

Christology: Toward a Synthesis of Christian Doctrine and Esoteric Teachings

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Summary

This article compares and contrasts Christian doctrine and modern esoteric teachings on the nature and person of Jesus the Christ and the purpose of his mission. It begins with a detailed examination of the positions taken by the two sides and how those positions have evolved over time. Similarities and differences of substance or emphasis are noted between and within the respective positions. The objective is to explore the possibility of achieving convergence or synthesis of Christological understanding that could be embraced by both practicing Christians and esotericists.

Traditional Christians and esotericists come close to agreement on Christ's divine status, the significance of his Palestinian mission, and his continuing involvement in Christianity. The main area of disagreement lies in esotericists' assertion that Jesus and the Christ had distinct origins and now have distinct responsibilities within the Planetary Hierarchy. Esotericists also reject most western theories of atonement, though they might find Eastern Orthodox theories of redemptive healing consistent with notions of planetary initiation.

Introduction

The life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central events defining, authenticating and promoting the world religion we know as Christianity. Early Christians' experiences of the man they remembered as Jesus of Nazareth crystallized over time into mutually reinforcing formats: the New Testament, the liturgy, and an impressive body of theology.

Christology is the area of theology that addresses issues concerning the person and nature of Jesus Christ and the purpose of his

Palestinian mission. Mainstream Christology emerged from a process of exploration, debate, and resolution—or suppression—of controversy. The outcome, after several centuries, was the understanding that Jesus Christ was and remains a single “person,” fully human but also truly divine: the Second Person of the Trinity. That understanding has stood the test of time and is still affirmed as infallible truth by the Roman, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed churches. Over the last 250 years, some liberal theologians have focused on the humanity of Jesus, to the point of denying his divinity.¹ The present article does not consider liberal theological viewpoints, but a companion article focusing thereon would be a worthwhile contribution to the literature, and interested authors are encouraged to explore that theme.

The gospel writers focused on Jesus Christ's teaching and healing ministry. Yet, under Pauline influence, mainstream Christian doctrine has emphasized the redemptive significance of his death and resurrection. Theories of redemption, or atonement, range from blood sacrifice in expiation for man's sins, still popular among evangelical fundamentalists, to the unlocking of latent potential in human nature, favored by certain Eastern Orthodox theologians.

About the Author

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An esoteric tradition emerged in Christianity as early as apostolic times and with it alternative Christological perspectives. Gnosticism was a conspicuous expression of that tradition during the first few centuries of the Common Era. Among the several Christologies it produced, one foreshadowed modern esoteric teachings in distinguishing the human Jesus from the divine Christ. The esoteric tradition continued, despite strenuous efforts to suppress it, and ran parallel with mainstream Christianity throughout its 2,000-year history. But later movements like Hermeticism and early Rosicrucianism focused on issues other than Christology.

New interest in esoteric Christology emerged in the 19th century with the work of New England philosopher and healer Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866) and English esotericist and feminist theologian Anna Kingsford (1846–1888).² It continued over the next several decades with the work of Rudolf Steiner, founder of Anthroposophy;³ members of the Society of the Golden Dawn and its derivatives; and members of modern Rosicrucian groups, notably Max Heindel, founder of the Rosicrucian Fellowship.⁴

Esoteric Christology was strengthened by trans-Himalayan teachings on the Bodhisattva and the masters, introduced to the West by the Theosophical Society and its offshoots.⁵ Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater led a “Christianization” movement within the Theosophical Society, counterbalancing its founders’ indifference or hostility toward Christianity. Besant’s *Esoteric Christianity*, published in 1905, was pivotal in that regard. It combined themes explored by Kingsford with insights from Theosophical teachings.⁶ Trans-Himalayan teachings were also communicated by Alice A. Bailey, former Theosophist and founder of the Arcane School. Bailey’s 24 books, most dictated by the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul, appeared from 1922 onward. They offer the most detailed esoteric Christological teachings, and we shall quote extensively from them.

Modern esoteric Christology is not diametrically opposed to its traditional Christian coun-

terpart. Yet on critical issues it offers new insights and explanations. It challenges the one-person understanding of Jesus Christ, asserting that Christ was a high initiate and avatar of the Planetary Hierarchy who “overshadowed” Jesus during the Palestinian ministry. Esoteric teachers reject western theories of atonement in favor of more positive accounts of his redemptive mission. Support for esoteric Christology has grown steadily in recognition of its intellectual merit and explanatory power. Former skeptics, turning to some form of spirituality in the backlash against rationalism, are likely to prefer esoteric over traditional Christology. Support is enhanced by the precision with which esoteric teachings define and discuss such concepts as “God,” “divine,” “soul” and “body,” all of which impinge on Christological understanding.

Little effort has been made to reconcile traditional and esoteric Christologies. Authorities in the mainstream churches consider their own Christology to be infallible and unchangeable. The great majority of theologians are either unaware of esoteric Christology or dismiss it as just one more assault on time-honored beliefs. For their part, esoteric teachers reject notions of infallibility and affirm the ongoing revelation of knowledge. Many esotericists identify themselves with other world religions in preference to Christianity, and some have gone on record with the opinion that Christianity is in its death throes, soon to disappear along with other vestiges of the Piscean Age. Of those who write about Christ, most present esoteric Christology with minimal reference to mainstream doctrine.

The present standoff is unsatisfactory and perpetuates separateness. This article seeks to establish a basis for conversations on Christological and related issues between Christians and esotericists. It identifies major areas of agreement but also identifies areas of fundamental disagreement where progress will require further work and new insights. “Christians,” in the present context, refers to adherents to traditional Christian doctrine, and “esotericists” to people who subscribe to modern esoteric philosophy. It should be noted, how-

ever, that we are not necessarily talking about two entirely distinct groups of people. Some traditional Christians are already open to esoteric teachings, and some esotericists are practicing members of mainline churches. What is lacking is a systematic basis for reconciling conflicting beliefs and alleviating the anxiety caused by that conflict.

Many more people could be drawn into this middle ground if a synthesis of understanding became available. The challenges are considerable, and sensitivity is needed on both sides because deeply held beliefs are involved. But, given the large number of Christians in the world and the prospect that Christianity could form a major pillar of a New World Religion, the stakes are high, and some effort to seek synthesis would seem worthwhile.

Traditional Christology

Evolution of Christology

The man we know as Jesus Christ was given the Aramaic name Yeshua by his mother Mary. *Yeshua*, whose Hebrew form was *Yehoshuah*, literally meant “He will save,” or simply “Savior.” Closely related names were Esau and Joshua. The Greek equivalent of Yeshua was *Iesous* from which the English “Jesus” is derived.

Jesus Christ expressed close kinship with God the Father and performed miracles in his own name, including raising three people from the dead. Some people believed he was a prophet, possibly a reincarnation of Elijah.⁷ Various titles were assigned to him during and after his ministry.⁸ His followers drew upon scriptural precedents to describe Jesus as the “Son of David”⁹ and the “Messiah.”¹⁰ “Son of Man” had deep Judaic roots and appears 82 times in the gospels. Sometimes Jesus used it to refer to himself, while on other occasions he seemed to imply a divine manifestation to follow him.¹¹ Occasionally people addressed him as “Lord.”¹² The unclean spirits and eventually his disciples called him the “Son of God.”¹³ Further appellations, applied after his death and resurrection, included “the Last (or Second) Adam”¹⁴ and “the High Priest.”¹⁵

The Greek equivalent of “Messiah” is *Christos*, from which “Christ” is derived. Messiah/Christ was a title, but the apostle Paul, who wrote his epistles between about 49 and 67 CE, shortened “Jesus the Christ” to “Jesus Christ,”¹⁶ essentially making “Christ” Jesus’ last name. “Lord” (Greek: *Kyrios*) could simply be a term of respect.¹⁷ But Paul drew upon the much greater significance of its Hebrew equivalent *Adonai*, which had served as a substitute for the unutterable YHWH “Lord Jesus Christ” became Paul’s favorite appellation and one often used by early Christians.¹⁸ Paul used those titles to proclaim Christ’s divinity: for example:

God also hath highly exalted him [Christ], and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [*Kyrios/Adonai*], to the glory of God the Father.¹⁹

In so doing he was redefining monotheism. Jewish and Islamic scholars would accuse Christianity of violating monotheistic principles in its Christology and trinitarian doctrine.

An important question debated during the first century was *when* Jesus Christ became divine. According to Paul, Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead.”²⁰ *Mark*, written 15–20 years later, suggested that divine sonship was granted at the baptism: “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”²¹ Paul and *Mark*’s author could be considered *adoptionists*, referring to the belief that Christ was not always divine but was “adopted” by the Father sometime during his earthly life. *Matthew* and *Luke*, which were written even later, did not refute the adoptionist position but implied that Jesus was the Son of God from the time of his conception. “God the Son” appears nowhere in the New Testament.

The *Gospel of John* identified Jesus Christ as the *Logos*, conventionally rendered in English as “the Word.”²² The term had a long, complicated history in Greek philosophy. First discussed by the sixth-century BCE Heraclitus,

logos acquired a range of meanings, including “ratio,” “proportion,” “harmony,” “reason,” even “idea.” The fourth-century BCE Zeno the Stoic viewed *logos* as a divine principle of natural law and rational ethics. His followers came to regard the Logos, now capitalized, as the soul of the universe. Still later, the first-century CE Jewish scholar Philo viewed the Logos as a god-man in the style of the Egyptian Osiris.²³ Separately, *logos* took on the additional meaning of “word” or “speech,” in the sense that speech is the manifestation of an idea. Designation of Christ as “the Word” carried the connotation that he manifested the hidden nature and purpose of the Father. Since Logos has a somewhat different meaning in modern esoteric teachings, from now on we shall use “the Word” in discussing traditional Christology.

In addition to establishing “the Word” as an enduring title, *John* refuted Pauline/Markan adoptionism by declaring that the Word was “in the beginning with God.”²⁴ The fourth gospel was written some 60 years after the crucifixion, and the prologue containing the critical Christological statements may have been added still later. But the concept was in place in time for Platonist philosopher Athanasius of Athens (c.133–c.190) to profess: “[W]e acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable... we acknowledge also a Son of God. . . . [T]he Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one.”²⁵

The statement that the Word was “in the beginning with God” called to mind *Proverbs* 8:22, which referred to Wisdom [Hebrew: *Chokmah*, Greek: *Sophia*]. Indeed, in early Christianity, “Sophia” was often applied to Jesus Christ.²⁶ For example the basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was dedicated to him. Sophia eventually recovered her feminine identity in Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

The Ecumenical Councils

Christological and other theological issues were debated for centuries. When controversy threatened Christian unity, closure was forced

by ecumenical councils, so called because bishops were invited from the whole of Christendom.²⁷ Six ecumenical councils issued Christological decrees, beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE and ending with the Third Council of Constantinople in 680–681.

The procedure was simple: attending bishops discussed the issues at hand and then voted. The majority opinion was deemed to have been guided and endorsed by the Holy Spirit. Published in the council’s formal proceedings, it became dogma, open to possible clarification but never to be contradicted by later councils. Deliberations did not always follow orderly parliamentary procedures, and outcomes sometimes reflected politics as much as theological insight. For example, the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE pitted Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, against archrival Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople. The latter was condemned and deposed before his delegation even arrived at the council. Upon their arrival Cyril’s faction intimidated the delegation to discourage further consideration. Nestorius himself stayed away in fear for his own safety,²⁸ but the Nestorian “heresy” was named after him.

The Council of Nicaea decreed that Jesus Christ was/is “the Son of God . . . that is from the substance [Greek: *ousia*, Latin: *substantia*] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God . . . through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth.”²⁹ The First Council of Constantinople (381) drew from the fourth gospel to affirm that Jesus Christ was not created in time but was “begotten from the Father before all the ages.” He “came down from the heavens and became incarnate from the holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.”³⁰ Both councils referred to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but “Trinity” was never used by the Council of Nicaea and appeared only once in the proceedings of First Constantinople.³¹ Trinitarian doctrine lagged behind Christology in its development.

The Council of Ephesus proclaimed the doctrine of the *hypostatic union*: that Jesus Christ

had both a divine and a human nature. “[T]he Word from God the Father,” the bishops affirmed, “has been united by hypostasis with the flesh and is one Christ with his own flesh, and is therefore God and man together.”³² *Hypostasis*, customarily rendered in English as “person,” will be discussed in due course. The bishops added that Jesus Christ was “perfect God and perfect man of a rational soul and a body.”³³ And, in a resolution of far-reaching significance, they endorsed the statement that the Son of God suffered and died on the cross. “[A]lthough according to his own nature he was not subject to suffering, [he] suffered in the flesh for us according to the scriptures For that purpose he gave his own body to death.”³⁴

In a backlash against the Alexandrian victory at Ephesus, the Council of Chalcedon (451) affirmed the single personhood of Jesus Christ. His divine and human natures, the council decreed, “undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁵

The one-person-two-natures understanding of Jesus Christ—to be discussed in more detail shortly—was now in place, but subsequent councils continued to refine that understanding. The Second Council of Constantinople determined that “the Word of God has two nativities, that which is before all ages from the Father, outside time and without a body, and secondly that nativity of these latter days when the Word of God came down from the heavens and was made flesh of holy and glorious Mary, mother of God and ever-virgin, and was born from her.”³⁶ Worship of Jesus Christ must not distinguish between his divine and human natures; rather, he is due “a single adoration God the Word in human flesh along with his human flesh, as has been the tradition of the church from the beginning.”³⁷

The Third Council of Constantinople declared that Jesus Christ has “equally two natural volitions or wills . . . and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion.” The two wills are not in opposition: “his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will.”³⁸

By the end of the seventh century the church had created a detailed and consistent—if not totally clear—description of the person, natures, and origin of Jesus Christ. It had distanced itself from Gnostic *docetism* (from the Greek *dokeō*, “to seem”), which asserted that the Word only seemed to take physical form; *Arianism*, which asserted his creation in time; *Nestorianism*, which asserted that Jesus Christ was two distinct persons; *monophysitism*, which asserted that his two natures were merged; and *monophylitism*, which asserted that he had a single will.

Schismatic churches emerged when dissenting bishops, or sometimes their followers, refused to submit to the majority opinion. After the Council of Ephesus a schismatic Nestorian church emerged with its primary base in Persia. Now known as the Assyrian Church of the East, it still exists. A schismatic monophysite church, based in Egypt, emerged from the Council of Chalcedon. Known as the Coptic Orthodox Church, it too remains active. The two churches’ survival, in the face of repression throughout the centuries—and in the present—testifies to the tenacity of faith.

In retrospect the various “isms” seem to have been matters of emphasis rather than substance, and the unity of Christendom could probably have been preserved if cooler heads had prevailed. But the polarized atmosphere of the time did not encourage inclusiveness and consensus-building.

One Person, Two Natures

Arguments over vocabulary plagued the formulation of Christological and trinitarian doctrine from the very beginning. With political or intellectual enemies always ready to pounce, terminology became a minefield into

which theologians—including some of the church fathers—stumbled at their peril. Anyone who understated the distinctions among the persons of the Trinity could be accused of Sabellianism, or modalism, while anyone who overstated them could be accused of tritheism.³⁹ Anyone discussing Jesus Christ could be accused of monophysitism, which failed to distinguish sufficiently between his human and divine natures, or Nestorianism, which implied a division in his personhood.

Eventually East and West each crafted a terminology to provide cover for theologians who stayed within its boundaries. One word had to be redefined for the purpose. The Council of Nicaea used the Greek words *hypostasis* and *ousia* and the Latin *substantia* synonymously; their English translation would be “nature,” “essence,” or “substance.” By the time of the First Council of Constantinople, 58 years later, *hypostasis* had acquired a new meaning, sharply contrasted with *ousia*. *Hypostasis* was now synonymous with *prosōpon* and its Latin equivalent *persona*, from which the English “person” is derived.⁴⁰ In classical times *prosōpon* and *persona* referred to the mask worn by an actor in a play or, sometimes, to the speaking tube through which an actor spoke.⁴¹ They had since come to mean the character portrayed or, more generally, the “face” someone presented to the world. *Hypostasis* now had a similar meaning. Meanwhile, the Latin *substantia* was left in an uneasy position: it was the direct translation of *hypostasis* but continued to mean *ousia*, or “substance.”

Eastern Orthodox theologians customarily use *hypostasis* to refer to Jesus Christ or to the Trinity, even when writing in English. While the term means little to the layperson, its post-Nicene technical meaning is fairly precise, resembling *partzuf* (Aramaic/Hebrew: “face”) in the Kabbalah.⁴² The hypostatic union is formally stated thus: Jesus Christ is one *hypostasis* and two *ousiai*. The Trinity, by contrast, is three *hypostases* and one *ousia*.

In place of *hypostasis* Western theologians use *persona* or “person.” This latter term is deceptively familiar, calling to mind a unique

human being, recognized by the way he or she looks, speaks, acts, and relates to others. Certainly the family and followers of Jesus Christ regarded him as a person. Possibly the term could be stretched to capture the principle that unified Jesus Christ’s two natures. But it would fail to capture the principle that distinguishes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Instead, theologians define “person,” in a Christological or trinitarian context, as an “individuating principle.” We might suggest “focus of consciousness,” or “self-conscious identity,” but theologians have yet to embrace those terms.

While the divine and human natures were both present in Jesus Christ, the full power of the divine nature was unavailable, or was voluntarily withheld, so that the Word could participate in human affairs. Because of his divine nature Jesus Christ could perform miracles, read people’s minds, and foretell the future. Yet at times his knowledge seemed to be limited. Paul wrote that Christ “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”⁴³ This is the doctrine of *kenōsis*, or “self-emptying.” Acceptance of the human condition was expressed most remarkably by the passion and crucifixion. As the Council of Ephesus noted, the Son of God suffered and died on the cross.

That startling conclusion is an example of what theologians call *communicatio idiomatum*, or “interchange of properties.” Other examples would be that Jesus created the universe and Mary was the mother of God. According to Jesuit scholar Gerald O’Collins, the principle “involves *naming* the person of Jesus Christ with respect to one of his natures . . . and *attributing* to him a property that belongs to the other nature.”⁴⁴ The propriety of naming with respect to one or other of the two natures opens up important possibilities, and we shall return to it in due course.

The hypostatic union began in 5 BCE, or thereabouts, when Mary conceived Jesus in her womb. From that moment onward the divine and human natures were combined. The human nature, the ecumenical councils pro-

claimed, consisted of body, soul and will. The soul, it was determined elsewhere, did not pre-exist the body.⁴⁵ Upon Mary's conception, we must understand, a body, a soul, and presumably a human will were created and united with the Word, which existed "in the beginning," "before all ages."

Conciliar discussions of the natures and person of the Jesus Christ focused almost entirely on his Palestinian mission. Apart from the use of "is" rather than "was" in describing the hypostatic union, the councils did not address the issue of whether the union continued after the mission was completed. Notwithstanding, ecclesiastical authorities came to assume that the union will last until the second coming, if not forever. In the Apostles' Creed the believer affirms: "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ . . . [who] ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead." Precisely what "seated at the right hand of God" means is not spelled out.

Atonement

The major questions relating to Jesus Christ's nature and person were settled by the seventh century. But the ecumenical councils did not rule on the purpose of his Palestinian mission, and debate continued for much longer; indeed it continues today, within mainstream churches and elsewhere.

Jesus Christ, the gospels tell us, was baptized in the Jordan, taught the multitudes, and healed the sick. He preached the importance of common-sense morality versus compliance with the minutiae of Mosaic Law. The Sermon on the Mount was a profound statement of ethical ideals. At the transfiguration Christ revealed his divine nature. At the Last Supper he instituted the Eucharist. He rose from the grave to demonstrate the reality of ongoing life. Passages from the gospels are read daily in worship services around the globe.

Within a few centuries, however, institutional Christianity was firmly wedded to the notion that Jesus Christ was the Savior who died for the sins of humanity. Meanwhile, "faith" lost its meaning of *trust*, as in "thy faith has made

thee whole".⁴⁶ Instead it came to mean *belief*, or submission to dogma. The Apostles' Creed, which dates from the fourth century, states tersely that Jesus Christ "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Neither it nor the Nicene Creed of 328/381 mentions the Sermon on the Mount, the transfiguration, or the Last Supper. Yet profession of one or other of the creeds became the prerequisite for baptism and membership of the church.

The focus on Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, as distinct from his life and ministry, can be traced to Paul.⁴⁷ He explored several theories of redemption or atonement in his epistles. Generations of theologians continued the process, producing theories distinguished from one another by the relative weight and interpretation attached to the Greek words *katallagē* ("atonement" or "reconciliation"), *lutrōsis* ("redemption"), and *sōtēria* ("salvation" or "deliverance").

Paul declared that "Christ died for our sins For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."⁴⁸ Christ freed us from the bondage to sin, or perhaps to Satan. According to church father Irenaeus, Christ ransomed, or bought back—*redeemed* in a very literal sense—humanity by the sacrifice of his blood.⁴⁹ Another early theory of redemption emphasized Christ's victory over sin and death. Through sin man brought spiritual, even physical, death into the world; through the resurrection Christ conquered death and the power of evil that lay behind it.⁵⁰

Augustine of Hippo drew upon *Romans* to promote the penal, or judicial, theory of atonement. Humanity was viewed as depraved, hopelessly mired in its own "actual" sins and the inherited, "original" sin of Adam. God the Father sat in judgment upon humanity, and his Son paid the penalty we deserved. Particularly influential was the satisfaction theory proposed by Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109),⁵¹ further developed by Thomas Aquinas, and eagerly embraced by the Protestant reformers. Sin was an affront to God. Aquinas argued that the more exalted

the person injured, the greater the dishonor; to strike a nobleman, for instance, was more serious than to strike a common man.⁵² Since God is infinite, the affront was infinite, and only a person of infinite stature could make amends. Yet only a person who fully embraced human nature could make it on our behalf. The doctrine of the hypostatic union precisely fit that twofold requirement.

Substitutionary atonement is a key belief of modern evangelical fundamentalism. Elsewhere in the West, penal theories have lost ground to theories that emphasize God's love and Christ's moral example. Although the creeds remain in force, attention is finally being transferred from Paul's epistles to the gospels.

Theologians in the eastern churches always subscribed to the Nicene Creed. Yet they attached more importance to Christ's transfiguration and resurrection, in which his divinity was manifested, than to the passion and crucifixion. Correspondingly, they were less influenced by Paul's focus on sin and atonement than were their western counterparts. The eastern theologians also rejected the notion of original sin. Adam, in their view, did not possess the knowledge or will necessary to commit a sin of the magnitude envisioned by Augustine. As a result humanity was not willful and wicked so much as wounded and weak.⁵³

In the first century CE Ignatius of Antioch theorized that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—and particularly the divine love that he expressed for humankind—inspired moral transformation. Christ's example and teachings were as important as his death. Seventh-century church father Maximus the Confessor viewed Christ's redemptive act as one of healing. Eastern theologians are fond of pointing out that *sōtēria* can mean

“healing”; “salvation” and “salve” come from the same root.⁵⁴ Citing Maximus' work, 20-century theologian Vladimir Lossky declared: “Christ healed all that belonged to man, but particularly his will.”⁵⁵ “The work accomplished by Christ is related to our nature,” Lossky continued. “It is a new nature, a re-

stored creature which appears in the world. It is a new body, pure from all taints of sin, free from external necessity, separated from our iniquity and from every alien will.”⁵⁶

Redemption, in Eastern theology, was linked to the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification. We find in scripture: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature”⁵⁷ Athana-

sius of Alexandria built upon that passage to declare: “He [the Word] was made man that we might be made god.” According to fourth-century church father Gregory of Nyssa, *theosis* was the very purpose of humanity's creation.⁵⁸ Our destiny is to become “priests of the cosmos, rendering by [our] dynamic engagement with the world's order, a degree of divine life, a sacred blessing as it were, to all the fabric of God's created existence.”⁵⁹

Christ's incarnation, Gregory of Nyssa and his followers argued, was not a repair mission, a response to humanity's failure, but was a pre-ordained mission to unlock humanity's latent capability. When “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,”⁶⁰ human nature was exalted. Redemption, as a commentator on Gregory's work remarked, meant the refashioning of “the very boundaries of creaturely existences.” The decrees of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon relating to the hypostatic union added weight to Gregory's teachings. While *theosis* received a cool reception in the West, it became a key element of Eastern Orthodox teachings.

Little effort has been made to reconcile traditional and esoteric Christologies. Authorities in the mainstream churches consider their own Christology to be infallible and unchangeable. The great majority of theologians are either unaware of esoteric Christology or dismiss it as just one more assault on time-honored beliefs.

Russian Orthodox priest Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) agreed with Gregory of Nyssa that Christ’s incarnation was motivated primarily by God’s plan to glorify humanity. In response to that plan “Man desires to become a son of God and enter into that glory of creation, and he is predestined to this. Out of natural man, he is called to become a god-man.”⁶¹ The glorification of humanity began at the incarnation and was completed when Christ ascended into heaven. Importantly, we are all invited to participate in the hypostatic union.

Esoteric Christology

Historical Background

Late in the first century the Egyptian Gnostic Cerinthus distinguished between Jesus and Christ. Jesus, in his view, was an ordinary man, the son of Joseph and Mary. “The Christ” was a heavenly being who descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at the baptism in the Jordan.⁶² We recall that *Mark* seemed to suggest that Jesus’ divinity was bestowed on him at the baptism. Cerinthus asserted that the Christ imparted to Jesus higher knowledge and the power to perform miracles. Christ withdrew before the crucifixion but will rejoin Jesus at the end of time.⁶³ Cerinthus’ views were refuted by the ecumenical councils, which decreed that the Son of God suffered and died on the cross. Attacked in his own time, allegedly by John the Evangelist and others, Cerinthus’ influence continued, and suspicions arose that he wrote the *Book of Revelation*.

Calling the higher being “the Christ” was problematic, perhaps reflecting Cerinthus’ ignorance of Jewish history. As noted earlier, the term, literally “anointed one” or “messiah,” was bestowed on Jesus before his divine associations became apparent; it had also been bestowed on various individuals, like King David, before him. Notwithstanding, modern esoteric writers have adopted the same convention.

Theodore (392–428), bishop of Mopsuestia and spokesperson for the theological school of Antioch applied the full name Jesus Christ to the man “who is from the Jews according to

the flesh.” Jesus Christ was to be distinguished from “the Word.” Theodore cited Paul to speak of the union between them as a union “of wills, of spirits, of personalities.”⁶⁴ Theodore was doing little more than naming the distinct natures, which, we are assured, is permissible. But he challenged the principle of *communicatio idiomatum*, claiming that the title of *Theotokos*, bestowed upon Mary, denied Jesus Christ’s full humanity. *Theotokos* literally means “God Bearer,” but Cyril of Alexandria interpreted it as “Mother of God.” The preferable title, Theodore suggested, was *Christotokos* (“Christ Bearer” or “Mother of Christ”).

Theodore was acclaimed “Doctor of the Universal Church.” Yet three years after his death the Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius (c.386–c.451) for taking a similar position. Nestorius’ stand on the *Theotokos* may have been as close as he ever came to promoting the heresy that bears his name. But his more extreme followers promoted a two-person Christology, in which Jesus Christ embodied the human nature, and the Word represented the divine nature.⁶⁵

The eastern and western churches went their separate ways in 1054, and the Reformation officially began in 1517. Important theological issues were at stake in both, but neither event was accompanied by any new challenge to mainstream Christology. The Protestant reformers accepted the conciliar decrees without question. A work by the Lutheran mystic and Hermeticist Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) can be read as implying a Cerinthean distinction between Jesus and the Christ.⁶⁶ Otherwise Böhme’s references to Christ were surprisingly orthodox.

In the 1860s Phineas Quimby distinguished, as Cerinthus had done, between Jesus and the Christ. He proposed that “Jesus embodied . . . an intelligence called Christ, embracing all the attributes of man, and being a revelation of a higher wisdom than had before appeared on the earth.”⁶⁷ Anna Kingsford made a similar claim in the early 1880s and added her own insights. Multiple esoteric teachers soon did the same. Within a few decades a sophisticat-

ed esoteric Christology had emerged, in which trans-Himalayan teachings played the major role.

Jesus

Esoteric teachings portray Jesus as a man who had advanced along the initiatory path through a number of previous incarnations. Alice Bailey noted his incarnations as Joshua the Son of Nun; as Jeshua at the time of Ezra; and as Joshua in the book of Zechariah, where he attained the third initiation.⁶⁸

During his lifetime in Palestine Jesus entered into an intimate relationship with the Christ, allowing the latter to speak and act through his body. Virtually all esoteric teachers agree with Cerinthus that the relationship began at the time of the baptism in the Jordan and ended at or near the time of the crucifixion. Thereafter the two individualities pursued distinct paths. This assertion contrasts with orthodox Christian teachings that the hypostatic union will continue indefinitely.

Annie Besant declared that the “man Jesus yielded himself a willing sacrifice . . . to the Lord of Love, who took unto Himself that pure form as tabernacle, and dwelt therein for three years of mortal life.”⁶⁹ Rosicrucian Max Heindel noted that an “ordinary man's vital body would have instantly collapsed under the terrific vibrations of the Great Spirit who entered Jesus' body.” Because of his initiatory training, Jesus' etheric body was “attuned to the high vibrations of the life spirit.” Even so, “that body, pure and high-strung as it was, could not withstand those tremendous impacts for many years, and when . . . Christ withdrew temporarily from his disciples . . . he drew out of Jesus' vehicles to give them a rest.”⁷⁰

Steiner declared that the descent of the Christ into Jesus' physical vehicles was a gradual process extending throughout the three-year Palestinian ministry: “In the early days [after the baptism], the Christ and the body of Jesus of Nazareth were only loosely connected . . . [I]t was only towards the end of the three years that the Christ spirit and the bodies . . . became one . . . and it only happened completely in the death on the cross, or rather

immediately before it.”⁷¹ Steiner stated that, despite long preparation, Jesus' lower vehicles “were able to accommodate only so much of the Christ's power: “The Christ spirit had all kinds of abilities, but in the bodies of Jesus of Nazareth it had only the abilities that were possible in those bodies.”⁷² Here we see a parallel to Paul's notion of *kenōsis*: Christ's “emptying” of his divine attributes.⁷³

At the end of the three-year ministry, Jesus—Christ journeyed to Jerusalem and there was sentenced to death. It was Jesus who died on the cross, and by that great act of renunciation he attained the fourth initiation. Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson suggested that, because of his training in the mysteries, Jesus could have avoided crucifixion: “His submission to martyrdom when he possessed the occult power easily to have saved Himself and confounded his enemies, is one of the sublime acts of submission and self-restraint in the history of mankind.”⁷⁴

Alice Bailey claimed that Jesus went on to attain the fifth initiation as Apollonius of Tyana.⁷⁵ Thus esoteric writers refer to him as the Master Jesus. Bailey explained that Jesus is not only active in the world but is in physical embodiment. Writing in about 1920 she declared that he is

at present living in a Syrian body, and dwells in a certain part of the Holy Land. He travels much and passes considerable time in various parts of Europe. He works specially with masses more than with individuals, though He has gathered around Him quite a numerous body of pupils. He is upon the Sixth Ray of Devotion, or Abstract Idealism, and His pupils are frequently distinguished by that fanaticism and devotion which manifested in earlier Christian times amongst the martyrs. He Himself is rather a martial figure, a disciplinarian, and a man of iron rule and will. He is tall and spare with rather a long thin face, black hair, pale complexion and piercing blue eyes.⁷⁶

Theosophist Charles Leadbeater added that Jesus “lives among the Druses of Mount Lebanon.”⁷⁷

Trans-Himalayan teachings assert that the Master Jesus now heads the Sixth Ray ashram within the Planetary Hierarchy. Religion is said to span the Second and Sixth Rays. Besant declared that Jesus “took Christianity under His special charge, ever seeking to guide it to the right lines, to protect, to guard and nourish it.”⁷⁸ Jesus’ work, in Bailey’s words, included “fostering the germ of true spiritual life which is to be found amongst members of all sects and divisions, and neutralizing as far as possible the mistakes and errors of the churchmen and the theologians.”⁷⁹ We can assume that Jesus incurred some of the karma of the historical church.

Bailey added: “No one so wisely knows as [Jesus] the problems of the West, no one is so closely in touch with the people who stand for all that is best in Christian teachings, and no one is so well aware of the need of the present moment. Certain great prelates of the Anglican and Catholic Churches are wise agents of His.”⁸⁰ Evidently, Jesus intends to exert more direct guidance in the near future; he “will again take hold of the Christian Church in an effort to respiritualize it and to reorganize it. From the chair of the Pope of Rome, the Master Jesus will attempt to swing that great branch of the religious beliefs of the world again into a position of spiritual power and away from its present authoritative and temporary political potency.”⁸¹ His continued involvement in Christianity would seem to refute claims that Christianity has no future potential

Jesus’ responsibilities extend beyond religion, “for to Him is given the problem of steering the thought of the occident out of its present state of unrest into the peaceful waters of certitude and knowledge, and of preparing the way in Europe and America for the eventual” reappearance of the Christ.⁸²

The Christ

In 1881 Anna Kingsford declared that, at the baptism, Jesus received “into his own spirit” the Logos, whom she equated with the biblical Adonai. “Then,” she continued, “is accomplished the union of the two natures, the divine and the human For the Christ,

having received the Logos, is Son of God, as well as Son of Man.”⁸³ Theosophist Annie Besant also identified the Christ with the Logos. Building on one of Kingsford’s themes, she compared Christ with the sun gods: Mithras, Osiris, Tammuz and others, who either incarnated or sent messengers to Earth.⁸⁴ Rudolf Steiner identified the overshadowing entity as a “Spirit of the Sun” who appeared to Moses in the burning bush.⁸⁵ Max Heindel claimed that the Christ was the highest initiate of the “Sun Period,” an early phase in the planetary evolution. Christ was now an archangel and, like them, could not descend lower than the desire body. Thus he needed the body of Jesus to accomplish his mission in Palestine.⁸⁶

Trans-Himalayan teachings identified the Christ with the Lord Maitreya, the Bodhisattva of Hindu and Buddhist tradition, and even with the Imam Mahdi of Shia Islam.⁸⁷ The Christ is a high initiate of the human lifestream. Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater placed Maitreya on the Moon Chain.⁸⁸ By contrast, Alice Bailey stated that the Christ achieved individualization on this Earth, in ancient Lemuria. So rapid was his development that “in Atlantean days He found Himself upon the Path of Probation as did also the Buddha” who had individualized on the Moon Chain.⁸⁹ Christ is said to have incarnated previously as “Sri Krishna and as one other who was little known.”⁹⁰ All agreed that the Christ serves as the World Teacher for the fifth root race and Head of the Hierarchy of Masters.⁹¹ The Buddha held the office of World Teacher for the fourth root race, and the Master Kuthumi is expected to assume that role for the sixth root race.⁹²

Besant described the Christ as an emissary of the Solar Logos, the divine entity whose physical body is the solar system. Other Theosophists seemed to agree.⁹³ Indeed, when they speak of “the Logos,” they seem to refer exclusively to the Solar Logos. Bailey, however, linked Christ with the Planetary Logos. She described a hierarchy of Logoi extending from planetary to galactic levels and beyond. Helena Blavatsky also spoke of multiple Logoi,⁹⁴ but it is unclear whether she placed

them in a hierarchical structure. Perhaps the emergence, in our understanding, of the Planetary Logos fills Bishop John Robinson's demand for a "God down here" in place of the conventional "God out there."⁹⁵ Regardless of whether the focus is on the Planetary or the Solar Logos, the Theosophists and Bailey all agreed that "the Logos" is triune, corresponding to Christian notions of the Trinity. And all distinguished their understanding of the Logos from Christian doctrine of "the Word."

By the 1920s more detailed information was becoming available on the Planetary Hierarchy and the seven rays. The Christ was recognized as holding the office of Second Ray Lord of Love-Wisdom and head of a major ashram that incorporates the work of other masters. Bailey described him as "the Great Lord of Love and Son of God"⁹⁶ and as "the great Lord of Love and Compassion."⁹⁷ "Through Him flows the energy of the second aspect [of Deity], reaching Him direct from the heart center of the Planetary Logos via the heart of Sanat Kumara."⁹⁸ Sanat Kumara is the Lord of the World, the one referred to in scripture as the "Ancient of Days," or in esoteric Judaism as the "Ancient of Ancients." He came from the Venus Chain and "incarnated" during the Lemurian Age to serve as the Planetary Logos' "representative" for the present globe.⁹⁹

The Christ, in Bailey's words, is "the absolutely perfect expression of divinity for this cycle."¹⁰⁰ His divinity was not demonstrated by the miracles reported in the gospels. Miracles, Bailey explained, can be performed by any entity, good or evil, who has gained "an intelligent understanding of matter." Rather, divinity is "the expression of the qualities of the second or building aspect of God—magnetism, love, inclusiveness, non-separativeness, sacrifice for the good of the world, unselfishness, intuitive understanding, cooperation with the Plan of God."¹⁰¹

Bailey declared that the Christ was the first member of the human lifestream to achieve the complete realization of divinity: "I and the Father are One."¹⁰² He was a "human-divine

Avatar."¹⁰³ For the first time in human history, the Christ

anchored on earth a tenuous thread of the divine Will, as it issued from the Father's House (Shamballa), passed into the understanding custody of the Kingdom of God, and through the medium of the Christ was brought to the attention of mankind. Through the instrumentality of certain great Sons of God the three divine aspects or characteristics of the divine Trinity—will, love and intelligence—have become a part of human thinking and aspiration.¹⁰⁴

Also for the first time the Christ "transmitted to humanity . . . an aspect and a potency of the nature of God Himself, the Love principle of the Deity."¹⁰⁵ He provided a direct channel from the Logos to humanity. Heindel noted that, through his association with Jesus, the Christ

possessed the twelve vehicles, which formed an unbroken chain from the Physical World to the very Throne of God. Therefore He is the only Being in the Universe in touch with both God and man and capable of mediating between them, because He has, personally and individually, experienced all conditions and knows every limitation incidental to physical existence.¹⁰⁶

We understand that Christ had "a Second Ray soul, a Sixth Ray personality (which accounted for His close relationship with the Master Jesus), plus a First Ray mind."¹⁰⁷ Esoteric writers typically say that Christ *overshadowed* Jesus. The Greek verb *episkiazein*, translated as "to overshadow," appeared in the Septuagint and also in New Testament accounts of the annunciation and transfiguration.¹⁰⁸ Bailey suggested, however, that their relationship was one of "inspiration" that contrasting with overshadowing and with "appearance or manifestation."¹⁰⁹ In inspiration, depicted as the positive counterpart of obsession,

the free will and intelligent understanding of the Master or the disciple is enlisted on the side of the spiritual Agent; the spiritual man, functioning as a soul, becomes the

channel for forces, ideas and activities other than his own but to which he gives full intuitive assent. It is all carried forward with full understanding and consciousness of method, process and results. It is an act of free spiritual cooperation, for the good of humanity, in the work of a great spiritual Force or Being.¹¹⁰

Most esoteric teachers agree that Jesus died on the cross. But they insist that the Christ did not die. Nor, in Bailey's account, did either Jesus or Christ "rise out of a rocky sepulcher and re-assume His discarded body."¹¹¹ How then are we to understand the resurrection? Leadbeater regarded it—along with the crucifixion—in purely symbolic terms.¹¹² Most other esoteric writers have steered clear of the issue. This is a serious deficiency, and we shall return to it later.

Once a distinction is drawn between Jesus and the Christ, the inevitable question is: which one appeared to the disciples and others after the crucifixion? The sayings attributed to him in the gospels suggest that it was the Christ. Further evidence is provided by the reports that his resurrected body could pass through walls but had a measure of solidity.¹¹³ We also note that the disciples did not recognize him, suggesting that he differed in appearance from the Jesus they knew. The post-resurrection body may have been a *mayavirupa*, corresponding closely to Paul's *sōma pneumatikon*.¹¹⁴ Manifestation of a *mayavirupa* is considered to be an ability of fifth- and higher-degree initiates.¹¹⁵ Christ certainly could have manifested one. Assuming that Jesus did not attain the fifth initiation until his incarnation as Apollonius, he would only have been able to appear in his astral body, possibly recognizable by the disciples but lacking solidity.

By the time the Christ entered into the relationship with Jesus he was already a fifth- or sixth-degree initiate. Following the Palestinian mission, according to Bailey, he "passed through the seventh Initiation of Resurrection and returned back to His original state of Being—to remain there throughout all the eternities The Son of God has found His way back to the Father and to His originating

Source, that state of Existence to which we have given the name Shamballa."¹¹⁶ Yet the seventh initiation, "the true and final resurrection," was "left incomplete." The "affirmative Voice," Bailey wrote,

will be heard when the Christ completes His work at the time of the Second Coming. Then the great seventh initiation, which is a dual one (love-wisdom in full manifestation motivated by power and will), will be consummated, and the Buddha and the Christ will together pass before the Lord of the World, together see the glory of the Lord, and together pass to higher service of a nature and caliber unknown to us.¹¹⁷

The Redemptive Mission

Esoteric writers reject any notion of judicial atonement. Anna Kingsford roundly condemned notions of a blood sacrifice, which implied "a God whose just anger was capable of being appeased by slaughter . . . a spotless sin-offering for men, in propitiation of the wrath of God."¹¹⁸ We are saved, "not by any Cross on Calvary eighteen hundred years ago . . . but by the Christ-Jesus . . . redeeming us from the world, and making us sons of God and heirs of everlasting life."¹¹⁹ The crucifixion, Kingsford averred, was significant in four ways: humanity's rejection of the god-man, renunciation of the lower self, Christ's personal sacrifice, and "the Oblation of God for the Universe."¹²⁰

Esotericists agree that Christ did suffer. Charles Leadbeater pointed to the sacrifice he made simply by assuming physical form.¹²¹ Rudolf Steiner explained: "This union of the all-embracing, universal spirit of the Christ with the body of Jesus of Nazareth involved untold suffering that was to continue for the three years."¹²²

For Kingsford the fall and the redemptive sacrifice were not one-time events but are being played out throughout eternity. God "is always making man in the image of God, and placing him in a garden of innocence and perfection. . . . And man is always falling away." Yet man "is always being redeemed by the

blood of the sacrifice always being made for him by the Christ Jesus, who is Son at once of God and of man, and is always being born of a pure virgin—dying, rising, and ascending into heaven.”¹²³

Dion Fortune, writing in the Golden Dawn tradition, declared that the crucifixion had cosmic significance: “The crucifixion of Our Lord at the hands of Roman authority was but the shadow thrown on the material plane by the struggle that was going on in the spiritual world.”¹²⁴ Besant saw the events in Palestine as scenes in a cosmic drama depicted in world mythology in which the Sun-God was born of the zodiacal Virgo, only to be sacrificed in an eternal ritual of death and rebirth. “Why,” Besant asked, “have these legends mingled with the history of Jesus?” She answered her own question thus:

These are really the stories not of a particular individual named Jesus but of the universal Christ: of a Man who symbolized a Divine Being, and who represented a fundamental truth in nature He was, as are all such, the “Son of Man,” a peculiar and distinctive title, the title of an office, not of an individual. The Christ of the Solar Myth was the Christ of the Mysteries.¹²⁵

Alice Bailey placed Christ’s sacrifice in the context of Sanat Kumara’s descent into manifestation during the Lemurian era. Sanat Kumara, in her words, “is the Great Sacrifice, Who left the glory of the high places and for the sake of the evolving sons of men took upon Himself a physical form and was made in the likeness of man.”¹²⁶ Besant placed it in the context of the eternal sacrifice made by the Second Aspect of Deity as it proceeds from the First Aspect. The Deity, she wrote,

by His own will limits Himself, making as it were a sphere enclosing the Divine Life, coming forth as a radiant orb of Deity, the Divine Substance, Spirit, within and limitation, or Matter without. This is the veil of matter which makes possible the birth of the Logos . . . that Deity may manifest for the building of the worlds.¹²⁷

Man is redeemed, Kingsford declared, when the Christ is born in him, for in Christ “the man becomes transmuted from Matter into Spirit.”¹²⁸ The trans-Himalayan teachers emphasized that Christ’s primary mission was to instill the sense of universal love and group consciousness. Prior to his coming little emphasis had been placed on God as Love in any of the world religions. In Bailey’s words the Christ, the Lord of Love, “inaugurated the ‘age of love’ and gave to the people an expression of a new divine aspect, that of love.”¹²⁹ She revealed that the Buddha and the Christ both embodied the energy of Venus, which “is esoterically recognized as that mysterious force which is a blend of love and knowledge, of intelligence and synthesis, and of understanding and brotherhood.”¹³⁰

The trans-Himalayan teachers assert that the Christ continues to be involved in human affairs. As World Teacher, he has planetary responsibility for religion and education. In Bailey’s account, Christ “has never left us but . . . has worked for two thousand years through the medium of His disciples, the inspired men and women of all faiths, all religions and all religious persuasions.” He works through the Christian Church, which “hides in its heart those who vibrate to the great love ray, the Second Ray of Love-Wisdom.” Moreover, he is to be thought of not as “the feeble Christ which historical Christianity has endorsed” but as “a strong and able executive.”¹³¹

As noted, the Christ heads a vast ashram. According to Bailey he “presides over the destiny of the great religions through the medium of a group of Masters and initiates Who direct the activities of these different schools of thought.” She added that one of those masters is Jesus, who has primary responsibility for Christianity:

The Master Jesus, the inspirer and director of the Christian Churches everywhere, though an adept on the Sixth Ray under the department of the Mahachohan, works at present under the Christ for the welfare of Christianity; other Masters hold similar posts in relation to the great oriental faiths,

and the various occidental schools of thought.¹³²

Although they are human inventions and have often failed, the world's religions, according to Bailey, have achieved certain basic goals:

Step by step man has been led through prayer, the voice of desire, through worship, the recognition of deity, through affirmation of the fact of human identity of nature with the divine, to a belief in the divinity of man. [The Christ] has told us (and the New Testament in many places emphasizes it) that we also are divine, all of us are the Sons of God and that . . . we are able to do still greater things than Christ did.¹³³

Trans-Himalayan teachers have discussed Christ's second coming, or "reappearance": he will, in the words of the Great Invocation, "return to Earth." "[T]he Living Christ will walk among men and lead them onward towards the Mount of Ascension."¹³⁴ We understand that, preparation for the reappearance has called for important adjustments: "[T]he entire [Planetary] Hierarchy shifted its location (since 1925 A.D.) from the higher mental levels to the buddhic plane, thereby making direct and unimpeded etheric reception possible."¹³⁵ Moreover, "The Christ can and does function now upon the atmic plane and embodies within Himself the great Point of Revelation which has been expressed by me in the words: 'The Will is an expression of the Law of Sacrifice.'"¹³⁶

By Bailey's description, the reappearance of "Christ, the Avatar of Love" will be profoundly significant for humanity:

Then shall the Coming One appear, His footsteps hastened through the valley of the shadow by the One of awful power Who stands upon the mountain top, breathing out love eternal, light supernal and peaceful, silent Will. Then will the sons of men respond. Then will a newer light shine forth into the dismal, weary vale of earth. Then will new life course through the veins of men So peace will come

again on earth, but a peace unlike aught known before.¹³⁷

The Spirit of Peace will, when the right time comes, vitalize the responsiveness of humanity, via the influence of the Hierarchy, to the will of God which has for basic intent the bringing of peace on earth. What is peace? It is essentially the establishing of right human relations, of synthetic rapport with its resultant cooperation, of correct interplay between the three planetary centers and an illumined, loving understanding of the will of God as it affects humanity and works out divine intent. It is for this reason that the Christ, Who established for the first time in planetary history a contact between the Hierarchy, Humanity, Shamballa and the Spirit of Peace in His Own high place, in His first recorded utterance said that He must be about His Father's business and then at the end of His life, reiterated the same thought in the words: "Father, not my will but Thine be done," thus carrying the thought up to the highest plane for He addressed the Father, the first Aspect of Divinity.¹³⁸

Among the Christ's objectives, when he reappears, will be to restore the Mysteries and thus revive "the churches in a new form."¹³⁹ This project will be part of the broader mission to establish a New World Religion.¹⁴⁰ Man, we understand, "is on the verge of establishing his divinity."¹⁴¹ The New World Religion will provide opportunities to put that new sense of divinity to use: "[T]o our past programs of prayer, worship and affirmation, the new religion of Invocation and Evocation can be added, in which man will begin to use his divine power and come into closer touch with the spiritual sources of all life."¹⁴²

Toward Synthesis

Several issues need to be addressed before any significant progress can be made toward the synthesis of traditional and esoteric Christology. They concern our understanding of God; the manner of the divine incarnation in human form; the hypostatic union; and the

purpose of Christ's Palestinian mission and continued relationship with humanity.

God and the Incarnation

Christian doctrine insists that Jesus Christ was/is the Son of God. But the very concept of "God" needs to be clarified. Theologians speak of God as both transcendent and immanent: infinite, eternal and immutable but also active in space and time. How the transcendent and the immanent are related—and how their relationship can be reconciled with statements by Thomas Aquinas and others that God is "simple," or without parts—is relegated to the category of "mystery." Esotericists speak of an utterly transcendent and unknowable Godhead and a Logos, or hierarchy of Logoi, through which the Godhead manifests and reveals itself. The Godhead is infinite, eternal and immutable, but the Logos ensouls its domain of activity. The Planetary Logos, in Bailey's account, ensouls and interacts with the Earth and its lives.

Christians would scoff at suggestions that the God of scripture can be equated to an entity "at the bottom" of a logoi hierarchy. Yet in fact the biblical Deity resembles the Planetary Logos quite closely. Notions of God gradually expanded from the tribal deities of the patriarchal era to the monotheistic "most high God" and "Lord of heaven and earth" of the gospels.¹⁴³ But early Christians felt comfortable declaring that God took human form and was born of the Virgin Mary. And God ruled a universe that was quite small, consisting of a

flat Earth and a nearby firmament of planets and stars.

Our understanding of Deity must adapt to modern scientific knowledge. The idea that the God of an observable universe 92 billion light-years in diameter, containing an estimated

10^{23} stars, would—or could—take human form stretches kenōsis beyond any possible meaning.¹⁴⁴ The "high God" of scripture, even the "infinite God" of 13th-century scholasticism, must be seen as existing within a larger divine system or structure. Mathematicians speak of different types of infinity, some larger than others.

Esotericists view the Planetary Logos as part of the logoi hierarchy, but they must avoid giving the impression that the Logoi are separate beings, like administrators in a layered bureaucracy. They

should point out that the Logoi serve as channels for the divine essence and energies flowing from the Godhead. In a real sense they are "all One." And the greatness and power of that One—or of the Planetary Logos considered as distinct—is utterly beyond human comprehension.

Esoteric teachings assert that the Logos is triune. The Second Aspect—or what Theosophists somewhat unfortunately call the Second Logos—proceeds from the First¹⁴⁵ in much the same way as the Christian God the Son was begotten by the Father. Moreover, esotericists would readily agree that the Second Aspect was "begotten before all worlds," or, in their own terminology, before the beginning of the *manvantara*.

A potentially divisive issue concerns the relationship between Christ and God. Trans-

For their part, esoteric teachers reject notions of infallibility and affirm the ongoing revelation of knowledge. Many esotericists identify themselves with other world religions in preference to Christianity, and some have gone on record with the opinion that Christianity is in its death throes, soon to disappear along with other vestiges of the Piscean Age. Of those who write about Christ, most present esoteric Christology with minimal reference to mainstream doctrine.

Himalayan teachers assert that the Christ was a high initiate and avatar of the Planetary Hierarchy. Traditional Christians would complain that the appearance on Earth of an avatar fails to capture the enormity of the truth that the Word “came down from heaven” and incarnated in human form. The term “avatar” has become problematic. In Hindu tradition it referred to the incarnation of a deity: like Vishnu’s incarnation as Krishna. Today it is used in a number of contexts, some quite trivial. Esotericists sometimes give the impression that Christ was just one of many avatars who appeared on Earth. Whether or not equivalent events occurred in previous rounds or on previous globes, esotericists should acknowledge the uniqueness of Christ’s Palestinian mission for our present globe and round. Such acknowledgement would go a long way to meeting Christian demands that the incarnation be recognized as the pivotal event in history, effecting changes in humanity’s very nature and potential.

Christian theologians would also reject the esoteric depiction of Christ as “not sufficiently divine.” In response, esotericists should emphasize that the Christ was deified to higher degree than is envisioned by the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis. They should emphasize that the seventh initiation, which Christ attained or is the process of attaining, is the highest possible on this planet. Christhood, to quote Anna Kingsford, “is attained by the reception . . . of the Logos. This accomplished, the two natures, the Divine and the human, combine.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the Christ’s planetary role was, and remains, to express the Second Aspect of Deity: the aspect of Love-Wisdom. Bailey explained:

At the sixth and seventh initiations the first, or will, aspect shines forth, and from being a Master of Compassion and a Lord of Love the adept becomes something more. He enters into a still higher consciousness than that of the group, and becomes God-conscious. The great will or purpose of the Logos becomes his.¹⁴⁷

Leadbeater affirmed that the Christ “is so utterly an expression or manifestation of the

Blessed Trinity that, for us at our stage, we can make no distinction between them.”¹⁴⁸

Theologians might complain that, no matter how “divine” the esoteric Christ is purported to be, his relationship with the Father is by adoption. (Adoptionism, we recall, was promoted by Paul but rejected by the fourth gospel and the ecumenical councils.) Yet that complaint may be unfounded. According to esoteric teachings, the Christ possessed a divine monad, a fragment of logocic essence and intent, from the very instant of his individualized existence. Even if that occurred “as late” as the Lemurian epoch, it would still be “before all ages,” as the term was understood in biblical times. Traditional Christians and esotericists can jointly affirm that Christ was and is divine.

Esoteric teachings, of course, assert that *all* human beings have a divine monad, and theologians would question whether enough distinction is being made between the Christ and humanity. The difference is that, by the time of his Palestinian mission, Christ had attained monadic consciousness; we, by the most optimistic assessment, are in the earliest stages of such awakening.¹⁴⁹ Theologians should also remember that the Fourth Council of Constantinople, which stripped us of our innate divinity, never enjoyed the same authority as did the earlier councils, even in the eyes of mainstream Christians. Anglicans and Lutherans, in particular, accept the decrees of only the first four ecumenical councils: Nicaea through Chalcedon.

The Hypostatic Union

The doctrine of the hypostatic union secured a majority vote at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, but it failed to win consensus or produce clarity. Even after Chalcedon theologians in East and West struggled to understand what had been decided. Not surprisingly the hypostatic union is once again a contentious issue, this time between Christian doctrine and esoteric teachings. But it is not an insurmountable obstacle to synthesis.

Christians might be willing to adopt the convention of *naming* the human nature of Jesus

Christ “Jesus,” and the divine nature “Christ,” without sacrificing belief in a single personhood. Liberal theologians’ almost universal use of “Jesus,” and their near-rejection of the divinity of “Christ,” shows that such a convention is already taking shape. How traditional Christians would react to esotericists’ assertion that Jesus—representing the human nature—pre-existed his conception in Mary’s womb remains to be seen.

Despite what a superficial examination of esoteric Christology might suggest, esotericists are not necessarily Nestorians. Even if, as they insist, Jesus and the Christ had distinct origins, they should agree that there is merit in the notion that the two entities came together into a single person. We have already seen that “person” has a larger meaning in theological discourse than it does in everyday usage. Esotericists could affirm that, during his three-year ministry Jesus–Christ acted, spoke, thought, and reflected on himself as a unified person. By analogy, the solar angel and the human monad had distinct origins, but their present union is so strong that the angel serves as the individual’s higher Self. Few people would regard their solar angels as “someone else.”

The more serious point of contention is the permanence of the hypostatic union. Christian doctrine asserts the continuation of the hypostatic union beyond the resurrection. Yet that assertion has little scriptural support and, as we have seen, only implied support from the ecumenical councils. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that the union was preserved at the crucifixion because it did not depend on a physical body.¹⁵⁰

Christian theologians insist that the hypostatic union was essential to explain the redemption—though that may not be true for all theories of atonement. Esotericists also affirm a “hypostatic union,” albeit with a slight redefinition of that term. They regard Christ as one who combined divine and human natures—before, during and after the period when he overshadowed Jesus. Leadbeater, who emphasized Christ’s identity with the Second Aspect of the Logos also described

Christ as “the head and front of humanity, the highest living man.”¹⁵¹ Whether or not Christians would accept such redefinition, they might be willing to concede that new revelation makes possible revised perspectives on the hypostatic union.

Yet another affirmation of the “hypostatic union” comes from esotericists’ recognition of the gradual awakening of the inner divinity of the monad within every member of the human family. Awakening of that divinity can be explained by the process of theosis or, equivalently, by progress on the initiatory path. And as Sergei Bulgakov suggested, the whole of humanity can participate in the hypostatic union through theosis. Few would doubt that the Master Jesus has already reached that stage.

The Palestinian and Ongoing Mission

The purpose of Christ’s earthly mission never became crystallized in dogma, and the range of theories promoted by segments of traditional Christianity is broad enough that esotericists can find areas of agreement within that range.

Esotericists could endorse the moral influence theory of atonement, but they would see great merit in Eastern Orthodox teaching, in which redemption is seen as a great act of healing and transformation, after which humanity’s divine destiny became attainable. The descent into human form by the Divine, according to the stronger forms of theosis, permanently expanded human nature and consciousness. Kenosis and theosis become complementary consequences of the hypostatic union.¹⁵² Leadbeater applauded the language of the Athanasian Creed that described Christ as “[e]qual to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. . . . One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God.”¹⁵³

Esotericists’ reluctance to discuss the resurrection and their silence on the post-resurrection appearance of Christ are impediments to convergence with Christian doctrine. They will have to address those issues and

offer constructive suggestions. Traditional Christians proclaim, with Paul: “[I]f Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”¹⁵⁴

The notion that Jesus and the Christ parted near the end of the Palestinian mission to perform distinct planetary roles could be unsettling for traditional Christians on two counts. They would be concerned about its impact on worship of the one they consider their risen Lord, “sitting at the right hand of the Father.” And members of sacramental churches might well feel that any suggestion that Christ did not die on the cross would undermine the validity of the Eucharist.

To help alleviate the first concern esotericists need to emphasize that, according to trans-Himalayan teachings, the Master Jesus retains special responsibility for Christianity and the Christ has overall responsibility for world religions. They should also point out the divine stature of the Christ and also the deification of Jesus by virtue of his high initiation. The issue of the Eucharist involves many factors, including whether the real presence should refer to the Christ rather than Jesus, and whether the sacrificial intent of the Eucharist actually requires Christ’s death on the cross. These issues are too complex to be resolved here, but Christians should be reassured by the writings of Leadbeater and Geoffrey Hodson, who were priests in the Liberal Catholic Church as well as Theosophists. They affirmed not only the real presence in the Eucharist but also the concept of transubstantiation.¹⁵⁵

Traditional Christians revere Jesus Christ as head of the church.¹⁵⁶ Yet such a depiction may underestimate the importance of his work. To quote Bailey, the Christ of Christianity

has been for two thousand years a silent, passive Figure, hidden behind a multitude of words written by a multitude of men (commentators and preachers). The church has pointed us to the dying Christ upon the Cross and not to the living, working, active, present Christ Who has been with us in bodily Presence (according to His promise) for twenty centuries.¹⁵⁷

She added:

We need to awaken faith in the factual nature of divine revelation, and galvanize the church of Christ into a truer appreciation of Him and of His work. It is the living, acting, thinking Christ with whom we must deal, remembering always that the Gospel story is eternally true and only needs re-interpreting in the light of its place in the long succession of divine revelations. His Mission on earth two thousand years ago is a part of that continuity and is not an extraordinary story, having no relation to the past, emphasizing a period of only 33 years and presenting no clear hope for the future.¹⁵⁸

Like traditional Christians, esotericists look forward to Christ’s second coming, or “reappearance.” But the two sides are far apart in describing the form it will take and the circumstances in which it will happen. Esotericists reject suggestions that Jesus will reappear, except perhaps in the general externalization of the Hierarchy; it is the Christ who will reappear. They totally discount the apocalyptic scenarios, promoted by “end-times” fundamentalists.

Esotericists reject notions that the Christ will reappear to restore order to an unruly world. Rather, they envision humanity as capable and responsible for responding to the message of Christ’s earlier appearance and taking definite strides towards the implementation of universal love, brotherhood/sisterhood, sharing, and group consciousness. The Christ, esotericists affirm, will reappear only when humanity has put its house in order and can provide an environment in which he could carry out a meaningful mission.

We do not know when or where the Christ will reappear. Nor do we know what specific form the reappearance will take, though there are suggestions that his presence will be expressed in groups of people as well as in an individual body. Moreover, we are told that the Christ will be overshadowed by a still higher entity, the Avatar of Synthesis.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps we can see a parallel here with the de-

scent, foretold by Christ, of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost.

Concluding Remarks

This article has examined the depictions of Jesus the Christ and his mission offered by traditional Christian doctrine and by modern esoteric teachings. Comparison reveals areas of fundamental disagreement but also greater consensus than might have been anticipated.

Not surprisingly, a major obstacle to mutual understanding is terminology. Theologians in the early church went to considerable lengths to craft language to express the doctrines being formulated. Their efforts were not entirely successful; differences between Greek and Latin terms were always problematic, and uncertainties remained even within the eastern and western churches. Precisely what the doctrinal formulations meant or implied was never quite clear, and their meaning has not been clarified by the passage of time. Sadly, ecclesiastical authorities locked themselves into notions of infallibility, limiting the opportunity for new insights. As a result the major Christian denominations are committed to dogmas based on a Greco-Roman world view at variance with modern scientific, philosophical, sociological, and psychological opinion.

Esoteric teachings are not homogeneous either. Differences are found between the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and Max Heindel, on the one hand, and trans-Himalayan teachings, on the other; some differences exist between the Theosophists and Alice Bailey. Nevertheless, all agree that Jesus and the Christ had distinct origins and separated at or near the time of the crucifixion. Steiner and Heindel regarded the Christ as a solar spirit or archangel. Trans-Himalayan teachers regarded him as a member of the human lifestream, whose divinity was expressed through high initiation. They also assert that he carried out his Palestinian mission through a mandate from the Planetary or Solar Logos.

Traditional Christians and esotericists can agree that divine and human natures were jointly expressed by Jesus Christ during his

redemptive mission. The meaning of “redemption” is of course debated, and Christians themselves hold widely different views on that issue. While esotericists—along with many modern Christians—regard penal theories of atonement as repugnant, they can find considerable merit in the Eastern Orthodox view that Christ’s mission was one of healing, transformation, and theosis. Some Orthodox theologians have suggested that Christ came to unlock humanity’s latent divinity. Esotericists would go farther to depict Christ’s mission as one of planetary initiation.

Christians and esotericists can agree that Jesus and the Christ—envisioned as united or distinct—continue to guide religion, with special emphasis on Christianity. Although the two sides would differ on detail, they could also agree that a major new intervention in human affairs lies ahead.

Hindering further convergence is the issue of whether divine revelation ended with scripture, capable only of subsequent interpretation and clarification, or whether new knowledge has been revealed as humanity became capable of assimilating and utilizing it. Esotericists take the latter viewpoint, insisting on the possibility of new revelation and new insights. The problem is determining how we can discern authentic revelation. Esotericists believe that modern esoteric teachings flowed from sources high in the Planetary Hierarchy. Yet they struggle, as do many others, to discriminate among competing claims and distinguish meaningful knowledge from dangerous misinformation and trivia.

This article does not claim to supply all the answers relating to Christology. Moreover, Christology is just one area separating traditional Christians from esotericists. But establishing a conversation in this area is essential if more comprehensive bridging endeavors are to succeed. While the challenges should not be underestimated, the benefits could be substantial; some two billion people identify themselves as Christian. The hope is that practicing Christians will feel more comfortable when they venture into esoteric studies, and that esotericists will feel more comforta-

ble expressing their understanding of reality in Christian language and images. The potential for success is particularly great at this time, as Christianity moves beyond its Pauline, Sixth Ray character and esotericism reassesses its own idealism.

The goal should not be to find a lowest common denominator to which each side could grudgingly subscribe. We need to build a larger, more inclusive truth. Synthesis of Christological understanding may not be attainable on the intellectual level, where both Christian doctrine and esoteric teachings currently reside, but it may be possible at the buddhic, or intuitional, level. The fact that esotericists find more in common with Eastern Orthodoxy than with western Christianity may reflect the emphasis placed on mystical theology in the Orthodox churches. Christianity's own esoteric tradition lies primarily in mysticism and mystical theology.

The history of western Christianity can point to examples of important internal synthesis, and perhaps we can find inspiration in the work of the 16th-century Anglican clergyman Richard Hooker. He steered his church onto the *via media*, or "middle road," between Roman Catholicism and continental Protestantism, building on the strengths of each while avoiding its respective weaknesses. "[I]n a time of bitter controversy," his admirers declared, Hooker achieved "not a compromise for the sake of peace, but . . . a comprehension for the sake of truth."¹⁶⁰

¹ A popular view is that Jesus was a social or political activist.

² Anna Kingsford served briefly as president of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society and later founded the Hermetic Society, a forerunner of the Golden Dawn. She did not subscribe to the *mahatmas'* teachings, so valued by the Theosophists in India, and died the year Helena Blavatsky published *The Secret Doctrine*.

³ Steiner served as head of the German section of the Theosophical Society, but he never absorbed much of the Society's teachings, and his

work more closely reflects Rosicrucian tradition.

⁴ Heindel was sometimes accused of plagiarizing Steiner's work, but he attributed his information to "Elder Brothers of the Rose Cross" whom he first encountered in 1908. Moreover, Heindel provided insights not found in Steiner's lectures and books

⁵ "Trans-Himalayan teachings" owe their origins to certain masters, or adepts, in Tibet and India. They were communicated to a western audience by Helena Blavatsky, other members of the Theosophical Society, Helena Roerich, and Alice Bailey.

⁶ The first edition of Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* was published in Adyar, India. Besant's discussion of the symbolism of the incarnation and the atonement owes much to Kingsford.

⁷ *Matthew* 16:14. All scriptural citations are from the King James Bible.

⁸ Since our objective is to capture mainstream Christian beliefs, challenges to the scriptural record are not considered herein.

⁹ For example, *Mark* 10:47; *Matthew* 15:22; *Luke* 19:47.

¹⁰ For example, *Matthew* 16:16.

¹¹ Self-reference is evident in *Matthew* 12:40 and *Luke* 18:31 but less clear in *Mark* 8:38 and *John* 1:51.

¹² For example, *Mark* 7:28; *Matthew* 8:2.

¹³ For example, *Mark* 3:11; *Matthew* 14:33. "Unclean spirits" are customarily interpreted as demons.

¹⁴ *1 Corinthians* 15:45.

¹⁵ *Hebrews* 4:14-5:10.

¹⁶ For example, *1 Thessalonians* 1:1-5; 5:23-28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-145.

¹⁸ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2/e (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 142.

¹⁹ *Philippians* 2:6-11.

²⁰ *Romans* 1:4.

²¹ *Mark* 1:11.

²² *John* 1:1-14. Elsewhere (e.g., *Luke* 4:36; 10:39), "logos" refers to words of power uttered by Jesus.

²³ Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea was so impressed with Philo that he declared him to be a church father!

²⁴ *John* 1:2.

²⁵ Athenagoras of Athens, *A Plea For the Christians* §X, trans. B. Pratten, *Early Christian Writings*.

- ²⁶ In a parallel metamorphosis, the grammatically feminine *Chokmah* took on masculine qualities in the Kabbalah.
- ²⁷ Ecumenical councils contrast with regional councils, or synods, attended by bishops in a particular region and whose resolutions were binding only in that region.
- ²⁸ William P. DuBose, *The Ecumenical Councils* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1897), 223-241.
- ²⁹ First Council of Nicaea, "Profession of Faith," §1. Citations from the ecumenical councils are all taken from Norman P. Tanner, ed. & trans. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1990.
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/>, last accessed Nov. 9, 2011.
- ³⁰ First Council of Constantinople, "Exposition of the 150 Fathers."
- ³¹ Ibid., "Letter of the Bishops."
- ³² Council of Ephesus, "Twelve Anathemas."
- ³³ Ibid., "Formula of Union."
- ³⁴ Ibid., "Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius."
- ³⁵ Council of Chalcedon, "Definition of the Faith."
- ³⁶ Second Council of Constantinople, "Anathemas Against the 'Three Chapters,'" §2.
- ³⁷ Ibid., §9.
- ³⁸ Third Council of Constantinople, "Exposition of Faith."
- ³⁹ O'Collins, *Christology*, 177-180.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 185-186.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 183. Theologians cite the etymology of *prosōpon/persona* to suggest that a person of the Trinity is the mouthpiece through which a particular quality of the Godhead speaks.
- ⁴² After the primeval catastrophe the divine vessels were not repaired directly. Instead, five divine "personifications," or *partzufim* (singular *partzuf*) were created. In a second stage the *partzufim* were organized into the familiar ten sephiroth.
- ⁴³ *Philippians* 2:7.
- ⁴⁴ O'Collins, *Christology*, 173-174. Italicization in original.
- ⁴⁵ *The Anathematizations of the Emperor Justinian Against Origen*.
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.xii.x.html#fnf_xii.x-p1.2, last accessed Nov. 9, 2011. The emperor's anathemas of Origen are often attributed to the Second Council of Constantinople, which he convened. But no record exists that they were ever put to a vote, and they do not appear in the council's proceedings. Notwithstanding, the anathemas are routinely cited to refute not only pre-existence of the soul but also reincarnation.
- ⁴⁶ *Luke* 17:19.
- ⁴⁷ Some scholars have argued that Paul either did not know of, or ignored, the real message of Christ. He referred surprisingly little to Christ's ministry prior to the crucifixion. But it should be noted that the gospels were written after Paul's death.
- ⁴⁸ *1 Corinthians* 15:3, 22. See also *1 Peter* 2:21-24.
- ⁴⁹ Some said the ransom was paid to God, others to Satan.
- ⁵⁰ An influential book exploring the notion of Christ's victory over death was Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1931).
- ⁵¹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God [Became] Man"), c.1097 CE.
- ⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Shorter Summa*, trans. C. Vollert (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press) §231, 297.
- ⁵³ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 219-220, 223.
- ⁵⁴ "Salvation" and "salve" come from *sōtēria* via the late Latin *salvationem*.
- ⁵⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. anon., (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1944/1976), 153.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 155.
- ⁵⁷ *2 Peter* 1:4.
- ⁵⁸ J. A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification," *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105-107.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 107.
- ⁶⁰ *John* 1:14.
- ⁶¹ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 1933, trans. B. Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2008), 187.
- ⁶² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, ch. 11, §123. Online:
http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2_ch11.htm, last accessed Nov. 9, 2011.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Nicene Creed*. trans. A. Mingana.
http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/theodore_of_mopsuestia_nicene_02_text.htm, last accessed Nov. 9, 2011.
- ⁶⁵ Nestorianism is relevant to our theme only because it contributed to the debate over the hypostatic union. Neither it nor monophysitism

- can be considered an esoteric branch of Christianity.
- ⁶⁶ Jakob Böhme, *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*. Reproduced in Robin Waterfield, ed., *Jacob Boehme* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2001), 214-239.
- ⁶⁷ Phineas P. Quimby, essay, "The Body of Jesus and the Body of Christ," Quimby Resource Center, 1863.
- ⁶⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1922), 56.
- ⁶⁹ Annie W. Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, reprint (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1914/2006), 69.
- ⁷⁰ Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, 1910, part III, ch. xv. <http://www.rosicrucian.com/rcc/rcceng00.htm>, last accessed Nov. 9, 2011.
- ⁷¹ Steiner, lecture, Berlin, Nov. 1913.
- ⁷² Rudolf Steiner, lecture, Berlin, Nov. 18, 1913, *The Fifth Gospel*, trans. A. R. Meuss, 3/e (Forest Row, U.K.: R. Steiner Press, 1995), 222.
- ⁷³ *Philippians 2:7*.
- ⁷⁴ Sandra Hodson, ed., *Illuminations of the Mystery Tradition* (Manila, Philippines: Theosophical Publ. House, 1992), 258.
- ⁷⁵ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 56-57. Jesus and Apollonius were close contemporaries; the latter's birth is placed as early as 15 CE, whereas Jesus is believed to have died in 30 CE. So their incarnations may have overlapped. Overlapping incarnations may not be possible for ordinary people, but Tibetan Buddhism speaks of bodhisattvas and even high lamas incarnating simultaneously in two or more bodies.
- ⁷⁶ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 56.
- ⁷⁷ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publ. House, 1925/1953), 42.
- ⁷⁸ Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, 74.
- ⁷⁹ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 57.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (New York: Lucis, 1949), 59.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Anna B. Kingsford, lecture, London, July 1881, *Clothed with the Sun*, 2/e (London: Watkins, 1889), 103.
- ⁸⁴ Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, 91ff.
- ⁸⁵ Steiner did not acknowledge the existence of a hierarchy of masters; consequently he assigned higher beings to the angelic hierarchy. Rosicrucians recognize masters like Christian Rosenkreutz but followed Steiner's lead in their depiction of Christ.
- ⁸⁶ Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, part III, ch. xv. Trans-Himalayan teachings do not recognize a "Sun period." They identify the previous phases of the planet's evolution as an unnamed Chain 1, the Venus Chain, and the Moon Chain.
- ⁸⁷ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 43. See also Charles W. Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publ. House, c.1923/2011), 112. This work was first published in 1983, long after Leadbeater's death.
- ⁸⁸ Besant & Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and Wither*, 77.
- ⁸⁹ Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology II*, 210.
- ⁹⁰ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis, 1957), 557. Elsewhere Bailey seems less sure that the Christ incarnated as Krishna. See *The Reappearance of the Christ* (New York: Lucis, 1948), 107; *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis, 1960), 254.
- ⁹¹ See for example Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 43.
- ⁹² Annie W. Besant & Charles W. Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and Wither* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publ. House, 1913/1971), 78. See also Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age II* (New York: Lucis, 1955), 596. According to early Theosophist Alfred P. Sinnett, Maitreya will become the Buddha for the sixth root race. See his *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Theosophical Publ. House, 1883/1972), 130.
- ⁹³ See for example Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis*, 106-107.
- ⁹⁴ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine I* (Theosophical Univ. Press, 1888), 246.
- ⁹⁵ John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: John Knox, 1963). Robinson was the Anglican bishop of Woolwich, England.
- ⁹⁶ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 397.
- ⁹⁷ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 43.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 44.
- ⁹⁹ John F. Nash, "Sanat Kumara," *The Beacon*, March/April 2002, 13-20. John F. Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny* (Bloomington, IN: Autho-rhouse), 83-84.
- ¹⁰⁰ Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, 38.
- ¹⁰¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology II* (New York: Lucis, 1942), 60.
- ¹⁰² Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age II*, 468.
- ¹⁰³ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 347.

- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 605-606.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 299.
¹⁰⁶ Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, part III, ch. xv.
¹⁰⁷ Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, 39. Parenthesis in original.
¹⁰⁸ Luke 1:35; Matthew 17:5.
¹⁰⁹ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 307
¹¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹¹ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 730.
¹¹² Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis*, 143-147. Leadbeater explained Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of Egyptian initiation rites. He also declared that Jesus was stoned to death, not crucified. Since Leadbeater left the work unpublished, we do not know whether those statements represented his considered opinion.
¹¹³ John 20:20-29.
¹¹⁴ I Corinthians 15:44.
¹¹⁵ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 697. See also Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis, 1925), 772.
¹¹⁶ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis, 1960), 730.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 83-84.
¹¹⁸ Anna Kingsford & Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way, or the Finding of Christ* (London: Field & Tuer, 3/e, 1890), 96-97.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 113.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 106.
¹²¹ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publ. House, 1920), especially 198-199.
¹²² Steiner, lecture, Berlin, Nov. 1913.
¹²³ Kingsford & Maitland, *The Perfect Way*, 176.
¹²⁴ Dion Fortune, *Applied Magic* (Wellingborough, U.K.: Aquarian Press, 1962), 20-21.
¹²⁵ Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, 89.
¹²⁶ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 28-29.
¹²⁷ Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, 109-110. Echoing one of Kingsford's themes, Besant related the "veil of matter" to the Cosmic Mary, the World Mother.
¹²⁸ Kingsford & Maitland, *The Perfect Way*, 188.
¹²⁹ Alice A. Bailey, *Education in the New Age* (New York: Lucis, 1954), 53.
¹³⁰ Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, 140-141.
¹³¹ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 511-512, 590.
¹³² Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 46-47. The Mahachohan heads up the great Third Ray ashram, under which are major ashrams expressing the fourth-through-seventh rays.
¹³³ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 400-401. Parenthesis in original.
¹³⁴ Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, 471.
¹³⁵ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age II*, 405, 426. Parenthesis in original.
¹³⁶ Ibid.
¹³⁷ Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, 13-14.
¹³⁸ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 161-162.
¹³⁹ Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, 122.
¹⁴⁰ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 402ff.
¹⁴¹ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 339-340.
¹⁴² Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 401.
¹⁴³ Mark 5:7; Matthew 11:25.
¹⁴⁴ Scientists even speak of an infinity of other universes, with which we shall never come into contact.
¹⁴⁵ Terminology is once again problematic. However, "Second Aspect" does not imply Sabellianism or modalism; nor does "Second Logos" imply tritheism.
¹⁴⁶ Kingsford & Maitland, *The Perfect Way*, 297.
¹⁴⁷ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 22.
¹⁴⁸ Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis*, 117.
¹⁴⁹ "Consciousness," normally considered to be a soul attribute, may not be the appropriate term to describe monadic awareness. See for example Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny*, 266-270.
¹⁵⁰ See the discussion in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: the Person and His Work*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 2005), vol. 1, 190.
¹⁵¹ Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis*, 116.
¹⁵² See the extensive discussion in Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 213-47.
¹⁵³ Leadbeater, *Christian Gnosis*, 116-117.
¹⁵⁴ I Corinthians 15:14.
¹⁵⁵ Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments*, 23, 119, 179. Also Sandra Hodson, ed., *Light of the Sanctuary* (Manila, Philippines: Theosophical Publishers, 1988), 104.
¹⁵⁶ Roman Catholics view the pope as Christ's "vicar on Earth" and temporal head of the church.
¹⁵⁷ Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, 64.
¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹⁵⁹ Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 303.
¹⁶⁰ Collect for Nov. 3, feast of Richard Hooker, *Book of Common Prayer*. The outcome of Hooker's efforts was the emergence of Anglicanism as a distinct branch of sacramental

Christianity. For a discussion of the *via media* and related issues see John F. Nash, *The Sacramental Church* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), especially 47-48, 120.