

A Study Guide for The Real Christ

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In a world where fewer and fewer topics are taboo for discussion, religion, unfortunately, remains one. One gets the feeling that most religious people are not open minded. We see very little sincere public dialogue about religion. We see cliché, caricatures, laissez faire, rampant ignorance, and banal replies to vague questions on Facebook. If we are waiting for someone to inform us of the truth from the top down, or from the other side of the planet, we may be waiting a long time. Instead of spiritual mud-slinging, we could help each other by sharing our experiences and possibly comparing them (although this is much more difficult). I see many people questioning other people's beliefs, but very few questioning their own. We don't have to worry about losing our faith as we question our beliefs. Beliefs give us something to question, but the Truth will always remain. According to Bernadette Roberts, Faith is God's presence in everyone and can only grow as we seek the Truth. The reason why it can only grow is because Faith is the Truth in us and the Truth is what remains when false beliefs have been abandoned. So don't be afraid to question your beliefs!

As a schoolteacher for many years, I have come to celebrate questions. I don't think there can be a bad question because, in the process of showing what is "wrong" with a question, one clarifies one's thoughts. Most of the following **500 questions** are a little technical.

Some are not. Some are questions for spiritual discussion. The idea behind this study guide is that small groups of people can use it to learn (and therefore grow) spiritually.

Three types of groups will probably emerge: The first group of people I will call, “**regular**” (for lack of a better word). These people have no philosophical or theological background. They may or may not be Christian. The questions that this group chooses to focus on are questions of comprehension of the text. It is a difficult text (but worth the effort!) so these questions are given to make sure you are understanding what Bernadette wrote. These people are open to an entirely new presentation of Christianity but would probably miss out by setting her book aside after fifty pages or so because they view it as too detailed and too much about dogma (which she was against). Almost all of these questions have correct answers that can be found in the book. Oprah’s book club would use this set of questions. Have fun!

The next type of group is those who might enjoy tackling the technical aspects of Bernadette’s book. These questions are for the philosophers and **theologians** among us (both professional and armchair). These people almost have to be Christian to have the requisite background to tackle these questions. Present¹ and future seminarians would also be in this group. These people seek the Truth above all else. They love discussing doctrine, and the history of ideas. Some of these questions require a little background knowledge or research.

Finally, I hope this study guide can be helpful to a third group of people. These are people actively seeking a deeper **spiritual** life. They may or may not believe in God as a person. They are able to be open and honest with themselves and each other about the spiritual

¹ I understand seminarians in India at least have the courage to do something other than spoon feed themselves the spiritual equivalent of tapioca pudding. They ordered multiple copies of The Real Christ **because** they had read the warning! Good for them! Will other seminarians have the same courage?

life. They are open to exploring new lines of thought. They come to the group with no agenda other than mutual support and growth in the spiritual life. They realize that time spent discussing the spiritual life is time very well spent. Some of these questions do not have correct answers.

Anyone with an interest in Christianity will find the questions interesting and challenging. Anyone who is afraid of new ideas, or afraid of exploring their beliefs, should read no further. I believe The Real Christ should be required reading for all seminarians, pastors, and teachers of Christianity throughout the world, even if only to show why the ideas are false, because the author was the greatest saint of all time and said, "We're going to have a whole different view of Christianity if we get it right!"

I **challenge** every English speaker who **thinks** they know something about Christ (and with a paypal account) to answer even **half** of these questions correctly, that is, how the author would answer the question. If the answer is yes or no, some explanation should be given. I will send you one hundred dollars if you can do it before the end of 2020. Submit your answers to www.bernadetterobertsisnotmyguru.com. I will publish the correct answers and send out money in January of 2021. You will need to read the book at least twice. I recommend you throw out all your beliefs first, and then get ready to think **way** outside the box!

Chapter 1: Subject Index for study of The Real Christ

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Chapter 3: Introduction to, and Study Questions for, The Real Christ:

Warning, Reason for Writing, and Thesis:

Bernadette was a contemplative first, and theologian second. This is why she writes at the end of the warning that people don't know where she is coming from. She is writing **from experience** and appeals to it **30 times** throughout The Real Christ. Especially in the second half of the book you will see that her experience was rare. She came to an experiential understanding of Christ while not paying much attention to Jesus. She even says that focusing on the historical Jesus can be detrimental to one's spiritual life.

As you read Reason for Writing, ask yourself these questions:

Regular:

Why does she use the word "spiritual" nine times in these few pages?

Could the case be made that, rightly or wrongly, Bernadette seems motivated to **save** Christianity?

What was a “Protestantizing” move the Catholic church made post Vatican II?

What is anthropolatry?

In what way was one of her reasons for writing to combat patriarchy?

Why do you think she is so careful to make the distinction between Jesus and Christ?

May we infer from the fact that the Shepherd never returned to his flock that Christ is going East with those who leave the Christianity in search of something deeper than anthropolatry?

Does it seem that her motivation is that Jesus be worshiped less or that the Trinity be worshiped more?

As you read the thesis, ask yourself these questions:

Regular:

What Christological conclusion do we arrive at when we remove “but sin” from Paul’s understanding of the difference between Jesus and the rest of us? Aren’t we, too, born without sin?

Can we say that the particular person was the “way” God chose to reveal Man’s destiny?

Theologian:

What mystery do man and the Eucharistic Christ have in common?

Does free will make it impossible for God to be united to any particular person?

Is having the “mind of Christ” a logical consequence of the fact that the Oneness of man and God beyond all self is a hypostatic Oneness that is In God, and therefore known only to God?

Did the human nature God created have to be for itself because God, by definition, creates for no other?

Why can't there be a particular human nature?

Can a person know the hypostatic union or only theosis? Why or why not?

Spiritual:

Can God only be united to what It has created because that is the way It is united - as its source?

Is it merely Bernadette's preference for Plato over Aristotle that motivates her to stress the importance of the Universal Christ over the particular man Jesus? Why or why not?

Can we prove worthy of the revelation of Christ?

Bernadette juxtaposes two different dimensions of existence with the preposition “in”. To what exactly does this preposition refer in the phrase “in God”?

Chapter 1: Early Fathers

(Note - If you don't believe Jesus was God, you may want to skip straight to Chapter 17.)

In this chapter Bernadette considers the early fathers and what constraints they were under as they grappled with a correct understanding of Christ and how to present it. She summarizes the development of the Alexandrian and Antiochian Christologies. She defines what she means by the term "party line". She introduces what she calls the "theological gem of all times"- Hilary's three states in the life of Christ. She introduces the conflict between Nestorius and Cyril. Finally, she points out the importance of the Eucharist for all the fathers.

Regular:

How and why is there a fine line between Christianity and Polytheism?

How is the Incarnation a revelation that God creates every soul individually?

Didn't Bernadette probably intend to write "with impunity" at the end of the section 1. Church Representatives and not "without impunity"?

Is the reason why the Christology of the early fathers tended towards Monophysitism because only the Jews could give to Jesus full humanity and almost all the Early Fathers were Gentiles?

Why, according to Bernadette, is there a fine line between Christianity and polytheism?

Theologian:

Is it appreciably different to say God united Himself to the human species than to say Christ “united the human race through Himself to God”?

Does the desire to attribute no human self to Jesus come from confusing no ego with no self?

What could be some ways that Christ may have affected or changed human nature with the Incarnation?

Did the fathers regard the nature of Christ to be visible?

Is Bernadette committing the logical fallacy known as “*post hoc, ergo, propter hoc*” (after the fact, therefore, because of the fact) when she says that the “end” of the early Christological disputes was the “Dark Ages”?

How much evidence is there to support the idea that the rock bottom basis of their Christologies was the understanding that no human being could be Uncreated, and that the Uncreated could be no human being?

Can Bernadette rightly insist that if Jesus was not fully human he could not have revealed Christ without simultaneously being forced to insist that he must also, therefore, have been fully God?

In order for God to experience the mind-will-consciousness of Jesus, must not God be an experiencer?

Where do we find the most consistency in the presentation of the mystery of Christ - in Scripture, the Eucharistic Tradition, or doctrine?

What evidence is there, if any, to support Bernadette's claim that translators have mistranslated (and-or not translated) many of the Fathers works that they don't agree with?

Spiritual:

How central to the spiritual life is the process of continually eliminating wrong views?

To what extent is our religious miseducation based on a failure to explain the difference between truth and (metaphor or analogy)?

Why might a static, pinned-down view of Christ abort spiritual progress?

Why could the fathers not connect Jesus' soul with their own?

How likely is it that the Fathers attributed to Jesus practically no human soul because of their lack of experience with, and understanding of, the unitive state of consciousness?

Can we say that Jesus was the example of how every person becomes Christ once transformation is complete?

Chapter 2: Philosophical Background

In this chapter Bernadette juxtaposes Judaic monotheism with Greek philosophy and opines that the Incarnation happened when and where it did because each had an important contribution to a correct understanding of Christ. She points out the importance of the Jewish mystic and philosopher Philo of Alexandria (a contemporary of Jesus)

and says elsewhere that he “practically got Christianity off the ground”². She addresses the issues around personifying or not personifying God.

Regular:

What are some of the differences between belief in a personified god and faith in an imageless God?

What would be Bernadette’s response to the atheist who says, “I just believe in one fewer God than you”?

Theologian:

Why did the revelation of the Incarnation happen in time and space at the crossroads of Judaic monotheism and Greek philosophy?

Why might the restoration of the “flesh” have been vindicating for the Stoic?

In light of the fathers’ attempt to clarify what Christ is not, did they have any alternative to pinning Christ down dogmatically?

Spiritual:

Could we say that Christ is the ever-thinning line that both unites and separates reason and revelation?

Could the “new” that the Incarnation ushered in be the growing understanding of the inseparability of matter and spirit, finite and infinite existence?

Chapter 3: Logos

2 DVD's Essence of Christian Mysticism, disk 2.

In this chapter she deals with the Stoic philosophers Hereclitus and Zeno and their concept of the *Logos*. She also examines how Philo of Alexandria understood the term. She laments its poor translation as “word” and the fact that few if any Christians today have even heard of the term.

For more on Hereclitus in the Axial period, see Armstrong’s book, [The Great Transformation](#). Bernadette was such an admirer of the Stoics that she called herself one.

Regular:

Are there any translations of John’s Gospel into English that retain the original Greek term *Logos*? Where can one buy a copy?

Theologian:

Is part of what the Incarnation revealed the idea that matter is inseparable from spirit? (Otherwise, how could one half of the matter required for conception to occur come from “nowhere”?)

Do we know that the *Logos* is God’s “knowing” or the “mind” of God because obviously the Incarnation was prepared for by the *Logos* or God’s plan?³

Is the *Logos* one with matter in the same way that matter, and spirit are inseparable, or is it a different kind of oneness?

³ “In the fullness of time...”

⁴ Philo of Alexandria

⁵ Pronounced “jen”.

Can we say that the *Logos* is the bond of love “midway between the two extremes”⁴ (of the Transcendent and the indwelling Holy Spirit) serving as a pledge for both?

Compare and contrast Stoic spiritual practice with the Confucian practice of cultivating the virtue of *Ren*.⁵

Were the Stoics pantheists or panentheists?

Is evolution a manifestation of the *Logos* or mind of God?

Could the Incarnation have been the revelation that the *Logos* was already hypostatically one with matter and, therefore, one with humanity?

Is the “great divide” between created and uncreated compatible with Philo’s view of the *Logos* as “Toastmaster of the feast who differs not from the draught he pours”?

Spiritual:

Does God know Itself with the *Logos* because the *Logos* is the Mind of God?

Why might self-awareness preclude awareness of the *Logos*?

What might a Stoic being “attuned” to the presence of the *Logos* within look like?

Was the Stoic notion of “charity” a logical consequence of their notion of “apatheia” because the inner flame of love burns outward when not impeded by a fearful self?

How can the cause be in the effect when the effect is in the cause?

Chapter 4: Monotheism

In this chapter Bernadette goes to great length to stress the great and unbridgeable divide between the created and Uncreated which has been bequeathed to us by monotheism. Because God is uncreated, God has no beginning or end. This is a beautiful chapter about her understanding of God and the “saving” work of Jesus.

This chapter could have just as easily been called “Jesus the Jew” In it she gives much of her understanding of Jesus and Judaism. She explains why a correct understanding of Judaic monotheism is crucial for a correct understanding of Christ. She states that Israel does know the one true God. Then she begins to explain the difference the Incarnation made. She concludes the chapter by presenting Christ as the fulfillment of all our longings.

Regular:

Is the eternal oneness of God and Man unique because it is the line that simultaneously divides and unites?

Is “flesh and blood” not able to reveal because the brain is made of flesh and blood and the Truth is beyond the intellect?

Is it ironic that Bernadette defines “the Uncreated” (God) by what it cannot do, namely create Itself?

Was it wise of God to provide the chromosome necessary to create a male who could then HONESTLY affirm “I and the Father are One” as a way to reveal to all of humanity our oneness with God?

Is Bernadette, by emphasizing the “great divide”, advocating a view of Jesus that might be more acceptable to both Jews and Muslims?

Why is there no such thing as Christian Mysticism?

What is the sole difference between Jewish and Christian Monotheism?

Theologian:

May it be said that the line which simultaneously divides and unites is the same line which distinguishes the Divine as experienced by consciousness, and the Divine as not experienced by consciousness?

Why does monotheism, understood in the philosophical sense, hold that the Uncreated Cause can only be revealed?

If a fundamental belief of monotheism is that the Uncreated cannot become the created, then does the “party line” fit within monotheism or not?

What is the difference, if any, between saying, “the soul participates in God’s life” (for so long as God wills it) and saying, “the soul takes its life and existence from God”?

Can the Uncreated exist throughout the created while being Transcendent to it?

Spiritual:

Was the Incarnation the natural or logical consequence of the Covenant God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai?

If “revelation” is the recognition of a Truth one already knows, then how is it different from “realization”?

If God is not near or far, can we say that God is not in the present moment either?

Might there be a subconscious fear of defining God as infinite, independent Existence because we don't want to confront our own finitude and dependence?

Would it be spiritually healthy for us to remind ourselves frequently that our existence depends on God like a fetus depends on its mother?

Why might God have “wanted” His people to know that they would be eternally one with him?

Do I fear being “snapped up” by God, or do I see it as the fulfillment of my deepest longings?

What would an “atheism in the name of God” look like?

What does it mean to say God transcends all man's notions of space and time?

Should we think of Christ as the umbilical cord between dependent humanity and the “mother” of our eternal life?

Chapter 5: The Man Jesus

This chapter looks at the man Jesus from a more historical perspective and examines the ways in which he was, and was not, the messiah. She explains how Christianity is a phenomenon and not an institution. She states that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal that fallible human nature is fallible human nature even if it is one with God. Only a fully human Jesus could reveal that. She explains how Paul made the “diagnosis fit the cure”.

This is the chapter in which she introduces the concept of the primacy of **what** one is over **who** one is. This is also the chapter in which she first explains the ancient worldview regarding the passing on of the father’s fallen soul. She also introduces the concept of, “how it went for Jesus is how it goes for each of us.”

Regular:

Does undermining Jesus’ humanity in some way undermine our own as if to say we aren’t worthy to be united, as is, “warts and all” to God?

If it is the same process that creates as that saves, then is the only room for sin made in this process the room made for it by man?

What is the most outstanding lesson the Incarnation has to teach?

Should the words “failure to recognize” also occur after “is” and before “one of the important “truths” the Incarnation revealed”?

Why do people give up on knowing God and settle for an idol (or guru)?

Theologian:

Is the reason why to follow is to recapitulate because, as Jesus said, “saying Lord, Lord avails nothing”?

Is our deepening of understanding that each soul is created one- on- one by God, and that no souls are reincarnated, two of the ways the effects of the Incarnation on the world are still in process?

Is Jesus the perfect model for us of someone who chose to become God’s own precisely because he was free to be his own person as much as we?

Spiritual:

What is the difference, if any, in saying that Jesus was “God’s slave” and saying that Jesus was “God’s instrument”?

If the risk of the Incarnation was idolatry, then is the “Jesus Cult” evidence of man’s lack of trust and understanding?

Was the “blinding light” seen by Paul perhaps the revelation of man’s universal human nature?

Why do we continue to insist that the unitive state is extraordinary when the man Jesus revealed with his “hidden years” that no one knew him as anything other than the carpenter’s son?

Chapter 6: Preface to the Trinity

While the Trinity is allegedly the object of worship (not veneration) for Christians, it is also simultaneously dismissed as too mysterious for sustained reflection. Rather than the Trinity being some far off unknowable mystery, Bernadette comes close to saying God can be known in our everyday spiritual lives. This chapter, perhaps for the first

time ever, makes the Trinity almost intelligible (or at least a possible subject of discussion). She says there are three ways God has revealed itself to humanity. She distinguishes between knowing God in one's self and knowing God in Itself. The difference is consciousness.

Regular:

Why do the modes of the Trinity reveal each other and not themselves?

Theologian:

Why is it that there is no understanding of Christ possible without first understanding the Trinity?

Why can God not reveal *ad extra* "what" God is not, *ad intra*?

Is Bernadette correct when she says that the Trinity is not unique to Christianity? Why or why not?

Spiritual:

In what ways are the modes of the Trinity the cause of man's spiritual life?

Chapter 7: Trinity

In this chapter she explains the Trinity as the three modes of God's existence. She distinguishes this from Modalism. She continues to explore the distinction between God as known to us and God in Itself. In the end, she outlines the role each hypostasis of the Trinity plays in humanity's spiritual development.

Regular:

How or why can we say that the Cause is in the effect?

What is wrong with the notion of Father as source of the Godhead?

Theologian:

Is the soul ever in a process of transformation because it is united to the Spirit which is united to the Logos and Transcendent whose *modus operandi* it is to transform?

Does consciousness create the distinction between the Logos *ad intra* as God's wisdom and the Logos *ad extra* as cosmic intelligence? If so, how?

How does the Monarchical view of God lead to emanationism and abet a true understanding of the Trinity?

Are the only distinctions to be made between Jesus and the Eucharist (both incarnations of the Logos) time/timeless and particular/universal?

Is the Holy Spirit the dynamism between the Created and Uncreated or is the Logos the bridge between the Holy Spirit and the Uncreated? Or both?

In what way, if any, is the Spirit the union of the Transcendent and the Logos in man?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why there is no separation between body and soul because there is no separation between existence and essence?

Why is there no human being and no human relationship in mystical love?

Chapter 8: The Father-Son Problem

Here Bernadette explores how the Fathers wrestled with the question, "Who is the son? Jesus or God?" She says there was a big switch in the use of the term son from Jesus as son, to *Logos* as son. The line was drawn in the sand first by Arius. It is said that three-fourths of the early church agreed with Arius. In this chapter she makes the bold claim that none of the Fathers held that the man Jesus was God.

Regular:

What was the sole reason for the switch from Jesus as son to the Logos as son?

How important is pointing out the difference between metaphor, analogy, and the literal Truth of something?

Does the Nicene Creed teach that the man Jesus preexisted the incarnation?

In what way was Jesus not orthodox?

Theologian:

How do we know that the incarnation was not understood as God “begetting”, but rather as God “creating” human nature for Itself?

Spiritual:

When we rely on the senses and mistake the metaphor for the literal Truth, do we practice Idolatry?

Chapter 9: Nicaea and Chalcedon

In this chapter Bernadette examines the development of the creedal statements at Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451). She agrees with the Chalcedonian formulation because it clearly states that Jesus’ human nature was not united to the person of the *Logos* but only to the nature of the *Logos*. This left him free to be his own person. She explains why she thinks the switch from “hypostasis” to “person” was a disastrous wrong turn. She does not explain when, where, or by whom this switch was made. She explains that hypostasis was used to formulate a nondual understanding of the Trinity.

Regular:

If we are one with God “consubstantially” then what part of us is not one with God - nature or person?

Was Jesus’ human nature united to the person or the nature of the *Logos*?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the term “hypostatic” is problematic because in God there is no above, and no below?

Could the preposition “in”, when used in the context of “the hypostatic union is ‘in’ the person of the Logos” refer to its origin or cause (because there is not space in God)?

When, where, why, and how did the term hypostasis come to mean particular individuals?

Spiritual:

Do we know that the Logos never became an individual being but rather created man’s one human nature because we know that God cannot be circumscribed?

Chapter 10: The Person Problem

In this Chapter she explains where the term “person” came from and what it originally meant. She takes many pages to explain the importance of distinguishing between what one is and who one is. The problem with the term person is we have no other way of understanding the term, other than from the perspective of what it means to be a human person. We are basically making God in our image with the term.

Regular:

Is Christ the oneness of a personless God with personless Man?

Why could Paul not have said, “We are all one person in Christ”?

Why can we **not** say man was made in the image of God?

Theologian:

Is the reason why to persecute one is to persecute all because God is not a respecter of persons?

Was the problem not in saying that nature and person was a union, but rather saying that they were a union that could be separated?

Spiritual:

Do we own ourselves, or is it the job of self to convince us that we do?

What does the mental shift from a person owning a nature to a nature owning a person feel like?

Chapter 11: Person as Self

In this chapter she comes right out and says it. Nestorius was right. To say God was the person of Jesus means that Jesus was not a human person. Yet, Jesus was a union of natures, not of persons. She compares this view to Hinduism. One should bear in mind while reading this chapter that it was written from the perspective of someone who knows from experience that person, self, or consciousness is NOT of the essence of either God or man.

Regular:

Why is it that if Jesus was not fully human that human nature is not saved?

Did Cyril really “Hinduize” Christianity?

Is Bernadette understanding Jesus and the importance of distinguishing between nature and person from the perspective of, or in the light of living with, **no-self** in this world for decades?

Why is it that the more Christianity tries to deify Jesus, the more it diminishes him and all people?

Theologian:

Is Aquinas helping to prove Nestorius right when he says, “no nature works unless it subsists as a person”?

Would a good place to start for incorporating the study of consciousness into Christian theology be to point out that it is identical to what the scholastics called the faculties of the soul - namely memory, intellect, and will?

Did the Alexandrians not understand the ability of the human subject to act in unison with the divine subject because they had little or no experience with the unitive state?

Can God become a human soul by possessing it? Why or why not?

If **even Cyril understood** that in the Incarnation God only assumed or united Itself to man’s common essential human nature, when and how did Christianity lose this understanding?

What are the theological ramifications of the possibility that the “mind” or “consciousness” of God is identical to the hypostasis of the Logos?

How is what nature owns in this life incompatible with eternal life?

Spiritual:

When St. Elizabeth of the Trinity said “let pride starve to death”⁴ (by ignoring it) was she demonstrating the principle that when one takes away the object of consciousness, one thereby sees the subject of consciousness removed as well?

What percentage of Orthodox Hindus and Orthodox Christians really believe that God is a Self in any remotely human way?

Do Christians get Christ wrong to the extent that they give ontological priority to person over common human nature?

Chapter 12: Person vs. Individual

This is one of the more technically difficult chapters in the book because she is analyzing distinctions in scholastic theology. It is also one of the most important because she struggled for the last half of her life trying to get people to understand this distinction - a distinction she knew from experience after her “person” was gone. She has some choice words for Boethius. In this chapter she also explains why one only becomes a whole, fully human person once one enters the unitive state.

Regular:

Wouldn't it be impossible for God to create a human person because a human being has free will and free will is what creates the person?

If God is imageless, and I am created in the image of God, aren't I then imageless too?

⁴ From “The Greatness of Our Vocation” paragraph 4.

Is perhaps the reason why Bernadette understands the importance of making the distinction between person and individual so well because she lived for many years as an individual and NOT a person?

How does she explain that, not only was Jesus not God but that Jesus was not Christ? "...simple as that."

When Bernadette uses the term "theologically" is she referring to the "party line" and not to her experience?

Theologian:

Did Boethius equate "what" with "who" when he equated individual with person?

According to Duns Scotus, why does the actualization of being an individual **not** differentiate the nature or essence, but only person does?

Is the reason why the terms person and hypostasis are at odds because hypostasis refers to **what**, and person refers to **who**?

Is the reason why we know that "how it went for Jesus is how it will go for each of us" because it is the function of the particular to manifest the universal?

Why can one not add up persons?

Is the reason why Jesus as an individual could not have been eternally united to God because God united Himself to what is common to all and which is, therefore, particular to none, including Jesus?

Can a divine nature have a property of a human person? If so, how? If not, then was Jesus his own person?

What is the difference, if any, between being created **as** the image of God and being created **in** the image?

Why can “one divine person” **not** be understood as “one divine being”?

What is the difference between thinking of Jesus as God in person and in thinking of the human person Jesus as being the person of God’s own human nature?

Why are references to the man Jesus to a person and not to an individual?

What happens if we substitute the word “species” for “human nature”?

Why is there no Christ outside the Trinity?

Why are the Trinity and Christ gone forever unless we can get past the notion of God as a person?

Spiritual:

Why is it not possible to realize the oneness of my being, existence, and nature with God's Being, Existence, and Nature while still under the illusion that "I" am my person or being?

What are the two different realities that "individual" and "person" refer to?

Is the no-self event the hallmark of going from being a person to being an individual of God's personless human nature?

Why can ONLY God occupy the center of man?

Why is it that only by conforming the will to its divine center that it becomes one with God's will?

What does it feel like to contemplate the difference between essence and person? What can be learned from such contemplation?

Chapter 13: Cyril's Christology

In this chapter she sets up and examines the theological dispute between Cyril and Nestorius. Again, she makes the case that Nestorius was right. She demonstrates that these patriarchs were talking past one another by not heeding St. Hilary's admonition to always consider the distinctions in the 3 stages of Christ. One was basing his Christology by looking at human nature on earth while the other was understanding Christ by looking at human nature in its eternal state.

Regular:

Why is it possible to say “God and man are not ‘other’ to one another” in a monotheistic context?

How could Bernadette know that Christ’s humanity could belong to God without thereby becoming God?

What groups of people don’t believe the notion that God acted as Jesus’ soul?

Do you think Cyril intended to refer to a being when he said the union of the natures made “one incarnate nature of God the Logos”? Why or why not?

Is Bernadette correct when she says that, “if God acts and looks like a human person then God is a human being” or, could God act and look like a human person and not thereby become a human being?

In what way were Cyril and Nestorius “talking past one another”?

Theologian:

Is standing up for the real Christ simultaneously affirming the unbridgeable gap (in time and space) between disparate natures and the oneness of the disparate natures (outside time and space)?

Does Nestorius’ view that the natures must remain in their own properties agree with the statement from the council of Chalcedon that there is no confusion of natures and that the “distinct property of each nature” is “preserved” in one hypostasis?

Which Christology, the Alexandrian or Antiochian, presents a more exalted view of human nature?

To what extent has the Christology of the Third Council of Constantinople - the human nature being a union of wills or theosis - been sufficiently received by “the faithful”?

What is the difference, if any, between the Incarnate Logos and the man Jesus?

What does Bernadette mean when she says, “God was solely united to Its own created humanity and not to this or that particular human being?”

If the dual natures cease to exist when a divine person replaces a human person then is Christianity, as the “party-line” presents it, still Monotheistic? Why or why not?

What are a few problems with the idea that God acted as Jesus’ human soul?

Was Cyril’s main problem that he made God the person of Jesus instead of the nature of Jesus?

Is the Russian theologian Zizioulas attempting to answer Bernadette’s question, “How can God as three ‘individual persons’ not be three beings?” (how or why not?)

Does the Third Council of Constantinople actually teach that Jesus was his own person **and** that Christ is a divine person?

Spiritual:

Is fully understanding why God could never become man itself a spiritual experience? Why, or why not?

What do you feel is more important- your nature or person?

Is it possible for God to “look like a duck and quack like a duck” and not be a duck?

Chapter 14: Monophysitism

She says Christianity today is basically Monophysitic. The belief is that Christ is one divine person with one divine nature. This essentially denies that Christ is a oneness with common human nature “warts and all”. This robs us of hope because it leaves us out. The human mind has a need to focus on one thing at a time and can’t really handle “oneness.”

Regular:

Is it possible that people love God, and love the man Jesus, yet do not know Christ at all? If so, how?

Do you agree that the “party line” is monophysistic? Why or why not?

How does Monophysitism block one’s ability to grasp God’s oneness with man’s common human nature?

In what way, if any, is Bernadette refuting the idea that Christianity is tritheistic?

Theologian:

Why does the unity of man and God not constitute a single being?

Did God perfect human nature by uniting it to Itself?

If the man Jesus was not a human person but a divine person and God is “impassible” (can’t feel or suffer), then **who** experienced his life?

Does Bernadette mean by “human nature” that which exists on earth “warts and all” or does she mean that which essential and not a property of nature (like self)?

How is one supposed to think of Christ as one divine person if Christ is not one divine being?

Spiritual:

Would God create a soul for Jesus that was humanly dysfunctional?

Why is it, exactly, that if one gets the Trinity wrong, one will always get Christ wrong?

What is the importance of embracing our limited, fallible human nature, “warts and all”?

Do you think she is correct when she says that unless we eliminate the term “person” from our thinking and talking about Christ, it is impossible to ever have a true understanding of Christ?

Chapter 15: Communication of Properties

In this chapter Bernadette again hammers home the difference between person and nature. She explores the possibility that only a person, and not nature, suffers. She objects to the communication of

properties because this “way of speaking” has all too much influenced our way of thinking.

Regular:

How does the Communication of Properties rob Jesus of his humanity?

Did Jesus suffer in his person or nature? How do you know?

What was the belief of all the fathers that “blows the whistle” on the Communication of Properties?

Was the initial intent behind the C. of P. to find a way to talk about the divine inspiration of Jesus’ words and actions without actually making him God?

Theologian:

Is it possible to atone to oneself for a sin against oneself?

How might someone defend the C. of P. against the claim that it flies in the face of God’s impassibility?

What is the relationship between the C. of P. and the “switch” in the father-son problem?

Spiritual:

Does God even have attributes?

Why might the Logos have no need to experience Jesus’ sufferings to know them?

Chapter 16: The Problem of Christ

It's basically a problem with how the brain functions. That's why the Trinity is a "mystery" because the Truth is not graspable by the discursive intellect. The culprit is the senses. They are adept at feeding information to the brain about discrete individual entities. It's easy for the brain to focus on Jesus. However, in so doing, we focus neither on God nor on Christ. She just wants God to be worshiped. Jesus became the image in which he was created, so must we.

Regular:

Can we regard the man Jesus as universal man?

If the problem of how to make Christ one thing is inherent in the term and in the mind, wouldn't the truth be better served by using the term "oneness" instead?

Did Jesus' nature belong to the person or did the person belong to the nature?

Theologian:

Did God not unite Itself to any particular person and only to universal human nature precisely so that we could securely put ourselves into Jesus' shoes?

Why did the fathers feel compelled to make the oneness of two disparate natures that is Christ one ontological being?

What does it mean to say that the oneness of two dimensions of existence is numberless?

Is one good way to think of the “Third Man” that it is humanity which participates in God?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why Christ is almost a foregone conclusion because God and man are not separable?

Did Jesus become what he was only an image of by giving up his self?

If Christ is the more we are becoming and Christ is not a “who”, then do we become more as we become less?

Does what we are increase as who we are decreases?

Chapter 17: Summary So Far

The first half of the book traces the wrong turns in the development of doctrine that led to the belief that Jesus was God. Because of these wrong turns, she is basically saying that Christ is gone from Christianity. It is lost and unable to be grasped by most Christians today. If you don't believe Jesus was God, you could save yourself a lot of time by beginning to read here at this summary. I suggested to Bernadette that she publish this book as two separate books, the second one starting here. Obviously, she disagreed. This second half is a spiritual masterpiece and will probably go down in history as the most original work of mystical theology of all time. Enjoy!

She's done it twice already, and three more times in the second half of this book Bernadette refers to Aquinas' “straw”. This is a reference to

a story near the end of the life of the Dominican Friar Thomas Aquinas that is told popularly among Carmelites and all contemplatives.

Aquinas had been working for years on his massive masterpiece of scholastic theology called the *Summa Theologica*. One day, while nearing completion of his life's work, he had a mystical experience of God. In the light of this experience he regarded all that he had written as "straw" and never wrote another word. It goes to show that the life-giving revelation of God does not come through the intellect.

Regular:

What is the problem with equating **who** one is as person with **what** one is as essence?

Does Bernadette say in this chapter that if Christianity was a fig tree Jesus would curse it for its barrenness? Is that what she is doing with this book?

Theologian:

Was there a backlash against Origen's understanding of "son" after his death? If so, why?

When theologians affirm the Logos was "begotten" do they mean in time or in the sense that it is the Eternally Manifest of the Unmanifest and the Form of the Formless?

Spiritual:

If it is the unfortunate legacy of Christianity to bequeath to the world the primacy of who one is over what one is, is the eastern idea that who

one is identical to what one is an acceptable alternative? Why or why not?

How might a Christian/Muslim dialogue benefit from discussing the idea that the Trinity understood as three individual numerical ones implies three embodied beings, or entities?

Is it true that to have the experience of God as the source of one's being and center of one's soul and **not** identify that as one's true self or any aspect of one's self, one must have a very clear understanding of the mysterious line which separates self from God?

How exactly do Jesus' human experiences "work" spiritually in everyday life? Do they work by verifying?

Chapter 18: Preface and Incarnation

Although the word "Incarnation" is inadequate because man is more than just "carne" or "flesh", one way to begin thinking about it is as a "scooping up" of humanity. It looks like universal human nature becoming an individual human nature then becoming universal human nature again. The universal had to become the particular to reveal the Truth of humanity to humanity. The particular human nature had to die to reveal universal human nature one with God. At the end of the chapter she points to Blessed Duns Scotus as someone who was basically saying the same thing as she, "How it went for him, is how it will go for every one of us."

Regular:

Is the reason all the accidents and properties of an individual person (personality, hair color, etc.) are not eternal because God did not unite

Itself to them, or, did God not unite itself to them because they are not eternal?

Is the reason why only man's universal human nature is eternal because God creates no particular human nature and could not unite Itself to a particular human nature (thereby making it eternal) because no such thing exists?

If being a person gives rise to a sense of ownership, wouldn't it stand to reason that to become **God's own** would entail a loss of self? Could anyone possibly understand the terribleness of the Kenosis better than someone who **experientially** understands the difference between a human and divine way of knowing?

Theologian:

Did God imbue our species with immortality at the moment of the incarnation (outside of time) or in time with the conception of Jesus?

Was the relationship between the universal human nature that God created and united to Itself and Jesus' human nature one of cause and effect? If so, is it because the cause is **in** the effect?

Is the reason why the Hypostatic Union must be revealed because it is no one's experience and ultimately beyond experience?

Do we know that, in the end, all are "saved" to the extent that we share or participate in Christ because Christ revealed that human nature has an essential passive potency for assumption and that no human nature can possess a feature that is sufficient to block this assumption?

Was it necessary for God to unite Itself to the essence of man (as opposed to what is accidental⁵) because accidents are (by definition) non-essential and therefore not suited to existence in Heaven “where” everything is (by definition) essential?

Must Christ be united to essence and not accidents because Christ is eternal and accidents (like self) are not?

Can we rightly say that Jesus is to earthy as Christ is to Heavenly?

Could the Holy Spirit have created a soul **not** one with itself from the moment of its conception?

Spiritual:

Is God’s own union with the essence of man’s universal human nature not to be found in nature (or creation) because it is in God?

Does Jesus demonstrate what everyone is capable of precisely **because** he was fully human and not divine?

Does our desire to have God be there **for us** after death work contrary to our movement towards existing **for God** alone?

Why is it that to see and know the real Christ is to see neither oneself nor some other?

⁵ Scholastic term for superficial characteristics

After **who** we are has been removed, might **what** we are be all that remains to be revealed?

Why might the loss of everything man **knows** about “God” be to “gain eternal life”?

In what ways is man’s eternal life **nothing** like his present life?

Is the reason why we know that the way it went for Jesus is the way it will be for us because, in the unitive state, we come to know Jesus’ experiences by way of our own?

Chapter 19: Kenosis

As always, Bernadette is writing from personal experience. She writes about her own experience of Kenosis on pages 188 and 189 of *What is Self?* and page 53 of *Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey*. Kenosis refers to the going from the heavenly dimension of existence to the earthly dimension. It is going from universal human nature to particular human nature. It entails the taking on of human consciousness. Since we get the word from St. Paul, Bernadette starts there. Then she invites us to consider who or what underwent the Kenosis. Then she points out a connection with Theosis. At the end of the chapter she invites us again to distinguish between what is essential in us (and therefore eternal) and what is not.

Just as yin points to yang, Kenosis is also the word Christians use to describe the opposite phenomenon. It is both God’s taking on consciousness and our divestment of consciousness or self. God divested Itself to show us that we need to divest ourselves.

Regular:

Why was it necessary for man's universal nature to become an individual person in this world?

Is another word for the reason why anything exists the Logos?

Why was the kenosis not the experience of Jesus?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the Incarnation necessitated a kenosis from being a "what" to being a "who" (ending in human consciousness) because consciousness is non-eternal and ultimately accidental to nature?

Is the reason why it was an "inhuman" ordeal for human nature to differentiate and become a human person precisely because it is the human ordeal to go from differentiated to undifferentiated, or from person to nature?

Is it because man is a microcosm of the macrocosm that we have this mysterious line within us of our oneness with God which we call the earthy Christ (in time and space) just as there is the Heavenly Christ beyond time and space?

Why is it to think heaven and earth have anything in common to not know human nature?

Spiritual:

Isn't the unitive state both a state of being and a state of consciousness, and not just a state of being?

When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who believe and do not see" was he basically saying, "Blessed are those who have faith" because Christ is beyond what can be known by the senses?

Why would God want to reveal to us our destiny so much that it would undergo the Kenosis?

What is revealed as our essence after all "accidental properties" (including genes) have been removed?