keep in mind. Compared to Itself, everything else in life was merely external and irrelevant."

Co p. 33. *"Something else about this experience that can only be reported without comment, is that Its interior leap was accompanied by a spark of light over my head."*

As you will see, this is not the last time she saw this light over her head.

Co p. 33 *"From this time on I looked upon life as a game that could never be taken seriously...It was as if this Power said to me, 'If I don't care, why should you?'...Later, I would look back and realize that everything of importance I really knew about life and how to live it, I learned from this Power."*

Co p. 34 *"Above all, I knew it was powerful, a power unto itself; it was also a small light in myself - sometimes, a very bright light. Because of its continued presence and seeming interest in me, I regarded it as a friendly, good Power. Because it apparently wanted me to learn certain things, it was also a teacher."*

While she couldn't always perceive this power within, up to this point it had always been benign, friendly, and instructive. It had always been a comfort to her. Yet, once, while she was playing hide-and-go-seek with her neighborhood friends, she decided, while hiding, to look within to make sure it was still there.

Co p. 34 *"so I closed my eyes, gazed intently within and urgently asked, 'Are You there?' The response I got was rather explosive, like a hard punch in the stomach I was knocked off balance and sent sprawling amid the garbage cans. Hearing the*

noise of the cans I was immediately caught, but for me, the game was over, I had to go down to the beach and think this over. The Power's blow had been no laughing matter, it had meant business. I took it for a reprimand or warning of some kind."

Co p. 35 *"After a time, however, I realized I didn't even have to look inside to see it; somehow, I knew of its continued Presence without having to look at all. I don't know how I knew this, but I did. (In a way, I think I had a 'feel' for it)."*

She learned a moral lesson while her parents were on vacation for a few days. She had been left the charge of Aunt Marge. One time, realizing construction could not continue on her beach sand castle project without a dump truck and shovel, she "borrowed" some coins from her sister's piggy bank. Her sister was not home at the time and she was sure her parents would pay her back from the money they had left for her, but things didn't turn out so well. She heard a blood curdling scream from her sister when she got home and was told by Lee that she had stolen, had sinned against God. Her first response was, "How can I sin against God when I don't even know Him?" So, she decided she had better get to know God.

Co p. 39 *"From now on, every night when I said my prayers I would end with this prayer: 'God, I don't know you and I don't feel any love for you, but I hope someday I will know and love you. Please make this possible.' I was faithful to this resolution for many years. There was something about being honest with God that always brought satisfaction - and ultimately, results."*

Another funny trick her older brother Lee played on her was to convince her that the following Saturday they could go down to the Venice Beach pier and see the god of the sea. She was so excited all week she found it hard to think about anything else. Finally, the awaited day came and she pushed her way through legs and knees to get a good view right above where the god of the sea was to emerge. After an eternity of minutes, the crowd grew quiet and a man covered in seaweed (actually, a local homeless man) began to emerge from the water. Instantly she

began shouting, "That's not God! That's not God!" Lee just laughed and laughed.

Co p. 40 *"I chased Lee all over the dock, he had something coming to him and I was a good kicker!"*

Looking back on the incident she was disappointed in herself. How could she have been so naïve? She learned the hard way that the God she had seen emerge from the sea a couple of years before was of an entirely different nature than human nature or anything seen in this world.

There was vast difference between dimensions of existence and this was impressed upon her again while lying on the deck of the boat to that was going to Catalina Island while looking up at the sky. Floating as light as a cork, all the frivolities of life melted away. What was left was a mystery. It was as if her body had disappeared into a quiet joy. Then, suddenly, a hot dog in a bun was thrust out the porthole next to her. The juxtaposition between the two experiences was jarring. The "real world" now seemed harsh.

Co p. 43 *"This experience was an eye-opener. Now I knew there was another dimension of life, a dimension so close you had only to sink into it. I knew, however, it would be impossible to live in this state and in the world at the same time, for despite their closeness, one precluded the other; in a way, they were worlds apart. I determined, however, to seek it out, do whatever I could to have the experience again."*

Co p. 44 *"Altogether this experience was a huge awakening, its relevance in my life was knowing this other dimension existed. Always it was before me as another possibility of life, a whole different existence. I was now on to a reality not of this world, yet somehow in this world. In this dimension it didn't matter who you were or what you were, simple existence was everything. The mystery, of course, was the true nature of its delightful 'medium' - 'what' was it I had dissolved into - air, space, or what? I was convinced this dimension somehow underlay all creation, and*

that only human being lied in the harsh world of practical living – ‘reality’, as it is called.”

Years later she came to distrust and disregard experiences. Here she starts to seek them.

Co p. 44 “I had already come upon something greater, a state or dimension neither in nor of this world, and having come upon something better, I would never again seek what was lesser.”

This incident with the hot dog was important because of the sudden juxtaposition between the different dimensions. It was almost like she got addicted to the experience. It was way better than ordinary life, and so close, so why not seek that? She always said that God in nature was the love of her life. Whenever she went anywhere in the car, she always stuck her head out the window. She sometimes felt overwhelmed by a love for nature she could not contain. So, she began to wonder about the origins of this love.

Co p. 50 “I asked, ‘What is it about you I love so much?’ No sooner were my questions out than there came a swift rush or leap from within and a brilliant ball of light stood before my eyes – about a foot above my forehead – a light so brilliant I couldn’t look at it directly. It identified itself as ‘love’ – the word imprinted on my mind. Somehow, I knew this ball of fire was the love I experienced for the sea, ‘It’ was my connection to the sea, and ‘It’ would be my life, my future. After that, it vanished. I looked inside to see if my Friend was still there because, initially, I thought it had leaped out of me as was Itself the brilliant Light. But no, when I looked within, It was there as usual, seemed not to have moved at all. I could not think about what I saw, I could only express my stunned reaction by running down the beach with everything in me crying out, ‘I love you, I love you!’ I ran clear to the Ocean Park pier before dropping from sheer exhaustion.”

Does anybody else hear a dramatic soundtrack and see the camera move into slow motion? But this quote is interesting

because she says elsewhere that it is God in us that loves God. Here we have this strange brilliant light identifying itself as love and the source of her love for the sea.

Co p. 50 *"While I could never put my finger on exactly 'what' it was I loved, I knew it was both the mystery in the sea and the mystery in me, they were the same."*

Very early in life she began to suspect that she was not going to have a life of her own. Instead, that she was going to be used. She began to feel a little like God's guinea pig. She was constantly being pushed around by spiritual forces and powers. These forces were powerful, and they meant business.

Co p. 55 *"Sometime later, alone in Gert's room one day, I again experienced a sudden, powerful infusion of the interior power. Though similar to the first experience - several years earlier - this time I had no impression of physically expanding. Instead, only the Power expanded, and so such an overwhelming extent, it seems on the verge of taking me over completely. I froze faced with the immediate prospect of the Power wholly possessing me, taking me over...Without a doubt, this imminent threat was the most frightening moment of my life, there is no fear like it."*

Co p. 55 *"What I learned was not only that this Power could take me over any time it pleased, but that It wanted me to know this; and also to know it was not going to do so - not now anyway."*

Bernadette said that God had to keep its distance from us or we would be obliterated. We will see in many of the experiences that follow there is often a shutting down of the mind which allows revelation to happen. She often wrote about going blank or her mind being immobilized. Maybe she just had a weak or damaged brain?

Co p. 56 *"This knowledge came from outside myself, seemingly from an indistinct light in front of me. It was not given with words or piece by piece, but instantly, all at once. It was*

almost like a blow to the head, because for a minute, at least, it felt as if my brain had frozen or become immovable. Since it was not conveyed with words -audible, interior or mental- nor imparted as an idea or concept, to convey this wordless knowledge it must be translated into words that can never do it justice. Although I would not call this an 'experience', it was nevertheless, mind-blowing."

Co p. 56 "I figured it had always informed me of the truth, taught me the right attitude toward the ups and downs of life, opened up an inner dimension I wouldn't have known otherwise; it had been the source of knowledge and joy, even laughter; it had been a constant companion, and on account of its presence I would ponder the deeper things in life instead of what was merely passing and obvious. In short, it was actually teaching me, helping me grow up. While I decided it was really working on my behalf, I also determined to keep a respectful distance."

How fortunate she was to have the inner power teach her, guide her and help her grow up both psychologically and spiritually. Perhaps she received endless guidance by God and was, perhaps even more importantly, acutely aware and sensitive to these interior promptings and eventually learned to go with them rather than fight them.

Co p. 57 "After this I would always think of myself as God's 'experiment' - too little of this, redo that, not enough here, whoops! Shouldn't have gone there... so went the great Plan and my life with God."

She began to realize there was something different about her. There had to be a reason.

Co p. 57 "From the beginning God had a specific Plan for my life; an unalterable Plan that would be accomplished regardless of me, my desires, my plans, or anything going on in my life. I would not die until this Plan had been completed, and some day this Plan would even be known to others. God had a specific work to do in me and was going to do it come hell or high-water (if I

may use the expression). This grand Plan was to accomplish something very specific, something God wanted to do or bring about. All my unusual experiences to this point had been part of this Plan, God's own doing. So too, from here on all such experiences - for the rest of my life in fact - would be God's doing and part of His great Plan."

She was informed that she would not die until this plan had been fulfilled. Since, at this point, I don't see any fulfillment of any plan God may have had for her extraordinary life, because she remains the most little known and underrated spiritual teachers of the twentieth century, I can only assume that a big part of that plan must have been the completion of her final masterpiece, The Real Christ. I think she was supposed to write that book. She died within a year of its publication.

Ws p. 165 "Somehow I knew that this power had a plan for my life, a certain work to do in me with a specific purpose or end in mind. I knew that whatever I wanted in life or whichever way I wanted to go would be of no concern to this power. In a word, I was not going to have a life of my own."

This is why she says God is no respecter of persons. She felt she didn't have a life of her own. What do you think the spiritual implications would be to know that God has a certain work to do in you, and that you will not have a life of your own?

When she was nine, she developed a painfully debilitating bone disease in her left hip. More difficult than the pain was that her parents didn't believe her because the doctor didn't see anything abnormal in the x-ray. In desperation she prayed to God for help. What did God do? Abandon her completely (or so she felt).

Ws p. 165 "I would always look upon this abandonment at age nine as the most tragic event and trial of my life; even in retrospect I believe the event was improper for my developmental age and that God overstepped himself and pushed the human limits too far."

She didn't sugar coat her words ever, even when accusing God. Improper, overstepped, and too far, yet she was never once complained about her physical pain. Her mom only realized she wasn't faking it after spying on her while playing at recess and saw her limping. It wasn't that she didn't get her way. It was that nobody believed her and the interior power and friend chose this moment to abandoner her.

At one point she was mute, unable to eat, and lifeless in her bed for days. Finally, on the third day she saw a flickering on the wall of her bedroom. She realized it was the reflection of the sun on the sea. She knew what she had to do. It took her hours to dress and crawl downstairs, determined to get to her beloved sea.

Co p. 71 *"When the water was up to my chest, seeing a wave coming, instead of jumping over it, I decided to go under. The instant my head went under my mind cleared - defrosted or returned - and everything in me cried out 'I'm myself!' 'I'm myself again!' The surprise, the joy and jubilation were overwhelming. It was an unrepeatabe experience that would forever be etched in the depths of my being. My beloved sea had done this for me, its inscrutable, magnetic mystery had been there for me! I never doubted God had worked this miracle, but not the God I didn't know or the one I had prayed to, no, it was God whose mystery is the sea, or sea whose mystery is God. This is the God who worked the miracle for me."*

She didn't jump over the wave because she couldn't. Her entire body was in pain. But after she had been cured, she felt the strength to swim out a little beyond the waves to experience that same joy of being one with their rhythm that she had known to love since the "hot dog incident" on her father's boat. Realizing she had better get back to shore eventually, she let a wave carry her back and wash her up. She lay there for hours exhausted, happy, sleepy, free of pain for the first time in months. Eventually, she realized the sun was getting low and people would be starting to come around after school got out.

Before she got up to test the pain in her leg, she asked herself, "What if it's still there? Would that negate my experience of being cured?" When she did get up and put weight on that leg, she found that the pain was a "3 or 4" instead of the usual "11" out of ten. She felt different and taller. The first thing she did once she got home was look in the mirror at her plaid school uniform only to find that it was above her knee as opposed to the school rule that it fall below the knee. She was walking taller, and with a newfound confidence.

When her father told her that they were planning a trip to Mexico City to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, she was incredulous. "You're not going there to pray for me, are you?" she asked. She honestly didn't want to go because she wasn't into all that "visions and voices" junk. But she was convinced and they had a great time. She saw the Blessed Virgin Mary who assured her that her wish to see God would be granted. She smiled for the first time in months. She stuck her head out the hotel window to loudly shout "Boo!" at the matador processing by who had murdered her friend the bull earlier that day. (She had been praying her rosary for the bull the whole time.)

Co p. 58 *"Mary would become the great provider in my life, so great in fact, I had to be careful what I asked of her, because I always got it. Thus, I was ever careful not to abuse her endless generosity."*

She was in southern Mexico when she turned ten. They figured that made her one tenth Mexican and she was o.k. with that. Her entire ninth trip around the sun had been an ordeal of both people not believing her limping and the Interior Power disappearing when she needed it most. She looked back and saw this as a mistake on God's part. It had overstepped Its bounds and asked too much from humanity.

Co p. 91 *"Sometimes when arguing I suddenly blurted out something profound that surprised me, something I had not known or even thought of. Sometimes it was as if a spark of light*

in the mind alerted me to some truth or something meaningful that I must pay attention to."

Bernadette often spoke of this "truth sensor" in relation to Faith. She concluded that Faith was God's presence in us while Grace is God's action in us. So, if the spark of light is Faith, then the alerting is a Grace.

So, we have seen young Bernadette experience God in nature, in herself, and next year will see the making good of a promise made by the Blessed Virgin Mary to Bernadette, that, yes indeed, her novena grace would be granted and she would see God.

Chapter 2: (age 10 - 15) "struggles" and "conversion"

In this chapter we see young Bernadette struggling with her faith, undergoing puberty, struggling with Jesus, and struggling with Christianity. This chapter ends with her "conversion experience" and her going in hot pursuit of God.

Co p. 101 *"If I learned anything at all it was this: see God and you will never be happy in this world again, never even be deeply interested in it. One glimpse of God will ruin your life forever. You will never again be able to put your heart, mind and soul into anything in this world."*

What do you think? Is that a beautiful sentence or a depressing one? "One glimpse of God will ruin your life forever." Obviously, it's only in comparison to Heaven that this world is horribly ugly and uninteresting. Fortunately, most of us don't have to worry about seeing God anytime soon. But for some unknown reason, she was being prepared to "bear the vision" of God, and not die from the sight of It.

You might want to pay careful attention because here she describes what it was like to "see God". She is ten and hiking high in the Sierra Madre Mountains. She still has crutches but

wanders off from her family to sit on a rock and enjoy the view. Then her novena wish was granted.

Ws p. 166 *"I might compare it to a sustained flash of lightning that blinded the beauty of nature around me, as well as the one who saw it. For weeks afterwards the world was void and empty."*

Co p. 101 *"I only know the light was so brilliant I couldn't see the forest. Either way, however, I know this light stunned my brain, stopped it completely. The second part is more easily describable: an instant after seeing the light, from within myself came an explosion of uncontrollable joy, in one respect it reminded me of the balloon experience five years before, only this time I understood it as a grace from God, a taste, as it were, of His own glory."*

Elsewhere she said the joy spilled down the ravine into the stream up the rocks and beyond the trees to the skies. This is why she calls God Transcendent "God in the woods" because she was walking in the mountains when she saw it. I hope you are noticing all the "stunned my brain" and "couldn't think" language. Do you think there was a physical or spiritual cause of her experiences? Do you think it really matters?

Co p. 102 *"A few months later I was in Grauman's Chinese theater watching a movie with two friends when again there came that forceful leap. I told my friends, 'I gotta go!' and ran out of the theatre to catch a glimpse of God's passing. Though the magnificent sighting of God in the woods was never repeated, for the next four or five years I periodically experienced what I called its traces, tail-end or afterglow. Sometimes I saw more, sometimes less, but the effect was always the same: a profound love and longing for God, a quiet happiness, and uplifting, a momentary disinterest in the whole world. Equally amazing was the interior 'leap' system, and as long as that was all it did, its presence was fine with me. These experiences of God's passing were never predictable, they could occur any time, any place, regardless of what I was doing or where I was."*

Co p. 102 *“Apart from its sudden awakenings, it remained for the most part a quiet space within’ akin perhaps, to the notion of a sleeping giant, an aloof Power unto itself. I say ‘for the most part’ because there was one other way it could affect me, which was when it acted like a powerful magnet drawing my mind inward and downward into an unknowable silence and stillness within. Needless to say, I dearly wanted to know the true identity of this Power.”*

Do you know of many other people who have experienced such a magnetic draw inward? We will see a few more examples of this. Do you think this was God’s fancy footwork here, or a chemical imbalance, or damaged brain tissue?

One day she struck up a conversation with her uber-Catholic dad about the love of God. She said she thought she loved her dog more than she loved God. He laughed and explained that the love of God is the desire not to offend him. She couldn’t see how she had ever offended God, (or even could) but she didn’t have love of God, so she didn’t buy her dad’s notion. But it got her to thinking and once she set her mind to figure something out, she either figured it out or bumped up against the wall of the limits of thinking.

Co p. 110 *“Love, then, was not an emotion or a feeling, nor anything produced in our minds or intellect; rather, it was the soul’s power, its will, its determination, even its desire, for the highest Good, namely, God. So, love of God was our determined will to seek the Good, move toward it and do it, do God’s will that is, because God’s will was always for our own highest Good, namely, for God Himself.”*

Co p. 110 *“From then on, for me, at least, love of God was a will-to-God. I practiced becoming ever more aware of this, aware of my own will, its presence in me. I even set out to see if it was possible to focus this inner power on God at all times. Indeed, finding out if this was possible, was the most profound goal I ever set for myself. Intuitively I knew that my will-to-God was the door to a profound mystery, a profound truth regarding God and*

myself. It was as if I'd suddenly learned the secret code to everything important in life and how to live it."

She doesn't write much about this will-to-God as the secret code to living a successful spiritual life. But it was important to her because she mentions it in her DVD's and retreats. It seems that emotions forever belong to the human and never the divine, while infused contemplation (or ecstasy) belongs to the divine and not to the human, but the human will has the capacity to belong to either, or both. (Technically, while ecstasy may feel good, it is not an emotion because emotions come from (and strengthen) the self. Ecstasy does not arise from the self or support it. It is the temporary cessation of consciousness.) Perhaps our life is a process from the will belonging to the human to belonging to the divine. After all, in the unitive state, God replaces your will towards self with Itself making it impossible for you to will anything for yourself. Then that inner consuming flame that has just suddenly grown from a spark to a flame begins to consume you.

Co p. 110 *"the will is not primarily the faculty of desire for anything known, but rather, the desire for something unknown, an innate longing for something that lies beyond ourselves, a longing for something we know is missing to us."*

She often wrote about coming to the end of thinking. It was as if she was seeing how far she could push the limits of human thought. She enjoyed pushing her brain to the limit between the phenomenal and the noumenal realms (as Kant would say).

Co p. 117 *"The wall, then, was not just a barrier to thinking, it was the end of it, period. Although the nature of this wall mystified me, I had a suspicion that beyond it lay great knowledge, not ordinary knowledge, but one that could penetrate the mystery of the universe, God, myself; I often wondered what my life would be like on the other side."*

Co p. 118 *"These experiences, however, reinforced my early belief I was destined to die young."*

She is eleven and contemplating her own mortality once again. She never expected the spiritual journey to take a long time.

Co p. 117 *“First there was the blank mind, then, a magnetic pull downward to the center of my being. My awareness was pulled downward, away from worldly awareness, even self-awareness. With my mind or awareness held to the depth – there seemed to be no further to go – what I encountered was not some ‘thing’, nor no ‘thing’, but just the opposite. At this mysterious depth was a pervasive sense of fullness, completion, an unemotional quiet joy, an other-worldly state I sometimes thought as a gateway to heaven...This state could last 15-30 minutes before the force gradually subsided and I was able to pull out of it – get back to my usual self, that is. Afterwards, however, there was always a lingering aura or subtle trace of the experience that hung on for hours before it finally disappeared.”*

You do not disregard an authentic experience of God or hold it to be merely transitory. What makes it authentic is it changes you permanently, it conveys a universal truth, and you never forget it.

At one point she decided to read the entire Old Testament front to back, even if, for the very bad reason of being able to say she had done it. It turned her off the bible for life. Some of it was so shocking it made her sick to her stomach and some of it was so bawdy she hid the book in her room so her mom wouldn't find it! She liked Joseph and his technicolored dream-coat, “but nobody else”. She couldn't see why it was considered a “holy” book and immediately went into her “blank mind” whenever she heard it in church. She concluded, “This God I have never known!”

Then she got to thinking about heaven and hell and that maybe there is a glorious and marvelous side to God but also a terrible and frightening side to God. Did she just want to know one side and not the other? Was she willing to die to know all of God because the frightening side might kill her? In the end she decided yes. She would rather die and know God completely than

live a lie. She had to know the truth! So, after telling God (basically), “bring it on!” she lived for minutes, then hours, then days, without dying before finally feeling that familiar belly laugh and suddenly, she knew there was no horrible side to God.

Co p. 121 *“There was simply no truth to such a notion. God had only wanted to know if I’d be willing to die to see Him, that’s all the dilemma had been about. I also knew that although I would, in fact, die when I saw God, it would not be out of terror and fear, but from His overwhelming glory. I was even convinced the sole cause of death, everyone’s death, was the vision of God. Thus, I got the notion ‘see God and live’, which meant to me, the ability to sustain the vision without dying. I wanted my whole life to be a preparation for that great day – to ‘bear the vision’ and not die. Be carried into God’s glory without missing a beat.”*

Co p. 124 *“If for Paul and dad, keeping the faith was their triumphant goal, to be fully human, live fully, that would be my goal.”*

She received her vocation to be a Discalced Carmelite in a Carmelite chapel in Oregon. While her parents were praying the stations of the cross, she ran ahead and entered the small chapel atop the hill. She felt warm and bathed in the familiar presence that is the Blessed Sacrament.

Co p. 127 *“I was sure that if anyone else had been there, they would have experienced it too. This radiant love was obviously not mine, it was God’s – indeed, it was God. I knew then, the love with which I loved Him was His own love, the same love wherein He loved me. Because of this gift, I was now certain I could be a Carmelite, dedicate my whole life to loving God with the same love with which He loved me!”*

Her parents had been looking for her for so long they missed their train. She finally came running down the hill explaining that there was a Carmelite chapel up there and she had been there the whole time. She didn’t realize it had been three hours.

It seems young Bernadette couldn't even go to an 8th grade house party without getting more revelations of God. There was a Jesuit priest chaperone present with whom, of course, Bernadette struck up a conversation in the kitchen. When she came back to the dance floor it was apparent that some boys were daring other boys to kiss some of the girls. Rather than make a big scene she decided to grab her jacket and hop out the bedroom window. As soon as she was out, she heard "Get her! Run her down!" The boys gave up after a couple of blocks, but she kept running until this happened...

Co p. 134 *"A block or so after I stopped running, I experienced not just the familiar leap, but an explosion that knocked me off balance and left me sprawled on someone's front lawn. I may never know how it actually worked or what exactly happened, I only know this much: the Power within seemed to burst out of me and stand before me as a blinding light, the wordless knowledge it conveyed went something like this - using my own words: 'I am your true life, you belong only to me, I will have you'. This was no loving encounter, on the contrary, this Power meant business, it was definitive, almost scolding."*

From this experience she eventually learned that the Power within was indeed God. It identified itself as such. But, initially, she had doubts that it was, in fact, God because it had abandoned her in her time of greatest need during her bone disease.

I could be wrong, but I suspect that if the following event happened to anyone else, they would have written a book about it, been a guest on a talk show, or at least called all their friends. Bernadette just introduced it with, "Something odd happened one day in Sr. Bernadette's math class." She was sitting all alone in the back row of seats under a windowsill. (So, right off the bat, we know she was not the teacher's pet.) It seems she'd rather listen to the wind than her teacher.

Co p. 139 *"In order to listen to the silence I let my mind go blank, but as soon as I did this I experienced a forceful pull inward and downward to behold a blaze of light. On seeing this, it felt as*

if a dazzling meteor had struck the center of my being, and in that same instant, the window pane behind my head blew out, shattered into a million pieces. Everyone was startled, especially myself."

Co p. 139 *"While I had no physical explanation for the window, my impression of the experience was that God-Passing-By had descended (maybe even come through the window) and united with the Power within which caused a kind of explosion. That's all I could think of. I was certain this experience was the two together, the Transcendent and Immanent and not simply one or the other."*

I want to say, "poor 14-year-old girl, just trying to make it through another boring math class...and here comes God breakin' windows and shite!

One time she was in the middle of giving a presentation in front of her American History class at Flintridge boarding school when something rather inconvenient happened.

Co. p. 147 *"Although the windows overlooked the mountains, this day I merely noticed that the window was open. I thought I either saw or felt a breeze come in when suddenly my mind shut down completely. It was as if a mysterious waft of fog had beclouded my mind and pervaded my whole person. I looked down at my notes but couldn't read them, they were a jumble of letters. What also surprised me was that I didn't care, instead of trying to get back on track or at least offer a quick conclusion - I could not have remembered the topic anyway - I just smiled at the teacher, shrugged my shoulders and abruptly sat down. I felt I had been ushered into a dimension compared to which nothing else had any meaning whatsoever, an ethereal dimension free of mind, desires, emotions, everything."*

Co. p. 147 *"My whole being was pervaded by something unknowable, something I could only compare to a breeze because it was lightsome, gentle, exhilarating and refreshing. Above all, it engendered an overwhelming love of God, so much so, this*

breeze seemed to be love itself, a love not engendered by myself, but by God. Though I didn't know why I had this experience or what its purpose, no reason would have had any meaning anyway, because the experience was IT - an end in itself. It took about a week before this experience completely wore off, slowly it ebbed away until one day it was completely gone."

She says in *The Essence of Christian Mysticism* that if a revelation is authentic, there is no need to interpret it or try to understand it. The message is in the revelation. In this case, the message seems to be that all of creation already exists soaked in the Glory of God.

Co p. 147 *"Because this experience was a piece of heaven, I firmly believed I was destined to die young and God was just getting me ready- warning me in a way. Because I believed this, I wanted to live in constant readiness - as dad often told us kids: 'Live each day as if it were your last'."*

Most of us struggle to accept our mortality, no? Here she is at fifteen once again fully convinced she would die young (she mentions it in two more places than the ones I give here) and is reconciling herself to the fact. In a way, of course, she was right. She died at 44 (and that's pretty young. Yet her organs continued to function for another 40 years until she was in her 80's. Maybe she was dying to consciousness her whole life and we get to read about it.

She indulged her lively interest in astronomy every Saturday afternoon by taking the bus to the Griffith Park Observatory for the lectures. One Saturday during Christmas break it was crowded so she found a seat in the middle near the back. She had her questions prepared for months and was ready to spit them out the next time she glimpsed God passing by the observatory. (Remember, previously she had bolted out the door to catch a glimpse of God-Passing-By.)

Co p. 149 *"Half way through his lecture, however, there came the familiar 'leap', instantly my whole body was poised to*

run outside to catch a glimpse of God passing by. This time, however, I held to the arms of the seat undecided whether to go or stay, when I saw God's Passing anyway - as if through the room. Though I full expected this Passing to be as swift as a meteor, to my amazement It stood still as if deliberately hovering for a moment, so I shot out my questions 'What is this in me that knows you? What is its connection to you?'"

The answer she got to this was, of course, it is God in you that knows God, it is God in you that loves God. And that which God loves in you is God. They are different manifestations depending on what side of consciousness you are on.

Co p. 149 *"The answer I received was not conveyed by any word or intellectual means, instead it was conveyed by what I saw, a knowledge by seeing alone. What I saw was the enactment or movements of God that conveyed a knowledge of how God works or how He manifests Himself, virtually moves to manifest Himself. In this movement I saw that God Passing by was also the Power within (my Friend), One and the same God only two different Manifestations, hence, two different experiences."*

She was so excited to finally have answers to her questions that blurted out a "hurray!" and the man next to her gave her a "sshhhh!"

Finally, she is able to make some connections between her experiences. The next quote is a little confusing because by "God in the woods" she does NOT mean God's presence in nature (the Logos). It is the Transcendent. She also calls it God passing by. So, in this quote she is realizing the oneness of the Trinity.

Co p. 150 *"That God's presence in nature was the same as in me not only accounted for the mysterious affinity I had experienced with nature all my life, this same Presence was the Leap within, the interior Power, my old Friend - and God in the woods!"*

Ens p. 140 *"I had to get outside and share this joy with my friends - the hills, the sky, and all the animals. Now I understood why I loved them so much and what they had been trying to tell me all along. We were the same, we were one - all of us, vessels of God!"*

Co p. 150 *"I saw a kind of developmental progression, how God had been teaching me, preparing me at each step, I had not gone from one isolated, disconnected experience to another, on the contrary, each experience had been a step on a specific path."*

Just to be clear, the steps in her spiritual journey were first God in nature (the sea), then God Everywhere, then Interior Power or Holy Spirit, finally God Transcendent or the Father. (She didn't like the word Transcendent because it makes it seem like it transcends the other two in the sense of being superior to them. She claimed that was false and that none transcends the other.) (Obviously, she's not going to much like the word Father either.)

While she could certainly celebrate for a time being a vessel of God, somehow that wasn't enough. Even if all creation is a vessel, it has no permanent existence and is here today, gone tomorrow while God keeps right on going. She couldn't figure out what her eternal place was. Why would God bother to reveal Himself if there was nothing eternal about her?

Ecc p. 20 *"Why would God want man to know and love Him if, in the end, it all came to naught? No, if God is to have any true meaning in our life there has to be an eternal link between God and man."*

In a state of spiritual anguish, she decided to put the question to God. What is my eternal oneness with you? This ushered in her conversion experience and completely changed the direction of her life. After this experience she understood something new about Christ and it became suddenly clear to her what she must do. Sell (or give away, much to the consternation of her mom) all her belongings and follow.

Co p. 152 *“Every bedroom had a crucifix on the wall – about 18 inches or so – and sometimes I knelt there to say my rosary before bed. This night I knelt to pray God for an answer, and vowed not to get up until I received it. If I had to stay there the rest of my life, no matter, people would just have to come and physically remove me. I posed my question not to the crucifix, but to God transcendent (“God-Without”; “God-of-the-woods”, or “God-Passing by”), after that, I waited in silence. I did not have to wait long before high up behind the wall somewhere, came a swift, straight, brilliant beam of light that passed downward through the center of the crucifix and on into the center of myself. I was hit with such force I fell backward against the maple bed post, it was as if I’d been struck by lightning. Instantly I recognized the Trinity – God Transcendent, “God-Passing by” (the Father); God Immanent, the Power within (the Holy Spirit); and between the two, Christ. Though I had blessed myself (In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”) thousands of times and knew the Trinity to be the lofty mystery of God, I had never given it any real thought – indeed, dad often said the Trinity was “unthinkable”. Seeing the Trinity in this light, however, it not only took on meaning in my life, it became central to it. But as regards Christ’s place in the Trinity and what he revealed of God’s mystery, I was a complete blank. It bothered me that the Light had passed through Christ, after all, he had no place in my life or experiences, I never thought of Him, never felt any need for him. So, what was he doing in the Trinity, what was his role? Above all, what did his place in the Trinity mean to me? I could not think of a thing.”*

She wracked and wracked her brain for hours and couldn’t come up with a thing. Completely exhausted from the effort, her bodily needs began to take over and she began to feel that peace just before sleep. Suddenly, from somewhere above her head on the pillow she was informed:

Co p. 152 *“Christ in the Trinity stands for you and all creation, He is your true and eternal connection to God, the link*

between God Within and Without. His humanity is the vessel, the meeting place where God within and without have fruition and become One so that everything created and uncreated is united and One. To know this same fruition as Christ knew it, the vessel must be perfect as he is perfect. Christ is the medium through which the vessel (me) could become one with its content (God). Transformed into Christ, His place in the Trinity is also your eternal place in the Trinity."

There are a few interesting words in the above quote. First, Christ "stands for you". Christians believe Jesus took our place in suffering and death but for some reason not in life or resurrection. Second, Christ is the "medium" of oneness. Christ is not humanity nor Divinity but the process whereby one becomes the other. He is the "link" or possibly bridge.

Co p. 153 *"Here now, after years of knowing I was not a Christian, there came the happy thought, 'Now I'm a Christian!' But no sooner had this thought entered my mind than it was instantly blown out: 'No, you are not a Christian yet, you are only becoming one.'" Though a bit sobering, I understood perfectly."*

For Bernadette, being a Christian never meant believing Jesus was God. It meant (and means) being transformed into (not in, not with, not by, into) Christ.

Co p. 153 *"As I saw it, no one could fully know Christ until they had been fully transformed into Him, until then, everything known of Christ was incomplete."*

Co p. 153 *"To me it was a complete revelation, the whole plan of God in a nut shell, ingenious, magnificent and definitive. Christ was not merely a medium between God Within and Without (Father and Spirit), rather, He represented all creation' inclusiveness in God's Oneness."*

In other words, Christ is the revelation that all of creation is included in God's Oneness. It finally made sense to her. She simply could not believe anything that didn't make sense. She refused to forfeit her intellectual integrity. But as soon as she

understood that Christ is what she was to become, it made sense and she could leave her questions behind and get on with it.

Co p. 154 *"I was also well educated in my Faith, familiar with the lives of the saints, in short, prior to my conversion everything was in place. Like a fledgling bird I had only needed a push to fly, and my conversion was that push. Once I took off, I never looked back, never hesitated or harbored a doubt; I knew my direction, knew the way, and just as the bee flies, I headed straight for my eternal home in the Trinity."*

Co p. 156 *"In short, I would never feel any need for the historical Christ, even though I realized that without His incarnation we would never have known the Trinity and God's plan for creation. It would be several years before I came across the term 'Logos' used for the divine Christ, it would have been helpful if I had known this term earlier because I would have recognized it as the term for the divine Christ in the Trinity - as set apart from the purely human, historical man Jesus."*

I don't know if it was because growing up in her home "there wasn't a whole lot of Jesus talk", or if it was because she could never believe he was God because she had already seen God and thought no human being is God, but it is sometimes confusing when reading Bernadette to know exactly what she is talking about when she uses the word "Christ". Here she clearly distinguishes between the historical Christ and the divine Christ, the Logos. Then she says how helpful knowing about this would have been for her in her spiritual life. I suspect she was not alone.

We will see this again later when she is in her early twenties, but young Bernadette was consumed by a desire to give something to God. As the recipient of so much love and affection from God, she felt obliged to give something in return. For years this need would plague her because she never felt she had helped a soul, had no missionary vocation, hadn't really done anything for God.

But here, after her conversion experience she could at least renounce all other joys and delights. So, she began eating what she didn't like and taking cold showers and the occasional blind dive of the hand into the garbage can to eat what she grabbed. She failed to keep down raw eggs, etc. She even went around to some girls chatting at school and asked if she could kiss their feet, which she did. Whereas a few years earlier she had been laughing with her mom in the kitchen while reading the lives of the "Desert Fathers" thinking "Good Lord! What the heck does living on top of a post have to do with loving God?!" to now reading the same "Desert Fathers" and wishing she could have been born in that time because she knew she had it in her to be a great ascetic. (Asceticism is denying pleasure to the self because it's obviously a never-ending trap. The challenge is in the intention. (When determining the moral value of any act, three factors must always be taken into consideration: 1. The act itself, 2. The circumstances, and, 3. The intention.) If one denies the self in order to feel good about the self, well, that's just stupid. If your intention is to put your source of happiness into something other than yourself, well, that's smart.)

Eventually, young Bernadette got "scruples" (worrying too much if she had done enough) and then got scruples about getting scruples, etc.

Co p. 164 *"Finally, however, I reached a point where I could not discern what I really liked or disliked any more, and at this point my ascetic practices didn't do anything for me, they did not seem to bring about any progress or make any difference to my interior estate. From here on, come what may, I could take it or leave it."*

She had finally learned what asceticism is supposed to teach. Don't grasp, seek, or strive for pleasures of the senses. Receive them gratefully and let them go.

Co p. 163 "I know the exact moment I was freed from my miserable condition [of scruples]. I believe it was on the night of the third day (after the reversal) I experienced a sudden release

comparable, perhaps, to having a load lifted from your soul accompanied by a surging sense of joyful freedom. I recognized the hand of God in this release because I had experienced it before – and would experience it a number of times again. It was as if God had said, ‘Enough of this!’ and that was that.”

She figured out pretty early in life (with her conversion experience at 15) that she wasn’t going to be transformed into the man Jesus. Nor could she relive his personal experiences in her time and place. She realized she was supposed to recapitulate or relive the interior life of Jesus. So, like Jesus, she focused all of her attention on God. With her will focused on God, she constantly asked herself if there was anything she could not give up, or do for God.

Ws p. 174 *“The desired goal was a continuous awareness of God that no activity or thought could alter or disrupt. Perfect love of God was the goal, and selflessness was a goal.”*

Once she figured out that the Interior Power was, in fact, God she could focus there, or on the Transcendent, or on the Eucharist. Her prayer was almost always a preparation for infused contemplation. She didn’t seek experiences, but when they came, she learned from them. Sometimes she was wrapped up into an ecstasy so delightful everything else was aridity. At first the force required to keep her brain still was very great. Later, it took less. She learned that ecstasy, and it’s difference from the “real world” could be a good gauge of the spiritual journey.

Co. p. 174 *“Kneeling alone in the quiet school Chapel, a great force came down on top of my head that stopped my brain and all its functions. I could not move my mind, a superior force, strong as steel, but light as a cloud, had overpowered it. It felt as if giant hands were holding my mind in a vise. I looked upward a little over my head to see a shaft of light a few feet before me. It seems a wide ray of this light had come down and penetrated my mind with a force that held it immobile. This condition may have*

lasted no more than one or two minutes, after that, the force gradually lessened and things eventually returned to normal."

Actually, it took her a full day to recover. Eventually, she began to wonder where had Inner Power had been this whole time? At this time in her life she was trying to get into a Carmelite monastery and was diagnosed with anemia. (She always doubted the veracity of that diagnosis because the next time she was tested the results were perfect.) From seeing blinding lights in front of her, to getting kicked around by God, to knowing the Trinity "like the back of my hand by age 15", she had to be asking herself, "Why me?" The only thing she could come up with was that she could never be an easy believer. So, if she was to believe, God was just going to have to be very active in her life.

Pns p. 202 *"The obvious purpose of this accelerated movement is to realize more quickly the full unitive state, in order to move on to the final emptying of self - to go through Christ's own experience of death and resurrection. This is why the calling to the contemplative life is the greatest of human destinies, and why half-measures are the greatest of human tragedies."*

She does not separate the experience of death and resurrection because in her experience they went together. If we are all called to the contemplative life, which of us is not guilty of half-measures? Which of us then is not a walking example of a great human tragedy? The truth hurts, no?

Well, I can't end this chapter on **that** note, now can I? There really is no substitute for reading the autobiography completely. I'm just focusing on the experiences and leaving out all the funny parts, family drama, vacations, etc. Actually, I must confess, I haven't made up my mind yet on if she had brain damage from being born a blue baby, or not. It would explain a lot. The opposite is much more difficult to believe. That God formed a covenant with a father and showered that child with Its presence in various manifestations, pretty much constantly, her whole life. We haven't even gotten to the "upper division" experiences. It

would be very convenient to just be able to say, we don't yet know the source of the self-reflexive mechanism of the brain, but some day we will, and we will be able to test for this kind of thing. You decide for yourself what you can believe.

Chapter 3: (age 16 - 17) "Monastery" and "Unitive State"

This chapter is about how young Bernadette experienced the permanent falling away of her ego or self-seeking center just after entering the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Alhambra, California. While she had been prepared for this monumental event, it still wasn't all daffodils and roses. It was a difficult transition and one that took a couple of years to be fully integrated and complete.

First, you should know a few things about the unitive state. Spiritual transformation only begins once the unitive state has been firmly established. Every attempt at spiritual growth until then is reformation, not transformation. The ego is too preoccupied owning that center and getting all of life to revolve around it. After it is gone, however, all the intricacies of the interior life now revolve around a divine center, and that center can organize things as they should be, not how we would like them to be.

Whereas before the unitive state there is an I-Thou relationship with God, after the unitive state there is a "we" consciousness. This is because, in the act of self-reflection, we now see two things at once. We see self and God within at the same time. Bernadette held that until we come to the unitive state, we are not fully mature. This maturity is not physical, mental, or merely spiritual. The unitive life ushers in a way of life that we were meant to live- the life of a fully mature human. Until then we are selfish, fickle, and spiritually childish. Most people do not become aware of their abiding oneness with God for many decades. That Bernadette realized this at seventeen is

remarkable. Even at such a young age she was a more mature human than any person twice her age but not in the unitive state.

Co p. 192 *"No, there was no explanation for being singled out at an early age. Though I never doubted He was equally at work in others, I had never heard of His working in such a mysterious, yet overt, persistent manner. The only hint of a reason I could come up with was that from the beginning, God knew I would never be an easy believer, that I was incapable of accepting any truth I could not verify for myself or come to know through my own experiences."*

The implication is that people who are easy believers don't need such overt, persistent attention from God. When she asked her dad why some saints that she was reading about received an abundance of graces and miracles he replied that those experiences were to increase their faith. So, she naturally concluded that saints were people who started out weak in faith. Because she was skeptical by nature and felt she was lacking in faith, she set out to strengthen her faith so she wouldn't need all these experiences.

While preparing herself to enter the monastery she had an interesting epiphany.

Ff p. 120 *"This reminds me of something I learned as a 15 yr. old reading St. Teresa's Mansions. When I got to her description of 'Mystical Marriage' (the unitive state) I understood it perfectly, recognized it as my own present experience, but then I thought, 'Is this all there is to the spiritual life?' Impossible! So I snapped the book shut - 'There has got to be more to the spiritual life than this!'"*

In other words, she had already had some similar spiritual experiences as St. Teresa of Avila and reckoned, since it didn't appear that she was going to die anytime soon, there had to be more. She wanted more, but she didn't appreciate the extraordinary path that St. Teresa trod. She "didn't go in for all that visions and voices junk." Soon she turned to St. John of the

Cross who presented a more sober and systematic treatment of the spiritual life.

What she learned later was that she had been wrong. She was not in the state that St. Teresa described. From this she learned that one can never appropriate another's experience. She didn't want people appropriating hers either.

Co p. 173 *"From the time of my conversion God had showered me with many graces - no two alike - the most important being some new knowledge of God and/or myself. There were also a few outstanding graces wherein their full relevance was not understood for many years. While in the years to come the following experience would become a kind of gauge of my interior progress, at the time it occurred, however, I did not know this - could not have known it."*

Once she figured out that the Interior Power was in fact God, she could focus there, or on the Transcendent, or on the Eucharist. Her prayer was almost always a preparation for infused contemplation. She didn't seek experiences, but when they came, she learned from them. Sometimes she was wrapped up into an ecstasy so delightful that everything else was aridity. At first the force required to keep her brain still was very great. Later, it took less. She learned that ecstasy, and its difference from the "real world", could be a good gauge of the spiritual journey. If the difference between the two is enormous, that means one is just starting off. If the difference is slight, that means one is near the end of the spiritual journey.

Co. p. 174 *"Kneeling alone in the quiet school Chapel, a great force came down on top of my head that stopped my brain and all its functions. I could not move my mind, a superior force, strong as steel, but light as a cloud, had overpowered it. It felt as if giant hands were holding my mind in a vise. I looked upward a little over my head to see a shaft of light a few feet before me. It seems a wide ray of this light had come down and penetrated my mind with a force that held it immobile. This condition may have*

lasted no more than one or two minutes, after that, the force gradually lessened and things eventually returned to normal."

Co p. 174 *"I took for granted I had experienced a foretaste of a state down the road, most probably reserved for heaven, since such a condition was obviously not compatible with continued life on earth."*

She saw these ecstatic experiences as a "foretaste". So, either she was being prepared by God or something was different about her brain and she could see that some part of it was dying.

Co p. 174 *"The next time this occurred - six months to a year later - while my mind was immobilized, the force was not as heavy and only accompanied by a dust of light that permeated my mind - no external, brilliant Light. Over the years I periodically had this experience and noticed the ever-lessening degree of force or power it took to immobilize my mind. Finally, the day came when it hardly took any force at all."*

Not everyone experiences ecstasy. It is not an essential aspect of the spiritual life and is therefore relatively unimportant. The spiritual life continues with or without it. But from how it was different every time and from how it got easier to bear, she realized that her spiritual life was a progressive movement in one sure direction.

She took summer school classes to finish High School a year early and get into that monastery. Actually, she was lucky to get into the monastery early. With her Irish Carmelite spiritual director Fr. Columbus, she had been tracking her bouts of aridity and was pleasantly surprised that he could practically predict when she was going to undergo the "Big Night" or "Passive Night of the Spirit" (which is the falling away of the ego). That she was in a monastic environment was probably a great help to her as she struggled to adjust to such an upheaval.

Again, this is somewhat of a "choose your own adventure" book. You are free to believe that this girl, while probably still a novice, attained the highest state of permanent infused

contemplation while most of the nuns around her who had been in the monastery for years or decades, probably had not. Or, you may believe that there was something “wrong” with her brain particularly as it pertains to consciousness. Each of us gets to decide for ourselves. Or, maybe they are not mutually exclusive.

This is her account of her no-ego experience:

Pns p. 85 “Then one day I was given the man-in-the-airplane treatment and was shoved out without any attachments. That there was no great splat attests to the miracle of the unitive state. It is like the butterfly emerging from the cocoon: there is fear and unknowing before it suddenly discovers it can fly, discovers that this is what its transformation was all about, and that to fly is the essence of its mature life.”

Ff p. 66 “Yet from out of the blue comes the totally unexpected ‘unitive revelation’. This might be compared to the appearance of a brilliant light in the center of ourselves, not deep within, but as if right in front of our eyes. With this we recognize God as the very Center of ourselves. To this point I had never thought of God as my Center or, basically, the Center of anything – the term ‘Center’ was not in my repertoire. Although there is a lot of talk about having a Divine Center, I hold this can only be revealed by God, otherwise, we haven’t come upon a true Center at all.”

Because she was so attached to God, when her ego fell away it felt like God had been stripped from her as well. She felt like she just had a big, scary, dark hole inside. Eventually, after about a week, she mustered the courage to look deep within and face whatever she encountered. She was surprised to see the eye of God staring right back at her. She talks about this experience in the Youtube video called Bernadette Roberts a path to no self (minutes 1:00:00 to 1:09:00), but she doesn’t actually write about the experience. It’s kind of strange because supposedly it is the goal of the mature Christian life.

She was not concerned about the loss of her ego because she never cared about herself. She felt bereft, however, because her experiences of God that were connected to her ego were also gone. Whereas before she had a strong sense of will and that she could always pull herself up by spiritual bootstraps, now that energy was gone and she felt helpless. In many ways, entrance into the unitive state is preceded by and accompanied by an acute awareness of one's own nothingness.

Pns p. 31 *"With the appearance of the black hole and the ensuing pain, I had the impression of being burned to the depths of my being. At times, the hole seemed to be only the pit of my own misery and nothingness, a bottomless pit that went nowhere. But at other times, I looked into the depths of this hole to see God eye to eye, and, realizing this as the most marvelous of sights, I took courage and opted for more pain - as if that were possible."*

This experience supported her love of the ancient stoics and their spiritual goal of apatheia. Central to Bernadette's spirituality was an awareness of a divine center. She was sometimes consciously aware of this center before the unitive state and always aware of this center, even if only unconsciously, after the unitive state. In the aforementioned Youtube video called Bernadette Roberts a path to no self (minutes 1:45:00 - 1:50:00), she talks about how experiences sink ever deeper until they come upon a threshold where only God is. She calls this center a "stillpoint". If you want to prepare yourself for the unitive state, it would be wise to contact this still center at the depth of your being.

Ff p. 33 *"it was years later I thought of the word 'stillpoint' to describe a passing non-experience. At the actual time, a better description of this was 'the eye of a cyclone', but if this was my first choice, it was a more awkward term to use in my book."*

Ff p. 33 *"the stillpoint was no experience, in fact this is what made it what it was: an interior place of no-experience, nothing going on there. It was what was going on all around it that was experiential."*

Ff p. 34 *“So stillpoint only has meaning as long as it is relative to movement, for where there is no movement there is also no stillpoint. In short, there can be nothing ‘absolute’ about a stillpoint, it is purely relative.”*

Many people when they experience their deepest sense of being runs into God’s Being conclude that they are God or that everything is God. Gurus and tricksters like Alan Watts will say you just have to realize you are God like Jesus did. Bernadette disagreed.

Ff p. 43 *“God is our deepest experience of being, which does not make us God’s Being.”*

She was adamant about maintaining the great divide between Creator and created, between source and dependent existence. We cannot talk of a source unless it is the source of something. If the whole universe is God, then either it has no source and is eternal, or it was created by something other than itself. But, by definition, God cannot create itself. Anything created is less than the Creator. It makes no sense to say that everything has a source and center and then say everything is God.

Ff p. 39 *“God is our divine Center and we are It’s circumference.”*

In the case of a doughnut, the circumference may be bigger than the center. In the case of a hula-hoop, the center is bigger. The center grows as the circumference diminishes. “He must increase while I must decrease.”

She is living life from the core of her being. Once that core drops out and is replaced by a Divine center, there is a reorganization as all one’s thoughts and feelings begin to revolve around a Divine center.

Ff p. 48 *“when we come to the Big Night the cloud of unknowing descends wherein God as much as says: until now it was your work (based on all you knew of yourself), but from here*

on it is My work based on My knowledge of yourself – and so it goes. We have no possible choice but to surrender and abandon ourselves to this divine work.”

It was a surprise for her to realize that her true self was not one with God, much less God Itself. Guru's like A. H. Almaas want you to believe that at your deepest core you are God. Whereas for Bernadette self had nothing to do with God. She actually wrote numerous times that God is everything except the self.

Ff p. 50 *“What I learned, however, is just the opposite, not only was the divine Center not myself, but even ‘that’ in myself that was one with God (which I had initially regarded as my ‘true self’) was also not myself. The reason this revelation is particularly disconcerting is because there is no place in the unitive state for ‘me’ or any aspect of self. Instead, ‘that’ in us that is one with God is not us at all but only Christ.”*

Ff p. 66 *“In the Passive Night of the Spirit we take the terrible journey to the depths of our own nothingness, the nothingness of our whole self. Literally, this is a journey to the nothingness from which we were created. It is from this nothingness we then come forth directly from God, only this time we know it, know it absolutely.”*

When she uses the phrase “the nothingness from which we were created” she means nothing knowable to the human mind. It is a reference to the Logos or Divine Christ “through whom all things were made”. There is an experiential knowing of how we come forth from God. One's origin remains a mystery until the Passive Night of the Spirit or entrance into the unitive state.

Pns p. 116 *“After this, however, the point of light seemed to explode and become all of this human form but the external husk. I saw how God was indeed my very life and breath, and that Christ, as the true self, was the inner strength, the will-to-God, the essence of the new man – the butterfly itself. Obviously, God had only withdrawn Himself as an interior object of vision in order to reveal Himself on yet a more subjective, everyday level. At the*

same time, it was clear that the true nature of all dark nights is God's moving progressively underground in order to take over our deepest subjective experience of personal being; this is how transformation works."

Ff p. 55 *"Seeing the divine Center explode into Christ infused throughout my whole being..."*

With this experience she realized the subjectivity of Christ. She was not focused on the historical man Jesus as an object but instead on the divine, formless Christ as her true self. She said that Christ was infused with everything she was except for the external husk. One has to wonder, then, "What exactly is the external husk?" It is obviously not life nor breath; it is not true self. Is it everything else like skin color, gender, personality, etc.?

Ff p. 66 *"thus our experience of God is actually the deepest experience of our own being. Another way to put it: God's Being is our deepest experience of being - our being, a run-on with God's Being. The Divine Center is the Source and Ground of our being - and all being."*

Notice how many times she uses the word "being" here. She said it was crucial to one's spiritual growth to have a real sense of one's being. She said that some of the existentialist philosophers of the twentieth century were coming upon something pretty profound. Bernadette didn't have a superficial bone in her body. She lived her life from the depths of her soul.

Chapter 4: (18 to 24) "Acclimation" and "Turning Outward"

Bernadette absolutely loved her monastic vocation. She felt like a duck born on dry land finally seeing and entering water for the first time. But after three years of acclimating to the unitive state, she began to realize some things. She learned that, complete as she felt, the nature of the spiritual life is one of

constant movement because God is movement. She also realized that there had always been some aspect of self that tinged every experience. So, she realized she was not yet fully perfected. She could not love God selflessly as long as she had a self. She no longer had an ego, but there was still self in all her experiences.

She had taken the inward journey as far as it could go. So, there was only one other direction that the flame of love within could take - outward. She wanted to test the practice of union. She learned that the more difficult the trial, the more she would feel God's sustaining presence. Eventually, she learned she would always land on her feet.

Pns p. 78 "So great are these advanced glimpses, and so great is the disparity revealed between this life and the next state, that we desire either to die or to have no more such glimpses. But, if not destined to move immediately into the next life, we must then be given a new direction in this one."

This is similar to the disparity she experienced in the hot dog incident on her father's boat at the age of five. She was constantly and keenly aware of the difference between the human and Divine dimensions.

Her new direction, as we have seen, was outward. There was probably a part of her that sincerely wanted to die so she could remain in that foretaste. But that would just have been a desire for more experiences. A vicious circle. So, she renounced all experiences, all the bliss, joy, and peace. She was inspired to do this by contemplating the Divine Christ and the bliss that "He" put off to assume human consciousness. So, the least she could do would be to sacrifice her human bliss. It was not for another year that God accepted that offer. But eventually she realized that living without experiences would become a reality.

Ws p. 175 "Christ, of course, never put off his divinity; what he could put off, however, was his heavenly state or experience... Though forfeiting or giving up my experiences of God cannot be compared to Christ's forfeiting the Godhead's heavenly condition,

I now understood how this worked and wished to follow Christ in this matter.”

Pns p. 83 *“It is to affirm and return God’s love that the soul desires to endure every trial and suffering within human limits...it is in the exercise of this union that its true glory breaks through and His face appears. And the tougher the exercise, the clearer the vision.”*

This is a unique moment in the writings of Bernadette because she could never imagine the human Jesus in her mind. Trying only gave her a headache. Along with her conversion experience, this is the only other reference we have to Jesus playing a role in her spiritual experience. She said she never gave the guy much thought. She was a very visual learner and “vision” plays an important role in her experiences and writings. She said that when a mystic says they “see” something, that means they understand it. So, when she wrote “His face appears” she was either referring to understanding the Divine Logos in a new way or understanding the Human Christ in a new way. Since this is in the context of suffering and human limits, we must conclude she is understanding the Human Christ in a new way. We must take for granted that she saw no physical image of a face in her mind.

If you are wondering how she could grow up in a devout Catholic family and say, “I never gave the guy much thought”, I think she resented being told she was a sinner. At the age of ten she hobbled on crutches into Blessed Sacrament Church in Los Angeles. She had some questions for Christ. Actually, they were for the historical Jesus but, as we know, “there wasn’t a whole lot of Jesus talk in my house”. There was, however, a lot of talk about God and saints and doctrine. Basically, her question was, “What did you die for? I know you didn’t die for me.” In other words, she refused to be convinced that she was a big fat sinner.

As soon as she got her questions out, she was overwhelmed by a sense of a terrible, dark mystery that underlay his death. She felt a sense of tremendous tragedy that no one really

understood his death. She didn't yet understand it either, but she felt that someday she would.

She was creeped-out by the fact that the eyes of the crucifix seemed to keep staring at her no matter where she stood. She went to the back of the church where she couldn't see the eyes to await her answer. After almost an hour of pacing back and forth and losing hope she thought that maybe the reason why she wasn't getting an answer was because there wasn't one. She remembered the phrase, "many are called but few are chosen" and figured she had not been one of the chosen. She was not really a Christian. She was nothing.

Then, suddenly, she felt overwhelmed by a rage unlike any she had ever experienced. She stormed out of the church, slamming the door forcefully on her way out. She determined to never go back to Church again. So, why did she not give the guy much thought? She disregarded his purported purpose for coming and dying. One is left wondering, would she have lived her early teens without thinking much of Jesus if there was a different rationale for his death, one more acceptable to someone not convinced they are a sinner. If it was understood that the kenosis was the redemptive act and not the crucifixion (which she would later do from an experiential perspective) and that Jesus is the Icon, role model, example, and guide, she probably would have paid a great deal more attention to him. This is all by way of explaining why Jesus didn't play a large role in her spiritual life.

She is in her early twenties now and able to articulate the great difference between the egoic and non-egoic states. She is careful to point out that, just because the state of apatheia does not permit of emotional extremes, it is not an uncaring state. St. John of the Cross says it's like the compassion that angels feel. It arises from the knowing mind and not from the feeling center.

Pns p. 89 *"True virtue does not arise from feelings, but from the strength at the center which needs no feeling to act. During the transformation, a shift occurred whereby acts are now either*

spontaneous – that is they bypass both feeling and knowing – or arise from knowledge and no longer from feelings.”

If true virtue does not arise from feelings, then is that which arises from feelings less than virtuous? Is there virtue in being so completely ruled by our emotions? Bernadette called herself a Stoic and said that there is very little evidence that man is a rational being. As a lover of philosophy and critical thinking, she probably would have agreed with Jordan Peterson when he claims that most people don't know how to think. She said people were constantly getting brainwashed by one thing or another.

“Strength at the center” (from which virtue arises) is a reference to the Stoic notion of apatheia. It is the immovable “stillpoint” around which the mess of our lives revolves. Only God occupies the center. No human thought or emotion enters. When an emotion goes deep enough, it eventually runs on with the Divine at one's core and as one's source and is consumed by it. At least that was her experience. True virtue is selfless and therefore does not arise from the self but from this “Strength at the Center”.

Pns p. 94 “We said something about the modification of the affective system, and how clarity of mind takes precedence, so that doing stems from knowing and seeing, not from feeling. This is the result of becoming established in our true center (God), and having put behind us the false center (emotions). The turning point of the unitive life is the emergence of the flame, or great energy, at the center, which is not only the source of virtue, but virtue itself. To reveal the full strength of this union – the soul's cementedness to God – there is need of continual trials and tests of every kind, because from this exercise arises the revelation of ‘that’ which lies behind the door at the center.”

Could “‘that’ which lies behind the door’ be ‘His face’? In other words, the human Christ? She did say (somewhat cryptically) that his consciousness was gradually replacing our own.

Bernadette strove constantly to repay the love she had received from God and found that she never could. This was

difficult for her because she was extremely grateful and concerned with justice. She said love demands equality and if one is loved more than one loves, that is not a satisfying position. In other words, no (spiritual) justice = no (spiritual) peace.

Pns p. 102 *"The way forward, then, is to exercise the great gifts of the unitive life, to take all the risks, stretch the human potential, and allow God to save us every day, every moment of our lives."*

We have to trust God enough to be able to say, "O.k. I know you've got this. I will let go". And then we realize there is something else to let go of. We are gradually allowing ourselves to become less necessary.

Pns p. 104 *"Thus it is not 'I' who love God; rather, it is God loving himself. In other words, what God loves in me is Himself, and 'that' in me which loves God, is also Himself. To completely realize the truth of this insight comes very close to doing away with the self altogether, for if 'I' do not love God, then what good am I? How am I needed or necessary? The day we see the full implication of what this means, we are getting close to the final demise of the self; with this demise, there is not union remaining, and therefore no further need for equality of love. Thus, one way out of the problem of equality of love is to have no equality at all. God loving Himself is the only equality there is."*

A noble and lofty reason to want to hang on to the self is so that one can love God. Yet it is far more noble to get out of the way and let God love Itself in you. But just as a candle cannot blow itself out, you cannot get out of your own way. What you can do is get tough and live the human condition fully and without fear. Spiritual character building, tested in adversity, is good preparation.

Pns p. 106 *"To see God we need only be prepared, and this preparation is what the unitive life is about."*

She said in one of her weekend retreats once that a person could do nothing better with his or her life than to write and speak

about the unitive state. This is because it is an important preparation and not the end of the journey. Her second book, The Path to No Self spells out exactly how it is a preparation and not the end. The reason why it is a preparation is that God is so shockingly beautiful that It overwhelms and incapacitates. As she said, 'it will knock you out'. So, the preparation requisite to 'bear the vision' must be, in fact, quite difficult.

Pns p. 111 *"Evidently the requirement to bear the vision is a sense of formlessness or bodilessness which does, in fact, characterize the later transformation and become a permanent state of affairs."*

If this is true, wouldn't it be a good idea to meditate on or get used to a sense of formlessness or bodilessness? You know, practice for the inevitable.

Chapter 5: (age 24 - 42) "More Doubts" and "Marketplace"

Consumed as she was by the burning desire to return to God such a Love, she began to wonder if a monastic environment was the best place for her. As mentioned before, she loved her monastic vocation, so she didn't want to leave. Life in a Discalced Carmelite monastery is impossible for those who do not love God. But it is relatively easy for those who do. Yet she wanted challenges to this new state of hers. She thought she would be willing to be a doctor in bug infested jungles to prove her trust in God. But she didn't foresee any such opportunities to prove her love in her near future so she began to wonder if such a comfortable life was conducive to the eternal movement which is the spiritual path.

She told her Mother Superior, "I think God wants me to leave". Mother Superior replied, "Oh, they all say that. Wait a year, and if you still feel that way, we can talk about it again." In

a way she was relieved because she really didn't want to leave but felt obliged to share with her Mother Superior everything going on internally. She said to her mother superior, "When I come back in a year, say the same thing, come back in a year." So, after a year they got to talking and her superior said to her, "Well, it's been a year now. What do you think? Do you still think God wants you to leave?" Bernadette replied, "I do." Her superior replied, "Then I want you to go too." To which young Bernadette replied, "Hey! Wait a minute!"

They agreed that if ever Bernadette wanted to return, there would always be a place for her in Carmel. This proved to be true because many years later in 1979 Bernadette returned to the same monastery and, while her Mother Superior had died and been replaced, they had known of that promise and immediately said, "Come on in."

Somewhat reluctantly, and not knowing anything about how the world had changed over the last eight-and-a-half years, she went straight to university and enrolled in pre-med (probably so she could try her hand at being a doctor in a malaria infested jungle). That didn't work out so well, but eventually she got a bachelor's in philosophy from USC and later a teaching credential. Now, for the first time in her life, she was out in "the world", paying her own bills, and trying (somewhat successfully) to keep down a job.

Ens p.12 *"Following this first movement is an interval (twenty years in my case) during which this union is tested by a variety of exterior (not interior) trials whereby this oneness is revealed in all its enduring depths of stability and toughness against all forces that would move, fragment, or disturb its center."*

Exteriorly, these twenty years were not easy for Bernadette. She was fired, egged by her students, robbed, lived out of her car for months, and was in an abusive marriage. Yet, interiorly, this was the good life. She really enjoyed living it out day to day with God and her children. She got so used to things going wrong that

she began to look for challenges because without them, life was boring.

Pns p. 211 "From here on, the glory of the unitive life can only be known in its fearless exercise, which means the full acceptance of our humanity and selfhood. Here we must literally lay ourselves and our unitive life on the line as if daring the forces of hell to separate us from God. This alone is the way forward to the final emptying, to the loss of everything that can be called a self."

As St. Paul said, nothing can separate us from the love of God. She had this indefatigable confidence to dare the forces of hell to separate her from God. Once you see that nothing can come between you, your love of God, and God's love of you, you realize you have nothing to fear. Up until this point we have so many fears of failure and rejection, etc. Union with God makes one walk tall.

Pns p. 132 "I saw I was indeed dying to all sense of personal existence, but at the same time the inner flame rose up - it reminded me of the angel's flaming sword guarding the door to paradise - and seemed to forbid any fear to enter. Within this great flame was a small, flickering, helpless flame - my self - and I could see it was about to be extinguished - hence the fear. But the greater flame which prohibited any fear to enter indicated one thing to me: let the self die, let it go, do nothing about it, let everything be as it is. I knew then the dying self was all in God's mysterious plan; it was His will, and because it was His will all things would be well."

If we can trust that No-Self is God's will for each of us, then we can trust that all will be well because God only wills the highest good for each person. She is still using the pronoun "I" here because, even though there is no ego left, there is still as sense of personal existence, although it is rapidly fading. Even after the No-Self event she would occasionally use the pronoun but only as a way of speaking. The alternative is rather clumsy,

like when she ended a letter with “from the typewriter of Bernadette Roberts”.

Pns p. 137 “The essence of the unitive life, then, is the gradual imperceptible death of the self, a death made possible because the self is secured, anchored in God so that it has no fear of living fully, accepting all the suffering, heartaches, and trials that come its way. The mechanism of the self’s dying is built into its life with God – we give all, He takes all, and when all is gone, He alone remains. Without this unitive life we cannot possibly give up the self; there would not be sufficient security, love, trust, or even a sufficient reason to do so.”

Only being existentially and ontologically anchored in God provides the release from fear which so characterizes our lives. Only then do we feel secure enough that we feel we can afford to give all. After all, only that which no one can take away do we really possess, and, possessing God within, we possess all. No one can add anything nearly as great, and no one can take it away. Remember, one can only speak of possessing God as long as there is a possessor. After No-Self, she would not feel like she possessed anything.

Pns p. 139 “The deeper self is too well taken care of to be a consideration; there is no need to make a choice between me or you.”

She suddenly realized one day that she was just running around serving her kids and husband that she was losing a sense of herself and thought, “Oh! I’d better try and get it back.” Suddenly, she heard a still small voice within her say something like, “Let it go” and she knew she could, and that all would be well.

Ws p. 178 “These are years of such egoless living and giving that we seem to lose the habit of considering ourselves at all; we are no longer mindful of having any experience of life to call our own. Thus, when we suddenly try to have a concern for our self it will not work.”

This is somewhat the Jungian view that spiritual maturation coincides with psychological maturation. Jung would say that if you have not yet realized your “true self” there is something incomplete about you. Where Bernadette differed from Jung is that she understood the importance of Grace. In other words, she believed in God and was willing to incorporate another dimension into her schema because she was not trying to be an objective scientist, while Jung was not so willing.

While she didn't regard living any certain number of years would guarantee spiritual enlightenment, she did see the spiritual path of the contemplative as kind of a “speeding up” of psychological maturation. Today, transpersonal psychologists like Ken Wilbur are trying to incorporate Spirit into their paradigms. I think Bernadette would say that until they can account for the free action of Grace, their paradigm will remain incomplete.

One must have an open mind to be sensitive and open to Grace. We want to hold on when we really need to let go. We don't need to blindly accept every new idea to have an open mind. We continue to think critically as make ourselves receptive and open to new ideas, circumstances, and people. A Taoist would point out that a living branch sways in the wind while a dead limb breaks.

Pns p. 156 *“Striving for the open mind is vital to the unitive life because it means stepping outside the self and our unconscious habitual ways of thinking and judging. In some respects, it means putting aside the content of personal consciousness, which seems to be a necessary preparation for eventually going beyond the personal or ‘I’ consciousness.”*

To be closed minded is to be brainwashed. People wonder if Bernadette became some kind of spiritual zombie after going beyond consciousness. Being closed minded is being a zombie. She became the opposite. To be closed minded is to be afraid of new ideas. To be open minded is the opposite of being a zombie. It doesn't mean you are politically liberal. It means you approach each situation as if anew and with an unbridled confidence in the

power of human reason to reach the most just and kind conclusion given enough time. When we think habitually (which is almost all our thinking) we are trapped within our unconscious thought patterns. When we put aside the content of personal consciousness we risk not think habitually, but creatively. Striving for the open mind isn't simply realizing your perspective is not only not the only one, and may not necessarily be the best, it is a necessary preparation for a happy death.

Who judges? You. Which consciousness has hopes and expectations of how others should think and behave? Yours. So, in order for transformation to be complete, the open mind, which we could perhaps call the universal mind, must be embraced and assumed.

Pns p. 160 *"I discovered the true key to the open mind was nothing more than the cessation of judgment itself."*

The judgement she is talking about here is not the faculty by which we reason and discern the good from the bad. It is judging others poorly which is a subtle attempt to inflate the ego. She gave people, even those she disagreed with, the benefit of the doubt. For example, when judging the wisdom of guru's saying they could teach the spiritual life, she said, "That's not how they did it". Meaning, that's not how they realized the unitive state. She is assuming that they are simply mistaken about being able to transmit spirituality, and not lying about their experience of union.

Pns p. 161 *"Until we can step outside ourselves, there can never be communication with others or any level of understanding between us, and without this, no relationship is possible, we are no more than physically present to one another."*

We get in our own way when trying to be in relationship with anyone. This is why going beyond ego is so important. Because it makes understanding and relationship possible. It is our only hope. And I think this is one of the reasons Bernadette was so important. She was saying the unitive state is not the end only

for a privileged few. It is our birthright and how each of us was meant to live as a preparation for the final extinguishing of all self. And along the way, to the extent we realize our common Source, it will at least be possible for us to understand each other, because it seems that right now it isn't.

Well, this is the end of the first half of her life, and the first half of this book. I hope you are starting to see how unique she was. Hopefully you are gaining an appreciation for the major movements and milestones of the spiritual journey. Classically they are defined as purgation, illumination, and union. (Although, in Bernadette's case, the order seems to have been illumination, purgation, then union.) The next chapter deals with the end of union and the chapters following that present a perspective hitherto unarticulated in Christian contemplative literature. In other words, from here on out it gets a little trippy.