

# The True Nature of Death

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## **Introduction**

If it seems sometimes like Christianity is pretty much broken, that's because it pretty much is. But this is not a book about bashing Christianity. There's not much challenge in that. Just to come clean a little, Bernadette Roberts claimed she knew, and I believe in, the centrality of the Trinity. Christ, the Eucharist, and Mary were never seen or known apart from the Trinity in her spiritual life. Not that you can't have a vigorous spiritual life without these beliefs. However, the way those things have been understood and handed down has not served us well. Bernadette would even say that the version of Christianity we have been given stifles spiritual growth. The challenge as the writer of this book is to convey to the intelligent and caring person how the vision of Christianity that Bernadette Roberts had (she said she didn't recognize as Christianity what goes around these days by that word) wasn't the result of insanity, duplicity, or stupidity. (Actually,

she referred to herself as the “dumbest” in her class, but I don’t think that had a bearing on her theology.) Maybe you will disagree. That’s o.k.

This book is about a new way to look at Christianity. It does not require any faith to understand completely. Neither is this another one of countless reform attempts, embarked both from within and from outside Christianity. This book represents a paradigm shift that may shake up everything you know about Christianity. Please don’t bother if you don’t have an open mind. This book will surprise you and get you thinking in a new way. This book will challenge you, and invite you to grow.

Abbreviations:

Co = Contemplative (her autobiography)

Ws = What is Self? A Study of the Spiritual Journey in Terms of Consciousness

Ens = Experience of No-Self

Pns = Path to No-Self: Life at the Center

Rc = The Real Christ

Ecc = Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey

Ff = Forcing the Fit

### **Crisis at the Crossroads**

In this chapter we look at where Christianity is today. Even though it is rapidly on the decline in many parts of the world, it is still hugely popular in others. The crossroads is this: Either Christians blithely continue to ignore the study of consciousness and what it means for the deposit of faith, or we take a right turn and allow science to shed a little light on our faith. Bernadette was saying that, based on her personal experience, Christians don’t have Christ right. If that is true, and if she could prove it, she would be shaking the very foundations of Christianity. The stakes couldn’t possibly be any higher.

Ws p. 64 “As I now see it Christianity has perpetuated a shortsighted view of Christ and, consequently, a shortsighted view of the rest of us. Christ’s passage was the revelation of the passage of every human being, and any misreading of him is a misreading of the whole of humanity. Investigating Christ’s human experiences in terms of consciousness or self opens up a whole new dimension of his Truth and revelation, and not only his, but our own and that of the whole of creation.”

Of course, we should investigate Christ’s human experiences in terms of consciousness because that is “who” he was. The who is the experiencer. Jesus was the who. Consciousness is not eternal, and Jesus was not eternal. But if **who** he was, was ultimately of little consequence, **what** he was, was of tremendous significance. Like Jesus we become transformed into what we are. Even if there is no experience of a body because there is no experiencer, the mysterious nature what remains is identified as Christ, the union of God and man. There is nothing else to be after the “who” is gone.

Ws p. 107 “To say that Christ’s self or consciousness was eternal gives an entirely different picture and meaning to Christ than if we say his self or consciousness was not eternal...I think the West will come upon its own set of problems when it faces the impermanence of Christ’s self or consciousness, but, at the same time, this will reveal an entirely new dimension of Christ’s revelation – of this I am certain.”

One of the problems the West will come upon when it faces the impermanence of Christ’s self or consciousness is, “Who, then, are we praying to?” One of the problems with saying his consciousness is eternal is if it is connected to the brain or even dependent upon it, and it seems obvious that at least it was, and if the brain needs blood and oxygen to function, where is the blood and oxygen coming from to power the mind of Christ?

There will be all kinds of explanations for the force of nature that was Bernadette Roberts. Some will say she was mentally unfit. Others will say she was physically unfit. I can even see some people in the future going way overboard in their connection between Bernadette and Jesus. For Bernadette, the fact that Jesus was miraculously conceived did not make him God. For her, he

was fully man and a manifestation of what it means to be fully man which is in union with God, and not God.

Yet she also held he was unique among all men in three distinct ways. The first is that he is the reality of the union of the soul with God. Second, he manifested what we can only experience. Third, he “came down” by the same path that man “goes up” (or dies). In other words, the taking on of consciousness (by the Logos) looks exactly opposite to its diminishing (or being consumed by the Logos). In other words, with the formation of consciousness first comes the feeling center then the thinking center. With the dismantling of consciousness first goes the thinking center then goes the feeling center.

But man is more than self, more than consciousness. (Ex p. 170) At least so said one woman who lived for forty years after the dismantling of her consciousness. She called this reality “Christ” because sharing the same type of human unitive consciousness as Jesus, what they were both transformed into is whatever the reality is beyond consciousness. Nobody recognized Jesus at first post resurrection because it wasn’t Jesus anymore. It was Christ which is beyond the particular individual person.

But if you are looking for where to pin Bernadette Roberts down theologically, you are in for a difficult task. She felt from the age of ten, after hearing the beautiful chanting coming from the Synagogue across the street from her church that she would always be “a secret Jew” once she realized they did not believe that Jesus was God either. She spoke affirmatively about the Muslims’ understanding that God is One (and not three). So, the irony of the situation is that in terms of her beliefs about Jesus, she may end up being more accepted by Jews and Muslims who she never wrote for, than the Christian contemplatives she did.

In fact, if belief in the divinity of Jesus is a prerequisite of being a Christian, it could even be argued that, even though she knew the Faith better than some of the sisters giving catechism classes, and even though she was a cloistered nun for eight-and-a-half years, and even though she claimed she was transformed into Christ, she was never a Christian.

Once she realized that she was not going to be transformed into Jesus (around age 10) she could focus on union with God, like Jesus. And because an

indominable will always directed to God is the only prerequisite to “bear the vision” and be transformed into Christ, how it went for Jesus is how it went for her.

Rc p. 78 “Sometimes the impression is given that Christianity has a monopoly on forgiveness, salvation, savior, eternal life, God’s Spirit, grace, and so on, when, in fact, Christianity took all this straight from Judaism! The revelation of ‘Christ’ had nothing to do with any of this and changed none of it.”

The early Christians were all Jews and “the Way” was looked upon as a Jewish sect. The revelation of Christ had nothing to do with sin. Christ was not revealed because we had sinned. In fact, self-reflexive consciousness which makes sin possible also makes the revelation of Christ possible. Christ is known in the depths of one’s subjectivity. Consciousness is not necessarily bad. It has a tendency to be selfish for as long as the ego holds reigns of the center. The Divine Christ (the Logos) used human consciousness to demonstrate the way of every human’s consciousness to death and beyond.

Rc p. 318 “The day Christianity lost this understanding of deification as the way man is saved, is the day it lost Christ.”

In other words, over time there was a switch was from the understanding that “salvation is transformation” to, “Jesus saved from sin”. This was when the understanding that Jesus revealed Christ and demonstrated the **way** that each of us is to be transformed **as well as what** each of us is to be transformed into (in-so-far as it could be perceived by the senses) was lost.

The “Party-Line” presentation of Christianity she calls “narrow, naïve and childish”. In other words, Christianity today is fearful, ignorant, and juvenile. I think her use of the word childish is important, particularly in relation to her idea that no ego is only the halfway point and not the end of the journey. She was brought to no ego at 17 and obviously still had a long time to learn. She is saying we are immature because our views are immature **and** that our views are immature because we are immature.

Rc p. 323 “That down the road, Christianity was turned into the narrow, naïve and childish view we have today – i.e., only the man Jesus is Christ, only Jesus could ever be eternally one with God – is the inevitable loss of the whole

revelation of the Incarnation, and, consequently, of Christ and Christianity... Christianity's exclusive, boxed-in view of Jesus and Christ, not only aborts man's spiritual journey, but will be its own undoing – why? Simply because it is not the Truth of 'Christ'."

How can she possibly get away with saying that a "boxed-in view of Jesus" (namely that only he is God) "aborts man's spiritual journey"? It seems like she is calling out all of Christianity to a dance battle. O.K. So, first, do we have to look at what she might possibly mean by "abort"? I don't think so. Next, do we need to unpack "only he"? Maybe. Christians say that "only he" was God and that the rest of us can only try to be like him and hopefully, one day, live with him in Heaven. Bernadette was not saying that we are already Christ and we just have to "realize" it. She was not saying that Jesus was not unique among all humans. She was just rejecting the use of the word "only". She became Christ. She did it a lot younger than most of us will. So, man's spiritual journey is "aborted" before it is begun because we assume we are completed. This is how we always will be. But that is very, very wrong. Bernadette became something very different. She became a human being with nothing in common with the rest of humanity. At least that's how she felt squeezing into a crowded pub in a college town (after leaving her Self on the monk's hillside) and ordering a beer. (I'm surprised she didn't order a spirit.)

Ecc p. 107 "Any misreading of Christ's path to the Father is a misreading of our own path and own ultimate destiny. In fact, any misreading of Christ is a misreading of ourselves."

This is exactly why the stakes are so extraordinarily high in terms of a correct understanding of Christ. If we don't get Christ right, we don't get ourselves right. And, I'm concerned we haven't. We have been told we are sinners and that God, like Santa, is keeping track of who is naughty and nice.

As you can see in Bollywood, in India, sometimes they like to go over the top. I saw recently a Jehovah's Witness/Hindu devotional type of realistic presentation of spiritual concepts video on Youtube. It showed Jesus with laser beams of light coming from his head riding a white horse followed by thousands of men riding white horses on the clouds literally above people playing basketball and cello who stopped to gawk in amazement. The people who were presented

to the “King of Kings” “Lord of Lords” and “Judge of Judges” were basically naked except there were some fuzzyness around their “private” parts. Then they were either cast falling by the millions down into fire and burning flesh or beamed up into a forest with waterfalls and children playing with lions and lots of “resurrected” people hovering around (with arms spread) by the force of their newly acquired wings. How did we get here? People have their senses in mind when creating these types of cinematographic spectacles.

I think that’s a misreading of Christ, and therefore I think it’s a misreading of ourselves and how our journey goes. This is what we want to know. How does it go? This is what we don’t know for as long as we continue to misunderstand Jesus and Christ (big difference!) In the next chapter we will look at some of the various ideas people have had about Jesus. Why dive into theological details? Because if we get Jesus wrong, we get ourselves wrong. Again, the stakes couldn’t possibly be any higher.

Ecc p. 99 “Our end, however, is not simply union with God, but a union followed by death, resurrection and ascension – total transformation into Christ in the Trinity. Nothing else and nothing less can define the end of our journey. The fact these issues are usually addressed as Christ’s mysteries and not our own, means we have missed the whole purpose of the Incarnation, missed what Christ came to reveal – missed the true mystery of our life, our journey, our end.”

Nobody was used to things being revealed to all of humanity (and not just our tribe) yet. They thought this Joshua ben Joseph guy was remarkable and different but they couldn’t quite put their finger on exactly how. Was he a prophet? Was he a healer? Was he God? The natures, according to Chalcedon, always remain separate and distinct. What that was, what he was, was a visible manifestation of the Logos communicating to us who we are, and where we are going to end up. We all want to know how to act and where we are going to end up. Children are more focused on the first question, and the elderly are more focused on the second. Christ answers both questions at the same time. How to act is in union with God, and where you are going to end up is in God, beyond union and not you.

**How did we get here? (a.k.a. These are not our beautiful children!?)**

In the spirit of transparent and full disclosure you should understand that Bernadette did not regard the Bible as particularly “sacred”. She endeavored to read the whole thing at age nine and was so put off by parts of it she hid it from her mom out of shame. It’s hardly surprising then when, a couple of years later, pubescent and irascible Bernadette would find fault with and object to some of the things Jesus said.

Like St. Ireneaus (d. 125) she regarded the gospels as the “apostles memoires” (although they were more like a new literary genre). She understood that the need to codify came from the need to establish veracity among competing versions of the Gospels. There was the gospel of Thomas, and Philip, and who are we to believe? Altogether, she exhibits somewhat of a distrust of the gospels. She was opposed to people worshipping “some book” instead of the living God (see commandment 1).

Full disclosure time again. She didn’t particularly like some of the language in some of the creeds. She says about the wording of Christ at Chalcedon in 451 “they got it right”. But she didn’t like the word “person” and she didn’t like “begotten” and she didn’t think the Divine Logos was a “Son” and none of her experiences ever indicated that the Transcendent was a “Father”. She even goes so far as to say the creeds need to be rewritten. Clearly they were written in a way that reflected their *zitz en laben* (social context) but that time and place are long gone. Today they have reached an audience they were never intended for. Of course they are misunderstood. They were only written for the highly educated in the ancient near east to be able to understand. Science is starting now to understand consciousness and creation and human nature in a way that was impossible to the early fathers. “They were behind in a number of ways.” As they are now, the creeds promote another god for the pantheon and monophysitism (the belief that the Divine will so overwhelmed the human will that, practically speaking, there was only one (divine) will). But if his will was not saved, then our will is not saved.

Of course, add all of this to how she couldn’t really accept how a human being could be God anyway (unless it could be in the sense that we are all gods, Jn. 10:34), and she could see that she was stepping further and further away from



the faith of her parents. She wanted to compare the lengths of two lists. The first list was of things she agreed with about her Catholic faith, and the second of things she didn't. She was happy to find that the first list was longer, but still somewhat troubled.

Pns p. 157 "The idea of stepping outside this [Catholic] referent, however, struck me as somewhat risky, for it occurred to me I might possibly lose my [Catholic] faith. But in putting the question to God, in the very moment of doing so, I had my answer. God is already outside my mental structure; He exists without it."

Bernadette loved to argue. It was just her favorite thing to do. And when she was old and was basically retired, she watched hours and hours of Judge Judy, People's Court, and "Who's that Latina one down in Miami? I like her. There's laughter in her courtroom.", etc. She grew up constantly grilling her knowledgeable father about various intricacies of the faith. What about this? How about that? That habit got so well engrained that by the time she got to boarding school she would stay up late coming up with things to argue about with her roommate. That habit never left her. She loved being fiercely critical.

Rc p. 335 "To say Christian theology is 'complicated' is the understatement of all time. It is an unadulterated mess. It so defies common logic as to require man to forfeit his intellectual integrity in order to 'believe'."

Basically, as a child, Bernadette could never believe Jesus was God because she had learned the hard way (The grammar school priest barged into her classroom and pointed a bony finger at her demanding that she tell him where her soul was.) that a spirit is nothing one can see with one's bodily eyes. Besides, she knew God "like the back of [her] hand" from the age ten. It wasn't that she never grew out of her childish beliefs. Closer to the truth was that her childish beliefs (or the beliefs of people around her) were constantly being challenged by her experiences. Neither could she accept that he had died for her sins.

Something very interesting happened to her when she went into Blessed Sacrament Church in L.A. at age ten (after "seeing" God the Father (or God-Passing-By)) "lookin' for answers". She was overwhelmed by a sense of mystery.

Cc p. 103 "Since I was on crutches and not allowed to kneel, I stood under this gaze and began to ask my questions. No sooner had I started, however, than a wave come over me, a sense of some terrible tragedy that whisked away my questions as if they didn't count, were meaningless, childish, totally irrelevant. Before me there was only some terrible dark mystery. It was like a gray cloud, a mystery so deep my mind could not follow, couldn't even think. Though I had no idea what this meant, I took it for an answer of sorts that left no doubt there was, indeed, more to Christ's death than I had ever known or been taught; more perhaps, than anyone had ever suspected. Though I did not know what more this could be, it occurred to me that the real tragedy of his death was that nobody really understood it! Though I wanted badly to know, yet nothing followed this experience but complete silence, seemingly a stubborn silence on the part of Christ."

Here's something else you should probably know about Bernadette Roberts. She thought that the crucifixion still has not been correctly understood by very many people in Christianity. And then she thought she proved it in her body by undergoing death, resurrection, ascension, then kenosis. She would never have said she proved it. She just said she knew what she knew from her experience. She was so sure that "how it went for him is how it is going to go for every one of us" that she claimed to know how long the kenosis of Jesus took (9 months) based on her own personal experience of returning to the Resurrected condition.

Back to her thoughts about the crucifixion, she learned something else from putting her questions to Christ.

Co p. 104 "While the effect left me with a subtle assurance I'd someday be privy to this knowledge – a true understanding of Christ's death – I took for granted it would only be in heaven. From that day, however, I never lost the certitude that the true mystery of his death was beyond any redeeming purpose, a mystery, however, not open to my understanding."

Basically, while she could understand lots of spiritual things pretty easily, the true nature of the crucifixion stubbornly eluded her. You'd better believe she thought about it off and on for decades until she was 45 and it suddenly became clear. She had been recapitulating the interior life of Jesus with her confident and

even defiant will to God. That it should end with his death and resurrection was almost predictable.

Final caveat: some parts of this book will be slightly theological and slightly technical. Christ, she said, is utterly simple. She wanted to clear out the mess that we have gotten ourselves into before addressing what Christ is. So here we dive into the theological mess. But don't despair. Have hope.

Pns p. 189 "bliss awaits those who can possibly make it through the tragedy of what has happened to Christ in the Church."

## **Wrong Turns**

Some years after her two-year acclimation process to life without a self had been over, she began to go back and look for some possible misunderstandings in the development of doctrine that may have been made to steer the course of ideas to our current miserable condition. And so, the book The Real Christ was born. How could it be that she was so far away from what everyone else was saying when she only knew what God had given her to know? How could it be that she fell outside of Christianity when she was just trying to give to God everything?

There were about five major wrong turns. The first is what Bernadette called "the great switch". For centuries the term "son of God" referred to Jesus and the miraculous way in which he was conceived. Then those recently converted from paganism started worshiping the man as a revealer of God. It wasn't that they had forgotten that you can be a revealer of God without being God. No one had ever told these polytheists. So they worshiped the man. The more learned Greek philosophers were not polytheists, but most people were not philosophers. They started referring to how the Logos was "begotten" by the Father which thereby made "Him" a son. Then they started to refer to the Logos as the "son" instead of to Jesus as the "son". In the scripture, Jesus is the "son" and there is not much talk about the Logos. But now, if the Logos is also "son"

then anything predicated of one can be said of the other. Suddenly, everything said or done by the “son” was divine.

It’s pretty clear why they wanted to do this. They had to deify the man to avoid the accusation of anthropolatry – the worship of a human being as God. So now Jesus is the incarnation of the “son of God” (or God, it’s already confusing) and, as God, he existed from all eternity. So now they could say, we don’t worship a man, we worship the “son of God”. A Muslim might ask, “Why not just worship God and not God’s son?” and “Since when does God have children?” and “If he was God, who was he praying to? Was he praying to himself?!” We will see there are various questions and various answers to all of these issues soon, but not yet.

Rc p. 149 “This was an unwarranted leap from a post to a pre incarnational understanding of Christ, one that was bound to change the original Trinitarian and Christological paradigms.”

The Church Fathers should have heeded Hilary’s admonition about not mixing up the three states in the life of Christ. They took a post incarnational understanding of the glorified Christ and, since Christ is one person, applied it to the pre incarnational Christ when Jesus didn’t even exist yet.

As a wise bishop named Arius (who was followed by two-thirds of the Church at the time) astutely pointed out, to say the Logos was “begotten” implies there was a time when “He” did not exist. But being of the same substance as the Father, they both must be eternal. The only one “begotten” in time was Jesus when the Logos became body and soul. Arius held that Jesus and God were of different substances. But once people started calling the Logos a son, and of course the Transcendent a father, then the son Jesus could be regarded as Divine.

Rc p. 140 “To think the anthropomorphic biblical interpretation of God ‘generating’ or ‘begetting’ an Uncreated ‘Son’ could have justified a transition in the Church’s whole understanding of the Trinity and Christ, can only be put down as the most flagrant wrong turn in the entire history of Christianity.”

Because people were already worshiping the man, there was not a great need to grant him a fully human soul. His words and deeds (it seemed) were Divine and not human.

Rc p. 249 “Yet the more divine one makes the Logos’ human nature, the more Christ fades from the picture and the more Christianity deteriorates to a Jesus-cult.”

Or possibly, as in Acts 28:22, a Jewish “sect”. To make the Logos’ human nature divine removes it from our personal experience and encourages one to worship that human nature instead of emulate it. You can’t copy God, but you can follow in the footsteps of a Jewish human.

Rc p. 144 “There has to be God (Logos) before there is any incarnation of the Logos – before there is any Christ and before there is the created man Jesus. No question, the Creed must be totally restated, Christians today are not the semi-polytheists of yesterday.”

Jesus became Christ because he let the Logos do Its job. But before Christ and before Jesus, there was only the Logos.

Rc p. 195 “God only assumed or united to Itself man’s common essential human nature – this was Cyril’s own understanding of the Incarnation. Obviously, then, man’s earthly properties needed for earthly existence were never intended or destined for eternal life.”

Earthly properties needed for earthly existence are consciousness, the senses, and all the things that make each person unique.

Rc p. 156 “Chalcedon does not say there is a union of nature with a person, but only a union of natures in a person. Although it is assumed the Logos was the divine person of both natures, still, there is no union of a divine person with human nature. This means that Jesus’ human nature was not united to or with the divine person of the Logos, but only united to the divine nature of the Logos.”

What he was, his nature, was united to the Logos while “who” he was, his consciousness, was not united to anything. It was his own. He had the experiences. God did not have the experiences.

The council of Nicea was called to settle these disputes (What was God united to? Who was the Son?). To put down Arianism and avoid anthropolatry the creed formulated there clearly states that “Jesus Christ... begotten by the father...came down and became incarnate”. Bernadette would say that this is a

great example of why, if you get the Trinity wrong, you will get Christ wrong. The Logos is not a “son” and Jesus is not the Logos. He calls himself “son of man” and certainly never Logos. There is a great divide between the created and the Uncreated. She posits that many of the bishops may have felt coerced into signing it. After all, if you went against the Bishop of Alexandria and the Emperor, you could lose your see, or even get exiled. You can also give it your own interpretation as you explain it to the people when you get back home.

While the Bishops in the East were mostly responsible for that error, it would be the Church in the West that would take the next wrong turn. The word used in four of the five ancient churches to describe the distinctions in the Trinity was hypostasis. It meant that which supports the essence of a thing and makes it what it is. It also meant form or function. The West didn’t have the same philosophical background or terminology. Think about it. Four of the five major Churches were in the East. Despite linguistic difficulties, they had to come up with a unified presentation of the Trinity. Unfortunately, the West came up with the word “Person” to describe the distinctions in the Trinity. This sounded like modalism to the East where persona meant mask. They rejected the term and never used it. However, when you read the creeds today, they use the term person (because we don’t know what hypostasis means).

Rc p. 157 “To my knowledge, however, the Greeks never agreed hypostasis meant persona – and indeed it does not. In time, however, in the West at least, hypostasis and person were used as synonymous terms. So due to this error, there occurred another switch from the original hypostasis to person – a monumental wrong turn as regards a true understanding of the Trinity and Christ.”

Some recent theologians have come up with some nuanced and beautiful ideas about what Person could mean in a Trinitarian context. Bernadette was not addressing those attempts. She was just pointing out that simply “capitalizing the ‘P’ in the word person” doesn’t much alter our understanding of the word. This understanding must be based on human persons since those are the only ones we know. Theologians will tell you it’s a transcendental person but they don’t tell you what that means. They say negate everything you know about person, and God is what’s left. Well, what’s left? Nothing.

You don't need the word 'person' to have a locus for the union that is Christ. But they wanted the Logos to be a 'person' so they could attribute human nature, all of Jesus' activities, to the person of the Logos. What's wrong with the word person? It leads, almost inevitably, in the minds of the non-theologian, to tritheism – the belief in three gods. And so, the Trinity is presented everywhere as Santa Claus on a fairly successful diet, a handsome young son, and a hovering pigeon.

Rc p. 170 “Like the fathers, Christians would be horrified to think they were polytheists or believed in three gods. But this is why the Trinity is kept at a distance, declared a ‘mystery’ incapable of the human mind to grasp. This is also why the Trinity means relatively nothing to the average Christian and plays no part in his spiritual life.”

The Trinity could be the center of everyone's spiritual life. Not because the Trinity is the truth, or because our spiritual lives are a little more complicated than parent-child relationship, but because it is what is already happening. The body is already being transformed by the Logos and the soul by the Spirit, all in the glory of the Transcendent all the time.

When people start having and asking questions about the Trinity, they are told it's a mystery beyond human consciousness and that is that. By making all aspects of the Trinity unintelligible to the rational mind Christianity has removed it from personal experience. More accurately, it could be said that it simply was never brought in.

The scholastic influence motivated them to come up with an adequate definition of person. Boethius came up with, “an individual substance of a rational nature.” So now what you are (person) is who you are. Your rational nature, your self is given primacy of importance. The word 'person' is a Christian invention borrowed from Roman law. Originally it meant one who owns something. A slave was not a person because they could not own anything. We recall that, before that in Greece it meant “mask”.

Rc p. 201 “Sometimes we wonder how Western civilization ever became so self-oriented compared to other civilizations that were more oriented to the benefit of everyone over their individual selves. Well, who invented the

individual and particular 'person' or self, and who gave it ontological priority over everyman's common human nature? Christianity!"

What does she mean when she writes "and who gave it ontological priority over everyman's common human nature?" Good question. She's referring to the switch from hypostasis (a term which pointed to the reality that underlies **what** you are) to person (a term which pointed to the reality of **who** you are). Why did they want to use the word 'person'? Because the human mind works by focusing on particulars. The word person makes Christ an individual being, and that is satisfying to the human mind.

Rc p. 279 "Eliminate the term 'person', and how is Christ to be envisioned as a single being? Without theology's absolute dependence on person as an individual being, its Christologies would go down like a row of dominoes."

Eliminate the term 'person' and we could begin to understand that Christ is not a person but a oneness. In fact, another reason why the term 'person' is problematic is that most people don't distinguish it from self. But if 'person' is what you are then 'self' is who you are. The reason why it is disastrous to conflate the two is because **what** you are (body) can live on beyond **who** you are (consciousness) is dead. Christ is not a person. It is the oneness, beyond experience, of God and man manifested when your self is gone because you have been transformed into Christ.

In the theological conflicts between the Alexandrian (or God-flesh) school and the Antiochan (or God-man) school, the question was, "Who or what did God unite Himself to?". Did God unite Himself with just flesh (the particular, the individual, Aristotle) or with all of Humanity (universal Man, Plato)? Without going into it, let's just say the Alexandrian view is currently MUCH more popular. The winners of the debate between Alexandria and Antioch would get to decide who would wield a greater influence on Christianity – Aristotle or Plato.

Rc p. 465 "What is unfortunate, however, is those who write the history of the early development of Christian thought and doctrine, consistently rely on the present-day Aristotelian rendition of it. It could be said this is a deliberate attempt to eliminate any possible 'Platonic' understanding of Christ as a universal in order to make Christ solely one particular man – Jesus, of course."



It would be difficult, if not impossible, to indict any particular historian or theologian on charges of deliberately attempting to eliminate any possible 'Platonic' understanding of Christ. Still, this is the view that has come down to us and we must try to understand why. You never hear of Christ as being a universal but It's what we are made in the image of, and Itself the image we are becoming. If you don't insist on saying that nature is dumb then you can think of Christ as coming from the intelligence of nature and returning to the intelligence of nature.

Because they believed Jesus was conceived miraculously **and** because they believed souls passed down via the sperm were tainted by Adam's fall, they concluded that Jesus was unlike any other human being. (That's why Catholics came up with the doctrine of the immaculate conception, which probably a majority of Catholics don't comprehend. Mary's soul was stain free as well.) Of course, they say "like us in every way but sin" but if he is the **only** sinless one, to the person in the pew it sounds like he's pretty fundamentally different.

Rc p. 434 "Thus it was assumed Jesus' human nature was different, a human nature so elevated it couldn't possibly be like that of another human being...The truth that no man is born with sin, however, would certainly have changed Paul's, and all subsequent, Christology's."

Paul, it is said, made the diagnosis fit the cure. If Christ saves then we must be sinners. Not that Paul came up with the doctrine of Original Sin. That was Augustine some five centuries later. Yet even for Paul, we are sinners because of the universally held belief at the time (which happens to be false) that a universally tainted soul was passed down through the sperm, and that the woman had relatively little to do with it. Therefore, Christ must have been a savior because we need one. However, if we are not sinners but foolish, ignorant, lazy, and spiritually immature, who were born perfect with souls created one on one by God but fragile, then we need an example, and not a savior.

Ecc p. 96 "But this is why my affirming the divine Person of Christ is without self is viewed by the theologian as wrong – heretical. For the theologian, Christ is equally a divine Person and a divine self. If this were true, however, then Christ had no human self – because as a divine Person he only had a divine self. But who can believe the man Jesus never experienced a human self such as we do? I hold that in his human nature Christ experienced self just as we do. Christ's

divine nature (the Logos), however, from all eternity is absolutely selfless – as is the whole Godhead or Trinity. Self is what distinguishes man, not God. This is my thesis.”

You can't have two selves, one human and one Divine in the same individual. Of course, Jesus had the experiences because that's what humans do. We have experiences. God, being impassible, had no experiences because in order to have an experience you must be an experiencer. God cannot be an experiencer because then It would be separate from that which it experiences. God being the source of all cannot be separate from any of it or it would cease to exist. And if you are thinking like the great philosopher Woody Allen, “Eternity is an awful long time, especially towards the end” and that God must be bored, then you have not grasped that it takes an experiencer to be bored.

Ecc p. 96 “when theology equates ‘person’ with ‘self’ it follows that my saying the divine Person of Christ is without self amounts to denying Christ as a divine Person. And so too, when I affirm that Christ had a human self, this amounts (theologically) to saying Christ was a human person – and there's the Nestorianism! What I said, however, was that Christ had a human self but was a Divine Person. Clearly I nowhere equate self and person.”

It is so important to constantly keep in mind the distinction between self (or consciousness) and Person. Person is a union of body/soul/spirit while consciousness is a function of the Person. I wouldn't want to try to parcel what pertains to what in that trinity of human nature but it seems that from the unity that it is emerges consciousness. If this is a little confusing, all the more reason the word ‘person’ should be thrown out. Not just because it's confusing but because it gave rise to the biggest theological ruse of all time (and wrong turn number three): The Communication of Properties (hereafter C of P or *Communicatio Idiomatum*).

Rc p. 242 “What few people realize, however, is that the official Church or Christian language is totally premised on this use of idioms instead of on the truth of Christ.”

Rc p. 248 “No question, the C of P is the most deceiving ruse in all of Christian history a ruse responsible for totally wrong views of Christ, the Trinity and the man Jesus.”

She uses the words ‘ruse’ and elsewhere ‘excuse’ because she wants to convince the reader that they have been intentionally duped. It is just her confrontational personality coming through. We can never know the intentions of the bishops and theologians who developed the doctrine.

Briefly stated in Pope Leo’s Tome of 449, doctrine is this:

[Christ] “acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division and without separation, each nature was assured its own ontological distinction, even though verbally permissible to predicate them of one and the same Christ.”

The C of P is saying that it is verbally permissible to say that God suffered and thirsted and cried because since Christ is one Person, whatever we can say about the human Christ we can attribute to the Divine Christ. Bernadette also called the C of P a “conspiracy” because so much “God talk” is completely dependent on it and it is never mentioned or taught, even to seminarians!

Rc p. 244 “The problem with ‘verbally permissible’, however, is the tendency to take words at face value as literal truth. It is one thing to attribute human experiences to God, but another for God to have human experiences. While the C of P does not outright make Jesus a divine person, it makes God a human person instead.”

With language, usage determines meaning. So, when we use phrases such as, ‘God suffered on the cross’, the meaning that is conveyed is that God was a human person (or that a human person was God). This kind of obfuscation and equivocation about questions such as, “Who was the ‘son’?” and, “Who was speaking, Jesus or the Logos?” and, “Who is the Person of Christ? Jesus, or the Logos?” (of course, they went for the Logos (being God and all) which left Jesus person-less (theologically)) did not help evangelical efforts that future missionaries would try to make into Muslim lands. Islam is simple. Submit. Follow the five precepts. Do your best. That’s it. One book, not two. One God, not three. One prophet (peace be upon him), Muhammed. Of course, it was

wildly popular with people who wanted less fighting and blood-shed over theological minutiae.

If unraveling the mess that was the development of doctrine is hurting your brain, you can probably sympathize with those early converts to Islam. The fourth wrong turn was defining Christ as two natures in one divine person. This was disastrous because person means individual for most people and the Logos is not an individual. St. Cyril (who was **not** a saint) who is considered the exemplar of Orthodoxy in Christology originally said that the two natures were in the nature of the Logos. Later commentators and translators claim that he really meant to say in the person of the Logos, not the nature of the Logos. This is just another example of the switch of importance from essence (or nature) to person. “Who” you are was not much of a concern to the ancients. They never really raised the issue. Much more important was your essence, what you are. Then along comes Christianity with its emphasis on person and now person is sacrosanct.

Getting back to Jesus, for a few years Bernadette was mystified by Jesus. If he wasn't God in the flesh, and he wasn't just another prophet, and his death wasn't redemptive but rather mysterious, what was his death all about? Fortunately for us, she found out the answer to that question. That's what the next chapter is all about. It will be the longest and most important chapter in this book. Get ready to have your mind blown.

## **The True Nature of Death**

You are about to be introduced to some new ideas. They may seem strange or outlandish. They may even be heretical. You decide for yourself. I just want you to know that Bernadette Roberts regarded these ideas as Orthodox. Essentially, she was drawing a necessary connection based on personal experience between Jesus's death on the cross and the end of consciousness for each of us.

Here is the first new idea. After 28 years of living in the unitive state of no ego, at age 45 she came upon the final and permanent cessation of all consciousness. It wasn't that her consciousness was altered. She wasn't ever

unclear about what happened to her. It was the end of all experience of self, all experiences in fact. There was never again the experience of being a body, having life, boredom, hunger, dreaming, being a person, etc. In that moment and for months afterward she was constantly making connections between her experiences and the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.