

Part One

The Discovery of Soul

Chapter 1

The Ramp from Here to Eternity

Spirit realization can be described with various religious vocabularies and enabled with many religious practices. In this book I will focus on the Christian heritage, but I will do so in a manner I hope will be useful to anyone who is seriously interested in pursuing the journey of Spirit toward ever fuller realization.

Christian theology begins with Jesus –
Jesus as an ordinary human being,
living at a space/time coordinate in history,
part of the biological life of the planet Earth,
inseparable from the plants, animals, fungi, and microbes,
inseparable from the rocks, soil, air, water, and energy exchanges of physical reality.

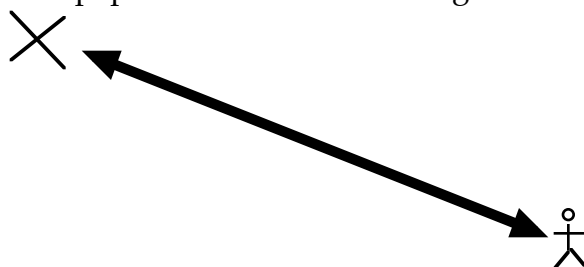
Jesus is a biological being capable of dying –
a finite human person
living in a specific finite and passing culture,
thinking with the ideas of his time,
dealing with the issues coming up in that time and place.

Each one of us is just like Jesus in all these respects. To the extent that we are not in touch with our bodies, we are not followers of Jesus. To the extent that we are not in touch with our residence in time and space, we are not followers of Jesus. To the extent that we are not wholehearted participants in the realm of mass and energy, we are not followers of Jesus. To the extent that we are not a living presence of biological life with all its finite qualities of consciousness, we are not followers of Jesus.

Jesus was not a soul substance trapped in a physical Earth suit, nor are we.

And Jesus was not a biological being with no Eternal reference, nor are we.

In addition to being biologically human, Jesus, and each of us, is a relationship with the Eternal. Imagine Jesus as a stick figure drawn on a large piece of paper. Imagine the whole piece of paper as the Eternal. Then imagine a line drawn from the stick figure to the whole piece of paper on which the stick figure rests.



Here is Christian theology in one diagram. Picture God as the whole paper; Jesus as the stick figure; and the line connecting them as the Holy Spirit. What does this diagram point to in our actual experience? Especially, what do we mean by the word “God,” if this word is understood to point to an experience in our everyday living?

The “God” that Jesus worshiped, the “God” that the Bible insists is our appropriate worship, is not a being among other beings, not a supernatural thing among other supernatural things, not a thing at all – not a person, not a being, but BEING-AS-A-WHOLE.

The whole piece of paper is a rough symbol for God. Like all symbols for the

Infinite, it is an inadequate symbol. Perhaps we would have a more adequate symbol if we imagine the paper extending forever in all directions. God is not a thing located somewhere on the paper. God is not a thing or a collection of things. God is that EVERY-THING-NESS that transcends every thing and yet is present in every thing. Each and every thing is contained within this EVERY-THING-NESS. I am using the word "thing" in a very broad sense, including Jesus, including you, including me.

Each of us is a specific finite being on the paper, yet each of us is also a being that is not separate from but is related to the EVERY-THING-NESS in which all things cohere.

Many Christians tend to see God as a supernatural thing – a thing alongside other things – a super-being in another world of things who can interfere in this world of things and help us handle the things we want to arrange differently. This view is not the biblical view of God. When the Bible and other Christian classics seem to be talking about an otherworldly person, we need to remember that these writings are poetry. They are using mythic language. We need to remember that people who lived in pre-modern times had no difficulty using mythic language. It was their way of talking about their life experiences. They were not literalists in the sense of believing that they might be able to pull on God's beard in some future life. Literalism is a modern construction – a heresy – a departure from the origins of Christianity.

Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, Richard Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many other great theologians all reject viewing God as a thing or a person. They reject literalism in all its subtle forms. When we use personal language to talk about God, we are talking mythically about our own personal relationship with the Infinite EVERY-THING-NESS that cannot be contained within any human imagery, personal or non-personal.

God is the Wholeness that is totally beyond everything, yet manifest in everything. And this Wholeness or EVERY-THING-NESS is a real experience that you and I, like Jesus, can have. We are the sons and daughters of EVERY-THING-NESS. We are a relationship with that inescapable Wholeness. Each of us is a relationship established for us by that Wholeness, a relationship from which we cannot escape, a relationship that is our glory.

I am not saying something unscientific. Scientists who are also humanly sensitive persons experience Infinite Mystery behind-beyond-within-surrounding all the things they study. Many an honest scientist has said something like this, "The more we know about nature, the more we know we don't know." This awareness of Mystery is an experience of God, the God of the Bible.

Even our curiosity and openness to know more about nature and humanity is an experience of the Infinite Mystery. When we are open to know more, we are open to Mystery. Curiosity about Reality is openness to God.

Imagine lying on a cot on a clear dark night viewing the wonder of the stars. Suppose you remember your post-Einsteinian cosmology and thus know that some of the dimmest lights in the sky, viewed through a powerful telescope, are whole galaxies of billions of stars. Suppose you know that it has been empirically shown that these galaxies are traveling away from one another at vast speeds, that the cosmos is expanding through time. And if you imagine running time backwards, all these galaxies would approach a single point of white hot potential. All this vast wonder had a beginning, an initial flaring forth – "the Big Bang" physicists have called it.

Then suppose that you call out to the night sky, **"What was before the Big Bang?"**

As you listen for the answer, no sound comes back to you. All you can hear is the Infinite Silence. Paradoxically, that is the answer to your question. Before the Big Bang there was Infinite Silence. Even at the present time, all vibrations, all noises, all bangs, big or little, take place within this Infinite Silence. God is the Infinite Silence in which all sounds sound.

The Infinite Silence not only spoke forth the Big Bang of Beginning, the Infinite Silence continues to speak every day. Here is a short poem I wrote about the ever-present quality of the Infinite Silence:

The Infinite Silence Speaks
through every rustle of tree leaves,
through every singing bird,
through every sound of any kind,
and through the silent spaces between the sounds.

The Infinite Silence is Void and Darkness
but also Fullness, a dazzling backlight
that shines through
every gleaming tree, every shimmering squirrel
and surrounds every human being
with a halo.

Our everyday experience of this living relation with the Infinite Silence is an experience of that actuality that the Bible points to with the word "God."

God can also be spoken of as The Infinite Stillness in which all motions move. Meditation practices can help us get in touch with our experience of this Stillness. Perhaps it is frightening at first to enter the place of Stillness and from that Stillness watch all the activity taking place, including the activity of our own minds. Our minds are always busy. Our minds are an aspect of our biological being which is always in motion. Our life processes, including our minds, never stop. Yet if we pay close attention to our minds, to our bodies, to all our inner being, we can also discern that all this motion is taking place within something deeper, the Infinite Stillness. We can access this Stillness as an actual experience.

Finding this Stillness in which all motions move is finding God. And as I will explore more thoroughly in following chapters, it is only within this Still point that we find the Trust, the Love, and the Freedom from which truly creative living can emerge.

God can also be spoken of as the Infinite Void out of which all finite things come and into which all finite things return. Both birth and death are an experience of this Void. When we are born, where do we come from? We come from the Void, from the NO-THING-NESS. When we die where do we go? We go to the Void, to the NO-THING-NESS. The Void is a real experience that travels with us all the time. Our being is always surrounded by the NO-THING-NESS from which we have come and to which we will return.

Our lives can be likened to a hallway with a door on each end. We enter at one end and exit at the other. And when we look out the windows of our hallway as we walk from door one to door two, we can see that NO-THING-NESS is traveling with us along the way. Indeed our hallway is like a plank suspended over NOTHING. Indeed the entire cosmos is like a plank suspended over NO-THING-NESS.

And this Void, this NO-THING-NESS is also the EVERY-THING-NESS in which all

things cohere. God is both NO-THING and EVERY-THING. The NO-THING-NESS is in everything, and the EVERY-THING-NESS is no singular thing. All of us have experienced or can experience this actuality. "God" is just a word. "God" is just a devotional concept indicating what we worship. But in the biblical heritage, the word "God" also points to an unavoidable actuality that confronts us in all the moments of our living.

And so who are we? We are the God experiencers. We are the Mystery experiencers. We are a line on the whole paper of Reality, a line that extends from our conscious, biological, physical space-time coordinate all the way to Eternity. This line is the Holy Spirit. This line is like a highway with two lanes. On one lane the Awesome Eternal is coming at us. In the other lane our own Awe is traveling away from us toward the Eternal.

The picture I have drawn to summarize Trinitarian theology is reminiscent of Jacob's dream about a "ladder" extending from the place where Jacob slept to Eternity with angels moving down and up this ladder. What is the ladder? What are these angels? What is this dream about?

In my Sunday school classes, we clearly did not understand this ladder. We sang a song "We are climbing Jacob's ladder." This was presented to us as some sort of moral ladder that we could climb, getting better and better by our own efforts. Nothing like this is actually contained in the original story.

The word translated "ladder" could also be translated "ramp." Jacob dreamed of a ramp from here to Eternity with angels traveling up and down the ramp. I can imagine that this ramp is like a two-lane highway. In one lane angels are coming from Eternity to here. In the other lane angels are going from here to Eternity.

Jacob's dream is a picture of Jacob's soul and of your soul and of my soul. Our deepest humanity is a ramp from here to Eternity. And what are the angels? Angels are symbols of the Holy, of the Holy movements of God. "Holy" is also another word for Awe. Angels are Awe figures. Angels are the messengers of Awe coming from the Awesome. And angels are also the energy of Awe moving from each of us toward the Awesome. Awe is a two-way movement: Awe-inspiring encounter and Awe-inspired response.

The young Jacob, all alone, the first night away from home, had a dream in which he saw his soul. He became aware of his own Spirit being. Jacob saw himself as a two-lane highway from here to Eternity and from Eternity to here. Every moment, each of us is having an encounter with Eternity and is being a response to Eternity. We may not always be aware of this angel populated highway; nevertheless, this movement of angels is what is always going on. At particular moments of our lives, we can, like Jacob, become aware of our deepest lives. We can be aware of that ramp from our biological particularity to Eternity. This ramp is real. It is our human essence. It is you. It is I.

And the whole ramp is our true being, not just one end of it. The materialist wants us to believe that each human is just a biological being. And the spiritualist wants us to believe that our body is not real or not important, that we are just a spirit spark lost in the material world of space/time – mass/energy. Christianity is a materialistic religion in the sense that it affirms that we are both human and divine, both biological and Eternal in our essential being.

Not just Jesus, but each of us, is both fully human and a divine ramp from here to Eternity. If we can resonate with Jacob's experience of becoming aware of this two-way ramp, we can begin to grasp the wisdom of the Christian Trinity:

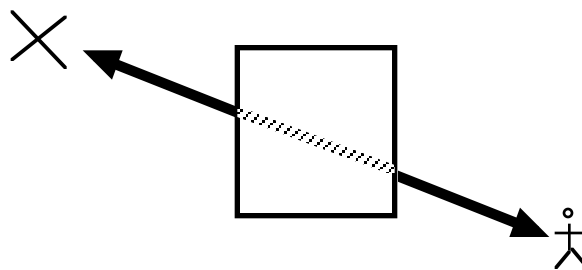
1. The ramp represents the Holy Spirit.
2. The upper end of the Ramp represents God, the Infinite Papa or Infinite Mama, who accepts us into the Divine family of all beings.
3. And the Earth-based end of the Ramp represents Jesus, the ordinary human who experiences the Infinite Mystery as Papa/Mama and is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one who is open to being this ramp – to being who he is – to being who she is. If you are open to being this ramp (your true soul, your true Spirit being), then you can identify with Jesus in his being both human and divine.

The Christian Trinity can also be viewed as the Awesome, the Awe, and the Awed human. The Mysterious Wholeness of Reality is the Awesome. This ramp is the Awe of ever-moving angels. And the Awed human is the biological being of you and me and Jesus. This is the Christian Trinity: God, the Awesome; Awe, the Holy Spirit; and the Jesus figure of human particularity, the Awed One.

It is meaningful to ask ourselves, "Have we experienced this Trinity?" "Are we experiencing this Trinity today?" The Trinity is not a doctrine about three supernatural persons; it is an experience that can be accessed at any moment. It is like a great Sun that is always shining. We see it whenever we crawl out of our caves. We see it whenever we sweep the clouds of illusion out of the way.

Every good religion explores this same Trinity – this same Spirit essence of the human being, the same Awesomeness, the same states of Awe, the same Awed humanity. I give many examples of this in my book *The Call of Awe*. Every Spirit-operative religion deals with the Awesome, the Awe, and being Awed; in this sense every healthy religion is Trinitarian. Christianity is simply a tradition that has made a point of naming this whole dynamic "The Trinity."

But seeing the Trinity is not the end of Christian theology. **More needs to be said.** Human beings, as a rule, **do not live their Spirit being.** They retreat into the little box of the personality they have developed since infancy.



If the entire line drawn from here to Eternity represents our soul, then our whole soul cannot be contained in this box. Living within our box, we have a reduced soul, a soul or self that is conscious of itself, but not all of itself. It is a soul in a box. Typically we do not know that we are in a box. We think that the soul we experience in the box is who we are. We also think that the box contains Reality. We think that this little soul in this little reality is really who we are. We do not know that the little soul is just a fragment of the soul we really are. For us to become fully conscious of our full soul (of our full Spirit being) we need to become conscious of the box in which we live.

Each of us has constructed our box, board by board, since infancy. This box is our personality. This box is our well-practiced set of habits. We often call this box our social conditioning, because most of what makes up our personality is not unique to us. We learned it from our society. Our society is also a box, a set of habits that have become customary for those of us who are this particular society.

A set of habits has a certain importance. We would not want to be without any habits at all. But our habits are not our true being. Our customs are not our true being. Our morals are not our true being. Our beliefs are not our true being. Our entire personality is not our true being. Our personality is a human creation: it is the particular habits we learned in the past. We put this personality together over the course of our lives. Therefore, the personality is past oriented. Though we use our personality to predict the future, the actual present and future are beyond personality.

We do not live in the past. We live in the NOW. And the real person living in the NOW has a capacity to break habits, to do something different. We built our personality pattern with our essential Freedom, but once built this personality, if we identify with it, functions as a box that excludes our Freedom. When we relax into identifying with and simply being our personality, we become a set of robotic patterns that function unconsciously, automatically, and inappropriately within the actual NOWs of our living.

Our personality patterns, though useful at times, do not apply in every situation of our lives. These patterns are like blocks of ice that won't move through some of the narrow places in the stream of living. The same water of soul when melted will flow through any spot in the stream. Our true being is like flowing water. But when living in our self-constructed box, we become a block of ice.

A Spirit-realized person lives in the NOW of Freedom rather than in the habits of the past. **Freedom** is one of the angels of Awe that moves on our Spirit ramp. Spirit Freedom means freedom from our habits, freedom from the personality that we have built. The same Freedom that built our personality has been lost when we exchange our Freedom for living in the box we have built.

Though we may call this box our "social conditioning," we need to notice that we have chosen to be socially conditioned. We have submitted to being a fit rather than a misfit in our society. Or perhaps we chose being a misfit. Anyhow, whoever we are, personality-wise, we chose it. We may not have been fully conscious of having chosen it. We may have never been fully conscious of the Freedom that we are. But we are that Freedom. We have always been that Freedom. And to the extent that we can transcend our box, we can be that Freedom in the living NOW.

But Freedom is scary to the person who identifies with being his or her personality. For it means that we do not have to be that person. If we think we are a shy person, if we have always behaved in a shy manner, seeing our freedom means seeing that we do not have to be shy. And this is true even though shy remains our default pattern for the rest of our lives. If we have always been an angry fly-off-the-handle person, Freedom means seeing that we do not have to be automatically angry.

Whatever it is that we think we are, we don't have to be that. We are not some definite thing. We are Freedom. Beneath all our habits and customs, we are Freedom.

Anthony Hopkins in the movie, "The Remains of the Day," played the role of a perfect butler. His character was stuck in this role. Even after he learned that he worked for a British conspirator with the German Nazis, even after he had to separate

from the woman he loved to be this perfect butler, he chose his old familiar box. He played the perfect butler for the remains of his days.

This is a picture of a despairing person who does not even know that he is in despair. Many of us have come to the place of openly despairing over being whoever it is we think we are. If so, we may be ready to hear some good news. The perfect butler is not a complete picture of who we are. We are Freedom. We live much of our time in our box, perfect butler or whatever it is. But we need no longer despair over being trapped in our box. We can step outside our box. We are Freedom. The box will remain in our lives, but it is no longer the self we identify as who we are. We are Freedom, Freedom from the box. Freedom is one of the angels that is moving up this ramp of our soul from here to Eternity. Freedom is a state of Awe. Freedom is the Holy Spirit, the real you, the real me.

Trust is another angel moving up this ramp. I need to speak personally about Trust. For me to participate in Trust means that I am open to being this ramp rather than hiding in my box. Trust means believing that the Awesome Mystery that posited me as a ramp from here to Eternity did not goof. This Mysterious Wholeness is trustworthy. The Mysterious Wholeness is my papa, my mama, my friend, my shepherd, my rock, my foundation, my beloved, my devotion, my God. Trust is trust of this God. Trust is also a courageous commitment of my whole life to being the Spirit being that I truly am.

Many children exhibit Trust. They are open to life and to whatever they can become. Most adults have built a strong box and trust that box instead. We can become children again. We can become open again. We can Trust again.

Consider Jacob as a frightened young man leaving home for the first time, all alone, and going somewhere he had never been before. During his dream about the ramp from here to Eternity with the angels going up and down, Jacob heard words about the trustworthiness of the God who met him in this dream.

This Trust transformed Jacob the frightened boy leaving home for the first time into a spunky youth who was willing to be his ramp, his Trust, his Freedom, his power to carve out a life for himself, to marry, to become skilled at work, to grapple with his conniving uncle, to meet and reconcile with his still angry brother, to become the father of a spirit community. We are all potential Jacobs. Each of us is a potential Jesus. We are just hiding in our boxes.

And when we insist on hiding in our boxes we are also *defensive and malicious*. Some people will even kill to stay in their box. Jesus called people out of their box. That was why they killed him. Those who love their box do not like the implication that their box is ungodly – that their box is part of “Satan’s kingdom,” that living in their box is a rebellion from the God of Moses and the prophets. So they killed Jesus.

Box dwellers are malicious, especially toward those who abandon their boxes. Everyone who insists on being in their box is malicious toward even the people they think they love. *But malicious is not who you and I really are in the essence of our being.* **Compassion** is another angel that moves up this ramp. Compassion is who we truly are. We do not have to work at being compassionate. We do not have to try to be loving. We just have to give up living in our box. We just have to give up self promotion, and be whoever it is we are. That real person is compassionate. That real person is Spirit Love.

As long as we think we have to make something of ourselves, that we have to

improve ourselves, that we have to achieve something to be worth something, we are into self promotion. And as long as we are into self-promotion, we are malicious. But our Holy Spirit self, our Jesus self, is not malicious, defensive, or self-promoting. Our true self is a realistic servant – a leader of others perhaps, but a servant leader. This real self is devoid of self-promotion. There is no need for it. Our true self does not need recognition or praise. We may notice these affirmations; we may enjoy them. But our real self is devoid of “self” as that term is ordinarily used.

In other words, being fully our Spirit self entails being dead to self, to ego, to personality. Here is the apostle Paul's repeated statement: “We were crucified with Christ that we might also be raised up with him to newness of life.” What is killed here? It is the illusion that the personality is the real me. It is slavery to the compulsion of grinding out my current set of habits as my only possible life. Redemption means death to this compulsion – death to this illusion – death to life in this box.

Only after we have passed through such a death can we discover the resurrection. Here is the meaning of resurrection: being this Ramp from here to Eternity, being Trust, being Freedom, being Compassion. These are your higher angels. These are my higher angels. And we do not have to create them. They are already the real you, the real me. *All* that is required is surrender to being who we really are.