

# The Nature of Reality: A Christian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

Part One delineates the history of science and its primacy as to the nature of reality and addresses issues that need to be resolved concerning quantum theory and, to a lesser extent, relativity theory. Part Two delineates a modified form of idealism as a possible solution to the relevant theories. Part Three investigates the theological implications of said solution. Part Four advocates Christian mysticism as a practical method of personal confirmation.

## Introduction

The following is an inquiry into life's deepest mysteries. The mysteries themselves are threefold:

### 1. God

The nature of God; His existence apart from the universe and his interaction with the universe (including man).

### 2. Spirit

The nature and existence of the human spirit; its interaction with the universe and with God.

### 3. Eternal life

The incorruptibility of the human spirit; the nature and understanding of such existence.

The inquiry is written from within the context of christianity; the solution is at once both modern and timeless.

## Part One: Science

### Intro

Although scientific methodology has existed for one thousand years, the *scientific method* was only established in the early 19th century. There are many variations but the simplest is as follows:

1. Pose a question.
2. Gather information.
3. Form a hypothesis.

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<sup>1</sup> The ideas expressed in this paper were the author's beliefs circa 2012, but do not necessarily represent the author's current views. A major revision is forthcoming. All comments welcome. Email - richardstovall42@gmail.com.

4. Perform an experiment.
5. Advance a theory.

This process can be applied not only to science but other disciplines as well (and is the basis for everything written here).

## Quantum theory

### Historical premise

*Classical physics* has been considered the “common sense” physics of everyday life. There appeared to be three directions (*dimensions*) to space, one direction in time (forward) and solid matter. Space and time seemed to be continuous while matter was composed of discrete *particles* known as atoms. Light was assumed to also be composed of particles. There were three turning points leading to the modern form of this understanding:

1. 450 BC Democritus defines the atom.
2. ca. 300 BC Euclid’s geometry leads to Euclidean space.
3. 1704 Sir Isaac Newton - The corpuscular (particle) theory of light

This was the progression of understanding up through the year 1800.

After 1800, several issues arose that would overturn the concepts of classical physics.

In 1803 was Thomas Young’s *double-slit experiment* in which it was shown that coherent light going through parallel slits creates a *wave-like* interference pattern. In 1838 Michael Faraday discovered cathode rays, later determined to be *electrons*. In 1859 Gustav Kirchhoff’s *black body radiation* problem had shown that the amount of energy output was dependant on the frequency of radiation instead of being equally proportional. In 1877 was Ludwig Boltzman’s suggestion of *discrete energy states* within physical systems. In 1887 came Heinrich Hertz’s discovery of the *photoelectric effect*, showing that matter emits electrons as the result of exposure to light. All of this led Physicists to a quandary as to whether energy was composed of waves, particles or, as it sometimes appeared to be, both simultaneously.

In 1900 Max Planck proposed the hypothesis of energy quantized into discrete amounts as a solution to the black body problem. The amount of energy became known as the *Planck constant*. 1905 Albert Einstein used the Planck constant in his photoelectric effect solution, confirming its validity. Quantum mechanics (or *quantum theory*) was slowly developed by many physicists over the next twenty years. Those involved included Niels Bohr, Max Born, Louis de Broglie, Paul Dirac, Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, David Hilbert, John von Neumann, Wolfgang Pauli, Max Planck, and Erwin Schrödinger. By 1925 Bohr and Heisenberg had published the results and in 1926 light quanta were termed

*photons*. In the summer of 1927 Heisenberg introduced the *Uncertainty principle*, stating that it is impossible to know both the position and momentum of a particle at the same time. In October of 1927, at the Fifth Solvay Conference in Brussels, quantum theory was “officially” accepted.

### **Copenhagen interpretation**

Quantum theory by itself is only a set of equations and formulae. It needs an interpretation for it to be a true explanation of reality. In 1927 Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg developed the Copenhagen interpretation which became the ‘standard’ interpretation for most (also referred to, semi-derogatorily, as the ‘shut up and calculate’ interpretation). This interpretation posits that in its *wave function* state, questions about the particle are meaningless, as it is impossible to know the condition of the particle until observation. While this interpretation may have appeal due to its simplicity, it doesn’t address the many paradoxes inherent in quantum theory:

**1. Wave-particle duality.** When a particle is in its wave function state, it is in a superposition of possibilities which expands through time until an observation takes place. At that moment it changes from one of several different possible states to one specific position. This is known as the *collapse of the wave function*. There is an instantaneous change from a state of probabilities to that of a particle.

**2. The Uncertainty principle.** While this states that it is not possible to observe both the position and momentum of a particle, it is not due to problems of measurement, e. g. the state of technology. *It is a statement of the fundamental property of quantum systems.*

**3. The double-slit experiment.** In this experiment photons (or, in theory, any beam of particles) is fired in a straight line through two slits in a shield and allowed to strike a screen on the other side. If light were composed of particles, there should appear two bands on the screen, corresponding with the two slits. Instead, multiple bands appear, reflecting the diffraction pattern caused by the interference of the two waves coming through both slits. Strangely, if an observation is made of the beam *before* it passes through the slits, the beam will appear as only two bands on the screen, reflecting its particle nature. The act of observation changes the nature of the beam. Stranger still, if the intensity of the beam is turned down to the point of only one photon at a time being released, the build up of photons will still show a diffraction pattern; *the wave function of the photon interferes with itself*. This behavior has been observed using carbon ‘buckyballs’ instead of photons, molecules large enough to be seen with a microscope.

**4. Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen (EPR) paradox.** Designed in 1935 by Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen as a “thought experiment”. If a pair of photons are entangled (*quantum entanglement*), then travel great distances apart and a measurement is made, then we would *instantly* know the state of the other particle, in direct violation of both the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) and the uncertainty principle. Einstein’s purpose was to show that there must be hidden variables in quantum theory, and that wave function collapse only appeared to be random. The only other alternative is that there is a *non-local* (not part of the universe) transfer of information. In 1964 John Stewart Bell proposed a theorem (*Bell’s theorem*) as an experiment to prove quantum entanglement. In 1982 Alain Aspect performed the experiment supporting quantum entanglement and non-local causation/information.

**5. Schrödinger’s cat paradox.** A thought experiment devised in 1935 by Erwin Schrödinger. In *The present situation in quantum mechanics* He wrote:

“One can even set up quite ridiculous cases. A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following device (which must be secured against direct interference by the cat): in a Geiger counter, there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small that perhaps in the course of the hour, one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges, and through a relay releases a hammer that shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed’.

If on the other hand an atom has decayed then the cat is dead. According to the Copenhagen interpretation, since the system before measurement is meaningless, then *there is indeterminacy as to whether the cat is alive or dead.*

**6. Wheeler’s delayed choice experiment.** A thought experiment proposed by John Archibald Wheeler. A variation of the double-slit experiment in which the decision as to whether to detect the path of the particle or to detect its wave interference is decided after it passes through the slits, instead of before, thereby determining which slit it passed through *after it has passed*. The first experiment, a variation known as the quantum eraser experiment, was performed in 1999 by Yoon-Ho Kim, R. Yu, S.P. Kulik, Y.H. Shih, and Marlin O. Scully. The standard experiment was performed in 2007 by the team of Alain Aspect, Philippe Grangier and Jean-François Roch. Both experiments gave positive results.

## The Theory of relativity

### **Space-time continuum**

The theory of relativity is actually two theories, both developed by Albert Einstein. *Special relativity* was published in 1905 and applies to the sub-atomic field. *General relativity* was published in 1916 and applies to the cosmological realm. These theories superseded Isaac Newton's 200 year old theory of mechanics. With relativity, two concepts changed. First, the separation between space and time disappears and is replaced by the *spacetime continuum*, in which time becomes a fourth dimension, at right angles to the three dimensions of space. Second, time and space become relative to different observers rather than fixed amounts. With relativity theory objects warp the three dimensions of space into the fourth dimension of time.

Most important to realize from this is that the spacetime continuum is an *intrinsic part of the universe*, not something within which the universe exists. This is also supported by the Big Bang theory, in which the universe is created from a quantum singularity, a point at which the laws of physics break down and there are no longer the concepts of space, time, matter and energy. Flowing from this is the hypothesis of quantum spacetime, in which all of the universe can be thought of in terms of quantum theory.

### **Conclusion Part One**

Two common arguments against the Copenhagen interpretation are Einstein's hidden variables and later, Everett's "many worlds" (parallel universes) interpretation. Both of these fall prey to *Occam's razor* principle, which states that out of many hypotheses the one with the fewest assumptions is most likely the correct one. As stated before, the Copenhagen interpretation is the most simplistic, but with its head-in-the-sand approach it is not complete; there is another way to view reality.

### **Part Two: Philosophy**

#### **Introduction**

Part two revolves around both of the following:

*Epistemology*: The study of the nature and grounds of knowledge, including its limitations.

*Ontology*: The study of the nature of being and existence, including relevant theories.

## Reality

## **Realism**

Like classical physics, *Realism* is the “common sense” view of everyday life; the belief that there is an *objective reality* “out there”, that exists independent of our observation of it. And also like classical physics, realism has had to contend with the results of quantum theory. With quantum theory a particle spends the majority of its life as a wave function and only momentarily as a particle, when an observation occurs. Objective reality then becomes a composite of “moments” rather than a continuous physical reality.

## **Idealism**

*Idealism* is the belief that reality as we perceive it is not independent of our observations and is fundamentally a mental construction or otherwise immaterial. *Metaphysically* (pertaining to the fundamental nature of being) idealism is the belief in the incorporeal or experiential nature of reality. It can be divided in time into two broad categories:

1. *Classical idealism*. Historically, idealism has its roots in Greece with Anaxagoras (480 BC) who believed in a universal “Mind” that tied the universe together and connected individuals to the universe, i.e. a pathway to the divine. Plato (428-348 BC) created the concept of perfect ideals from which all of reality has its basis. Plotinus (ca. 253) advanced the belief of the “One” as a first cause and the intellect as the perceiver.

3. *Subjective idealism* is the belief that only minds and their contents exist. Bishop George Berkeley (18th century) was an originator of this view who held that the experience of an objective reality only exists in the consciousness of individuals and the mind of God. A modern advocate was Sir James Jeans (1887-1946) the English physicist and mathematician who, in an interview published in the Observer (London) said:

“I incline to the idealistic theory that consciousness is fundamental, and that the material universe is derivative from consciousness, not consciousness from the the material universe... In general the universe seems to me to be nearer a great thought than a great machine.”

## **Consciousness**

*Consciousness* is that which transcends the physical world. It is our awareness *of* the universe. Consciousness is made apparent by the following:

**1. Thought.** While a person has thoughts, the thoughts are not the person. This can be established by realizing that anytime the thought process is taking place our consciousness can independently be aware of those thoughts.

**2. Emotion.** The same can be applied to emotions. While we have feelings we can at the same time be consciously aware of them.

**3. Action.** Most, if not all actions are the result of thoughts and/or emotions. Again, our consciousness can be independently aware of all three taking place.

In short, Consciousness has *possession* of but is not to be *identified* with thoughts, emotions and action.

### Quantum theory revisited

#### **Consciousness collapse history**

One overarching issue with all interpretations of quantum theory is resolving what constitutes an observer. Several of the founders of quantum theory including Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, Erwin Schrödinger and Eugene Wigner, had already realized the correlation between quantum theory and philosophy, specifically mind/body dualism. By 1939 F. London and E. Bauer presented the idea of consciousness being the lower boundary of an observer.

#### **Schrödinger's cat part 2: Wigner's friend**

*Wigner's friend* is another thought experiment proposed by Eugene Wigner and is a variation of Schrödinger's cat experiment. In it, Wigner's friend performs the Schrödinger's cat experiment in Wigner's absence. It is only upon Wigner's return that he is told the results of the experiment. The question then becomes that of whether or not the superposition state became part of a larger state including the friend until he returned. Wigner reasoned that consciousness causes the collapse of the wave function therefore the state is determined the moment his friend found the result of the experiment. This later became known as the *consciousness causes collapse interpretation*.

#### **Other viewpoints**

Werner Heisenberg believed that collapse took place with the mind of the observer.

Wolfgang Pauli's position on quantum theory was to bridge the gulf between objective and subjective realities by interjecting an intermediate stage between the two referred to as "lucid platonic mysticism".

Informational theories posit that reality is essentially informational in nature. Physicist John Archibald Wheeler (who worked with Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein) believed that it is not unreasonable to imagine that information sits at the core of reality. He advocated the *participatory universe* in which the universe remains in a state of quantum superpositions throughout history until consciousness is available to collapse all the states back to the beginning of the universe.

The French theoretical physicist Bernard d'Espagnat (who worked with Niels Bohr and Louis de Broglie), well known for his work on the nature of reality, writing in an article titled *Quantum weirdness: What we call 'reality' is just a state of mind* said:

"What quantum mechanics tell us, I believe, is surprising to say the least. It tells us that the basic components of objects - the particles, electrons, quarks etc. - cannot be thought of as "self-existent"

And in the paper *The Quantum Theory and Reality* he writes:

"The doctrine that the world is made up of objects whose existence is independent of *human consciousness* turns out to be in conflict with quantum mechanics and with facts established by experiment."

Physicist Fred Alan Wolf believes that quantum wave functions exist as possibility-waves in sub-spacetime and become probability-curves upon consciousness' observation of such.

## Hypothesis

### **True reality**

As can be seen from all of the above, the objective reality that has been taken for granted by most is erroneous. This does not mean to imply that there is no "objective" reality; only that our definition of it must change. Information appears to be the basis of objective reality. With quantum theory the wave function exists as a superposition of many possibilities. This delineates the range of information available, or to put it another way,



*Objective reality only exists as potentialities within specific parameters.*

Likewise subjective “only” reality is incorrect. Consciousness is *the* subjective reality working in tandem with the informational “objective” reality. Consciousness is needed to collapse the wave function. *Consciousness is not emergent but is a fundamental aspect of reality.*

The interaction of Information/potentialities and our subjective experience of such become the true reality. *Our experience is made “manifest” through the interaction of potentialities and consciousness.*

#### Conclusion Part Two

All this of course leads us back to the original inquiry; God, spirit and eternal life. How can we apply all of this knowledge in a meaningful way that will enrich our lives rather than only an abstract understanding?

### **Part Three: Theology**

#### Introduction

Because of the aforementioned informational nature of reality, Part Three uses the *metaphorical* approach to scripture. Although a literal interpretation is many times also possible (excepting allegory and parable), in all forms of interpretation the apparent lessons and applications are metaphorically derived irrespective of which method is used. The King James version of the bible is used. Where there is a need for more modern language and/or clarification, along with the original names for God (and His Son), those words are placed in brackets.

#### Relational reality

### **Spirit**

As has previously been established consciousness, being non-local, fulfills the role of the observer. Another term for consciousness, by definition of its transcendence and its being of the individual, is *spirit*. Also by definition of its being non-local, transcendent i.e. not a part of the space-time continuum, spirit is timeless. Rather than being everlasting, eternal must be rethought in terms of being “beyond” time itself. This manner of existence cannot be imagined within the confines of analytic thought but must be experienced. Spirit is therefore also incorruptible.

### **Panentheism**

*Panentheism* comes from the Greek, pan “all”, en “in”, Theos “God”, or “all-in-God” and is the belief that everything is in God but that God also extends beyond everything (not to be confused with pantheism which equates God with only the universe). In this view God is both *immanent* and *transcendent*. God in His immanence is the subjective reality that we experience and in His transcendence is the objective reality of information. This is made more evident through the following scriptures:

Acts 17:28.5 For in him we live, and move, and have our being;

Eph 4:6 One [Theos] and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Jer 23:24 Jer 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith [Yahweh]. Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith [Yahweh].

Ps 139:7-10 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

### **Informational/Experiential Theology**

While God creates objective reality through information, we in turn create subjective reality through our experience of it:

Genesis 2:19 And out of the ground [Yahweh Elohim] formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof.

In this manner, while God is the creator of the universe (information), God and the individual become co-creators of *reality*. *Reality is the interplay between the immanent and the transcendent.*

### **Egoism**

#### **Original sin**

While consciousness is that which has thoughts and emotions, our *identification* with those thoughts and emotions of the individual is the *ego*, *and is the result of sin*:

Genesis 2:17 But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.  
Genesis 3:6 ...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.  
Genesis 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked;

Metaphorically, in our desiring of the knowledge of good *and evil* we fell into the trap and in turn created the ego and forgot that we are spirits possessing thoughts and reversed the process, believing that we are thoughts possessing consciousness. The solution is the process of redemption whereby we reconcile ourselves back to God.

As a consequence of this we live in a fallen state of *egoism* and have a sinful nature i.e. are “bent” towards sin. Egoism is consistent with the other illusions found in parts One and Two. On the surface it appears to be “common sense” but looking at the deeper reality it is still an illusion, results in self-centeredness and works in conjunction with the other illusions; that of being a physical body (and brain), living in a universe “out there”.

### The path of salvation

The understanding of our fallen state necessitates the hope of a solution, or in christian vernacular, *salvation*. Within the New Testament scriptures, there can be found a process entailing a progressive knowledge of salvation.

This can also be found in the many different Greek words in the New Testament used for knowledge (broadly grouped from weakest to strongest):

1. Manthano: Increasing knowledge; learn.
2. Ginosko: Experiential progressive knowledge; understand, perceive.
3. Sunesis: Flowing knowledge, understanding.
4. Eido: Perceive, discern.
5. Dianoia: Mind, understanding.
6. Nous: intellect, perceiving, determining, understanding.
7. Oida: Intuitive knowledge, perceive, know.
8. Epiginosko: Thoroughly know.
9. Sophia: Wisdom, intelligence.
10. Gnosis: Intellectual knowledge; understand.
11. Epignosis: Precise, correct knowledge.

Salvation can be seen as a three step process. The following verse is all inclusive in its description of these steps:

1 John 5:20 And we [*intuitively*] know that the Son of [Theos] is come and hath given us an *understanding*, that we may [*experientially*] know him that is true, even in his Son [Iesus] Christ. This is the true [Theos], and eternal life.

While the following order is typical it can at times change depending on the individual and the circumstances:

## **1. The initial salvation experience**

This begins with the intuitive knowledge of our fallen state, the resultant sin and our necessity for repentance and forgiveness through Christ Iesus. It begins what Marcus J. Borg refers to in his book *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* as the state of *precritical naiveté*. While many individuals remain at this stage it is (hopefully) the precursor to a fuller understanding through knowledge. Some scriptures supporting this stage are as follows:

Acts 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards [Theos], and faith toward our lord [Iesus] Christ.

John 3:16 For [Theos] so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [believes] in him should not perish, but have [eternal] life.

John 8:55 Though you do not [*experientially*] know him, I [*intuitively*] know him.

Metaphorically this means believing in Christ's *message* that reconciliation is through rediscovering our true nature; Christ has shown us the path, from the initial intuitive stage and onwards until death.

## **2. The progression of understanding**

The next stage is understanding and involves many forms of knowledge: learning, perceiving, discerning, wisdom, intellectual etc. The natural progression is for it to become a bridge between stages one and three. It is to study the scriptures from within the context of what has been revealed within this document. Some relevant scriptures are as follows:

John 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your [understanding], that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect, will of [Theos].

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a[n adult], I ceased to do [childlike] things.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see [in a mirror dimly]; but then face to face: now I [experientially] know in part; but then shall I [thoroughly] know, even as also I am [thoroughly] known.

Ephesians 1:17-18.5 That the [Theos] of our Lord [Iesous] Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the [thorough] knowledge of him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened;

Philippians

Colossians 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the [correct] knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

### 3. Experiencing the presence of God

Also known as a spiritual awakening, this last stage has been the exception rather than the rule. To experience the presence of God is to experience that which is eternal; to exist beyond the confines of the space-time continuum and the world of matter. It is the actual state of being free from egoism. It is also to experience the peace and love of God. There are many applicable scriptures:

Genesis 1:27 And Elohiym created [humankind] in his *own* image, in the image of Elohiym created he [them]; male and female created he them.

Psalms 82:6 I have said Ye are [elohiym]; and all of you are children of [Elyown]”.

Matthew 18:3 And said Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the [realm] of heaven.

Luke 17:21 Neither will they say, lo here! or, lo there! For behold, the [realm] of [Theos] is within you.

John 4:24 “[Theos] is a spirit, and they that [reverence] Him must [reverence] *him* in spirit and in truth.”

John 8:58 Iesus said unto them Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I [exist].

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the [universe] existed.

Acts 3:19 ...When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your [understanding] that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect, will of [Theos].

Ephesians 4:23-24 And be renewed in the spirit of your [understanding]; and that ye put on the new [person] which after [Theos] is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Philipians 4:7 And the peace of [Theos], which [transcends] all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through [Christos Iesus].

Hebrews 6:4-6.5 For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy [Spirit], And have tasted the good word of [Theos], and the powers of the [age] to come, If they [deviate from the right path], to renew them again unto repentance;

Jude 1:24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

### Conclusion Part Three

With step three comes the possibility of subjective proof of God, spirit and eternal life. It is part of a new theology that implies a method of confirmation. A method that is approachable by all who desire it.

## **Part Four: Christian Mysticism**

### Introduction

Part four introduces and delineates the actual practice of experiencing God first hand and as such confirms, from a subjective point of view, everything in parts one through three. It is subjective proof through spiritual awakening.

### Definition

Christian mysticism can be broadly defined as *that which is concerned with the direct experience of the Spirit, Absolute, ground of being, etc.* A more elaborate explanation is adapted from Winfried Corduan's *Mysticism: An evangelical option?*, in turn adapted from F. C. Happold and is as follows:

1. The nature of reality.
  - a. The phenomenal world is only partial reality.
  - b. There is a "ground of being" which is the true reality.
2. The nature of knowledge.
  - a. Human beings have limited knowledge through inference, which is secondary.
  - b. They can also have knowledge of the ground of being through direct experience.
3. The nature of human beings.
  - a. Human nature consist of two "selves".
  - b. The phenomenal ego as daily existence is not the true self.
  - c. The true self is spirit that has either the same or similar nature as the ground of being.
  - d. By identifying with one's true self, a human being can identify with the ground of being.
4. The purpose of human existence
  - a. The ultimate goal of human beings is to (re)identify with their true selves.
  - b. Through this realization they identify with the ground of being and come to know pure truth, love and peace.
  - c. Through this experience, the human being will enter into a state of being which has been given different names, spiritual awakening, enlightenment, etc.

### History

Although unknown to most, christianity has a rich history of mysticism.

### **Scripture**

The precursor to christian mysticism can be found in various passages in the

Old Testament, most notably in the Song Of Songs which can be seen as an analogy of man's union with God. In Judaism is the concept of *devekuth*, which is the mystical union with God.

Christian mysticism has its beginnings with Christ's disciples. The root word discipline is the term used by other contemporaneous mystical sects including the Stoic, Essene, Therapeutae and Sramanic traditions in which the followers were to follow a specific discipline. Christ told his disciples that He is the *way* (*John 14:6*), or the path to be followed which in turn requires a discipline to follow it.

In the New Testament, phrases such as *in Christ*, *indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, *peace which passes all understanding* etc. are not abstract terms. Today we tend to interpret these words as simple platitudes and as a result they have lost their original impact. These should be interpreted as the direct experience of the divine. The following verses attest to this understanding:

Matthew 6:6 (prayer method) - But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

John 14:17 (indwelling) - *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 17:21 (unity) - That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Romans 8:5 (of the Spirit) - For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

Romans 8:9-11 (in the Spirit/in Christ) - But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ *be* in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up [Iesous] from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Romans 8:39 (in Christ) - Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,



shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ [Iesous] our Lord.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (indwelling) - What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which* is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (Third heaven/paradise) - I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is unlawful for a man to utter.

Galatians 2:20 (in Christ) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 4:6 (Indwelling) - And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.

Ephesians 3:9 (mystery) - And to make all *men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by [Iesous] Christ.

Ephesians 3:17 (indwelling) - That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;

Ephesians 3:19 (indwelling) - And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Philippians 4:7 (transcendent peace) - And the peace of God, which Passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ [Iesous].

2 Peter 1:4 (Participating) - Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might [participate in] the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The writings on Christian mysticism are numerous enough to fill several books. Here are some key examples:

### **Early church**

Desert Fathers (3rd century AD) - Lived as hermits or together in small communities and stressed *asceticism*, austerity, simplicity, humility, and

fasting as a way in which to experience God.

### **Eastern**

Hesychasm (4th century AD) - Includes the *Philokalia* - Compiled between the 4th and 15th centuries, *The ladder of divine ascent* (ca. 600 AD) and *The way of the pilgrim* (19th century AD), all of which stressed the use of the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner", to be repeated continually (along with the use of the knotted prayer rope for counting) to experience God.

### **Western**

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) - Wrote of the *immutability* (unchanging) of God and the experience of such as the epitome and highest goal of the Christian life.

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) - Influenced by the writings of Augustine, she wrote of the union of the soul with Jesus.

Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591) - A contemporary of Teresa, he is most known for *the dark night of the soul*, in which the individual feels abandoned by God and loses faith and hope as a way of purging the soul before experiencing God.

*The cloud of unknowing* (14th century AD) - An anonymous book in which the writer describes the cloud of forgetting, thoughts, feelings and desires, that must be left behind in order to reach the cloud of unknowing, which is God.

Lectio divina (6th century AD) - A method by which a scripture is read and then a key word or phrase is repeated in order to center the heart for the experience of God.

### **The three fold path**

In this method the body, mind and spirit are addressed, the eastern method that of the prayer of the lips, the mind, the heart; the western method being purgative, illuminative and unitive. In both of these the process is cleansing, understanding and then the experience of God.

Because of the *noetic quality* of the mystical experience, that of receiving knowledge through experience, and its *ineffability*, that language cannot directly communicate the nature of the experience, mystical language is only analogous to the actual experience. This is why many terms are used such as superrational, translogical, transsubjective and ultratruth. The experience of the presence of God transcends language.

The nature of the experience can vary from one mystic to another. One may speak of being in the presence of God while another will report of being in union with God. Experience is subject to interpretation. Perspective can change so that the same experience will be perceived in different ways. Also, there can be a divergence of experiences within one individual.

### Contemplative prayer

In all of the above *Contemplative prayer* is used in one form or another. The following is a consolidation of the various methods:

#### **Atmosphere**

For many, *symbols* such as a cross, pictures, a shrine, attire and prayer ropes/beads can help create a connection with the divine. Stillness is most important; a place of quiet and relaxation is needed. Music can also be beneficial.

#### **Introductory prayer**

This is of two parts; an acknowledgement of God, his supremacy, omniscience, omnipotence, immanence, transcendence, eternal nature etc. and a petition asking for God's help in your desire to experience Him.

#### **Technique**

Most contemplative prayers will last thirty minutes to several hours. One of the simplest ways is to count breaths; one on the inbreath, two on the outbreath etc. for the duration of the prayer. This method helps keep thoughts from occurring and the mind focused on God. The next method is repeating one of the names of God, a word or phrase of scripture or some other sacred phrase, especially in time with the breath. Key to remember is to remain aware and attentive to the goal of the experience of God. If you find your mind wandering simply return to the method used.

#### **Transcendence**

The culmination of all the above is the loss of ego, an expanded awareness, a timelessness and of course the experience of God, along with His peace love and joy. Not all of these will be manifest but the experience of God, whether that of being in His presence or of being in unity with Him, is usually considered beyond the ability to be put into words.

#### **Closing prayer**

A prayer of gratitude thanking God for His help and mercy.

### Conclusion part four

For some the experience of God can come through what Abraham Heschel refers to as *Radical amazement*, as stated in Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. This is a change in perspective in everyday life; from mundane to sacred. This along with contemplative prayer can meet to create an ever-present experience of God.