

God's Spiritual Experiment:

Bernadette Roberts

This book may be perfect for you right now. However, it also may not be right for you. It is not for everybody. I don't want you to waste your time or your money, so here is a checklist for you to review before you decide if you want to buy this book or not:

1. If you believe that no one can tie God's hands and that God can act anywhere and in whatever way It chooses, this book is for you!
2. If you are not really sure what you believe and have an open mind, this book is for you!
3. If you enjoy spirituality and theology, this book is definitely for you!
4. If you believe Jesus was an amazing example for us all, but was begotten in time and not beyond time, this book is for you!
5. If you believe the Kingdom of God is within and closer to us than we are to ourselves, this book is for you!
6. If you believe God is loving and not an ogre, this book is for you!
7. If you believe God is beyond male and female, this book is for you!
8. If you believe that the Christianity could use some help being what it was supposed to be, this book is for you!
9. If you are able to contemplate, even for just a few moments, your own nonexistence without freaking out, this book is for you!
10. If you love truth and wisdom, this book is definitely for you!

On the other hand:

1. If you believe that if something isn't in the Bible then God never said it or did it, this book is not for you.

2. If you know exactly what you believe and don't want your beliefs questioned, this book is not for you.
3. If you don't like spirituality or theology, this book is not for you.
4. If you believe that Jesus preexisted the Incarnation and are unwilling to consider any other interpretation, this book is not for you.
5. If you believe Heaven is on some large planet someplace, this book is not for you.
6. If you believe in Original Sin and that God was so mad at humanity that He had to send some man to be killed as a sacrificial lamb, this book is not for you.
7. If you believe God is a male, this book is not for you.
8. If you believe that Christianity is perfect and that outside it there is no salvation, this book is not for you.
9. If you are deathly afraid of even considering your own nonexistence, this book is not for you.
10. If you don't care about truth or wisdom, this book is not for you.

Table of Contents:

Introduction

Chapter 1 - Biographical Sketch

Chapter 2 - Cutting to the Chase

Chapter 3 - A New Christology

Chapter 4 - What the Early Church Fathers said about "Salvation"

Chapter 5 - If Christ is not a "who", what is Christ?

Chapter 6 - Mary the feminine Icon of Christ

Chapter 7 - Eucharist - God with us

Chapter 8 - God's Big Experiment

Chapter 9 - John 3:30 in the Spiritual Life

Chapter 10 - "Have a good time!"

Chapter 11 - At the end of the day

Appendix 1- Ten mind blowing new ideas

Appendix 2- Support from the Gospels

Appendix 3- An open letter to former students

Appendix 4- Short quiz on Chapter 3

Introduction

A. Reason for writing

You almost certainly have never heard of Bernadette Roberts. This is due to the fact that she stubbornly refused to have any kind of online presence. She was just old fashioned that way and, frankly, couldn't be bothered. But you should have heard of her by now because she was the most original and challenging spiritual thinker of **all** time. She wanted to remain unknown and succeeded. Her experiences and insights will shape the future of Christianity throughout the world. I believe that what God revealed to her has universal significance for all of mankind. Therefore, I have sold my beautiful house in northern California, quit the best job ever, and am currently halfway through a journey of 6,000 kilometers to the place where the people are, as far as I can tell, the most pious in the world. From Antigua, Guatemala, I hope to devote my life to making Bernadette Roberts a household name.

This whole thing started a couple of years ago when I received a phone call from a longtime acquaintance while I was teaching subtracting across zeros to my second-grade class.¹ I called him back at recess and he explained that, regretfully, the discussion group scheduled to meet the following month had to be canceled due to lack of participants. Not only was I disappointed (I had already bought my plane ticket), I was shocked and thought that something was radically wrong here. Over the past few decades this woman had written a half a dozen great books, presented at conferences, been interviewed on the radio, and made DVDs of her work. Furthermore, she limits the number of participants at her retreats and discussions to twelve or thirteen. So, to think that she couldn't even get a dozen people together was mind boggling!

So far, everyone who has written about Bernadette Roberts has gotten her wrong. So, when I told her of my intentions for this book she asked me not to write it and said that I couldn't add a thing to what she had written.

¹ I should have had my phone off.

She was correct about that. The truths of her experience and understanding of Christ are all right there in her wonderful books. However, because I am, in the words of my English stepfather a “cheeky bastard”, when Bernadette asked me to not write about her I replied, “Try to stop me”. I understand that everyone who writes about her gets her wrong. I tried to explain to her that perhaps she underestimated my ability to get her right.

With loads of love and respect for Dr. Peter Traben Hass who wrote some beautiful words for the back cover of her book, [The Real Christ](#), it seems even **he** doesn't really understand what she is saying. He writes, “While there is hardly anything new or unorthodox in what Bernadette has written, it will be evident to anyone...” Now wait a second! With the exception of the occasional novel, I have chosen to read voraciously nothing but philosophy and theology for the last thirty years and I found **lots** of new and unorthodox ideas in her book! In fact, I started notating in the margins where they occurred and there were over seventy! And that was just in **one** of her books! I'm not advocating everyone agree with everything she has written. But if you want to be exposed to some truly new and unorthodox ideas from the pen of a modern-day saint, read lots of Bernadette Roberts.

In my effort to understand her well enough that I can actually explain her writings for an audience of readers that does **not** hold advanced degrees in both philosophy and theology, I have essentially “brainwashed” myself with her thoughts. I have read each of her books ten times, watched or listened to her four disk series called *The Essence of Christian Mysticism* (9 ½ hours) ten times, watched or listened to her DVD called *A Passage Through Self* (insert link here) ten times, and listened to a recording of one of the last of her weekend discussion groups on her book *The Real Christ* (14 hours) ten times.

I recommend everyone interested in a deeper spiritual life

“brainwash” themselves in the writings of Bernadette. If you find yourself afraid to read things that you don't agree with, it can only be because you have been **un**intentionally brainwashed. In other words, don't be too lazy to think for yourself. Each of us is in charge of our own intellectual integrity. You decide for yourself if you can assent to these new ideas or not.

I'm pretty sick of wrestling with her ideas after years of intensive study, and am looking forward to reading some fluff² literature for a while after this book is done. However, next to teaching and surrounding myself with beautiful children, steeping myself in the mind of Bernadette has been the best thing I have done with my life.

Writing this book is also against the advice of her longtime

friends.³ They say I should just write about my own spiritual life. I may do that later, but this book is far more important. Also, they say I shouldn't present myself as her friend. Bernadette was not my guru, and I was not her friend. She didn't want people writing about her while she was alive because she was afraid people would put her on a pedestal and treat her like a guru. She calls such people "spiritually retarded." Over the last twenty-five years I have flown down to Fullerton to participate in her weekend offerings five or six times. For better or for worse, I don't know much about anything **except** Bernadette's writings.

This book is not a biography for two reasons. One, I didn't know her well enough. Two, she has written her own wonderful autobiography and I recommend that people start there **first**.

² Well, maybe not fluff, but **something** different!

³ Two of her three friends authorized to lead discussions have websites of their own. The third friend manages her official site. http://www.christologyforum.com/?_branch_match_id=504720630839497226 and <http://contemplativedaybook.blogspot.com/> People around the Bay Area should find offerings soon.

While leaving one of her weekend retreats she once told me that, "We expect great things from you!" (maybe because I had been a Discalced Carmelite for five and a half years?) This book is my attempt at

not letting her down. It is my attempt to prove her wrong² (that I can get her right). It is also my attempt to start a vigorous and respectful public dialogue about the ideas in Bernadette's books, because their implications are enormous.

For those who suspect my real motivation for writing this book is not to make her writings more known but to "cash in" on my (loose) association with her, I would point out the following: I don't buy alcohol, cigarettes, or fancy food. I live out of my van³ and make my own instant coffee. I have been giving away all my possessions⁴ every day for months and have no desire to acquire more. If this e-book sells more than a couple of copies to my parents, I will probably buy microphone stands for the local restaurants that host live music. After that, I will do what I can to get healthy food into the mouths of the local kids because they eat **way** too much junk food down there. So, on behalf of the musicians and children, thank you for buying this book!

² She was not my guru.

³ Practically "down by the river"

⁴ Including my sexy new cell phone...radical, right?

B. A little about me

Before we begin, allow me to introduce myself and explain my credentials so you know that I am not just another goof ball with an ax to grind.⁵ I met Bernadette while studying philosophy at the University of San Francisco. I was planning on becoming a Zen Buddhist monk after graduating 16 years of Catholic School.⁶ I flew down to Fullerton to attend one of her retreats and, during the course of that retreat she said something that surprised me because somehow I **knew** it was true. She said (rather matter-of-factly), “We are just here to love and serve God...” Now I didn’t even **believe** in God! But somehow I knew what she had said was true. The next day I went to the Zen Buddhist monastery north of San Francisco and had my conversion experience which I relate later in this book.

After graduating U.S.F. I worked with Mother Teresa's sisters in an AIDS hospice in the city for a year. Then I joined the Discalced Carmelites⁷ and accumulated 116 units in theology and scripture on my way to the priesthood. Eventually it became clear that I did not have a lifelong vocation to celibacy and I left the seminary. Usually preferring the company of children to adults, I have taught little kids for the last fifteen years. Now, after selling my house and quitting the best job in town, I am driving to the basilica of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe in Mexico City to make a visit with my heavenly mother before continuing on to Guatemala where I hope to eke out a life as a professional musician. I hope to become an Orthodox priest someday if any bishop will ordain me after reading this book.⁸

If there is anything in this book that is true, it comes from the thought of Bernadette. If there is anything that is false, I take full responsibility for those thoughts and apologize. I will try to present her ideas as faithfully as possible.

It’s a little scary for me to publish this book. Unlike Bernadette, I would prefer to think of myself more as a lover, than a fighter.⁹ And people can get pretty hot around the collar when you start attacking their cherished religious beliefs. Being a pleaser by nature, I don’t hope to make a bunch of new enemies. But I believe so strongly in the necessity of a vigorous, public, respectful, and rational discussion on Christianity that I’m willing to take that risk.

⁵ Actually, I am.

⁶ “cheeky”?

⁷ A truly great saint-producing Order

⁸ While I would literally give my left arm to make this a reality, sadly, it is highly unlikely that any bishop would ordain me because my views don’t align with the “party-line” presentation of Christianity.

⁹ In reality, she loved ten times better than I ever will. She fought better too.

C. Reception by various traditions

Bernadette's writings have not been received as well as they should have been by now. This is due to a variety of reasons. First, (as mentioned) she didn't advertise or have any online presence, so she remains the best kept secret in the contemplative world. Second, her ideas not only challenge the current theological status quo, but practically attack it. She made no attempt to water down her message or be popular. Third, in order to understand what she is saying, you need to be gifted with a fairly healthy dose of two particular intelligences (as articulated by the Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner) - existential intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. None of us can be smart in every way. I would even venture that those who find it easy to live in the other world (or dimension) might sometimes find it difficult to live in this one. However, if you read her autobiography, you will quickly see that she was born a spiritual genius with an amazing desire and ability to discern with acumen the vagaries of her rich interior life.

Finally, there is her writing style. She was so upset about the direction Christianity has taken that her latest book comes across as confrontational. After giving manuscripts of The Real Christ to various friends interested in the spiritual life, they all gave them back to me after reading 20-30 pages with comments such as, "what is she so upset about?" and "why is she so angry?" and "I didn't like the dogmatism." My friend, who helped me edit some of her audio recordings even asked me, "Is she an alcoholic?" I replied, "Hardly touches the stuff, but was a smoker for decades!"

My point is this - if you purchase and read a few of her books

and don't really get it, you are in **very** good company. Her ideas are so new that you have to steep yourself in her worldview for a long time to really grasp what she is saying. I recommend watching or listening to her DVDs many times.

The main reason why her take on Christianity is so radically different from others is that she never could accept the "party line." While she grew up steeped in Catholicism, (and the only straight "A's" she ever got in school were in religion), what she came to know about God was from direct experience, and not from any book, priest, or parent. In her books she is just passing on what God gave her to know (which very often is not in conformity with the teachings of any modern day church). She does, however, find many parallels with her understanding in the teachings of the early Church Fathers.

Just as the revelation of Christ at the time of Jesus was not meant for

Christians (there were none around), neither is it meant exclusively for Christians today. Christ is beyond all religion. This book is intended for people of all religious backgrounds and none. The ideas presented in this book are universal. However, if you would like to read Bernadette's writings in the light of your own background, then you should probably read the introductory remarks geared specifically to where **you** are coming from. Or, you can skip this section and go straight to page 30. I don't recommend reading the introductions for religions you are not familiar with. You might not have the requisite background to understand what I am saying to those who do.

Each of the ten religious traditions that follow will be challenged by what Bernadette had to say about Jesus and Christ. However, what she was saying also has tremendous possibility for uniting many traditions. The goal is not that there will ever be one universal religion of Bernadette. The idea is preposterous. But, rather, that every tradition with the courage to take her seriously be thoroughly enriched by her thoughts.

The book continues for **ALL** on page 30.

For example, if you are Jewish scroll to page 13.

If you are Hindu scroll to page 14.

If you are Buddhist scroll to page 16.

If you are Catholic Christian scroll to page 19.

If you are Protestant Christian scroll to page 20.

If you are Orthodox Christian scroll to page 21.

If you are Atheist/Secular Humanist scroll to page 23.

If you look to Nature or Santo Daime scroll to page 26.

If you are Taoist scroll to page 28.

If you are a Muslim scroll to page 29.

Jew?

When, as a child, Bernadette could not believe or accept the “party line” presentation of Christianity, she thought for years that she should become Jewish. After visiting the synagogue across the street from her church and being uplifted by what she encountered there, for years she considered herself a “secret Jew”.

She drew on the Jewish understanding of the word “remember” to make an important point regarding the celebration of the Eucharist. For the Jew, the word means much more than to recall an event. It means to relive, re-present, even recreate, the event. Gradually over time the first Jewish followers of “the Way” began to realize that they had been recreating Christ in their midst all along, and their faith in the true presence grew stronger. This is seen by the gradual allusions to the Real Presence in the early documents.

She loved the exalted view of humanity that Judaism presents. She believed that the Jewish mystic Philo of Alexandria was one of the greatest mystics of all time and that he “to some extent, got Christianity off the ground” by bringing the Trinity together. Although he lived before any formal (or informal) presentation of the Trinity, he wrote about the Transcendent, the *Logos*, and the Spirit.

She also says on page 84 of *The Real Christ* that in Judaism we can find an incredibly true presentation of God.

Hindu?

She saw the main revelation of God manifested in Hinduism as being the revelation of God within. In the Brahman/Atman unitive experience she sees a profound truth. She said that Christianity as she understands it (not how it is currently presented) should catch on pretty quickly in India. My guess is that this is because Jesus was born into this state of Unitive Consciousness and lived it thoroughly. Jesus was not an Avatar because God doesn't need multiple attempts at salvation/transformation.

What happened with Jesus, what was revealed to us about what happens after death, Bernadette calls "the resurrection". She said it forever put an end to the myth of reincarnation. The Resurrection is the revelation (beyond the mind) that matter and spirit are inseparable. Also, she saw clearly that there is nothing left to reincarnate once transformation is complete. The spiritual body is revealed but remains only briefly until its ascension into the Glory of God.

When trying to explain what she means by the no-self experience, she says, "think of an Atman, the divine presence within, **that** dies."

She saw consciousness as man's way of knowing, not God's. She did not believe human consciousness to be eternal. If the Hindu says that God's consciousness is eternal and gives rise to the universe, the Hindu will have to explain very carefully what they mean by the term consciousness. She was pretty adamant that there is no such thing as a subject without an object.

The YouTube video "integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo cps (part one)" has an example of the Trinity according to Vedanta from 19:58 to 21:38.

In the YouTube video on Infinite Existence by Swami

Sarvapriyananda at minute 20 he makes the same point that Bernadette makes when she makes the distinction between dependent finite existence and Uncreated Existence on page 75 of *The Real Christ*.

Maybe reincarnation is the remembrance of someone else's life because we are somehow connected as a species beyond time and space. That is why

gender and nationalities don't matter with reincarnation remembrances. One experiences these remembrances as one's own because one IS one's experiences. One can't really remember being someone else. One always remembers as oneself.

Between 8:40 and 11:40 of the YouTube video, called the Upanishad of Sri Aurobindo, when the Sraddhalu Ranade says that the divine "enjoys" both the state of being with qualities and without qualities, this could be interpreted as the justness or rightness of God. There could be a connection here to what Bernadette is saying about the non-duality of Christ.

Buddhist?

People generally think Bernadette was speaking in Buddhist terms (and not Christian) when she talked about "no self." However, what she means by no self is no skandhas. When looking through numerous interpretations of the Zen poem about the ridgepole being shattered (and never to be rebuilt), she found only psychological interpretations and did not find any similarity to the ontological change she experienced.

So she went once (innocently) to a Buddhist monastery to talk to the monks about what they meant by no-self. What she got was only a cold silence and was later informed that Buddhists don't talk about self as a matter of general conversation.

When she writes about her experience in the "void of voids" she relates coming to the understanding that the void is form and form is void.¹⁰ A Buddhist is probably more likely to understand what she is talking about here than a Christian.

People who follow the spiritual teacher Adyashanti will see some similarities in what Bernadette is saying about Christ and what Adya is saying about what remains when one let's go of the self. Adya speaks of how important it is to have an innate sense of one's own presence. Bernadette also speaks of how important it is to have a sense of one's own being. There are two reasons for this. It is to have something substantive to offer God, and because it is only there that ownership lies. There is a shift that happens from believing that we own ourselves at our core, to believing that we are **owned** at our core.

¹⁰ pp.184-185 of [What is Self?](#)

Adya also talks about the natural movement of existence to become aware of itself. Similarly, Bernadette writes about the “eye seeing itself” and “knowing with God’s own knowing” when we become one with the Logos.

Interestingly, Adya agrees with Bernadette when he says that “it starts off with no ego and then continues after that...” He speaks of parts of the self (or pieces of the self) falling away. This is exactly why

Bernadette doesn’t like the word “transformation”, because she never felt in herself anything changing, but rather falling away. They both state that the unitive state is a new beginning.

Both Adya and Bernadette have a way of saying that we will all eventually understand these great mysteries. While Adya says that, “life has a way of bringing us to itself”, Bernadette says that God will be All in All and that we will know with the mind of Christ.

They both speak of the futility of self trying to dissolve self, but rather the attitude to have is to submit and allow the change to happen.¹¹

They both speak of saying “yes” to humanity with all its challenges and limitations.

They both speak of the fact that the transformation that happens does not pertain to the personality but happens only at one’s depths. They both speak of trusting the Absolute and that, in the end, everything will be fine.

They both speak of “presence” as being nonphysical and permeating one’s being.¹⁴

They both speak of “no self” and having no will other than God’s will. They both speak of actualizing all of our potential in terms of a flowering or blossoming.¹⁵

They both speak of the importance of ordinary daily life in living out our relationship with the Absolute.

They both speak of things moving within them from an entirely different dimension.

They both emphasize the importance of what one is over who one is.

They both speak of being drawn by God. He says God is a hunter looking for vulnerability, she says God is like a magnet that can’t get too close.

While he says that everything is self, she says that reality is everything except the self. Obviously, they don’t mean the same thing by that word.

¹¹ “Allow” starts to look pretty active as one discerns, with increasing perspicacity, God’s will.

He speaks of a change of occupancy of one's body, while she speaks of being no longer one's own.

He speaks of the eroding away of the personal will, while she speaks of becoming less free.

He speaks of truth being indescribable, while she speaks of faith being beyond the mind.

He speaks of there being no opposite to reality (because it is one), while she speaks of the oneness that is Christ being completely non-dual.

¹⁴ p. 456 of [The Real Christ](#)

¹⁵ p. 164 of [The Path to No-Self](#) and p. 37 of [The Experience of No-Self](#)

Catholic?

Some of what you read in Bernadette's writings about the Eucharist and Mary should be viewed in the light of her lamenting the loss of the pre-Vatican II church. She missed benediction and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as well as the place of prestige Mary held in the

Church before the Second Vatican Council. She sometimes listened to Catholic Answers and quotes books published by Tan. (Both "conservative" sources of Catholic thought) She lamented the Mass in the vernacular and preferred the Latin. (Interesting that the same words that will inspire one person to prayer will distract another from prayer.) When talking about a woman being interviewed about converting from Catholicism to Islam in Berkeley she says (about Berkeley), "a bunch of radicals, wouldn't you know?!"

As to her being theologically conservative or liberal, the issue is fraught with irony. She was so conservative that she was essentially pre-orthodox. Normally love of the real presence and devotion to Mary are regarded as theologically conservative tendencies. (They are also what all the Catholic Saints have in common.) Yet, it was **because** of her intense love of the real presence in the Eucharist and love of Mary, she ended up looking like a theological radical by denying the divinity of Jesus. Also on the liberal side, she didn't believe it the prerogative of a bunch of men sitting around some church to decide what the truth is. She was against the patriarchal elements of the Catholic Church. It just goes to show that Christ is beyond such ultimately meaningless distinctions as liberal or conservative.

While the party line presentation of Christianity did not make sense to her, she believed the Real Christ could be found today in the Eucharist of both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. For people looking for the Real Christ today, she might not point to the theological teachings of any church. Yet, she pointed directly and consistently to the Eucharist.

Protestant?

Sorry, but much of what Bernadette had to say will confound and frustrate you.¹² She valued Tradition over Scripture, didn't go in for all that sin stuff, and when she compared a protestant chapel to a Catholic church, called it a "big empty hall." She was anti seeking after experiences, anti giving her surprising experiences much attention, never gave Jesus much thought, and said that much of what goes around today as Christianity she didn't recognize as Christianity at all.

On the positive side, her mother was a Protestant and she says of her mother that she was in the unitive state before she (Bernadette) was born. Bernadette also agreed with the protestant idea that there can be no mediator between a human and God. One's relationship with God is between them and God alone. Just as Jesus didn't have a mediator, neither should we. This includes Jesus as a mediator. It's why she refused to be a guru. It would be good to have a clear understanding of the difference between "mediator" and "instrument". First, we need to have an experiential (not a conceptual) understanding of the Trinity. Then we can begin to understand Christ.

Orthodox?

Orthodox Christians will find a kindred spirit in Bernadette. She chose to worship according to an Eastern rite of the Catholic Church. She loved the iconography and candles and incense and calls this form of Liturgy "real church." She agreed with the Orthodox understanding of the theologian as one

¹² I get you. I've driven/sung to KLOVE for a decade and feel the hope in your songs.

who is on his knees. She agreed that the scholastic impulse of the West was poorly placed. Critical thinking is good but over intellectualization is not. The consensus (among Christians) is that revelation comes through both Scripture and Tradition. If we could think of a spectrum of importance allocated to either side it might look like Scripture/Liberal on the one side, with Tradition/Conservative on the other. According to this, whereas Bernadette appears to be a theological radical, she was, in fact, theologically Conservative. She was basically saying that people who worship the man Jesus as God are not Orthodox enough!

As to her theological vision being Orthodox or not, she ends her monumental work by saying (in a typically confrontational tone) that it is **more** Orthodox than the Orthodox.¹³ When these words came to her at first she was amused and confused, yet they stuck and she never doubted them after. My memory could be mistaken but I seem to recall she mentioned (about twenty years ago) that her father was a boxer in the military before becoming a lawyer. Perhaps this is where she got her inclination to make confrontational statements like this. She said she would much rather spend time with someone who disagrees with her, than with someone who agrees with her. Basically, she was pre-Orthodox.

She believed that more theological considerations should take Christ as understood by St. Irenaeus as their model.

She had a tremendous and deep love for all the fathers (except Cyril whom she calls a skunk and a devil). She especially loved St. Maximus the confessor and the Cappadocian fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. It will soon become clear to you that she immersed herself for five years researching all the fathers to see where they may have inadvertently made some wrong turns. She said that they should have defined their terms better when disputing and that they were at times “talking past one another.”

She said of the Orthodox practice of giving the three sacraments of initiation to infants, “They have it right.”

Atheist?

¹³ This idea came to her in 1979. Page 104 in *Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey*

Bernadette posited that since the essence of matter remains unknown to science that it may in fact be spirit, and that the scientist may unwittingly be a contemplative, and the contemplative really a scientist.¹⁸

She was thoroughly rational, not at all sentimental, and eschewed all superstition.

The atheist will understand immediately when she says God is not a person. In fact, many people self-identify as atheist because they understand the silliness of the view that God is a person. If you ask them, "What if I define God as infinite existence?", that concept will be so foreign to them that they may reply, "That's not what everybody means by God." So the problem is that the shortsighted and childish view of God has been around for so long that it is now the cause of its own demise.

She told a funny story about a boy who knocks on the priest's door in the middle of the night in a crisis of faith.¹⁹ The priest comes to the door and the boy says, "Father! God is gone! I don't believe in God anymore!" The priest replies, "Neither do I." The boy says, "Wait a second! You're a priest! You **have** to believe in God!" The priest replies, "I don't believe in the God that you don't believe in!" This is the view of the atheist. You don't believe in the God that boy doesn't believe in. Bernadette didn't believe in the god that **you** don't believe in. Interestingly, she said it's actually impossible to be an atheist. Something to ponder...

¹⁸ p. 57 of [The Experience of No-Self](#)

¹⁹ This is also a footnote on page 74 of [The Real Christ](#)

She vehemently objected to the caricatured presentation of the Trinity as an old man, a young man with a beard, and a bird. Everybody knows these images are not to be taken literally but when you see the Trinity portrayed in this way in churches all over Latin America (and even in some Orthodox Churches) one has to wonder about the extent to which this presentation of the Trinity has had deleterious effects. After all, before there were any catechisms,

people learned their faith by how they worshiped.¹⁴ If one is surrounded by images like these while worshiping, what is one's faith likely to be?

Bernadette said she had a lot to offer to the field of psychology because she knew what consciousness was. She came to her understanding by living thoroughly a life of intimate union with God (not a person). However, perhaps this is not necessary to understand her writings. After all, the truth can speak for itself. In fact, perhaps the atheist is at somewhat at an advantage in understanding her writings because you don't have to throw out all your wrong religious views. Many atheists claim to be such, simply because they correctly reject the caricatured presentation of God that is so prevalent that they take it to be what the word "God" means.

Years ago, when her voice was stronger, Bernadette used to read to us for the first half of lunch during her weekend retreats. It should be telling to the atheist that the **following** selection from chapter five of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius is one that **she chose** to read:

"That the supreme Cause of every conceptual thing is not itself conceptual."

"Again, as we climb higher [toward "God"] we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth- it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial."¹⁵

¹⁴ *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (The law of worship determines the law of belief.) This is followed by *Lex credendi, lex vivendi* (The law of belief determines the law of living.) *Ergo*, change the way of worshiping and you will change the way of living.

¹⁵ p. 141 of Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works (From the Classics of Western Spirituality series)

She didn't want us to have a childish or caricatured view of the Ultimate either.

Nature?/ Santo Daime?

God in Nature was the first love of Bernadette's life. She saw God in the sea, baptized the neighborhood dogs, and said (when she was a child) that if all her friends, the animals, weren't "saved" and in Heaven, that she didn't want to go there.

She called God in nature "huge" for her and says that she never lost the ability to see It. She even said that whenever riding in a car she would stick her head out the window. She said that she loved to lie on the ground and look up at a tree and just sink into it. After receiving the Eucharist one day she walked far out into a marsh and sat down on a rock until she was not only surrounded by life, but covered with it as well.

She said she loves the Native Americans and all that they went through to become spiritually mature. She saw God revealing Itself to all people long before Christianity and far from Christianity.

For people who turn to shamanic practices like ayahuasca for spiritual support, you already know the experience of the Holy Spirit and Its connection to the Transcendent. You will be challenged by her insistence on moving beyond experience. That which experiences is Self, and when we walk in naked faith, it is purer and selfless. You call upon, in your sacred ceremonies, a panoply of holy saints and beings to aid you with your intention. Eventually, you will have to see if you can accept that, either they never existed and are symbolic archetypes, or that they have been transformed into Christ, the only name we have for the oneness between all of God and all of man. The medicine that you embrace, she is a gift of the Divine Mother according to Ireneau. Just as the complementary opposites of body and blood are united in the Eucharist, the leaf and the vine become one to transform you into a being of peace and joy.

The medicine incapacitates your ego and then reality can rush into the space created and, in intuitive and precise ways, illuminate the origins of whatever hang-ups you may still have to let go of. Let them all go.

Taoist?

Bernadette said she loved the *Tao*. She never studied any religion,¹⁶ Eastern or Western extensively, but from the studies she did do, she regarded Taoism as the closest to Christianity. Of course, she was not the first to relate the *Tao* to the *Logos* (The late Orthodox priest Fr. Seraphim Rose held a similar view), but when you read what she had to say about the *Logos* as the flowing intelligence that pervades all things, you will probably recognize the *Tao* there.

She draws a parallel between St. Paul's spiritual body and the spiritualization of the body that Taoist practices have as their goal. She calls this view beautiful.

In her book entitled The Experience of No Self, she writes about really living in the great Flow. It was while she was camping in the mountains for five months. She uses the word "flow" 3 times on page 35 of the book. She says that "not for a day" had she lived before living in the Flow.

A good place to start a comparison of Bernadette's writings with classical Chinese thought would be with the concept of *Jen*.¹⁷ The great synthesis of Taoist and Confucian philosophy as formulated by Chu Hsi should be studied more.

Muslim?

Bernadette, when talking about the iconoclastic controversy, stated that at the end of it, along came Islam. Then she said, "I can't help but think that God had something to do with that." I think that what she meant is that, while the Trinity practically emerged of itself, and can be seen in various traditions, it

¹⁶ Besides Christianity

¹⁷ Pronounced "ren"

was a **further** revelation of God to humanity to remind us that God is ONE. While Jesus was more than a great prophet, he was not God.

Also, in her DVD series called “The Essence of Christian Mysticism” she talks about an interview she had seen on T.V. about a woman who had converted from Catholicism to Islam. The woman was investigating various traditions looking for more depth in her spiritual life. When she came to visit a Muslim, she was asked, “If Jesus was God, who was he constantly praying to? Himself?” A Christian who believes that Jesus was God would say that it was the second person of the Trinity praying to the first person of the Trinity with the third person, or give some such trinitarian understanding based on the concept of God as three persons.

However, as you know, God is not three persons. That is pure tritheism. Bernadette reports that she knew the Trinity “like the back of her hand” since the age of fifteen and reports that there are no persons in God. Jesus was a full human person and great prophet of God. She did understand Jesus to be unique in a few important ways and you may be challenged by those parts of her writing.¹⁸

Chapter 1. Biographical Sketch

A. Life before Carmel

I will not give a lengthy (and unauthorized) biography here because I want to encourage you (again) to buy and read first my favorite of all her books, her autobiography called Contemplative. Future scholars of her works will find in its pages ample evidence of how it could be possible that God pushed her so far and so fast spiritually that she ended up living the last **half** of her life without **any** self. I don’t think we can even say this of the Buddha!

It’s ironic, but because of her large, loving, confrontational, humorous personality which remained, it seemed like she had a huge self even when she had none.

Copyright laws prohibit quoting more than five hundred words from her works. I will give this lengthy quote (133 words) that she concluded her autobiography with because it sets the context of her entire life. All her spiritual experiences,

¹⁸ For example Appendix 1 in her book What is Self?

struggles, revelations and general outlook on the world can be attributed to **this experience**.

Because her parents had already lost one child in labor, and because her father regretted that the child had not been baptized, when Bernadette was born not yet breathing she was instantly baptized and offered to God with prayers of supplication by her father. After she finally breathed, her father shouted out loud in the delivery room, "She belonged to God before she belonged to this world!" To understand the writings of Bernadette Roberts one need only keep her father's words constantly in mind. Here is the quote:

"When he [her father] 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... Had God not accepted, I would not be here to tell the story. Would that every child were 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."

One day, when she was five, she was running around the house singing, "I am what I am and that's all what I am" by Popeye the Sailor Man. She understood perfectly that Popeye was not talking about **who** he was, or about what his occupation was. **What** he was, was more important. She stresses repeatedly in her four DVD series called "The Essence of Christian Mysticism" that we need to pay much more attention to **what** a person is than **who** that person is.

So when she wrote that it "could be said" she was this covenant between the earthly and the Heavenly, what did she mean? She was not talking about who she was. She was talking about what she was. She called **what** she was a covenant. I'm just pointing this out. You draw your own conclusions.

Or, maybe she was talking about who she was. Her father had given her to God, and, just as importantly, God had accepted the offering. She was someone who stubbornly refused to accept that she belonged to God. For about fifteen years she was afraid God would take her over (which It did). Then she had her conversion experience,¹⁹ entered the monastery as early as possible, and became someone who had been "tamed". For as long as she was a "who" she showed with ever greater completeness her acceptance of her father's offering. She was someone **who** belonged to God. So does each of us.

¹⁹ More on that soon

I will not go into the many experiences she relates in her autobiography.²⁰ One gets a wonderfully clear view of a feisty, stubborn, (she even uses the word 'ornery')²⁷ strong willed girl who was always handed the ball when it came to pegging out the last two dodgers in dodgeball, and who used her crutches to whack boys in the shins. She tells many funny stories like when she went down to the peer with her older brother to see Neptune the "god of the sea". When a man covered in seaweed emerged from the water holding a trident she kept shouting, "That's not god! That's not god!" because God in the sea had already revealed Itself to her and made sure that she saw It. In her autobiography she also relates how God in the sea miraculously healed her of a debilitating bone disease. It was always the love of her life. Another story she tells is of when she saw Mother Mary point to her from high in the old basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and wave dismissively at her (as if to say to a scribe at her side), "She's already taken care of". There are many more experiences in the book that you just have to read for yourself.²¹²²

It seems that, for whatever reason, the Trinity wanted to be sure that Bernadette knew It's three manifestations, or modes of being. First, God in nature (specifically the sea) manifested Itself to her and then waited for her to see it before returning to the sea. Then, at age five, came the sudden explosion or expanding of God within, followed by the words, "You're too big for yourself!" and an accompanying laugh. Finally, at age ten, after asking Mother Mary to see God Transcendent, she was granted that as well.²⁹ This vision changed the course of her life. She said that she knew the Trinity "like the back of her hand" by age 15. She was not bragging.

She was just telling it like it is. Yet, who else can honestly say this?

I will give one more lengthy quote from her autobiography because she refers to this experience at age fifteen as her "conversion experience". She knew God Transcendent (which she called 'God passing by' or 'God in the woods'), and she knew the dynamic God Immanent (a powerful force within her),²³ and her favorite was God in nature, but she didn't understand what **she** had to do with any of this. What was **her** role, her place, or significance? Did **she** have any eternal life? She knelt before a crucifix in her room and resolved to not get up until she had received an answer.²⁴

²⁰ <http://bernadetteroberts.blogspot.com/p/self-published-works.html> ²⁷ Page seven of a letter to "Tim"

²¹ <http://bernadetteroberts.blogspot.com/p/self-published-works.html>

²² p. 135 of The Experience of No-Self and p. 100 of

Contemplative (age ten) It took her two weeks to recover from this event.

²³ This force scared her that it might take her over. (which it did)

She did not have to wait long before being struck as if by a bolt of lightning that knocked her over. The beam of light originated in the Transcendent, passed through the crucifix, and into her center. Initially, she was confused about what Christ was doing in the Trinity. She tried and tried to figure it out for hours until she was exhausted. Here is the quote:

“But no sooner had I reached this point, when something came into my mind from the outside - above my head on the pillow - which informed me:

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.*²⁵ To know this same fruition as Christ knew it, the vessel must be perfect as he is perfect.²⁶ 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.”

Bernadette's interior life was so active from such an early age that one almost has to distinguish between two Bernadette's, the inner and the outer. She confided to her roommate at Flintridge boarding school about these two selves and they jokingly concluded that she had split personality disorder. She did not. Personality is the exclusive domain of the outer. Bernadette's inner life was so rich that it took on the characteristics of an entirely different person. It had a life of its own.

This caused her countless problems. She was misunderstood by her teachers - they held her back in second grade even though she had passing marks.²⁷ She was misunderstood by her peers - they stood with mouths open looking like ghosts when she asked them if they ever experienced being inflated like a balloon.²⁸ She was misunderstood by her Jesuit spiritual directors - just go to Mass and obey your superior and don't worry about all that union with God stuff.²⁹ She was even misunderstood by her own mother. Her mother once told her, “I understand your father (who she described as ‘a most complicated man’) and I understand your brothers and sisters, but I never understood

²⁴ This reminds one of the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree resolving to not get up before attaining Nirvana.

²⁵ Italics mine

²⁶ Selfless, that is.

²⁷ p. 54 of Autobiography

²⁸ p. 29 of Autobiography

²⁹ p. 161 of Autobiography

you.”³⁰ This would bother Bernadette and she concluded that we never really understand each other anyway. If being misunderstood is a sign of greatness, Bernadette was probably the greatest of all time because, to this day, she is misunderstood by almost all.

B. Life in Carmel and its influence on her spirituality

Bernadette loved her monastic vocation and life in Carmel. I had the chance to visit her old monastery in Alhambra (when I was a Discalced Carmelite) and ask a couple of the nuns from her community about her.

They lit up and had nothing but glowing remarks. She called the day she entered the monastery the happiest day of her life. She compared herself to a duck being born in the desert and seeing a pond off in the distance. For her, entering the monastery was like being that duck, sliding into water for the first time, finally at home.³¹

Many years ago, she related a story to me about her first day in the monastery. Just after being received by the community with a kiss of peace she was shown to her monastic cell. (Discalced Carmelite cells are the same all over the world.) She saw her small bed covered with a brown wool blanket, small desk, and simple wooden cross on the wall. She had always lived with a crucifix on her wall, so she asked Mother Superior, “Where is Christ?” She was told, “The place for Jesus on the cross is empty because that’s where you put yourself.” As a fifteen-year-old-girl, she was naturally **a little** taken aback by this reply.

After she entered Carmel, she confided in her spiritual director, the Irish Discalced Carmelite Fr. Columban, that she was looking for more guidance in the Carmelite tradition about all that was happening in her soul. He replied, “I have just the book for you.” He came back the next week with a copy of, The Spiritual Doctrine of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity by the

French Dominican named M. Philipon. She was greatly influenced by the book, both because she already shared a similar spirituality, and because the book shed light on what was happening to her. She once remarked to me in passing that she felt that Blessed Elizabeth³² had penetrated deeper into the mystery of God than her French contemporary, St. Therese of Lisieux. An interesting connection between the thought of Elizabeth of the Trinity and Bernadette’s thought is the idea of being God’s prey and of being consumed by God. St.

³⁰ p. 128 of Autobiography

³¹ p. 191 of Autobiography

³² Now **Saint** Elizabeth of the Trinity

Elizabeth of the Trinity uses these words “prey” and “consume” twelve times in her four short spiritual writings. What is being consumed? The self is being consumed. This will be explained later in chapter nine. We will also reflect on this idea of being consumed by God on the chapter called the Eucharist.

Elizabeth writes about letting the self starve to death by giving it no thought. Similarly, Bernadette related that she never gave a thought to herself or cared about it at all until it was gone and she realized what it had been. Elizabeth uses this word “self” far more frequently than any of her spiritual contemporaries. In her four short works she uses the term (freed from self, rid of self, stripped of self, etc.) thirty-two times! So the “self” was very important to Elizabeth. And what is being consumed? The self is being consumed. Remember, if this sounds discouraging it is because you don’t yet understand that it is one’s ability to experience discouragement that is being consumed.

In regards to other aspects of Carmelite spirituality and their influence on Bernadette, she confessed that she didn’t much care for all the “visions and voices stuff” of St. Teresa’s spirituality. She did, however, refer to something St. Teresa wrote while trying to explain what was unique about her “fifth mansion” of the spiritual life. She reflected on what the saint meant when she said that she knew she was working for God, and with God, even when she was not aware of it. Bernadette said that this attests to the fact that the unitive state exists on both a conscious and unconscious level. In other words, once we come to the unitive state, there is no movement against God’s will, even on a subconscious level.

Through the continual process of looking in Christian contemplative literature for greater understanding about what was happening to her, she came to understand that if it could not be found in the works of St. John of the Cross, it probably doesn’t exist. In her book, The Path to No-Self, she quotes the saint over twenty times. Part three of the book could almost be called an extended commentary, based on her own experience, of his masterpiece, The Spiritual Canticle. Of this work, she said she “practically lived it.”

She was 17 when God brought her completely into the unitive state.³³ She was reading in the garden when she felt a cloud or mist descend upon her mind. And that was it. She could no longer read the words on the page, but the problem was not a matter of vision. She realized this when she went to pray the Divine Office with her community and had no problems because it was in Latin and (she didn’t understand that language anyway). So there was a change in her ability to understand. This may have been due to the fact that understanding pertains to what the words mean to oneself. When she could not relate the words on the page to her ego (because it had been recently

³³ This is a remarkably young age. For most people it happens in their early thirties.

removed) then there was consequently a sense of being stymied. There was a darkness within.

Initially, this was disconcerting for her because it felt like God within her had disappeared. She avoided looking within for a few days so she wouldn't be faced with this absence. (She came to understand later, with the help of St. John of the Cross, that the darkness within was actually an excess of light.) Eventually, she realized she couldn't go on like that forever, so she mustered up some courage to face whatever it was that had taken the place of God's indwelling presence. She decided that, after chanting the Divine Office, at the beginning of silent evening prayer, (Carmelites call it "mental prayer") she would look within.

She told a story about what she found. She said it was like seeing a ship off in the distance coming up over the horizon. One puts one's binoculars up to one's eyes to get a better view. The second one does this, what does one see? The eye of the captain of the ship! She said she was "shocked and surprised". Then she relates a saying by Meister Eckhart,

"The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me."³⁴

Then began the acclimation process whereby every outstanding spiritual experience became ordinary and mundane. Eventually, she realized there was some subtle joy and delight in this state. She wanted to return to God in the same measure as she had marvelously received. She thought of the self emptying on the part of the Divine Christ to become the Human Christ. She wanted to live the unitive state fully with nothing, no consolations, no joy, for herself. She wanted challenges to this state, so she could have something to offer God, namely her perfect trust. She wanted to offer the only thing she had - her self. She made an important and rare point about love and justice. Love demands equality. She said **if one is loved more than one loves**, it is not a satisfying state of affairs.

She began to feel that, as much as she loved her contemplative vocation, God was calling her to leave the monastery. A friend in her cadre with a good sense of humor said, she got "bored with bliss." She wanted to "test the practice" of union with God. What better place to test one's oneness with God than in "the marketplace"? Her superior made her wait a year. She loved her monastic vocation and did not want to leave. She told her superior that when she came back to the issue in a year that she hoped her superior would say come back in another year. When she left, it was almost reluctantly because

³⁴ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Meister_Eckhart

she knew the way ahead would be tough,³⁵ and it was on the condition that if ever she wanted to return, she would always have a home in Carmel.

Both of her two spiritual parents in Carmel write about the need for challenges in the spiritual life. St. Teresa compared living in community to being a bunch of pebbles in a pouch. In the process of the banging around in there as the pouch is carried, one is worn smooth. Similarly, St. John of the Cross referred to the virtues being like a bag of spices. The bag has to be shaken up a little to smell the spices, to see the virtues. It is not at all surprising then that Bernadette felt God was calling her out of the monastery. The community God had in mind for her was much larger than the sixteen (or so) nuns she lived with.

C. Life post Carmel- kids and no-self event

After Bernadette left the monastery she went straight to University. It is interesting to note that the world she re-entered was the world of the civil rights movement. In her talk called “The Essence of Christian Mysticism,” she went out of her way to mention that St. Augustine was black. She said that she loved these African Bishops. Then, smiling, practically shouted, “Black!” So one can easily see where her lifelong love of justice would place her in the debate over civil rights.

While at university she asked her visiting professor of epistemology, “What is this whole marriage thing about?” He replied to her that he could give it to only her straight³⁶ - procreation. So when she met her soon-to-be husband they both got fertility tests before getting married. We need not concern ourselves with her marriage, but they had four children together. Bernadette loved raising her children and living her life with God and them. “It was a good life - just living it out day to day with God.”³⁷ She certainly had her share of trials and tribulations (robbed, fired, egged, etc.) but her four kids helped keep her feet on the ground in a way that only teenagers can.

³⁵ It was.

³⁶ What he meant is that his words would likely be misinterpreted to referring to the pleasures of the act, rather than the purpose of the act.

³⁷ This is from her 4 DVD series called “The Essence of Christian Mysticism.”

She resented the fact that she was never taught about the *Logos* or God in nature. Therefore, because God in nature was the love of her life, she resolved to teach her children that they didn't have to exclusively go to church to find God. A few days later, her two teenage boys knocked on her door dressed in their wetsuits and holding their surfboards saying, "Let's go! We want to go to mass!" and "You remember what you told us!"

So she would sit there in her car and watch her beautiful boys try to catch waves, and mostly fail. She would clap when either of them caught one. She marveled at their ability to just sit there waiting **for hours** without losing interest. She bragged about them. She asked one of her sons if he really saw God out there. He replied, "Yea, sure. No problem."

At some point, partly because the psychic energy required to keep her household together was no longer there,³⁸ she decided to go camping for five months in the high Sierras. It was there that she felt she was really living for the first time. The animals were her friends and she was living in the great flow. Eventually, she had to leave before the first big snow trapped her there.

Eventually, in her early 40's, on the hillside below the Camaldolese monastery in Big Sur, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, she walked down the slope with a little self remaining, smiled at a flower and felt that the flower smiled back "like a smile of welcome from the whole universe."⁴⁷ She understood the oneness of that which smiled, that at which it smiled, and the smile itself. She walked back up the hillside having left all sense of self and existence behind. And so began a long and difficult acclimation process to living in this world in a way that no human is meant to.

During this time, she **first** wrote, The Experience of No-Self, **then**, The Path to No Self. Then she wrote the autobiography of her childhood called, Contemplative - Autobiography of the Early Years. Then she wrote, What is Self? - A Study of the Spiritual Journey in Terms of Consciousness. Her summative work is called The Real Christ and will surely go down in history as the most important work of mystical theology of all time.

I recommend reading her autobiography **first**.

³⁸ partly for other reasons that don't concern us ⁴⁷ p. 55 in The Experience of No-Self.

In lamenting the current theological and spiritual climate of the Catholic Church, Bernadette set off for five years to research where the Church could have possibly made some wrong turns to lead us to where we are today. In today's Catholic Church she saw no real authentic presentation of the Trinity, Logos, or the Eucharist. Therefore, like many before her, she set out studying the development of Christian doctrine. However, unlike any before her, she was examining it under the light of what God had experientially given her to know, to see if anyone had "gotten it right."

Her concern was not to disparage the man Jesus. She had many beautiful things to say about the importance, greatness, even uniqueness of Jesus. Her concern was that the Trinity be realized and worshiped in people's lives. After briefly reading about the various historical wrong turns the Church took, you will see that Bernadette's life, like none before her, demonstrated a new and different understanding of Christ. She experienced Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost not as passing experiences, but as permanent changes at the deepest level of her being.

Chapter 2: Cutting to the chase

This is what "cutting to the chase" looks like. This is the only part of this book you really need to pay attention to. Just read through Chapter 3, then you can chuck it (or delete it), if you want. Hang in there! Make sure your thinking cap is on tightly before continuing to read further. The thesis statement of Bernadette's theological vision is this:

Jesus had to manifest what we will only experience.

This idea seems to be new to Bernadette. She never really thought much about the man Jesus until coming to the unitive state at age 17. After that, she could identify with him. She began the process of verifying Christ's experiences, then Christ would be there to verify her experiences. In other words, she got out there first and took all the spiritual risks like Jesus did, then, suddenly, there would be the presence of Christ confirming her experience as spiritually authentic. When that body³⁹ went through the no-self experience, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Pentecost, she recognized in her experiences what Christ manifested with his body. In other words, Jesus' body manifested what our consciousness will only experience. Bernadette experienced what Jesus manifested.

A. Death

Another thing that Bernadette was saying that is utterly unique is that the true nature of death is entirely spiritual and not physical. She was entitled to her own definition of "death" just as any of us is. She was defining death as the end of consciousness, and the experiencer. The body will not know its own death. The organs cease to function and with them the faculties of the soul, or consciousness, ceases as well. Usually that's the order. With Bernadette, consciousness ceased first. She claimed that it is the cessation of consciousness that is the true nature of death.

One should always keep in mind that "how it went for Christ is how it will go for each and every one of us."⁴⁰ Jesus, on the cross gave up his unitive self not so that we wouldn't have to, but to reveal that we **do** have to. To be made perfect even as our Heavenly Father is perfect means that not only do we need to be forgiven, we must be brought to the state or condition whereby the need to be forgiven can no longer arise. Self is the cause of the need to be forgiven, so in Heaven there can be no self. In order for God to be "all in all" God cannot be an object of consciousness because that's not God's job. As long as God is an object of consciousness then there is a subject (which is not God) and an object (which is God) and therefore God is not "all in all".

Bernadette said that, on the cross, Jesus' experience of God, which was identical to his experience of life and being, left him. She marveled at the fact that he "hollered" that God had left him. She says, "you would think he would keep it to himself." Perhaps he was being used as God's instrument to reveal that the end of consciousness feels like no more interiority, hence no more presence of God within. His transformation into Christ was now complete. "It is finished." The journey of human consciousness was finished.

³⁹ I had written "she went" but she did not go through these experiences. "She" was dead.

⁴⁰ p. 323 of [The Real Christ](#)

B. Resurrection

After Jesus' death there was still a human nature there. But it was not his human nature. He was dead. And it was never his to begin with. It was created by the *Logos* for God. What rose was Christ, universal human nature in union with God. The person Jesus died and persons aren't resurrected. What was revealed was universal human nature with the resurrection. That's why they didn't recognize him.

The Resurrection that Christ revealed is not the resuscitation of the particular body that we know with the senses. Jesus did not resurrect Lazarus or anyone else. The miracle that God worked through him (to draw attention to him) was to revive or resuscitate Lazarus, who later died again anyway. There is an enormous difference between resurrection and resuscitation.

Resurrection is of an entirely spiritual nature. We know this because nobody recognized the physical form that presented itself to them with the revelation of the Resurrection. As everyone knows, the senses can't perceive the truth of anything. Bernadette's experience of the Resurrection was of the true nature of the body, the form of the body. She links it with the Incarnation in that they are both revelations of universal humanity.

They are both manifestations of the eternal form of the Formless Unmanifest.

C. Ascension

Jesus manifested what we will experience. Just as his Ascension was not his flying up into the air to take his "seat" next to his father on some distant planet, neither will our Ascension be anything like that. Death is the experience of no-self. Resurrection is the experience of not having any sense of interiority anymore and the revelation of what remains - the essential body not available to consciousness or the senses. Ascension is the experience of this essential body "going to air." For Bernadette, this happened nine months after the resurrection experience and lasted for four months before the acclimation process was complete. The scriptural account of the body being taken into the "clouds" has a mystical meaning. "Cloud" is always a reference to the mystery of God. According to Bernadette's experience the body has an experience of dissolving into a divine gas.

In experience, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension go together. They are natural, logical consequences of God's transformation of our nature. First, the self dies once its usefulness has been outlived. Then, comes the revelation of what remains in the absence of a self. Finally, so that God can be "all in all", even that which remains is absorbed into God's mysterious dimension of existence.

Chapter 3: A New Christology

There will be a short quiz at the end of the book on the contents of this chapter. (At least it won't be a "pop quiz"!) Please put on your thinking cap.

Bernadette describes her discussion groups held twice a year in Fullerton as a "free for all". There is a level of joking, arguing, and teasing that one normally finds only among siblings. ⁴¹There are questions, stories from personal experience, and even accusations. At one such group meeting, the topic of the Kenosis and how long it took came up. (Actually, it has come up at least twice.) Bernadette, with alacrity, as if to say, "Pick me! I know the answer!" said, "I know from my own experience because I timed mine, **nine months**. The Kenosis started with the conception and ends with the birth."

Two things are striking about this comment. The first is that she is drawing, in a matter of fact way, a connection or relationship between "how it went for Christ" and "how it goes for each and every one of us." In this case, her. She takes this as a given, based on her own extensive experience.

The second thing that is striking is not that she **has** an answer but **what** her answer is. She had long been accustomed to journaling. That her memory was not faulty is seen on pages 188 and 190 of her book, What is Self? On both pages she says that the difficult process of leaving the Ascended state and returning to the Resurrected state took her **nine months**.

Of course, it could be mere coincidence. Two previous milestones along her journey also lasted nine months. The first one was no ego. While there was definitely a dramatic and abrupt change of consciousness at her entrance into the unitive state at age 17 (while in the monastery), she relates both on page

⁴¹ See my latest book for a transcription of one of these groups.

28 and 51 of her book The Path to No Self that it took **nine months** for the transition to the life of the butterfly, or unitive state, to be complete.

Similarly, the no-self event was accompanied by **nine months** of a particular type of “seeing” a oneness as if through “3-D glasses”. This is seen both on page 39 of The Experience of No-Self and on page 182 of What is Self? So what is going on here?

It would be tempting to link her coming to the unitive state (age 17) with the Kenosis of the Divine Christ (the *Logos* taking on flesh, then consciousness) because they both end with unitive consciousness. However, the reason it took her nine months was because it took that long for all of her “deep inner rebellion” to completely submit or surrender. So in this instance she was approaching the unitive state from the perspective of human consciousness. Whereas, of course, the *Logos* united to humanity was **not** approaching the unitive state from this same direction, if you will.

Kenosis, for the Divine Christ (the *Logos*), was going from a condition of body-less-ness to a sensory condition. Kenosis, for Bernadette, was also going from body-less-ness to a sensory condition. The only difference is that, whereas for the Divine Christ the end product was an individual body that became the person Jesus, for Bernadette, the end product of her Kenosis was universal man beyond any particular person - Christ. So, at the end of the first one we have a “who” (Jesus) and at the end of the second one we have a “what” (Christ, and no “who”).

This leaves, as yet, the question of their similarity in duration unanswered. One may never know. Maybe it's coincidence. However, the fact that Bernadette called it “akin to the **incarnation** experience”⁵⁷ and also said, “But after the experience of ascension **and incarnation**, the resurrected state was altered”,⁵⁸ forces one to conclude that, at least for her, they are intimately related. In other words, by saying her Kenosis experience (taking on some form of consciousness) was like the Incarnation, she was saying that is how long sensory awareness takes to develop in every human (including Jesus). She obviously believed that how it went for him, is how it goes for each and every one of us. (And, (perhaps) also that how it goes for each and every one of us is **because** that's how it went for him.)

So her Kenosis lasted nine months. But before that, her Resurrection experience lasted nine months. She says that we go to God in the reverse order of the Incarnation. For the *Logos* the journey happened in this way. First, the state called Ascension (which has to do with the bodily senses), then

Resurrection (which has to do with consciousness), then the egoless state. Whereas for us the order is egolessness, then Resurrection (no consciousness), then the Ascension (no sensory awareness).

Since our way back to God is the reverse process of the Divine Christ's Incarnation, could it be that her experience of the "seeing" that accompanied Resurrection lasted nine months because it was **diminution** of consciousness, **and** it took nine months for the baby Jesus to **develop** self-consciousness after his birth? Seems more than coincidental. That it only took him nine (instead of the normal fifteen months) only the more attests to the fact that he was born in the unitive state. (The six months after the first nine are when the ego develops.)

(At this point the "cheeky bastard" side of me wants to launch off into a few "Bernadette is the second coming of Christ" pages and start my own religion. The appeal is not fame or fortune but is, rather, the mischievous joy acquired by thinking that, for Jesus to return (even if it were possible) as a girl who would chase boys because they had "something coming to them" and she "was a good kicker"⁵⁹ and who got a "D" in conduct "at least once"⁶⁰ is so great, because it is so hilarious!)

Logically, either she is right or she is wrong. She may have been delusional, inaccurate, or hyperbolic. Or, she's simply telling it like it is. She said that once we catch up to Jesus with entry into the unitive state, that Christ (not a person) begins making consciousness less and less necessary. If consciousness arises out of protection and fear, might it not become less necessary as Christ grows.

⁵⁷₅₈ p. 189 of [What is Self?](#)

p. 190 of [What is Self?](#)

She says that, at death, Christ dies, spans the void of voids (descent into hell in which one realizes that the Form is Void) and Christ rises, then Ascends. (She explains how all this works in her books. This is only an introduction to them.) Nevertheless, this was her experience, and that was always the only thing she would ever write or speak about. She never claimed to be an expert on anything other than her experience. She even said once, "I'm no theologian." (Obviously she was wrong.)

She was never one to lie. She said once, "I wouldn't wish no-self on a dog!" Then, because **maybe** she had told a white lie to make an important point, she immediately corrected herself by saying, "Actually, I would." And everybody chuckled. So, when she said, "I'll tell you how long Kenosis lasts" in reference to **Christ's** incarnation, by telling you how long **her** Kenosis lasted, she is saying it took **nine months** of sustained effort because of Its "determined will

to be in this world”⁴² (for both of them) to take on the limitations we call human senses. She knows because that’s how it went for her. Kenosis took nine months for her.

So what? Why does it matter at all? If you want to be mediocre, it can mean nothing. However, if you want to be fully human, it can mean everything. So, let’s explore the idea a little further.

What evidence could there possibly be to support the idea that when Jesus said, “I am the Way” he was not referring to his doctrines, Church, or beliefs, but to his manifestations of what each of us will only experience? That he was “showing” the way... Well, we know almost nothing about his

“hidden years”, but haven’t we all had them? With his entrance into the “marketplace” we see what a fully mature human looks like. The problem is, we are not there yet. We would like to think we are, but we are not yet fully mature. It is only **after** we catch up with Jesus in the unitive state that he becomes our manifestation of “how it goes.” Until we reach the unitive state, we are mostly stumbling along.

Saints (people in the unitive state) around the world in every tradition live similar lives. Like Jesus, they often retire to prayer or meditation because knowing God and loving God amount to the same thing. You want to be alone with your beloved. Like Jesus, they show mercy and compassion to their neighbor because they see the same union there. Like Jesus, they live fearlessly and courageously because they have all that matters.

Part of what Bernadette was saying (because she was light years ahead of the rest of us spiritually) was that we don’t have enough literature from contemplative authors that indicate that the unitive state is **not** the end, but the beginning. It has a purpose. It is meant to be lived out through courageous sacrificial giving in this world as a preparation for no-self (death).

The reason why Christ takes over when we die is that’s how it went for Jesus. Jesus died, then Christ was revealed to the world. Unearthing his bones (as some claim to have done) would both prove he was not God

(but God’s “instrument” -St. Irenaeus), and would prove that the Resurrection is not a physical but a spiritual event.

If all of this seems a little too theoretical or philosophical, here is the same story told from a scientific perspective. Bernadette experienced the

⁴² p. 189 of [What is Self?](#)

permanent cessation of consciousness. Because she was raised in a conservative Catholic environment, she interpreted her experiences in this light. According to her reports consciousness shuts down in the following way, and in the following order:

First, the self-reflective (voluntary) mechanism of the brain ceases (cerebellum?). She calls this the “knowing self”.

Then, the self-reflexive (involuntary) mechanism of the brain ceases (medulla oblongata, pons, and midbrain?). There is no feeling of “I” any more. She calls this the “feeling self”.

Then the will and the whole affective systems of emotions falls away.

Then, there is no sense of interiority or of having a center (or circumference). If one felt God within oneself before death, it feels like God is leaving as the sense of interiority leaves.

Then, one feels that one’s body is formless or non-personal.

Then, the body (not the person) experiences being infused with Divine Air. This is the body’s last experience.

At this point, one’s transformation into Christ is complete. Then, if it is one’s “time”, the senses shut down, and the organs cease to function.

Christians call this the Paschal Mystery, but it is really just the mystery of death. That she experienced this Paschal Mystery and lived on to talk and write about it to a lucky few **is** the message. Death is not a physical event. The true nature of death is spiritual. It is our spiritualization. As far as I know, she was the only person ever to have experienced the end of being a person and who lived on to tell about it. People who have near death experiences always return to consciousness. She never experienced consciousness after the death of self because she did not have a **near** death experience.

But in order for Jesus to be our Icon, first we have to catch up with him. Sometimes it seems like it’s almost a secret among contemplatives that the quickest path to God is through the will. Had you heard that before? It’s true. Bernadette came upon this knowledge as a young girl.

She just couldn’t figure out what all this “love of God” stuff was all about.

Was she supposed to love God as a parent, or spouse, or friend, or what? So, she asked the person she described as “the next thing to the Pope”, her father.

Her father replied with St. Teresa of Avila’s famous definition, “The love of God is the strong desire not to offend Him.” Young Bernadette didn’t see how she had ever offended God, or even how she could. She asked the question, “Who could possibly be less surprised at man’s sinning than the one who made it

possible?" For her, if there was anything she couldn't understand or accept, she'd throw it out. After she threw out "not to offend" she was left with, "The love of God is the strong desire...him."

And that's the will. The reason why it took nine months for her to enter completely into the unitive state is that she had a strong, resilient, defiant, stubborn will. For most people, once they realize at the depths of their being that they are nothing, and totally dependent on God for even existence, it takes far less time. So, in that respect, the spiritual life should be easier for us than it was for her. However, there is another difference between us and Bernadette.

She loved God. She trusted God completely. She said once in her four-disk set called "The Essence of Christian Mysticism", "It wouldn't bother me at all to go to hell. If God wills that I go to hell, I'm all for that!" She loved God because she saw/knew God. First, she fell in love with God in the ocean at an early age. She felt that God wanted her to see It before it disappeared. Later, she turned to God in the ocean to miraculously cure her from a debilitating bone disease at age nine. She received her Carmelite vocation at age 13. Remember, "She belonged to God before she belonged to this world!"? That's how her father described her birth.

And love is in the will. It's literally up to you. (Choose wisely friend.)

It took nine months in Mary's womb for universal human nature to leave its glorious estate in God and take on bodily senses. Then it took another nine months to take on as much consciousness as necessary to function in the world (the unitive state). Eventually, we catch up with Jesus in the unitive state and go the rest of the Journey, the rest of the Way, with him even if he is not our model and guide as he certainly was not for her. She said that, in each of her major spiritual revelations, Christ (not Jesus) was there to verify her experience and help her understand it. Why would God reveal to humanity the path each of us is to take with, as Irenaeus said, his "instrument" Jesus?

It is precisely because words do **not** suffice to give to the human heart the certitude it longs for that God **manifested** the Truth. God **showed** us "The Way" and didn't just tell us about it. This is the essence of what the word revelation means. It is a showing, not a telling. A revelation of God is not understood with words, but in one's bones. Unlike concepts, there can be no

doubt because the Truth is **in** the revelation. It is as if God is saying, "If you really want to see me, stop looking. It's what you are."

The revelation of Christ did not end with the birth of Jesus. God continued to reveal what it means to be human through the man Jesus all the way through Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. Those events were not just for Jesus, but were a revelation for us **all**. Pentecost is knowing the Logos from the inside out. It is having the mind of Christ, and not one's "own" mind.

He had to manifest what we will one day experience. We experience the journey as consciousness, He manifested the journey of consciousness because that's what it means to be human. Hence, he was "the Way". Bernadette points out that it would be **impossible** for any of us to relive his human **physical** experiences. What we are destined to recapitulate are his **spiritual** experiences. We experience these things while he was those things (human nature in life, death, and beyond).

Human nature took on, or as Duns Scotus would say "condensed" from a "what" to a "who" only insofar as it was necessary, and no farther. This means Jesus had to be born with some sense of self just to get around in the world. But he did not need to develop an ego and therefore probably never did. This is a huge difference between him and us. We develop ego's. There is nothing inherently bad, sinful, or evil about the ego. It is the seat of the will and can be a tremendous powerhouse for good in the world. However, Bernadette points out, it is unstable and also gives rise to all the evil we find in the world. So it is essentially a fickle and immature state.

We don't like to believe that we are in an unstable and immature state. It takes tremendous humility and courage to admit that one is a spiritual infant. We are all spiritual infants until we enter the unitive state and our will is united to God's in an irrevocable way. Only then can we truly live fearlessly because we know that no one can take away the precious presence of God within and, by possessing God, we possess all.

One of the things Bernadette said about the unitive state that I am not sure I agree with⁴³ is this idea of its irrevocability. She saw coming to the unitive state as God's pledge that we can never again fall into sin. We are thereby "confirmed in grace." She said we can have glimpses of future states of consciousness (and even no-consciousness) but these are just glimpses, and not the real thing. I guess it depends on how long a glimpse lasts. For myself, I was brought into the unitive state for at least eight hours while at a Zen

⁴³ Recall, she was not my guru.

Buddhist monastery when I was 21. I, too, identified with Jesus in that moment. However, there was something about the activity of the subconscious mind during the process of falling asleep⁴⁴ that eventually brought the ego back. Maybe somehow the conscious mind was non dual, had perfect faith, was integrated while the subconscious mind was still dual, not completely trusting, or had some integration left. I don't know. I watched the ego come and go for a while before falling asleep. I woke up the next morning once again with an ego but nevertheless hitchhiked back to San Francisco believing that I had learned all Buddhism had to teach.⁴⁴

My only point in mentioning this experience is this: Besides certainty about my oneness with God, there was certainty that it was with **this** consciousness that each and every human being was meant to live on this planet. It was the state of a fully mature, fully human person. In the absence of an ego there is a tremendous sense of oneness, peace, security, and joy. I felt I had "caught up" with Jesus.⁴⁵

Bernadette pointed out that, until this state becomes ordinary consciousness and the "bliss" wears off, it is so delightful that many people mistakenly believe it is the end of the journey. However, according to Bernadette, it is only the midway point to the Beatific Vision. Her calling it the halfway point is not really fair. We were not really built to bear the Beatific Vision this side of the grave. Bernadette posits that it is precisely this vision of God that is incompatible with continued earthly existence and the reason for death.

Maybe it was her enormous will to see God that made her unsatisfied with the accepted idea of "see God and die." Instead, she wanted to see God and live!⁴⁶ She was willing to cooperate with all the difficult circumstances necessary to prepare her to be carried, swept up, into the Glory of God without missing a beat. In fact, you could almost say she loved God so much that she spent her entire life revolting against the idea "see God and die" or (as she was told by her mother) "you have to die to go to Heaven." Both are wrong physically, but correct spiritually. She wanted to survive the Beatific Vision and did physically, but not spiritually.

So, for exceptional souls like hers, she can call the unitive state the halfway point, but, for the rest of us we would do well to arrive there. Life on earth would be a paradise if everyone was in the unitive state. It would be the

44

1:00- 2:00
a.m.

44 |

was wrong.

⁴⁵ Today, I find myself with A LOT of catching up to do!

⁴⁶ In fact, she did see the Transcendent for a few seconds in the woods and live.

garden of Eden all over again. Adam and Eve and all of humanity were created “theocentric” or God-centered. They covered this image, and we continue to cover up this image, with self-seeking. When we finally arrive at the unitive state we have caught up with Jesus (and all “enlightened” beings). Just as he sought nothing for himself (didn’t even have a place to lay his head) neither will we seek for anything for ourselves. We will only seek the glory of God and our neighbor.

Perhaps one reason why Jesus was born in the unitive state was to reveal that it is the essence of man that is united to God and not what is non-essential. Experientially he knew God to be the source of his life and being. He was one with God in his essence. When we come to the unitive state we have the same experiential knowledge. Just as he was free to create his own person and personality and ultimately hand it all over to God, so are we. (If personality comes from the person, how do you get a human personality from a Divine Person? They have nothing in common!) The abiding anguish of Bernadette's life was her inability to offer to God anything near in quantity or quality that which she had received from God. Showered by graces from an early age, she found herself in the unhappy position of not being able to return love for love. Although once she entered Carmel at age 15 she was able to sacrifice the ability to ever again visit the beloved sea (which she describes as the love of her life), it was paltry in comparison to the gifts she had been given. To repay love for love was a constant desire of hers, even after coming to the unitive state. This idea that love demands justice was the key for her going from the unitive state to the state beyond union. She realized that there was some enjoyment of the unitive state for herself so she resolved to sacrifice even that spiritual joy, and aspired to live in naked faith with no spiritual consolations or “favors.” This idea came to her after contemplating the kenosis (self-emptying) on the part of the *Logos* to become a “who”.⁴⁷

There are actually two Kenosis’, each going in opposite

directions. First, is the *Logos*’ divestment of God's dimension of existence (which is beyond self) to become a conscious being. The end result of this divestment was the person Jesus born in the unitive state. Jesus did not undergo this kenosis, but universal human nature which God united to Itself did. Second is our divestment of self to arrive at God's dimension of existence (which is beyond self). Bernadette experienced both. First, she experienced her divestment of self. Then she experienced what it must have been like for the *Logos* to divest itself of the divine condition to be in this world. She describes this event as “God awful” because no human person experiences it. It took her nine months (coincidence?) to acclimate to the Resurrected state after coming to the Ascended state.

⁴⁷ Ultimately, it probably hurts less to use up a self, than it does to take one on.

As we have seen, it also took her nine months to acclimate to the Resurrected state after the no-self event. That's how long it took for all vestiges of consciousness to fall away completely and forever. (However, it took her ten years to acclimate completely.)

The second divestment (our way up) is written about in spiritual literature the world over. What is missing in that literature, however, is an exploration of the further self-emptying that is required after one comes to the unitive state and before one participates in God's dimension of existence. That's why she wrote her books. The account was missing in contemplative literature. When we come to the unitive state we have only caught up with Jesus. The journey is not yet "finished".

Jesus demonstrated and lived what we will experience. Just as it went for him, so it will go for each of us. Only once we have an experiential awareness that God is our true being can we really afford to be fully human. This is because once we have God as our center no one can give us anything (or take away anything) that really matters. Because of this, even in trials and tribulations, we can have joy. We are not afraid of losing anything that anyone can take from us. We realize that the only things we truly possess are the things no one can take. We can finally live with courage.

Bernadette was saying that the crucifixion has been universally misunderstood. It was never about atoning for sins in the first place. It was a showing of what will happen for each of us after the end of consciousness. If she was right, then maybe she really **did** know how long the Kenosis takes based on personal experience. If she was wrong, and God really is a "big fat meanie ogre", then she was probably off her rocker, or had Alzheimer's⁴⁸. Let's see what the early Church Fathers said about salvation. (The Mothers were contributing in their own beautiful way.)

Chapter 4 - What the fathers said about salvation:

"Of what does salvation consist?" or, "What does it mean to be saved?" (Is it just faith, or faith and good works, or some third option?) We could look to St. Irenaeus: "The purpose of the Incarnation was man's deification." The motto of all the Fathers was, "Salvation is transformation."

As to why there is even any question about this, apparently Maximus the Confessor wondered the same thing: "If the dogma of 'salvation as deification' belongs to the mystery of the faith of the Church, why was it not included with the other dogmas in the symbols⁴⁹ expounding the pure faith of Christians

⁴⁸ She wasn't and didn't. But you are entitled to your own opinion.

⁴⁹ This is shorthand for "symbols of faith" or creeds.

composed by our holy and blessed fathers?" Salvation consists in neither faith alone, nor faith and good works, but in transformation into Christ. The Fathers called this deification. As to how this deification happens, Maximus tells us that it is through self-emptying - Deification "demands the kenosis and self-emptying of the adopted sons in order to lay hold of the divine **to the same degree** as that to which the *Logos* of God truly became man." So, the self-emptying on the part of the *Logos* was not any greater than the self-emptying required of each of us - total and complete. There is, however, a major difference in the direction of the movement. The *Logos* went from being a universal "what" to a

particular "who", while we go from being a particular "who", to the universal "what".

So what, exactly, is "saved" in the incarnation? Is it the person or the nature? We can look to Gregory of Nazianzus (329-290AD): "what God did not assume in the Incarnation, God does not save" and also, "in Christ we have two 'what's', not two 'who's', two 'I am's or 'two persons'." The implication should be obvious to anyone with their thinking cap on. God did not assume any "who's" therefore none are "saved". Why would you? **What** we are is enough.

The reason why salvation consists in transformation into Christ is that sin is its own punishment and virtue is its own reward. So, to be "saved from sin" is to be saved from yourself. Consciousness is responsible for all the sin and evil in the world. We are always already forgiven by God but at some point (for God's sake!) we have to go beyond this constant need to be forgiven. This happens in a big way when the Divine Christ takes over our ego and the energy required to sin is no longer present. It happens in a complete or final way when there is no longer any separation of any kind between God and man. For most people this happens at death. Jesus' consciousness had to die to manifest for us that our consciousness has to die.

Does man's nature have the potential to be Christ? We could look to Duns Scotus (1266-1308): "Christ's human nature is the same as every other human nature. Christ's human nature has a passive potency for assumption. The passive potencies and liabilities of a nature are essential features of it, not accidental features. The passive potency for assumption had by Christ's human nature is thus essential and therefore shared by all human natures." By "assumption" here, Duns Scotus means our being united to God. Because we share the same nature, Jesus was revealing that we all have the potential to become Christ. Jesus was showing what our human nature is capable of.

So what are we becoming? St. Irenaeus said, "On account of His infinite love he became **what** we are, in order that he might make us **what** he himself is" and "Thus we must become that of which we are only now but an image". The

image is the oneness between God and man. Notice Irenaeus does not talk about becoming **who** we are so we can become **who** he is. What we are is a mystery and **what** we are becoming is "**what** he himself **is**".

When we are thinking about **who** or **what** is saved, we might remember Theodore the Studite (759-826): "For Christ did not become a mere man, nor is it orthodox to say that he assumed a particular man, but rather, that He assumed man-in-general, or the whole human nature." Remember, what was not assumed was not saved and God did not assume any particular person. Jesus was not God but the **instrument** God used to reveal the eternal Christ which Jesus became, and which all are becoming. Theodore is merely restating what Cyril had said a few centuries before. While this was the understanding of the Church for centuries, today it seems radical and new.

Still think that our transformation into Christ is a radically new idea? Here's Methodius (d.311): "Each individual must reproduce what took place in Christ, each must die to his former life and receive the Logos in himself, thus Christians are so many Christs, or rather they are but one Christ for the Logos unites itself with them all". Salvation consists of a radical transformation of our nature.

There is also a transformation of the person, but no person becomes the Logos' human nature. In regards individuality and personhood, here is what St. Maximus the Confessor has to say, "Loss of individual personhood in union with God" and "Having God through prayer as its mystical and only Father by grace, the soul will center on the oneness of its hidden being by a distraction from all things, and it will experience, or rather, know divine things, all the more as it **does not want to be its own**, or able to be recognized from, or by itself, or anyone else's, but only all of God, who takes it up becomingly and fittingly as only He can, penetrating it completely **without passion** and deifying all of it and transforming it unchangeably to Himself." How many sermons have you heard about being transformed unchangeably into God? My guess is none. Notice not only the idea of change in ownership, but also **how** it is done - without passion. In other words, there is nothing in the process of transformation for the self.

How is Christ both the Alpha and Omega? Here is Maximus again, "As Creator, the Logos stands at the beginning of creation, and as the incarnate Christ, He stands as its end when all things will exist not only through Him but in Him. In order to be in Christ, creation had to be assumed by God, made God's **own**, this is the final glorification of man". This is (partly) why our transformation into Christ (through the Eucharist) is a recapitulation of the Incarnation. We are being made "God's **own**" just as Jesus was.

If all of this seems strange, new, or different it is because we have been handed a watered-down version of Christianity unknown to the early fathers. As Bernadette said, "We're gonna have a whole new understanding of Christianity once we get it right!"⁵⁰

Chapter 5 - If Christ is not a "who", what is Christ?

Bernadette states on page 41 of The Real Christ that her book is not a commentary on the Fathers. Many people⁵¹ like to quote this or that Church Father as support for their particular theological ax to grind. This is not difficult because, like quoting the "inerrant" authority of scripture,⁵² there is so much diversity in their thought that you can find some Father to back up almost any view of Christ. Bernadette lists ten different ancient views of Christ on page 101 of The Real Christ. What follows are quotes that she uses that support her view. I give them here because they are beautiful and, given how new Bernadette's thoughts seem to be, surprisingly numerous.

What did the Logos assume in the Incarnation? Here is Cyril of Alexandria (346-444): "The Logos did not assume some particular human being, but universal man, or universal human nature, yet a nature that appeared as an individual." God did not assume **a** man, but Man.

Along similar lines she quotes Gregory of Nyssa (335-394): "By becoming exactly what we are, He united the human race through Himself to God." Notice that according to this Gregory (and all the Cappadocian Fathers), God did **not** unite Itself to "**who**" we are, but to "**what**" we are.

Bernadette posited that the Fathers may have been "talking past one another". She quotes Hilary of Poitiers (300-367) and calls this the theological gem of all time: "It is one thing that he was God before he was man, another that he was man and God, and another that after being man and God, he was perfect man and perfect God. Do not then confuse the time and natures in the mystery of the dispensation, for according to the attributes of his different natures, he must speak of himself in relation to the mystery of his humanity in one way **before** his birth, in another **while** he was yet to die, and in another as **eternal**". Cyril was basing his Christology on the **third** phase of Christ- after the Ascension - while Nestorius was basing his on the **second** phase of Christ- God and Man.

⁵⁰ In four DVD series called, "The Essence of Christian Mysticism".

⁵¹ Seminarians especially

⁵² The appeal to authority is the weakest of all philosophical arguments.

This is why Cyril was stymied by Nestorius' question: "How can you have a complete human being who is not a human person?" So Cyril called a council, made sure that it started before many of the representatives of Nestorius' Antiochian view could arrive, denounced Nestorius, and no one has ever stood up for the full humanity of Jesus ever since for fear of getting the "Nestorian treatment."

So if Christ is not a "who", what is Christ? Christ is the oneness of all of God with all of humanity in three different ways and at three different times.

First, before Jesus we have the Divine *Logos* uniting Itself with man's common human nature or essence. God and man are both mysteries, so this oneness is therefore a mystery. The form of God, from which come multiple forms, becomes one with the form of Man. The form of Man, therefore, begins to show itself. This is called the Incarnation.

Second, we have the revelation or manifestation of the Incarnation. This is called Jesus. It is only because the *Logos* has a connection to matter **and** that human nature is an inseparable union of matter and spirit that this was even **possible**. So that humanity could see this oneness, it was manifested as a particular individual (not person)⁵³. Jesus created his own person **because** he was the manifestation of what it means to be fully human.

By uniting this flesh to itself, the *Logos* "begot" it (because of the difference between Infinite and finite existence). The Spirit was united to his soul (actually created it, just like ours). The Transcendent was united to the ground of his being (just like ours). So with Jesus we have the visual manifestation of what it looks like for the form of man to be united to the form of God.

"Begotten not made" refers to Jesus, not to Christ. It's pointing out the difference between how he came to be (the miracle created from Itself), and how we came to be (made by our parents). Other than that, as the form of man, he was identical to us.

Jesus himself was not Christ. He was the manifestation of humanity's spiritual oneness with God. That's why he demonstrates how our spiritual life goes. His

⁵³ I know that is confusing. That is why Bernadette has an entire chapter devoted to this distinction in her final masterpiece.

oneness with God was Christ just as our oneness with God is Christ. Jesus became Christ when he died because Christ is a universal and, to become a universal, one has to stop being an individual.

Thirdly, we have the risen, ascended, glorified Christ. This is the *Logos* (the form of God) eternally united to the formless Transcendent and Holy Spirit. This is the Eucharist. This is the oneness of the manifest with the unmanifest. This is an impersonal oneness and it is revealed with the Ascension because the historical Christ had to “leave” in order for the eternal Christ to be revealed.

Those are the distinctions St. Hilary asks us to make when thinking and speaking about the historical Christ. Today, however, there is only the Earthly Christ, which is the oneness of the form of God (the *Logos*) with the form of Man (in the unitive state), and the Heavenly Christ which is the oneness of the form of God (the *Logos*) with the Formless God (in the Eucharist). The Earthly Christ is what we are becoming on earth. The Heavenly Christ is what we will be after death. It's the same thing just in two different dimensions of existence. One is subjective and personal. The other is objective and impersonal. There are not multiple Christs. There is one Christ which is the eternal oneness of God and Man, the Transcendent and one's true self, the formless and form, heavenly existence and earthly existence, universal and particular, unmanifest and manifest, uncreated and created, infinite and finite, immutable and mutable, and in the distance between the sacred and the profane, it is called laughter.

Christ is not one, and not two. Christ is a “what” and not a “who.” Christ is not just nondual but nonduality.⁵⁴

Why does all this seem so new and different? Why does it seem confusing? Christ is simple, but it has been made confusing. Christianity got way off track pretty early on. The entire first half of [The Real Christ](#) traces this history of disastrous wrong turns. It's a great read if you are into the history of ideas. Basically, the Fathers wanted to be faithful to the tradition they had received. They wanted to stick with traditional terminology. There were linguistic and cultural misunderstandings. There were also egos looking for power or prestige that got involved.

If you think we should look to Church Councils and their ability to discern the truth of Christ in peace, you might want to listen to Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390): “To tell you plainly, I am determined to fly from every convention of bishops, for I never yet saw a council that ended happily. Instead of lessening, they invariably augmented the mischief. The passion for victory and the lust of

⁵⁴ This should not be understood in a Buddhist sense.

power are not to be described in words. One present as judge, will much more readily catch the infection from others than be able to restrain it in them. For this reason, I must conclude that the only security of one's peace and virtue is in retirement." When the saints flee the building, who is left to decide what the "truth" is? What role could political considerations have played?

Why did the Fathers stick to traditional terminology? Let's listen to Gregory of Nazianzus: "For those whose faith in God is pure, there is no greater stimulus to unanimity than using the same words when we speak of Him, nor is anything more conducive to division than disagreement on this score." Along the same lines we could look to Irenaeus (125-202): who said that traditional terms were accepted "as a formality and out of respect for tradition".

Another major wrong turn was equating the terms hypostasis and person. They never meant the same thing, and they still don't. Hypostasis meant the substance underlying the thing. Person is a property of nature and refers to the agent that owns something in Roman law. Once person became a theologically acceptable term, it was used more frequently with completely disastrous effects. The problem with the term "person" as applied to God is that the mind cannot think of a meaning for the term that is not analogous to human persons. Of course, God is nothing like a human person yet we continue to use the term "person" anyway.

Why did the Fathers use personified Biblical language? In her final book, she quotes St. Augustine (454-430): [It] "was the language of analogy and an accommodation to the childish understanding of men..." He says that we use the terms Father and Son due to a "deficiency in human language". Unfortunately, this continued use of personification in art and language has done much to perpetuate "the childish understanding of men".

Should we hold onto Scripture for the Truth? Here's Maximus the Confessor (580-662): "It is necessary that one who seeks God in a religious way never hold on to the 'letter' lest he mistakenly understand things said **about** God for God Himself. In this case we are unwisely satisfied with the **words of scripture in place of the Logos**, and the *Logos* slips out of mind while we thought by holding on to his garments (visible things) we could possess the incorporeal *Logos*, **thus mistakenly worship the creature instead of the Creator**". We must be careful where we place our attention. Let us direct our attention towards the *Logos* and what the Fathers said about it because the day we lost our understanding of the *Logos* was the same day we lost the ability to understand Christ.

There are no lines in organic nature. Even the horizon is curved. Yet the mind needs to distinguish, categorize, and concretize in order to understand. This is why an appreciation of the *Logos* is crucial, because it is God united to nature. Yet, we can't put our hands on it, or see it. A new vocabulary for the new Christology might use organic words. We might think of man as a fleeting flowering of consciousness. The flower is not separate from the branch. Is the stem of the apple part of the tree, or the apple? Can you define an organism without simultaneously defining its environment?

We sometimes think of the Incarnation as some cataclysmic lightning bolt that forever changed the human landscape. Might we call it instead an "embracing" of all that it means to be human. Can we agree with Alan Watts when he says that the earth "peoples" in the same way that an apple tree "apples"? Was what happened in Mary's womb, a "sprouting"?

I like the flower analogy. Think of people like flowers on a flowering tree. These flowers are all different. Because they have conscious free will, they can choose to hide and remain closed, or they can choose to open up to the sun, to strain towards the sun, to smell as sweetly as they can. In the end, they will all die and fall off. But some will have been beautiful, and others not. Perhaps we could say the flower becomes "Christ" when it realizes that, while it looks very different from the branch, it has never been anything other than an extension of the branch.