

Love in the Age of Apocalypse:
How to Spiritually Awaken and Transform Trauma for the Liberation of the World
through the Power of Nonbinary Consciousness, Intersectionality, and the Fluidity of Identity

A dissertation submitted to the
Theological School
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry

Advisor: J. Terry Todd

Mitchell J. Wood
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey

August 2021

Abstract

Love in the Age of Apocalypse:

How to Spiritually Awaken and Transform Trauma for the Liberation of the World
through the Power of Nonbinary Consciousness, Intersectionality, and the Fluidity of Identity

by

Mitchell J. Wood

We live in an apocalyptic age of mutually accelerating mega-crises that threaten the collapse of multiple global systems all at once due to the climate crisis, mass migration, escalating inequality, and so much more. In the United States, we're also witnessing the intensification of "culture wars" over our national identity due to growing challenges to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant worldviews that have formed the predominant moral and cultural framework of American society from its inception.

To shape a new national identity and effectively respond to the globality of threats, I contend we must develop comprehensive and integrative worldviews that promote the holistic transformation of ourselves, society, and world. To that end, I focus on "consciousness" as a useful integrative concept that may be equally applied to the psychospiritual, sociopolitical, and ecological dimensions of our lives. I also examine the interaction between consciousness and identity, and how they both apply to the promotion of spiritual awakening, psychological transformation, and sociopolitical liberation. The interrelationship between consciousness and identity is the primary theme of this paper.

This study identifies four modes of consciousness that are especially relevant to the renewal of our personal and collective identities. They are awakened consciousness, critical

consciousness, prophetic consciousness, and apocalyptic consciousness. I explore these modes of consciousness from conceptual, historical, methodological, experiential, and biblical perspectives and consider how they might be practically applied. I give special attention to Pauline apocalyptic theology. I conclude that all four modes of consciousness are integral to the cultivation of a nonbinary/nondual mode of consciousness that promotes multiplicity, intersectionality, and fluidity of identity, all of which help to repair and heal the fragmentation and polarization of our times and to promote the co-creation of a more whole, just, and loving world.

Keywords: Consciousness, spiritual awakening, spiritual enlightenment, nonduality, spirituality, apocalypticism, eschatology, prophetic, psychotherapy, psychology, trauma, nonbinary, intersectionality, fluidity of identity, multiplicity of identity, society, politics, Internal Family Systems, Self, no self, Pauline apocalyptic eschatology

To Adyashanti
who shows me no self

To Dick Schwartz
who shows me Self

To Christopher Morse
who shows me Christ

To Change the World Enough
By Alice Walker

To change the world enough
you must cease to be afraid
of the poor.
We experience your fear as the least pardonable of
humiliations; in the past
it has sent us scurrying off
daunted and ashamed
into the shadows.
Now,
the world ending
the only one all of us have known
we seek the same
fresh light
you do:
the same high place
and ample table.
The poor always believe
there is room enough
for all of us;
the very rich never seem to have heard
of this.
In us there is wisdom of how to share
loaves and fishes
however few;
we do this everyday.
Learn from us,
we ask you.
We enter now
the dreaded location
of Earth's reckoning;
no longer far
off
or hidden in books
that claim to disclose
revelations;
it is here.
We must walk together without fear.
There is no path without us.

Contents

Introduction	1
Part 1	
Awakened Consciousness	5
Overview of Awakening	5
What is Awakening?	5
Brief History of Awakening.....	14
Stages of Awakening	17
How to Awaken	22
Awakening and Personal Transformation.....	24
Awakening and Collective Transformation	29
Internal Family Systems and Legacy Burdens	29
Terry Patten’s Republic of the Heart.....	32
Michael Lerner’s Revolutionary Love	37
Part 2	
Prophetic Consciousness	43
Heschel Abraham’s Prophetic Consciousness.....	43
Walter Breuggemann’s Prophetic Imagination	44
angel Kyodo william’s Prophetic Wisdom.....	46
Part 3	
Critical Consciousness and Awakening	49

The Three Eyes of Being	49
Small Self	55
Big Self	58
No Self	61
How the Three of Eyes are Interrelated.....	65
Polymorphism and Identity Dynamics	68
A Nonhegemonic Metanarrative and Self-Deconstructing System	70
Postlude.....	72
Applications.....	73
 Part 4	
Apocalyptic Consciousness	76
The Apocalyptic Mood	76
Pauline Apocalypticism	80
The Final Submission	81
God is All in All.....	83
Christ Fills All in All	85
Christ is All and in All.....	86
All the Fullness of God	88
Far Above all the Heavens.....	90
Divinization of All through Submission of All.....	92
Mutual Submission.....	95
The Apocalypse of a New Ontology	99

The Apocalypse of the <i>Imago Dei</i>	102
The Infinite Plurality of Supreme Being	105
The Apocalypse of Love.....	106
Implications and Applications	108
Anti-Supremacism	108
Johannine Dualism vs. Pauline Universalism	110
Universalism	112
Postlude.....	115
Conclusion.....	117
Bibliography	119

Introduction

I believe we're on the cusp of another great awakening in America. Sparked by the murder of George Floyd, the spirit is now on the move once again, compelling millions to take to the streets both here and abroad; joining us together in a global movement that's multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-generational, and multi-religious; and unifying us in our overwhelming grief and outrage at centuries of genocidal terror perpetuated by whites against people of color, so together we're crying, "black lives matter" and "end white supremacy now!" And as we know, this massive uprising is occurring amidst a global pandemic and economic meltdown, which stands against the backdrop of our tottering democracy and the global rise of neofascism, all of which is happening in the context of planetary ecological collapse that is already causing mass extinction, mass starvation and mass migration.

Despite this evil brew of mutually-reinforcing global catastrophes, I and others still believe a new spirit and emergent consciousness is rising up to create a new world that's based on love and justice and devoted to the common good. This paper seeks to delineate the contours of this new consciousness that's uprising within and among us to meet these mortal dangers now moving directly toward us at ever accelerating rates. In short, this paper is all about identifying new visions and pathways that may indeed foster the next great awakening in America.

While public theology is rightfully defined in many different ways, for me one of the most important and defining roles it has to play in our country today is to help renew our civic spirit and promote new forms of national identity to undergird our personal and collective lives that affirm our basic goodness, essential unity, and radical diversity, while also moving us

toward ethical action. This urgent task is especially important given that the white Protestant consensus — which has provided the cultural and moral framework for American society from its foundation — now seems to be in its final death throes. As alternatives to the old order, this paper explores emergent visions of comprehensive and integrative worldviews that might serve as new foundations for our national identity, which can help to orient and anchor us as we go through these collective crises. To honor and respect the multicultural realities of contemporary America, these new forms of civic spiritedness are based on universalist, integrative, holistic, love-centered, and intersectional perspectives that affirm the diversity of our religious and spiritual traditions, while also equally affirming those of us who identify as agnostic and atheist.

The central topic and unifying theme of this paper is the interplay between consciousness and identity, and how their dynamic interaction may be conceptually and experientially explored, developed, and practically applied to the ongoing awakening, transformation, and liberation of ourselves and the world. This study is especially devoted to the integration of the psychospiritual, sociopolitical, and ecological aspects of our lives. In other words, it attends to the individual, collective, and transcendental dimensions of our existence in a wholistic way, so we might more fully and effectively respond to the multi-dimensional crises of our day.

This study is divided into 4 parts, with each part giving special attention to a particular mode or model consciousness that I believe is profoundly relevant to the renewal of our personal and collective lives. The first part focuses on awakening, which entails a radical shift in consciousness from the sense of being a separate individual to the direct experience of

universal connection. After providing an overview of various aspects of awakening, this section then turns to the application of awakened consciousness to psychospiritual transformation and sociopolitical liberation. Part 2 focuses on modes of prophetic consciousness that emerged in Jewish and Christian contexts that are centered on God's impassioned engagement in the struggle for love and justice on earth. These traditions emphasize the partiality and particularity of God's involvement in history on behalf of marginalized and oppressed peoples, and therefore they emphatically reject notions of the impartiality, universality, and "now-ness" of ultimate reality associated with awakened consciousness, since they are only seen as sanctifying the oppressive status quo. In the third section, I present my own practice model for the integration of awakened consciousness with critical consciousness, with the latter being somewhat akin to prophetic consciousness in that it is power-sensitive, critiques oppressive structures, and is oriented toward historical and material liberation. Through the integration of awakened consciousness and critical consciousness, this model seeks to affirm the universal and essential oneness characteristic of awakening, while also showing a deep respect for the irreducibility of difference and distinct worldviews that's characteristic of critical consciousness. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the apocalyptic consciousness of Paul through the exploration of a particular passage in the New Testament that culminates in the revelation of God as "all in all." I interpret this vision to proclaim the essential unity, diversity, and divinity of all creation. I also argue that while his vision is entirely indigenous to the particularity of Christian scripture, it offers a universal vision of reality that transcends Christianity itself. Thus, through the exploration of awakened, prophetic, critical, and apocalyptic modes of consciousness, my intention is to draw upon some of the world's most profound and

longstanding traditions to help mobilize, integrate, and apply them for the meeting of this day.

I believe these comprehensive and integrative worldviews upholding visions of essential unity in radical diversity are much needed to counteract the growing polarization and fragmentation of our times and for promoting the establishment of a more just and loving world.

Part I

Awakened Consciousness

Overview of Awakening

What is Awakening? As used here, awakening refers to a subset of religious, spiritual, and psychological experiences characterized by a profound shift in identity, whereby one goes from the ordinary sense of being a separate individual to having a direct experience of the essential oneness, emptiness, and interconnectedness of all reality.¹ There is no single term consistently used in the literature to denote the experience of awakening. Furthermore, awakening has been described in many different ways in both popular and academic texts, so there is no general consensus regarding its precise definition. This diversity of terms and definitions is undoubtedly reflective of the fact that awakening is intrinsically hard to describe, since it generally refers to nonconceptual modes of consciousness that by definition go beyond all names and definitions. For this reason, awakening is frequently represented in metaphorical, metaphysical, and paradoxical language, as well as in negative terms that often describe what it is not rather than what it is. Another terminological difficulty is that experiences of awakening have been described over millennia within countless traditions, using distinct terms specific to their cultural contexts that are frequently esoteric and technical.

¹ Adyashanti, *Emptiness Dancing* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc., 2006), 2-4; Stephan Bodian, *Wake Up Now: A Guide to the Journey of Spiritual Awakening* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 8-9; Leonard Jacobsen, *Journey into Now: Clear Guidance on the Path of Spiritual Awakening* (La Selva Beach, CA: Conscious Living Publications, 2007), 3-4; Laurel A. McCormick, "The Personal Self, No-Self, Self Continuum: An Intuitive Inquiry and Grounded Theory Study of the Experience of No-Self as Integrated Stages of Consciousness toward Enlightenment" (PhD diss., Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA, 2009), 2-4, ProQuest Dissertations); Steve Taylor, *The Leap: The Psychology of Spiritual Awakening* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017), x.

Despite all these challenges, however, the word “awakening” is consistently associated with a cluster of terms that are commonly used interchangeably and widely believed to refer to the same general phenomena. These terms include spiritual awakening, enlightenment, liberation, self-realization, and nondual realization, along with many others.² The term “awakening” was selected for this paper since it is the word most widely used in contemporary literature to describe these phenomena.

Although awakening is defined in many ways, the various definitions are consistently structured by the central metaphor of awakening itself, as evident in the fact that many authors describe awakening as “a shift in consciousness” from a dream-like state to an awakened state.³ As this formulation suggests, consciousness plays a central and indispensable role in the conceptualization of awakening. Despite whatever metaphysical connotations it may carry, the term “consciousness” is frequently used synonymously with other common terms like awareness, knowing, experience and perception, so there’s nothing necessarily extraordinary or metaphysical about it. To the contrary, many authors insist that consciousness — regardless of

² Kelly Kilrea, “Introduction to the Special Topic Section on Spiritual Awakening: Joy, Not Elsewhere Classified—Towards a Contemporary Psychological Understanding of Spiritual (and Secular) Awakening,” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 37, no. 2 (2018): 66; David Loy, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1988), 4; Michael A. Rodriguez, *Boundless Awareness: A Loving Path to Spiritual Awakening and Freedom from Suffering* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2018), 5.

³ Adyashanti, *Emptiness Dancing*, 2006, 1; Adyashanti, *The Way of Liberation: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Campbell, CA: Open Gate Sangha, 2012), xi; Jacobson, *Journey into Now*, 2007, 3-4; Loch Kelly, *Shift into Freedom: The Science and Practice of Open-Hearted Awareness* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2015), 22; Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library and Namaste Publishing, 1999), 6-7.

whatever state it's in — is entirely knowable and verifiable on the basis of direct experience, and therefore it is not dependent on any religious, spiritual, or metaphysical beliefs.

The initial state of consciousness in the process of awakening is frequently called the dream state, egoic consciousness, or ordinary consciousness; and it is generally described in the literature as our normal adult experience of consensus reality based on social conditioning, which above all is characterized by the experience of being a separate, subjective self with an inner world, who lives in an outer, objective, material world. This separate self — usually called the ego — is viewed as a byproduct of mental constructs and narrative thinking, so it only exists as “a collection of thoughts, feelings, memories, beliefs, and stories that have been woven together by the mind into the appearance of a substantial, continuous someone with certain abiding qualities and characteristics.”⁴ Since it is viewed as having no autonomous or substantive reality, the ego — along with all egoic consciousness — is frequently characterized as a dream or an illusion. According to the literature, the epistemological error of the ego's identification with its thoughts and images — especially about itself — is generally regarded as the root cause of all needless human suffering.

The awakened state of consciousness, on the other hand, is called by many different names and described in many ways. Not only has the nomenclature yet to be stabilized, but it still seems to be proliferating, as different authors continue to emphasize and brand their various conceptualizations of awakened states. Despite this proliferation, the different terms for awakened states are widely believed to refer to the same family of experiences that all share certain core characteristics — even when those experiences are sometimes described in

⁴ Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 8-9

opposite ways and given contradictory names. Terms referring to awakened states of consciousness include Being, pure consciousness, emptiness, God, the One, nonduality, true nature, nirvana, Self, no self, Spirit, the Tao, kingdom of God, love and many more.⁵

While the dream state is widely conceptualized as identification with thinking, the awakened state is associated with disidentification from thinking, and especially disidentification from dichotomous thinking that divides all reality into binary opposites (e.g., subject/object, self/other, mind/body, good/evil, God/creation).⁶ Perhaps the single most important duality that must be overcome to shift into an awakened state is the division between the isolated ego and all else, since only then can the egoic sense of the separate self be totally dissolved. But what happens after the dissolution of the separate narrative self? What is it like to be awakened? The awakened state is generally conceptualized as the immediate experience of life as it actually is without the mediation of thoughts and images that by their very nature distort reality and alienate us from the true nature of ourselves and all of life. In stark contrast to the endless divisions manufactured by the dualistic mind, awakened consciousness is perhaps most commonly characterized as an undivided state of oneness and interconnectedness that both encompasses and transcends all things and beings, while also being the source of them all.

One of the most common terms in both popular and academic literature referring to the awakened state is nonduality (also called nondual awareness and nondual consciousness). In

⁵ Ibid., 12; Jenny Wade, "After Awakening, the Laundry: Is Nonduality a Spiritual Experience?" *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 37, no. 2 (2018): 89.

⁶ Taylor, *The Leap*, x; Wade, "After Awakening," 88.

direct contrast to the dualistic ideologies that commonly prevail throughout the world — which insist that reality is ultimately comprised of two different realities, like mind and matter or the natural and supernatural — nonduality denies that reality consists of multiple substances, natures, essences, or any other such thing.⁷ Most authors of nondual literature use the words nonduality and oneness interchangeably, with the one universal reality most commonly referred to as “consciousness” or “awareness.”⁸ Other authors, however, define nonduality with greater technical precision that distinguishes it from oneness. This more precise definition of nonduality not only rejects dualistic ontologies but also questions the very notion of oneness itself. Since oneness is only conceivable in contrast to other concepts like dualism, it ends up depending on and perpetuating the very thing it seeks to deny. To avoid this self-contradiction and the reification of both oneness and dualism, the term nonduality points toward the nonconceptual and ineffable nature of reality through the strategy of negation, that is, by saying what it is not, rather than what it is.⁹

Another distinguishing feature of the awakened state is that it shifts attention away from the objects of consciousness to consciousness itself, with a categorical distinction being made between the two.¹⁰ The objects of consciousness include all inner phenomena (like

⁷ Rupert Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness: Essays on the Unity of Mind and Matter* (Oxford: Sahaja Publications, 2017), 1.

⁸ Rodriguez, *Boundless Awareness*, 4.

⁹ Rene Dumetz, “In a Dark Light: A Heuristic Investigation of Nondual (Unitive) Experiences” (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA, 2017), 14, ProQuest Dissertations.

¹⁰ Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness*, 87.

thoughts, feelings, and sensations) along with all outer phenomena (like animals, vegetables, and minerals). Consciousness itself, on the other hand, is defined as that which is aware of all objects of consciousness, both inner and outer. A metaphor sometimes used to convey the significance of this distinction are movies playing on a screen.¹¹ In this metaphor, the movies represent all objects of consciousness with the screen representing consciousness itself, so no matter how many movies play on the screen, the screen not only remains totally unchanged, but it's also quickly forgotten and totally identified with the movies. According to the literature on awakening, consciousness itself likewise gets lost beneath the play of phenomenal reality and becomes totally identified with all the objects of consciousness. This body of literature also maintains that awakening begins when we stop focusing all our attention on the objects of consciousness, and instead give our full attention to that which is aware of all the objects of consciousness, so finally awareness becomes aware of itself. In this crucial moment, personal consciousness disidentifies with all objects of consciousness — particularly all thoughts and images of the self —and instead focuses on consciousness itself, so that personal consciousness finally comes home to its true identity as pure consciousness. Here, the subject/object division is collapsed, since the subject itself is made the sole object of contemplation, leading to the experience of subject and object becoming one. The ensuing “awareness of awareness” reveals our essential nature as undivided, centerless, and all-pervading consciousness that is always and everywhere present in the here and now.¹² In this way, consciousness discovers the true

¹¹ Ibid., 89.

¹² Ibid., 33.

nature of its own being — as infinite and boundless instead of finite and divided — so pure consciousness and infinite being are ultimately experienced as one and the same thing.

To extend the metaphor a bit further, just as a blank movie screen may be seen as empty of all content, so too consciousness and being are sometimes described as empty and void.¹³ This nothingness, however, is not dead or nihilistic, but is seen as an unfathomable divine abyss pregnant with formless potential out of which all phenomena arise ex nihilo. Therefore, the awakened state is often described as the direct perception of pure consciousness, infinite being, and emptiness, all of which are seen as aspects of one and the same thing. This awakened experience of our true nature is said to engender a profound sense of freedom, joy, peace, love, compassion, and wisdom, along with many other positive qualities.

The phenomena associated with awakening has only recently become the subject of investigation by modern methods of empirical research. Based on this research, there is now sufficient preliminary evidence to conclude that awakening exists as phenomena that can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively.¹⁴ As an emergent subject of scientific inquiry, awakening is being studied with new methods of investigation (e.g., MRIs and pharmaceuticals) within different academic fields (e.g., neuroscience and consciousness studies) that conceptualize awakening in innovative ways.¹⁵ As a result, new terminology, definitions, and conceptual frameworks are being developed to frame the subject of awakening more

¹³ Adyashanti, *Emptiness Dancing*, 1.

¹⁴ Kilrea, "Introduction to the Special Topic," 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

adequately for empirical research and to reflect the new findings of this research more fully. One of the more striking trends being documented and no doubt accelerated by empirical research is the “secularization of awakening”, whereby definitions of awakening are increasingly divested of religious, spiritual, and metaphysical terminology, and instead increasingly described in terms that are phenomenological, developmental, evolutionary, and empirical.¹⁶ Furthermore, awakened states themselves are increasingly experienced as entirely natural phenomena that arise in nonreligious contexts without any reference to spiritual or metaphysical realms.¹⁷ Consistent with this trend, part of the project here is to help construct a more neutral conceptual framework for the understanding of awakening, making it more accessible and applicable to diverse communities of discourse, whether they be nonreligious or religious, scientific, or metaphysical, popular or academic. For that reason, this essay will privilege definitions that avoid reductionistic assumptions (like those of materialism or idealism) that inhibit cross fertilization among various communities; and instead, it will seek to develop a more flexible and inclusive set of terms and definitions derived from a more polyvalent lingua franca, a goal foundational to the practice of public theology.

In summary, the literature defines awakening as a shift from dualistic thinking to nondual awareness, from symbolic thought to nonsymbolic experience, and from identification with the narrative self to identification with awareness itself, all of which are more or less referring to the same shift in consciousness. My personal favorite definition is that awakening

¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷ Wade, “After Awakening,” 106.

is a shift from thought-based knowing to awareness-based knowing.¹⁸ Perhaps one of the most concise definitions of the initial stage of awakening is simply disidentification — as in our disidentification from everything — since the only thing left after that is pure consciousness appearing as a single, seamless, infinite whole.¹⁹ As many proponents of awakening write, this process of disidentification is ordinarily experienced by the ego as a process of self-annihilation. Indeed, awakening to our true nature requires nothing less than our willingness to surrender everything we most cherish, especially our most precious identities. As many spiritual traditions attest to in one way or another, we are all called to die before we die, so when we die, we never die. For this reason, awakening is widely understood as a sort of death practice — a radical *via negativa* — that reveals the nonexistence of the self and leads to the end of the world as we know it.²⁰

While I personally ascribe much value to practices of disidentification, I also believe a reductive emphasis on disidentification has resulted in pernicious tendencies within many spiritual traditions that devalue personal stories and diverse cultural identities, reducing them to some totalitarian oneness and sameness, while simultaneously undermining critical thinking, personal embodiment, and a passionate commitment to socio-economic, political, and ecological justice in this world. My intention in this paper is to explore possible correctives to

¹⁸ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 127.

¹⁹ Wade, “After Awakening,” 92.

²⁰ Adyashanti, *The End of Your World: Uncensored Straight Talk on the Nature of Enlightenment* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2008), 8; Steven Kotler and Jamie Wheal. *Stealing Fire: How Silicon Valley, the Navy SEALs, and Maverick Scientists are Revolutionizing the Way We Live and Work* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 37.

this historical tendency, so the ancient wisdom of awakening can be more fully lived in our contemporary world for the spiritual, psychological, and material benefit of all. As I will discuss later, many authors describe additional stages of awakening that move well beyond ego-identification and dis-identification to also include phases of re-identification — a radical via positive — so eventually all things and beings are experienced as unique expressions and embodiments of one essential being, which then becomes the foundational starting point for the ongoing transformation of self and society.

A Brief History of Awakening. Throughout nearly all recorded history, awakening has been fully embedded within the domains of what we now call religion, spirituality, and philosophy. The first known systems of thought and practice devoted to awakening originated in the Indian subcontinent nearly three thousand years ago. Indeed, the word “awakened” is a direct translation of the Sanskrit term “*bodhi*,” which is the root word of “buddha,” meaning the “awakened one.”²¹ Similarly, “nonduality” is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word “*advaita*,” which first appeared in ancient Hindu scriptures called the Upanishads around 800 BCE to describe the essential unity of God, the self, and all reality. The Chinese philosophy and religion of Taoism is another spiritual tradition whose sacred texts — including the Tao Te Ching from around the 6th century BCE — also promote a nondual understanding of reality that is ultimately characterized as unnamable and empty. According to the great Asian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, awakening is not just one spiritual experience among many,

²¹ Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 30.

but it is the quintessential and ultimate realization that lies at the heart of their spiritual traditions.²²

Outside Indochina, nondual conceptions of reality were especially evident in the philosophical tradition of Neoplatonism initiated by Plotinus in the 3rd century CE. Plotinus studied Greco-Roman philosophy in Alexandria, along with Indian philosophy during an expedition to Persia. After that, he settled in Rome, where he taught that ultimate reality is a transcendent “One,” which individuals may become identified with through a process of meditation that leads to mystical union.²³ For many centuries, his metaphysical writings had a profound influence on the mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam despite the foundational belief of the Abrahamic faiths in the essential dualism of God and creation. These conflicting beliefs led to battles over the fundamental nature of reality for over a millennium, resulting in the excommunication, persecution, and execution of countless mystics deemed to be heretics.

One way these metaphysical ideas have persisted into the modern era is in the form of the Perennial Philosophy, which holds that all world religions spring from a single metaphysical truth that is timeless and universal. Although perennialism has its roots in the Renaissance, it was popularized in the mid-twentieth century by Aldous Huxley in his book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, where he defines it as “the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something

²² Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 9.

²³ Loy, *Nonduality*, 1.

similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality."²⁴ These sorts of metaphysical ideas have a long and rich history in the United States, where they were especially promoted by the Transcendentalists in the 19th century and have continued to be popularized through many different spiritual teachings, religious movements, and philosophies that uphold various forms of universalism, perennialism, and awakening to this very day.

Since the early 1900's, religious and spiritual experiences have been intensively studied in the field of psychology, with major contributions being made by renowned theorists like William James, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, and Abraham Maslow.²⁵ In the 1960's, the school of transpersonal psychology emerged out of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement for the primary purpose of integrating spiritual and transcendent aspects of human experience into the framework of modern psychology, with perennialism having a strong influence within this school of thought. As a result, much of the academic research on awakening has been pursued within the subfield of transpersonal psychology. From the beginning, there have been substantive critiques throughout academia questioning the validity of perennial philosophy, including from scholars within transpersonal psychology itself, with some of these critiques specifically targeting the research on awakening.²⁶ As chief editor of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Glenn Hartelius identifies recurring

²⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), vii.

²⁵ John Davis, "An overview of transpersonal psychology." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 31, nos. 2-3 (2003): 6.

²⁶ Jorge N. Ferrer, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 110.

problems with transpersonal research in general and with studies on awakening and perennialism in particular.²⁷ For one, he says they contain too many unacknowledged metaphysical concepts that are unfalsifiable and therefore cannot be scientifically examined. And for another, he says that subjective states are frequently taken as evidence for metaphysical claims about the nature of reality, which is based on a false equivalency that conflates phenomenology with objective reality. Hartelius offers these criticisms with the intention of more firmly establishing transpersonal scholarship on scientific grounds, thereby seeking to elevate the status of transpersonal psychology in the academic world. All of this brings us right back to our contemporary context where the ancient religious, spiritual, and metaphysical traditions of awakening are now intersecting with modern psychology and scientific methods, while simultaneously being integrated into various sociopolitical worldviews and practices, all of which will be further explored later in this paper.

Stages of Awakening. One of the more renowned contemporary writers on transpersonal psychology, perennial philosophy, and nondual consciousness is Ken Wilber, who developed a systematic philosophy called Integral Theory that seeks to integrate all existing human knowledge and experiences into a single unified framework, which he describes as a “theory of everything.”²⁸ While Wilber’s thought has gained influence within particular domains, like transpersonal psychology, he has been widely criticized in academia for lack of intellectual

²⁷ Glenn Hartelius, “Taylor’s Soft Perennialism: A Primer of Perennial Flaws in Transpersonal Scholarship.” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 35, no. 2 (2016): 42-46.

²⁸ Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2000), x.

rigor. Nonetheless, some of his ideas offer creative and provocative ways of thinking about the integration of disparate fields of study, including the secular arts and sciences, along with Eastern and Western spirituality. One of Wilber's theories that directly pertains to awakening is his stage theory of psychological development. In his "integral psychology," Wilber argues that human development progresses through three major phases across the human lifespan, which he describes as pre-personal, personal, and transpersonal. Wilber bases his conceptualization of the pre-personal levels of early childhood development on thinkers like Piaget, Freud, and Erickson, whereas the personal levels draw heavily on humanistic and ego psychologies. Wilber's understanding of the highest, transpersonal stages of human development are deeply influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, as evident in his description of those stages in nondualistic terms (Armstrong 2020). Along with stage theory in general, Wilber's stages of psychospiritual development have been criticized for being unduly hierarchical and overly universalizing. Despite these legitimate concerns, Wilber's theory is helpful insofar as it offers one possible way of thinking about awakened states of consciousness as an integral part of a natural progression in human development.

Another contemporary writer and teacher of awakening, Loch Kelly, similarly describes awakening as "the next natural stage of human development."²⁹ While recognizing that everyone has their own unique experience of awakening, Kelly also maintains that awakening generally unfolds in identifiable stages, something that is widely acknowledged in both Eastern

²⁹ Loch Kelly, *The Way of Effortless Mindfulness: A Revolutionary Guide for Living an Awakened Life* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2019), 22.

and Western spiritual traditions.³⁰ Kelly outlines five different stages relevant to the process of awakening. He calls the first two stages “everyday mind” and “subtle mind,” both of which occur before the initial shift into awakened consciousness.³¹ The first stage of everyday mind is our ordinary, egoic consciousness that tends to be identified with dualistic thinking, as previously described in this paper. As Kelly puts it, “We begin our journey of awakening by being ego-identified. This is when the thought-based operating system creates a small, separate sense of ‘mini-me’ located in the center of the head.”³² The second stage, subtle mind, entails the development of a mindful witness or observing ego, whereby the ego learns to take a step back from everyday mind and become more aware of its own inner world of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and perceptions. Many psychotherapeutic techniques and secularized versions of mindfulness practices derived from Buddhism (like mindfulness meditation) have been popularized in the United States to increase self-awareness and cultivate subtle mind. One such method that has been particularly influential is Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which emerged in the 1970s to help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and illness. Virtually all these contemporary awareness-based practices have been developed and marketed for the express purpose of achieving practical benefits, like maximizing personal performance and boosting mental and physical health, along with dozens of other improvements that have been empirically validated by scientific studies over the last

³⁰ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 207-08.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³² *Ibid.*, 84.

few decades.³³ While providing substantial and measurable benefits, these contemporary practices are rarely offered as a means of awakening to one's true nature. In stark contrast, traditional teachings consistently orient mindfulness practices toward the primarily goal of awakening, which is upheld as the best medicine to heal the root of all suffering, with all the other benefits regarded as secondary (and sometimes distracting) side effects. For this reason, Kelly and other teachers emphasize the importance of moving beyond popular notions of mindfulness that focus on gradual approaches to personal improvement and individual gain, and they instead give their primary attention to awareness-based practices that immediately precipitate awakening to our true nature in the here and now.³⁴

After everyday mind and subtle mind, the final stages of Kelly's model of human development correspond to his three levels of awakened consciousness, which he calls waking-up, waking-in and waking-out. Kelly primarily associates waking-up with transcendence, waking-in with embodiment, and waking-out with interconnectedness.³⁵ According to Kelly, the awakening process typically begins with waking-up *from* ego-identification while waking-up *into* awake awareness.³⁶ This stage is characterized by one's identification with boundless awareness as the transcendent witness of all contents of awareness, which is like the movie screen previously described. This state of mind is said to feel like a big open sky, through which

³³ Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 5-6.

³⁴ Kelly, *The Way of Effortless Mindfulness*, 3; Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 5.

³⁵ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 208.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

all thoughts and feelings freely pass without causing any disturbance.³⁷ Regarding transcendence, Kelly is careful to emphasize this critical distinction regarding: “In waking -up, what we’re transcending is not our ego functions, not our bodies, not our personalities, but our ongoing process of ego-identification.”³⁸

As for the next stage, waking-in, boundless awareness then drops into the body and comes to recognize thoughts, feelings and sensations as expressions of itself. It’s as if an ocean of awareness suddenly becomes aware of itself and its own existence as a single wave, all at the same time. In this stage, both formlessness and form are simultaneously recognized as inseparable expressions of one’s true nature.³⁹ Finally, Kelly sees awakening as culminating with waking-out into the world of work and relationships where we learn to create and relate from open-hearted awareness, which is a mode of consciousness he describes as “the fabric of love” that binds all things together.⁴⁰ In this final phase, all doing arises out of being, and on account of our awareness of the unity and interconnectedness of all things and beings, we spontaneously feel motivated by love and compassion to pursue the common good in this world.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., 84-85.

³⁸ Ibid., 209.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹ Ibid., 212.

How to Awaken. Some spiritual traditions practice a gradual approach to awakening, while others emphasize a sudden approach. Still others maintain it's a combination of both.⁴² In any case, it is generally assumed that seekers of enlightenment must engage in arduous practices (such as intensive meditation, contemplation, prayer, self-examination, penance, service, devotion, solitude, and ascetic disciplines) over long periods of time before attaining awakened states of consciousness; and throughout history, this has mostly been the case.⁴³ But currently there are teachers of awakening — some of whom are informed by many different traditions but affiliated with none — who espouse the “direct approach,” which they contend is a much more efficient and accessible path to awakening.⁴⁴ Unlike gradual and progressive approaches to self-improvement that demand the mastery of various traditional techniques and practices as prerequisites to awakening, the direct path does not require any preparatory practices, spiritual beliefs, or religious affiliation.⁴⁵ Instead, the direct approach is based on the perspective that we can access our essential, true nature immediately at any time, since it's always and everywhere fully present. There's no need to work for it, earn it, develop it, or even believe in it.⁴⁶ To recognize our true nature, we simply need to know where to look to find it. For that reason, the direct approach is based on simple “pointers” given by teachers

⁴² Ibid., 38; Taylor, *The Leap*, 43.

⁴³ Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness*, 46; Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 48)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48; Stephan Bodian, *Beyond Mindfulness: The Direct Approach to Lasting Peace, Happiness, and Love* (Oakland, CA: Non-Duality Press, 2017), 14; Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 38; Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness*, 46.

⁴⁵ Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 48; Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness*, 47.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 39.

to help students know where to look in order to catch “glimpses” of their true nature.⁴⁷ The goal of these glimpses is to precipitate a brief shift in consciousness that offers direct insight into our natural wakefulness and its positive qualities. One huge benefit of this approach is that it allows seekers to directly experience the final destination right from the start, instead of needing to wait for years if not decades before having their first taste of awakening.⁴⁸

After students receive pointing out instructions, they are then directed to prompt themselves with pointers daily to precipitate many small glimpses as they actively pursue their lives in the world, so there’s no need to sit on a cushion or join a monastery. The daily repetition of these “micro-meditations” helps to train the brain to remain in awakened states of awareness for longer and longer periods of time, until transient awakened states finally become abiding personality traits, so that awakened consciousness finally becomes the default mode of personal awareness.⁴⁹

The direct path may also help to overcome some negative side-effects of the progressive path. As Bodian describes it, “the gradual approach to spiritual unfolding may actually undermine the possibility of awakening right now...[since] the very premise of the progressive approach—that you need to engage in certain practices over a period of time in order to realize who you are—reinforces the belief that our true nature is deeply concealed and requires protracted effort to uncover.”⁵⁰ As a result, the gradual approach to awakening may

⁴⁷ Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 49.

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 39.

⁴⁹ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 86-87.

⁵⁰ Bodian, *Wake Up Now*, 42.

inadvertently become the greatest obstacle its realization. But one might reasonably ask: if our true nature is so readily accessible, then why is it so difficult to recognize? A traditional Buddhist response to this question goes something like this:

So close you can't see it
 So simple you can't grasp it
 So easy you can't believe it
 So good you can't take it⁵¹

In other words, as Kelly puts it, “We are so used to knowing ourselves through our troubles.... that awake awareness, which is our true nature and our basic goodness, is hard to accept as our true identity.”⁵² The essential goodness and radical universality of our true nature — along with the simplicity, accessibility and nonsectarianism of the direct path — all suggest to me that awakening may have much to offer to the theory and practice of public theology. In any case, the main point here is not to promote any particular path, but to affirm the immediate accessibility and applicability of awakening to the general public, and to challenge common perceptions of awakening as an inherently exclusionary, esoteric, and elitist process that only applies to those who are either blessed with saintly self-discipline or privileged with surplus time, space, and money.

Awakening and Personal Transformation

Nothing needs to change to awaken. Inner and outer conditions and circumstances can remain very much the same after awakening, and for the most part they usually do. So if we're sick and poor before awakening, then we'll probably be sick and poor afterwards, since

⁵¹ Kelly, *Shift into Freedom*, 15.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15-16.

awakening doesn't give us anything that we didn't always already have. Indeed, some may argue it gives us nothing and takes away everything, including our identity. Upon awakening, the only thing that really changes is our perception of everything; and to those who awaken, that makes all the difference in the world, since awakening entails the experience of liberation from all conditions and circumstances in this world, even as they persist. For this reason, awakening occurs on a totally different level of reality than transformation. But just because awakening is categorically different from transformation doesn't mean it has no impact on it. To the contrary, awakening may serve as a huge catalyst to personal and collective transformation for the better, and that possibility is now what this paper will turn to explore.

We'll begin with looking at the relationship of awakening to personal transformation, especially as it pertains to my ministry setting as a psychotherapist. I've been in the field of mental health for about 35 years and have received extensive training in many different methods of treatment from diverse schools of thought. Over the years, there have been several pivotal developments in the field that have transformed the foundational theories and practices of psychotherapy and greatly enhanced its effectiveness, with just one example being the huge leaps in our understanding of neuropsychology and its clinical applications. But for me, the single most exciting development over all these years has been the ongoing integration of various spiritual practices and perspectives into mainstream schools of psychotherapy (including the mindfulness practices I previously mentioned), so spirituality is now frequently regarded as an ordinary dimension of psychotherapeutic practice, whereas before it was generally regarded as marginal to the field. One mainstream school of psychotherapy that is

particularly aligned with awakening and other forms of spirituality is Internal Family Systems (IFS), which I especially want to focus on here.

IFS is an empirically-validated model of psychotherapy developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz in the 1980's. Over the last few decades, it has grown into a worldwide movement with widespread applications to individuals, couples, families, groups, businesses, education, and much more, so now many regard it as a comprehensive and integrative approach to life. The model is built on three foundational propositions regarding human psychology: the normal multiplicity of mind, the existence of the core Self, and the psyche as system.⁵³

Multiplicity refers to the notion that the normal mind is not unitary, as is commonly believed, but is composed of multiple subpersonalities or parts, each with its own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and positive intentions. This is evident in such ordinary experiences as when a part of us wants to go out with friends, while another part wants to stay home. As we all have experienced, these inner parts may interact harmoniously with each other (as when the head and heart are aligned), or they may have intense conflicts with each other (like when an inner critic attacks us for eating too much). IFS maintains that all deep inner conflicts are the result of past traumatic experiences that force parts into two different types of roles, either that of an exile or protector.⁵⁴ Exiled parts carry the pain of unresolved traumas, and they are forced into exile by protector parts whose primary purpose is to keep the psychic system from being retraumatized by the pain of the exiles, so we can remain functional enough to survive in

⁵³ Frank G. Anderson et al, *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual: Trauma-Informed Treatment for Anxiety, Depression, PTSD & Substance Abuse* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media, 2017), 3.

⁵⁴ Anderson et al, *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual*, 4.

the world. The exiles are frequently experienced as inner children who became frozen in time by traumas that get deeply buried in the body. For example, an individual who experienced childhood abandonment may have an exile located in the chest who feels broken-hearted with grief, or someone who experienced neglect may have an exile who holds shame in the pit of their stomach. On the other hand, many protectors may reside in the head, where past traumas have forced them into managerial roles (where they might always be trying to figure out what to do) to make sure the system is never again overwhelmed by trauma. Protectors generally feel compelled to deny, dismiss, attack, or extinguish any exiles that threaten to break out of their confinement, for fear the exiles' storms of emotion will shipwreck the entire inner system and sink the whole ship.⁵⁵

In addition to the multiplicity of parts, IFS also upholds the existence of the core Self, which lies at the heart of the entire model. According to IFS, the Self is the innate and indestructible spiritual center within every person that is always whole and never wounded by trauma, no matter how severe.⁵⁶ The essential qualities of the Self include love, wisdom, peace, and joy, along with what's called the 8 C's: calmness, curiosity, compassion, confidence, courage, clarity, connectedness, and creativity.⁵⁷ Although the Self is always present, it frequently goes unrecognized, since it can become covered up and blended with traumatized parts that overtake and dominate the internal system. The primary goal of IFS is to help clients

⁵⁵ Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2020), 31.

⁵⁶ Richard C. Schwartz, *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model* (Oak Park, IL: Trailheads Publications, 2001), 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

“unblend” the Self from their parts so they can gain direct access to the Self.⁵⁸ After being uncovered, the client’s Self then becomes the primary agent of healing in therapy. The Self heals by turning towards the traumatized parts (both protectors and exiles) to listen to their stories with compassion and respect to learn what they need to be freed from the past. The Self can then retrieve parts from the traumatic scenarios they’ve been constantly reliving by giving them what they need, and then by helping them to “unburden” themselves of whatever traumatic emotions and destructive beliefs they still carry. In this way, the parts are finally liberated from their captivity in the past and brought into the present, where they are allowed to assume new roles within the internal system according to their own innate talents and preferences.⁵⁹ The Self is likened to the conductor of an orchestra whose role is to lead, direct and harmonize all the different musicians as they each play their own unique part in the symphony.⁶⁰ This system of interconnected parts and the Self is also likened to an internal family, which accounts for the name of the model.

One of the beauties of IFS is that it is a non-pathologizing model, so the parts are never seen as bad no matter how dysfunctional and destructive they may be, since they’re all understood to have been forced into unnatural and undesired roles that are only as extreme as the trauma they suffered. Along with the Self, all parts are seen as intrinsically good and believed to be fully redeemable. For this reason, the unofficial motto of IFS is “all parts are

⁵⁸ Anderson et al, *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual*, 9.

⁵⁹ Schwartz and Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 160.

⁶⁰ Regina A. Goulding and Richard C. Schwartz. *The Mosaic Mind: Empowering the Tormented Selves of Child Abuse Survivors* (Oak Park, IL: Trailhead Publications, 2002), 84.

welcome.” Another huge benefit of the model is that it not only promotes psychological healing like other psychotherapies, but it’s also a practical method of experientially accessing the Self and living a Self-led life that goes well beyond healing trauma. Indeed, Dr. Schwartz describes his model as a method of “awakening” to Self. Furthermore, he uses the analogy of particles and waves from quantum theory to describe how the Self can exist in the form of a particle as an individuated Self, while also existing as an energetic wave that is more collective in nature.⁶¹ Therefore, he maintains that ultimately everyone shares the same Self. To go even further, it is common for seasoned IFS practitioners to maintain that each part also has its own core Self. For this reason, they not only see IFS as a way of liberating parts from the bondage of trauma, but also as a method of awakening parts to the individuated Self lying within each of them *and* to the collective Self abiding within all of them. In this way, IFS may be seen as a nondual model that promotes a vision of unity in diversity, in which oneness and multiplicity are each experienced as having equal and inherent value. Just as importantly, IFS is also frequently regarded as highly compatible with many earth-based spiritualities by virtue of its emphasis on multiplicity of mind and retrieval of exiles that share many parallels with the animistic beliefs and practices of “soul retrieval” found in various forms of shamanism.⁶²

Awakening and Collective Transformation

Internal Family Systems and Legacy Burdens. IFS is not only a method of individual therapy but also has a strong collective dimension that makes it relevant to the full range of

⁶¹ Goulding and Schwartz, *The Mosaic Mind*, 84.

⁶² Richard C. Schwartz and Robert R. Falconer. *Many Minds, One Self: Evidence for a Radical Shift in Paradigm* (Oak Park, IL: Trailheads Publications, 2017), 17.

human experience, including the socioeconomic and political domains of life. In addition to helping clients heal “personal burdens” resulting from traumas earlier in their lives, IFS also helps to release “legacy burdens” comprised of extreme beliefs and emotions inherited from one’s family lineage, ethnic group, or culture. As Schwartz puts it, “Cultural biases like individualism, patriarchy and racism are burdens that throw families and cultures profoundly off balance.”⁶³ According to IFS, these and other destructive biases are absorbed and carried within our parts. To release these biases, the model provides specific techniques to uproot legacy burdens and expel them from the internal system.

Schwartz further illustrates the interrelatedness of our inner psychological systems and outer social systems in the following passage:

IFS is about changing people’s internal politics. By virtue of growing up in culture and family dominated by certain qualities and exiling of others, your mind reflects that hierarchical arrangement. Reading this book is a subversive activity. It aims to help you replace your authoritarian inner government with a form of pluralism in which each part feels appreciated, is free to do what it prefers, and trusts the noncoercive, heart-centered leadership of your Self.⁶⁴

As indicated here, IFS is a liberationist movement intended to decolonize the mind and body of repressive psychic structures that are internalizations of oppressive social structures. But not only that, by virtue of freeing individuals from internalized hegemony, the model also seeks the liberation of society as a whole, as further described below:

A Self-led nation would also shift from thinking in terms of a single mind to a plural mind.... The idea of a singular mind leads us to demonize each other as if our most extreme parts define us. Through the lens of multiplicity there are no jihadists, addicts, white supremacists, narcissists, people with borderline personality disorders, and so on. Instead, there are protective parts who, in their efforts to manage pain, shame, and

⁶³ Schwartz and Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 56.

⁶⁴ Schwartz, *Introduction*, 121.

fear, became locked in extreme roles. Through the lens of IFS we see the exiles behind our own scary, destructive protectors, and we also see the exiles behind our worst enemy's protectors. We trust that every person has a Self, even those whose behavior is evil. The four legacy burdens of racism, patriarchy, individualism, and materialism have driven the United States to its current dysfunctional state with massive numbers of exiles controlled by extreme and highly polarized protectors. The antidote is to bring more Self to our country.... Self's compassion, clarity, and connectedness challenge racism, patriarchy, individualism and materialism. And since human system levels are interconnected, Self-leadership at any level helps to heal all levels. We believe that each client who unburdens helps reduce the burden load of the planet, allowing all of us to have a little more access to the Self.⁶⁵

Schwartz upholds Gandhi as the very embodiment of the conviction that the only way to save humanity from global catastrophe is by first transforming the human heart, as evident in Gandhi's immortal command: Be the change you want to see in the world.⁶⁶ As we know, Martin Luther King Jr. then introduced Gandhi's teachings into the heart of America by way of the black church experience for the sake of establishing social justice and the beloved community here and abroad. The Gandhi-MLK connection shows how the confluence of Hinduism and Black faith contributed to one of the greatest demonstrations of public theology in America that prioritized inner transformation in the struggle for socioeconomic and political transformation. Contrary to many prejudices, especially on the political left, history shows that the emphasis on inner transformation in no way inhibits effective action for outward transformation, but instead only seems to strengthen it.

IFS has much to offer in our common struggle to cultivate and integrate inner and outer transformation. IFS is a pathway of awakening to Self, healing individual and collective trauma, enhancing personal growth, promoting community development, and liberating the world from

⁶⁵ Schwartz and Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 251-52.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

socioeconomic and political injustices. Through the cultivation of Self-awareness that immediately links the individual to the collective, IFS provides a strong foundation for Self-led activism that's rooted in love and directed toward inner and outer liberation from all forms of oppression. As Schwartz puts it, "When Self connects to Self the result is a larger sense of connection and belonging, and a divine sense of love.... By helping to spread the word that everyone has a Self (which most can access relatively quickly) and that parts are not what they seem, but can be loved into transformation we hope to contribute to the new manner of thinking Gandhi advocated."⁶⁷ Therefore, IFS has much to offer public theology on account its ability to cultivate love, compassion, and spiritual awakening among those who are actively engaged in self-transformation and global liberation, even as they seek to encourage others to cultivate those same loving capacities, as well, so the path is truly inseparable from the destination.

Terry Patten's Republic of the Heart. The relationship of awakening to collective transformation is also a central theme in Terry Patten's book, *"A Republic of the Heart: An Ethos for Revolutionaries—A Guide to Inner Work for Holistic Change"* (2018). In this book, Patten seeks to address the current climate crisis from an integral perspective, which he describes as a way of knowing that is holistic, evolutionary, ecological, and integrative; and as such, it embraces a multiplicity of inner and outer, as well as individual and collective approaches to theory and practice, including those rooted in spiritual and scientific worldviews. The integral approach is largely a metatheoretical tool that can be used to integrate, coordinate, and mediate between diverse perspectives and conflicting practices to concretely

⁶⁷ Ibid., 250.

address the world's practical problems. While based on Ken Wilber's Integral Theory, Patten's primary intent is not to promote the "integral project" so much as to cultivate "a loose-knit network of practitioners, scholars, and communities who creatively cooperate with practitioners in many areas of culture and society," all for the purpose of addressing the immanent collapse of human civilization due to the wholesale destruction of the planetary ecosystem.⁶⁸

To meet these overwhelming and unprecedented challenges, Patten insists we need "whole system change" that entails a comprehensive transformation of every facet of human life, including revolutionary changes in our inner consciousness, interpersonal relationships, values, cultures, technologies, economics, and politics.⁶⁹ To accomplish this "Great Transition," he believes "we are called to a robust and dynamic new form of spiritual activism—or activist spirituality—that fuses the "inner work" of personal transformation and awakening with the "outer work" of service, social entrepreneurship, and activism."⁷⁰ Patten views inner and outer work as inseparable, since "awakening cultivates a wholeness in our personal awareness.... [while] activism strives for a wholeness in our social relations. These expressions of inner work and outer work are complementary but each is in its own way incomplete."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Terry Patten, *A New Republic of the Heart: An Ethos for Revolutionaries* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2018), 103.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47, 6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

Patten uses the word “wholeness” to refer to “the essential nature of reality,” which he explicitly equates with other words like awareness, spirit, God, Self, love, etc.⁷² He regards wholeness as “the boundless totality of everything,” the source from which everything springs, the integrative principle that brings everything together, and the teleological endpoint toward which everything is heading, all of which is best intuited by the intelligence of the heart.⁷³ He also states, “Wholeness is not synonymous with any one idea, system, framework, philosophy or pattern of understanding,” but rather it is the context for all of them, so wholeness transcends all perspectives and is owned by none of them.⁷⁴ By virtue of the radical inclusivity and indestructibility of wholeness, the integral view is a both/and approach that maintains there is an element of truth in all perspectives, even those we most disagree with, so “every perspective is both true and partial,” since the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.⁷⁵ For these reasons, the integral approach eschews an “us versus them” mentality that’s rooted in the “epistemic closure” of self-certainty, while favoring “epistemic humility” based on the “understanding that knowledge is a process that is always evolving, so it is best to be curious and open and to always question our certainties.”⁷⁶

Patten’s understanding of wholeness stands in direct contrast to the reality of fragmentation that is endemic to virtually every aspect of our contemporary world, as evident

⁷² Ibid., 47, 66.

⁷³ Ibid., 69, 73.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 72, 105, 66.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 67, 105.

in scientific methods, academic departments, political parties, cultural divides, and the structure of language itself. They all express a separative approach to life rather than a holistic one that not only make wholeness difficult to embody and live, but also virtually impossible to perceive or even imagine.⁷⁷ For Patten, the primary struggle isn't between the political right and left, but "rather it is the revolution of wholeness against fragmentation."⁷⁸ Indeed, he believes the very heart of true religion is liberation from the delusion of separation that causes the fragmentation of all creation.

Patten believes one of the deepest questions of our times is: How do we stay consciously grounded in our essential wholeness while simultaneously healing ourselves and actively transforming the world? Or in the words, "How can we be the agency of wholeness that heals division" within us and between us?⁷⁹ In response to that question, Patten calls us to the dual projects of awakening and activism, which compels us to practice wholeness from moment to moment at all levels of existence throughout our entire lives. He believes wholeness must be the organizing principle of all our practices — whether they be inner or outer, individual or social — and that they all must be grounded in the recognition of the wholeness and interconnectedness that is our true nature.⁸⁰ Based on this fundamental recognition of our essential wholeness, Patten makes the critical distinction between the seeker and the practitioner. While the seeker is constantly trying to fill an inner lack by doing

⁷⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 81, 141, 179.

something to get something, the practitioner is someone who embodies and lives their essential wholeness over and over again. In other words, the practitioner is “not attempting to seek it, achieve it, or create it—but to *remember* it, to *experience* it, to *participate in* and *enact* it.”⁸¹ For this reason, Patten believes that trust in the unnamable and essential wholeness of reality — which already exists — is the hallmark of a true practitioner. This “ontological stance” represents a core commitment that organizes the whole of life that helps us to stay mindful of the bigger picture and “intuit higher syntheses of the polarities that are pulling us apart.”⁸²

Although Patten identifies a full spectrum of diverse practices that traverse many domains of life, he gives special emphasis to communities of practice that help to shift one’s identity from “me to we.”⁸³ As he puts it, “Whereas individual and group competition has always determined evolutionary success, now a new level of collective cooperation will determine our survival,” particularly regarding the climate crisis.⁸⁴ Such communal practices include the development of new narratives about our collective crises and how we might best respond to them together. Communities of practice may also promote the development of comprehensive and coherent metanarratives that leave ample room for radically divergent personal stories and tribal ideologies, with Patten offering the integral approach as one such metanarrative.

⁸¹ Ibid., 143.

⁸² Ibid., 141, 146.

⁸³ Ibid., 273.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 277.

Ultimately, Patten argues, “We are being called to our next stage of evolution and to a new level of consciousness.....We are being called to a develop a new revolutionary framework for our global culture, based in a profound realization of our interdependence, our prior and ultimate wholeness and unity.”⁸⁵ According to Patten, the realization and practice of wholeness will integrate transcendental spiritualities with immanent earth-based spiritualities, and it will align the soul’s individual journey with a “politics of love,” all of which will organically arise out of a profound recognition that “we are forever one with the vast Whole that is none other than love itself.”⁸⁶

Michael Lerner’s Revolutionary Love. In *Revolutionary Love: A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World*, Michael Lerner says his book — like Patten’s — is based on one “central idea—namely, that a transformation of consciousness is needed to save our planet.”⁸⁷ Lerner calls for the development of a new consciousness based on “revolutionary love,” which he envisions as the driving force in the creation of a “Caring Society.”⁸⁸ He describes revolutionary love as “the love of all life and all beings.... even those whose behaviors we hope to change.... It is recognizing oneself and all others as part of the fundamental unity of all being—and caring for the welfare of every part of that unity.”⁸⁹ Lerner also writes, “As it

⁸⁵ Ibid., 129, 217, 84.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 347.

⁸⁷ Michael Lerner, *Revolutionary Love: A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 149.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 39.

embraces the sacred core of all being, revolutionary love manifests within us an intense desire to heal...hurts rather than simply demean or punish those who act out their pain on others. To heal effectively, we must recognize that every one of us has been wounded in some way and needs forgiveness, atonement, and personal transformation.”⁹⁰ He then goes on to say that “we can build an economic and political system that embodies and sustains that kind of universal caring.”⁹¹ For these reasons and more, Lerner describes revolutionary love as “an ethical psycho-spiritual strategy—and a social/political path.”⁹² Lerner asserts that spiritual prophets throughout history have consistently insisted that inner and outer work is necessary for world transformation, and that “separating the two would make either level of transformation deeply limited and flawed.”⁹³ Revolutionary love, then, is the new consciousness that permits and promotes the integration of the psychospiritual and sociopolitical dimensions of life, which is the necessary prerequisite for profound, pervasive, and sustainable transformation of oneself and society.

The new consciousness of revolutionary love is especially intended to supersede the false consciousness of global capitalism with its reductionistic materialist discourse that above all glorifies the competitive accumulation of personal power and profit, which is purported to be an inescapable feature of human nature. According to Lerner, the worldwide triumph of this false ideology hinges on the separation of our struggle for material gain in the public sphere

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁹¹ Ibid., 40.

⁹² Ibid., 56.

⁹³ Ibid., 55.

from our spiritual and psychological needs that have been relegated to the private sphere, where they are deemed to be personal matters with no legitimate claim on public affairs; so if someone is unhappy and not making it in the capitalist marketplace, it's seen as their own fault and a personal failure.⁹⁴ As a result, Lerner says we now suffer widespread deprivation of love, community, meaning and self-esteem, which he calls the "Great Deprivation," a chronic psycho-spiritual condition analogous to the economic collapse of the Great Depression.⁹⁵ Lerner claims the only remedy for this sickness is revolutionary love that replaces the old bottom line of profit maximization with the new bottom line of "love and generosity, kindness and forgiveness, ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior, [and] social and economic justice."⁹⁶

Lerner believes the first step toward creating the Caring Society must begin with the transformation of the political Left. Indeed, much of his book offers a comprehensive critique of liberals and progressives, along with corrections he believes they must make to build a broad-based movement for the transformation of America. To start, Lerner notes that historically the socialist and communist ideologies of the Left overwhelmingly focused on concrete material needs while mostly ignoring psychological and spiritual needs, and how contemporary progressives have largely internalized the materialist-reductionist discourse of both socialism and capitalism, so they typically frame their arguments entirely in economic and political terms.⁹⁷ As a result, the Left is largely incapable of speaking to the unmet "meaning

⁹⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 17, 143.

needs” of Americans, which conservatives have exploited to their huge advantage. Lerner believes that “addressing these needs would allow us to win a majority of Americans to effectively challenge global capitalism and its destructive impact.”⁹⁸ To get there, he says the Left needs to renounce its own “religiophobia” as it did before with homophobia, sexism, and racism. As a part of this process, he suggests Democratic candidates apologize to conservative religious communities for the way the Left has not recognized or respected their core values, which could help to pave the way for the Left to build coalitions with religious conservatives based on their shared love-centric values that are contrary to the fundamental principles of capitalism.⁹⁹

Lerner also insists the Left needs to overcome toxic forms of identity politics that promote the shaming and blaming of vast swaths of the American population. He is especially critical of the failure of contemporary identity politics to adequately highlight the class oppression faced by people of every race, gender, and sexual identity, much of which he attributes to the elitism and classism of liberals and progressives. Rather than recognizing the working class as another disadvantaged identity group, Lerner decries “the emergence of an American majority whose needs are not only forgotten but sometimes even actively erased by much discourse of identity politics.”¹⁰⁰ Lerner specifically notes how the rates of suicide and opioid overdose has skyrocketed among middle-income white men, while their life expectancy has plummeted, and how calling them privileged makes little sense in this context and only

⁹⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 125.

serves to alienate them further, especially given that most of them had nothing to do with the creation of the current system and feel powerless to change it.¹⁰¹ Instead of engaging in a blame/shame game with others, Lerner writes:

Our goal is to help everyone understand that every form of oppression ends up supporting the larger system that hurts almost everyone. To get there, we have to be willing to see that this class-based global capitalist society hurts people in different ways, stop arguing over who suffers most, and open our hearts (and our discourse) to the suffering of everyone.”¹⁰²

Lerner believes a mass movement for social justice can only be successful if we learn to love those who are not on our side.¹⁰³ He calls on all of us to cultivate "prophetic empathy" that is rooted in universal consciousness, proclaims that everyone deserves care and respect, advocates for the benefit of all, and compels us to learn how to love those who do not yet love social justice, all without weakening our prophetic critique.¹⁰⁴ According to Lerner, "Revolutionary love is recognizing, feeling and acting upon the truth that we are all interconnected;" and it has the power to heal activists on the Left by teaching us how to love and care for our opponents, even as we offer that same possibility to love the other, as well.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately for Lerner, revolutionary love is not a material principle but a spiritual force that enables us to address "the Great Yearning all people have not just for economic security and

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 38, 103.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43, 137.

social justice (though both are very important to us all) but also for love, respect, generosity, community, and a sense of meaning and purpose.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 156.

Part 2

Prophetic Consciousness

Abraham Heschel's Prophetic Consciousness

In his magisterial classic, *The Prophets*, Heschel states the aim of his book “is to attain an understanding of the prophet through an analysis and description of his consciousness.”¹⁰⁷ According to Heschel, “the ultimate object and theme of his consciousness is God,” who “is encountered not as universal, general, pure Being, but always in a particular mode of being, as personal God to a personal man, in a specific pathos that comes with a demand in concrete situations.”¹⁰⁸ Prophetic thought is not focused upon His absoluteness, as indeterminate being, but upon His.... expression, pathos, and relationship” of love, care and concern for humanity.¹⁰⁹ For these reasons, Heschel maintains that God is characterized by “world-directedness” and “an involvement in history,” so “it is God’s concern for Man that is at the root of the prophet’s work to save the people.”¹¹⁰ Heschel insists that God’s impassioned engagement in history out of love for God’s people is the *sine qua non* for biblical theology, just “as ideas of being and becoming are for classical metaphysics,” and as such, “they mark the difference between pagan and prophetic experience.”¹¹¹ Indeed, the entirety of Heschel’s work may be seen as a polemic against the metaphysics of Asian and European philosophy, including the “mysticism of Yoga,”

¹⁰⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*. (New York: Perennial, 2001), xxi.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 622.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 618.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 619.

where “the apprehension of the divine is attained only by the complete surrender and dissolution of the ego.”¹¹² In the final sentence of his book, Heschel writes, “‘Know thy God’ rather than ‘Know Thyself’ is the categorical imperative of the biblical man [sic]. There is no self-understanding without God-understanding.”¹¹³ Therefore, Heschel no doubt would emphatically uphold prophetic consciousness over against awakened consciousness. For Heschel, awakening to the universal, eternal, essential, and impersonal nature of reality through a process of deep inquiry into the nature of the self is anathema to prophetic consciousness due to the former’s implicit (and sometimes explicit) devaluation of finite, embodied, and relational existence within concrete, historical contexts, all of which the personal God of the prophets imbues with infinite value and ultimate importance.

Walter Brueggemann’s Prophetic Imagination

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann similarly writes:

No prophet ever sees things under the aspect of eternity. It is always partisan theology, always for the moment, always for the concrete community, satisfied to see only a piece of it all and to speak out of that at the risk of contradicting the rest of it. Empires prefer reasoned voices who see it all, who understand both sides, and who regard polemics as unworthy of God and divisive of the public good.....[but the prophet] takes sides with losers and powerless marginal people; he has not yet grown cynical with the “double speak” of imperial talk and so dares to speak before the data are in and dares to affront more subtle thinking.¹¹⁴

According to Brueggemann, the overall task of the prophet is to cultivate an alternative consciousness based on the freedom of God and a politics of justice and compassion, which

¹¹² Ibid., 624.

¹¹³ Ibid., 625.

¹¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 16.

stand in direct opposition to the totalizing, false consciousness of dominant culture with its triumphalistic politics of oppression and exploitation.¹¹⁵ To achieve this alternative consciousness, Breuggemann contends that prophetic consciousness needs to be enacted in two fundamental ways: it must seek to dismantle dominant culture by criticizing it; and it must seek to energize marginalized persons and oppressed communities “by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move.”¹¹⁶ For Breuggemann, living in the eternal now is just another hallmark of Empire’s false consciousness that above all seeks to tighten its grip on power through sanctification of the status quo.¹¹⁷ In stark contrast, the prophetic imagination envisions a radical “break with the old rationality, and a discontinuity between what has been and what will be... [and presumes] a contrast between that to which we cling and a future for which we yearn.”¹¹⁸ So, like Heschel before him, Breuggemann sets prophetic consciousness over against a consciousness based on the “metaphysics of presence” that eternalize the here and now — a quintessential feature of teachings on awakened consciousness. However, unlike Heschel who focused the existential, psychological, and ontological dimensions of these modes of consciousness, Breuggemann gives central attention to the socioeconomic and political implications of both types of consciousness, highlighting how the prophetic tradition typically favors “a minority community consisting of marginal people,” whereas the totalizing discourse of dominant culture routinely favors the hegemonic status

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

quo, rendering any other possibility barely even imaginable.¹¹⁹ Considering this perspective, we can't help but ask to what extent that same oppressive tendency may be working in the universalizing discourses associated with traditional teachings on awakened consciousness.

angel Kyodo williams' Prophetic Wisdom

The reconciliation of awakened consciousness with prophetic consciousness is like trying to circle the square. Even so, in *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation*, Rev. angel Kyodo williams — a queer Black post/Buddhist womanist — attempts to do just that. Her book is described as a series of conversations in which “the Black prophetic tradition meets the wisdom of the Dharma” (a Sanskrit word for universal truth) in order to mobilize “a compassionate response to the racial injustice running rampant in the United States.”¹²⁰ To meet this challenge, Williams calls for “wisdom prophets.... [to] lay bare the unarmed truth of the transgenerational cultural illness of white superiority in equal measure with an unapologetic love that holds those besieged by that plague in the light of their humanity, distinguishing disease from host.”¹²¹ Williams goes on to say that the paradoxical and nonbinary consciousness of “prophetic wisdom.....transcends dualism or any frames that would limit the creative emergence of truth. Rather than adherence to or containment by particular ideology, its starting point is that fundamental wisdom and basic goodness are inherent.”¹²² In

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 111, 127.

¹²⁰ Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah. *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016), Editor's Note.

¹²¹ Ibid., 194.

¹²² Ibid., 192.

addition to wisdom prophets, Williams recognizes the need for transformative social change, which she envisions as an emergent movement that includes agnostics, atheists, and humanists who don't identify with any religion or spirituality, along with religious and spiritual folks who embrace the "mash-up" of both Eastern and Western views but are no longer exclusively associated with any particular faith or cluster of traditions, such as the Abrahamic prophetic traditions, Indian nondual traditions, and indigenous earth-based traditions.¹²³ According to Williams, "In a world of multiplicity, the path toward liberatory mastery—personal and social—can no longer remain rooted in a single ideology, discipline, or viewpoint; it itself is becoming intersectional and interdependent."¹²⁴ Given all this, Williams believes an uprising of nonbinary wisdom prophets and intersectional collective movements are both needed to "wake up and cut through not only individual but also social ego," since "without inner change, there can be no outer change, [and] without collective change, no change matters."¹²⁵

Williams affirms the inherent value of personal and collective identities, while simultaneously stressing the importance of transcending both. On the one hand, she recognizes that the distrust of identity in her spiritual communities is based on an authentic desire to transcend ego-identifications at the root of much suffering. But on the other hand, she also experiences most of "this distrust as a strategy to control and gain power over who has a right to talk...[so] there is less chance that the dominant group will be made uncomfortable having to tolerate a dharma expression that reminds them of their implicit role in the suffering

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 100, 193.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxiv, 89.

of underrepresented groups.”¹²⁶ Therefore, Williams insists on the liberative power of staying true to oneself through the authentic expression of one’s personal and group identities, which is essential to the love of self that permits the love of others. At the same time, however, she equally insists that we must “see past sameness and likeness as the lens through which we view our potential to care for and love one another,” and for this reason, she is critical of certain types of identity politics that is simply another form of tribalism.¹²⁷ In its place, she upholds the vision of embodied intersectionality with its deep relational interdependency that respects both our diverse identities and common cause for the liberation of all — including for those who neither share this vision nor heed its call.¹²⁸

Along with Williams and others, I believe we need to simultaneously cultivate nonbinary/nondual modes of consciousness upheld by the wisdom/awakening traditions, even as we simultaneously build up the prophetic/critical consciousness that’s necessary in our struggle for justice for the oppressed. To help advance this collective project, in the next section, I will present my own model for the integration of awakening with critical consciousness for the sake of developing individual and collective identities that are fluid, nonbinary, and intersectional.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 203-04.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

Part 3

Critical Consciousness and Awakening

The Three Eyes of Being

One of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time, Moses Maimonides, wrote *The Guide for the Perplexed* in the High Middle Ages to help those who were utterly bewildered by the cacophony of conflicting claims espoused by the various religious, philosophical, and scientific authorities of his day. Nearly a thousand years later, many of us can still relate to the urgent need for guidance in making sense of the dizzying array of responses to the existential questions, crises, and threats besieging us today, both individually and collectively as a species.

I wish to offer my own guide for the perplexed to help those of us who are seeking deeper truths about such things as the nature of ourselves and reality, including what some might call spirit or God. This simple map is intended to help us conceptually organize and practically navigate the overwhelming diversity of religious, spiritual, and humanistic beliefs and practices that flood our contemporary ideological marketplace with their jumble of conflicting visions and contradictory perspectives. Nothing in this map is particularly new. Everything has been said in one way or another by others before. Nonetheless, I sometimes define terms and combine concepts in idiosyncratic ways that may open new ways of understanding, experiencing, and responding to the multiplicity of worldviews within and around us.

Like all cartography, this map is of a completely different order than the terrain it intends to represent -- so obviously, the map is not the territory itself. In the Zen tradition, they tell us not to confuse the finger for the moon, which is to say that we must look to where the

finger is pointing, not so much at the finger itself. This map is just one small finger pointing toward the many moons of reality. It contains no inherent truth and is not meant to be taken literally. It is merely offered as a useful conceptual tool – a heuristic device – that may help us to sort out and schematically symbolize various aspects of reality and their interrelationships for the practical purpose of providing some guidance on our journey of exploration and discovery, so once we enter the promised land through our own direct experiences, we are free to discard the map altogether. Ultimately, this map is not intended to get anyone to believe or disbelieve anything, but instead it is devoted to the hope of freeing us up to more fully embody and live our own unique gifts, deepest truths, and highest callings, whatever they might be. So I humbly offer this simple map in-the-making in the sincere wish it may help someone else on this unspeakably perplexing, harrowing, and exhilarating journey of life and death, just like it helped me.

This map was developed in response to one of the most fundamental questions known to humanity: “Who am I?” The immediate and universal accessibility of the subject in question – namely, the subject of the personal pronoun “I” – makes it a very useful point of departure into the inquiry of all life itself, especially because it is quite specific and doesn’t require any prior belief system or added overlay except the very “I” by which we already identify ourselves. This map is my response to the ancient Greek imperative to “know thyself” inscribed above the threshold to the Oracle of Delphi, considered by ancient Greeks to be the center of the world, and as such this inscription may be seen as written over the very heart of Western civilization itself. The injunction to “know thyself” also may be viewed as the quintessential summation of the Upanishads, which are among the most sacred texts of ancient India, and as such are

foundational to much Asian thought and spirituality to this very day. The supreme importance of the “I” is also evident in the revelation of “I AM” as the very name of God in Jewish and Christian scriptures. And for better or worse, the increasingly individualistic, capitalistic and (many would say) narcissistic culture of our contemporary world has increasingly pushed the ubiquitous “I” into the center of all our lives. And on a more practical note, one of the many purposes of this map is to facilitate a phenomenological inquiry into the nature of reality based on our own direct experiences, and for that task, the “I” is simply indispensable. In light of all this, I start this inquiry into the nature of the “I” of the self on account of its practical accessibility and central importance throughout virtually all our individual and collective lives in both the sacred and profane worlds from ancient times to this very day.

The fundamental working assumption of this model – or we might say, its central artifice, metaphor, myth, or conceit – is simply this: There are three foundational modes of human consciousness that correspond to three distinct senses of self. These three modes of consciousness, each with its own sort of self-experience, are radically different from each other in their whole way of experiencing and understanding the world. In effect, each mode serves as a different lens to reality that reveals a boundless realm with its own characteristic features and unique qualities, including a fundamentally distinct sense of self. Collectively, I call these foundational states “the three eyes of being” -- or just as well, “the three I’s of consciousness.” Each of these three great modes of awareness with their corresponding types of self-experience have been given innumerable names over the millennia. But for now, I’ll simply refer to them as the realms of the small self, big self and no self, along with the added

indication that the small self exists in the realm of thinking, and the big self abides in the realm of being, with no self being found in the realm of emptiness.

I view these three realms of consciousness as distinct but interdependent states that simultaneously exist together, with each state occurring in either a relatively manifest or latent form, so someone in one state may or may not be aware of the other states at any given time. I also see them as co-equal in the sense that each one is invested with its own unique majesty, integrity, and sovereignty. Sometimes these three realms of consciousness may be experienced as smoothly braided together, forming a powerful unified force, while at other times they may feel hopelessly entangled and mutually disruptive. But whether consciously or unconsciously, harmoniously or conflictually, they're always there somewhere, unfolding within each of us and interfolding among all of us.

I believe this conceptual framework can chart the foundational modes of consciousness of virtually all the great religious, spiritual, and humanist traditions, and their relationships with each other, without necessarily elevating or devaluing any one of them in relation to the others. When properly understood, I believe this model helps to clarify the interrelationships among monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, atheism, and other "isms," suggesting how they stand in relation to each other. Put in another way, this map can help to make sense of how the various forms of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, shamanism, and humanistic philosophies, for instance, all relate to each other. In short, I'm proposing that all these great traditions may be profoundly understood in terms of their relationships to these three great modes of consciousness. I believe this framework can help individuals and communities gain a deeper understanding where they themselves are located on this map,

thereby increasing awareness of their own preferred modes of consciousness, as well as identifying underutilized modes of awareness they might want to develop. Finally, I would hope this model will help to build mutual understanding and respect among these many different worldviews, helping to ameliorate the tendency to ideological supremacism and self-righteous fundamentalism – something we're all prone to – which I believe are rooted in our over-identification with our own default modes of consciousness. Therefore, I offer this map to help guide the perplexed among us through so many competing traditions that appear hopelessly contradictory by showing how they might be seen as profoundly interrelated without negating their fundamental differences.

At this point, it would be perfectly reasonable if you got the impression I'm pushing a particular metaphysical philosophy, since I use abstract terms like consciousness, being, and emptiness. But it's important to understand that's not what we're doing here – and I say that for four critical reasons that are central to this project. First, as previously indicated, I'm not insisting on any kind of objective, universal truth. To the contrary, this model resists the reification of all abstract terms. Second, I'm merely insisting on the importance of certain types of subjective experiences that can be known and validated through one's own direct experiences. Third, as we will see, these experiences can be reliably cultivated and accessed through specific methods that are integral to this approach, so I'm not just proposing a map but also certain practices. And fourth, these experiences and methods are meant to support personal and collective transformation that's both subjectively and materially emancipatory. For these reasons, this practice model is very different from most philosophical and metaphysical systems that emphasize intellect over direct experience, and that lack methods

for both personal and collective transformation. In contrast, the conceptual framework I'm offering here is designed to support specific psychospiritual practices, which in turn are intended to cultivate certain types of direct experiences that are ultimately meant to promote ways of being in the world oriented toward the psychospiritual and sociopolitical liberation of ourselves and others.

But to get back to the main point, this model is based on the notion that there are three fundamentally different meanings or referents to the personal pronoun "I" that correspond to either the I of the small self, the I of the big self, or the I of no self. In other words, the elemental meaning of the "I" is determined by the mode of consciousness that utters it – which is to say, by the realm of being within which it is uttered. This model is founded on my firm conviction that the quality of our lives and our effectiveness in the world may be profoundly enhanced whenever we become more fully aware of whichever "I" we're speaking and living from, along with whichever "I" might be possessing and driving us. I believe this awareness is supremely important because it empowers us to choose which "I" we want to speak, embody, and live into being, a choice that literally determines who we are and who we most want to be. By virtue of this awareness, we are empowered to consciously choose whichever individual and collective I-dendenties we most want to cultivate and propagate for the sake of ourselves, others, and the world.

So now let's turn to identifying some of the definitive features of these three I's of consciousness that make each of them so different from the others. While doing so, I'll particularly consider how each realm exists on three different levels -- namely, on the individual, collective and transcendent levels. I emphasize these three levels of reality since this

model is explicitly intended to integrate psychospirituality with sociopolitics; and to do that, I believe our map must adequately address how the three modes of consciousness explicitly relate to the personal, communal, and nonmaterial dimensions of life. We'll start by looking at the realm of the small self, then move on to the realm of the big self and conclude with the realm of no self; and in the process of doing so, we'll consider how each of the three realms is experienced at the personal, collective, and transcendent levels of reality. As we go along, please keep in mind that the three I's of consciousness are merely intended as useful typologies that rarely if ever exist in any pure form in lived experience, since in fact our ordinary experiences typically include qualities from more than one mode of consciousness at any given time. Therefore, these descriptions are merely intended to briefly highlight some of the most prominent and relevant features within each mode of consciousness; and as such, they are primarily intended to be suggestive and evocative, rather than providing a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of each realm in all its complexity.

Small self. Of the three modes of consciousness, the realm of the small self is by far the easiest to comprehend, since it's just another name for the ordinary consciousness of our everyday lives, with the "I" of the small self commonly referred to as the ego. Above all, the realm of the ego is defined by thinking -- that is, by symbolization, language, and the word -- such that the felt experience of the egoic "I" is ultimately a byproduct of the ego's conscious and unconscious identification with its own narrative constructs and symbolic images. Moreover, the most distinctive feature of egoic thinking is its binary logic, whereby all reality and the very meaning of life itself tends to be represented through opposing terms that are hierarchically organized, so one term is prioritized while the other is devalued. This dualistic

mode of thought is evident in such common pairs of opposites as good/bad, subject/object, self/other, mind/body, male/female, natural/supernatural, black/white, us/them, along with countless others, all of which naturally predispose the ego to an either/or style of thought and perception.

While ego-consciousness has a profound impact on all facets of embodied life, the place of its deepest origination and greatest concentration seems to be rooted in the felt sense of the “I” located somewhere in the brain of each and every one of us. As a result, another hallmark of the individual ego is the pervasive experience of being a separate self with an inner, subjective life that’s living in an outer, material world. This separation of the self from all other things and beings is perhaps the single most defining feature of ego-consciousness at the individual level of identity.

At the collective level, ego-consciousness is especially marked by our tendency to subjectively identify with the tribal “we.” This tribal identity is a necessary byproduct of the inherent tendency of dualistic thinking to objectify others since it can only conceive of “us” in opposition to “them.” Similarly, the “I” of ego-consciousness is basically the same as that found in Martin Buber’s “I-it” relationship – described in his masterpiece, *I and Thou* – that divides and reduces all things and beings into discrete objects for the instrumental and utilitarian purposes of survival and gaining advantage in this world (Buber 1958, 33). Indeed, the very purpose of ego-consciousness is to help ensure our individual and collective survival through the evolutionary advantage of symbolization that allows us to encode the past so we can predict the future in order to minimize pain and death, while maximizing pleasure and the odds of survival.

Some would say the awesome achievement of symbolic representation of ourselves and the world -- the *sine qua non* of ego-consciousness -- is the most distinguishing and exalted feature of our humanity, especially because it affords us some degree of transcendence over nature that allows for the creation of all human culture and civilization. For this reason, thought itself may be viewed as the transcendent dimension of ego-consciousness that most validates and grants deepest meaning to our very existence, a perspective perhaps most cogently encapsulated in the Cartesian cogito: I think therefore I am.

Some of the worldviews most deeply rooted in ego-consciousness include much of Western humanistic philosophy and scientific thought developed in the Modern era that prioritize such things as empiricism, language, logic, analysis, history, and individual rights. Perhaps the paradigmatic figure of this general orientation to life is Socrates with his dialogical method based on critical thinking that is foundational to the critical consciousness that characterizes so much of the western intellectual tradition.

Before describing the next two fundamental modes of awareness, I want to underscore the great divide between the small self on the one hand and the big self and no self on the other. While the small self is identified with thinking, the big self and no self are both associated with disidentification from thinking, which is frequently described as the decisive shift in identity that must take place to move from ego-consciousness to awakened consciousness. On account of their disidentification with thought, I regard the big self and no self as two fundamental modes of awake awareness, each with its own distinct features and characteristic qualities. The difference between the symbolic experience of ego-consciousness and the nonsymbolic experience of awake awareness is hugely important, and it essentially

amounts to this: the ordinary consciousness of the small self is experienced as embedded within the relative, conditioned, temporal, and mortal realities of the natural world; whereas the awakened modes of consciousness adherent to the big self and no self are experienced as revealing the absolute, unconditioned, timeless, and immortal nature of reality generally associated with the sacred, supernatural, and divine. With all that in mind, we'll now turn to consider the unique features of the big self, after which we'll explore the sense of no self.

Big Self. As mentioned before, while the small self exists in the realm of thinking, the big self abides in the realm of being. This latter realm is frequently associated with pure awareness/subjectivity/consciousness/spirit that is characterized by such qualities as oneness, wholeness, and fullness, all of which are experienced as the true nature of our essential and indestructible being. The big self (also known as the Self) is animated by an all-inclusive worldview that says "yes" to all that is -- the good, the bad and the ugly -- since everything is seen as inextricably interconnected and ultimately manifesting a greater good that always prevails. The Self's radical acceptance and affirmation of all life is born of the direct experience that all is one and one is all, which engenders a universalist perspective and a both/and approach to life that stands in direct contrast to the either/or of the ego.

At the individual level, the Self may be identified with the personal spirit or soul that is experienced as a microcosmic part of the macrocosmic whole. Therefore, the individuated Self is inherently relational, deeply ecological, and always communal, such that the ego's sense of being a separate self is seen as illusory. Moreover, the "I" of the individuated Self may be understood as basically the same as that in Buber's I-Thou relationship, which can only be spoken with one's whole being to another whole being who is never used like an object or thing

but only encountered in an intimate relationship bound together in love and born of grace.¹²⁹

Unlike the individual ego located in the head, based on thoughts, and oriented toward the past and future, the embodied Self is heart-centered and rooted in unconditional love, which is only found in the present among our intersubjective relationships with all things and beings, including supreme Being itself.

At the collective level, the defining feature of Self-consciousness is its recognition that we all share one and the same being. The collective Self is especially grounded in its identity as the differentiated “universal we” that includes each and every being and thing throughout the whole body of creation. At the same time, however, Self-consciousness recognizes that humanity exists as a subcommunity of the universal we, and that humanity itself is comprised of innumerable tribal identities. From the perspective of Self, each of these various “we’s” may be regarded as a distinct, collective Self with its own organic integrity that may be thought of as the spirit of a tribe, nation, or people. These collective Selves are in turn comprised of diverse individuated Selves, each of which has its own integrity, as well. All these collective and individuated Selves together may be experienced as interdependent parts within the natural ecology of the differentiated “universal we,” which itself is grounded in undifferentiated, universal Being. In this way, Self-consciousness equally affirms both the essential unity and radical diversity of communities and individualities that naturally proliferate throughout the world.

As for the transcendent Self, above all, it may be known as the great I AM: the supreme being that exists beyond all things, within all things, and as all things. As such, it is both the

¹²⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 4, 11, 15.

holy transcendent Self and the wholly immanent Self, appearing as nothing and everything, all at the same time. On the one hand, as transcendent subject, it stands alone as the self-subsistent “I” that is eternal witness to all objects of consciousness, so it is disidentified from all the contents of its own pure awareness. As immanent Being, on the other hand, it not only constitutes the source and ground of all reality, but it also may fully identify with each and everything it beholds, as if saying, “I am that, and that, and that, along with everything else that is.” Thus, the transcendent I AM may be known through the *via negativa*, whereby it is disidentified from everything except the “I” at the center of all that’s beyond all; while in turn that same “I” within each of us may also engage in a radical *via positiva* until it finally recognizes its true identity as the immanent whole of all reality.

In contrast to ego identity that tends to be experienced as relatively fixed, solid, and separate, identity in the realm of being is much more fluid, porous, nonbinary, and polymorphic. This is evident in the Self’s ability to experience itself as an embodied and individuated “I,” while also being able to commune with any facet of creation as a collective “we,” while also being able to know itself as the great I AM at the heart of each and every being, which can appear as either nothing or everything. Furthermore, while the ego views most of nature as comprised of dead matter, the Self experiences nature as altogether alive and intimately personal, seeing it as filled with spirits, gods and archetypes typically associated with animistic, polytheistic, and metaphysical worldviews. As for limitations, the Self is perhaps more likely to devalue history, critical thinking, and the scientific method than ego-consciousness on account of its tendency to privilege the eternal now over linear time, intuition over intellect, and direct experience over scientific evidence. Worldviews that seem especially

resonant with this understanding of the Self include Vedantism, American Transcendentalism, German idealism, Neoplatonism, many forms of shamanism, and mystical traditions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

No Self. Of the three modes of consciousness, the experience of no self (or selflessness) in the realm of emptiness is by far the most difficult for most to grasp, so much so it may even sound alien, nihilistic, and vaguely threatening or even sinister to the contemporary ear. No doubt this is because the self is generally experienced as the locus of our existence and central focus of our lives that positions us in the world and anchors us to reality, without which there would be no sense of continuity from one moment to the next. This is especially true with respect to the dominant culture here in the United States, where the ideology of individualism reigns supreme, giving primary importance to personal freedom, rights, responsibilities, salvation, and success. All this places the self at the center of our individual, national and religious identities, such that our personal status and accomplishments end up determining our fundamental worth as human beings. As a result, the very notion of having no self is antithetical to everything most anyone would ever perceive or believe to be desirable, good, or true.

From the perspective of selfless-awareness, however, none of these dim assessments could be further from the truth. Without minimizing the immeasurable benefits of personhood, this perspective nonetheless maintains that the highest form of individual and collective freedom comes not from liberation of the self but liberation *from* the self, along with all its self-deceptions, chief of which is the self's insistence on its own essential and separate reality. Therefore, the realm of emptiness is above all characterized by the conspicuous

absence of any sense of substantive self. In this realm, there is no self, never was a self, and never will be any essential self, eternal soul, or personal spirit. Thus, the self in any form is merely seen as a useful fiction conjured up by the effects of language that is most deeply rooted in the personal pronoun "I," which in fact has no actual referent. In the realm of selflessness, there is no essential "I am," great or otherwise. To be clear, this perspective doesn't deny there's actually something there there. For instance, it fully recognizes there is a human body that uses language and refers to itself as "I." But the key point here is that selfless-awareness – unlike the ego or Self -- doesn't identify with any of the physical, psychological, sociocultural, linguistic, or even spiritual aspects of the human condition. In fact, it doesn't even identify as human since there is no identification with anything in the realm of emptiness. Indeed, all things in heaven and on earth – including all gods and creatures -- are seen as empty of any essential identity or self-subsistent reality. Instead of being in any way autonomous, each and everything is seen as comprised of component parts, such that whenever all the parts are fully separated out, nothing remains at the bottom of it all that constitutes the fundamental substance of anything. As one spiritual teacher put it, we may all love chocolate chip cookies, but when you separate out all the ingredients – flour, sugar, butter, eggs, chocolate chips, and salt – there's nothing left over that constitutes some abiding essence of the chocolate chip cookie, since it is nothing more than a composite reality made of other things; and in that respect, we're all just like chocolate chip cookies. Furthermore, since all these other things are also made up of other things, this eventually leads to the realization that everything is inseparable from everything else, and that ultimately everything is everything. Therefore, in the realm of emptiness, it's not just the self that is empty of self, but in fact each

and everything is totally devoid of any self-subsistent reality. While the Self, then, is deeply saturated in a felt sense of its own reality and that of others, selfless-awareness directly experiences the emptiness of all things and beings, such that the ontology of Self in the realm of Being is displaced by the nontology of no self in a realm of emptiness.

In many Christian theological traditions, the *via negativa* is a way of knowing God through a process of negation that refuses to identify God with any attributes or qualities. Similarly, in classical Indian philosophy, there's the negative path of *neti neti* -- meaning not this, not that -- which seeks to reveal the one true nature of both Self and God. In the realm of emptiness, however, the way of negation is used to describe the self's journey of radical disidentification from all inner and outer conditions and circumstances that ultimately leads to a direct experience of the bottomless ground of emptiness that exists within oneself, the universe, and even God, whereby we all stand naked before the great unknown as the nameless mystery that we truly are. If the Self says "yes" to all that is, then selflessness is born of a relentless "no" -- a no which in fact is a double negative that is not negative at all, since after saying no to everything else it ultimately says no to itself. Therefore, while the Self abides in the realm of both/and, and the ego in the realm of either/or, no self is found in the kenotic realm of an endless neither/nor.

At the individual level, the experience of no self is usually first encountered through a profound journey of descent into the depths of one's own being that sometimes may be just as harrowing and humiliating as it is liberating and exhilarating. Throughout this journey, the many masks of our conditioned identities are stripped away one by one until finally our root identification with the "I" likewise slips away, revealing the true nature of ourselves, the

universe, and God as empty of all identity. This process of thoroughgoing disidentification is ordinarily experienced as a process of self-annihilation, since awakening to our true nature requires nothing less than our willingness to relinquish everything we most cherish, especially our most precious identities. For this reason, awakening to selflessness is widely understood as a sort of death practice that calls us to die before we die, so when we die, we never die.

Whereas the ego sees with the “I” in the head, and the Self with the eye of the heart, the embodied sense of selflessness is most deeply got in the gut, where it can feel like a silent still-point around which all else moves. This energetic center in the body -- called the *Dantian* by Taoists and the *Hara* in Japanese martial arts – in turn serves as the gateway to an even deeper descent within the body into a boundless pregnant abyss of unfathomable peace and pure potentiality. The numinous darkness of this velvety, fertile womb may also be likened to the experience of gazing deep into the eyes of one’s lover or into the vastness of a starry midnight sky. Although this divine abyss may rightfully be described as transcendent on account of its utter formlessness, it might better be described as trans-descendent, since it is encountered by falling downward instead of by ascending upward.

At the collective level, selfless-awareness experiences everything as the same unnamable thing made manifest in the countless, nameable things of this world. So, like the Self, selflessness exists beyond all things and within all things simultaneously -- with the main difference being that the Self primarily experiences reality as mostly personal, whereas selflessness primarily experiences it as profoundly nonpersonal. By virtue of the nonpersonal sameness and radical diversity of all things, selfless-awareness immediately recognizes the inherent ecological interdependency of humanity with the whole of creation, and thereby

naturally feels a profound sense of solidarity and kinship with all things and beings. For all these reasons, collectivity in the realm of emptiness is deeply inflected with a nonpersonal yet intimate sense of universality that inhabits and moves each and every me and we.

Buddhism and Taoism especially resonate with notions of selflessness and emptiness. Other perspectives that also subscribe to various forms of selflessness include scientific materialism, Sartrean existentialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and postmodern critiques that deconstruct the self. Unlike Buddhism and Taoism, however, many of these other worldviews do not affirm the existence of any sort of spiritual or transcendent reality.

How the Three Eyes are Interrelated

Having just reviewed the unique characteristics of each realm of consciousness, I'll now turn to various axiomatic principles guiding my understanding of all three realms of consciousness and how they relate to each other. None of these propositions and examples are meant to be taken and applied in any rigid sort of way. Instead, they're primarily intended to evoke our intuition, spark our imagination, and stimulate conversation by providing basic parameters for creative inquiry and some ground rules for free play. These propositions are:

- All three realms are of equal value, so it's no better or worse to abide in one realm as opposed to another.
- All three realms of consciousness co-exist simultaneously, indivisibly, and interdependently, so what affects one realm affects them all.
- Each realm has its own unique strengths, integrity, and sovereignty. For example:
 - Modernist conceptions of the individual self, empirical reality, and reason (all associated with the egoic realm) have facilitated huge advances in such areas as science, technology, the arts, and human rights.

- Indigenous, earth-based spiritualities (associated with animism in the realm of being) especially emphasize how to live respectfully and harmoniously with nature.
- Each realm has its own unique limitations. For example:
 - In many religions, supreme Being is believed to be completely disembodied, which may be considered a limitation insofar as many worldviews also maintain that bodily existence is intrinsically good.
 - In Buddhism, the egoic realm is marked by the limitations of sickness, old age, and death.
- Each realm usually exists in a relatively manifest or latent form, depending on context. For example:
 - While many Christians have traditionally believed they are citizens of both the earthly and heavenly realms, the earthly (egoic) realm is generally regarded as more manifest and the heavenly realm (of being) more latent during this lifetime.
 - For Buddhists who attain enlightenment, the egoic realm becomes latent while the realm of emptiness is made manifest.
- People can shift from one mode of consciousness to another. For example:
 - Hindus can shift from ego-consciousness to transcendent Self-consciousness through prayer, contemplation, ritual, and worship.
 - Buddhists can shift from egoic consciousness to selfless-awareness through intense meditative and ritualized practices.
- Each realm views the same reality through its own lens, so the same thing will appear fundamentally different in the three different realms. It's as if they're all viewing the same scene but from radically different angles. For example:
 - Whereas the individuated Self may experience the I AM as its own highest Self, the individual ego may experience it as a personal Supreme Being who is Absolute Other.
 - What selfless-awareness may experience as the formless abyss of unfathomable peace, the ego may perceive as an immediate, existential threat that triggers a sense of impending doom and annihilation anxiety.

- What the ego may experience as an inert, material thing in the objective world, the Self may experience as an embodied spirit in the world of Spirit.
- People in one mode of consciousness may devalue, denigrate, or even deny the reality of other modes of consciousness. For example:
 - Atheists, logical positivists, and empiricists (associated with the realm of ego) generally deny the reality of any sort of spiritual, metaphysical, or divine realm (associated with the realm of Being).
 - Some forms of Hinduism maintain that universal Being is the only reality and that the realm of the ego is entirely an illusion.
- People generally idealize particular realms of consciousness and universalize their value, so consciousness supremacism is normative at this time in history. For example:
 - Empiricists typically privilege the importance of improving the measurable and material conditions of our lives in this world (associated with the egoic realm), while dismissing all metaphysical and supernatural realms
 - Christians traditionally believe the highest destination one may ever hope for is the kingdom of heaven (associated with the realm of being), while the kingdom of this world (associated with the egoic realm) is relatively devalued.
 - Many schools of Buddhism view the attainment of Nirvana (associated with the realm of emptiness) as the ultimate spiritual goal toward which all human life is best directed, while the phenomenal realm of the ego is seen as illusory.

Now that we have some basic understanding of each of these three modes of consciousness and how they relate to each other, I want to further surface the significance of this whole project, especially because it's so easy to miss the forest for the trees. But first of all, I just want to give this friendly reminder: I'm not saying there are literally three different modes of consciousness that exist at three different levels. Just for the record, I actually believe life consists of an infinite spectrum of ever-changing states of consciousness. But at this time in history, I also believe three great modes of consciousness may be directly experienced and conceptualized to exist alongside countless other modes of consciousness. In any case, my

primary intention here is to present a practical typology of states of consciousness that roughly captures the most outstanding features from some of humanity's most cherished worldviews. At the same time, I also want to acknowledge that this conceptual framework is historically, culturally, and subjectively embedded and therefore neither universally valid nor objectively true. Instead of facticity, this map is offering a practical way to explore and expand our awareness so we might become more open-minded and open-hearted and thereby be of greater service to ourselves and the world, especially when confronted with the hard facts of life.

Polymorphism and Identity dynamics

One of the most important facets of experience this model seeks to explore pertains to the very nature of consciousness itself: namely, that consciousness is infinitely polymorphic, which is to say that it appears in countless particular forms, constantly changes form, assumes opposite forms, includes all forms, and transcends all forms. I call this the polymorphic perversity of consciousness since it transgresses the bounds of all common sense and conventional wisdom. The whole notion of polymorphic awareness – which can be directly experienced -- is the single most important concept that undergirds this entire model, since it is only by virtue of polymorphism that consciousness can appear in so many diverse forms throughout all the different realms and levels of reality described in this paper.

Just as importantly, this model is also based on the understanding that polymorphism itself is a function of complex processes of identification and disidentification with thinking. These processes of dis/identification go something like this: The diverse things and beings of this world can only take form and become known to us through the cognitive process of

symbolization. This becomes a problem, however, when we inevitably confuse actual things and beings with their symbolic representations and thereby lose access to our pre-symbolic, direct experience of life. As one spiritual teacher put it, “The day you teach the child the name of the bird, the child will never see that bird again.” To regain direct access to the true nature of oneself and all reality (instead of merely relating to their symbolic representations), one must begin the process of disidentification from thinking, including disidentifying with all the stories we tell about ourselves and everything else. This shift from symbolic knowledge to post-symbolic experience marks one’s movement from the egoic realm of thinking into the awakened realms of being and emptiness, whereby identity becomes much less fixated and exponentially more fluid, nonbinary and polymorphic.

Just to be clear, this dramatic shift in identity does not necessarily imply that the ego needs to be devalued or dissolved to make way for awakened consciousness. I would argue it’s not necessarily a zero-sum game, since it’s perfectly possible to strengthen one’s ego while also cultivating one’s spirituality – which for many may be best of all. In any case, what’s most important to me is that we’re all free to cultivate any one or more states of consciousness, according to our own values and needs. Ultimately, my wish is that we’re all free to disidentify from each and every state and to identify with each and every state -- so we’re free from all states and free to assume all states -- according to whatever serves our highest purpose in any given situation.

What I’m advocating for is the free play of identity dynamics -- with its multiplicity of selves and no selves -- that totally embraces yet infinitely exceeds the common categories of identification prevailing today. As it stands now, we’re acutely aware of our demographic

identities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, class, and political affiliation, so much so we're totally consumed with tribal and identity politics on both the right and left. On top of all that, we have our various role identities, too, like family member, friend, and worker. All these identities are critically important, with many being sacred, and they deserve to be honored and celebrated. However, most of them are firmly planted in our individualistic, familial, and tribal identities that separate us from the vast majority of humanity and put us in direct competition – if not outright conflict – with everyone and everything outside our own circles, so me and mine still rule the day. Moreover, most of these identities are primarily determined by objective factors, whereas for many people identity is primarily based on their subjective experiences. Indeed, many insist their essential identities are sovereign and transcendent, so they refuse to allow themselves to be defined by others or by the accidents and conditions of objective reality. Therefore, this model is designed to explicitly include and cultivate a wide range of personal and collective identities that are more expansive and universally oriented and therefore more likely to serve the common good. At the same time, however, this model is also designed to minimize the othering of those who do not share these universalist perspectives, so that universalism itself doesn't merely become yet another tribal identity, spawning a false sense of spiritual superiority or consciousness supremacy based on the invidious belief we're more "highly evolved" than them.

A Nonhegemonic Metanarrative and Self-Deconstructing System

A rather unique feature of this model is that it actively affirms the equal truth and merit of both materialism and idealism, historicity and universality, essentialism and nonessentialism, embodiment and transcendence, individuality and collectivity, local narratives and grand

narratives, egoic identities and awakened identities, along with so many other opposing perspectives, all without privileging one over another. And as already indicated, this model does not seek to elevate its own perspective above any of the other perspectives. Instead, it endeavors to articulate a nonhegemonic metanarrative that is both self-affirming and self-deconstructing: self-affirming insofar as it structurally promotes its own unique vision and version of reality that it actively offers to others; and self-deconstructing because it structurally attempts to contain and critique its own biases and partiality arising from our inescapable entanglements with biology, history, tribe, and personality.

Along with affirming and deconstructing itself, the model also seeks to both affirm and critique all other worldviews, too. The critical task is pursued by immediately juxtaposing the three modes of consciousness with each other – and by implication all the worldviews they represent -- which are then allowed to mutually confront, critique, correct, compliment, complete, and compete with one another. The tension caused by the juxtaposition of their fundamental differences is intended to instigate a creative process of mutual interpretation, interrogation, and dialogue. While emphasizing their differences, the model also affirms their underlying commonality by framing them all as modes of consciousness. In this way, the concept of consciousness serves as the one and only playground within which all their differences are encouraged to play.

Let me say more about how this model is strategically structured to be a nonhegemonic metanarrative through its design as a self-deconstructing system. First, we must admit this model is in fact hegemonic because if nothing else it is a linguistic construction, and as we have seen, this model maintains that language itself is the very source of ego-consciousness that

inevitably puts self, tribe, and species above the common good of all creation, despite every best intention. And although the model attempts to counteract these egoic tendencies by introducing the wholistic perspective of the Self that's oriented toward the common good, the Self may also impose its own hegemonic vision by consistently privileging the universal oneness of all, which tends to reinforce the erasure of differences and thereby increase the marginalization of minorities. As yet another corrective, the model then offers the perspective of selfless-awareness that negates egocentrism, as well as the totalizing tendencies of Self, through its emphasis on the emptiness of all things, including the emptiness of all modes of consciousness. In this way, selfless-awareness recognizes that ultimately reality is not any mode of consciousness at all, but instead it is that which is the indeterminate source of all modes of consciousness that's beyond all experience, and therefore must remain forever nameless and unknown. Selfless-awareness hereby negates the primacy and ultimacy of its own mode of consciousness, denying its own special access to universal truth, even as it denies the same to all others. As a result, the self-negating power of emptiness serves to undermine the very notion of consciousness upon which this whole model is based. By virtue of this self-negation, the model incorporates a self-critical, self-deconstructing component into its entire system that serves to mitigate against the hegemonic, totalizing, supremacist, narcissistic and idolatrous tendencies deeply embedded in the very structures of language and logic out of which this whole model is constructed.

Postlude

But the story does not end there, my friend.

Out of the nameless darkness of the great unknown

the word once again is miraculously born
that instantly tears mind from body
so the heart again gets torn.
But by ego's fierce utterance
of distinct and diverse names
once again
fiery new worlds are formed and framed.
So in this way
like life itself
this model continuously creates
then simply negates
its own three selves.

Applications

I would like to present this model in the form of a workshop at the Internal Family Systems annual conference that is primarily attended by psychotherapists and other professionals who are interested in developing their clinical skills. As indicated earlier in this paper, the IFS model is built on the concepts of the Self and parts (which may be seen as small selves), so there is a natural fit between these two models. The IFS model, however, has nothing to say about the experience of selflessness. For that reason, I believe my model might help in the further development of IFS theory and practice. The IFS community is generally very encouraging of the further application and expansion of the IFS model. Furthermore, the IFS organization and community as a whole have demonstrated a passionate commitment to a

holistic approach to spiritual, psychological, and sociopolitical transformation, so I believe there would be much interest in my model.

I envision my presentation taking the form of a 2-day workshop that includes both conceptual and experiential learning. The first day would focus on the exploration of personal identities, with the second day focusing on collective identities. Both days would include didactic presentations but mostly be comprised of experiential exercises and methods already practiced in the IFS community, coupled with experiential practices and techniques that already exist in communities devoted to awakening, particularly those associated with the “direct approach” to awakening, as described in my section on methods of awakening. The goal of the workshop is help participants to more fully and directly experience the multiplicity and fluidity of both their personal and collective identities, allowing them to feel more expansively and authentically connected to themselves and others. The workshop would also include opportunities for unburdening individual trauma, as well as collective traumas that we all carry from the intergenerational transmission of oppressive familial, ethnic, and cultural dynamics, such as racism and sexism, as described in my section on IFS. In addition to having glimpses of awakening and healing experiences for themselves, the participants will also be equipped to share these concepts and practices with the clients in their own practices for the purpose of bringing further transformation to the broader community, thereby helping to “reduce the burden load of the planet, allowing all of us to have a little more access to the Self” – and I might add, to the no self, as well.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 251-52.

In addition to the IFS annual conference, I could imagine other venues for this workshop or even a retreat, including a spiritual center for holistic learning (like the Omega Institute or the Open Center) or a religious institution (like Middle Church or Union Theological Seminary). And particularly in Christian contexts, my workshops or retreat might also integrate – or present separately – themes and perspectives I’m about to explore in my next section on apocalyptic consciousness, since I see my model is entirely consistent with and complimentary to my understanding of the apocalyptic gospel proclaimed by Paul, as I hope you will see.

Part 4

Apocalyptic Consciousness

The Apocalyptic Mood

We're living in an apocalyptic age. We feel it in our guts, and we know it in our bones. We're now witnessing the cataclysmic convergence of mutually accelerating crises that threaten the collapse of multiple global systems all at once due to the climate crisis, pandemic, economic recession, escalating inequality, failed states, mass migration, decline of democracy, rise of ethno-populism and authoritarian strongmen, and the epistemic meta-crisis due to the lack of shared facts and spread of big lies. And then there's still the ever-present danger of nuclear annihilation, too. And that's just the tip of the melting iceberg.

These are the signs of our times that threaten to end civilization as we know it, which we can now declare as a matter of scientific fact without hyperbole, irony, or religious belief. This is the bad news of our contemporary world, live streamed 24/7 for all to hear and more than most of us can bear.

Despite the end drawing all too near, many Christians lack an apocalyptic faith and practice to help guide us through these increasingly disruptive and disorienting times. Those of us who see ourselves as non-fundamentalist Christians seem to have little zeal for apocalyptic theology and discourse. This has long been attributed to our embeddedness within the general optimism of liberalism and enlightenment thought that emphasize the progressive transformation of self and society through human efforts, which leaves little room and not

much need for God's sovereign imitative in saving us from our devastation of this world and our own self-destruction.¹³¹

Many Christians also have a visceral aversion to the apocalyptic dualisms so vividly portrayed in biblical passages with their visions of eternal salvation for God's elect and everlasting hellfire for everyone else, which fundamentally contradict the humanistic and universalist commitments of those who resist the tribalism, imperialism, supremacism, and even genocidal racism perpetrated throughout much of Christian history, all in the name of Christ and all too frequently fueled by apocalyptic fanaticism.

As a result, many of us seem to have largely abandoned biblical apocalypticism and ceded it to fundamentalist Christians who continue to effectively weaponize it to advance their dualistic worldview, especially here in America, where apocalyptic ideologies are deployed by Christian nationalists to shape our national identity and influence foreign affairs.

For all these reasons and more, much insensibility and resistance to Christian apocalypticism persists, despite the overwhelming consensus of biblical scholars that the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament authors were indissolubly steeped in an apocalyptic worldview that came to define the most central terms and tenants of Christian faith, including the coming reign of heaven on earth, resurrection, new creation, Son of Humanity, Son of God, and perhaps above all, the very designation of Jesus as the Christ.

Indeed, apocalypticism is not just one perspective among so many others in the New Testament, but rather it may be seen as the very substance of the faith itself, since the good

¹³¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* [1937]. (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 189.

news proclaimed by Christ is essentially an apocalyptic gospel in every way.¹³² Therefore, I believe it is misguided for Christians to marginalize, soft pedal, or dilute the apocalyptic dimensions of the gospel. Instead, I believe we need to face and lean into the crucible of the apocalyptic gospel so it can take deeper root in the heart of our faith and practice. To do this, we need to reengage the apocalyptic passages in scripture to reclaim them as our own from those who use them to further divide us, so we ourselves can be reclaimed by the apocalyptic gospel and empowered to proclaim it for the liberation of all. First and foremost, I believe we need to do this to be more fully faithful to the good news of Jesus Christ. But I also believe we need to do this so we can more faithfully confront the bad news of the global mega-crisis now converging upon us.

In the collective imaginary of contemporary culture, the apocalypse is envisioned as all doom and gloom, a looming specter reflected in Hollywood's perpetual production of ever more images of worldwide destruction and post-apocalyptic desolation. But this is not the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. Indeed, any "apocalyptic reduced to a mood of world ruin and promoting desperate anxiety has nothing to do with the gospel."¹³³ As feminist theologian Catherine Keller explains, "The Greek term used in the New Testament, apokalypsis, does not signify "the end of the world;" but instead, it actually means to uncover, unveil or make naked, such that "originally the word signified the sexually charged moment of an ancient bride's

¹³² Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), xiii, xv.

¹³³ Ernst Kasemann, *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 8.

unveiling.”¹³⁴ This term most prominently appears in the title of the last book of the Christian bible, where it is translated as the “revelation” to John. In this context, it ultimately refers to the unveiling of “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” where God will dwell with God’s people and “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.”¹³⁵ This beatific vision of tender communion between heaven and earth, God and God’s people, is the true and final apocalypse of God promised and proclaimed by the good news of Jesus Christ; so in the end, what gets destroyed is only that which seeks to deny and destroy the consummation of this final communion.

And yet the revelation to John does not stop there. In the last scene of the last book in the whole Christian canon of scripture, John describes how outside the gates of the new Jerusalem “are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.”¹³⁶ In this way, the bible ends with the image of Christ and his servants within the city gates, reigning in eternal glory, while everyone else is outside “in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.”¹³⁷ Although not explicitly stated in the text, throughout much of Christian history, this concluding vision has been taken to portray the

¹³⁴ Catherine Keller, *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), xvi.

¹³⁵ Rv 21:2-4.

¹³⁶ Rv 22:15.

¹³⁷ Rv 21:8.

permanent division of humanity between the eternally saved and the eternally damned, as if this were the final word on our collective destiny. End of story.

But is this really the ultimate vision of the end according to the New Testament? Does scriptural witness really conclude with so many condemned to eternal hell? Is this really as good as the gospel gets?

Pauline Apocalypticism

The cosmic dualism so vividly depicted in *The Revelation to John* is a defining feature of 1st century apocalyptic literature. This dualistic worldview is found in many apocalyptic passages throughout the Bible, including in Christ's own teachings on the end times.

Nonetheless, there is one -- and I believe only one -- apocalyptic passage in the New Testament that emphatically breaks with this tradition and explicitly moves beyond the cosmic dualism of the day by describing an altogether new vision of the ultimate unity of God and all creation in the end. This apocalyptic teaching is found in a passage by Paul in his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, which will be the focal passage of this entire study. (And please note, as we go along that whenever I refer to "Paul," that designation includes pseudonymous authors, as well). In this passage, Paul writes:

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits, then at this coming/*parousia*, those who belong to Christ.

²⁴Then the end will come, when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion and all authority and power. ²⁵ For he [Christ] must reign until he has subjected all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For God "has subjected all under his feet." But when it says that

“all” has been subjected to him, it is clear that this does not include God, who subjected all under Christ. ²⁸ When all are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to him who put all under him, so that God may be all in all.¹³⁸

The fact this passage represents Paul’s teaching on the end times is explicitly stated in verse 24, where he introduces all subsequent pronouncements with “Then the end will come, when.” In what Paul describes thereafter, there is much consistency with other apocalyptic passages in the bible, including in *The Revelation to John*, that depict Christ’s victory over all his enemies and his triumphant reign. But what I especially want to focus on here are two extraordinary teachings of Paul, neither of which are found anywhere else in scripture: namely, the eschatological subjection of Christ to God, and the final apocalypse of God as all in all.

The Final Submission

As for the first teaching, Paul informs us that Christ will “reign *until* he has subjected all under his feet”; then Christ will hand over his kingdom to God; and finally, Christ himself will be subjected to God. In other words, this passage clearly and explicitly depicts the end of Christ’s reign.¹³⁹ Full stop. The provisional nature of Christ’s reign is hardly something ordinarily taught in bible school or preached from the pulpit. As far as I know, it doesn’t exist in any lectionary. Of course, commentaries on this passage do exist, and even the most traditional and hoariest of Protestant commentators generally recognize that this passage describes the end of Christ’s reign, as evident in these following three examples: Christ’s “offices of mediator and king, becoming unnecessary, shall cease”; “a great deal of dogmatic theology has been imported, in

¹³⁸ 1 Cor 15:22-28.

¹³⁹ 1 Cor 15:25.

order to make the apostle not teach—what, in truth, he does teach with the greatest distinctness—that there is a cessation of the rule of Christ”; and “the interpretation which affirms that the Son shall then be subject to the Father in the sense of laying down his delegated authority, and ceasing to exercise his mediatorial reign, has been the common interpretation of all times.”¹⁴⁰

I believe the radical implications of Paul’s stunning revelation of the end of Christ’s reign in the eschaton has barely even begun to be fully appreciated, applied, and proclaimed in the past or present, and therefore we have yet to hear the good news in this teaching and receive its salvific and liberative benefits. The extraordinary significance of this Pauline vision is not merely limited to the biblical doctrine of the end of Christ’s reign -- however important that may be in itself. But for me, what makes it most powerful of all is that this depiction of Christ’s abdication and subjection are the final acts of Christ recorded in all scripture. In other words, I believe there is no other description of Christ in the biblical testimony that could possibly be interpreted as occurring after this final event described by Paul that reveals submission as the telos of Jesus Christ. Given that eschatological and apocalyptic worldviews are based on the belief that the end defines, interprets, transforms, and reveals the meaning of all that comes before it, I submit that the eschatological submission of Christ is the final, definitive event in the entire lifespan of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Christ proclaims he is the Omega, the last, and

¹⁴⁰ “1 Cor 15:28, Benson Commentary,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm; “1 Cor 15:28, Meyer’s NT Commentary,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm; “1 Cor 15:28, Barnes’ Notes on the Bible,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm.

the end, we must not think of him in the end as *Christus Rex* reigning over his kingdom, but more as subject/king who has already, voluntarily abdicated his royal office and delivered his realm to God.

We have been taught that Christ's lifespan is marked by such major stages and milestones as the pre-existence, incarnation, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming (*Parousia*), each of which has huge narrative and doctrinal significance.¹⁴¹ But then after the Parousia (explicitly mentioned in verse 23), Paul reveals to us the culminating event in the entire lifespan of Jesus Christ for which there is no name. At least for our purposes here, then, I will simply refer to this event as Christ's final submission or *hypotaxis*, which is the Greek term used in this passage that means to subject, to submit, or to place or rank under (Strong's Concordance). As Christians, I believe we need to honor this event by fully integrating and properly positioning it within our Christological teachings and doctrines, so all the other events in Christ's life are ultimately interpreted in light of and directed toward his closing act, which is especially imperative because Paul teaches us that Christ's whole mission only finds completion in his final submission.

God is All in All

What then is the ultimate meaning and purpose of Christ's final submission? Paul explicitly gives us the answer in the final verse of this passage, where he writes, "the Son himself will be subjected to him who put all under him, *so that* God may be all in all."¹⁴² In

¹⁴¹ Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*. 2nd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 2009), 149.

¹⁴² 1 Cor 15:28 [emphasis added].

other words, Christ's final submission occurs so that God may be all in all. This brings us to the second, extraordinary teaching of Paul -- namely, that in the end, God becomes all in all -- which is an entirely new way of describing God, not found anywhere else in scripture. Paul's teaching that God is all in all may be seen as the final apocalypse of God in the New Testament, since this is the last thing scripture has to say about God that occurs after Christ's final submission.

The expression "all in all" comes from the Greek "*panta en pasin.*" Both "*panta*" and "*pasin*" are adjectives with the same meaning, since they're both derived from the root word "*pas*," which means all, each, every, everyone, everything, and the whole (Strong's Concordance). Moreover, the Greek expression for "all in all" is rendered with a definite article, so it might also be translated as God is "the all in all." This suggests to me that this unique Pauline characterization of God may even be considered a new name for God. Even more importantly, however, this eschatological theophany and divine appellation not only reveals something new about God's nature, but it simultaneously unveils the true nature and final destiny of all humanity and the whole cosmos, as well, since all are necessarily included and fully participate in the divine all in all. Therefore, I believe "the all in all" in this apocalyptic passage represents the endmost telos of both creator and creation, beyond which nothing further is recorded in the whole canon of Christian scripture, thereby making this revelation of God its final beatific vision. As a result, just as all Christology must be interpreted in light of the final submission, I also believe that each and every Christian doctrine must likewise be oriented toward, viewed from, and interpreted through the understanding that ultimately God is all in

all, including all doctrines pertaining to Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, anthropology, cosmology, eschatology, ethics, and above all divinity itself.

Christ Fills All in All

The expression “all in all” is found in only one other place in the bible, where it refers not to God but to Christ. In this other passage, Paul writes that God “subjected all things under his [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all/*panta en pasin*.”¹⁴³ Here, Paul is emphasizing the unique relationship between Christ and the church before his final submission. In this context, the church is depicted as the body and fullness of Christ, with Christ himself being described as the one who fills all in all. This has been widely interpreted to mean that while Christ’s presence extends beyond the church insofar as he pervades all things, he nonetheless shares a unique identification, intimacy, and organic unity with the church, where he is made most fully manifest.¹⁴⁴

What’s particularly noteworthy about this passage for our purposes, however, is that Christ is described as the one who “fills” all in all. This strikes me as significantly different than the description of God who will “be” all in all in the end, since the latter description explicitly identifies God with “all in all,” whereas the former leaves any such identification implicit at best. Furthermore, while Christ is here described as the head of the church and the church as

¹⁴³ Eph 1:22-23.

¹⁴⁴ Bible Hub, “Eph 1:23, Barnes’ Notes on the Bible.”; “Eph 1:23, Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-23.htm>; Bible Hub, “Eph 1:23, Meyer’s NT Commentary.”

his body, no such special designation is afforded to the relationship between Christ and the “all in all” that he “fills.” In this way, Paul effectively affirms both the universality of Christ while simultaneously setting apart the Church as the fullest expression and embodiment of Christ. In other words, Paul upholds Christ’s identification with the church as analogous to the way we ordinarily feel identified with our own bodies; and evidently for Paul, this bodily identification and *being* something is more profound than simply filling or being *in* something, no matter how complete that filling might be. Therefore, the fullness of Christ’s embodied identification with the church emphatically does not extend to all creation. This stands in marked contrast to the apocalypse of God in the end where God is proclaimed to *be* all in all, which in effect reveals God’s ultimate and intimate identification with all creation.

Christ is All and in All

There is only one other biblical passage that contains a clear variation on the turn of phrase we’re exploring here, which is where Paul writes, “You have taken off the old humanity/*anthropon* with its practices and have put on the new one....where there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and in all/*panta kai en pasin*.”¹⁴⁵ In these verses, Paul is specifically describing the new nature of the self and humanity that exists in Christ, which he repeatedly insists is characterized by the subordination of all differences to the everything-ness of Christ, who “is all and in all.” As one

¹⁴⁵ Col 3:10-11.

commentator put it, Christ “is the principle of unity, through whom all the distinctions that mar the oneness of mankind [sic] are done away.”¹⁴⁶

What especially distinguishes this passage from all others, however, is that it goes beyond affirmations that Christ is “in” all and “fills” all to explicitly proclaim that wherever the new humanity exists, there Christ “is” all. As mentioned above, this outright identification of Christ with the new humanity is also evident in Paul’s designation of the church as the body of Christ. Nonetheless, this passage seems to go even further by indicating that the new humanity (and hence the church) is not just the body of Christ but is Christ in every way. This wholistic identification of the new creation with Christ is echoed in other verses as well, including where Paul writes, “we have the mind of Christ” and “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,” with Peter similarly writing that believers are “participants in the divine nature.”¹⁴⁷ In this passage, however, Paul moves beyond asserting that the saints are partakers of the divine nature in mind, body, and spirit to proclaiming that every facet of their total being *is* Christ, both individually and collectively.

But Paul goes even further than this in his discussion of the new creation/*ktisis*, which may be seen as synonymous with the new humanity/*anthropon*, as evident in the fact that he describes both in much the same way [e.g., when Paul writes, “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but what counts is a new creation/*ktisis*.”¹⁴⁸ This echoes

¹⁴⁶ “Col 3:11, Expositor’s Greek Testament,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/3-11.htm>.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Co 2:16; Ga 4:6; 2 Pe 1:4.

¹⁴⁸ Gal 6:15.

Colossians 3:11 quoted above, where he says, “there is no...circumcised or uncircumcised” in the new humanity/*anthropon*]. Regarding the new creation, Paul states that “anyone in Christ is a new creation/*ktisis*; the old has passed away, behold the new has come.”¹⁴⁹ The last words in this verse have also been translated as “behold all things are made new” (KJV), which clearly correspond to Christ’s apocalyptic declaration in the New Jerusalem, “Behold, I make all/*panta* new.”¹⁵⁰ For this reason, the new creation that Paul speaks of in these passages seems to extend beyond the saints and humanity to include “all things,” so indeed all creation is made new. Furthermore, since the new humanity and new creation are virtually interchangeable concepts, it’s not much of a stretch to assert that “Christ is all” in the new creation/*ktisis*, just as he is in the new humanity/*anthropon*. Therefore, the new creation may be seen as ultimately encompassing all creation, and in such a way that ultimately the entire cosmos and everything in it is revealed to be Christ. I believe this identification of Christ with the cosmos may be the simplest, most direct, and most accurate interpretation of Paul’s explicit statement that “Christ is all.”

All the Fullness of God

I want to further explore the identification of Christ with the new creation, since it might help to illuminate the meaning of Paul’s identification of God with “all in all,” which we’ll still come back to later on. I believe this question of identification can be further investigated by way of two powerful parallels that Paul draws between Christ and his saints. As for the first parallel, Paul writes that in Christ “all the fullness of God dwells bodily,” while elsewhere he

¹⁴⁹ 2 Cor 5:17.

¹⁵⁰ Rv 21:5.

affirms that the saints “may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹⁵¹ In both these verses, Paul uses the same expression “all the fulness/*pan to pleroma*” to describe the indwelling of God in both Christ and the saints. According to Strong’s Concordance, *pleroma* denotes fullness, completeness, and even super-abundance; and here it refers to the totality of divine qualities, including God’s essential nature along with all the divine attributes. As one commentator put it, “The fulness of God’ is another expression for the whole sum and aggregate of all the energies, powers, and attributes of the divine nature, the total Godhead in its plenitude and abundance.”¹⁵² In this and other passages, Paul closely links “fulness/*pleroma*” to “all/*pan*,” so each term is used to intensify the unlimited expansiveness and inclusiveness of the other.¹⁵³ Thus, “all the fullness of God” may also be translated as the whole completion/perfection of the divine nature. For me, the most striking feature in these verses is that Paul uses identical totalistic terminology to describe God in Christ and God in the saints -- with the one distinction being that Christ is portrayed as already possessing “all the fullness of God,” whereas it is promised to the saints in the fullness of times. But either way, Paul affirms that in the end the saints, like Christ, “must be perfect/*telios*” as God is perfect, just as Christ commanded us to be.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Col 2:9; Eph 3:19.

¹⁵² “Eph 3:19, McLaren’s Expeditions,” Bible Hub, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/3-19.htm>.

¹⁵³ Eph 1:23; Col 1:19.

¹⁵⁴ Mt 5:48.

Far Above All the Heavens

Paul continues to elaborate on this theme in a second parallel between Christ and the saints, all of which appears in the letter to Ephesians. Paul tells us that God made Christ “sit at His right hand in the heavenly places,” and then in the next chapter writes that God likewise “made us sit with him in the heavenly places.”¹⁵⁵ According to Paul, then, both Christ and his saints are already seated together in heaven. As if that weren’t startling enough, the book of Revelation even more specifically envisions the saints sitting on the throne of Christ and God, where they all “shall reign for ever and ever.”¹⁵⁶ While many Christians believe the final goal is to get to heaven to be with God, Paul teaches us that we are already in heaven with God, which is consistent with Christ’s teaching that the realm of God is within and among us in the here and now.¹⁵⁷

Paul further develops this parallel between Christ and his saints in yet another passage in Ephesians, where he writes that Christ “ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all”; and then just a few verses later he proclaims that “we all shall attain....*perfect/telion* adulthood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” and “grow up into him in all [ways] who is the head, Christ.”¹⁵⁸ Here again, Paul asserts the full equivalence between Christ and the saints in the *end/telion*, even indicating that the saints will eventually not only be the body of Christ but also will “grow up into him in all” ways, so ultimately they will fully share in

¹⁵⁵ Eph 1:20; Eph 2:6.

¹⁵⁶ Rv 3:21; Rv 22:5.

¹⁵⁷ Lu 17:21.

¹⁵⁸ Ep 4:10; Ep 4:13, 15.

the headship of Christ, as well. Furthermore, Paul describes Christ as “ascended far above all the heavens.” In biblical cosmology, there is nothing in creation higher than heaven, so I take this to illustrate Christ’s complete transcendence over all creation by virtue of his divinity, which according to Paul allows him to “fill all.” Then perhaps most astonishingly, Paul proclaims with repetitive emphasis that “we all” will become perfect and complete, and that we too will measure up to “the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Strong’s Concordance states that “stature” may refer to both height and the “end-goal of a lifespan.” For these reasons, we might rightfully believe that humanity will share Christ’s final destiny in every way, and therefore we too must “ascend far above all the heavens” and “fill all” with Christ in the end. In this way, Paul may be understood as proclaiming that all will ultimately attain both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, including both his transcendent essence and universal immanence.

There are many other verses in scripture that directly address the question of the divinization of humanity, not the least of which is the verse from Psalms, where *Elohim*/God says, “you are *elohim*/gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Christ quotes this verse to defend himself against those who accuse him of making himself God – which of course, according to scripture, he turns out to be, suggesting this might be true for all of us, too.¹⁶⁰ The Genesis creation narratives also pivot on the crucial motif of humanity being made in the image and likeness of God, along with the drama surrounding Adam and Eve becoming like God. Paul in fact alludes to Adam in our original passage (verse 22), so the

¹⁵⁹ Ps 82:6.

¹⁶⁰ Jn 10:34.

passage as a whole may be seen as a mini-recapitulation of salvation history from Genesis to the apocalypse of God as all in all. I want to further explore and reinterpret the whole question of human/divine identity in the creation story in light of Paul's apocalyptic vision, since I believe many rich veins have yet to be mined there, but unfortunately that must be left to a later date due to current constraints of time and space.

Divinization of All through Submission of All

Up to this point, I've basically argued that Paul's eschatological vision culminates in the divinization of all creation. So now I want to return to the issue of the causal relationship that Paul envisions between Christ's final submission and God becoming all in all, whereby in effect Paul teaches that universal submission is the means to the end of universal divinization, which might also be described as *pantheosis* through *panhypotaxis*.

In our primary passage, Christ's enemies are the last of all creation to be put in submission to Christ, as if to portray Christ the King as the last one standing. But then as we have seen, Christ in turn is subjected to God "so that God may be all in all." And just to be clear, the "may be" in this last sentence carries the full force of "will be" and "must be," so it's only conditional in the sense that *pantheosis* must follow from the *hypotaxis* (Strong's Concordance). In this way, the final submission of Christ may be seen as the ultimate and paradigmatic eschatological event, since it entails the climactic apocalypse of Jesus Christ whereby God is revealed to be all in all; and for this reason, the definitive and final apocalyptic act does not herald triumphant conquest and eternal division but *pantheosis* through loving surrender.

While nowadays many might be surprised by the mere suggestion of Christ's final submission, Paul reports it simply, directly, and matter-of-factly, without any explanation or fanfare, as if there would be nothing surprising or controversial about it to his own contemporary listeners. And why would it be? Paul consistently insists that Christ's greatest achievements are accomplished through his self-abnegation, from the beginning through the middle to the very end of his lifespan. This is evident in his representation of Christ's kenotic incarnation where Christ empties himself to become human, and above all in Christ's crucifitory resurrection about which Paul writes, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."¹⁶¹ And finally, there's Paul's depiction of Christ's submission for the sake of God becoming all in all. In each of these instances, Paul clearly does not regard the abnegation and abdication of Christ as a diminishment of his divinity, but to the contrary, as the very means of God's greatest action and supreme self-revelation in the world, according to the self-proclaimed principle of God that "my power is made perfect in weakness."¹⁶²

But Paul's relentless emphasis on the way of *kenosis*, *thanatos*, and *hypotaxis* extends well beyond these central Christological motifs. Just as Christ applied the way of self-denial and death to all his followers in addition to himself (e.g., "If anyone desires to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"), so too Paul insists that "our old humanity was crucified with Him" and "we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that *as* Christ we raised from the dead."¹⁶³ Indeed, with respect to himself, Paul proclaims,

¹⁶¹ 1 Co 2:2.

¹⁶² 2 Cor 12:9.

¹⁶³ Lu 9:23; Ro 6:4, 6, emphasis added.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Ga 2:20), thereby demonstrating his embodiment of the total annihilation of the “I” of the old self, as well as the complete selflessness of the new self that is none other than Christ’s self. It is no surprise then that all the saints, along with Christ, are fully subjected to God in the end, with submission being the very mode of their participation in the final and fullest revelation of God and themselves. In this way, Paul shows how the ministry of Jesus Christ and all who follow him are marked by the stigma of self-sacrifice, death, and submission for the sake of the supreme revelation of God in and as the new creation.

Yet Paul’s way of negation may be seen as going beyond Christ and all the saints to include all of creation, too. This is evident in Paul’s own rendition of creation *ex nihilo*, when he quotes God as saying, “Let light shine out of darkness,” thereby reminding us that the Genesis story of creation begins not with light, but with darkness, formlessness, chaos, and emptiness, out of which all light, order and form are born.¹⁶⁴ And at the other end of salvation history, Paul describes how the Day of the Lord comes with the crisis of cosmic destruction through which all things are made new, and how ultimately all creation must be submitted to God for God to become all in all.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, from the dawn of creation to the end of times, Paul portrays God and all creation journeying together along the path of emptiness, self-denial, death, and submission until they finally reach their common destination of glorious communion and perfect union.

¹⁶⁴ 2 Cor 4:6.

¹⁶⁵ 1Co 15:24-26; 1Th 5:3.

Mutual Submission

The theme of submission is not only crucial to our primary passage, but it also plays a central role throughout much of Pauline theology. For that reason, I want to explore its importance elsewhere, as well, to further illuminate its meaning in this particular passage. The significance of the final submission becomes clearer when linked to Paul's more renowned kenotic hymn in Philippians, where he writes:

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of humankind and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.¹⁶⁶

While many progressive Christians may shy away from this hymn on account of its triumphalist Christology, I see something altogether different at play here, especially when interpreted in the greater context of Pauline thought. For me, this hymn is not about the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ, as many believe. But above all, I believe this hymn depicts the quintessential dynamic of agape love that lies at the heart of all reality, whereby God as Christ initiates the deepest bow from heaven before all creation and then all creation responds by bowing down before Christ as God. Through this mythic imagery, Paul dramatizes and uplifts the loving dynamic of mutual submission as the paradigm of right relationship between

¹⁶⁶ Phil 2:5-11.

creator and all creation. In this passage, Paul depicts the humanization of God through God's submission to humanity, whereas in his eschatological passage he depicts the divinization of creation through creation's submission to God. By putting these two passages together, we can see Paul showing us how creator becomes creation, and creation becomes creator through a loving process of kenosis and mutual submission.

This dynamic of mutual submission between God and creation also serves as a supernal template that grounds and guides all of Paul's social ethics. This is perhaps most evident in another passage widely despised by progressive Christians, but which I believe is also underappreciated. I'm referring to the infamous household code that appears in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians that is rightfully criticized for exhorting, "Wives be subject to your husbands," "Children obey your parents," and "Slaves be obedient to those who are your earthly masters."¹⁶⁷ These three sentences alone condemn this passage to an immediate triple death among contemporary progressives due to the sexist, patriarchal and racist overtones blatantly evident in this passage. While all those biases were virtually universal and endemic to Paul's time — and so it may be somewhat anachronistic for us to expect him to completely transcend his historical location — it's still our responsibility to contextualize and critique the attitudes and customs of prior ages so they do not continue to be used for oppressive purposes in contemporary times. But if we simply stop there, then the radically subversive and liberative message explicitly delivered by Paul in this very same passage would be entirely lost to us, and I believe that would do a grave disservice to both Paul and the gospel of Christ — not to mention to the cause of progressive Christianity itself, since it would surrender yet another biblical

¹⁶⁷ Eph 5:22-6:5.

passage to fundamentalists by failing to do the hard work of re-interpreting these passages, and thereby reclaiming them as our own.

For me, the most meaningful and powerful thing about Paul's entire household code is that it begins with this one simple and extremely direct introductory command, through which everything else that follows is meant to be interpreted: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."¹⁶⁸ As is perfectly evident in his opening salvo, Paul is telling husbands to submit to their wives, parents to submit to their children, and masters to submit to their slaves, in addition to what he is also saying to wives, children and slaves. So along with noting the oppressive elements of this passage, I also feel compelled to trumpet Paul's radical re-interpretation of the boilerplate household codes that routinely circulated throughout the ancient world. While not directly attacking the existing power structures of his time — which is neither his style nor intent — Paul deploys a radical rhetorical strategy of transvaluation that undermines the very assumptions upon which the oppressive power dynamics of all societies are utterly dependent. This is no ordinary household code from a bygone era, but a radical subversion of the norms of his day, as well as our own. Paul is kicking out all three legs of the stool upon which the household codes of his day rested, which was the presumed intrinsic superiority of husbands, fathers and masters, and in its place he is heralding a new creation in which all persons are not only essentially equal to each other, but even more radically, are being called to submit to each other in love as members of one body. Even now, in the context of the extreme individualism of modern America on both the right and left, this is still more challenging and radical than we wish to even contemplate, so mostly we don't. Perhaps the

¹⁶⁸ Eph 5:21.

one thing we can all agree on — as husbands, wives, parents, children, oppressor, oppressed, conservative or progressive — is that we all hate to be told to submit to anyone.

Regarding the strategy of transvaluation, I'm particularly struck by Paul's extraordinary positioning of slaves in his epistles, and indeed of the privileged symbolic status of the slave throughout much of the New Testament. In this passage, Paul directly addresses both slaves and masters as equals in Christ, not only expecting them to submit to one another, but also explicitly telling masters "to do the same unto" slaves as slaves do unto them, demonstrating that he recognizes only one standard of behavior for both, and that the slave is actually the model for the master.¹⁶⁹ Even more startling, in the kenotic hymn, Paul depicts God as taking "the form of a slave" to serve all humanity, whereby the slave is upheld as a divine archetype and model for us all.¹⁷⁰ And then in John's beatific vision of the New Jerusalem, the saints are still described as slaves, even as they reign for ever and ever.¹⁷¹ Thus, the prophetic words of Christ that "the last shall be first and the first last" continue to resound throughout Paul's epistles and John's Revelation, not just as a simple reversal of fixed hierarchies, but also in the sense that we all must become last so we all may become first, whereby lords are submitted and slaves glorified in the one universal body of Christ who is both "the first and the last."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Ep 6:9.

¹⁷⁰ Ph 2:7.

¹⁷¹ Re 22:3-5.

¹⁷² Matt 20:16; Rv 22:13.

The Apocalypse of a New Ontology

On the basis of the various biblical passages and verses discussed above, I now want to further explore what it means to say that “God is all in all.” In doing so, I’m inclined to ask the question: What’s the difference in saying that “God is all,” “God is in all,” and “God is all in all?” How are these statements similar or different? And what difference does this all make anyways?

So let’s start with the assertion that “God is in all” and “fills all” (which I take to be synonymous statements). This is by far the most familiar to us, since it is widely attested to throughout scripture, and because it is biblical language for the common belief in the omnipresence of God.¹⁷³ Paul most explicitly articulates this belief when he refers to the “one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.”¹⁷⁴ But as we have seen, Paul goes beyond the usual description of God being “in all” to proclaim the unique revelation that ultimately God is “all in all.” While it’s easy to assume “all in all” basically means the same thing as “in all,” I nonetheless believe that’s an erroneous assumption. If we interpret scripture with scripture, then I believe it’s best to understand the meaning of “God is all in all” in light of similar descriptions of Christ, especially because scripture maintains that Christ reveals the true nature of God. For this reason, I’m particularly inclined to interpret “God is all in all” in relation to Paul’s assertion that “Christ is all and in all,” since they’re virtually identical expressions with both pertaining to the divine nature, leading me to conclude that “all in all” and “is all and in all” are interchangeable phrases.

¹⁷³ Ps 139:7-12; Je 23:24; Is 6:3; Ro 1:20.

¹⁷⁴ Rv 22:13.

According to Paul, then, I believe it's safe to say that both these statements are ultimately true: God is all, and God is in all. So just as Paul identified Christ with the new creation, so too God is hereby directly identified with all creation in the end, without any mediation through Christ or anything else, such that the holy One becomes wholly all. In this way, the portrayal of God in Genesis stands in stark and complimentary contrast to the final apocalyptic vision of God in the New Testament, whereby the transcendent One in the beginning is also revealed to be the immanent all in the end, suggesting that God is both the One and the All. It's as if the progressive revelation of God in scripture takes us from the understanding that God alone is One, to God and Christ are one, to God and Christ and the church are one, to finally God and the cosmos are one, so ultimately God becomes all in all. Similarly, just as God becomes flesh in Christ, and Christ becomes embodied in the church, so too all creation may be seen as becoming the body of God. By extending Paul's metaphor of the body into the end times, we can see how the oneness and "allness" of God are unified in one cosmic being who, like Christ, is both fully creator and fully creation. And just as the body of Christ is differentiated into interdependent parts that all work together, so too God's cosmic body is not to be understood in terms of a monistic oneness, but more as a differentiated unity that is both one and many, and in such a way that "all the fullness of God" inhabits each and every one of its parts. Therefore, I'm suggesting that Paul's final revelation of God may be rightfully described as monotheistic (God is one), pantheistic (God is all), panentheistic (God is in all), and perhaps even "polyune-theistic" insofar as the one true God is fully manifested in each and every being and thing throughout the whole body of creation -- all of which reminds us how God's identity cannot be fixed and refuses to be boxed in by any of our labels. Indeed, I

believe the unique brilliance of Paul's vision of God as "all in all" is that it elegantly affirms and reconciles all these divergent perspectives on God in one precise and concise expression that simultaneously conveys transcendent oneness and immanent allness in terms of a differentiated unity that preserves the distinct integrity of God and creation, while also affirming the fullness of God's embodiment in each and every thing and being. In this way, Pauline eschatology culminates in a radically new vision of God, humanity, and creation, revealing an altogether new ontology and cosmology that represents both a continuation of the Hebraic tradition and a dramatic break from it. In nonbiblical terms, this new reality may be characterized as both theocentric and cosmocentric, transcendent and immanent, divinized and embodied, selfless and individuated, eschatological and sacramental, paradoxical and mystical, holy and wholistic, integrative and ecological, evolutionary and revolutionary, unifying and diversifying, and perhaps above all fluid and nonbinary.

I acknowledge this interpretation of Paul's apocalyptic vision is not consistent with traditional Christian teachings that uphold the eternal anthropological dualism between the saved and damned, along with the absolute ontological dualism between creator and creation. But of course, a radical break with received tradition and prevailing wisdom lies at the very heart of the Christian tradition and particularly apocalyptic eschatology. Indeed, at the time of his first coming, Jesus instigated a blasphemous subversion of the chief cornerstone of Hebraic faith – that God is one with none beside God -- by declaring himself to be the Son of God, Son of humanity, and Christ, so ever since Christians have proclaimed him to be God seated at the right hand of the God. And then with his second coming, I believe Paul is prophesying that Christ will complete this revolution so all humanity and all creation may also become fully

divine. Perhaps the most shocking thing about Paul's revelation of God as "all in all" is that it has been so widely ignored despite him stating it so simply and directly; so now the great irony is that many Christians may regard the plain meaning of his words as blasphemous and subversive to their own faith, as well. But the only thing that's truly subversive about these words is that they don't conform to our current views of God, ourselves, and the world, which I believe is primarily due to the sin of our separation from God and alienation from our own true nature.

Awakening to the full implications of Paul's revelation of the new ontic relationship between divinity and humanity, creator and creation, may even suggest the need for a second reformation based on a whole new ontology and cosmology that supersedes the European worldview of the early modern era, along with so many other worldviews both before and since. As radical as that all may be, I still firmly believe this understanding of Paul's apocalyptic vision doesn't negate the core tenets of Christian faith and scripture, including all the doctrines upheld in the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. Traditional beliefs regarding the identities of God and Christ do not necessarily have to change -- since God and Christ are both doing just fine. Instead, what most needs to change is our traditional anthropologies and how we see and know ourselves, so we ourselves might be transformed through the renewal of our own minds and identities, and thereby experience the root meaning of metanoia.

The Apocalypse of the *Imago Dei*

Above all, the bible may be read as the history of God's self-disclosure, the story of the unfolding revelation of the very identity of God for the sake of humanity, yet all for the glory of God. In this sense, scriptural witness is theocentric from beginning to end. And as I've argued,

the supreme apocalypse of God's identity is that God is all and in all, which is not only the omega point of God's identity but of all creation, too. And given that we are made in the image of God, it is my contention that the *imago dei* is not fully revealed in scripture until it is made known in this final theophany.

While we are told in the Genesis creation story that humanity is made in the image of God, it actually says nothing about what that specifically means, leading to millennia of theological speculation. Perhaps the one major exception is when Paul explicitly tells us that Christ "is the image of the invisible God."¹⁷⁵ And insofar as we must "mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ," then we too must ultimately be the *imago dei* in the same way as Christ, who most profoundly is revealed to be both fully human and fully divine.¹⁷⁶ Even so, I don't believe the greatest meaning of Christ's identity as *imago dei* is fully revealed in scripture until his final submission, since only that allows for the supreme revelation of God's identity, too. Therefore, I maintain that we cannot fully know our own individual and collective identities, or the true nature of the cosmos itself, without first awakening to the final revelation of God as all in all, since only that reveals the one identity of all identities that is the common destiny of all.

Even though in our original passage Paul indicates that God becomes fully identified with Christ, the saints, and cosmos, whereby they all become the visible image of the invisible God, he describes this process of divinization in such a way that each is resurrected "in proper

¹⁷⁵ Col 1:15.

¹⁷⁶ Ep 4:13.

order,” with Christ being “the first fruits,” then the saints, and finally all creation.¹⁷⁷ I believe Paul hereby emphasizes the processional and functional distinctions between Christ, the saints and cosmos, even as he portrays these differences as the very means to his climactic revelation of their common identity in the end. So along with the teaching that “he [Christ] who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin,” Paul proclaims they all have one destination, too.¹⁷⁸ In this way, Paul shows how Christ, the saints, and cosmos all journey from identical Alpha point to identical Omega point, while playing different roles along the way.

But most importantly, the Omega point of God, Christ, church, and cosmos is the triumphant reign of heaven that is already breaking into our hearts and world, revealing to us our true identity as fully human and fully divine in the here and now. Furthermore, I believe this Omega point must now become our Alpha point of departure as “we live and move and have our being” in this world, since the eschaton is always the new beginning that’s already come upon us and now rising up within and among us.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, contrary to what some might suggest, I do not believe we stand between the already and not yet of the kingdom, as if we straddle the two. But by faith, I believe we must now fully stand with both feet firmly planted in our essential identity as the new creation that is already here, and then bring our “alreadiness” to the not yet of the old creation both within and without us that emphatically is not who we truly are, and thereby bring the gospel of life to that which is dead.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Co 15:23.

¹⁷⁸ He 2:11.

¹⁷⁹ Acts 17:28.

The Infinite Plurality of Supreme Being

To put it another way, I believe we may now know our new selves as sharing one and the same being with the One who is revealed to be all in all in the end. I'm especially inspired to affirm this because of Paul, who in the very same chapter as our original passage self-discloses his own identity as "I am what I am," which of course is also the name of God.¹⁸⁰ This is reminiscent of Jesus who referred to himself as "I am," with God doing the same on Mount Sinai, and how the very name of God, YHWH, is similarly associated with the Hebrew verb "to be."¹⁸¹ All of this suggests to me that the "I am" of God, the "I am" of Christ, and the "I am" of Paul and all the saints -- along with the new being of all creation -- all find their essential identities in the great I am and the one supreme being who is all and in all. In this way, *elohim* -- true to its translation as both god and gods -- is revealed to be both singular and infinitely plural in the end.

So you might ask: How does this all not amount to the supreme sin of self-idolatry? My simple answer is this: The new self that is perfectly unified with God is also perfectly selfless, since it has already been totally crucified with Christ in this world and fully submitted with Christ in the next. Thus, the new self that is perfectly identified with God is a selfless self, who is fully joined and surrendered to the Other and all others in perfect love, where there can be no idolatry of self or other. So I believe it's true: whoever sees God face to face must die, particularly in the sense that we're all gods who must die to self before we can see ourselves

¹⁸⁰ 1 Co 15:10; Ex 3:14.

¹⁸¹ Jn 8:58; Ex 3:14.

perfectly mirrored in the face of God, where we finally behold what it truly means to be the perfect image of God.

The Apocalypse of Love

Paul's renown hymn of love appears just a couple chapters before our original passage, where he prophesies that "now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face."¹⁸² I believe the "then" in this verse clearly relates to the "then comes the end" (v. 24) in our original passage, which culminates in the great unveiling after Christ's reign, when God and all creation finally stand naked face to face. In his hymn to love, Paul also emphatically proclaims with a quadruple "panta" that "love bears all, believes all, hopes all, endures all. Love never ends/fails/falls."¹⁸³ So even though in the end "every rule and every authority and power" on earth must fall, and even though Christ's mediatorial reign must also be brought down as the last veil between God and all creation, the love of God still reigns forever, revealing that Love is all in all.¹⁸⁴

Paul's final vision of all "in" all builds upon his teaching that the saints are "in" Christ and Christ "in" the saints, which itself is based on Christ's teaching that "I am in the Father and the Father in me" and you "abide in me, and I in you."¹⁸⁵ Jesus quickly ties the inter-abiding of each one being "in" the other to his commandment "that you love one another as I have loved you," so mutual abiding as mutual love lies at the very heart of the Christian experience of God

¹⁸² 1 Cor 13:8, 12.

¹⁸³ 1 Cor 13:7-8.

¹⁸⁴ 1 Cor 15:24.

¹⁸⁵ Jo 14:10; Jo 15:4.

and love encapsulated in the proclamation that God is love.¹⁸⁶ While this form of mutual love is overwhelmingly portrayed in the New Testament as existing among God, Christ, and the saints, this more limited dispensation is superseded by Paul's final revelation of God as all "in" all, where God's love is radically universalized so ultimately everything abides in everything else, with all things bound together in love.

We are hereby invited into a new vision of ultimate reality where not only does all the fullness of God dwell in each and every one of us but the whole cosmos, too. This vision of the whole containing every part and the part every whole, in such a way that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts, may be seen as the ecclesiastical body of Christ now transformed and incorporated into the cosmic body of God. This eschatological vision of unity in diversity conveys the ontological sense that "one is all and all is one," which in turn grounds the ethic of "one for all and all for one." Giving our lives for one another is the greatest love Christ spoke of, and it constitutes the essence of mutual submission, which is the narrow passageway we must pass through to be born again into the mutual indwelling that lies at the heart of divine love.¹⁸⁷ In this way, Paul weaves together his inextricable and inexorable themes of mutual submission, mutual indwelling, divinization, and love, all of which are pointing us toward the ultimate source of all reality that's always pulsating and creatively proliferating in all, through all, and as all. This All in All is Paul's supreme vision of holy communion born of agape love that is universal, unconditional, incarnational, sacrificial, and liberative, all of which also makes it utterly irresistible. Everything else in Pauline theology is

¹⁸⁶ Jo 15:12; 1 Jo 4:8.

¹⁸⁷ Jo 15:13.

subordinated to and oriented toward this climactic revelation, including his central doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, which is but a means to this greater end. So above all, in the end, the apotheosis of all in all is the crowning apocalypse of God's most gracious love.

Implications and Applications

Although this study is primarily intended as a theological exploration of this one biblical text, it is only made flesh and blood through its applications to our contemporary world, where I believe the implications of Paul's apocalyptic vision reach unfathomably deep and immeasurably wide. Even so, the main intention of this study is not to delve deeply into any specific contemporary topic, but to articulate a biblically based theological framework that can be applied to virtually any matter whatsoever, whether it be personal or public, local or global. Given the multiple crises of apocalyptic proportions now converging upon us all, however, it is especially intended to help orient us in our shared struggle to confront the many threats to our collective survival now coming at us. So with that in mind, I'll highlight some important implications and applications of the Pauline apocalyptic gospel, especially as it relates to the praxis of public theology in our world today.

Anti-Supremacism. Above all, I believe the final submission of Christ and the divinization of all creation depicts and demands the complete evacuation of all forms of triumphalism and supremacism from all Christian faith and practice. The picture of Christ as submitted and decentered in the end is anything but triumphalist and supremacist, and therefore the humility of the eschatological Christ must serve as a model for all Christians today, especially as we face the apocalyptic challenges now before us that inspire so much self-righteous indignation in us all. The radical egalitarianism of *pantheosis* likewise dispels all

delusions of superiority of any kind, including over our enemies. For me, Christ's commandment to love our enemies is the third greatest commandment of all.¹⁸⁸ For if we ever imagine we might somehow fulfill the first two, then the third is most likely to bring us to the end of our self-delusions and thereby return us to our need for the humility of our crucified and subjected Lord, who helps us to grow in mutual love through mutual submission as we all move together toward universal communion. And as we have been taught, loving our enemies means recognizing them in us and us in them -- instead of us vs. them -- since we're all "caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny" that requires us to see our enemies as the body of Christ and image of God, as well.¹⁸⁹

Beyond the repudiation of triumphalism and supremacism in general, I believe Christians most emphatically must renounce and denounce Christian supremacy in particular. I believe Paul's teachings on the *hypotaxis* of Christ and *pantheosis* deal a powerful double blow to all forms of Christian supremacy that uphold Christianity as the one true religion that is superior to all others, along with the contention that Christ is the one and only way to salvation. On the one hand, I believe the ultimate decentering of Christ as King contradicts the triumphalistic Christocentrism of contemporary fundamentalists, many of whom weaponize apocalypticism to target and dehumanize those they perceive as unchristian. And on the other hand, I believe the final revelation of God as all in all is the greatest depiction and proclamation of Christian universalism given to us in scripture, which is completely at odds with doctrines

¹⁸⁸ Lu 6:35.

¹⁸⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* [1963] (London: Penguin UK, 2018).

upholding ultimate ontological and anthropological dualisms. In this way, I believe Paul's inseparable dual doctrines of *panhypotaxis* and *pantheosis*, much like crucifixion and resurrection, serve to shape Christian faith and practice in a way that resists all forms of triumphalism and supremacism, both within and without.

Paul's apocalyptic theology moves us toward a universalist worldview that both affirms and subverts the primacy of Christ in the end, thereby suggesting that Pauline faith and practice may be seen as self-affirming, self-denying, and ultimately transcending all forms of Christianity itself. In this way, Christian faith may be seen as an intrinsically non-triumphalist, anti-supremacist, and self-deconstructing practice, whereby we are repeatedly called to submit, deny, and die to ourselves, even as we are forever lifted up, reaffirmed, and reborn into the universal communion that far exceeds anything we've ever known or could ever imagine.

Johannine Dualism vs. Pauline Universalism

In the Book of Revelation, John's final depiction of the saints reigning in glory and everyone else be damned is perhaps one of the most powerful visions undergirding Christian supremacy. John's hypervivid, phantasmagorical imagery is both terrifying and sublime, making it hard to forget; whereas Paul's apocalyptic vision is described in abstract terms through contorted logic that make it hard to follow, let alone remember. John's dualistic descriptions of cosmic battle with the final victory of good over evil and the unbridgeable gap between the two, only serve to heighten the dramatic tension of his vision, searing it into our souls; whereas Paul offers no images or metaphors by which to envision his revelation, so we have no idea what it really looks like.

But what we know for sure is that Paul's vision is universal, wholistic, and all-inclusive. We also know that God is fully manifested in all of it and as all of it, and that it will somehow look like unity in diversity bound together forever in selfless love. And unlike John's vision of a walled city that provides a sense of closure, enclosure, and foreclosure, Paul's vision remains radically open and boundless. So herein lies its greatest strength: the "inness" of the Pauline vision of all "in" all with its *interiority*, *inclusiveness*, and *indeterminacy* stands in stark contrast to the *exteriority*, *exclusiveness*, and *explicitness* of the Johannine vision. It is not surprising then that Paul's letters to the Corinthians are filled with the experiential language of love, grace, peace, and joy, while in John's book the word "love" is mentioned only twice -- once due to the lack of it and the other like this: "I know your works and your love...but I have this against you" (Re 2:19). So much for love. Similarly, John mentions "grace" only twice, once in his ritualized greeting and then again in his farewell, but never in his vision; while he mentions "peace" only twice -- again in his greeting and then in the sense of "to take peace away" (Re 6:4); with "joy" not to be found anywhere. Instead, John's book is replete with references to rage, wrath, and fury, none of which are even mentioned in Paul's letter. To be fair, much of John's literary power resides in his beautiful depictions of love, joy, and peace in terms of concrete imagery, but he only does so by way of comparison to its polar opposite and at the expense of exclusion and fixation.

In contrast, the Pauline vision of the end is both teleological and ateleological: teleological in the sense that we know the end is forever universally good, and ateleological in the sense that we never know its final shape or form, since it is forever subject to further elaboration and co-creation. In this way, Paul reveals our blessed end as full of potential, ever

evolving, and endlessly open-ended. This, I believe, is yet another reason why John's revelation of the end is not really the end, and why his dualistic vision of salvation and damnation must ultimately be interpreted through the lens of Paul's wholistic apocalypse of all in all, with the latter superseding the former in both time and perfection.

Universalism. What's at stake here is the difference between the historical predominance of Christian supremacy and the ascendancy of Christian universalism that is yet to come. We already know what Christian dualism has wrought, so now let's see what Christian universalism can bring. I believe the Pauline apocalypse of God as all in all is the climactic recapitulation of all salvation history and the most concise proclamation of the promise of universal salvation to be fulfilled in, with, through, and beyond the mediation of Christ. The revelation of the universal redemption and divinization of all creation is the fulfillment of the good news that Jesus Christ is savior of the cosmos. Jesus came that we might immediately know, fully embody, and wholeheartedly live, both individually and collectively, the eschatological reality that God is all in all. This is the telos of Jesus Christ, humanity, cosmos, and God. And for me, that's the good news we're called to proclaim.

But I also believe we need to proclaim universal salvation to resist the bad news of eternal damnation that only serves to accelerate the prevailing apocalypse of demonic division, death, and destruction. The apocalyptic tradition is both renowned and notorious for its unrelenting accentuation of the eschatological either/or, with Paul especially known for his unyielding antinomies, as exemplified in his opposing principles of works and grace. In the opening line of our passage, Paul writes, "in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22), where he teaches that we are either dead in Adam or alive in Christ, but we

can't be both at once. In the spirit of the Pauline prophetic tradition, then, I maintain that we must either accept or reject the doctrine of eternal damnation. We can't have it both ways. I believe this doctrine is marked by faithlessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness, and that it is born of sin, death, the Devil, and the law -- to speak in the manner of Paul -- since it fundamentally contradicts the gospel of grace, Spirit of love, destiny of Jesus Christ, and the apocalypse of God as all in all.

In fact, the verse just quoted explicitly proclaims "in Christ all shall be made alive," which to me clearly states that ultimately all will attain eternal life. Many traditional interpretations, however, take it to mean only true Christians will be raised to eternal life with all others being raised to eternal death and damnation. While we might reasonably interpret scripture to uphold universal salvation or eternal damnation, still by faith we must choose one or the other. We can either profess a cosmic dualism where Christ, Savior of the cosmos, fails to save the cosmos, or a cosmic wholism where Christ actually succeeds in saving all. I believe the dualistic worldview is propagated by those in Adam who still eat from the tree of good and evil, which is at war with the wholistic vision of those in Christ who partake from the tree of life that makes "us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.... and creates one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end."¹⁹⁰ John most definitely does not envision one humanity but two, which then has been eternalized and weaponized by Christians who justify tribalism, nationalism, supremacism, militarism, imperialism, and triumphalism, all in the name of a false Christ that is the anti-Christ. And to me, that all shows bad faith.

¹⁹⁰ Ep 2: 14-16.

This binary worldview also lies at the heart of compulsory cisheteropatriarchy that insists on the division and fixation of gendered roles. Feminist theologians have shown how this same binary logic that pits man against woman also splits him off from the whole natural world, whereby man views himself as superior to nature, too. But the wholistic vision of God as all in all transfers the ultimate concern of God's salvific activity from humanity to all creation, thereby putting an end to the anthropocentrism that has characterized the Jewish and Christian traditions from the start. In Genesis, God commanded *ha-adam* to subdue the earth, with the Hebraic term for "subdue" carrying all the connotations of being assaulted, forced into bondage, trampled, and even violated (Strong's Concordance), so now we reap the whirlwind of that toxic legacy. But Paul's apocalyptic vision abolishes the law of that commandment, too, by virtue the revelation of God's grace that fully and equally extends to all creation. The final submission of Christ likewise marks the end of human supremacy that's so deeply embedded in ancient and contemporary forms of Christianity and inherent to Christocentrism itself. So let all heaven and earth praise the Lord, as God brings down the tyranny of humanity that brings mass extinction and supplants it with the rule of cosmic love that is the "caritocacy" of the new creation.

I truly believe the implications of Paul's beatific vision are infinitely applicable, so this list is hardly exhaustive but merely suggestive. My heartfelt prayer is that we all spread the good news of God's unconditional love and superabundant grace for all, as we follow the way of Christ's submission until we attain the oneness of all in all. And through us may the Holy Spirit set the world on fire with the apocalyptic gospel of the universal Christ!

So the one who submitted to birth in the flesh, who submitted to death on the cross, who submitted self and crown in the end so God may be all in all, this is the one who now comes for us all, whose triumphant submission subverts all powers and principalities in heaven and on earth, all to establish the commonwealth of heaven on earth. And as the body of Christ in heaven, we must now bow down and return with Christ for the salvation, liberation, and divinization of all, and hereby come to know: We are all the ones we've been waiting for.

Postlude

So yes, the apocalypse is upon us. The signs of the times are overwhelming and undeniable: false prophets, wars, pestilence, famines, floods, consuming fires, persecutions and more. The goats are being separated from the sheep. Our love grows cold.

Battle lines are being drawn. On one side are those who believe humanity is fundamentally and forever divided between us and them, good and evil, superior and inferior, chosen and damned. And on the other: those who believe we're all essentially and indivisibly one — which includes, of course, all those who believe we're not.

But no matter how long these battles may rage, the apocalypse does not ultimately signal global catastrophe. Neither personal nor collective sin will have the final word. Our ancient foe will not prevail. Indeed, we already know what the apocalypse reveals in the end:

The old has passed away, all things are made new. The spirit is poured out on all flesh, the law written on our hearts. The reign of God breaks into this world, and the commonwealth of heaven is established on earth. God is all in all.

This is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ: The revelation of our full humanity and full divinity, and the unveiling of all creation as fully divine. Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then

we shall see God face to face, beholding our one true image in love and our one true being as love.

This is the apocalypse. And that's good news!

Conclusion

While awakening originated in Asia and critical consciousness predominated in the Europe, prophetic apocalypticism rose up right in the middle where Africa, Asia, and Europe all meet. And for me, it is the intersection of these three great modes of consciousness that will best equip us to face, withstand, and overcome whatever may be. For this reason, I pray the next great awakening in America is the apocalypse of universal, unconditional love that sooner or later is sure to come. Awakening and apocalypse both bring us to the end of ourselves and the world as we know it, just as they both birth us into a new heaven and new earth that is the commonwealth of God and all creation. Both awakening and apocalypse also lead us down the path of self-deconstruction, critique, and negation for the sake of the Other, all others, and especially the othered, so through our embodied intersectionality we all come back together again to our truest selves in the communion of all.

For me, the golden thread that ties this all together is the radical shift in consciousness that awakens us to supreme being, our essential selves, and the abyss of unknowing, which is much the same as the great gift of metanoia that restores us to right relationship with God, ourselves, and all creation by transforming our minds and thinking, thereby taking us beyond all thinking into the new creation that far exceeds all our greatest thoughts.

In closing, I'd like to offer this prayer with a wink to Paul: May we all be given the spirit of sophic wisdom and apocalyptic revelation in the true gnostic knowledge of our supreme being, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened that we may know the riches of our glorious inheritance of the immeasurable greatness of the divine power within us, so we may all directly

behold and fully embody the beauty, fluidity, and sovereignty of our nonbinary identities that shine with the love of both sacramental unity and prophetic intersectionality.¹⁹¹ Amen!

¹⁹¹ Ep 1:17-19.

Bibliography

- Adyashanti. *Emptiness Dancing*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2006.
- . *The End of Your World: Uncensored Straight Talk on the Nature of Enlightenment*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2008.
- . *The Way of Liberation: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Campbell, CA: Open Gate Sangha, 2012.
- Anderson, Frank G., Sweezy, Martha, and Richard C. Schwartz. *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual: Trauma-Informed Treatment for Anxiety, Depression, PTSD & Substance Abuse*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media, 2017.
- Armstrong, Thomas. "The Stages of Life According to Ken Wilber," American Institute for Learning and Human Development, February 5, 2020, <https://www.institute4learning.com/2020/02/05/the-states-of-life-according-to-ken-wilber/>.
- Bible Hub. "Col 3:11, Expositor's Greek Testament." Accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/3-11.htm>.
- . "1 Cor 15:28, Barnes' Notes on the Bible." Accessed July 14, 2021. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm.
- . "1 Cor 15:28, Benson Commentary." Accessed July 14, 2021. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm.
- . "1 Cor 15:28, Meyer's NT Commentary." Accessed July 14, 2021. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/15-28.htm.
- . "Eph 1:23, Barnes' Notes on the Bible." Accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-23.htm>.
- . "Eph 1:23, Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers." Accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-23.htm>.
- . "Eph 3:19, McLaren's Expeditions." Accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/3-19.htm>.
- . "Eph 1:23, Meyer's NT Commentary." Accessed July 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-23.htm>.

- Bodian, Stephan. *Wake Up Now: A Guide to the Journey of Spiritual Awakening*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
- . *Beyond Mindfulness: The Direct Approach to Lasting Peace, Happiness, and Love*. Oakland, CA: Non-Duality Press, 2017.
- Breuggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- Davis, John. "An overview of transpersonal psychology." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 31, nos. 2-3 (2003): 6-21.
- Dumetz, Rene. "In a Dark Light: A Heuristic Investigation of Nondual (Unitive) Experiences." PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations.
- Ferrer, Jorge N. *Revisiting Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Goulding, Regina A., and Richard C. Schwartz. *The Mosaic Mind: Empowering the Tormented Selves of Child Abuse Survivors*. Oak Park, IL: Trailhead Publications. 2002.
- Harris, Sam. *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.
- Hartelius, Glenn. "Taylor's Soft Perennialism: A Primer of Perennial Flaws in Transpersonal Scholarship." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 35, no. 2 (2016): 42-47.
- Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: Perennial, 2001.
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.
- Jacobson, Leonard. *Journey into Now: Clear Guidance on the Path of Spiritual Awakening*. La Selva Beach, CA: Conscious Living Publications, 2007.
- Kasemann, Ernst. *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010.
- Keller, Catherine. *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021.

- Kelly, Loch. *Shift into Freedom: The Science and Practice of Open-Hearted Awareness*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2015.
- . *The Way of Effortless Mindfulness: A Revolutionary Guide for Living an Awakened Life*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2019.
- Kilrea, Kelly. "Introduction to the Special Topic Section on Spiritual Awakening: Joy, Not Elsewhere Classified—Towards a Contemporary Psychological Understanding of Spiritual (and Secular) Awakening." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 37, no. 2 (2018): 66-72.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail* [1963]. London: Penguin UK, 2018.
- Kotler, Steven, and Jamie Wheal. *Stealing Fire: How Silicon Valley, the Navy SEALs, and Maverick Scientists are Revolutionizing the Way We Live and Work*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017.
- Lerner, Michael. *Revolutionary Love: A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 2019.
- Loy, David. *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books. 1988.
- McCormick, Laurel A. "The Personal Self, No-Self, Self Continuum: An Intuitive Inquiry and Grounded Theory Study of the Experience of No-Self as Integrated Stages of Consciousness toward Enlightenment." PhD diss, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA, 2009. ProQuest Dissertations.
- Morse, Christopher. *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*. 2nd ed. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 2009.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Kingdom of God in America* [1937]. Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1988.
- Patten, Terry. *A New Republic of the Heart: An Ethos for Revolutionaries*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2018.
- Rodriguez, Michael A. *Boundless Awareness: A Loving Path to Spiritual Awakening and Freedom from Suffering*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2018.
- Schwartz, Richard C. *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model*. Oak Park, IL: Trailheads Publications, 2001.

- Schwartz, Richard C., and Robert R. Falconer. *Many Minds, One Self: Evidence for a Radical Shift in Paradigm*. Oak Park, IL: Trailheads Publications, 2017.
- Schwartz, Richard C., and Martha Sweezy. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 2nd ed. New York: The Guilford Press, 2020.
- Spira, Rupert. *The Nature of Consciousness: Essays on the Unity of Mind and Matter*. Oxford: Sahaja Publications, 2017.
- Taylor, Steve. *The Leap: The Psychology of Spiritual Awakening*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017.
- Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Novato, CA: New World Library and Namaste Publishing, 1999.
- Wade, Jenny. "After Awakening, the Laundry: Is Nonduality a Spiritual Experience?" *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 37, no. 2 (2018): 88-115.
- Wilber, Ken. *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2000.
- Williams, Angel Kyodo, Owens, Lama Rod, and Jasmine Syedullah. *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016.
- Ziegler, Philip G. *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018.