

Chapter 2

Jesus: Facts, Fictions, and the Eternal Truth

There are still many Christian-identified persons who insist that every sentence about Jesus in the Bible is an historical fact. On the other hand, there are a few quite serious and thoughtful persons in contemporary culture who claim that Jesus is pure fiction, a product of religious imagination, requiring the assumption of no historical, factual kernel whatsoever. The historical truth, I firmly believe, is somewhere between these two extremes.

Jesus, I assume, was an historical figure, part of a particular historical development. He lived an actual life and his living and dying were central to some important historical results--namely, the emergence of a community of people who remembered him as the all-determining reorientation of their lives.

If, however, we are to understand both the historical nature of Jesus and the theological interpretations of him created by the early church, we must give up every insistence that each and every sentence of the Bible is an historical fact, channeled to its writers from some divine realm. This view is sometimes called "the literal inspiration of the Bible." It is not a biblical view, it is a view that came into being in our modern scientific age to protect the Bible from being dismissed. While this aim of protecting the Bible from complete dismissal may have been appropriate, the means used--"the literal inspiration of the Bible"--was heretical, unbiblical, and thoroughly misleading in hundreds of ways.

A religious breakthrough, of any kind, begins with the fire of an actual experience of the living. Awesome reality of a human relationship with the Infinite. Then, in order to communicate that fire, the Spirit breakthrough is put into human words--into sayings, stories, doctrines, or written books. As Henri Bergson put it "A doctrine which is but a doctrine has a poor chance indeed of giving birth to the glowing enthusiasm, the illumination, the faith that moves mountains. But grant this fierce glow, and the molten matter will easily run into the mold of a doctrine, or even become that doctrine as it solidifies."¹ Only when we are clear about this order of development for any and

all religious expressions, can we hope to become clear about the complexity of the Jesus figure in the New Testament.

1. Jesus: The Person of History and the Literary Creation

I have arrived at my present beliefs about the historical actuality of a person named "Jesus" through the methods of modern science. An actual historical existence of the person Jesus is, for me, the most plausible and probable explanation of the historical records we possess. But such truth, like all scientific truth, is approximate and changeable.

As members of modern culture, we are all immersed in the scientific mode of truth seeking. We can no more escape our scientific culture than we can jump out of our own skins. Science has proved to us, by its enormous results in our practical lives, that it has veracity. Yet very few of us deeply understand the nature of science nor the limitations of scientific wisdom. Many of us simply assume that truth-seeking and scientific truth-seeking are the same thing. Another large number of us attempt to reject scientific truth-seeking (or part of it) in order to maintain some authoritative dogma. And a few of us even attempt to reject scientific truth-seeking entirely, viewing it as some kind of enemy.

But thinking scientifically is not, in itself, evil. Doing science is not, in itself, an estrangement, though many of our relationships with science and our uses of science are estranged. Scientific thinking, in its pure form, is simply a sophisticated elaboration of one aspect of the natural capacities of the human mind. We can no more reject it entirely than we can reject thinking itself.

Furthermore, if we understand scientific truth carefully, we can see that it does not conflict with the sort of truth that good religion is seeking and expressing. So, in order to be fully clear about the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, we must, strange as this may seem, clarify the essence of scientific truth. I want to begin this clarification with some precise definitions of the elementary concept, "fact." A fact is not simply a kernel of thereness. A fact is a formulation of the human mind. And there are two kinds of facts: experimental facts and historical facts.

An experimental fact is a formulation of the human mind that is capable of repeatable empirical experiments to establish its veracity.

¹ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1935) page 238

For example, here is one such formulation: if two objects of different mass are dropped from a high place (and air resistance is not a factor), they will accelerate in velocity at the same rate. This sentence defines an experiment that can be performed again and again. If through more careful measurements we were able to conduct experiments that contradicted this statement, then the statement would no longer be a fact. **An experimental fact is a statement that can be experimentally tested and has not yet been contradicted by an experiment.**

An historical fact is also a formulation of the human mind, but in this case it is not capable of repeatable empirical experiments. An historical fact is assumed to have occurred once and only once and cannot be repeated. The “data” for establishing the veracity of an historical fact are the historical records of human beings and the physical artifacts that still remain in present time. What can be repeated is not the historical event itself, but the rational examination of all these records. **What establishes the veracity of an historical fact is the plausibility and also the probability of its occurrence based on its rendering these existing records meaningful in terms of general scientific knowledge.**

Now in terms of Jesus, this means that the historical truth about Jesus is an unending process of research. This historical truth, like all historical truth, is some formulation by some human mind of statements whose plausibility and probability are supported by objective examination of the records. These records include all the records we have about that period of time; but if Jesus is our focus, the most important historical records we have are the writings of the New Testament.

The writings of the New Testament are counted as historical records not because they are Christian Scripture, but because they exist as actual records of actual people. Relative to their historical veracity, modern science approaches the writings of the New Testament in the same manner as it would approach the writings of Homer or anyone else.

Now let me illustrate the importance of all this with a particular passage of New Testament writing. The following is the New English translation of Mark 9:2-8:

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain where they were alone; and in their presence he was transfigured; his clothes became dazzling

white, with a whiteness no bleacher on earth could equal. They saw Elijah appear, and Moses with him, and there they were, conversing with Jesus. Then Peter spoke: ‘Rabbi,’ he said, ‘how good it is that we are here! Shall we make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah? (For he did not know what to say; they were so terrified.) Then a cloud appeared, casting its shadow over them, and out of the cloud came a voice: ‘This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him.’ And now suddenly, when they looked around, there was nobody to be seen but Jesus alone with themselves.

Now what are the historical facts here and what is religious fiction? By “religious fiction” I do not mean “worthless,” for I or you might count a particular religious fiction and its meaning as far more important than the particular historical facts and their meaning. The facts we might also count as important: the facts may even be important for understanding the religious fiction and its meaning.

First of all, one historical fact probably is that this entire story was written after the death of Jesus to describe how the person of Jesus had been transfigured in the view of the early church. Quite probably, there never was an historical event in which Jesus’ clothes actually became ethereally white and in which a voice was acoustically heard speaking from a cloud.

On the other hand, it is quite probable that there actually was a man named Jesus who perhaps did have disciples with names like Peter, James, and John. It is also probable that these disciples had “religious experiences” (if not before, certainly after the death of Jesus) that had to do with the relationship of Jesus to Moses and Elijah, and the relationship of Jesus to the God that Moses and Elijah worshiped. Further, it is quite probable that these disciples and the community which they founded became clear (as this passage expresses) that their “religious experience” of Jesus contained a huge paradox. On the one hand, Jesus was dazzling--dazzling with the same dazzle that made Moses and Elijah dazzle. The Awesome Wholeness of Being was filling the eyes and ears of these disciples’ inner beings with Awe, and this Awe expressed an overwhelming affirmation of the person, Jesus. And yet, on the other hand, “when they looked around, there was nobody to be seen but Jesus alone with themselves.” There was just Jesus! Yet at the same time, there was present that Awesome Final Finality that fills us with Awe and provides us with a compelling memory that is almost inexpressible to our companions.

So did this whole scene happen? Well, in one sense, no, the story is fiction. But in another sense, yes, it did happen. This piece of fiction expresses well a religious experience that did actually take place in history--if not in the lives of Peter, James, and John, certainly in the life of whoever it was who wrote this story. Even more important, this religious experience might take place in your life and in my life.

A strict scientific positivist might argue that no religious experience can be the content of an historical fact. And, of course, it is true that a happening of Awe is a very personal experience that is only plausible to someone who has also had that experience. So a happening of Awe cannot be historically verified, if we insist that it be made plausible in the context of a strictly objective sort of scientific thinking. So in terms of the very strict standards of scientific objectivity, any experience of Awe would have to be dismissed as some sort of "excess" unfit to be honored with the designation of scientific fact.

But from my or your perspective as a Spirit person, history can be viewed as a history of Awe experiences. Even as we tolerate a history of human thought, we might tolerate a history of human Awe. And if we did, we would have to allow for the fact that human beings, living before the scientific era, used wildly unscientific poetry for expressing their experiences of Awe. Indeed, we who express our Awe today may also use wildly unscientific poetry to do so. Our task as historians could be conceived as attempting to understand these ancestors by translating the language of their Awe-experiences into the language we use today to talk about the very same Awe-experiences.

So looking at it from this perspective, it is quite plausible to me that the transfiguration of Jesus happened. But what actually happened was not some magical event constructed by modern, scientifically minded, biblical literalists. What happened was an Awe moment in which the historical person, Jesus, became for some of those who knew him an Awe event in which the whole scope of Awe and the place of Awe in human living was incredibly transfigured. This happening is not fiction only. It was an historical actuality that was expressed in religious fiction.

We can deal in a similar way with all the rest of the New Testament writings. Was the resurrection of Jesus an historical happening? Yes, certainly! It was perhaps the central happening in the lives of those who wrote the entire New Testament. But, like the transfiguration, it was an

Awe happening. We might even say that the transfiguration and the resurrection were the same Awe happening: two different ways of talking about the same experience. Historically speaking, the body that came out of the tomb of Jesus was a community of people who saw Jesus in a new light. Indeed, they even called themselves "the Body of Christ." The fact that the resurrection was an experience in which Jesus was seen in a new light is clearly told in the 24th chapter of Luke. If we simply read this chapter aloud to ourselves, expecting Awe to happen to us, we can get the point of this chapter. We can see with our own "Spirit eyes" what the resurrection was all about.

In this story, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, perhaps a woman, are leaving the scene of Jesus' crucifixion in a state of despair. According to the story, they have already heard tales about an empty tomb and Jesus being alive, but this has made no impression on them. Clearly, these two despairing disciples were not even interested in a resurrection that may or may not have happened to Jesus. Only when the resurrection was something that happened to them personally did "it" become an event worth remembering.

So here they are walking down the road in despair, "their faces drawn in misery," and some mysterious figure they do not even recognize begins to walk with them. In an almost jocular and nonchalant fashion this mystery figure gets them talking about what is bugging them. They express their grief in these poignant words, "But we were hoping that he (Jesus) was the one who was to come and set Israel free."

So then this mysterious figure, whom we, the readers, are told is Jesus himself, does a theological interpretation for them on the subject of suffering. The main point of this sermon was the claim that it was befitting for the Christ "the expected one" to suffer. It is almost like Jesus is asking these two, "Have you ever heard of a true prophet who did not suffer rejection?"

After this lecture on suffering, Luke, or whoever was the author of this story, inserts these words in his tale: "They were by now approaching the village to which they were going." Is this sentence just part of the tale or is Luke alluding to the Spirit destination he is about to describe? Contemplate these power packed words:

He (the mystery figure) gave the impression that he meant to go on further, but they stopped him with the words, "Do stay with us. It is

nearly evening and soon the day will be over.”

So he went indoors to stay with them. THEN IT HAPPENED! While he was sitting at table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other,

“Weren’t our hearts glowing (burning) while he was with us on the road and when he made the scriptures so plain to us?”

And they got to their feet without delay and turned back to Jerusalem.

They had just walked **SEVEN MILES** away from Jerusalem, from the scene of the crucifixion. But after **IT HAPPENED**, they walked back, without delay, at night fall, **SEVEN MILES** to the very place where their entire lives had come unraveled. We are left to assume that these two disciples joined that strange community of those who spent the rest of their lives celebrating rather than despairing over the fact that true Messiahs get rejected by a world that does not buy their sort of victory.

This envisionment by some of the followers of Jesus of “a crucified Messiah” is the happening called “the resurrection.” The happening has nothing whatsoever to do with the physical corpse of Jesus. The resurrection is a transformation in the lives of those who come to see Jesus, his life, and his death in a new light. “Jesus Christ” became the code name for this happening. This happening was an Awe happening, the sort of happening that kept happening to people for decades. It quite literally took decades for the resurrection happening to get “fleshed out” in the stories we now have about it. But even more important, the resurrection is a happening that still happens. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth into the Christ figure of all history is a happening that can happen to you or to me this very day.

Like the transfiguration and the resurrection, the virgin birth was another way to talk about the Awe-event called “Jesus Christ” in the lives of those who told and retold these stories. Who was it that was born of a virgin? In John’s gospel we are told that the virgin birth applies not only to Jesus, but to everyone who received him.

But to all who did receive him, to those who have yielded him their allegiance, he gave the right to become children of God, not born of any human stock, or by the fleshly desire of a human father, but the offspring of God himself.²

² See John 1: 12-13 See also my essay in *To Be or Not to Be a Christian*; “A Virgin Birth for Everyone.”

Now, what on earth does it mean for me personally to be “virgin born?” What on earth does it mean for me personally to have a vision of the resurrection of Jesus? What on earth does it mean for me to call Jesus, the Christ? What on earth does it mean for me personally to see Jesus dazzle in the presence of Moses and Elijah? What experiences of Awe in my own life are these New Testament Awe-stories talking about? If we will ask such questions, and ask them personally as questions about our own experience, then the entire New Testament will spring to life and answer our own questions in surprisingly vivid ways.

Furthermore, when we begin asking questions about our own Awe-experiences, we can respect the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as they deserve to be respected. They were astonishingly creative writers who were powerfully dealing with our most basic questions. We do not have to dismiss them as dogmatizers who destroyed the beauty of some pristine historical Jesus. We can see them as illuminators of the inner depth of Jesus and of the breakthrough of Spirit awareness that happened to those who knew him and followed him. We can give up insisting that the gospel writers were scientific biographers of Jesus or grieving over the fact that they were not. We can accept them, and those who preceded them, as elaborators of a breakthrough of Spirit--as solidifiers of a hot, living tradition. Strict, objective, scientific history could not possibly have been their ideal. They clearly violated our scientific and historical ideals, but their gospel-writing was experienced by them as an appropriate creativity inspired by an inward understanding of which they were powerfully certain.

What I find remarkable, when I stop to think about it, is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do preserve some fairly accurate historical facts in their literary creations. Oral memories and written notes on the sayings and deeds of Jesus were honored and incorporated by these writers. Even when a story is clearly fictitious, we can sense in its portrayal of Jesus a style of living that might have been true of the real human being, Jesus. Here is an example of the style of Jesus as portrayed by Luke:

And while he was still saying this, a woman in the crowd called out and said, “Oh what a blessing for a woman to have brought you into the world and nursed you!” But Jesus replied, “Yes, but a far greater blessing to hear the word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:27,28)

This blunt, quick, always challenging style may have been what the historical person, Jesus, was actually like. Anyhow, Luke apparently thought so.

On the other hand, when we read the Gospel of John, we experience this author exercising a liberty with the historical facts that is, to me, astonishing, indeed outlandish. The author of the Gospel of John is clearly not interested in the original style of the historical Jesus. His “gospel” is like a morality play in which his “Jesus” is a completely fictitious role, indeed, a melodramatic character in a coarsely staged drama. It is as if Jesus enters from stage left with some corny sign hanging around his neck. For example, read the ninth chapter of John with this picture in mind. Jesus has a sign hanging around his neck that says “The Light of the World.” He enters a scene in which the other people also have signs around their necks: “Blind Man,” “Religious Authority,” “Bewildered Disciple.” It is completely clear to me that the author of this gospel is intent on making theological points, rather than doing scientific biography. The historical facts, though he does incorporate some facts in his drama, are far, far from his concern.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not so outlandishly loose as John with what we would call “the historical facts,” but they were outlandish by modern standards. Without any guilt whatsoever, they elaborate a number of the sayings of Jesus for their preaching and community building purposes. They have him say things he clearly did not say. They also exaggerate the details of his wondrous healings, creating dramatic tales that have strong metaphorical meanings. They compose elaborate legends to match Old Testament passages. They fill in detailed conversations in their stories of Jesus’ death to spell out their theological points.

Mark’s gospel is perhaps the most restrained. He does not include any legends about Jesus’ birth or early childhood. He treats the messiahship of Jesus as a secret which was kept until after his death. What was probably true, historically speaking, was that the messiahship of Jesus was an interpretive development of the early church rather than part of the teachings of Jesus. But Mark seems to feel no restraint about doing theological interpretation rather than strict biography. For example, Mark includes symbolic allusions such as his use of the number 12. Twelve disciples are called. Twelve healing stories are told. One of them is of a woman with a 12 year flow of blood. Another is of a young girl

who is 12 years old. Obviously Mark is more interested in signaling to his readers that a new Israel is emerging than he is with historical accuracy on the age of some girl who was raised from a sleep that looked like death, or a death that looked like sleep. For Mark, it was Israel who had fallen into deathly sleep and it was Israel who was being raised up. ***From Mark’s perspective, which was clearly a Spirit angle of vision, this resurrection of Israel was already happening as Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee.*** Indeed, in the last chapter of Mark, some women go to the tomb of Jesus and find not Jesus but a young man in white who tells them Jesus is raised, and that they are to go and give this message to the disciples (who have all fled back to Galilee). “He is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.” But then Mark simply ends his gospel with these women fleeing in trembling Awe from the empty tomb of Jesus and not daring to say a word about this to anyone. The resurrection, like the messiahship, was a secret.

The original Mark included no sightings of the resurrected Jesus in his dramatic tale, yet clearly the resurrection (the resurrection of Jesus as the true Israel) was the secret truth within his whole story from beginning to end. Clearly Mark’s concern is to take the reader on a journey and, at the end of his story, to drop the reader into an abyss of Awe, into the true meaning of resurrection.

2. Jesus, his Model Prayer and the Kingdom of God

Contemporary New Testament scholars such as John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg have sought afresh to discern, through careful historical research, what can and can not be known about the historical Jesus. This summary by Borg is instructive.

1. The historical Jesus was a ***spirit person***, one of those figures in human history with an experiential awareness of the reality of God.
2. Jesus was a ***teacher of wisdom*** who regularly used the classic forms of wisdom speech (parables, and memorable short sayings known as aphorisms) to teach subversive and alternative wisdom.
3. Jesus was a ***social prophet***, similar to the classical prophets of ancient Israel. As such he criticized the elites (economic, political, and religious) of his time, was an advocate of an alternative social vision, and was often in conflict with authorities.

4. Jesus was a **movement founder** who brought into being a Jewish renewal or revitalization movement that challenged and shattered the social boundaries of his day, a movement that eventually became the early Christian church.³

I am especially interested in Borg's first point about Jesus being a spirit person. "Spirit person" is a very difficult category for contemporary people, for we have all been culturally conditioned in what Paul Tillich called "self-sufficient finitude," an attitude in which our direct experience of the Infinite is ignored. In the first two short books in this series, I illustrated the category "Spirit" quite carefully in terms of your and my actual contemporary experiences of Awe. These reflections are important for seeing clearly what it means to say that Jesus was a "Spirit person." Borg seems to imply that being a Spirit person is something occult or grandly unusual. But this implication seems to me to miss the main point. Jesus was not unusual. What was and is unusual is for any of us to be the "Jesus-being" or if you prefer, the "Buddha being" we actually are. But if I include this important reservation, I thoroughly agree with Borg; Jesus was a Spirit person, a person who lived his profoundly Awed existence in such a way that people were Awed wherever he went.

I want to illustrate this quality of Jesus by commenting on two elements of Jesus' teachings which can, almost without question, be included among those "facts" that were probably true of the historical Jesus. (1) He was a person of prayer who referred to God quite intimately as Abba, Papa, or Father. And (2) he was a religious teacher for whom the topic, "the Kingdom of God," was of primary importance. So what did prayer mean for Jesus and what did he mean by "the Kingdom of God"? In the remainder of this section, I intend to challenge scholars and non-scholars alike to consider more deeply these two primary topics.

In the popular view, Christian prayer includes believing in a two-story view of reality. By "two-story," I mean believing there literally is a heavenly **above** to our earthly **below**, that there literally is a **supernatural** realm that goes with or completes the ordinary **natural** realm, that there literally is a **spiritual** something that exists along with our **material** something.

Praying, in this context, means talking with or to a Supreme Being who lives in that second-story realm. So what would it mean to pray, if we assumed that the two-story view of reality is a metaphor--even an obsolete metaphor which was useful to Jesus, but is no longer useful to us?

When we propose to cease using two-story language in this century, we raise this question: Why was it appropriate for Jesus and the New Testament writers to use two-story language, but is no longer appropriate for us to do so? The key to answering this question resides in the word "literally." In the modern mindset, we tend to take everything literally. This is what the scientific age is all about: taking things literally. Literal truth and scientific truth are one and the same. For many people, Christian and non-Christian, it is hard to imagine that there really is some other kind of truth. A truth, expressed in religious metaphors, does not seem like truth to us. It seems like fiction, where fiction means untruth. At most, religious metaphors seem to express no more than subjective preferences which, we correctly believe, cannot be equated with "truth."

So in this modern scientific age, many conservative Christians feel constrained to take every sentence of the Christian Scriptures literally, and many other persons reject the whole of Christian Scriptures because they cannot, with integrity, take this language literally. Some Christian-identified persons thread their way between these two extremes, taking some things literally and interpreting other things metaphorically. Even these more liberal persons, however, quite often hold on to a literal Spiritual realm and a literal person-like God who dwells in that literal realm. Such basic beliefs seem too precious to be "merely" metaphorically true.

Our deepest truths, however, can only be expressed in metaphorical ways. Scientific wisdom can become part of our poetry, but strictly objective language, devoid of all poetic expression, cannot share our experiences of Awe. Furthermore, Awe-experiences are something more than expressions of our subjective preferences. Awe-experiences are actual events, yet this actuality of our Awe-experiences does not imply that these "unscientific" actualities indicate a second realm of reality alongside the ordinary realm. Rather, we have two ways of viewing the same **universe of Reality**--a profoundly inward and Awe-filled relatedness and an outward, literal, scientific viewpoint. Our personal, interior Awe-perspective on life cannot be fully expressed

³ Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995) page 30. For a further grasp of Jesus research, I also recommend John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). Also useful is Rudolf Bultmann's classic volume, *Jesus and the Word*.

without poetry, story, art, and religious metaphor. Experiences of profound Awe require language that we call metaphorical or mythic. Myth entails the odd or exaggerated use of imagery derived from our finite experiences, yet this finite imagery is used to share with each other our relationships with the Infinite--that mysterious Overallness that interpenetrates each and every event of our lives.

In the culture which pervaded when the New Testament was written, scientific literalism was not fully developed, as it is today. Furthermore, there was no pressure to say and understand everything literally. Metaphorical truth and literal truth were blended together in one fabric of meaning.

So here is my question to we modern Christians: When Jesus prayed, "Our Father who art in Heaven," did he believe that there literally is a heavenly realm in which a male Supreme Being dwells? While it seems we must answer, "Yes," the better answer is that Jesus could never have raised such a question. How difficult it is for us to grasp that such a question simply could not have come up for Jesus or for any of his contemporaries! While we must work to be clear

that the two-story metaphor is a metaphor, Jesus did not have to clarify that. Why? Because everyone sort of knew that metaphors were metaphors even though they never thought about it in the way we must think about it today. Jesus was clearly using the language customs of his time to talk about the basic experiences and choices of human existence. Therefore, in order to understand Jesus fully, we will need to translate his sayings from his two-story language into the metaphorical language we need to use today. Only in this way can we avoid confusion about what Jesus was talking about in his own life experience and in ours.

I want to illustrate all this by using a familiar piece of New Testament writing. In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus is seen teaching his followers about prayer and giving them this model prayer often referred to as "The Lord's Prayer." (I realize that some of the lines of this prayer may be creations of the early church rather than Jesus' own words, but I believe that this prayer is still a good window into what was very likely the theology of Jesus.)

The chart at the bottom of this page contains my effort to translate the familiar phrases of this

Translating The Model Prayer of Jesus

**from Two-story Metaphors that speak of the Infinite as Another World
into One-story Metaphors that see the Infinite shining through the finite**

Our Father who art in heaven,

Oh Infinite, enigmatic Wholeness, whom we trust like a small child trusts its parents,

Hallowed be Thy Name,

We request all who live to hold your reputation in Awe-filled respect.

Thy Kingdom Come,
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

May human society that expresses and obeys your Eternal presence, rather than flees from it, take place right here and right now, for such living is rooted in the essence of things.

Give us this day our daily bread,

We request from you all our daily needs.

And forgive us our debts
even as we also
have forgiven our debtors.

And we count on you to welcome us home in spite of all our flights into unreality, even as we welcome and wish well those who mistreat, ignore, and take from us.

And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.

And may our encounters with you not panic us to flee into further illusion, but rather rescue us from all unreality.

Matthew 6:9-13 RSV

GWM 1996

prayer from the two-story metaphorical language of the first century into the one-story metaphorical language we are learning to use in our era.

Obviously, my translation could be done differently--perhaps more accurately and fully, but I have thoroughly eliminated, in my rendering, any hint of a two-story metaphor and have used metaphors which are consistent with a one-story view of reality. When Jesus prayed "Thy kingdom come," he was using a popular metaphor "The Kingdom of God." This phrase was clearly central in the teachings of Jesus. In my translation of "Thy kingdom come." (line 3 of the chart), I have made some very important assumptions about what Jesus was talking about with this phrase. Let me spell those out.

The Kingdom of God was a religious metaphor constructed out of ordinary experience with earthly political entities. In that day, there were no democracies. And Jesus had probably never experienced a tribal society. He only knew civilizations, and civilizations were organized as kingdoms with male kings. So Jesus and his contemporaries used the metaphor of a "kingly God dwelling in heaven" as a way of referring to that Final Power which ruled all of nature and history--the coming and going of every civilization, every human being, every lily or sparrow. This was their assumed analogy: just as an earthly king rules over his kingdom, so the heavenly King rules over His kingdom. In this metaphor of a heavenly King, "His kingdom" means every natural being and every historical event.

This image of a sovereign God, a Male King, is difficult for contemporary people. Our democratic sensitivities fight against the image of King. Our feminine sensitivities fight against the image of a male ruler. It is difficult for us to recapture the glorious joy that members of ancient civilizations felt toward a good King. People today tend to equate sovereignty with an autocratic boss. They do not immediately understand that their full obedience to an Infinite sovereignty could result in the deepest experience of human freedom.

Furthermore, if we are trapped in literalism, we picture a literal Supreme Being and then ask questions like: how could this Supreme Being be all powerful and all loving at the same time when there is so much evil in the world? When we ask such a question, we are approaching the biblical discussion about Final Reality backwards. All the biblical writers had no doubt whatsoever that Some Power was sovereign over all of history and nature--that Some Power had created them and

delivered them from the slavery in Egypt and schooled them in modes of realistic living for hundreds of years. The question still remained: Did that sovereign Power love us, and if so, did that sovereign Power love us because we were good or in spite of the fact that we were rebellious from that sovereignty? So the image of a heavenly King was meaningful to them because they were preoccupied with their relationship to that clearly obvious All-power-fullness which they encountered in their daily lives.

So this is the **first meaning** of the phrase "the kingdom of God": **the All-powerful is our God--** that is, whatever it is that **is** "King," metaphorically speaking, of all nature and history, this Reality is the proper object for our worship.

A **second meaning** of "the kingdom of God," as this term appears in the sayings of Jesus, is a **transformation** in the life of an individual person. The kingdom can be said to **come** in a personal life. The root meaning of this transformation is that my or your specific life has been dislodged from its enthrallment with trusting our civilization, our technology, our intelligence, our charm, our hard work, or any other finite reality and now trusts instead the Infinitely dependable Oneness from which all these fragile finite realities come. In other words, using the New Testament metaphorical language, God, the real power of Reality has become my personal King, the Power I honor, respect, trust, and worship--the Power I am loyal to with all my mind, heart, will and strength.

Perhaps you remember the story of the wealthy, chief tax collector who climbed a tree to see Jesus. Jesus saw him up there, and must have smiled that this scoundrel felt such need to see him. Then Jesus, with his typical boldness, said, "Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, I must be your guest today." The bystanders muttered that he had gone to stay with a real sinner this time. But Zacchaeus said, "Look, sir, I will give half my property to the poor. And if I have swindled anybody out of anything I will pay him back four times as much." And Jesus says to him "Salvation (that is, the kingdom as personal transformation) has come to this house today!" (See Luke 19:1-10) The sign that Zacchaeus has entered the kingdom is this: he has accepted forgiveness and changed his life.

A **third meaning** of the kingdom of God is a **community** of people here on Earth who are constructing their patterns of life out of the experience of having made God sovereign in their

lives. In this third sense, the Kingdom of God can refer to the followers of Jesus, that is, to the Church. It can also refer to that social order which the whole human population needs to become.

A fair number of conservative Christians understand “the kingdom of God” as having almost nothing to do with human community in this world. In their view, the kingdom of God is a literal other-worldly society or place to which we might go after we die. Such a kingdom never “comes on Earth,” in any real sense. The only thing that comes now is hope for a happy hereafter.

But in Jesus’ mind, the kingdom actually comes on Earth. And he asks us to pray for it to come now. Such a request is synonymous with asking for God’s will to be done by all human beings. It is assumed that human beings are rebelling against the WAY LIFE IS and that there is no excuse for it. The WAY LIFE IS just IS. Furthermore, the WAY LIFE IS is like a Father whom we can fully trust. So trust God, and thus love God--which means: manifest on Earth compassion for every person and sparrow. Manifest the compassion that flows out of trusting the Power in power. Build human communities--culturally, economically, and politically--which manifest this compassion. In other words, for us to be the community of the kingdom of God here on Earth means loving God and neighbor and assisting all your neighbors to love God and all their neighbors.

The Kingdom of God can **come** to a social whole, and this coming is manifest in cultural, political, and economic functioning! For example, if we who comprise this rebellious industrial society would choose to limit ourselves in order to protect the other species of life and to honor the biosphere as a whole, preserving its integrity for all future generations of human and non-human life, then Jesus’ words to Zacchaeus would apply to us as a human society, “The kingdom has come to this house today!”

If our vast social maladies are the absence of the Kingdom of God, what is it that prevents this kingdom from coming? Jesus uses this strange metaphor: “the world is being ruled by Satan.”⁴ This is mythic talk. Satan is not a literal super-being in the realm next door. “Satan and his kingdom” are a way of talking about an all-pervading enthrallment operating in the lives of human beings. Rather than devote ourselves to

⁴ The phrase “deliver us from evil” in the RSV translation of the Lord’s prayer is translated in other more recent versions as “deliver us from the evil one.”

the all powerful Infinity that actually “rules” nature and history, we invest ourselves in devotion to the passing realm of finite possessions, status, cravings, and aversions. These superficial aspects of our lives trick us into believing that abundant life can be found through trust in these passing things. This is a lie: abundant life is found through trusting the way life really is. Every finite thing is passing and not to be trusted for our fulfillment. In the kingdom of Satan, death is the arch enemy because death threatens the finite realities we are trusting. In the Kingdom of God, Satan, not death, is the enemy: death is simply part of the way things are. When we do not see this and do not live from this truth, then Satan, the massive delusion, rules our lives.

But there is no excuse for this delusion. The kingdom of God is the essence of things. The kingdom of God is the way life was put together in the first place. In the end, the kingdom of God will unmask and destroy all delusion and return us to our real lives. So we can join Jesus in praying “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.” That is, “May human society that expresses and obeys your Eternal presence, rather than flees from it, take place right here and right now, for such living is rooted in the essence of things.” In our time, such society would reverse ecological devastation, reduce the gap between rich and poor, and all the other obvious violations of loving every neighbor.

Let me probe one more confusion. Some may feel that we are falling into a two-story way of thinking when we address the Infinite, enigmatic WAY IT IS in a personal way. But this need not be so--not if we know what we are saying--not if we are clear that we are not addressing a literal Supreme Being in heaven. So what does it mean to say “You” or “Thou” to that mysterious WAY IT IS which we confront in every natural and historical event? We need not be saying that this “Infinity” is a person in the same sense that each of us is a person. Our personhood is finite; we are facing the Infinite. An Infinite Person is not just one more person. An Infinite Person is a metaphor, a way of saying something about our relationship of trust toward the WAY IT IS. Calling this Wholeness “God” or “Thou” or “You” shapes our relationship to the WAY IT IS into a relationship of worship. Saying “O Infinite enigmatic Wholeness, whom we trust like a small child trusts its parents” is saying that we are willing to trust the WAY IT IS--that we are willing to trust being born, sustained, limited, and extinguished by the Infinite Determiner of our Destiny--that we are willing to trust being

deepened in freedom, trust, and love. If, in the gift of our lives and in the deepening of our lives, we trust that we are being loved by the WAY IT IS, then we can love this Wholeness, be loyal to this Wholeness with all our mind, heart, will, and strength.

Why would we want to do that? Why not? The opposite of trusting the WAY IT IS is fleeing from it, hating it, and, in the end, despairing over being in the power of this Wholeness. So, why not follow the lead of Jesus? Pray like this:

Oh Infinite, enigmatic Wholeness,
whom we trust like a small child trusts its parents,

We request all who live
to hold your reputation in Awe-filled respect.

And most important,
May human society that expresses and obeys
your Eternal presence, rather than flees from it,
take place right here and right now,
for such living is rooted in the essence of things.

O yes, I almost forgot,
We request from you all our daily needs.

And we count on you to welcome us home
in spite of all our flights into unreality,
even as we welcome and wish well those
who mistreat, ignore, and take from us.

And may our encounters with you not panic us
to flee into further illusion,
but rather rescue us from all unreality.

I think that is everything.
Amen

3. Jesus and the Inversion of the Christ symbol

Christ was not Jesus' last name. Christ is the Greek term for Messiah, which was a religious title, an interpretive meaning rooted in the popular mindset of the Jewish community of which Jesus was a member. The historical Jesus probably never referred to himself as the Messiah. This meaning was probably given to him after his death. However, Jesus did, apparently, see himself as part of the dawning kingdom of God. He probably used the strange phrase "the son of Adam" to refer to the advent of a humanity with which he clearly identified himself. So perhaps there were, after all, messianic overtones in all that he said and did. Apparently, many of his followers, certainly his most intimate disciples,

had messianic expectations relative to him, expectations which were disappointed by his early death.

The popular messianic expectations of Jesus' time apparently took one or the other of these two forms: (1) the advent of a military victory over the Roman oppression, and (2) the advent of a cosmic cataclysm that did away with all evil once and for all. In both of these views, the Messiah was seen as a sort of Superman who would lead us out of our finite human condition. This way of hoping for a Messiah is similar to a quite general attitude among human beings in every age and place: namely, expecting our real living to begin when we get past some problem situation. When I inherit some money, when I finish school, when I get a job, when I retire from my job, when I get married, when I get a divorce, when I have children, when the children leave home, then I will begin to truly and fully live my life. Such an attitude is clearly an estrangement from living life in the actual here and now.

Such a "messianic expectation" is quite the opposite of finding our Eternal Life now in the actual Awe we experience before the actual Awesome we now confront. Clearly, many people saw Jesus through the lens of messianic expectations of this "escapist" form: wanting out of their here and now situation.

The coming of the kingdom of God meant for Jesus, as it did for everyone in his culture, the coming of that messianic era long foretold by the prophets, but Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God pointedly contradicted the popular messianic expectations of his culture. The kingdom Jesus said was dawning was the very opposite of getting past some problem in our finite lives. The arrival of the kingdom in our lives meant the confession of our estrangements from our finite human condition. The arrival of the kingdom meant a reconciliation with the elemental human condition through that "Welcome Home" being offered to us by the Awesome Wholeness of Being. As depicted in the first three gospels, Jesus' relationship with his own disciples reached a crisis point for them when he spoke of his death. Apparently, even his closest disciples could not, in the beginning, imagine how someone could be the Messiah and yet be misunderstood and rejected by most people and put to an ignoble death by the leaders of their culture. A Messiah who did not win a tangible victory over evil was no Messiah.

So in all the ways that most people, then and now, expect a Messiah, Jesus was not a Messiah.

To his original disciples, Jesus' weak and disgraceful death indicated to them that not only was he not the Messiah but that their following of him had been a big mistake. All their hopes were frustrated. Their lives were left in total disarray. An echo of this profound disappointment was captured by Luke with this poignant sentence, "But we had been hoping that he was the one who was to come and set Israel free."

But Luke, of course, is writing from the perspective of one who believes that Jesus did indeed set Israel free. Luke is provoking us to consider an entirely new perspective on the meaning of liberating Israel. The liberation was not from finitude, but from our fantastic hopes of escaping finitude. This is what authentic life looks like: living our authentic finite lives and thereby assaulting the illusions of our culture and suffering the wrath of that estranged culture. Did not all the prophets suffer in this way? Was the Messiah to be an exception to this? Indeed, this is the real crux of the matter: blessed are you when you suffer persecution for living the Messianic liberation. This rejection by your estranged culture is one sign that you may indeed have been liberated from the common estrangements of the social herd and may indeed have made entry into the kingdom of God.

This Spirit dawning in the lives of Jesus' disciples was called "a resurrection appearance." That is, the resurrection mythology was created to express this Spirit dawning. The "resurrection" that is so often preached in contemporary pulpits on Easter Sunday is the exact opposite of this Spirit dawning. Easter after Easter, Sunday after Sunday, people are being told that there is some escape from our finite lives into some heavenly realm. This is clearly not the sort of resurrection experienced by those two disciples who walked away from Jerusalem toward the village of Emmaus. They experienced a complete overhaul of their Christ image which completely overhauled their expectations. With this loss of false expectations, they ceased to despair and returned to Jerusalem to pick up living their lives at *the same place* where they had despaired. This rescue from despair was the resurrection. This new vision of Jesus, this burning light that shown from the cross of Jesus, illuminated everything afresh.

The very same Jesus who was not the Messiah in terms of the popular expectations of being delivered from evil, was indeed the Messiah who had delivered them from the real evil. This not-Christ was the Christ! They saw that the true Christ was not a Superman, but simply a real

human person who delivers others not by the heroics of violently putting down evil, but by the heroics of revealing the real evil and forgiving the real evil through the weakness of being a finite being suffering at the hands of those being served.

The term "Messiah" had been associated with "the anointed one" or "the oil smeared one"--the King of the people of God. The first three Gospels play with this imagery in a most amazing fashion. When, in the gospel stories, the Roman authority, Pilot, asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews, Jesus does not deny it. In the view of the gospel writers, Jesus was the King of Jews, but in a quite different sense than anyone could see at first. In the story that the gospel writers told, the soldiers mocked Jesus, put a crown of thorns on his head. They put up a placard on his cross that read "The King of the Jews." Clearly, for these soldiers, all this was a cruel joke. But from the perspective of the gospel writers, there was an even deeper joke. This placard was true. What an Awe-filling irony! Jesus was indeed punished for being the "premiere leader of the true people of God." This was his crime! The anointed one had appeared, but was not recognized as such by those who rejected him.⁵

Perhaps the most outlandish story in the whole New Testament is this bit of obviously fictitious conversation that is said to have taken place as Jesus hung on the cross between two companions.

One of the criminals who hung there with him taunted him: "Are not you the Messiah? Save yourself, and us." But the other rebuked him, "Have you no fear of God? You are under the same sentence as he. For us it is plain justice; we are paying the price for our misdeeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come to your throne." He answered, "I tell you this: today you shall be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:39-43

What an image! ***The cross is the throne of the Messiah!*** This is Paradise: hanging on a cross (or on some other finite circumstance) in full consciousness that this here and now, this authentic finite existence is life and life abundant.

⁵ For a more extensive elaboration of this topic see my essays "Behold the Leader of the Vanguard!" and "Full-Bodied Resurrection" in *To Be or Not to Be a Christian*, Realistic Living Press: 1994

4. Jesus Christ as Healing Event and as the Picture of Health

The complexity of the Jesus Christ symbol--its full range of meanings as it appears in the New Testament--can only be sorted out when we notice that this symbol "Jesus Christ" is being used in two very different ways. On the one hand, "Jesus Christ" means an event that happens to someone, a transformative event which brings one from spirit death to Spirit life, from despair to trust, from hopelessness to hope, from bondage to freedom, from egoism to unconditional compassion for every other being.

On the other hand, "Jesus Christ" means the picture of Spirit health, the full stature of humanhood toward which we are moving if we are indeed submitting ourselves to being healed and healed and healed and healed. If we are moving from faith to faith to faith to faith we are moving toward being like Jesus Christ. Even if we have only begun to move in this direction, we can be said to be "in Christ"--in his "new or renewed humanity," in that authenticity of being human which he exemplifies.

This state of being "in Christ" is contrasted with the state of being "in Adam." "In Adam" is a symbol for spirit unhealth or sin. "In Adam" means a state of bondage rather than freedom, a state of egoism rather than love, a state of despair rather than trust, a state of finite hope that always disappoints rather than that enigmatic state of hope that does not disappoint.

The term "in Adam" needs to be clarified a bit further. The myth of Adam, as used in the New Testament, is the story of falling away from being "in Christ." That is right! Adam before the fall was "in Christ!" In other words, "in Christ" means being "in the humanity" we were "created" to be in the first place. The story of Adam is much more than a story about the origin of sin in the first humans. It is a story about an ongoing process of falling away that is taking place in the life of every human being. I am Adam. I am Eve. You are Adam. You are Eve. The fall did, of course, take place long ago, as long ago as we want to go back. But the fall also takes place every day--every day when a human being refuses, or acquiesces, or just oozes into not being the human being he or she essentially is.

Some evolutionary-minded modern writers have attempted to interpret the Adam and Eve myth as expressing an advance in consciousness. They picture Adam and Eve before the fall as in

some way preconscious or unconscious. So when they eat of this "tree of knowledge," they are seen as becoming conscious or more conscious. When we take this view, the fall is basically (or at least partially) a positive thing. But the fall of Adam, in both the Old and New Testament contexts of meanings, is not in any way a positive thing. It is wholly evil. This story is a story about the very source and nature of evil in human living.

The full name of the tree from which Adam and Eve ate was the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," not "the tree of knowledge," not "the tree of higher consciousness." Adam and Eve, we must assume, were conscious before the fall. After the fall they were not more conscious but less conscious. Indeed, they were in illusion: they were in a twisted consciousness. Eating this fruit resulted in an evil consciousness. Why had they eaten from this tree? In order to become "like God, knowing good and evil." The myth also states very clearly that "being like God, knowing good and evil," was (and thus still is) forbidden. We are finite. In mythic language, we are forbidden by God from becoming Infinite. So we are ignorant of good and evil in any absolute sense. In mythic language, we are forbidden by God to know good and evil! When we think we do know good and evil, we have already eaten from the forbidden tree. We simply do not know good and evil in an absolute sense. Only the Infinite, metaphorically speaking, knows good and evil, and we never get to be Infinite. When we have rebelled against our finite state and thus seek to be, within ourselves, the criteria for good and evil, we have just committed the original sin.

So what does it mean to *not know* good and evil? Every parent attempts to teach his or her children "good and evil." Every law enforcement system expects us to know good and evil. Every culture of human beings has its definitions of good and evil and maintains order and peace and good will among its members by teaching and expecting its members to know the good and do it and to know the evil and not do it. So what is so bad, bad, BAD about knowing good and evil?

There is nothing bad about knowing your cultures standards of good and evil; nor with, for the most part, abiding by them. What the Adam myth is saying is something that we are continually forgetting: our cultural conditioning is not the absolute criteria for good and evil. When human beings have retreated into their culture for ethical security, they have retreated from the experience of God. They have retreated from all those experiences in which we are receiving the

illumination that we human beings do not know good and evil in an absolute sense. Quite frequently, one human culture wars against another human culture or holds it in contempt simply because its ways of being good and avoiding evil are different. But standing in the presence of the Infinite, every human culture is fragmentary in its notions of good and evil. Every culture is a fragmentary expression of the way life truly is. So members of any culture who have forgotten the radical fragmentariness of their culture have, thereby, eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Being “in Christ” means being “in freedom” not in some bondage of slavish obedience to the herd practices of one’s culture. Before Adam and Eve ate from the tree, they were in freedom. After they ate, they were in bondage, in bondage to a good and evil which they thought was absolute but was not. They were, therefore, ashamed of their freedom, ashamed of their true humanity, ashamed because their true humanity was finite not Infinite. They covered themselves with leaves hoping to hide what they truly were from their own eyes, or perhaps hoping to hide the falseness of what they had become from the all-seeing eyes of the Infinite Neighbor.

If we look at the Adam myth in the above manner, then we can begin to understand correctly the New Testament usage of “in Adam” and “in Christ.” One of the most deadly misunderstandings of these contrasting states has been this view: “Adam and Eve” represent our material nature and “Christ” represents our spiritual nature. The end result of this misunderstanding is viewing our physical beings as something to be delivered from. We view our sexuality, our finitude, our deaths, as the evil from which we must be delivered. Being “in Christ” is then assumed to mean some sort of non-physical or ghostly state of being wherein we have escaped from our physicality. This is not the New Testament view! In the New Testament view, Adam and Eve are physical/Spirit persons who have gone astray. This fall has not destroyed their physicality or their Spirit beings, it has only twisted everything out of shape. This twistedness is experienced as evil precisely because the good endures to condemn it. And this good is called “in Christ.” With meticulous care, the orthodox center of the early Christian development maintained the view that “Jesus Christ” is an utterly fleshly, physical human being. Surely this includes being finite, fragmentary, limited, ignorant, sexual, emotional, mental, and dying. At the same time, “Jesus Christ” means perfection, the perfection of being the wholly

appropriate relationship with that ever-active, Infinite Thou. This perfect relationship includes obedience and freedom, faith and love. This perfect relationship is loving God and neighbor with all one’s mind, strength, heart, will, and Spirit. And we do that Awesome living not as a Super-human but as a real, ordinary, down-to-Earth human being. That and that alone is perfection. That and that alone is being “in Christ.”

Being “in Christ” must also be distinguished from another false meaning: namely, being a member of a Christian religion. One can be “in Christ” without ever having heard of Christianity or Jesus. One can be “in Christ” even when one is refusing to be a member of any Christian religion. This huge category, “in Christ,” includes all persons who, in any measure, are living their freedom, trust, and love. If it is true that no person is completely devoid of all Spirit health, then every person, to that extent, is “in Christ.” “In Christ” means “Human Authenticity.” “Jesus Christ” means “The Authentic Human.”

Now “The Authentic Human” may seem, at first thought, to be a rare reality, because sin is so widespread and so tragically deep in our customary habituations of human living. Yet, “The Authentic Human” is never more than one healing event away from any of us at any time. The Authentic Human is simply the one who is being filled with Awe by the Infinite Awesomeness we all confront. Being filled with the fullness of Awe means being filled with our own full trans-cultural, trans-egoistic freedom, our own full trust of the Infinite Neighbor, and our own full unconditional compassion for every neighboring being. When Fully Awed is understood as full freedom, full trust, and full love, then “Jesus Christ” means nothing less and nothing more than “The Fully Awed One.”

Now Jesus Christ, “The Fully Awed One,” came to be called “The Only Begotten Offspring or Heir” of the Awesome, Almighty, Infinite Neighbor. What does it mean to call “Jesus Christ” the “Only Begotten”? It does not mean that the Christian religion is best. It simply means that there are not two Human Authenticities, or three, or four. There are many types of human culture and many types of human personality, but these vast differences are still finite in nature. There is just ONE Human Authenticity--namely, being Awed by the Awesome and filled with Awe--namely, being filled with freedom, trust, and love.

So the Awed One is the ONLY true offspring of the Awesome. "Jesus Christ," when this poetic name is properly used in the Christian tradition, means the Awed One and hence the Only Begotten Heir. But in so far as Gautama, the Buddha, is the Awed One, he is also the Only Begotten Heir. The Only Begotten Heir is Human Authenticity, not simply the person Jesus, nor the person Gautama, nor you or me.

To whatever extent a Christian community is manifesting Human Authenticity, that Christian community is the Only Begotten Heir. But the Only Begotten Heir is something far more vast than good Christianity. Unless we are clear about this vastness, the phrase "Only Begotten Heir" becomes an expression of Christian bigotry.

So if we are admitting that the Christian religion, like all religion, is finite not Infinite, what need do we have for the phrase "Only Begotten Heir of God"? Here is the essential truth we need to maintain: The Awed One is not Human Authenticity for Christians only, while something else is Human Authenticity for Buddhists, Moslems, or Native Americans. No, The Awed One is Human Authenticity for Buddhists as well. In so far as the Buddha is indeed "Awake," the Buddha is an Awed One, an exemplification of Human Authenticity. Or to put this statement in Christian language, the Buddha is an exemplification of being "in Christ." It may be true that each particular strand of Buddhist religion only expresses a small part of what it means to be "in Christ." But it is also true that each particular strand of Christian religion only expresses a small part of what it means to be "in Christ." "In Christ" is a huge landscape--the breadth and depth of which has only been partially explored by any religious community (or all of them together). The exploration of being "in Christ" continues.

So it is meaningful to say that "Christ has come" only if we are clear that what has come is a vast fullness which is still being explored. Jesus was seen as the coming of the Christ. This was the jarring news of the New Testament proclamation. Human Authenticity has come; we do not need to wait for it. It has come in Jesus, and we do not have to wait for some other coming. In other words, this experience--being Awed by the Awesome and filled with Awe--is the criteria by which all religions, all societies, and all human beings can be accurately evaluated yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever. Human beings who existed thousands of years before Jesus was born are to be judged by this criteria.

Human beings who may exist thousands of years from now are also to be judged by this criteria. So the everlasting question addressed to every group of human beings is: Are you Awed by the Awesome and filled with Awe? Do you manifest freedom, trust, and love? This is the FINAL JUDGMENT!

So this is the challenge to Christians and non-Christians alike: live your own essential freedom, trust, and love. This is the FINAL criteria. A more superior criteria is not going to arrive. This is IT. The Awed One is the Only Begotten Offspring of the Awesome. The Awed One is the Heir. And the Awesome Wholeness of Being supports only one Heir to the Commonwealth of Being. The Awed One is the Heir. Blessed are the Awed Ones for they shall inherit the Earth, theirs and theirs only is the Commonwealth of Being. They and they alone shall see the Awesome. They alone shall receive and show forth the mercy of the Awesome. They alone shall make peace on Earth with the Awesome and with one another.

Blessed are the Awed Ones. They stand in inseparable union with: (1) the Awesome Otherness of the Infinite Neighbor and (2) the upwelling of Awe as inward Spirit. And thirdly, ***The Awed Ones are the Third Third of the experience of God!*** This is the Trinity; this is the triune experience of God, not for Christians only but for everyone: ***The Awesome, the Awed Ones, and the Awe itself.***