Hello, everybody, and thank you so much for joining us in *Return to the Heart*, a special gathering that will be examining what a truly Integral Christianity might look like—a more comprehensive, inclusive, full-fledged Christianity—what it is, and how to experientially apply it in your life if you so wish. We are truly delighted to have you come and be with us for this.

1 out of 3 people on this entire planet are Christians. That’s a sort of good news/bad news situation. We all know of Christians—or believers in any religion—who, in their fundamentalist form, have committed murder, torture, religious war, and all told, subjected humanity to the single greatest cause of pain and suffering in its entire history. And yet, with a different twist, Christianity—and spirituality in general—has been the source of some of the greatest boons to humanity imaginable—overflowing sources of love, wisdom, compassion, charity, and good works, items the world is never short of, and could certainly use now. So which will it be? The good news of spirituality, or the bad news? Both… are possible.

Part of the problem is that, prior to just recently, we haven’t even been able to understand exactly what the difference was between these two versions of religion—what were the actual causes that tipped a religion into the good-news or the bad-news column? But with recent breakthroughs in Integral Meta-Theory, these differences have become very obvious, and we can, today, actually understand these differences and operate on
them so that we can more consistently get the good-news versions of spirituality and profoundly downplay the bad-news aspects. This means that there actually might be a role for spirituality in our future. With all our hi-tech, highly advanced, rapidly growing scientific breakthroughs, which seemed to particularly define the future, it now appears that not just science, but science and a good-news spirituality, will both be necessary if humans are to achieve the best that they can be in the world of tomorrow.

So, during this coming get-together, we will be pointing out the basic causes of these major differences—good news and bad news—using the most populous religion now in existence, Christianity (with the understanding that similar factors are at play in all the world’s spiritual systems, and can be used with them as well). But at this gathering I, and several truly special guest presenters, will attempt to share with all of you some direct insights into, and experiences of, a truly Integral Christianity—a truly good-news Christianity—what it is, what it means, how to do it.

For a preliminary overview of what an Integral Christianity might be, I’ve prepared the document you now hold in your hands, with the idea that you might read this before the meeting and therefore be versed in some of the central notions, so at the gathering itself we can just jump right in and won’t have to spend a lot of time going over background material. So in this presentation, I’ll be reviewing with you the basic Framework that led to these breakthroughs, and the Framework than an Integral Christianity is using—and that is the Integral Framework itself—the all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states, all-types Integral Meta-Theory. And I can imagine some eyes glazing over already.
Yes, there will be a little bit of theoretical stuff thrown in here. But even if we value, say, feeling or direct experience over thinking or intellect, all of us have some sorts of Frameworks that we use as guides or maps of the various territories we run into. And while nobody wants to confuse the map with the territory, you don’t want to have a totally screwed up map, either. So sometimes it helps to think through the Frameworks that we’re using. And that’s what we’ll be doing with Christianity—looking at its traditional Framework and then suggesting some significant ways to improve it here and there, but still remaining broadly kosher (if that’s the right word). And once we have that Framework, it will suggest plenty of experiential exercises and feeling-based practices, so there will be abundant room for that. And I’ll have a great deal of experiential exercises; in fact, almost the entire second half of my presentation—which I’ll be presenting in person at the gathering—is based on experiential exercises. But there is a little bit of theoretical issues we need to cover first, and many of you, I’m sure, find these things interesting—or I hope you do.

But as we go through these, keep in mind that these theoretical aspects are actually *psychoactive*—and that means, simply let them wash over you—don’t struggle with them, or try to memorize them or anything like that (although of course you can if you want)—but just let them wash through you, and they will actually begin the process of transformation. Just hearing them, just letting them in—that itself will actually initiate a process of genuine transformation.

So by the time we’re done, even if some of this might have occasionally been boring or dull, your system will actually have begun to transform (and we in fact have evidence demonstrating this). Of course, if you don’t want to change, you don’t have to.
But if you do, just sit back and let it happen. So this theoretical stuff isn’t just intellectual or just a head-trip—it’s deeply changing and transformative. Simply exposing the mind to it actually begins to change one’s being. And that’s what we’re going to be doing in the next 40 pages or so—start your system headed in a transformative direction (if you’re game, that is). At the same time, these Integral factors will help explain what an Integral Christianity (or Integral Spirituality in general) is all about. And once we get that general understanding clarified, we can jump right into numerous experiential exercises, which is exactly what we’ll be doing. So if that’s your cup of tea, just hang in there.

Now, many of you are already broadly familiar with this Meta-Theory; some of you know it well, and some of you not at all. I’m going to assume that this is the first time any of you have ever heard of such a thing, and then give an introductory overview of some of its basic elements, each time pointing out exactly how this applies to spirituality in general and Christianity in particular. When we’re done, hopefully not only will we all have a good general grasp of an Integral Christianity and how it can be applied in your own life if you wish (and how to distinguish, clearly, a good-news version from a bad), but also we’ll have a general integrating Framework that can be applied to all areas of your life, literally, and in each case help to show a more inclusive, more comprehensive, more embracing reality.

Okay, let’s get started, yes?

Very simply: Jesus Christ talked ABOUT God; he talked TO God; and he talked AS God. Why is that?

Cut to the Integral Framework. This Framework has many different elements. One of the most important we call “quadrants”—and this simply means that all
phenomena in existence can be looked at from 4 different views, or 4 different angles, or 4 different perspectives—the “4 quadrants.” You can look at something on its own, as itself, as an individual; and you can also look at it in terms of its surroundings, its environments, and the groups or collectives that it is a part of or is a member of. All individuals are members of at least some groups or collectives, and, in fact, they can’t exist without each other. So those are two views—the individual and the collective. And further, you can look at each of those—the individual and the collective—from the inside (in a feeling, awareness, subjective, 1st-person fashion), and you can look at it from the outside (in a distancing, 3rd-person, objective fashion). So overall that gives us 4 basic perspectives—the inside and the outside of the individual and the collective. Those are the “4 quadrants.” Now in some ways this sounds ridiculously simple and obvious, but it turns out to actually hold the solution to an enormous number of problems. Because the tendency is always to take just 1 or 2 of those as real and important—and dismiss all the others—and that’s where the problems start.

So, quadrant #1—the inside of the individual. This is an “I space,” a 1st-person perspective. And for those of you who have forgotten your grammar, a “1st-person” perspective means the person speaking—an “I” or “me”; “2nd person” means the person being spoken to—a “you” or a “thou”; and the “3rd person” is the person or thing being spoken about—a “he” or “she” or “them” or “it” or “its.” So right now, if I were presenting this in person and you were the audience, I’d be 1st person, because I’m speaking. And all of you would 2nd person—the person being spoken to—and you’re actually 2nd person plural, which technically is the word “youse”—“y-o-u-s-e”—that’s the actual plural of you, although you hardly ever hear it much—except Northerners will
often say “youse guys” (“Youse guys wanna go to lunch, youse guys want to play pool?”)—usually in a heavy Jersey accent), and Southerners famously say “you all”—or “y’all” (“Y’all wanna have a mint julep on the porch, y’all wanna go on a walk through the park?”)—and so on. So that’s 2nd person. And 3rd person—“the person or thing being spoken about”—is, for us right now, Integral Christianity. So right there we have 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person. And what we’ll see is that each of those pronouns fits a different quadrant. And, incidentally, all major languages have all of those pronouns, because those pronouns—and the quadrants—represent real realities, and language evolved in contact with these real realities and so they all have these pronouns—they aren’t just theoretical or speculative—they are very real and very universal.

So, the interior of an individual is an “I” space, a “me” space. It’s what you see when you look within right now. “The Kingdom of Heaven lies within”—that’s a 1st-person space—and that’s very different from Heaven being a 3rd-person objective place up there in the sky, isn’t it? So in a human being’s case, 1st person would contain images, thoughts, feelings, insights, sensations, impulses, desires, and so on. So one of the ways you can be aware of yourself as an individual is the view from within, the subjective, 1st-person “I” perspective.

But you can also look at yourself from without, in an objective, detached, even scientific fashion—as a 3rd-person object, as an “it,” as a material entity. So if you cut open your head and looked at your brain in a 3rd-person objective fashion, as you examined that material brain you wouldn’t see feelings and sensations and thoughts and desires, you’d see a neocortex and a limbic system and reptilian brain stem (and in the rest of the body, 2 lungs, 2 kidneys, 1 stomach, 1 heart)—and on a smaller scale, you’d
see neurotransmitters and hormones like dopamine, serotonin, testosterone, estrogen, and so forth. That is not looking at yourself subjectively, but looking at it objectively; not 1st person but 3rd person; not an “I,” but an “it”; not the view from within but the view from without. But clearly both of these are real and important. Yet there’s a huge argument over which of these views is really real—some maintain that awareness, that “I”-ness, that consciousness, that “the view from within” is actually nothing but some material brain processes or the view from without—just an objective, 3rd-person, material “it” thing. Subjective Idealism maintains just the opposite. And so the common typical battle goes. For Integral Meta-Theory, both of those are right—both of those views and those realities—the inside and the outside—arise together, depend on each other, and neither can be reduced to the other. You can’t have an inside without an outside, and you can’t have an outside without an inside—makes no sense.

Okay—so those are two views of the individual being—the view from within and the view from without, or subjective and objective, or 1st person and 3rd person. Now further, all individuals exist as members of various groups or collectives—humans exist in ecological groups, in state and national groups—they have circles of friends and colleagues and family and romantic relationships and so on. And those collectives, just like their members, have insides and they have outsides—they can be looked at from within, and they can be looked at from without.

The inside or interior of a group is the group’s shared values and meanings, its shared language, a shared history, mutual understandings, and so on. So an “I” plus a “you” is a “we,” and this “we space” is an important part of your life—it is the interior of the collective, the interior of our lives together (and we say this is the “view from within”
because you can’t see it out there in the exterior world—take something like “mutual understanding,” for instance—where is that located? You certainly cannot see it running around out there in the exterior world; it’s an interior reality, it exists “in here,” in our shared “we space”—but that doesn’t make it less than real; it’s very real, and very important). When you and I come together, and we interact, and we start to understand one another, we form a “we,” an “us”—it has what we call “culture.” Culture is an intersubjective reality, a nexus of shared subjectivities, shared “I’s” and “you’s,” the interior of our collective lives together. Think of the number of “we’s” that you exist in now—your family, your circle of friends, colleagues, intimate relationships, your local community, the nation, the globe—and all of us who come together at this gathering will start to form a “we,” we will start to share understandings and thoughts and feelings and ideas—a “we”-space will start to form—and by the end of the gathering, this “we-space” will have become much thicker, with lots of shared understandings and shared meanings and new ideas and new friends.

And again, we can look at these collectives or this group space from the inside or from the outside. And this can also sound really simple and obvious, but it also answers an enormous number of problems. We just examined the inside view, where “I” and “you” come together in various “we’s.” But we can look at those “we’s” from the outside, too—and then we just look at all the objective, observable facts that we could see about how a particular “we space” moves and functions and operates. So if we look at a country, for example, we would examine its birth rates, its death rates, its monetary system, its legal system, its educational and medical institutions, and so on. In other words, we take a 3rd-person, objective, even scientific view of the whole group—what we
could see if we videotaped the group. There’s no insides to a videotape (a videotape won’t tell you want members are thinking or feeling or desiring or trying to achieve); it gives just the outsides (the overall behavior of all the members as a whole). And this gives us things like systems theory, where every objective thing and event is viewed as being a part of a larger system, or each individual is a strand in the Great Web of Life, and from this perspective, only this objective whole is really real—all so-called “individuals” are abstractions from this larger Whole, which is an interwoven network of mutually interactive dynamic objects or holistic “its,” the totality of all the videotaped outsides. For Integral Meta-Theory, both of those—the inside cultural “we” and the outside system “its”—are equally real and equally important—you can’t reduce one to the other (but that is true for all the quadrants—they all arise together, evolve together, exist together).

So overall that gives us an individual subjective “I” (like my awareness or my consciousness); a collective “we” (the shared interiors of our lives together); an individual objective “it” (like the brain or body); and a collective “its” (something like an ecosystem, or the view of a city from the air, or this group here videotaped for the whole time we’re together)—I, we, it, and its. And every phenomenon in existence has all 4 of those dimensions. Sometimes the two objective dimensions—the “it” and “its”—the individual videotaped, and the group videotaped, or just the overall outsides—those together are combined as simply “the” objective dimension—so then we have a shortened version, which is I, we, and it. But in reality, all 4 of the quadrants are present; and at the very least we look at what we call “the Big Three”—I, we, and it. And the only thing that’s odd about the I, the we, and the it is how rarely they’re all included and all taken
into account. But the Big Three is behind everything from Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; to the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; to art, morals, and science—they are absolutely fundamental and crucial dimensions to this Kosmos, and they always arise together and evolve together.

So. Christ talked ABOUT God; he talked TO God; and he talked AS God. (And, as we’ll see with our experiential exercises, you’re going to be invited to do just that as well—and have exactly those same direct experiences.) But those are exactly the Big Three—I, we, and it; or 1st person (Jesus talked AS God, as an “I,” as a 1st person—he was God and so he talked AS God); and 2nd person (he also talked TO God, as a “you” in a “we” relationship—we saw that he was in such intimate relationship with Spirit that he usually addressed God with the word “Abba,” which actually means Daddy); and he spoke of Spirit in 3rd person (as something he talked ABOUT, as an objective reality or Great It or Real Condition).

And the point about Spirit in general is that every one of us has all 3 (or 4) of those dimensions of relationship with Spirit (what we call “the 1-2-3 of Spirit”—for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person). Each of us can look at Spirit in an objective, 3rd-person fashion (as the sum total of reality, or the totality of all things and events, like Gaia or the Great Web of Life in which each of us and all beings are an equal strand)—people like Fritjof Capra (and pantheists in general) are big fans of the Great-Web-of-Life view of Spirit, and many people use things like systems theory or chaos and complexity theories to portray their “objective totality” view of Spirit—and all of that is Spirit in 3rd-person.

But we can also exist in a direct, living relationship with that Spirit (that is, we can exist with Spirit in a direct relationship, as a Great Thou or Great Love or Great
Inspiration or Great Presence, but in any event, not just an object—like the Great Web of Life—but a relationship: not just to know Spirit, but to be in a direct relationship with Spirit. So in this relationship, we might still think of Spirit as Other, as a Great Other—but that Other is vital, creative, luminous and numinous, brilliant, loving, uniting, and connecting—this is sometimes called Eros, or in more 3rd-person terms, something like “self-organizing wholeness”—and this self-organizing Force or Presence is real, it is there, it is genuine, it’s the creative drive of the entire universe, and I am intimately related to it. I am directly related to that Presence right here, right now—in what Martin Buber famously called an “I-Thou relationship”—that’s a direct relationship with Spirit as a living Force or Presence or Great Thou—right now—and that’s 2nd person. (We’ll come back to why this is a real relationship, and not just a myth. But for the moment, that’s Spirit in 2nd person—Spirit as a Great Thou forming, with me, a spiritual “We.” That’s what the theistic traditions are all about—finding the right relationship with God or Goddess—and there’s some truth in there, as we’ll see—if viewed appropriately. But that’s clearly Spirit in 2nd person.)

And finally, we can discover that Spirit which is indeed our own highest Self or True Self or Real Self (our highest 1st-person or “I”—what Ramana Maharshi called our “I-I,” or “I hyphen I,” our ultimate Self or pure Awareness or Everything Mind), which is unborn and undying, infinite and eternal, timeless and all-pervading. As such, we can then speak AS Spirit, since Spirit is what we ARE—1st person. Christ did all 3, and that is exactly what we are to do when we resurrect our own Christ-consciousness. Wars have been fought over which one of those views is correct—and for Integral Meta-Theory, all of them are. The quadrants arise together, exist together, and evolve together.
So the point here, with regard to Integral Christianity, is that a complete Christ-consciousness includes a full realization of all 3 (or 4) of those dimensions. The particularly difficult dimension to realize—in any spiritual system—is the subjective “I” space—realizing and resurrecting our Ultimate Self, our True Self, our Real Self, and letting go the self that is living in sin and separation and fragmentation and duality—letting go the small self, the ego, the self-contraction, and finding our Supreme Self, our Real Self, which is at the same time the ultimate Reality of the entire universe, or Spirit itself (as Christ put it, “I and the Father are one”).

But as for that more difficult 1st-person transformation from separate self to Supreme Self, Jesus himself had to undergo that transformation—he had to die on the cross to being Jesus, the mortal human, and awaken to his own Christ-consciousness, his perfect Divinity, his infinite and eternal True Being. In his last words on the cross, Jesus says at one point, talking TO God, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” Now imagine, he actually feels abandoned by what is in fact his own Highest Self or Ultimate Reality. How could that happen? It happened because he had not yet fully realized his own Highest Self and Reality. Therefore he next says, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit”—surrendering fully to this Highest Reality so that he could finally realize it directly and immediately himself. So he lastly says, “It is finished”—his own transformation is finished, and he dies there on the cross—dies as a mere mortal human being, Jesus of Nazareth, and is resurrected and reborn as his own eternal Christ-consciousness, or ultimate Reality itself. This time, he really knows who he is—he knows his real 1st person or True Self.
Now, the Christian tradition itself looks at this Ultimate Reality through the Big Three—1st, 2nd, and 3rd person views—in other words, the Trinity. It sees Reality as the ultimate 1st person: as my own deepest, highest Self or “I” (or “I-I”)—that is, as my own Christ-consciousness, my true Being and Real Self (and the Real Self that is resurrected once I die to the self-contraction)—and a Real Self that is radically one with pure Spirit or deep Divinity—a oneness the Sufis call “the Supreme Identity.” Yet even as I identify with pure Divinity, my particular identification (my Real Self) is not the Whole of Reality—although I am one with the Whole of Reality, there are still zillions of sentient beings who share this ultimate Self or Supreme Identity with me, and if my particular Supreme Identity or Unique Self disappeared, the Kosmos would still arise, the Supreme Identities of all other beings would still arise—there is still a God (or Godhead or Spirit or Ultimate Reality) that exists; and further, this Ultimate Reality, even if am perfectly Realized or Awakened (or fully Identified with it), is something that I also can be in relationship with—my I AMness is in 1st-person identity with Divinity (as “I-I”) AND it is in 2nd-person relationship with that Divinity (as “I-Thou”)—I have a personal relationship with Ultimate Reality—a perfect 2nd-person relationship; an “I-Thou” relationship with the Ultimate Reality that I AM—which I might see as Father or Mother or Parent or Savior or Presence, or the Ground and Creatrix of All Being, or the Source and Suchness of it All, but something that I am in a living, alive, vital, mysterious, inspirational, overflowing, superabundant relationship with—and simply because this manifest world is made of relationships, and thus even though I AM one with all these relationships, I also inhabit these relationships as real realities, starting with a relationship with the Ground of it All or true Spirit—to realize my 1st-person Supreme Identity is
NOT to disappear into a uniform oneness or pure mush devoid of distinctions, but—with a full Realization—is also to inhabit and bring to life and embody the actual relationships by which Emptiness or Godhead allows and creates this entire manifest universe—\textbf{I AM} God and the All, AND \textbf{I AM related} to God and the All—a perfect 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd}-person existence, fully awakened and fully realized.

And of course, that’s not all—there is still a 3\textsuperscript{rd}-person reality that I AM also intimately connected with, an actual objective 3\textsuperscript{rd}-person “it” or objective process or energy—and this objective process or energy (the so-called \textit{prima materia}) is what is actually responsible for all spiritual transformation, and it shows up symbolically in the Christian tradition as white doves descending on the individual, or a ring of fire or radiant light around the head, a luminous halo—but this is always what is actually doing the transforming—and this is, of course, the Holy Spirit—which can actually, precisely like Kundalini energy, descend on you and awaken in your own body and is the actual energy of your own transformation.

So in the Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit is metaphorically pictured, we just noted, as white doves descending, or a ring of fire around the head, or blazing light—but it is always this Holy Spirit—and not God, and not Christ—but this Holy Spirit that does the actual transformation—it’s the actual \textit{energy} or \textit{mechanism}, as it were, that my individual Christ-ness realizes its Supreme Identity with God-ness (“I and the Father [or Mother] are one”—that is, the energy connecting “I” and “God” is the Holy Spirit)—again, just like Kundalini energy (these are both actually referring to the same objective, subtle energy dimension available to humans, the energy that connects the merely human to the fully Divine)—an objectively real, 3\textsuperscript{rd}-person connection.
And finally, all 3 of those (1st, 2nd, and 3rd person perspectives of Spirit) are dimensions of the ultimate-Ultimate Reality—known as Godhead. So these 3 views are simply some of the ways that Spirit or Godhead looks through each of these 3 major dimensions or perspectives, dimensions that every one of us has available to them right here and right now.

The Trinity, in other words, is simply one version of the Big Three (we see similar Big-Three Trinities in other traditions, such as Satchitananda, Purusha, and Prakriti; or Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva; or Tao, Te, and wu wei; or the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, and so on). The central point of the Trinity is that Spirit is not just some objective totality, like Gaia or the Great Web of Life (although it is that); but it is also a Reality or Presence that I have an immediate relationship with—a direct, living, vital, energizing relationship that I can feel and know and taste, right here and right now; and further yet, this Spirit is not just something that objectively is, and not just something that I am in relationship with, but something that I actually AM—my own deepest, highest, truest Big Mind and Real Self, my Supreme Identity with Spirit itself, realized through the death and resurrection (or rebirth) of my own consciousness—the whole point of Christ’s passion on the Cross.

Now the reason that Christian theologians emphasize the Trinity so much is that in the manifest universe, reality is made of relationships—not just oneness, but relational events, different dimensions and perspectives, starting with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person—that is, starting with the 4 quadrants, all the way up, all the way down. The unmanifest or formless realm is pure Oneness—or more technically, pure Emptiness; but you simply ARE that Oneness, you can’t relate to it if there is just Oneness, there’s no Other to relate
to; Oneness is without relationship, it simply is itself, the One. So Godhead spontaneously manifests a realm of form and others so that there can be *actual relationships*—and it starts doing so *within Itself*, by creating different dimensions of Itself related to each other—a pure Father or Mother or Creatrix or Ground; a pure Son or Daughter or Self; and an objective background or mass-energy Form, Mahamaya, Shakti, Kundalini, the Holy Spirit. The general Eastern traditions agree, with the pure One giving rise to Brahman-Atman (the creative Ground), Purusha (the pure Self), and Prakriti (the objective mass-energy component, Shakti or Kundalini)—the point in any event is that these are relationships created within the One—*just so there can be real relationships* (simply imagine, after billions and billions of years of just being itself in pure bliss, what possibly could a One want? RELATIONSHIP, otherness, manyness)—and from those first relationships (the 4 quadrants) the rest of the manifest universe arises. So the manifest realm, the realm of Form, is the realm of the relational quadrants, combined and existing in thousands and thousands of different ways, but all resting on these fundamental, primordial quadrants, or the very first perspectives that there are. That’s what the Trinity is all about, fundamentally. There’s nothing weird or mysterious or spooky about it (although it has been given some very strange mythic interpretations over the years—which isn’t its fault).

Okay, we’ll return to these topics when we discuss “states,” short for “states of consciousness,” or what actually happens in us as we awaken to higher realities, spiritual realities, ultimate realities, and the interior transformations that we need to undergo in order to see and experience these ultimate realities—foremost amongst which is *the death and resurrection of the interior self*—moving from the small, narrow, self-contraction to
the infinite, eternal, ultimate True Self and Suchness of the entire Kosmos—the whole point of spiritual life in general, certainly including Integral Christianity. As St. Paul put it, “Let this consciousness be in you which was in Christ Jesus, that we all may be one.” That’s a good, short summary. Again, we’ll return to some experiential examples of that transformation at the gathering.

Now, at this point we start to move into the heart of the new dimensions or new conceptions that Integral Meta-Theory introduces that help to transform spirituality into Integral Spirituality and Christianity into Integral Christianity. In other words, this is where it starts to get really interesting.

One of the most important things that the modern world has learned about spirituality is what it learned about the interior realities of human beings in general—namely, that nobody is born fully and completely formed, or fully developed, but rather everybody has to undergo various stages of growth and unfolding and developing. The basic reason for this is that in this manifest universe, all things and events have undergone evolution, or an unfolding development of their own forms. We start from nothing, then a Big Bang—which blew only the material universe into being—we don’t yet have biological bodies or psychological bodies, or spiritual realizations, just early matter, which itself grows and develops from quarks to subatomic particles to atoms to molecules—and notice that each one of those is more and more whole, more and more unified, more and more inclusive. And then a large group of those molecules, in a spectacular leap of creative emergence (or Eros), come together, a cell wall drops around them, and pow!—life emerges—living cells emerge from just molecules. Astonishing!
This whole process of increasing wholeness, of producing larger and larger wholes (quarks to atoms to molecules to cells) occurs through a process of “transcend and include.” That’s the very nature of development and evolution itself, its very core and essence. Each stage goes beyond or “transcends” its predecessor (by adding new, novel, and emergent material), but it also enfolds or “includes” its predecessor (as a sub-ingredient). So every thing and event in the Kosmos is actually what Koestler called a “holon”—a whole that is part of a larger whole. So the universe isn’t build of wholes (as in holism) nor of parts (as in atomism)—it’s built of “whole/parts,” or holons. So whole quarks are parts of whole atoms; whole atoms are parts of whole molecules; whole molecules are parts of whole cells, whole cells are parts of whole organisms, and so on. Everything in the manifest universe is made of holons (and every holon has 4 quadrants).

So… the result of this evolutionary “transcend and include” is that today in the human body you can actually find all of the previous evolutionary stages still fully enfolded—the human body literally contains quarks, and atoms, and molecules, and cells, and those cells arrange into systems that have the essentials of life biochemistry from the earliest plants, to an actual reptilian brain stem, then a paleomammalian limbic system—which actually physically enfolds the reptilian stem (transcends and includes it)—then a mammalian cortex—which actually physically enfolds the limbic system (transcends and includes) and then a specifically human neocortex (which also transcends and includes)—all of those, from the bottom of quarks to the top of the neocortex, are all holons, all transcending and including, all the way back to the Big Bang—we truly are made of stardust (literally, dust from the earliest stars is in us)—but so are plant biochemistry, and fish muscles, and reptilian drives, and mammalian emotions, and
human thoughts. Every single entity that has emerged in the past 14 billion years is still contained, literally included, in this body. Talk about being interwoven with the entire universe…!

And as we reach the human stages of evolution, this same process of “transcend and include” continues—and THIS is where it gets really important. This is what has changed our view of spirituality irrevocably. Now, for the last 3 or 4 hundred years, humans have known that their exterior, objective, 3rd-person, material bodies evolve (the account I just gave—of atoms, and molecules, cells, reptiles, mammals, and so on). But what humans discovered in literally just the last 100 years is that their interior, 1st-person, subjective selves and cultures—the interiors of the individual and the collective—have also evolved. And like everything else in evolution, this development involves a “transcend and include,” or a series of interior holons—in both I and we—that get larger and larger and larger, ever more inclusive and more unified and more whole (but also with the chances of ever more ways to break down or malfunction, as well—given that something can go wrong with any of those stages—the more stages there are, the more things that can go wrong. The stages of modern consciousness can get sick in ways that tribal consciousness literally cannot even imagine).

Now there are definitely a large number of different views of the actual stages and epochs and eras of human development—in both the individual today and the species as a whole. But if you look at all of them taken together, certain unmistakable agreements can be found. And this is where the important part starts to come out. For example, if we look at the one or two dozen different models given by the modern schools of developmental psychology today, we find that there are around 6-to-8 major stages of
development that virtually all of the developmental schools agree on. Some schools give fewer, some give more, but these basic half dozen stages stand out in virtually all of them. I did a book called *Integral Psychology*, and in the back I included charts of over 100 different developmental models, and what is so amazing about them is that you can see variations of these same basic half-dozen stages time and time again in virtually all of them.

And if we look at history overall, we find the same basic major stages as well. These stages—Integral Meta-Theory refers to them as “levels” (or “structures” or “waves”)—these stages can be given a large number of different names or labels, because they refer to the growth or development of all aspects of being human (so we’ll see several examples of different names). But the point of these stages—again, discovered only around 100 years ago—is crucially important for how we understand spirituality, because our own spiritual intelligence—how we think about and view spirituality—itself grows and develops and *changes dramatically through each of these stages*. It’s this overall developmental sequence that so profoundly alters how we view spirituality, with each stage having, in effect, an almost entirely different spirituality (even if they all profess to be Buddhists, or Christians, or Hindus—those at different stages of this development will have very different views of their spirituality, and this is something that simply has to be taken into account—and yet, so far, never has been). So let’s track these stages fairly closely. (And by the way, we actually have some very good research directly showing these different stages of spirituality, so this isn’t just speculative or theoretical; it’s real.)
Now let me briefly preface this with an important point. What we are talking about here is what we call the “Growing-Up” part of spirituality; we’re not yet talking about what we call the “Waking-Up” part. So two parts: Growing Up and Waking Up—both crucially important. The Waking-Up is obviously incredibly important—in many ways, it’s the core component of any authentic spirituality. This is the part that leads to what is called Enlightenment, or Awakening, or Metamorphosis, or Moksha, or the Great Liberation, Death and Resurrection, satori, gnosis, and so on. But crucially, what that following recent discoveries—the “Growing-Up” part—found out is that those spiritual experiences are all interpreted according to which of these 6-to-8 stages a person is at. This means that there really are 6-to-8 different versions of, different experiences of, spiritual Enlightenment or Awakening—and that is a new discovery that simply changes everything. We’ll continue to see exactly how this dramatically alters our understanding of religion and spirituality as we go along, and how it directly relates to a genuine Integral Christianity.

But now, to continue with our story. We were introducing these only recently discovered 6-to-8 stages of evolution or development (or Growing Up). And, keeping in mind how limited any one name is for any of these stages (and again, we’ll see many different names used for each stage, so don’t let these first names throw you), but one set of names I like is a variant on those first given by the great developmental pioneer Jean Gebser—and those names are—going from the earliest and lowest and least unified stage, to the latest and highest and most unified stage—we have the “archaic,” to “magic,” to “mythic,” to “rational,” to “pluralistic,” and to “integral” (with higher stages still
possible; and all sorts of sub-stages are available—but those are a good general overview).

And if we look at overall history, we see the same basic levels appearing in the major epochs or eras of human history—from tribal hunting-and-gathering magic (do a Rain Dance, and this magically forces Nature to rain); to traditional farming societies or the great classical mythic Empires (and here “mythic” means, for example, the times during which things like the Bible were written, where Moses really did part the Red Sea, God really did rain frogs down on the Egyptians, Lot’s wife really was turned into a sac of salt, and so on—myths taken to be literally true—as in the Middle Ages—that’s the mythic stage); and from that stage to modern industrial-rational societies and the rise of modern sciences; and then to postmodern, Information-Age, pluralistic societies—so, magic tribal hunting, mythic traditional farming, modern rational industrial, and postmodern pluralistic—and each of those has a very different version of spirituality (as we’ll clearly see); and further—and this is the point—each of those versions of spirituality is fully available to every individual today, right now—AND, we are standing at this moment on the real verge of the emergence of integral levels of consciousness on a global scale, and for the first time ever in all of our history—and this, as we’ll see, is truly revolutionary.

Now there’s a reason that these interior “I” or “we” stages were only discovered around 100 years ago. And that is, you can’t see them by introspecting, by simply looking within. You can introspect right now, but you’ll never see something that says, “Oh, that’s a mythic thought,” or “Ah, that’s rational, and that’s magic, and, oh, that’s pluralistic.” It’s important to realize this, because people like meditation teachers will
often say, “My spiritual tradition has an extensive psychology and it doesn’t have anything like those stages, and I’ve been meditating for 20 years and I’ve never seen anything like those in my awareness at all”—and that’s right, they haven’t, and they won’t—not by looking within or introspecting or meditating—you’ll never see them that way, which is why no meditation or spiritual system anywhere in the world has those major 6-to-8 stages.

You can’t see those stages by introspecting because these views are much more like grammar. Every person born in a particular language-speaking society grows up speaking that language fairly correctly—they put subjects and verbs together correctly, they use adjectives and adverbs correctly, and in general they correctly follow the rules of grammar of that language. But if you ask any of them to write down those rules, virtually nobody can do it. In other words, they are following a large system of rules but have no idea that they are doing so, let alone what those rules actually are. These stages—archaic, magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic, integral—are just like the rules of grammar. You can’t see them by looking within (rather, you have to study large groups of people over long periods of time and look very carefully to see what they all have in common; and because you have to study large groups of people for this, you can’t see this by looking within just one individual). That’s why you can’t see these stages right now by looking within—any more than by looking within right now you can see the rules of grammar you are following—you can’t. These stages are not obvious, they’re largely hidden like water to a fish, and that’s why these stages were not discovered until only about 100 years ago. And simply notice that by that time, all of the great spiritual traditions were long-ago completely formed, and so you find these stages in not a single
one of the world’s great traditions—they are just completely unaware of them, and 
unaware of how their own beliefs change dramatically at each and every stage. That’s 
why this discovery has so profoundly shaken the religious traditions whenever they have 
become aware of it—and mostly, they simply ignore it (if they know about it all, which 
most simply don’t).

Now the thing about this “transcend and include” nature of evolution and 
development is that it is meant literally. So today, every single human being born 
anywhere on the planet still starts out at the archaic stages of development—the simple 
basic physiological needs and drives of the organism. No matter how high the culture’s 
development, every individual is born at square 1—born at the archaic stages and begins 
their development (in any line) from there. And after the archaic, around age 1 to 2, the 
magic stage emerges—that is, the emergence of a distinctly separate self, early 
emotional-sexual drives and needs, fantasy thinking, magical thinking (we still see this 
“magic” stage remaining in things like voodoo—if you make a doll representing a person, 
and stick a pin in the doll, the real person is magically and really hurt—that’s pure 
magic). This stage transitions (the so-called “magic-mythic” stage, around ages 3 to 5) 
into the emergence of a concrete-literal mythic stage (throughout the latency period). 
This stage gets this name from the fact that somebody at this mythic-literal stage, who is, 
say, a Christian, will believe that everything in the Bible literally and truly happened—as 
we earlier noted, Moses really did part the Red Sea, Elijah really did go straight to heaven 
in his chariot while still alive, Christ really was born of a biological virgin, and so on. 
Most of the Great Religions around the world were born during this mythic-literal era 
(from around 1500 BCE to 1500 CE), and part of their problem in today’s world is trying
to figure out what to do with those myths, which increasingly seem to be considerably less than really true. (Was Lao Tzu really 900 years old when he was born? We’ll come back to this problem, because it’s a central part of the difficulty in fitting religion in with today’s world and today’s science—and yet that has to happen if spirituality is to go forward at all.)

But back to our story: If a human continues to develop beyond this mythic-literal stage—and by the way, many will not—but if they do, they move into the adolescent stage of the emergence of reason, and of being an individual with individual wants and needs and thoughts and drives. The historians Will and Ariel Durant called this historical epoch the “Age of Reason and Revolution”—the emergence of rationality on a large scale, which also brought a significant demise of mythic religion and the spectacular rise of modern science, the end of monarchy and the rise of a democracy of individuals—such as with the American and French revolutions—and the end of slavery, the rise of the Western Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and so on. It was at this point that religion—which in many cases remained at the previous mythic-literal stage—started getting into constant battles with modern rationality and modern science (a completely unnecessary battle, as we’ll see). But starting with Galileo Galilei and his telescope—around 1605—the Church began refusing to look through the rational eye of science (much to its detriment, alas).

Now, just a few more background technicalities, briefly—and again, no need to remember any of these details, just the conclusion, which I’ll point out very clearly. The reason that this stage—this modern, rational, scientific stage—arose at this time is that the rational level is the first level of development that can fully and easily take a
3rd-person perspective—that is, take an objective overall view of things. The first 2 or 3 stages (from archaic up to mythic) are all "egocentric or narcissistic—they’re actually called that. And that means those early stages are only aware of the 1st-person perspective, they can’t take the role of other, or put themselves in another person’s shoes and see how they see the world—so a child will stick its head under a pillow and think that because it can’t see anybody, nobody can see it, either. But with the emergence of mythic-literal thinking, a 2nd-person perspective emerges and the self accordingly can evolve from egocentric to ethnocentric—that is, from a “self-only identity” to a “group identity,” from only an “I” to an “us,” and an “us” based on family, or tribe, or nation, or religion, or sex, or race, or creed—and it’s an “us VERSUS them”—versus all the people that are not part of our group, and therefore aren’t to be fully trusted. So ethnocentric is not yet worldcentric—ethnocentric is just “us,” while worldcentric is “all of us,” or truly global. But ethnocentric thinks only in terms of its ethnicity—its race, its blood, its sex, its religion, its political party, or whatnot—all 2nd-person “us” realities, not yet any 3rd-person “all-of-us” or universal/worldcentric perspectives or identities.

But with the emergence of reason in a major fashion, consciousness moves from an ethnocentric identity to a worldcentric identity—it tries to treat all people fairly regardless of race, color, sex, or creed. It was at this point in human history—just 3 or 400 years ago—that we have the emergence of modern science (which takes an objective 3rd-person view), the rise of democracy, the end of slavery—“the end of slavery” because of a universal morality, or universal and worldcentric rights of human beings (and this was for the first time in our entire history. With the rise of modern rational societies, every single modern nation worldwide outlawed slavery—every one of them—that had
never happened, ever, because humankind had never thought in universal or worldcentric terms, only in ethnocentric terms (“us versus them,” and you’re allowed to enslave, torture, or kill “them”); but now there is the emergence of the recognition of “the UNIVERSAL rights of men and women”—the first time in all of history—and very suddenly… we are in the modern era).

And that’s the conclusion. Mythic-literal takes an ethnocentric perspective (an “us versus them”; a “chosen people”; an ethnic identity, based on race, color, sex, or creed); whereas worldcentric takes a global, all-human identity, not just a special-group-of-humans identity. So the conclusion is this big break in development between just a 2nd-person ethnocentric identity (“us versus them”) and a 3rd-person worldcentric identity (“all of us”). This is a very important stage of development, and it becomes particularly important in understanding spirituality, as you can probably already begin to imagine.

So, to carry on the evolution story, if a person continues their growth in any intelligence beyond the rational stage (which typically emerges today in adolescence), then with early adulthood they will move into the postmodern pluralistic—or multicultural—stage of development. This stage initially might sound a little strange or hard to understand, but by the time we’ve finished talking about it—and especially its spirituality—you’ll recognize it clear as day, because it’s everywhere. But this stage tends to look beyond any universal or human-wide truths, and allow individuals and individual cultures to have their own specific truths—what’s true for one culture is not necessarily true for others; and the same with individuals—I have my truths, you have yours, and these cannot be challenged; they are true for each of us. So this stage does
look at all the world’s cultures, but it reaches a more complex conclusion—it sees just how different most of the various cultures are, with each of them tending to have some of their own truths, truths that you don’t find in other cultures, and thus this stage really emphasizes this “multiculturalism.”

So the result is that this stage tends to be hyper-vigilant about making sure that nobody attempts to impose their views or their values on others, that everybody is fully free to decide for themselves what is true and false, right and wrong, good and bad. The whole civil rights movement came out of this stage, along with feminism and environmentalism, among many others.

(Short footnote: This is clearly very admirable, but we have to constantly watch out for a contradiction in the heart of this postmodern stance that critics were soon to pounce on. Namely, this pluralistic stage—and “pluralistic” means “multiple” or “many truths”—and so this stage claims that there are no truths that are true for everybody—there are no Big Pictures, no universal truths, no meta-narratives—like the one I’m giving here—but only local and individual and multicultural truths. There are no superior views anywhere, in other words. You can’t say one view is better than another. But that pluralistic view believes that its way of seeing things, its view, is in fact the one correct way to see things—and this is true for all people, in all cultures, at all times. In other words, it believes that it is universally true that there are no universal truths; it maintains that there are no superior views, but it also believes that its view is superior to all the others. So it is itself doing what it says cannot and should not be done. So, we have to watch out for that, and simply remember that there are universal truths and there are individual, cultural truths. Both are real, both exist, both are important. $2 + 2$ is $4$—for
EVERYBODY; and a diamond will cut a piece of glass, no matter what cultural words we use for “diamond,” “cut,” and “glass”—there ARE universal truths. Some of the developmental models of these 6-to-8 stages of development have been tested in over 40 different cultures around the world—including Australian Aborigines, Amazon Rain Forest tribes, and Russian workers, with no major exceptions found—so we are indeed claiming that some of the components of this Integral Framework are universal, are found everywhere—although the exact way they appear—their “surface features”—will vary from culture to culture, but their “deep features” are identical worldwide.

“Post-modern” means “beyond the modern,” or “after the modern”; and it’s just that—the first major stage to emerge after rational modernity. So it’s also sometimes called “post-rational” or “post-formal.” So the modern stage began around 1600 CE—we mentioned Galileo—and was marked by the emergence of rationality or reason in a significant fashion, the rise of the modern sciences, various democracies, the Western Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, the emergence of universal and worldcentric rights, the end of slavery, and so on (a stage that itself began fighting its mythic-traditional background, the previous stage, found in such entities as the Catholic Church and the new Protestantism). This modern rational stage was the leading edge of human evolution until just recently, around the 1950s and 1960s, with the emergence of the stage of postmodernism, the Information Age, pluralistic multiculturalism, a hyper-vigilance for human rights and thus the whole civil rights movement, personal and professional feminism, and a movement of universal environmentalism and the notion that the environment has rights, too. All of that from the postmodern pluralistic stage.
Now, we previously mentioned that there is, in fact, an even higher stage (or stages) beyond the postmodern pluralistic—these are just now emerging, and really only started to emerge on any sort of widespread scale around 2 or 3 decades ago. This higher stage is called integrative, integral-aperspectival, systemic, global, or simply integral. It gets its “integral” or “integrating” names from one of its most important, profound—and unique—characteristics. All of the earlier stages (if we count the most common ones given, we find around 6 or 7 of them leading up to Integral)—but all of those stages are often called “1st tier,” simply because each one of them believes that its truth and values are the only real truth and values in existence; all of the others are confused, childish, or just plain wrong. But the integral level is called “2nd tier,” because of the following unique characteristic—it believes that all of the previous stages are important, have some sort of significance, are somehow true but partial. It’s just like atoms to molecules to cells to organisms—just because the higher levels are more encompassing, more whole, more unified, doesn’t mean the earlier levels aren’t real or don’t exist—they do, and, more importantly, they are ingredients of, and stages toward, the higher levels themselves—just as atoms are parts of molecules, molecules are parts of cells, and cells are parts of organisms. The higher levels wouldn’t and couldn’t exist without them. They’re parts of what’s called a growth hierarchy, and not a dominator hierarchy—in *growth* hierarchies, each higher stage is more inclusive and more freeing; in *dominator* hierarchies, each higher stage is more domineering and oppressive (like the caste system). Many postmodernists confuse these two hierarchies, lump them together, and then toss out all hierarchies, a huge mistake. But these are growth hierarchies, which honor all of
their earlier stages. Molecules don’t oppress atoms or dominate atoms or hate atoms—they include them, they enfold them, if anything, they love them.

Somehow, the integral stage of development intuitively understands this fact—the importance of all earlier stages. And so the integral stage strongly pushes toward views of reality and approaches to reality that are inclusive, holistic, comprehensive, embracing. The integral level sees all views as “true but partial,” including its own, and sees all of them as endlessly evolving and unfolding to ever-higher, ever-wider, ever-more-inclusive holons.

So every previous stage in our entire history (up to integral) was one that fundamentally wanted to pick a fight with any other stage—making global peace and harmony absolutely impossible for all of our history up to now (and in fact, for every one year of peace in humankind’s history, there have been 14 years of war)—but now, starting with the integral level, a genuinely inclusive, peaceful, and harmonious humanity becomes a real possibility, and for the first time ever. This is monumental, to put it mildly. Right now, only about 5% of the worldwide population is at an integral level, but many developmentalists think this could reach 10% within a decade or two—so some profound, indeed revolutionary, changes are headed our way.

* * * *

Okay, given what we’ve said so far, what would be some of the major components of a truly Integral Spirituality or Integral Christianity—that is, a spirituality that took account of, and included, all of the facts that we’ve just discussed? Well, for
starters, it would certainly include the quadrants—or the view of Spirit (and reality in
general) from 1st-person, 2nd-person, and 3rd-person perspectives. Thus, it would include
Spirit as the sum total of the entire objective or manifest universe—the sum-totality of the
Many, the great Whole of the entire manifest universe, or the All—sometimes known as
Gaia or the Great Web of Life, in which each of us is an inherent and equal strand. (This
is an objective 3rd-person view, often called a systems view or an “eco [e-c-o] –
ecocentric” view.)

But overall reality would also include your existence, not just as a part or a strand
of this Whole Web, but a part that is in direct relationship not only with the rest of the
Web, but with Spirit itself, with the Ground of All Being, with the ultimate Reality of the
Web itself. You’re not just an objective 3rd-person part of this Whole Web, you are in
direct 2nd-person relationship with its Ultimate Reality or Real Condition, in an
immediate, personal awareness—you are directly related to Spirit. (The 2nd-person
“I-Thou” view.)

This means that you can be in direct relationship with the Ultimate Intelligence of
this whole universe—you can engage in “conversations with God” (as Neale Donald
Walsh’s bestselling book put it). But we hasten to note that how you picture this
“Ultimate Intelligence” or “Spirit” or “Presence” will depend upon your level of
development (or Growing Up). If you are mythic-literal, you will indeed likely view God
as that grey-haired gentleman sitting on a throne in the sky; if you’re at rational, you’ll
more likely see it simply as a vast global Intelligence or Higher Wisdom that you can
draw on, and the reason this is not a myth or just a story is that this universe is not simply
driven by chance and random mutations so that it is essentially meaningless and running
downhill—which would make any belief in a Higher Wisdom indeed a myth. But in fact, the simplest look at evolution will show that it is running uphill—chance and randomness is exactly what this universe is not doing—atoms to molecules to cells to organisms to plants to fish to amphibians to reptiles to mammals to humans is a direct climb to higher and higher and higher levels of wholeness and unity and inclusiveness and awareness and intelligence—running downhill is exactly what that sequence is NOT doing—there is an Intelligence or Wisdom—as we said, often called Eros—that is winding up that whole series—systems theory today calls it “self-organization,” and maintains that evolution is driven by it. But that’s just a 3rd-person term for it; that’s fine, but since you are also a product of that self-organizing drive, there is no reason you can’t be in a direct relationship with that Intelligence—which is not just a great “It” but can be viewed as a “Great Thou” or pure “Presence” and as part of an “I-Thou” relationship—and you can do this because that organizing Wisdom is actually there, and it has been for 14 billion years—so talk to it, commune with it, open your heart and head to this extraordinary Brilliance, ask it questions, listen carefully for any sort of answers. Ask your question, and then simply say to yourself, “May whatever answer that arrives be from this Great Wisdom”—and then listen wholeheartedly. That Great Wisdom is there, it has created this extraordinary Kosmos we see everywhere, it created you—why on earth shouldn’t you be able to directly address it? You are clearly in some sort of relationship with it. You can view it as God, or as Goddess, or directly as Jesus Christ or some other great saint or sage—or simply as divine “Presence”—and whatever response you get will, in large measure, depend upon the developmental stage that you are at—you might get magic, or mythic, or rational, or pluralistic, or integral. And yes, it is anthropomorphic—
it is how a human being would hear this type of response. And so what? This Kosmos is alive and brimming with this creative Eros, this infinite Wisdom and Intelligence and Being and Consciousness and Light—how could we just shut our eyes to it? Sit on the edge of the Grand Canyon, or look up at the stars at night, and simply contemplate the *Mystery of existence*—this Kosmic Wonder is a perfect form of connecting with Spirit in 2nd person, as a Great Mystery suffusing our entire being with Wonder. You are here, you are existing, you are actually here *right now*—is that not a miracle? You don’t need a detailed answer, you just need to be embraced by the Wonder of it All. The sheer Wonder.

A 5-year old asked his mother, “Mom, where do I come from?” And she gives this long drawn-out explanation of the birds and the bees and so on. When she’s done, the child says, “No, Mom, Johnny comes from Detroit, where do I come from?” In other words, our questions to God and the answers we will hear will depend upon our stage of development—from simple, innocent, and sweet, to complex, complicated, and sophisticated. Doesn’t matter; it’s just us opening ourselves to that Kosmic Brilliance that has built all of this out of a handful of dust—literally. From dust to the sonnets of Shakespeare—that is categorically NOT the universe running downhill. That Spirit-in-action, that Eros, that Wisdom, that Intelligence is the force of evolution itself—and evolution is nothing but Spirit-in-action; it’s how Spirit actually creates this manifest universe—it didn’t happen out of chance—that’s headed in the wrong direction! Nothing is better proof of Spirit’s existence than evolution, or what Whitehead called “the creative advance into novelty.” Eros! So why not open ourselves to a direct relationship with that extraordinary Wisdom? *Ask your question sincerely, and you will receive a sincere*
answer—tailored at and by your particular developmental stage. But whenever you feel Wonder, or Love, or Forgiveness, or Gratefulness, or Joy—take a few minutes to bow in thankfulness, for you are in the presence of the Lord our God and Goddess, or simply, Kosmic Wisdom. How could we not be astonished by THIS? Just let the Wonder come flooding in, and bask in the miracle of it all… and in your Heart, bow deeply.

And yet, even further, you are not just in relationship to Spirit, you ARE Spirit. Your own deepest and highest “I” (or “I-I”) is in a Supreme Identity with the Ultimate Reality or Spirit of the entire Kosmos. Thou art That. And awakening to your Supreme Identity, your True and Real Self, is to resurrect the state of Enlightenment, of Awakening, of the Great Liberation, from the stream of consciousness into its true and timeless and eternal condition. (And this is the ultimate 1st-person view. At the gathering, we’ll do some exercises to directly awaken this awareness.) Even if you don’t believe in Spirit in 2nd person (as a Thou or We), but you do believe in Spirit in 1st person (Spirit as your own Highest Self), then your relative self, which will remain in existence, will still look at its own Highest Self in a 2nd-person stance—the lower, conventional self will see its own Highest Self as a Thou, as a Great Other—its own Great Other, but still Other nonetheless. So even with Spirit in 1st person, Spirit in 2nd person still needs cultivating (as does Spirit in 3rd).

So again, all 3 of those perspectives are important, and each of us has all 3 of them perfectly available. The Trinity is nothing but a version of the Big Three. And fully including all of these quadrants and their realities is called “Showing Up”—showing up for all of reality and not just a part of it.
Next, any Integral Spirituality (including Integral Christianity) would certainly have the component of the actual transformation of consciousness, or what we call “Waking Up.” We talked briefly of states of consciousness, of meditative or contemplative transformations through states of consciousness, from the narrowest at one end to the most inclusive and all-pervading at the other—and successfully moving through that overall sequence is what constitutes Enlightenment, Awakening, Metamorphosis, Moksha, satori, Waking Up. We will be returning during the gathering, as I indicated, to these actual states and their developmental unfolding (what we call state-stages), which show a remarkable similarity in all of the world’s great meditative systems, including contemplative Christianity. And it’s these state-stages that constitute the path of Waking Up. That Waking Up is the process that Christ himself underwent on the cross, the process that every Christian is asked to emulate, the same process the Zen practitioner undergoes in his or her path to Enlightenment, the same process the Sufi undergoes in his or her quest for the Supreme Identity—all-in-all the path of Waking Up is the path of realizing and resurrecting that sumum bonum—that greatest good—of the human condition, namely, finding that it is deeply one with the Divine.

Now again, at the gathering we will be returning to this component and offer some actual practices to give you a direct taste of these higher and highest states of consciousness—what they mean, and how to reach them. But for now, we can simply note that this path of Waking Up goes back several thousand years, at least, and constitutes the path of the Great Liberation that virtually every major esoteric spiritual tradition worldwide has explored. The point is that we don’t want to forget the path of Waking Up, its major states of consciousness—and the state-stages through which they
go on their way to the realization of Enlightenment and Awakening (again, we’ll be
going over each of those at the gathering). This Enlightenment or Redemption or
Waking Up—the death and resurrection of the interior self—is the utter core of
spirituality wherever it appears, and is crucial.

But it is the last major component that, all things considered, has caused the most
excitement, the most enthusiasm, the most controversy, and the most profound new
discoveries. Where versions of the quadrants and versions of the path of Waking Up can
be found in many traditions the world over, this new component—the discovery of those
6-to-8 major levels or structures and their stages of unfolding (i.e., from archaic to magic
to mythic to rational to pluralistic to integral)—those were only discovered, as we’ve
said, around 100 years ago, whereas quadrants and the state-stages of Waking Up are
thousands of years old. But virtually all major traditional spiritual systems were long set
in place well before 100 years ago, quite before structures of consciousness were ever
discovered, and so, not surprisingly, there is not a single spiritual system or tradition
anywhere in the world that has anything like these 6-to-8 structure-stages of
development—and that is why their discovery has caused such a sensation in spiritual
circles (when, that is, they’re aware of it at all).

But altogether these stages of development are called the path of “Growing Up.”
As we earlier noted, Growing Up and Waking Up are very different—both are crucially
important, and leaving out either of them leads directly and inevitably to various forms of
real problems. Because what recent research has clearly demonstrated is that these
structures (or structure-stages) of Growing Up form the background interpretive grid
through which all experiences—including meditative or spiritual experiences—are
interpreted and therefore experienced. So you’ll interpret your Waking Up experiences in terms of the stage of Growing Up that you’re at (and we’ll come back to that).

But these two paths—that of Waking Up and Growing Up—are relatively independent developmental paths—you can grow and develop through structures (Growing Up) and through states (Waking Up) in a relatively independent fashion—you can be highly developed in one path, such as Waking Up, and poorly developed in the other path, that of Growing Up (and vice versa). This has enormous implications for spirituality.

(And briefly, the structures of Growing Up are, remember, very like the rules of grammar—“structures” are mental patterns that govern how we interpret and operate on our world; they can’t be seen by looking within, and they can’t be discovered by introspecting. This is why they were only discovered fairly recently. So if you’re at a mythic-literal structure of development, you’ll interpret your world in mythic-literal terms, but you won’t realize that you’re doing so, unless somebody points it out and explains it. But the states in the path of Waking Up, on the other hand: states, unlike structures, are direct, immediate, 1st-person experiences; so if you have a spiritual experience of oneness, or a meditative state of love and bliss, or a peak experience of flow, you’ll know it immediately. This is why an awareness of the states of Waking Up goes back thousands of years and can be found in virtually every major system of meditative spirituality the world over; whereas the structures of Growing Up were discovered, as we’ve said, only a century ago and are found in none of the world’s great traditions.)
This became abundantly apparent with the empirical research of the brilliant developmental pioneer James Fowler, who, using methods from the path of Growing Up (with its 6-to-8 major levels or structures of development), found that what people call their religious and spiritual views, and how they see and picture and describe them, actually do vary enormously, but they do so in a developmental sequence that runs—no surprise—from archaic views to magic views to mythic-literal views to rational views to pluralistic views to integral views. And that means a person whose Growing Up has brought them to, say, the mythic-literal structure, can nonetheless undergo a fairly complete Waking Up through all of the major states all the way to traditional Enlightenment. But they will interpret that Enlightenment according to the structure they are at—mythic-literal in this case (but it could be magic, rational, pluralistic, integral, and so on, depending upon what their actual stage is in the spiritual line of development).

And this is what James Fowler’s research clearly found. No matter what states they were undergoing in their Waking-Up transformation, they were still interpreting them according to their particular *structures* of consciousness they were at. So we have these two developmental axes here—development through structures (or Growing Up) and development through states (or Waking Up). (Again, we’ll have a better sense of these, what these are and how they differ, when we momentarily go through these basic *states* of Waking-Up development, just as we briefly outlined the 6-to-8 basic *structures* of Growing-Up development. So far, we’ve just been referring to the states and stages of Waking Up, without listing them or explaining them, so it might not be terribly clear exactly what we mean. But we will go through each of those Waking-Up states and stages in just a moment—and, at the gathering, accompanied with direct experiential
exercises—and then I trust this whole notion of Waking Up and Growing Up will be much clearer.)

For the time being, let’s continue just a bit more with these structures of Growing Up in spirituality. Because this component of structures (or structure-stages) points to the fact that human beings categorically do not have just one single way that they interpret their spiritual dimension; they have 6-to-8 major, dramatically different ways to interpret spiritual experiences. And this means that if we, say, went to a large gathering of Zen Buddhists, who claim that they essentially share the same basic beliefs and practices, what we find—what Fowler found—is that if you explore just a bit under the surface, you will find people all over the full spectrum of different interpretations (some are at egocentric magic, some at ethnocentric mythic, some at worldcentric rational, some at pluralistic, and so on).

What happens in traditional Enlightenment is that the individual is said to experience a “unity of Emptiness and Form”—or a unity of formless Spirit with the entire world of manifest Form, or a unity of your awareness with a oneness with the entire universe—known generally, East and West, as “unity consciousness” or simply “oneness” (or more technically, “nonduality”). Now if the individual experiencing this oneness is at, say, the ethnocentric mythic stage, they will indeed experience a full unity at that level. But there are still, over their head, the structures or levels of the rational world, the pluralistic world, the integral word (and higher), and the person who is at the ethnocentric mythic-literal level, and who is having a genuine experience of “unity consciousness,” is indeed “one with” his or her entire world—but the problem is, their “entire word” does not include rational, pluralistic, or integral realities. So their “whole world”—which certainly seems fully comprehensive and unified and whole to them—is actually
partial, fragmented, and limited—and they have no way of knowing this, because everything
seems totally on line for them, whereas it is actually leaving out many truly significant higher
levels of the Kosmos—so they’re not one with everything (and they can’t tell this because they
can’t see it by introspecting—so they have no way of knowing). So they might indeed have an
experience of “Waking Up” or “Enlightenment” or “oneness,” but it is not a full and complete
Oneness—it is not one with ALL of reality—it is leaving out substantial and crucially important
aspects of reality itself (such as the entire worlds of rational and pluralistic and integral).

So this means that Christianity—or any spirituality, or any worldview in general—
actually has around at least 6-to-8 different views of its central beliefs—what they mean, what
actually constitutes them, what value they have. It’s almost not an exaggeration to say that each
of these different stages of development—with different values, different drives, different needs
and desires, different truths and methods—actually present entirely different versions of
Christianity itself.

And remember, you can’t tell this, you can’t see these stages, just by looking within or
examining your own awareness. So let’s walk through some of these different views, and see just
how different they are, even though all of them will call themselves “Christian” (we could do the
same thing with Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and so on—and if you want to see examples of all
of these, I highly recommend the work of Dustin Diperna). If you’re just talking to some of these
people with different views, you might not even notice it, unless you know specifically what to
look for. So let’s see….

So somebody at magic Christianity will be looking first and foremost to their own
salvation—this is an egocentric level, after all—so they are concerned primarily just with
themselves. If they have a dream of a radiant being of light suffusing love everywhere, they
might take that figure to be Jesus Christ—and if severe, they might believe that they
themselves—and only they—actually ARE Jesus Christ (asylums are full of dear souls who truly
believe that). But in any event they will be oriented especially to the magic elements of this
level—they are attracted to being able to walk on water, raise the dead, conquer death, turn water into wine, fly through the air, and so on. They are essentially at the same stage that watches “superhero” cartoons every Saturday morning—the magic stage—and they see Jesus, and sometimes themselves, as being a literal cartoon superhero, capable of all sorts of miracles and magic and superpowers. That’s what they want out of their religion—ways to magically be superman. Some believers at this level are members of things like snake charmers, where poisonous snakes are actually handled with the magic belief that if you are a true Christian, the snake can’t bite you. In fact, the leader of one of the largest of these sects just died—from a rattlesnake bite.

At the next major level, the mythic Christian, the emphasis shifts to ethnocentric concerns and especially “us versus them.” “Us” are all those who are saved, who have accepted the mythic-literal version of this religion as the one and only absolutely true and absolutely real account of reality, and for this belief they will literally live in a mythic heaven forever—literally forever. And it is maintained that, from this lofty perch, they will derive great joy watching the torture and torment of all those in hell—even their own children. Because all of “them”—all nonbelievers or unbelievers—are bound for eternal damnation; infidels have deliberately turned their backs on the Lord Divine—as Lucifer originally did—and for that they deserve a punishment as severe as the reward is blissful. But every single word in the Bible is literally and absolutely true—it is the word of God, and simply cannot be challenged, period. Pentecostals are generally at this fundamentalist stage; and they are the fastest growing spiritual group anywhere in the world.

While alive, their job is jihad—which in Islam means “holy war,” but it applies to virtually every believer at this fundamentalist mythic-literal stage of every religion (it’s the war of “us”—who have the true word of God—versus “them,” the unbelievers, the infidels, the disbelieving, who must be converted—or killed—in order to spread the one true word). But that can take many forms across a wide spectrum. At the gentlest end, it involves trying to convince
or convert the nonbeliever; this person might take up being anything from a minister to a
missionary, devoting their lives to converting “them” to the one true way. More aggressively, a
true believer—a fundamentalist—has the right to coerce others into accepting the mythic-literal
word of God. In this case, they might actually engage in a genuine religious war, trying to rid this
world of infidels and send them where they really belong—to hell. The vast majority of terrorists
in today’s world are at this fundamentalist stage of whatever religious tradition they belong to
(whether Southern Baptists blowing up abortion clinics in the South; Buddhists putting sarin
poison gas in the Tokyo subway system; Islamic ISIS killing and murdering countrymen; Hindu
nationalists attacking Pakistanis; Hamaas and Hezbolah killing Israelis; al Qaeda blowing up the
Twin Towers; the horrible attacks that occurred between the Irish Protestants and Catholics—the
list is almost endless, and no religion—at this stage—is immune).

And right here we are standing directly on one of the central factors that determines
whether spirituality will be good news or bad news. Ethnocentric mythic-literal, and the even
earlier egocentric magic—precisely because both are less than worldcentric—are open to the
very worst possibilities in the religious engagement. Pre-worldcentric is fundamentally trouble.
Now egocentric is relatively less trouble, but only because it doesn’t care about others, it only
cares about itself—so it wouldn’t bother to attack somebody else. Ethnocentric, however, does
care about others—it is aware of others, but only in an “us versus them” fashion—“us” who are
saved, and “them” who are damned, and a “them” that therefore (as one’s holiest duty) have to
be convinced, coerced, or killed, in order to fulfill the one true word of God—and that is where
the single largest source of human suffering throughout history has come from—religion in its
truly bad-news, its very worst, form.

Now this is a big deal. Research shows that some 60-70% of the world’s entire
population is still at ethnocentric or lower levels of development (of Growing Up). That’s 2 out
of 3 people on the planet are Nazis or lower. 2 out of 3. Look no further for the major reasons
for worldwide conflict, continuing war and aggression, the stubborn refusal of humanity to come
to any sort of world peace and harmony. And this is not caused by lack of money; it’s not economically caused; it’s not lack of land, or food; it’s not generated by oppression or social degradation—it is directly traceable to one’s level of Growing Up. The higher levels in that developmental sequence (worldcentric and Kosmocentric) are more inclusive, they embrace and enfold more and more individuals, they’re more whole and enfolding, so fewer and fewer individuals are seen as other, as enemy, as “damned,” as somebody to attack, but are rather embraced in a human solidarity; whereas the lower levels (egocentric and ethnocentric) include fewer and fewer people; more and more individuals are therefore seen as “other,” as alien, as strangers, as enemies to be attacked and dispatched. And money won’t cure that; technology won’t cure that; politics won’t cure that; only interior growth and development will cure that.

So looking to outside forces to solve this—financial solutions, or material solutions, or economic solutions, or technological solutions—doesn’t get at the real source of the problem—the real source is in the interior quadrants—I and we, consciousness and culture—and not the exterior quadrants—material “it” and systems of technological “its.” And what is the real content of this 60-70% of the population’s actual ideas? The vast majority of them believe in one or another of the world’s great Religions—but of course, mostly in their mythic, literal, fundamentalist, ethnocentric form or stage. An ethnocentric Christian simply cannot understand how a Hindu can be fully saved while remaining a Hindu. That goes against everything the ethnocentric fundamentalist believes in. It took the Catholic Church its entire history—all the way to Vatican II in the ‘60s—to acknowledge that (paraphrasing) “comparable salvation to Christianity can be offered by other religions.” There, finally, a worldcentric stance—and the next two Popes did everything they could to ignore that—and most major religions still do.

This ethnocentric, “us versus them,” fundamentalist version of spirituality is what gives spirituality its bad name in the modern era—and why the so-called “new atheists” like Dawkins and Hitchins and Harris and Hawking can so aggressively attack religion. Mythic-literal,
ethnocentric religion is basically all the bad things they say it is. And the vast majority of religious believers worldwide are magic or mythic-literal.

And that is why we desperately need the conveyor belt—which is the idea that every major religion needs to learn how its religion looks at each of the major levels of development, and offer a version of that religion across the entire spectrum of development, taken from each of those major 6-to-8 stages. Besides, as research has made very clear, there are already people at virtually every different stage of development in that religion, and they are interpreting it themselves according to their own stage of development (magic or mythic or rational or pluralistic or integral)—this is already happening. And the conveyor belt (instituted in every major spiritual system)—by inviting their true believers to continue developing into more and more inclusive and more embracing and more holistic stages—is the primary cure for the historically rampant bad-news versions of every major religion on the planet. The conveyor belt is the key to this crucial wicked problem.

Now, for those at the next major stage beyond ethnocentric mythic-literal—the stage that Vatican II was often trying to come from—we have rational, objective, 3rd-person-capable-of, worldcentric Christianity. A good example of this stage is the so-called Jesus Seminars. These are a group of well-respected scholars who are trying to figure out just what parts of the Bible are historically accurate and objectively true, and what parts are just mythic fabrications and stories. Somebody at this stage can take a 3rd-person, objective, critical view of their religion, look for the parts that are true and good, and dismiss those that sound outmoded, or archaic myths not much different from Santa Claus and the tooth fairy. I mean, do we really want to stone to death a woman found guilty of adultery? Condemn all homosexuals to eternal damnation? Not allow women in the front of the temple, or even in the temple at all? Those are all in the Bible—but they are not necessarily true. Somebody at this stage of reason will much more likely see Jesus as a world teacher, comparable to other great world teachers, and full of a genuine wisdom about life that this age could still use and still needs. Jesus is not literally the biological son of God (like
Hercules is the son of Zeus—both of those have the same truth status for somebody at this reason stage). Jesus rather is somebody who has himself deeply realized the Mystery of his own Being, his Real Self (one with Spirit as all beings are—and this is not “anti-scientific”; it’s true that science cannot prove Spirit, but neither can it disprove Spirit—something that it’s own fundamentalists keep forgetting, but somebody whose spiritual intelligence is at this stage definitely recognizes). So Jesus becomes somebody to whom one can turn for inspiration in making that same discovery themselves (i.e., of their own Christ-consciousness; but Jesus can be viewed in any of the 1-2-3 versions of Spirit as they appear at this stage)—and all of this is held in a non-mythic or rational and reasonable fashion (including the perfectly rational notion of transcending reason at its own limits, yielding to a different mode of perfectly reproducible knowledge, such as gnosis. This is not only completely rational, it doesn’t conflict with science, either.)

But in all events it’s a balanced, critical view, and it’s definitely worldcentric, meaning that all humans are treated fairly, regardless of race, color, sex, or creed—and “regardless of creed” means “regardless of religion”—somebody at this stage would not judge a Hindu negatively just for being a Hindu. They might not like Hindus, but they don’t think they’re going to burn in Hell forever just for being a Hindu. As a matter of fact, at this stage, they might not even believe in Hell, either. (“Hell” is usually no longer viewed as an actual, “objective,” “3rd-person,” mythic location, but rather as a 1st-person state of mind, which appropriate spirituality is meant to ease or eradicate.) At the very least, we want to see our world Religions move to a worldcentric level of development—that single move alone would kill all inter-religious warfare; would end most terrorists’ justifications for their acts; would open that 60-70% of the population to continue their Growing Up past ethnocentric bound-for-hell beliefs and into higher, wider, more inclusive, more loving, more embracing, more caring modes of spiritual development—and hence open humanity itself to much more peace and harmony. This move itself would be absolutely stunning.
As development continues, at the pluralistic stage, individuals carry on their quest to treat all people fairly, and this extends to spiritual beliefs and practices as well. In fact, some people at this stage will actively investigate other religions or spiritual practices, and often will take up some of those practices themselves. They can still consider themselves Christian (or members of any given faith)—they can still find that, for example, Jesus Christ or his teachings have a special resonance for them, and that’s important to remember. Even as you continue forward on the path of Growing Up, including more and more and more perspectives in your own views, this doesn’t stop you from having your own favorite perspectives and viewpoints, and committing to those with real faith and fervor.

Good examples of a Christianity at this stage can be found in the writings of, for example, Bishop Shelby Spong. He flat out says that he doesn’t believe any of the Christian myths—doesn’t believe the Genesis account of 7 days of creation, doesn’t believe Jesus’s mother was a biological virgin, doesn’t believe Moses parted the Red Sea, and so on—and he also says he doesn’t know a single colleague of his who believes them, either—those events are all interpreted theologically, not literally, he maintains. And he still strongly sees himself as Christian, and that is totally and radically acceptable. He reinterprets the Christian canon from this postmodern pluralistic stage, and in a way that makes a lot of sense to many people in our postmodern world. He particularly includes many feminist perspectives—and including feminist views is one of the characteristics of this stage—remember, it is strongly against any oppression or subjection or repression or exclusion, and this particularly means all minorities. This is exactly the type of thing that needs to happen as Christianity moves up the conveyor belt to higher and higher levels. This is in sharp contradistinction to, say, the mythic-literal level, where, with its ethnocentric orientation, it is usually sexist and patriarchal—the previous pope said that allowing women to be priests is equivalent to the sin of pederasty—can you imagine? You can often tell if the leadership of a religion is at this pluralistic stage by whether the overall religion is starting to allow minorities in its top positions—arguing in favor of homosexual marriage, for women as
priests, and so on—very typical pluralistic stage—the “civil rights movement” brought to spirituality itself.

Now, of course, every stage has its limitations, too. One of the ways that a person at this pluralistic stage can often be spotted is their reluctance to make judgments or to form any rankings of any sort. Ranking is bad, period; partnership is what we want. Remember, the pluralistic stage believes (at least on the surface) that no views are really better than others, and so we shouldn’t judge or rank people or their beliefs. This stage also strongly has something of an anti-intellectual stance—it doesn’t really trust logic and rationality (it’s “post-rational,” remember, which is often confused with “anti-rational”)—instead, it trusts feelings, and it is always supposed to “come from the heart.” “Listen to the heart, not the head,” is its motto. In fact, rationality is almost equated with the demonic, and everything non-rational is equated with Spirit. This emphasis on feelings and coming from the heart is almost always a sign of the pluralistic stage. And they’ll jump on people who adopt hierarchies of any kind, or who judge some views as being better than others—even though they themselves believe their own view is the best view of all.

Meetings run on pluralistic principles are considered a success, not if any conclusion is reached, but if everybody has a chance to express their feelings. Actual conclusions are often subtly avoided, because that means picking one view and denying the alternatives, and that’s a nasty ranking, so it’s avoided; and instead, everybody is asked to express what they are feeling about the topic. If everybody can express their feelings, the meeting is considered a success. This is part of that self-contradiction I mentioned with postmodernism, where its own belief that it’s view is superior to all others is quietly not mentioned.

But this stage does offer a wonderful opening to all sorts of different approaches, and prepares the ground for the next level, the Integral level, which actually begins to tie all these various views together and provide real integrations of all the different views that just stumble randomly through the pluralistic stage. But violate the pluralistic, “no-ranking” view, and
individuals at that stage can rise up in a truly indignant and nasty rage, which can genuinely startle folks, given how caring most people at this stage are. But if they think you are violating egalitarianism—the absolute equality of all views (so if you have any stages or rankings or any hierarchies at all)—they will lash out, sometimes viciously. Somebody at the pluralistic stage, for example, would have a great deal of trouble with these 6-to-8 stages of Growing Up that we’re talking about.

This is certainly a concern for those at the Integral stages. In their own spiritual path, individuals here will feel the impact of the integral stage of development on their own consciousness, and they will be looking for spiritual paths that address as many as possible of all of the ingredients that they intuitively feel crashing down on them (such as all the items we’ve been discussing). They might not yet have names for all of them, but they can feel them, they know they are there, and they are looking for people to help them understand that fact—they are looking for truly integral approaches to match their own integral level of development.

And if you will allow me to say so, most of us attending this gathering are at some version of this point in our own lives—or we wouldn’t be here, the topic of this gathering just wouldn’t be interesting. And with many of us, the Integral view rescued us from the swamp of pluralistic postmodern contradictions, relativism, nihilism, and narcissism. Many of us knew that we were different, and we tried to explain how we saw the world to our friends and colleagues, only to be met with that deer-in-headlights blank stare. And then we found some expression of an Integral view—maybe a book, maybe a video, maybe a friend—but almost as soon as we started hearing it, we knew we were home. It felt immediately right, it felt like it was speaking immediately to us, like we had indeed come home. And the reason this happens is that Integral awareness is not merely a theory—like, say, deconstruction—that you can study a bit and decide whether to agree with it or not—but rather, it’s an actual stage of development, an actual level or structure in the real universe—it’s a real territory, it is actually there—and you are actually at that real territory, and so when somebody comes along with a map of that real territory, you recognize
it immediately. “Hey, I know that place! I live there!” And maybe for a little while you become a bit fanatical about it all. You’re crazy wild about all things Integral, and you start to drive your friends—and certainly your mate—completely nuts listening to it all. But you’re just so happy to be home! Sound a little bit familiar?

One of the things that somebody at integral levels of development will almost always—not every time, but often—be interested in is the path of Waking Up and the various states (or state-stages) that it moves through. And the reason is that the path of Waking Up is not just a set of stories, mythic or otherwise, it is an actual and direct experience. It’s how you genuinely come into direct contact with Spirit, with the Ultimate Reality of the entire universe. It’s what spirituality is actually all about—in its true heart, anyway.

What those 6-to-8 stages of Growing Up in the spiritual line are about is what could be called “spiritual intelligence,” or how we specifically think about and view Spirit—and we could be a believer, or an agnostic, or an atheist, and any of those could be the result of using our spiritual intelligence to reach that conclusion—because spiritual intelligence is simply the intelligence that thinks about ultimate concerns. And spiritual intelligence, or simply how people think and talk about Spirit—goes from magic to mythic to rational to pluralistic to integral (and possibly higher). But—and here’s the point—at any of those stages of Growing Up, we can have an actual experience—a peak experience, an altered state of consciousness, a direct experience—of some spiritual reality, some state in the path of Waking Up. And that is not spiritual intelligence but spiritual experience (not just Growing Up, but Waking Up).

So, I’ve promised we would eventually look at these stages of Waking Up and really attempt to clarify them and outline them. And that is exactly where we will start when we get together in person over the upcoming weekend—with specific descriptions of, and direct experiential exercises for directly tasting, these higher and highest states of Waking Up. So I want to finish here, in this brief Integral Overview, with just a few more quick points, and then look forward to seeing you all this weekend.
At the very beginning of this Overview I mentioned the fact that the Integral “AQAL” model included “all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types.” We have briefly covered “all quadrants” (and the “Big Three”); “all levels” (also known as waves or structures—the 6-to-8 major structures of Growing Up); and “all states” (the major states and stages in the path of Waking Up—which we will start with this coming weekend). Let me very briefly mention “all lines” and “all types,” because, although not quite as important as the others, they are still significant and in some cases crucial.

“All lines” refers to “lines of development.” All 4 quadrants have various developmental lines; when we are referring to spirituality, we particularly are referring to developmental lines on the interior of the individual—many of which are also often referred to as “multiple intelligences.” As is now fairly well known, human beings don’t have just one all-encompassing intelligence (as was once commonly believed—usually a “cognitive intelligence”); but in addition to cognitive intelligence, we have emotional intelligence, moral intelligence, mathematical intelligence, aesthetic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, conative (will) intelligence, kinesthetic (somatic or bodily) intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and so on (with various authorities postulating up to two dozen different multiple intelligences, and around 8 or 9 generally recognized).

Now the thing about these multiple intelligences or multiple lines of development is that, as different as they all are, these different lines of development all move through the same basic levels of development—namely, the same basic 6-to-8 stages of Growing Up that we have already covered. Those 6-to-8 levels are simply the levels in these various lines. Different lines, same levels. So there are archaic, magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic, and integral levels of the cognitive line, the emotional line, the moral line, the spiritual line, and so on.

We have been primarily discussing the half dozen major levels as they show up in the spiritual line itself. And that’s important. But in addition to that, one can look at (or interpret) one’s spiritual experiences with an emphasis on the cognitive line, or the emotional line, or the
aesthetic line, or the intrapersonal line, and so on (as well as any combination of them). This will give one’s experience a significantly different flavor or view—each of them perfectly acceptable, but each quite different, and that’s worth remembering. One person might approach experience primarily through the emotional line, and thus they might interpret their spiritual experiences with an emphasis on, say, love; whereas somebody who emphasizes the cognitive line would give particular attention to awareness; and somebody who emphasizes the moral line might emphasize forgiveness, and so on. All of those would still go through the same basic 6-to-8 structure-stages of Growing Up (as well as the same state-stages of Waking Up)—but with that different emphasis. This is a minor point, but it can become quite significant at times. In the Eastern traditions, for example, entire and quite different schools of Yoga are built around different lines (so that jnana yoga emphasizes cognitive intelligence; bhakti yoga emphasizes love or emotional intelligence; karma yoga emphasizes direct action or kinesthetic intelligence, and so on). Just a point worth keep in mind.

And likewise with “different types.” “Types” generally means items that stay the same through different levels of development. So “male” and “female” are different types; if you’re female, you’ll stay female throughout the 6-to-8 major levels of your Growing Up (although many significant changes in exactly what “female” means can occur). There are many psychological typologies, including Five Factor, Myers-Briggs, the Enneagram, and so on. There are so many typologies, in fact, that AQAL Integral simply includes “all types” to mean that, as you are studying a particular area of human experience, be sure and check for any major typologies that might apply, since they almost always give some very important information about that area.

One typology that has proven consistently useful in human experience is the Enneagram. Its origins are obscure (some trace it back to Gurdjieff, some to Sufism, but it’s not totally clear). What is clear is that it is an extremely useful typology that has proven itself in all sorts of applications. You can see the kind of information it offers just from looking over the names of
the 9 major types that it presents: the perfectionist, the giver, the performer, the romantic, the observer, the questioner, the epicure, the protector, and the mediator. (And the point, again, is that all of those different types still proceed through the same basic 6-to-8 major levels of Growing Up.) At the gathering, Helen Palmer, world-renowned Enneagram expert, will give a special presentation on spirituality and the Enneagram, so we can see how these types have a significant impact on our spirituality. Again, something definitely worth keeping in mind.

Now, all of these factors—quadrants, levels, lines, states, types—might seem to be a bit “much”—it’s just too much stuff to keep in mind. But also remember that these phenomena are occurring in any event; they are occurring whether we are aware of them or not. Ignoring them doesn’t make them go away, it just makes us ignorant of them, so that, instead of consciously being able to face them, they simply blindside us, run over us, smash into us. They are there in any event, and they are arising and having an influence on us whether we are aware of them or not. Our only choice is not whether they are there or not, but simply whether we are conscious of them or not. We get hit by them in any event.

So Integral Meta-Theory, by including all of these factors, really does become a very comprehensive, inclusive, embracing Framework. There really is very little that it can’t include or embrace—it “makes room for everything.” And therefore it gives us a very holistic, comprehensive, expansive viewpoint of virtually any topic we approach with it—and this certainly includes spirituality, as we’ve seen. And in this case, Integral Christianity in particular. Many intelligent people in the West were brought up on Christianity (and almost always in its mythic-literal form); and so as they hit adulthood, they dropped any belief in Christianity specifically, and therefore often spirituality in general—a great loss, to be sure. Later in life, often after studying Eastern traditions, they started to get a better understanding of the higher views of Christianity that could be taken—including higher ways to view Spirit in 2nd person—and so they end up coming back to a spirituality that includes a comfortable embrace of a higher
Christianity—with many feelings of relief and gratitude, and happy to be over the nightmares often brought with a merely mythic-literal view. The relief is palpable.

And that is certainly one of the things that we hope we can offer you in this gathering, Return to the Heart. By taking an Integral view of Christianity, many of its higher and highest potentials can be brought forth. Particularly given the fact that it is the most popular religion on the planet—and especially if seen via the conveyor belt—this religion (and any religion seen via the conveyor belt, and blending both Growing Up and Waking Up) actually has a place in the modern and postmodern world. It’s no longer just a mythic fairy tale, but a map of our higher and even highest potentials, and thus its popularity becomes a good news, and not necessarily bad news, event for humanity. So let’s keep that possibility in mind for the future of our species, yes?

So I will be looking forward to seeing each of you this weekend at our actual gathering. It’s a pleasure, and an honor, to be with each of you. And I hope our get-together can be a mutually beneficial event for all of us. I’m certainly hoping it will be—and looking forward to it!

Much love, Ken