

FOR GOD SO LOVED
THE WORLD



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*“The object of religion is direct knowledge of God; for
this there is no substitute”;*

Alvin Boyd Kuhn

(A Rebirth for Christianity, Quest Books, 2005. P. 75)

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PART ONE:

SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH JOHN 3:16

1. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of 2012, and into the first half of 2013, the words of John 3:16 kept bubbling up into my thoughts:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

On the surface, this almost constant intrusion into my awareness was most likely a held-over from a tour I’d taken of the Holy Land in the early fall of 2012. Although I do not have any church affiliation, I accepted an invitation from a younger brother to take a guided tour organized by his evangelical church group. Perhaps, the Holy Land trip had served as an external catalyst, thrusting this doctrinal icon of the Christian faith up to my rational mind for re-examination and processing. I certainly heard it recited enough times during the trip.

However, on some deeper level, it was as if I had unfinished business with this verse. Over the course of the previous three decades, I had undergone an inner spiritual upheaval, precipitated by a variety of spontaneous spiritual experiences and an intense and extended period of spiritual search which they triggered. The combined effects of these influences was a deepening of my understanding of the psychological function served by the human religious impulse, especially as this is expressed through the Christian creed. As a result of my perceptual change, I radically updated all the religious conceptions I had inherited, or taken at face value, and this re-visioning extended even to how I understood and viewed the Gospel story.

My revised perspective on the Gospel story began with a discovery I'd made in the early 1980s that the key discourses of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven constitute a *transformational psychology*, comprised of a well-organized program for advancing our human consciousness to a higher level.¹ As a result of this discovery I felt that I could no longer relate to the Gospel story as a literal/historical document. I found it made more sense, especially in the context of everything else that I'd read, to relate to the entire story of Jesus and his disciples as allegory, useful in the service of the psychology of transformation they contain. In other words, the Gospel story served a function not unlike that of a scaffold for a building under construction, which in this case, is a system of spiritual psychology, designed to orient us away from our destructive animal impulses towards their higher, spiritualized counterparts.

As convinced as I eventually became that the transformational psychology was the ultimate goal of the Gospel story, I was initially reluctant, on an emotional level, to dismiss the historical track entirely. However, logic eventually prevailed, supported by over two decades of intense personal research in the fields of comparative religion, mythology, and biblical criticism. I eventually had to arrive at my current position that the Gospel story couldn't be both a historical account and the container of a hidden design for transforming our consciousness in the here and now.

Needless to say, the re-visioning of my religious universe had not yet been complete, as some key tenets of the Christian dogma were too colossal, too sacrosanct, to be tampered with. In this regard, John 3:16 stood out as the flagship doctrine of all Christian theological thought and appeared untouchable. I've had a long acquaintance with John 3:16, as it was the first of many Bible verses I, like many other children, had to memorize in Sunday school so many decades ago. It's no wonder then that it's by far one of the most quoted verses among Christians.

2. VISITING THE HOLY LAND

I doubt that one could have found a greater contrast of agendas than those between myself and my host touring-group of evangelical Christians on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Throughout our 12-day tour, devotional sentiments inspired by John 3:16 became the keynote theme. On many occasions, I heard many prayers being offered thanking God for allowing us to be in “this special land” which he “had chosen of all the places on earth” for the birth of his only son.

The group was visibly giddy with excitement by the overwhelming sense of destiny with which, to them, “this special land” was imbued. They took every opportunity to put their faith on display, expressing their devotion in hymn singing, prayers, and Bible readings on our lengthy bus rides and visits to the holy and famous sites on the circuit, including—visiting the cave of the nativity in Bethlehem, viewing a reenactment in modern-day Nazareth of daily life at the time of Jesus, visiting a commercialized baptistery on the banks of the Jordan, a boat crossing of the sea of Galilee, sauntering around the grounds on the Mount of the Beatitudes, touring temple ruins in Capernaum, walking the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, conducting a communion service in the Garden of Gethsemane, the site of the Garden Tomb, standing on the Mount of Olives, and more. Of course, they didn’t allow the real world conflicts which now envelop the Holy Land to intrude into the narrative of divine orchestration.

Not wanting to be seen as an ungracious guest, I avoided any controversial discussions with my fellow travellers and participated outwardly in much of the group’s activities as possible. I also made myself useful by taking photographs of the group, which I shared with them later. However, I was able to fulfill my personal agenda, which was to use the trip to familiarize myself with the setting of the Gospels, to contemplate how it would have felt to have been alive at the time of Jesus and to witness the things written of in the

Gospels. I tried to take as much realism into my visioning exercise as possible.

At this point, one might justifiably ask what purpose was to be served by a visioning exercise of daily life at the time attributed to Jesus when I no longer believed that the outer story of Jesus and his disciples to be anything more than a scaffold for a transformational psychology. The best way I could explain it is with the aid of the following analogy. For me, this outer story, which nourished my inner life for such a long time, had become like that once-favourite suit, which you've outgrown, but which continues to occupy a privileged place in your closet. The Holy Land tour was like finally taking that trip to the charity depot, saying that loving, but final goodbye—but not before turning out the pockets to ensure that “the baby was not thrown out with the bathwater”, if I'm allowed the indulgence of mixing my metaphors.

As if to assure me of the validity of the trajectory I was now on, the group, in their role of staunch believers, provided me with an excellent foil. I couldn't have asked for a better setting—an evangelical touring group on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The group was a demonstration of what it means to take the Gospel accounts to their word—as a literal biography of the only son of God. It provided me with a sort of living laboratory to demonstrate the true complexion of religious belief when taken to its limits, without doubt or prevarication. Under such circumstances, the downside or underbelly of such capitulation to the emotions become only too evident—the abandonment of reason and the ability to argue a position on its merits without resorting to quotations from the Bible, the stultification of the imagination, and the complete absence of intellectual curiosity.²

As I mentally sorted through the questions that arose in my thoughts during the trip, there was one that was always uppermost in my mind: *Did God create an exceptional intervention in human affairs in the form of “fathering” an only son..... FOR THIS?*

3. RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH JOHN 3:16

The recent re-emergence of John 3:16 into my thoughts after such a lengthy period of estrangement was every bit like playing catch-up with a former acquaintance after a long absence, and taking some nervous delight in sharing your respective life-journeys. Of course, the wording of John 3:16 had not changed, though its constituent clauses and phrases appeared more emphatic, luminous, and alluring, with each one seeming more independent of its predecessor. Overall, the verse did not feel as logically integrated as I remembered it from childhood, a feature which now invite you into a deeper exploration of its mystery. I thus found myself delving so deeply in contemplation on the clauses and phrases of this verse, that it felt as if I was making its acquaintance for the first time.

Whereas previously, like many Christians, I related to biblical writings at a more-or-less surface level, the intervening years have permitted me to take a deeper look at these works. By so persistently bubbling up in my awareness, it was as if John 3:16 was aware that I had acquired a more refined perception, or rather, discernment, and was offering me the opportunity to probe its vastness and depth from a higher vantage point.

My subsequent contemplation on John 3:16 was not a simple mental recitation, but a phrase by phrase turning over in my mind, in the same manner that one would parse a legal document, looking for hidden, or nuanced meanings, and their implications. For example, the key clauses and phrases that kept bubbling up, inviting a deeper analysis, were:

1. *For God so loved the world that he gave*
2. *... his only begotten son*
3. *... so that whosoever believeth in him*
4. *...should not perish but have eternal life*

As I deliberated on these phrases, the first thing that struck me is that their constituent declarations do not indulge in explanations. The verse simply

puts down a series of premises without any obligation to explain their bases. Instead, what we have is premise upon premise, each one independent of the preceding. For me, it's this very cursory, matter-of-fact way that the ideas flow in this verse that makes it interesting. From one perspective, its pronouncements are made with the utmost certitude, but from another, it's a certitude that seems to be based on knowledge not readily available to the casual reader.

It is clear to me that it was not the intention of the author of John 3:16 to set out a philosophical discourse but simply to set down articles of faith. And on this score, he's more than achieved his objective. The sentiment it expresses has been the focal point for Christian theology and interpreted as conferring a unique status to Christianity. For believers, John 3:16 is like a *Divine Charter*, in which God Himself was endorsing Christianity as the only true path to Him. In this "charter," the Divine descent of Jesus of the Gospels was irrefutably established, and anyone who was not a believer in him—which is to say his divinity and his biography as reported in the Gospels—could not be assured of eternal life, or a place in heaven—which amounts to the same thing.

As far as rank and file Christians are concerned, this verse contains all the proof they need to argue for the superiority of Christianity over other faiths, since other religions have not had God's patronage of his unique gift—his *one and only son*. But, as the saying goes, there are two sides to every story. The natural outcome of this sense of specialness and Divinely-sanctioned privilege can be an attitude of disdain and intolerance towards other faiths. Being favoured by God means someone else has fallen out of favour, or being chosen means that others have been rejected, or relegated to a lesser status. The Chinese sage, Lao-tzu summed up this human tendency to view and relate to the world in dichotomous, or pairs-of-opposites terms rather aptly in the following lines:

*People through finding something beautiful
Think something else unbeautiful,
Through finding one man fit
Judge another unfit³.*

4. JOHN 3:16 AND THE ISSUE OF DIVINE JUSTICE

Even before I had any personal awareness or understanding of other major religious philosophies, John 3:16, as expounded and taught in Christian churches, struck me as problematic. For one, it didn't sit well with me that God would limit his intercession in human affairs to one historical event, in one geographical location, and focus his entire program for the redemption of the entire human race through this one event. It also didn't sit well with me that I was one of the "elect" by reason of accepting a belief system—Christianity—prevalent in an area of the world in which I was fortunate enough to have been born. What if I had been born in India, or China, or some place else where Christianity was not the dominant religion? How fair was it that salvation was readily available to me for believing in Jesus while someone else, who might very well have been a better, more loving person than myself, was to be condemned for all eternity simply because they had not been exposed to Christianity?

This inner struggle was to come to a head during my first year at university. The occasion was during my attendance at a first-year university lecture in economics. It is difficult to recall precisely what triggered the initial moment of reflection. However, I do recall that moment when I began to look around the packed lecture hall, scanning the three hundred or so faces instead of paying attention to the lecturer. As I did so, I wondered to myself how many of these others met the requirement of salvation, as the church to which I belonged expounded it.⁴ At that moment, the thought came to me that each one of these other students could have been me, or I any one of them, but for the accident of parentage, geography, and personal history. These thoughts gave

place to the question which took over and dominated my thinking and guided my explorations of spiritual and religious matters from then on, namely:

- *“How can any religious system which sees only two outcomes – eternal salvation or damnation—to a human situation infinite in its variability be compatible with the ideal of Divine justice and Divine impartiality”?*
- Further, *“What does it say about our understanding of the Divine when not everyone has an equal opportunity to subscribe to a doctrine that is supposedly essential to their salvation”?*

This inner struggle was to mark the beginning of the end of my relationship with my church and orient me towards the pursuit of a more inclusive conception of the Divine.

As a result of becoming unshackled from my restrictive theological world-view I switched my loyalty from a system of fixed beliefs to the *search* for *Truth*. In my search, the arbiter of what idea or belief was to become part of my philosophy of life was whether or not that idea made sense in the context of everything else that I knew. In other words, my search was to be an intuition-led one, satisfying both my mind and heart. When I eventually settled on an idea as “True,” it was because that idea, or world-view, added to my intellectual understanding and deepened my emotional appreciation of life in all its wonder and complexity. I became interested in, and studied a wide range of subjects that offered insight into our human condition. My studies included extensive readings in Eastern religious philosophy, mythology, Jungian psychology, and astrology. I also began to meditate and took up Hatha Yoga.

However, although I left my church, I did not reject Christianity, only those ideas and doctrines which I felt could not integrate into a comprehensive philosophy of life. As a matter of fact, my studies of other religions enable me to appreciate some of the objective values of my Christian upbringing even more, such as the Golden Rule, which is enshrined in at least ten of the world’s major religions. (Please see Text Box 1 on the following page).

TEXT BOX 1
THE GOLDEN RULE

The Golden Rule in Ten of the World's Great Religions	
Christianity	"... All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them
Confucianism	"Do not unto others what you would not they should do unto you."
Buddhism	"In five ways should a clansman minister to his friends and familiars—by generosity, courtesy and benevolence, by treating them as he treats himself, and by being as good as his word."
Hinduism	"Do not to others, which if done to thee, would cause thee pain."
Islam	"No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."
Sikhism	"As thou deemest thyself so deem others. Then shalt thou become a partner in heaven."
Judaism	"What is hurtful to yourself, do not to your fellow man."
Jainism	"In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self."
Zoroastrianism	"That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self."
Taoism	"Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss."
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One of the benefits I experienced from my various studies was a deepened appreciation of how many ideas and doctrines in Christianity had antecedents and parallels with themes from other religions, some of which

antedated Christianity. I also learned to appreciate that there's more to the Christian scriptures than can be ascertained through a casual or surface reading. My relationship to the Bible developed from one where the physical book and its contents were revered as a source of final answers on life's questions, simply based on its status as a "Holy Book," to seeing it as an invitation and guide to cultivating a higher level of consciousness.

My current relationship to the Bible is one of deep respect and increased appreciation for it, not as a book of final answers, but as a source for objective values and spiritual exercises that can facilitate our advancement to a higher consciousness. One of the insights I've garnered is that the Bible shares the feature of other books designated as "holy" in that their authors wrote their accounts fully aware that not everyone would be capable of accessing their deepest meanings, since everyone does not have the same degree of knowledge or preparation. Hence, when studying such writings as those contained in the Bible, it is essential that students take the proper attitude of humility and diligence into their pursuit, not settling for surface interpretations. It is only after the student has demonstrated the right level of commitment and sincerity that the secrets of the scriptures will reveal themselves.

And considering that the Bible yields its deeper secrets only grudgingly, I've discovered the practices of prayer, meditation and contemplation to be essential disciplines if one is to successfully uncover its secrets and gain the insights it contains about accessing a higher level of consciousness. I've been able to employ this approach to my studies of the Bible and have offered insights into undiscovered perspectives on the *Book of Revelation* and the canonical Gospels.⁵

PART II: A Clause-by-Clause Contemplation on John 3:16

It was with this wider knowledge base that I achieved from my studies over the decades that I began a clause-by-clause contemplation of the words of John 3:16, after an estrangement of almost five decades. I have no explanation as to why its words bubbled up in my consciousness when they did, but I welcomed the intrusion. I felt it was time to play catch-up with an “old friend”, to see what new insights would emerge by examining the verse against the background of the wider knowledge base I had acquired over the intervening decades.

The Component Phrases of John 3:16

- 1) *For God so loved the world that he gave*
- 2) *... his only begotten son*
- 3) *... so that whosoever believeth in him*
- 4) *...should not perish but have eternal life*

The fact that I couldn't simply disengage my attention from John 3:16 meant that I needed to do some deeper probing to see what could emerge. I had the feeling that there was much that these phrases wanted to confide to me.

1. “FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE...”

The statement, “For God so loved the world” is declarative, in that it sets out the primary cause, or reason, for God's involvement and participation in the world. Note that after drawing our attention to the very potent causative agent, God's love, John links it to a resulting action, something “given” by God. The principle is clear: God's love for the world sets things in motion. This love is the primary mover because it is not passive, but active. Hence, because God loves, He gives.

In other words, God's involvement is a spontaneous outreach to the world, and is not premised on any prior condition or state of the world, such as "sin," as so many of our Christian preachers and evangelists would have us believe. God's love for the world is unconditional and is rooted in the fact that God is Love. Because God loves the world, giving something to it is inevitable, since the act of giving is the only true measure of love, whether divine or human.

Why is it necessary for a condition of love to require a sacrifice? This is because love, and giving of oneself are synonymous, whether it's viewed as a sacrifice or not. In a sense then, the phrase "God so loved" followed by the statement, "that he gave" are complementary actions. *Why?* Because to love and to give are one and the same thing, and the strength of one's love is measured only by how much one is prepared to give to demonstrate that love. At a human level, our initial experience of love is always accompanied by an exultation, a leap of the heart, that springs from the realization of unity with another. Ordinarily, this cognizance of unity can lead to a desire for union, which, in the absence of an offsetting desire to give something of value to honour the newly-discovered bond, can sometimes degenerate into an impulse to objectify and acquire the person or thing that is loved. This is how lust of various kinds manifest.

So, as John testifies, the love of God for the world is made manifest in the act of God giving something of immense value to the benefit of the world. *And what quality and value of gift can be a worthy expression of God's love?* The only gift that would qualify as a worthy expression of God's love is the gift of God of himself! Thus, "God so loved the world" that he must give *Himself* to the world. But John says that God's gift is that of his "only begotten son", suggesting that God's "only begotten son" is an even greater gift.

2. HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

(a) Towards An Esoteric Understanding of God's Son

John tells us that the consequence of God's love for the world is the sending forth, by God, of his "only begotten son". This phrase, his "only begotten son" has been used by Christians to flaunt the superiority of Christianity over other faiths, since, in their minds, God's gift of his only son is applicable to Jesus of the Gospels.

Christians today take the idea of God having a biological son in their stride, thanks to the Gospel accounts and two thousand years of tradition. If we think about it carefully, there are so many issues that arise when we take a literal interpretation to the idea of God having a son that we'd have to seek a more satisfactory, esoteric explanation. In other words, we need to see that the concept of God having a son is not the same thing as a human having a son.

However, before we proceed further, readers are encouraged to check out the accompanying text box following to review the explanation of the concept of the esoteric as it's used in this article.

In the early years of church history, the idea of God being accredited with having a physical son is something early church authorities had to defend. This is somewhat ironic, since accepted wisdom is that Christian teachings would have had greater clarity and authority due to their closeness to the supposed historical events that gave birth to the Christian church. Justin Martyr (AD 100-160) acclaimed as one of the early fathers of the Church (Saint Justin) argued that Jesus's sonship with God was no less justified than the claims of the pagans for the sons of Jupiter, such as Hercules, Mercury, Aesculapius, Bacchus, among others⁶. Justin Martyr, of course, did not see the irony that the pagans did not regard these sons of Zeus to have been flesh and blood persons.

BOX 2

True meaning of Esoteric

The use of the term, "esoteric" in this little context has little to do with the dictionary definition. The kind of esoteric knowledge I'm referring to here has nothing to do with the definition you find in the dictionary, which is basically a reflection a word's common or popular usage. In common usage, esoteric has been defined to mean knowledge that is secret, or hidden, and carries connotations of secret societies and organizations or groups whose dealings are hidden from public scrutiny.

The true meaning of esoteric in a spiritual or religious sense has to do with the *innermost meaning* of certain kinds of spiritual information, symbols, or rituals. Furthermore, esoteric knowledge is not book knowledge; though it may be contained in books. In other words, it is insight into a deeper Reality which we can only acquire with our total being.

The esoteric level therefore means the application of knowledge to oneself, in the sense of one's inner psychological functioning. Once we've gone through all the various potential explanations that can be applied to a bit of written or oral knowledge, the esoteric level is the one that cannot be distilled further. It is therefore that explanation that is the final resting place for our attention since it is derived from having direct insight into the psychological principles behind the knowledge conveyed through scripture, ritual or symbol. Once we get an esoteric insight, words usually fail us, simply because words are inadequate to convey the depth, beauty and clarity of what is received.

The true esoteric level forces one to ask, "*What does this mean for me, to my life situation?*" This is why not everyone is ready for certain types of spiritual knowledge, for the simple reason that they may not be ready to take responsibility for it and act on it. And that is also why esoteric knowledge has traditionally been reserved for the advanced seeker, the one who is sincere and more than ready to act on the knowledge that they receive. Even in the Gospels, the gospel writers show Jesus speaking to the multitudes in parables and plainly to the disciples, because, as Jesus said to them, "*..blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.*" (Matthew 13:16)

As startling, and perhaps, "heretical," as this might seem to some, what John is describing here is a Cosmic and Eternal principle that has no referent

whatsoever to recorded history. It's not history, or reportage, but esoteric philosophy. Whereas history and reportage record actual events in time-space by actual and accredited witnesses to those events, philosophy is the product of the intuition. Intuition is an integration of our most refined (i.e. unbiased) powers of intellect and sincerest capacity of feeling and devotion.

Through intuition, we're able to have a "direct" and ineffable experience of the spiritual things we seek to know. We're then left with the task of providing an account of things subtly discerned, using terms from ordinary life totally unsuited for conveying knowledge from a subtler, spiritual dimension. It is thus with this important mission to discharge that the intuitive explorer must become the philosopher. He or she must create a mental framework to help us to better understand and meet the problems and challenges of life. In the final analysis, the goal of a philosophical system is to offer insights on how we can lead a harmonious and fulfilling existence with those factors and forces that are beyond our control.

Of course, the challenging of finding suitable terms of reference to allow someone with a special knowledge to share their insights with another is not limited to esoteric philosophers. It can happen between adults and children, as well as between people of different cultures. However, it takes on another level of difficulty when we are dealing with esoteric, spiritual knowledge when the communicator must find the vocabulary and terms of reference to communicate information to us that is not part of our everyday experience. One way around this challenge is with the use of analogies, which use things in our everyday experience to "paint us a picture". Readers familiar with the New Testament would recognize this language form in use quite frequently in Jesus's discussions relating to the Kingdom of Heaven: "The Kingdom of Heaven *is like...*" Of course, the idea is for us to use our *imagination* and direct knowledge of the elements used in the comparison to arrive at a *feeling state*

within ourselves that would serve as a proxy for the original image that the speaker is trying to represent.

Sometimes, even analogies do not suffice, so that the communicator must resort to a more direct representation of the transcendent by using metaphors. A metaphor utilizes *representative reality*, or representation by proxy, as for example, when we give human attributes, say, to the Divine, as when we speak of the “hand of God,” or “the heart of God,” or even “the mind of God.” In so many respects, we really are severely handicapped when we try to speak of divine things using language that’s been developed to deal with the mundane sphere.

In articulating his esoteric philosophy, this “representation by proxy” solution is what John resorts to as he tries to convey to his readers, in a way that has emotional meaning for us, a divine process that has no direct earthly point of reference. He chose to utilize events we commonly experience to represent a divine process he’s trying to convey. That way, we’re able to relate to an esoteric idea from the point of view of an earthly situation or circumstance that has meaning for us. That is how John ends up attributing God with a son, as this is the closest human activity—*that of ensuring succession through one’s offspring*—he could come up with that comes even close to conveying a particular process in the Divine realm.

But of course, failing to grasp the underlying esoteric idea that John was trying to portray, we⁷ unquestioningly settle for a literal interpretation of God’s son, or male offspring—even when we know that having children is a strictly biological process, applicable only to physical beings.

(b) Difficulties Inherent in a Literal Interpretation of God’s Son

As mentioned previously, a philosophical interpretation of John 3:16 means that God’s ***only begotten son*** *that* is being given has nothing to do with the Jesus of the Gospels! At least, this does not appear to be the original

conception when this idea was being set forth. It's likely that John's Gospel, as a document, is the product of various authors, a committee, most likely.

It is only when we permit ourselves to think outside of the accepted Christian framework and doctrine that we've inherited that we'll be able to resolve the many problems that arise when we view *God's only begotten son* as pertaining to a historical figure.

First, we'll look at some of the difficulties that arise when we frame this cosmic and eternal action (of God sending forth his son) in a temporal setting. In particular, if we interpret this as specific to Jesus of the Gospels, several questions pose themselves. These issues relate to the categories of

- i. Divine justice,
- ii. Ethics, and
- iii. Logistics.

i. The Divine Justice Issue

In terms of the issue of Divine Justice, a historical and literal interpretation of the idea of God's son would imply that God had held back his involvement in the salvation of the world until 2000 years ago. And in the context of John 3:16, wouldn't such a delayed action imply that He'd only just discovered his love for the world? A related issue created by such a time-and-place-specific intervention is this: *How can a plan of salvation for all of humanity be just and equitable if it revolves around a specific person, born at a specific time and place?* Under the historical interpretation of God's son, not everyone on earth would have had an equal opportunity to know about, and accept God's gift.

Of course, it's simply preposterous to think that God's involvement in the world to redeem it is limited to one historical event. The "world", whether we think of it as the Earth or the Cosmos has always been sustained by God's love, and God's love has guided the evolution of life on our planet.

ii. Issues Of Ethics

On the matter of ethics, since God has given us the gift of ethical discernment, it's not out of place to ponder some of the ethical implications of this idea of God giving his only son. First off, from a human perspective, when you have a son, he's usually not "something" you can give—unless of course, the concept of son for God is not the same as our human one. Thus, for God to have a son that he could give would have to mean something else than for us humans to have children. Looking at such an action from a purely human perspective, a son is not chattel, or a commodity that can be used as a currency or some median of exchange. Yet, we allow this idea to slip by us without subjecting it to a rational analysis.

There are additional issues we have to resolve if we think of God's son in the same manner as we would a human being. Namely, *"Did the son volunteer or was he conscripted?"* Secondly, *"If the son did not volunteer, but was sent, then is he being used as a chattel, something to be used as a substitute for currency?"* Thirdly, whether the son volunteered or was conscripted, *"Why is God being given credit for a gift that is at someone else's. i.e., his son's expense?"*

iii. The Logistical Issue

Lastly, there's the logical question as to whether the story of Jesus of the Gospels fulfills the criterion of a gift. Apart from the above issues of Divine justice and of ethics arising from a literal, historical interpretation of God's son, the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life seem to suggest something more of a loan rather than an outright gift. The Gospels tell us that Jesus came to Earth through the miracle of a virgin birth, preached the Kingdom of God, worked miracles, was killed by crucifixion, was resurrected after burial, and returned to the Father. To call this a gift rather than a loan is to strain credibility. But John 3:16 does not refer to a loan, but an outright gift.

(c) An Esoteric Explanation of God's Only Begotten Son

It is likely that when John tried to translate God's immense and immeasurable love in terms that could be understood and produce an emotional resonance by most of us, the idea of someone *parting with their only son* fitted the bill. This metaphor takes on even more poignancy when we consider how different social values and customs were at that time compared to our own. Sons were valued as a means of continuing the family legacy, and an only son represented someone's only chance of perpetuating one's lineage. Thus, to impress upon his readers the depths of God's unimaginable and stupendous love, he tells us that *God gave his only son* for the world, which is the same thing as saying that *God paid the ultimate price* for the world with the most cherished thing he had, *his only son*.

Now that is indeed an extraordinary price, and what's left for us to contemplate is the reason that God would pay such an extraordinary price for the world. Before we go further into this contemplation, we need to take stock of our bearing, i.e. get a better sense of where we've started from so that we can have a better sense of where we'd end up.

First, we've seen that the only way that John could convey to us the magnitude of God's love for the world in a way that would have emotional resonance for us was to "paint us an emotional picture" in terms familiar to us. This is how we end up accrediting God with a Son, even though we know that a son, or male offspring, is the result of a biological process. But God is not a creature of nature subject to the laws of biology. *So how could God have a son? What process is there in the Divine realm that would compare to a human having a son?*

If we think about it rationally, the idea of God having a son really speaks to the dynamism of the Divine Reality itself. Of course, God can only have a son in the analogical sense, namely, by two Cosmic processes coming together to create a third. In this case, Spirit ("Father") and Matter ("Mother") have come

together to create a third state of a reconciled Spirit-Matter consciousness. It suggests that the Son is the growth point of the Divine Consciousness—the point, or phase, of an ever-widening and ever-deepening awareness. Matter is the last unconquered frontier of the Spirit, and redeemed Matter, in effect, is what God’s Son represents. That this aspect of the Divine is characterized as the “only begotten son” suggests that this is the *freshet point of emergence* in the Divine Consciousness. Paul’s wonderful elucidation that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19, KJV), addresses this phenomenon rather aptly.

The statement “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son” must be interpreted as the Divine’s “all-in” commitment in affecting the fate of the world, based solely on his immeasurable love. This is the process by which the “freshet”, most active part of the Divine Consciousness becomes reinvested in awakening the more latent aspects of the Divine, which is embodied (one might say, imprisoned) by the “world.”

Having an esoteric understanding of what God’s only begotten son represents puts us in a better position to pose a couple of important questions: *Why does God love the world? And “What value does the world have for God that he would give up his son for the world?”*

The final piece of the puzzle falls into place once we understand that the depth of God’s love for the world rests on the fact that the world is part of the Divine Reality. God loves the World because God recognizes the World in himself, even if the world is ignorant of this unity with the Divine.

The idea that God would give, i.e. exchange, his Son for the world is also contained in the Parable of the Lost Sheep in the synoptic Gospel of Luke. It is also told in Matthew, but in a less direct presentation. This parable tells of the owner of a hundred sheep not being satisfied to “cut his losses” when he

discovered one of his sheep missing. Instead, he leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that is lost.

BOX 3

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke:

So he told them this parable: 4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. **(Luke 15:3-7, ESV)**

Matthew:

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. **(Matthew 18:1-13, ESV)**

This parable is pregnant with cosmic meaning, and it is this essential sense of someone’s all-out commitment to his domain that it addresses. What this is telling us is that God’s involvement with the Cosmos is “all-in”, meaning that the Divine is willing to risk everything that is already secured (i.e. spiritually redeemed, or awakened) for that component of the Cosmos that is lost in ignorance. This lost sheep is the “world” that God “so loves” and for which he is willing to give everything (his Son) to restore it to the fold of Consciousness of its Divine origin.

3.....WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM ...

By now, thanks to the contemplative journey we've been on, it should become obvious that "whosoever believeth in him" has a greater significance to it than for someone to mentally and verbally affirm to themselves and others that a historical person lived who met the requirements to be God's Son. Even granting for the briefest of moments, that this requirement is to be accepted at face value, then it would be very hard not to arrive at the conclusion that an extraordinary cosmic drama has been performed on the earth simply so that God's Son could become an object of belief and adoration.

But of course, there is more at stake in the story of God's love for the world and the incredible lengths God is prepared to go to "secure" the world. Esoterically speaking, to believe in the Son is *to accept the reality of our divine heritage and subscribe to the possibility of transformation for ourselves into that Divine Reality*¹. And seeing that we're wrapped up in a material existence, we have to learn to identify and coax the Divine element, which is hidden within, into expression. In this sense of being obscured by the material element, the Divine has been sacrificed on the *cross* of matter (the two axes of the cross are time and space). *The son of God is the Divine Seed becoming aware of its true nature within the sphere of matter*. Like any seed, this Divine Seed has to be fed and nurtured in order to germinate and mature. Its germination is the experience of the risen Christ in us. In this sense, the statement of St Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."⁸, is not to be confused with an

¹ The notion of human beings having a Divine-, or God-Seed is a universal idea of East and West, though different terms may be used to express this endowment. In the New Testament, Paul, in an address to a group in Athens concurred with their philosophers that humans are "off-springs" of God: " ..for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'", Acts 17:28; RSV. Meister Eckhart, a 13th-14th Century Christian mystic expressed this idea most directly with the following example: "The seed of God is in us. Now the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree; and a hazel seed grows into a hazel tree; a seed of God grows into God." (Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 28. Matthew Fox describes Meister Eckhart (1260-c.1329)

affirmation that we can make casually. It actually describes a reality that one is able to live once the Divine element is elevated in consciousness.

God loves the world because *God is the world*, or to put it differently, the world is an extension of God. Hence, giving his Son for the world simply means that the Divine process is functioning on an *all-in* basis, meaning that no part of the Divine Body is neglected or abandoned. The Divine Son is not separate from God—in the manner that the son of a human is separate from his parents—but is one aspect of the Divine Consciousness. It is the most integrally awakened aspect, or the growth node of the Divine Consciousness. Hence, the most advanced aspect of the Divine Consciousness reaches back to lift up the straggling and lagging elements. This is the principle of redemption and it is necessary for the maintenance of the integrality of the Divine Consciousness, which is beyond division. The Son is the only Begotten of the Father because this aspect of the Divine process does not happen in time and therefore renders duplication redundant. The notion of “only begotten” suggests that it is not something that has to be validated or replicated, but is eternally taking place. The only begotten of the Father is an Eternal Process always operating to enlighten all of the Universe. It doesn’t have to be replicated because it is always present and functioning. It is only when we begin to temporalize this Divine Process that we encounter problems and cross-cultural conflicts.

The point is, none of this makes any sense if we think it’s referring to Jesus of the Gospels. It refers to the Christ Presence, or the Higher Self. This term “Higher Self” represents both a description and an invitation to acquaint ourselves with and explore the deepest, most profound aspects of our existence.

What did God give his Son for? Taking John 3:16 on its own, one gets the impression that God gave “his only begotten Son” so that he could become an object of belief. The next thing, if you pass this test and believe in him, you won’t perish.

One of the immediate benefits of an esoteric understanding of God's Son is that it will keep us from making the further error of thinking that "believing"—in the superficial sense of *giving our mental consent to the existence of something, or agreeing that something exists*—qualifies us for the grand prize of salvation. But again, the architects of the Christian religion—even the literalist form—saw enough of the danger of a superficial definition of belief and offered precautions against such complacency. In the epistle of James (2:19), part of the apostolic letters section of the New Testament, it's author reminds us:

Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder. (ASV)

In other words, believing in the Son, if by "believing" we mean "affirming to ourselves" that something is true, isn't worth much more than a shrug, especially since even the "demons" show a greater response to their belief in God. They shudder, even as humans claim to believe and go on doing what they've always done and being who they've always been.

Believing that a historical person to be God's son is stagnant, and limited in scope, as far as having an impact on the transformation of our consciousness. All such a belief requires is a willingness to mentally subscribe to something, because there's a promised benefit in doing so. In any other department of life, apart from religion, we would consider someone who believes in something simply on the basis of what benefit he or she can derive from doing so, as gullible and vulnerable to manipulation.

Believing in the Eternal, Everlasting Son is more challenging, because it requires us to first identify and *engage a certain process within ourselves*. This kind of belief requires a unification of our understanding and our will and it is the only kind that can lead to our transformation. Esoterically understood, a

transformed consciousness is the only salvation on offer in the promise to believers in the Son.

Believing is only the *starting point* on the journey of transformation. There is really no other salvation apart from transformation, and thinking or searching for an effortless form of salvation is illusory. Anyone who thinks that he or she is assured of eternal bliss, simply on the basis of their beliefs is no different from someone who knowingly walks out of a shop with a higher-than-entitled change due to a cashier's error. He or she knows that something is wrong, but doesn't speak up because they feel entitled to the benefits of an error that's to their advantage. In the case of salvation, the deeper, ethical part of us knows there's a flaw in a scheme that promises salvation simply on the basis of our beliefs, but our rational minds defer to our emotions and does nothing to disabuse it of its error

4.....SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE ...

The statement, "whosoever believeth should not perish but have eternal life" is not meant to be interpreted as a personal offer of eternal life from God to anyone who *believes*; if by "believe" we mean "agreeing with a stated proposition or apparent fact".

But as noted in the previous section, believing in the son, esoterically speaking, means **to accept the reality of our Divine heritage and subscribe to the possibility of transformation, for ourselves, into that Divine Reality**. It thus makes sense that those who *believe*, in the esoteric sense used here, and commit themselves to a path of transformation, should not perish—provided that they continue on the path. This condition of engagement and continuity of practice is equivalent to advising a motorist wanting to get to Montreal from Toronto, "*If you take Highway 401 East, it **should** take you to Montreal*". Getting to Montreal is conditional upon continuing the journey to the end.

At the risk of overstating the case, the two potential destinies outlined in John 3:16, namely, to “perish” and to “have eternal life,” are not meant as a threat and a promise to “non-believers” and “believers”, but simply a description of the two end-points on a continuum of possible futures for human life in general. In other words, what is given here is nothing more than an esoteric principle, outlining an impersonal law linking potential outcomes from a given set of prior conditions. As well, the employment of the term “should not” tells us that we’re dealing with likely outcomes only, depending on whether certain conditions are met.

(a) How We Might Perish

At one end-point on the continuum of destinies for organic life, such as ours, we find decay, or maximum entropy, which is the ultimate state of all matter. In other words, decay is the natural, ultimate state of matter, or of flesh, a term the New Testament writers are particularly fond of. This is what it means to “perish”, and all we have to do to for it to take effect is to do nothing.

When we “believe in the Son”, in the sense of acknowledging the Divine Seed within us and actively embark on a process to transform ourselves into the image of the Divine ideal,⁹ our consciousness undergoes a change from that of the animal¹⁰ to something greater. If, on the other hand we take our cues for living exclusively from our inherited animal nature, then our fate is sealed with that of the animal part of us. Although we’re born with our inherited, animal nature, we also have an endowment from the Divine Spirit which offers us hints and glimpses into another, higher way of being, effectively equipping us with a dual nature. Over the course of our lives, the relative weights we give to these different “natures” through our choices and actions determine our psychic investment¹¹ in each. Of course, the more we defer to either of these natures in our decision-making, the greater our “psychic investment” in it, relative to the other, and by default, the greater the executive authority it assumes over the course of our lives.

The challenge for us, as human beings, is to learn how to progressively withdraw the psychic investment we've made in our animal nature¹² and reinvest in the spiritual part of ourselves, thereby strengthening it. It is this process of dis-investment and re-investment that constitutes the transformation of consciousness. Without transformation, all our identity would be entangled with the animal nature, and as the animal perishes, so will the consciousness and the identity that's attached to it.

(b) Obtaining Eternal Life

It's a mistake for us to think of "eternal life" as an extension of life as we currently experience it—i.e., this existence spilling over into an afterlife. In other words, eternal life is not an infinitude of living, as we've known it. Esoterically speaking, eternal life is not defined by duration of time, but by quality, or mode of expression. As the apostle Paul states, "...*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable* (I Corinthians 15:50). This suggests that **eternal life is not compatible with a consciousness that is still bound to our animal nature**. Least of all, it is not something that can be bestowed on us, but is something that accrues to us through the attainment of spiritual consciousness. In a manner of speaking, we can say that attaining spiritual consciousness is the process through which we cleanse ourselves of those dispositions and tendencies in us—beliefs, attitudes, impulses, desires, selfishness, and so on—which court and harbour death.

In a nutshell, we cultivate spiritual consciousness when we incorporate and practice higher spiritual virtues that would uplift and refine how we think, feel and act in any given situation. As this author noted in a previous work, *The Pilgrim's Companion-A Handbook for the Spiritual Path*:

Spiritual consciousness is a quality of being that is sensitive and receptive to the necessity, existence, and beauty of the movement

in life toward wholeness. Spiritual consciousness is an expression of cooperativeness and connectedness, and therefore LOVE. It is not sufficient that we only desire spiritual consciousness, for it is not a power in the ordinary sense of the word. We must understand spiritual consciousness as the only meaningful outcome and ultimate ripening of human life. Spiritual consciousness is therefore a logical consummation of the Life principle.

Given that the acquisition of spiritual consciousness is vital to the attainment of a transformed consciousness, and with it, eternal life, this ought to be the primary objective of Christian teaching and practice. Every doctrine, dogma, and ritual should be evaluated in terms of its usefulness in helping us in this quest.

Indeed if we pay as much attention to our inner life as we do to the outer, we'd come to no other conclusion than the one argued so strenuously in this article—that *the transformation of conscious is the only salvation on offer in the Gospels*. Hence, there is no other *name* (i.e. reality) under heaven whereby we must be saved but that of the *Christ*, the Divine Seed resident in every human soul, no matter the race, or language, or the religion we may profess. We are all the same, and the same promise, opportunity and destiny is offered to each in equal measure.

CONCLUSION:

Weighing The Esoteric & Conventional Views on John 3:16

During this contemplative exploration, we've examined the esoteric explanation to the three principal premises of John 3:16, dealing with—

1. God's immense love for the world,
2. God's gift to the world of his only begotten son, and
3. God's promise of salvation to anyone who believes in his son.

As discussed in Box 2, an esoteric explanation is one which seeks to understand a spiritual principle, or religious symbol from the perspective of what it implies for our inner life, namely, our psychological functioning. Sometimes, an esoteric explanation can be so different to the conventional view that it can present a challenge to our previously held beliefs. How we react to such a challenge can be critical for our spiritual advancement

As with most religious decisions, our future relationship with John 3:16—in terms of whether we decide to stick with the conventional explanation or transition to the esoteric one—is clearly a matter of faith and must be respected as such. However, that is not to say that faith cannot be supported by the input of our rational faculty. To this end, doing a comparison of the implications of the esoteric and conventional views on the three principal premises of John 3:16 will go a long way in helping us come to the right decision.

As we engage in this exercise, we will also discover that we have nothing to fear from the utilization of our rational faculty to examine the pros and cons of even our most cherished religious beliefs. Indeed, we may well discover this approach to be the most reliable avenue for acquainting ourselves with Truth, which is to say, with Ultimate Reality. Let's all pray that we can be as brave and steadfast in our commitment to Truth as Meister Eckhart, who said

that "Truth is something so noble that if God could turn aside from it, I could keep to the truth and let God go."¹³

As we become more experienced in the discernment of Truth, or Reality, we might discover that progress on the spiritual journey is not defined by our beliefs, or by the doctrines of our church, but by our willingness to make ourselves open and available to the Divine Spirit. And perhaps, as we progress and open ourselves to the Spirit as flowers to the sun, we might even discover which of our various beliefs serve as impediments rather than stepping stones to a transformed consciousness.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD

Although both the Literalist and Esoteric explanations agree that God loves the world immensely, they arrive at different conclusions on how, or why.

- The Literalist perspective on God's immense love for the world tends to be short on explanations and overladen with sentimental musings about the unworthiness of the world to receive this love because of sin. This traditional approach also believes that God wants us to worship and adore him in return for his love.
 - ✓ This conventional explanation of God's love is based on the premise of separation between God and the world. Indeed, this position makes God seem like an absentee landlord, who, having created the world, and the creatures in it, leaves them to fend for themselves, then blames them for behaving according to the natures he's given them.
- The esoteric explanation to God's love for the world is that the world, or the created universe is in God, and God in the world, and the two are not as estranged as the conventional view believes.
 - ✓ God loves the world so much that he's taken up residence in the world, in the deepest beings of human beings. Obscured by our outer, and more familiar selves, this Divine element appears as potential only, a

seed in effect. Hence, we speak of a Divine Seed, or a God-Seed, or an “offspring-of-God ignorant of its true heritage. Our salvation of course lies in reclaiming this high estate, like the prodigal son coming to his senses and remembering the better life that awaited with the family he’d abandoned.

GOD’S GIFT OF HIS ONLY SON

God expresses his love for the world—so much so that he gave a gift of greatest value to the world, his only son.

- Under the Literalist explanation, God’s gift of his son to the world was fulfilled in Palestine, by the birth of a human child, Jesus, born to a virgin named Mary around 2,000 years ago.
 - ✓ An all too obvious question that emerges out of this explanation to God’s love gift to the world has to do with the timing: *Why did God wait so long? Did he just discover his love for the world only two thousand years ago? Furthermore, where is God now?*
- The esoteric explanation says that God’s gift of his Son does not relate to a historical person per se, but to God’s gift to every human being, of a measure of himself, sometimes referred to as a “God Seed” or a Divine Spark, or implied by the expression Paul used in Acts, “we’re God’s offspring”.
 - ✓ To convey to us the weight and significance of God’s gift in terms that we can relate to, the writer of John’s Gospel equates this gift with the painful image of human being sacrificing his only son. Of course, as we often do, we take everything literally, unaware of the disservice to God in attributing him with human characteristics.
 - ✓ In this regard, we run the risk of committing a most grievous slander against the Divine, and psychological injury to ourselves, when we interpret John 3:16 to suggest that God’s love for the world has been

exhausted in one event, the birth of a human son, two thousand years ago in Palestine. This historical interpretation of God's love and involvement in the world ends up turning God an absentee landlord. Such a notion of course is scandalous, since God's love for the world has never been absent.

- ✓ The esoteric approach to God's son is all too well aware of the many instances in world religions and mythology where a divine son is born to a woman whose name is a variant of Mary—*Maya* as the mother of Buddha, *Myrrha*, as the mother of Bacchus, *Myrrha* (also) as the mother of Adonis; *Maia* as the mother of Mercury or Hermes, and so on.

GOD'S PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIS SON

- The traditionalist or literalist explanation of this condition is that those who believe that Jesus was the Son of God will be rewarded with eternal life, while those who do not make such an acknowledgement will be damned (perish).
- ✓ When looked at critically, this explanation does a great disservice to God. *Did God plan all this from the foundations of the world (as scriptures tell us) so that the product of all this planning and effort, a son, could become an object of belief? By suggesting that God rewards, with eternal life, those who believe that Jesus was his actual son, aren't we inferring that God is in need of human approval or endorsement?*
- ✓ Furthermore, isn't this suggesting that God is asking us to make perjurers of ourselves by bribing us to endorse an event we cannot verify through the faculties with which he himself has endowed us?
- ✓ Also, by offering believers eternal life in one fell swoop, this interpretation removes any incentive for someone to uphold the vast body of Christian teachings for a moral and holy life, seeing that such effort is made superfluous when all you have to do is "believe."

- Esoterically speaking, believing in the son is not about Jesus of the Gospels, but about, first, our acknowledgement of the reality of our Divine heritage and second, our acceptance of the necessity of transformation for ourselves into that Divine Reality. Though it is referred to as a “seed”, it is not a “thing” but more a psychological function, or a talent, or an ability or potential that has not yet been developed. While its recognition tends to be initially feint, perceived maybe as a “still small voice”, or the voice of conscience, as a mother feeds and tends to her infant, we have to feed this presence through our constant attention and validation for it to grow in strength and dominance.
- ✓ What we call transformation is the process of giving the divine element a greater profile in our lives, and through its direction, transforming our outer lives into the glorious promise that it holds out before us.
- ✓ As we walk through the esoteric explanation we can make no other reasonable conclusion than this: *Transformation is the only response we can make that does justice to God’s immense love of humanity celebrated by the gift to us of himself.* Transformation is not something that can be imposed on us, or done for us. It is something we must do for ourselves since we cannot be saved from without, only from the inside. It is only by acknowledging this Divine presence in ourselves, this God-seed, and take the appropriate steps to liberate it that we are saved.
- ✓ Hence, there is no other name (i.e. reality) under heaven whereby we must be saved but that of the Christ, the Divine Seed resident in every human soul growing into maturity. This is true for all of us, no matter the race, or language, or the religion we may profess. We are all the same, and the same promise, opportunity and destiny is offered to each in equal measure.

Although the esoteric explanation says that the traditional one has interpreted an eternal and omnipresent mythos as history, its interpretation of

God's presence in the world is not dependent on whether the Gospel accounts of Jesus are truly historical or totally allegorical. It is possible to adhere to the two explanations at the same time, provided that we realize that, in the final analysis, it will be the esoteric explanation that has the greater weight in determining our future. The unique value of the esoteric explanation is in the challenge and responsibility it places before us.

So in conclusion, we can reiterate that transformation of consciousness is the only response we can make that does justice to God's immense love of humanity celebrated by the gift to us of himself. It is only by acknowledging this Divine presence in ourselves, this God-seed, and take the appropriate steps to liberate this repressed element that we can gain eternal life. It is this coming to realization and turning around to make the journey home—of reconnecting with our true identity—that constitutes what is called, in psychological terms, the transformation of consciousness.

END NOTES

¹ Details of this discovery are provided in my book, *Hidden Treasure—Jesus’s Message Of Transformation* (iUniverse, 2011). The gist of *Hidden Treasure* is that the Gospels contain spiritual exercises aimed at the activation of subtle energy centres in the human body, which then paves the way for the release of a pent-up psycho-spiritual force, called Kundalini in Eastern Yoga. Once awakened, this energy heightens our spiritual sensitivity and shepherds our transformation from an ego-centred existence to a God-centered one. The link to follow should take readers to a downloadable chapter-by-chapter summary of *Hidden Treasure*.

² By way of illustration, I cite the example of a member of my own family who’d rebuff any reading recommendation, even it were a gift, if he couldn’t be assured that it was authored by a “Born-Again”, “Bible-believing” Christian. It’s as if he couldn’t risk exposing himself to ideas that would challenge his beliefs.

³ Lao-tzu, *The Way Of Life*. Stanza 2

⁴ The teaching of the Christian denomination to which I belonged at the time (The Church of Christ) was that one had to make a personal confession of faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ and then subscribe to certain beliefs, namely “believing in the truth” and then “obeying the truth.” Since “the truth” was defined in terms of doctrinal beliefs, it followed that if you did not have the right doctrine, you could not obey the truth, and therefore could not be saved. Further, since this church was the only one that practiced the right doctrines, anyone outside of it could not obey the truth and thus could not be saved.

⁵ These two books are *Meditations on the Apocalypse—A Psycho-spiritual Perspective on the Book of Revelation*, first published in 1992 by Element Books, UK, and reprinted in 2011 as an iUniverse, Authors Guild Back-in-Print edition; and *Hidden Treasure—Jesus’s Message of Transformation*, published by iUniverse in 2011.

⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chapter XXI – “Analogies To The History Of Christ. “

“And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter. For you know how many sons your esteemed writers ascribed to Jupiter: Mercury, the interpreting word and teacher of all; AEsculapius, who, though he was a great physician, was struck by a thunderbolt, and so ascended to heaven; and Bacchus too, after he had been torn limb from limb; and Hercules, when he had committed himself to the flames to escape his toils; and the sons of Leda, and Dioscuri; and Perseus, son of Danae; and Bellerophon, who, though sprung from mortals, rose to heaven on the horse Pegasus. For what shall I say of Ariadne, and those who, like her, have been declared to be set among the stars? And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears he has seen the burning Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre? And what kind of deeds are recorded of each of these reputed sons of Jupiter, it is needless to tell to those who already know. This only shall be said, that they are written for the advantage and encouragement of youthful scholars; for all reckon it an honourable thing to imitate the gods. But far be such a thought concerning the gods from every well-conditioned soul, as to believe that Jupiter himself, the governor and creator of all things, was both a parricide and the son of a parricide, and that being overcome by the love of base and shameful pleasures, he came in to Ganymede and those many women whom he had violated and that his sons did like actions. But, as we said above, wicked devils perpetrated these things. And we have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue; and we believe that those who live wickedly and do not repent are punished in everlasting fire. “

Moreover, the Son of God called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary generation, yet, on account of His wisdom, is worthy to be called the Son of God; for all writers call God the Father of men and gods. And if we assert that the Word of God was born of God in a peculiar manner, different from ordinary generation, let this, as said above, be no extraordinary thing to you, who say that Mercury is the angelic word of God. But if any one objects that He was crucified, in this also He is on a par with those reputed sons of Jupiter of yours, who suffered as we have now enumerated. For their sufferings at death are recorded to have been not all alike, but diverse; so that not even by the peculiarity of His sufferings does He seem to be inferior to them; but, on the contrary, as we promised in the preceding part of this discourse, we will now prove Him superior—or rather have already proved Him to be so—for the superior is revealed by His actions. And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus. And in that we say that He made whole the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, we seem to say what is very similar to the deeds said to have been done by Aesculapius.

⁷ By “we” I do not only mean present-day believers, but extend the inclusion all the way back to the architects of the literalist strain of the Christian religion as it has come down to us. The more esoteric, and some would say, original version of Christianity propounded by the Gnostics became marginalized and eventually anathematized as heresies.

⁸ “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” Galatians 2:20. ESV.

⁹ As Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (The Holy Bible, ESV).

¹⁰ We can compare the nature we're born with, namely, our human nature, to a default operating system of a computer. Just as we can sometimes upgrade our computer's operating system to something that's more advanced, we also have opportunities to *upgrade* or refine our nature by overhauling the values which motivate our actions and reactions in the world. A good example of a key value we can implement is the Golden Rule—*Do unto others as we would have them do unto us*.

¹¹ We make a “psychic investment” in our animal nature when we identify with all the biological urges and egoic impulses that arise and treat them as inalienable parts of ourselves and our identity. A psychic dis-investment occurs when we learn not to capitulate to the emotions that arise in us in response to external situations. Instead, we learn to bring a degree of rational analysis to counter-balance such emotions.

¹² The animal part of our nature is primarily concerned with finding ways to satiate the biological and egoic needs that arise in us without paying too much attention to consequences. Though social norms and legal proscriptions help us to constrain our urges and impulses, these are externally imposed. We enter the path towards transforming our consciousness when we learn to self-monitor and self-regulate our desires and impulses to consider the impacts on others from taking actions to satisfy them.

¹³ Raymond Bernard Blakney, (Translator) *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (1941), 240.

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