



Communication

Science and the Mystery of the Human Person

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“Traveling with haste, in the unerring security which transcends all objects, instructed by the Spirit Who alone can tell us the secret of our individual destiny, man begins to know God as he knows his own self. The night of faith has brought us into contact with the Object of all faith, not as an object but as a Person Who is the center and life of our own being, at once His own transcendent Self and the immanent source of our own identity and life.”¹

With these poignant words, Thomas Merton concluded his mature book entitled *The New Man* dedicated to the exigent need for clarification regarding the mystery of the human person. Put plainly, we simply do not and cannot know who we really are in the eyes of God. My main reason for writing this communication is to help dispel the darkness of secular humanism that easily tends to stifle a deeper appreciation and understanding of who we really are.

As the title suggests, the salient issues concern the mystery of the human person in light of modern neuroscience. A secular humanist approach to neurophysiology would attempt to capture the human person primarily in physicalist terms. Neuropsychology would be similarly restricted concerning transcendent levels of human consciousness.

I offer an alternative perspective about the mystery of the human person closely allied with that which Merton has so eloquently expressed. It is my contention that the essential spiritual nature of the human

person quite transcends the secular domain, being irreducible to space-time biophysical components or considerations. Nevertheless, during its incarnational sojourn, the human person is capable of expressing self through physically familiar and scientifically detectable space-time categories of behavior. In other words, “soulish” expressions would be expected and manifested in detectable somatic ways. However, the *innermost* essence of the human person must be sought elsewhere, viz in the *authentically eternal* spiritual soul that is embedded with Christ in God. Accordingly this *quintessential* aspect of the human person remains totally unbeknownst to most and inherently beyond the scope of any form of physicalism. As well, this alternative view faithfully reflects the intricate nature of the “whole person” who is created in the image and likeness of God so *potentially* shares the divine capacity for deep interpersonal love.

The essential nature of any human person, as a child of God by *adoption*, accordingly *reflects* the image and likeness of the one eternal God who is Love. At the very least, the one eternal God must be *authentically* eternal. This stands in contrast with the secular view of eternity construed as endless time, for we are dealing with that which transcends time altogether.² Accordingly this also implicates and entails the dual nature of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. As Son of God not by adoption but in virtue of his divine nature this same Jesus Christ also became “Son of Man” through whom God himself

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deigned to dwell incarnationally with *all* humanity. As Christians we celebrate his coming as Emmanuel. This is a key part of the "Good News" of Christianity. Although it may seem to be shockingly simple, the "rest of the story" is that every human person, in virtue of being created in the image and likeness of God, is also *authentically* eternal. Though the human person can be partially *expressed* in somatic terms, the essential human person cannot be exclusively described as a function of genetic disposition. This conclusion, standing in stark contrast with the dominant vision of secular humanism, has profound implications vis à vis the mystery of the human person.

Living Eternity Is Not Merely Living "Forever"

In the first instance, this alternative perspective has serious implications for the eternal life of the human person. All too often this topic is discreetly deferred to the "end" of our physical life, almost as if it were taboo. Indeed, from the trans-humanist perspective, it ought to be within the purview of medical science to "fix" this untoward "departure problem" by lengthening physical life indefinitely. Yet Christianity is all about developing a mutual loving relationship between human persons and the eternal living God who constantly yet dynamically dwells within our earth-based midst! How else, pray tell, could human persons *relationally* "connect" with God except upon a mutually shared basis? Although reason may fail us here, it is by faith that we are assured that the living God "dwells within us."³ Scripture concurs: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Paul reminds us that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7), for the actualization of this potential indwelling presence is "so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10b).⁴ Unfortunately, human weakness and ignorance easily divert us from gaining a clear appreciation of Christ's poignant mandate that even "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).⁵

As already mentioned, all this remains fraught with conventional misunderstanding about "authentic eternity" in general, whether applied to God or human persons. Variations of classical secular viewpoints from the Greeks, dealt with by Augustine and the later Scholastics, remain entrenched today in spite of a radically bifurcated understanding of "until the end of time." Eternal life is not a boringly endless recycling of the familiar but a complete state of full existence that, due to the poverty of language, might be provisionally expressed as *present moment NOW-ness*. Yet this must also be the very same type of NOW by which the one eternal God is "ever present" to the space-time universe, perhaps like in that single-point

"osculating" fashion suggested by C. S. Lewis whereby our time-line touches the "sphere" of eternity. God, in his unlimited wholeness thereby continues to sustain his creation even as it unfolds within the confines of its ongoing, evolving space-time frame.

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Amazingly, this "fullness of time," construed as the present moment NOW, can sometimes be *experienced*, if only vaguely, by human persons while living in space and time. This experience might take the form of in-breaking manifestations perhaps in "deep awareness" of the "Beyond Within." As noted above, human persons do inherently bear a latent capacity for eternal life, usually unbeknownst to themselves, even while they continue to live in space and time. But rarely is this dual capacity evoked in physical life, and even then only with great difficulty.

Writing of such experiential duality, Henri Nouwen briefly described his personal experience of what he could only term "living eternity" even while remaining earth-bound. Reflecting upon his serious surgery in the early 1990s, and fully expecting to die as a result, Nouwen suddenly awoke to a quite unfamiliar way of consciousness and thinking.

It was only in the face of death that I clearly saw – and perhaps only fleetingly – what life was all about. Intellectually, I had understood the concept of dying to self, but in the face of death itself it seemed as if I could now grasp its full meaning.⁶

Until now I have been thinking and speaking from time into eternity, from the passing reality toward a lasting reality, from the experience of human love to the love of God. But after having touched "the other side," it seems that a new witness is called for: a witness that speaks back to the world of ambiguities from the place of unconditional love. This is such a radical change that I might find it very hard, yes even impossible, to find the words that can reach the hearts of my fellow human beings.⁷



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It is possible for a human person to "live eternity" by entering deeply into a state of contemplation ... The "core" human person is eternally linked with Christ, potentially in a veritable existential I-Thou relationship. This relationship is hidden, hence not something that can be discovered by scientific acumen.

What is at stake here is a way of being in the truth that tries less to persuade than to demonstrate. It is the way of witness. I must remain on the other side while being sent back. I have to *live eternity* while exploring the human search in time.⁸

All of this manifests a "dual" modality of existing very difficult for anyone to apprehend much less maintain, since opposing gestalts are involved. Nouwen was quite aware of the difficulty. He wrote:

The clarity of the meaning of life received on a hospital bed easily fades away when the many daily obligations return and start dominating life again. It requires an enormous discipline to remain a disciple of Jesus, to continue to stay anchored in his love, and to live primarily from above. But the truth of the hospital experience cannot be denied.⁹

Writing about this life-transforming experience five years later, Nouwen was quite aware that he had lost much of the peace that he had experienced while at the veritable portal of death. Nevertheless he could still claim: "I know for sure that my accident was nothing but a simple reminder of who I am and what I am called to become ... a child of God."¹⁰

In a similar vein, it is possible for a human person to "live eternity" by entering deeply into a state of contemplation, the approach taken by Merton. The "core" human person is eternally linked with Christ, potentially in a veritable existential I-Thou relationship. This relationship is hidden, hence not something that can be discovered by scientific acumen. Yet it can mature into what is essentially a deeply interpersonal bond of mutual love. Merton, like Nouwen, also affirmed that most persons remain basically unaware of this deeper capacity of their human condition. It is generally off the secular "radar screen" altogether. As a result, the secular "hobby" self that we easily assume to be our true self "core" actually becomes reinforced, though only a chimera, and even stabilized by the "world" through support from socializing factors that include psychological testing. Our "false self" is thereby able to evade detection as the vacuous state that it is.

As Merton observes, most persons do not even guess who they really are until after death. Only then is a human person mercifully released from his or her ongoing enthrallment by the "false self" system comprised mainly of emotional and affective states. Merton clarifies in poignant detail the inevitable future of one's personal chimera, one's familiar "false self" persona which has audaciously and magnificently been posing for so many years as if it were one's true self.

There is an irreducible opposition between the deep transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. We must remember that the superficial "I" is not our real self. It is our "individuality" and our "empirical self" but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. The "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes his own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney.¹¹

Why are we so fixated upon, yet ignorant concerning, our false self chimera that is destined for death and destruction? The essential if kenotic human person is linked with Christ in God. Whether *this* self, our true self, is even partially revealed to us during earthly life or only after death does not affect the main point. *This* God-made true self is the authentic human person who is eternally loved by God. While this universal truth must extend to everyone, not only to Christians, we easily tend to remain in denial of this Good News. One reason for this is our inveterate and specious human tendency to limit and restrict what could even count as reality (*viz.*, ontic) to that which is deemed to be rationally knowable by us, (*viz.*, epistemologically), at least in principle. Searching by means of reason appropriately tempered by faith may seem difficult. Yet put plainly, the mystery of the human person remains embedded with Christ in God. Choosing

ultimately to accept who we *really* are is the universal “fear must eventually yield to love” story of all human life. In our gradual passage from the Old Adam to the New, the true self eventually becomes activated even as the fearfully protective old self yields in love. This transition can be swift, like in the case of Paul when he yielded his self-righteous false self to Christ: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Universal Nature of the Human Person

Again, this reflects the Good News while also conveying the deep meaning behind the explicit mandate of Jesus: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). Indeed the only authentic reality within *any* human person is Christ. Since each of us is linked with Christ, we are to this extent also *linked with one another* through Christ. Thus the common nexus or locus of all authentically human interactions is also to be found in Christ.

While this essential aspect of the mystery of the human person includes everyone—past, present, and future—this may require some clarification since the universal nature of the human person differs from “universalism” understood as all will be saved in the end. Although this may indeed be true, the obvious great unknown regarding “salvation” is human free will. “We’ll all live forever spiritually,” as Ogilvie succinctly affirms. But because of free will, there can be no “universalism,” he continues, so the “question is where and how. Christ offers us the gift of eternal life ...”¹² Our personal choice ultimately to accept or to reject this offer, as with Paul, certainly depends upon the infinite mercy and grace of God. Eschatological matters aside, however, every human person is bound with Christ at the depth of his or her very being.

Universalism concerning the essential nature of each human person is well documented and fully endorsed by such church luminaries as the recent Pontiffs John XXIII and John Paul II. Human love manifesting the universal image of God is the key. In particular, they affirm God’s universal love for humankind for “love is the basis of all that Christ came to declare to the world. It is the command to love which distinguishes the Christian revelation from the doctrine of all other religions.”¹³ The profound and radical implication is that every human person, in virtue of having been created in the image of God who is Love, each has the built-in potential to convey God’s love. This applies to all creation in the stewardship mode. As regards other persons, we are each called to share with everyone the evangelization mission of “*love for mankind*,” for all mankind, without any exception or division at all: without difference of race, of culture, of language, of concept of the world, without distinction between friends and enemies.¹⁴ For this is “the message of universal love preached by Christ.”¹⁵

Though the vast majority of human persons—past, present, and to come—may have but a vague grasp of the role of Christ dwelling in the depths of their very being, Christ’s explicit wish is that all may be one and return safely home.¹⁶ While ultimately our choice to return depends upon our personal *response* to the infinite mercy and forgiveness of the Father’s love, whether anyone could successfully choose to reject the power of divine Love remains hidden in the eschatological mystery of salvation.¹⁷

Limited Access through Science

While the authentic human person can never be completely identified or fathomed by any mode of human experience, including science, nevertheless *expressions* of the human person can be manifested and detected in the here and now. For this reason, both neurophysiology and neuropsychology about the human person are valuable to open new frontiers of scientific explanation. Specifically, these may well provide considerable information and valuable new understanding about biological and mental *functions* of the human person.

Neuroscience, however, is also being freighted with considerable optimism and interest today because it seems capable of providing a degree of assurance regarding life beyond the grave. Extreme optimism about what is called science but often operates as an ideology called scientism has become the modern mantra in the public mind, for some even replacing any need for faith in Christ.¹⁸ Expectations are running high. Could we perhaps really know with purportedly “scientific” assurance that there is something personal that will survive our death? Is there something “soulish” that would surely survive, something that we could detect and measure today? After all, fear of death still remains our biggest obstacle to living joyfully. Must everything ultimately depend upon a human response to Christ?

To engage this fear, let us examine the situation from the point of view of proper science. Manifestations or expressions of soul-ness would certainly be expected, directly or indirectly, via normal bodily functions and activities. Since we are “whole persons,” body and soul, it is not surprising that these expressions and manifestations are *associated* with particular brain states which can be measured and detected, as spectacularly exemplified by Michael Persinger’s “God-helmet” experiments.¹⁹ Electromagnetic stimuli of diverse areas of the brain seemed to yield evidence of induced mental states purportedly associated with alleged signals of divinity. Whether this might correlate with a built-in god-spot as a genetic disposition remains an intriguing possibility.²⁰

Other recent examples abound within neuroscience and psychology especially regarding states and levels of “consciousness.” However, if approached from the bottom-up, by means of “physicalism,” “soulish” manifes-



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tations intentionally induced and stimulated anywhere within the somatic matrix appear to be essentially indistinguishable from what might implicate a deep “spiritual core.” Physical registration of itself is unable to differentiate locally induced “bottom-up” manifestations from authentic “soulish” expressions and manifestations. The problem is certainly not any absence of correlation between the functions of the hidden soul and detectible brain states. The problem remains how to determine the cause of the correlation. No matter what the data, the results cannot easily discriminate a process that is locally self-induced from a process that may implicate an immediate experience within the “core” spiritual soul; an experience that is not self-induced by some chemical or other means. What then is the source of the identified “signal”? In particular, authentic mystical experience cannot be placed “on call” as it were. Therefore the purported *origin* of these claimed experiences must remain inherently underdetermined. God is not, as it were, available at our beck and call. He will “awaken us” through Christ at a time of his choosing! But, will we be open to his coming? Will we choose humbly and fearlessly, despite our sin, to respond in love to the call of Christ?

Interrelated Issues about Time, Genetics, Ontology, Death, and Consciousness

While much of this may be quite self-evident from a Christian perspective, considerable confusion continues to reign concerning what constitutes authentic eternity. Augustine’s classic treatment in Book XI of his *Confessions* still spawns a considerable literature concerning time and eternity. The problem for us today can be traced to an uncritical acceptance of the secular understanding of eternity taken as endless or perpetual time. When dealing with the nature of the human person, this underlying problem is only exacerbated by an unwarranted tendency to uncritically construe the human person in terms of bio-genetic factors alone, reflecting a deeply entrenched ideological perspective disguised as neutral science.

The resulting state of confusion is evident from some current comments regarding cloning and stem cell research. If the human person were identified exclusively or even

primarily with genetic aspects, then great difficulties would arise. Controversy continues to plague our understanding concerning the status of “nascent humanity” and whether an embryo is inherently “human or person.”²¹

From the alternative perspective discussed above, it follows that the nature of the human person, indeed the very meaning of personhood, evidently transcends biology and genetics. Therefore what is being empirically observed is the incipient manifestation of a human person as one commences his or her incarnated sojourn. Confusion reigns only when the human person is reductively and exclusively associated with specific identifiable bio-genetic aspects of that sojourning human person. For example, to speak of the genetic beginning of personhood is a rather incomplete way of expressing this crucial matter since this secular formulation would implicitly deny by default that the *authentic* human person is eternally linked with Christ in God. Following the skewed rules of scientism, there would be no acceptable way to justify such a claim, much less confirm it, so it must be dismissed as mere speculation far beyond the range of human understanding. Yet from a Christian perspective, human beings, human life, and hence human persons are primarily of God, only secondarily of “stardust.” Once again, the key error is to mistake what is epistemic for what is ontic; that is, to delimit reality to what human reason can fathom. In general, however, the level of available knowledge ought never to decide the scope of reality.

From the perspective of science, what seems ephemeral could be dismissed as altogether beyond the pale. Yet *neutral* science, in contrast with specious scientism, is at least open in principle to the existence and value of what it cannot access. Nevertheless, an *exclusive* dependence upon the genetic-biological scientific approach remains inherently problematic for it cannot penetrate the surface *expression* of the human person. On this basis, it would be considered quite standard to assert that “the uniqueness of an individual begins at the moment of syngamy” [aka fertilization].²² Thus *fertilization* would seem to define the commencement of life for a unique human person.

On this alternative perspective, however, maintaining that the essential human person

is authentically eternal, it would follow that: "the uniqueness of an individual begins [to manifest self in space and time somatically] at the moment of syngamy." Clearly these two assertions are not identical!

That considerably greater depth of understanding is required to approach the mystery of the human person is patent even from simple considerations of the "twinning" phenomenon on the genetic level. The key point here is that genetic components alone do not and cannot suffice to account for the quite nontrivial differences between individual personalities observed in twins. Yet on this alternative view of the human person such problems would not even arise.

Evidently this alternative approach to the mystery of the human person yields profound implications, not least regarding the vexed matter of cloning. Human persons are unique in the eyes of God both in virtue of their genetic aspects but primarily in virtue of their essential and authentically eternal nature linked with the mystery of Christ. While the genetic and somatic aspects of the human person are important as the *sine qua non* for one's earthly pilgrimage, these remain secondary when assessing the essential nature of each unique human person.

From this postulate, several corollaries and extrapolations follow straightaway:

1. Somatically, every living human person is composed of stardust. Though the genetic units of the body are recycled every few years, the essential human person normally remains relatively constant in his or her development over time vis à vis one's ever-present source.
2. Spiritually, or in terms of the soul, while the entity that we each call "me" persists over time, developing deep patterns of volition and attitude, each of us is far more than merely a congeries or summation of individualized "soulful" instances, however unique these may be. The deep source of continuity in spirit or soul constitutes the essential core of the human person who is not confined to space and time. This directly affirms our "God-made selves as the true source of our being" in contrast with our addictive and enthralling socialized "false self" construct, aka our time-bound "hobby self," which we customarily project as if it were the essential "me."²³ While earth-bound, the human person can express self within a space-time frame in virtue of his or her somatically embedded participation within bio-chemical structure. Nevertheless, the *essential* human person transcends space and time.
3. The uniqueness of each human person is "sourced," as it were, in the eternal Christ. In this respect, it would be impossible to clone a whole human person, for only God creates the authentically eternal soul. That is God-stuff. We have limited access even regarding the bodily and genetic aspects of the human person. Although these somatic aspects and associated genetic components could

in principle be duplicated, the essential "core" of each unique human person accordingly remains "sourced" at an entirely different level altogether.

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Another serious issue about the mystery of the human person concerns death and dying. Physical death releases the essential human person from the bonds of its genetic disposition. One result of such release would be that the human person becomes less constrained in expressing self. But such human expression is best conducted in the "whole person" mode, entailing and embracing both body and soul. Therefore the children of God await "new clothing," as it were, the gift of a spiritual body after death once awakened by Christ. Accordingly, in terms of eschatology, human persons are not destined to remain in a *non-incarnate* state similar to the angels.²⁴ On the contrary, authentically human persons who freely choose to abide in Christ as adopted children of God will ever remain *whole* as the unique "incarnate spirit" they were created to be in the eyes of God.²⁵

The normal way by which the whole human person could express self is by means of some kind of body. Evidently a spiritual body would free the whole person from those space-time constraints associated with the physical body. Physical death therefore results in freedom from somatic limitations without the human person losing the ability to interact with space-time creation. Indeed, this may provide one way to understand reported visions, apparitions, and perhaps even near-death experiences.

Finally, human consciousness is a multi-leveled phenomenon extending far beyond mere stimulus response characteristic of most living beings. At increasingly higher levels, human consciousness enters the domain of partial self-reflection leading toward advanced transcendence that is manifestly not of human origin. That no system can completely grasp itself reflexively follows directly from general systems theory. The domain of human consciousness is effectively, experientially and demonstrably open-ended in its extraordinary dual capacity for *projective*



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transcendence and especially for *responsive* transcendence. Operating at these higher levels of consciousness, human physiology often seems engaged with transmitting and receiving signals of information connected with other minds and with the Spirit. Nevertheless, no conscious person could completely grasp or understand self reflexively. Attempts to objectively measure and detect psychic manifestations of such reflective consciousness would be subject to these same "system" limitations. So confining the limits of what is permitted even to count as human consciousness to that which can be objectively measured and detected scientifically is therefore quite counter productive for the physicalist approach, since this patently exposes its own poverty when it comes to exploring the mystery of the human person. Indeed, an enlightened investigation of human consciousness conducted from a properly scientific perspective including non-reductionist psychology might succeed in delving more deeply into this mystery thereby enhancing the findings of neurophysiology and psychology.

Conclusions

Absent shared terms of reference, no amount of rational argument alone could ever convince or suffice to elicit the quasi-gestalt switch required to change one's attitudinal default position. Secular humanism allied with rationalistic scientism presents a formidable default position quite impermeable to arguments not in conformity with that highly restrictive belief position. Indeed, this truncated perspective often goes unrecognized as being essentially a *belief* position despite its prominence today. Christianity combined with authentic science offers a less restrictive perspective on matters pertaining to the human person. However, neither approach can fathom the mystery of the human person not least because of various limitations about human reason and the constraints of systems theory. Neither science proper nor its ideological imposter *scientism* can fathom the mystery of the human person. If secular humanism would nevertheless presume to consider it solvable, at least in principle, perhaps this illusion arises from having set the reality-bar too low.

To the extent that human *experience* regarding consciousness might be welcomed

and acceptable to the investigation perhaps the search could move beyond the restricted domain set by human neurophysiology if imbued with physicalism. Indeed exploring the range of human consciousness more freely might even enhance and expand the limited findings available from neurophysiology and neuropsychology.

Approaching the mystery of the human person from the perspective of sense perception and scientific knowledge alone is inherently limited. Nevertheless, further scientific exploration would be most welcome, especially if conducted from a wider perspective even though these means cannot suffice to unlock the mystery of the human person any more than we could fathom the nature of God. The soul, and all that is essential to the authentic human person, is simply beyond the scope of physicalism. A further clarification of the dual features of the human person, as described by Merton above, would entail distinguishing the time-bound "false self," largely a social construct, from the eternally loved "true self" known only to God. Indeed, a clarification of the dialectical relationship between the "false self" and the "true self" would be paramount for any proper understanding of the physiology and psychology of this situation.²⁶ As with Paul, our false self must first be *voluntarily* surrendered to Christ so that our dormant true self, which is already living eternity in and through Christ, may be fully awakened.

The essential message of Christianity which is most relevant here is that God is nearer to us than we oft dare to consider, for it is in him that we live, move, and have our being. Keating reminds us, though we cannot see this, "Christ is dwelling at the center of all creation and of each individual member of it."²⁷ This seminal insight can augment and enhance the limited perspective made available through science and reason, so it ought not to be prematurely nullified by exclusive utilization of, and conformity with, a truncated physicalist perspective which, by definition, is inherently restricted to space-time considerations.

Many of the problems concerning the nature of the human person as an incarnate spirit can be traced to an inveterate misunderstanding regarding the notion of authentic eternity. Therefore a careful distinction

must prevail regarding authentic eternity in contrast with the deeply embedded secular view of eternity as an infinitely long time, a distinction so poignantly captured by C. S. Lewis.²⁸ Furthermore, a careful distinction must be maintained between ontic and epistemic aspects associated with the human person as an incarnate spirit. Setting the “ontic” viz. reality-bar too low by applying exclusionary epistemic constraints would perforce prematurely delimit the available domain of reality to the highly restrictive expectations characteristic of rationalistic secular humanism. Such restrictive reality-gating would inappropriately filter out all “things unseen” (Heb. 11:1) precluding God, soul, and spirit indiscriminately along with albino unicorns and little green leprechauns.

On the alternative perspective espoused here, the eternal soul of the human person, envisioned as an incarnate spirit created in the image of God, really exists, even if “sleeping” awaiting Christ’s call. Although “flying” beneath the restrictive radar of physicalism during its somatic sojourn, the authentically eternal soul can nevertheless manifest its presence, even if unconscious, by means of detectible space-time categories and functions while remaining in a somatically embedded state. ❁

Coda

Just as we come from God, so must each return to God through Christ (John 10:34; 14:6), the ultimate mystery far beyond the scope of science, indeed of all human discernment.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to the several anonymous referees who offered many insightful suggestions for improving the original manuscript, raised points requiring further clarification, and encouraged further related reflections concerning this complex nexus of issues. I have tried at least to address most of these points. Any residual errors and lack of clarity remain my responsibility.

Notes

- ¹Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrer, Straus & Giroux, 1961), 247–8.
- ²Adam Drozdek, “Time and Eternity,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 (1997): 192–5. This useful article concerning several views of eternity draws on Aquinas, Horvath, Underhill, Pascal, and others to “point to the fact that our humanity is strengthened by the eternal perspective. Without it human personality withers and human being turns just into being. Eternity is, therefore, no foe to human personality” ... In turn, “God’s personality is guaranteed by his eternity” for his personality is directly “proportional to eternity,” 194.
- ³Thomas Keating, *Crisis of Faith, Crisis of Love* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 33.
- ⁴Paul expressed this emergent awareness and manifestation of what we already are in the eyes of God as a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).
- ⁵Clearly, Christ dwells kenotically within everyone.

- ⁶Henri Nouwen, *The Path of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 33.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, 34–5.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, 36–7, emphasis added.
- ⁹*Ibid.*, 41.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, 46. Likewise, Lloyd Ogilvie highlights that we can indeed experience “His resurrection lifting you up to the person He created you to be” (Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Silent Strength for My Life* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990], 105).
- ¹¹Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 7. In a poignant note at the bottom of the same page, Merton adds: “Hell can be described as a perpetual alienation from our true being, our true self, which is in God.”
- ¹²Ogilvie, *Silent Strength*, 111. An authentic relationship of love necessarily entails “freedom as a foundational characteristic” – in this case the freedom to will and to choose whether to accept or to reject Christ’s offer of eternal life (Peter Rüst, “Dimensions of the Human Being and of Divine Action,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 47 [2005]: 200.) That perhaps God’s grace and mercy could “override” human free will, kenotically, through the complexity of natural events is interesting. However, the authenticity of free human choice remains subject to the test of Christ. “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven” (Matt. 7:21–23).
- ¹³Pope John XXIII, *Days of Devotion*, ed. John P. Donnelly (New York: Penguin, 1998), 51.
- ¹⁴Pope John Paul II, *Prayers and Devotions*, Peter van Lierde (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994), 330.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, 92. After dealing at length with possible alternative meanings for “*Imago Dei*,” Malcolm Jeeves has recently focused on our human “capacity for relatedness to our Creator, to one another, and to the creation of which we have been made responsible stewards.” For Jeeves, this “calling to a personal relationship of love and obedience to our Creator [is also our] destiny to fulfill his invitation and command to be faithful stewards of his creation” (Malcolm Jeeves, “Neuroscience, Evolutionary Psychology, and the Image of God,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 47 [2005]: 182–3). The key to all of this is to be found in a mutual relationship of love where human persons are appropriately endowed and mandated to bear God=Love to all creation before leaving for “home.”
- ¹⁶Yet Christ is “dwelling at the center of all creation and of each individual member of it” (Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ* [Amity, NY: Amity House, 1987], 87). Christ died “for all, for all; no one is denied his love and his forgiveness” (Pope John XXIII, *Days of Devotion*, 288). Christ embraced all humanity in hopes that everyone would freely choose to return safely home. Though “I have other sheep, that are not of this fold” (John 10:16) his greatest wish is for ultimate unity in the spirit.
- ¹⁷Salvation from self-enthrallment by freely electing our hidden love-bond with Christ yields eternal life, that is knowing-loving the Father and Jesus Christ with our full heart and mind (John 17:3).
- ¹⁸Authentic science must be defended by clearly differentiating it from the ideology of scientism, which publicly masquerades as science and has usurped the name “science.” Scientism bears the essential characteristics of a fundamentalist belief position, an ideology espousing rationalistic secular humanism. While authentic science humbly acknowledges the proper limitations of science when probing reality, scientism would artificially delimit the scope of reality to the ultimate horizons of human reason.
- ¹⁹As reported in *Wired Magazine* (November 1999), Michael Persinger experimented with a head-circlet device that produced weak electromagnetic fields to stimulate areas of the right hemisphere and reportedly induce alleged religious or spiritual experiences. This research has been further developed by the behavioral neuroscientist, Todd Murphy, an associate of Persinger, to facilitate the production of artificially altered states of consciousness mainly for therapeutic purposes. www.innerworld.50megs.com/god.htm Retrieved July 10, 2006.

²⁰Dean Hamer, *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

²¹K. A. Mannoia, "An Evaluation of Three Religious Perspectives on Stem Cell Research," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 56 (2004): 233.

²²D. M. Sullivan, "Would God 'Play' This Way?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 56 (2004): 236. To speak of an individual being present from conception is not the same as to speak of that individual beginning to manifest its own personal uniqueness from conception. Nor does this manner of addressing the issue entail "pre-existent" souls. This ancient and rather vexed position would inappropriately imply a "time" sequence on that which is authentically eternal and hence altogether timeless. Human souls simply "are," created in the image and likeness of the one authentically eternal God. Considerable confusion has already been generated amongst adolescents vis à vis the beginning of human life and its early viability, their abysmal ignorance often due to linguistic obfuscation. During a recent in-class debate concerning abortion, some quite intelligent young ladies from Christian homes vigorously defended the position that prior to "four months" abortion involves no killing whatsoever since at that early stage it has allegedly been "proven scientifically" that the fetus is not yet even *alive!* Yet these same young ladies become very perplexed when presented with the challenging possibility that they themselves *could* have been victimized in this manner. For truly they know not what they do!

²³Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997) reading for April 8.

²⁴While Mark's Gospel (12:25) affirms that those who rise from the dead will be *like* angels, this of itself does not preclude the *spiritual body* proclaimed by Paul (1 Cor. 15:35-54). Human persons are blessed with the gift of *time* enabling them to decide and repent unlike angels who "live eternity" presumably rendering their freely chosen state of humble love or prideful hate irrevocable.

²⁵Pope John Paul II, *Prayers and Devotions*, 315-16. The "human person is an incarnate spirit, that is, a soul expressing itself in the body, a body informed by an immortal spirit ... God is love and lives in a mystery of personal communion of love in himself. In creating mankind in his image [God is also] continually conserving it in love." The very "core of the human person as such" is expressed in human love which becomes "a rendering of the deepest truth on man, that of his being in God's likeness."

²⁶Our true self, properly understood, is certainly not a separate self—aloof, solipsistic, or egocentric in any way but more a quiet participation in the God-self where it remains *embedded with Christ in God*. During one's journey through life, as Ogilvie notes, we must first "pass through our own death to self with a complete surrender of our lives" (Ogilvie, *Silent Strength*, 103).

When turning over our false self to Christ, however, one embarks upon an ongoing journey that ultimately leads to no self at all. In the end, utter faith becomes paramount for there would seem to be not really *any* self at all! According to Roberts: "at one point in this journey, self comes forth, contributes what it can give, and then fades forever beyond reach" leading to a sense of oneness that is, however, "not ... God's oneness with self or consciousness, intellect or will or any such faculties of the soul. Rather, our oneness with God IS Christ and only Christ. The resurrection, then, is the Truth of Christ: the Truth that only the divine Christ (*Logos*) is eternally one with God, and not our personal individual selves. While this is truly the good news of Christ, for some people, at least, this seems to be too frightening to even consider" (Bernadette Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey* [Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993], 196, 150).

²⁷Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*, 87.

²⁸"For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity," in C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942; reprint, London: Fount-HarperCollins, 1977), 76.