

Commentary

ACIM® Text (CE)

T-3.III, Atonement without Sacrifice

The underlining, italics, and footnote formats are explained at the end of the commentary. Also see the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition. Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Note

There's no perfect place to put this so I'll put it here.

This section was 3.I in the FIP edition, and I realized when I was trying to integrate the Urtext with my commentary on the FIP section 3.II that things had really been moved around. I added the following note about the confusion. It's worth being aware of just how much things were changed in the editing of the FIP edition.

Actually, Paragraphs 4 and 5 are inserted from elsewhere in the text. Paragraph 4 is drawn from entirely different pages of the Urtext, with sentences 1 to 4 coming from 35 pages earlier, and sentences 6 and 7 from fifteen pages before *that!* Paragraph 5 originally followed Paragraph 7 of the previous section, T-3.I! It's a mystery to me why things were moved around quite so much. Paragraph 6 of this section originally directly followed Paragraph 3. The thoughts contained in these two paragraphs, however, *do apply* to the topic at hand.

Overview

In my opinion, this section is one of the most important sections in the Text concerning the relationship of the Course to traditional Christian doctrine. The other important section is T-6.I. Therefore, I ask you to excuse me for writing a longer commentary than usual. I attach more importance to this, perhaps, than many people would, because of my extensive background in fundamentalist Christianity, whose most fundamental “fundamental” this section unflinchingly refutes.

Section 3.I flatly contradicts the orthodox Christian teaching that Jesus Christ died in place of all mankind, taking the punishment for their sins upon himself. The New Testament clearly presents this teaching, so we have to acknowledge that *A Course in*

Miracles contradicts the Bible on this point. For instance, compare these quotations, the first two from the Bible, the third from the Course:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3, NIV)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24, NIV)

[Jesus speaking]: I was not “punished” because *you* were bad. The wholly benign lesson the Atonement teaches is wholly lost if it is tainted with this kind of distortion in *any* form. (T-3.I.2:10–11 (FIP), T-3.III.4:5–6 (CE))

In the Course, Jesus is quite overtly *correcting* what he feels to be a gravely mistaken teaching by the apostles¹. In a later section in which Jesus again reinterprets the crucifixion, he says, “The Apostles often misunderstood it” (T-6.I.14:2). Their misunderstanding was recorded in the Bible and became unquestioned scripture for millions of Christians since.

Christians who adhere to traditional teachings as revealed truth are justified in considering the Course to be heretical from their perspective. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, heresy is simply an opinion or doctrine that conflicts with established religious beliefs. The Course’s teachings deliberately contradict established religious beliefs, which it views as regrettable errors. One example of such an error is the belief that Christ died for our sins.²

Jesus, in this section, says that sacrificial Atonement is a major misunderstanding, and sets for a very different interpretation of the meaning of Jesus’s death, and how Atonement is achieved.

Paragraph 1

There is one more point which must be perfectly clear before any residual fear which you may still associate with miracles becomes entirely groundless.²The crucifixion did *not* establish the Atonement; the *resurrection* did.³This is a point which many very sincere Christians have misunderstood.⁴Nobody who was free of the scarcity fallacy could possibly have made this mistake.³

To fully appreciate the passionate tone of the discussion in this section, it is important to understand the traditional Christian teaching about the crucifixion. Orthodox Christian theology teaches that Jesus’ death on the cross was a sacrifice for sin; this is called the

¹. According to tradition, the authors of the two statements above were Paul and Peter. Scholars affirm Paul’s authorship, but most of them doubt that Peter authored either of the epistles attributed to him.

². See my extended note on the origins of this traditional teaching in the Appendix to this commentary.

³. The “scarcity fallacy” is the belief in an inner lack, which then sparks driven behavior in order to fill the emptiness. In this case (as Jesus clarifies later in regard to Edgar Cayce—see Cameo 15), the belief in a lack of worth leads one to believe in a need to sacrifice as a way to fill that lack.

doctrine of *substitutionary atonement*. Our Atonement was purchased at the cost of Jesus's blood and suffering. "Christ died for our sins" (I Corinthians 15:3), the Bible teaches. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (I Peter 3:18, NIV). The typical understanding of such passages is that, in some mysterious way, the sins of all humankind for all time were "imparted" to Jesus. Because he was (in this view) not simply a man but God in human form, his infinite being was able to absorb the sum total of all guilt. His death was then the just punishment for *our* sin, thus satisfying the (supposed) demands of God's justice. Because our sin was imparted to Jesus, his righteousness has been imparted to us. "We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10, NIV). "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Peter 2:24, NIV).

Probably the clearest single summary of this teaching in the Bible comes in the book of Romans. I think it speaks for itself:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice right now, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23–26, NIV)

The idea is that God by His nature must be just, and therefore punish sin; however He is also loving. By punishing Jesus for our sins, He set us free, thereby satisfying both His justice and His love. Atonement is squarely based on, and earned by, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

This is the teaching that the Course sets out to refute in this section. Notice that it is still dealing with ridding us from "fear...you may still associate with miracles" (1:1), a major theme of the preceding chapter. Our understanding of the Atonement must be purged of any connection to sacrifice and suffering before we can be completely free of fear concerning miracles. Jesus' succinct statement in 1:2 tells us that the *resurrection*, rather than the crucifixion, established the Atonement. He will explain his statement further in 7:6ff (FIP), 8:1ff (CE), but for now what is clear is that the Atonement has no real connection to the *death* of Jesus.

This has been misunderstood by "many very sincere Christians" (1:3). Jesus does not put down those who have held this mistaken belief; he calls them "sincere." Yet he goes on to say that anyone who makes this mistake *must* still be caught in the belief in "the scarcity fallacy" (1:4), a phrase last used in T-1.IV.3:3 (FIP), T-1.29.2:3 (CE)). There it was associated with "darkness" and the general idea that we had lost the completeness we had in God's original creation. If we believe in scarcity, we will operate on the principle of "giving to get." We will think that we must give up something to have something else, which is the idea that underlies sacrifice. And Jesus dying for us is clearly a form of sacrifice. To put it in plain words: The belief that Jesus died for our sins stems from the ego's thought system of sacrifice and lack.

The Course uses strong words. In this paragraph and the next, it calls this idea a “mistake,” “an upside-down point of view,” a “particularly unfortunate interpretation, which arose out of projection,” and an “anti-religious concept.” Later, in 3:8 (FIP), 6:1 (CE), Jesus calls it “utterly impossible.” It really is not possible to retain a belief in the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and be true to the Course.

The idea that God would allow His “only begotten Son” to suffer such a horrible death—not only allow it but *encourage* or *command* that he so die!—has understandably led people to mistrust God. If He would do that to His #1 Son, He is *very* likely to ask *me* to suffer in some way, too! Marianne Williamson jokes about how, when she felt that God was calling her to serve Him, she was afraid that, “I would have to wear gray for the rest of my life, and go to Africa or something.” We have learned to equate doing God’s Will with suffering and sacrifice. I recall asking a girl in Bible college what she planned for her future, and she replied, “I’m really not certain. All I know is that it involves suffering and sacrifice.” I thought she sounded *so spiritual!*

Paragraph 2

² If the crucifixion is seen from an upside-down point of view, it certainly does appear as if God permitted and even encouraged one of His Sons to suffer *because* he was good. ²Many very devoted ministers preach this every day. ³This particularly unfortunate interpretation, which actually arose out of the combined projection of a large number of my own would-be followers, has led many people to be bitterly afraid of God. ⁴This particularly anti-religious concept happens to enter into many religions, and this is neither by chance nor coincidence. ⁴ ⁵The real Christian would have to pause and ask, “How could this be?” ⁶Is it likely that God Himself would be capable of the kind of thinking which His Own words have clearly stated is unworthy of His children?⁵

The upside-down idea of a substitutionary atonement does seem to imply that “God permitted and even encouraged one of His Sons to suffer *because* he was good” (2:1). This nonsensical idea is still widely preached, and believed, in evangelical Christian churches around the world (2:2). Jesus suffered *because* he was good, and God planned it that way? The God of Love just *had* to punish someone? It makes no sense.

I used to believe it. I had trouble understanding the why and how of it, but, as people in evangelical churches still say, “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.”

The very idea that God wants to punish sin is nothing but our projection (2:3); see also (6:1). The full sentence in the CE is: “This particularly unfortunate interpretation,

⁴. This “anti-religious concept” seems to be that God sees the suffering of certain people—particularly good people—as having saving value for the whole.

⁵. “His Own words” seems to refer to the Bible, particularly the gospels, with their emphasis on loving even one’s enemies (Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:35). Loving the enemy is clearly incompatible with punishing the good.

which actually *arose out of the combined projection of a large number of my own would-be followers*, has led many people to be bitterly afraid of God.” That does include *modern-day* projections, but it seems to support what I say in my Appendix about the way the doctrine crept into Christian theology in the First Century. As we saw in the previous section (3.II.6:2), God has nothing to do with judgment. *We* are the ones who believe we deserve punishment. *We* are the ones who think justice *means* punishment. And we have projected that belief onto God. It has aroused deep fear of God in many people.

It isn't unique to Christianity, either; it “happens to enter into many religions.” The root cause is the tendency of everyone in the world to project their belief in their own sin onto whatever concept of divinity they hold (2:4).

The Course is saying that we have to get rid of this kind of thinking. Small wonder we are afraid of getting involved with miracle-working. Miracle workers end up being crucified! Jesus says that “the real Christian” will question the reason of this entire line of thinking. It would be unworthy of any of us to encourage someone else to suffer on our behalf, or to bear the punishment for our mistakes. We know that, and yet we persist in thinking that God asked Jesus to suffer in our place. Does that make any sense? Of course not (2:5–6).

Paragraph 3

³ The best defense, as always, is not to attack another's position, but rather to protect the truth. ²It is not necessary to consider anything acceptable if you have to turn a whole frame of reference around in order to justify it. ³This procedure is painful in its minor applications and genuinely tragic on a mass basis. ⁴Persecution is a frequent result, justified by the terrible misperception that God Himself persecuted His Own Son on behalf of salvation.⁶ ⁵The very words are meaningless.

Punishment of sin is a belief that the best way to defend against evil is to attack it. Jesus says this is not so; the best defense is “to protect the truth” (3:1), or to love rather than to attack. Attack is attack; calling it “punishment” or “justice” does not negate that. To justify attack on sin we have to “invert a whole frame of reference” (3:2), which seems to refer to inverting the concept of a loving God and making Him vengeful. He goes on to give two examples of such inversions, one of “its minor applications” that is nonetheless “painful,” and one “on a mass basis” that is “genuinely tragic” (3:3).

⁶ This difficult sentence, in context, means that when a people turns around its whole frame of reference to accommodate the concept that punishment can be redemptive, then persecution “on a mass basis” will often result. This mass persecution is “justified by” the idea that this is how God works, as seen by what He did to Jesus. Jesus probably has the Holocaust in mind as an example here. He refers to the Holocaust in Chapter 1 (T-1.43.8:1), where he calls it “inverted or upside-down thinking” and likens it to his own crucifixion, just as above he refers to turning “a whole frame of reference around” to justify a mass persecution that he also likens to his crucifixion.

Minor applications might include corporal punishment for children or “getting even” with someone who has offended us in some way.

The wider-scale one is *persecution*. I’m not sure quite how this is meant. One interpretation could be that, based on the idea that the best defense is attack, religions will often persecute those who do not accept their teachings. We have examples of this in the Holocaust, the Inquisition, the Muslim Jihad, and all wars that are fought in the name of God. Persecution, of course, need not be based on religion; it can occur based on race, sexual orientation, or politics. Another interpretation might be that when *we* are persecuted we tend to think it makes us *more worthy* because we are suffering like Jesus did. We twist Jesus’ words, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matthew 5:11, NIV), and make them mean something like, “The more I suffer, the holier I am.”

The very notion that “God Himself persecuted His Own Son on behalf of salvation” is meaningless (3:4–5). Nevertheless, it has endured for centuries. The next paragraph explores some reasons why this has been difficult to overcome.

Paragraph 4

4 It has always been particularly difficult to overcome this because, although the error itself is no harder to overcome than any other error, people are unwilling to give it up because of its prominent escape value. ²In milder forms, a parent says “This hurts me more than it hurts you” and feels exonerated in beating a child. ³Can you believe that the Father *really* thinks this way? ⁴It is so essential that all such thinking be dispelled that we must be very sure that nothing of this kind remains in your mind. ⁵I was not punished because *you* were bad. ⁶The wholly benign lesson which the Atonement teaches is wholly lost if it is tainted with this kind of distortion in any form.

The idea of God persecuting Jesus (that is, God punishing Jesus for our sins) is a tough one for us to give up because of “its prominent escape value” (4:1). The FIP version changed that to “its value as a defense,” which is an attempt to understand “escape value.” God punished sin, so therefore we are being loving when we beat our children (4:2), or we are being loving when we use attacking methods to make people accept “salvation” as we understand it. The idea is useful to defend our own attacking behaviors, allowing us to escape from any guilt feelings.

We need to ask ourselves the question raised here. *Can* we believe that God thinks like a parent who beats a child, saying, “This hurts me more than it hurts you?” Of course not! (4:3)

Every last thread of this kind of thinking needs to be eradicated from our minds (4:4). Hear the words of Jesus: “I was *not* punished because *you* were bad” (4:5). If we exempt any of our thoughts along this line, they will “taint” the rest of our thinking, and the true meaning of the Atonement will be lost to us (4:6).

Therefore, we need to pay attention as Jesus leads us through the next few paragraphs, helping us ferret out any lingering belief in these false concepts. You may feel that you don't need this section because you were never a Roman Catholic or a fundamentalist Christian; you never believed that your salvation required the death of God the Son on the Cross. However, *read on anyhow*. You may find that, since Western civilization has been heavily influenced by historical Christian thinking, you may have absorbed more of this influence than you thought.

To give you an idea of just how powerful this message of the Text is, let me share a story related to Robert Perry by Curt Morrow, a Course teacher in Texas who died several years ago. Curt had been a Baptist minister from a long line of Baptist ministers. He eventually left that ministry and embarked on a spiritual search, which led him first to Joel Goldsmith's works and finally to the Course. When he first came across the Course, he started reading the Text. I believe he was aware of who supposedly had written the Course. But when he reached this line, "I was *not* punished because *you* were bad," he had a sudden recognition that this really was Jesus himself speaking in these pages. The recognition was overwhelming.

From that line on, until "The Message of the Crucifixion" in Chapter 6, he said it was "read and wipe"—he had to sit with a box of tissues while he read. *He knew this was his master speaking to him*. He felt something within himself being healed as the Course overturned the traditional picture of Jesus that Curt had learned in his Baptist upbringing. When he finished "The Message of the Crucifixion," his old view had been wiped away along with his tears, and something new had established itself in him. From then on until he died, he devoted his life to studying and teaching the Course.

Paragraph 5

5 "Vengeance is Mine, sayeth the Lord"⁷ is strictly a karmic viewpoint.
²It is a real misperception of truth, by which you assign your own evil past to God. ³The "evil conscience" from the past has nothing to do with God.⁸
⁴He did not create it, and He does not maintain it. ⁵God does not believe in karmic retribution at all. ⁶His divine Mind does not create that way. ⁷He does not hold the evil deeds of a person even against himself. ⁸Is it likely that He would hold them against me?

"Vengeance is Mine, sayeth the Lord"—the three-word phrase occurs three times in the Bible, first in Deuteronomy 32:35 (the verse the New Testament quotes hundreds of years later), then in Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30. Jesus declares that it is "strictly a karmic viewpoint" and "a real misperception of truth" (5:1). (See the end of my Appendix for an indication of when and how such a thought entered the mind of

⁷ Romans 12:19 (KJV): "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

⁸ Hebrews 10:22 (KJV): "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." The "evil conscience" here is a conscience plagued by one's past sins.

humankind.) He uses “karmic” here in the sense of always having to suffer for past mistakes. He says we are making God in our own image, assigning our “own evil past to God” (5:2). The words “evil conscience” are another partial quote from the same passage in the book of Hebrews in the Christian scriptures, Hebrews 10:22. He says it has nothing to do with God; *we* are the ones condemning ourselves for our past mistakes (5:3). God did not create our evil conscience, nor does he maintain it (5:4). He is no cosmic Santa Claus, making a list, checking it twice, finding out if you’re naughty or nice. “God does not believe in karmic retribution at all.” (5:5)

When I first read the Course, I had a very hard time with statements like sentences 3:1–2, because I had accepted the Bible completely, and this sentence takes a quotation from the Bible and calls it a “misperception.” Jesus here manages to offend Judaism and Christianity at the same time. There is no question, however, that many of the writers in the Bible *did* believe unequivocally that God was vengeful. For instance, the prophet Nahum wrote: “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies” (Nahum 1:2). Even most Bible-believing Christians have a little trouble with the God of vengeance pictured in the Old Testament.

The relevance here is that the doctrine of Atonement by way of sacrifice presumes a vengeful God Who *must* punish sin. That picture of God is a projection. In the quote from the Apostle Paul, we have *been* vengeful; now, becoming “holy,” we are going to leave vengeance up to God. We’ve passed the dirty job on to Him. We have been sinful, so we think God will punish us because He believes in retribution.

He does not! God does not hold our “evil” deeds against us. Consider how you feel in reading that. Is there at least some sense of relief? If so, then you must have been harboring some belief that God *does* hold our “evil” deeds against us.

If He does not hold them against us, how likely is it that He would punish Jesus because of them? Not very! (5:7–8). It’s more than *unlikely*—it is “impossible”(6:1).

Paragraph 6

6 Be very sure that you recognize how impossible this assumption really is, and how entirely it arises from projection. ²This kind of error is responsible for a host of related fallacies, including the mistaken belief that God rejected man and forced him out of the Garden of Eden,⁹ or that I am misdirecting you. ³I have made every effort to use words which are almost impossible to distort, but human beings are very inventive when it comes to twisting symbols around.

Early in human evolution, when we felt guilt, we believed that God (or karma) would punish us for what we had done. When Jesus came along 2000 years ago, human

⁹ Genesis 3:23-24 (RSV): “Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

evolution had not progressed far enough to dispel the idea, but we had arrived at believing that, somehow, God loved us. We had to invent a theory of how God could circumvent His judgement and welcome us back into His love, so we invented the theory of substitutionary atonement. It was *entirely* our projection (6:1).

The idea that God is vengeful—that He in some way holds our “sins” against us—is the root idea for “a host of related fallacies” (6:2)). He names only two specifically: the religious error that God rejected Adam and drove him out of the Garden of Eden (a widely taught interpretation of the story in Genesis 3:23–24); and the personal error that Jesus (or the Holy Spirit, or God) is sometimes *misdirecting* us as a way of punishing us, deliberately leading us into painful and harmful situations. God never rejected Adam or anyone; we weren’t driven out of Eden, we *left*. And God never misguides us. We do blame our misfortunes on Him, instead of recognizing them as the inevitable consequence of our mistaken choices. We think, “God! Why are you doing this to me? What did I do to deserve this?”

More specifically, we may think that sometimes the very words of the Course are leading us astray. Helen apparently did believe that at times, which explains what follows. Jesus speaks these words, which say volumes about the Course itself: “I have made every effort to use words that are *almost* impossible to distort” (6:3). There is no question here that Jesus claims to be *choosing the very words of the Course*, not simply the formless concepts that take shape and form in the vocabulary of the scribe. This is one of the reasons I feel it is meaningful to pay such close attention to exactly how things are worded, and why I feel confident that none of the words were chosen lightly. If we misunderstand the words of the Course, it is not because they are hard to understand; it is because we *want* to misunderstand them, and therefore we find ways of “twisting symbols around” (3:11). It makes me glad that, in the CE version of the Course, we have those original words restored.

Paragraph 7

7 God Himself is not symbolic; He is Fact. ²The Atonement, too, is totally without symbolism. ³It is perfectly clear, because it exists in light. ⁴Only the world’s attempts to shroud it in darkness have made it inaccessible to the unwilling and ambiguous to the partly willing. ⁵The Atonement itself radiates nothing but truth. ⁶It therefore epitomizes harmlessness and sheds only blessing. ⁷It could not do this if it arose from anything other than perfect innocence. ⁸Innocence is wisdom, because it is unaware of evil, which does not exist. ⁹It is, however, perfectly aware of everything that is true.

Paragraph 7 affirms the truth about each one of us, in the light of the Atonement. The opening two lines (7:1–2) state that God and the Atonement are not symbolic, totally without symbolism. They are Fact. Behind its illusion of ignorance and doubt, your mind is one with God (see 17:2–3). The statement about God and Atonement not being symbolic but Fact, I think, means that this our mind’s oneness with God is not mere perception or a mental arrangement of words *about* us and God (words which are only symbols that represent some

facts) but direct apprehension by means of union. You share God's innocence because you are part of God's Being. How else *could* you share His innocence?

When Jesus says that the Atonement is also "totally without symbolism" (7:2) and "perfectly clear" (7:3), he is emphasizing its non-dualistic nature. It is unmixed. It is "wholly benign" (4:6), wholly healing, wholly loving; there is no sacrifice hidden in it, no demand for loss of any kind. It has no dark side; "it exists in light" (7:3).

The mention of "attempts to shroud it in darkness" (7:4) reminds me of T-1.IV.1-2 (FIP), T-1.22.4 (CE), where the Text speaks of our attempt to hide our holiness in darkness. What makes the Atonement hard to understand, or fearful to us? Ultimately, it is our own choice not to see. The Atonement seems obscure and shrouded in sacrifice and blood because we have chosen to hide its real meaning.

Lest that seem too harsh, let us remember that Jesus speaks of those who misunderstood the Atonement as "sincere Christians" (1:3). Perhaps we have chosen to hide its true meaning, but we have done so out of fear, confusion and madness. If being told we have *chosen* to hide the real meaning of Atonement raises a chill of guilt within our hearts, let us remember that this is exactly the situation for which the Atonement was created. Hiding the meaning of the Atonement has not placed us out of its reach.

The theme of the total benevolence of Atonement continues: It radiates nothing but truth (7:5). It is the perfect example of harmlessness; it offers us nothing but blessing (7:6). This can only be so if the Atonement arises from perfect innocence (7:7). If sacrifice and punishment for guilt were part of it, it could not be wholly harmless; it would not offer pure blessing. Jesus seems truly intent on ridding us of every last vestige of belief in sacrifice!

The Atonement is an assertion of perfect innocence, rather than a perfect punishment for sin. What a travesty we have made of Atonement! The mind that accepts Atonement knows its own innocence, and therefore is wise, unaware of evil, and perfectly aware of truth (7:7-9). We might think that being unaware of evil is dangerous, but if, in truth, evil does not exist (7:8), to be aware of evil would be delusion or insanity.

Paragraph 8

8 The resurrection demonstrated that *nothing* can destroy truth.
²Good can withstand *any* form of evil, because light abolishes *all* forms of darkness.
³The Atonement is thus the perfect lesson.¹⁰ ⁴It is the final demonstration that all of the other lessons which I taught are true.
⁵You are released from all errors if you believe in this.
⁶The deductive approach to teaching accepts the generalization which is applicable to all single instances, rather than building up the generalization after analyzing numerous single instances separately.¹¹ ⁷If you can accept the One Generalization *now*, there will be no need to learn from many smaller lessons.¹²

The traditional view of Atonement is painfully aware of evil; evil is so awful that it requires the death of God's Son. The Course's understanding is that evil has no more substance than darkness, which vanishes the instant light appears (8:2). The resurrection was that light; it "demonstrated that *nothing* can destroy truth" (8:1). That *is* the message of the Atonement. The resurrection validated everything Jesus had ever taught (8:3–4). If we believe what he is saying—that *nothing* can destroy truth, that good can withstand *any* form of evil—we will be released from *all* errors (8:5).

In 8:6, he takes a brief side-trip into elementary logic. Deductive reasoning works from a general truth to accept all specific instances. For example, "All trees die; this oak is a tree; therefore, this oak tree will eventually die." You don't need to observe every tree before you know the oak will die, once you know the general truth. If we "accept the One Generalization *now*" we will not need "to learn from many smaller lessons" (8:7). What is the "one generalization" he is asking us to believe? I think it is the overall message of Atonement that the resurrection demonstrated: "Nothing can destroy the truth. Good can withstand any form of evil." The whole push of the Course is to get us to accept the Atonement; why should this paragraph be anything different? If we can accept the idea that nothing can destroy truth, all the smaller lessons are contained in that one lesson.

¹⁰. "The Atonement" here refers to the resurrection, as it probably also does in 4:6 above ("The wholly benign lesson which the Atonement teaches...").

¹¹. Deductive reasoning starts with general truths and then applies them to specific instances. An example is the famous syllogism "All men are mortal (general truth). Socrates is a man (a specific instance to which the general truth can be applied). Therefore, Socrates is mortal (application of the general truth to the specific instance)." Inductive reasoning, in contrast, involves the reverse: "building up the generalization after analyzing numerous single instances separately."

¹². The "One Generalization" is the message of the resurrection: "*nothing* can destroy truth."

Paragraph 9

9 *Nothing* can prevail against a Son of God who commends his spirit into the hands of his Father.¹³ ²By doing this, the mind awakens from its sleep and remembers its Creator. ³All sense of separation disappears and level confusion vanishes. ⁴The Son of God is part of the Holy Trinity, but the Trinity Itself is one. ⁵There is no confusion within *Its* levels, because they are of one Mind and one will. ⁶This single purpose creates perfect integration, and establishes the reign of the peace of God.

The first sentence contains a reference to the words of Jesus while on the cross: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46, KJV). This makes a clear connection between this current section and the discussion of Jesus’ crucifixion in the preceding section, and shows that Jesus’ behavior is being held up as the model of true perception. Jesus is talking here from personal experience, not in theory.

If I place myself in your hands, it means I am yielding entirely to your will. Given the context of the preceding paragraphs, to commend my spirit into God’s Hands basically means to trust in His Will, to give up the illusion of a *separate* will, and to recognize the oneness of my will with God’s. It is to be right-minded; to accept only what God creates as real, and therefore to perceive only the innocent. That is what Jesus did during his crucifixion.

Try actually saying it and see how it feels, and the sense of it becomes quite clear: “God, I place myself into Your Hands.” When the mind commends itself to God’s Hands, it “awakens from its sleep and remembers its Creator” (9:2) and, “All sense of separation disappears” (9:3), so that it realizes its oneness with God. The message to us here seems to be continuing a theme sounded several times already in the Text, that of willingly accepting God’s guidance (usually in the form of Jesus or the Holy Spirit) and relinquishing our stubborn wish for an independent will. This yielding ourselves up to the Will of God is the gateway to awakening. Nothing can prevail against anyone who does this (9:1). It is an experience of unlimited power, which is about as far away from being “imprisoned” as you can get.

The sentences about the “Holy Trinity” and its oneness (9:4–6) are difficult for us to completely understand, probably due more to the lack of clarity in our *minds* than to any lack of clarity in the words. The next paragraph helps us understand when it asserts, “this

¹³ Matthew 16:18 (KJV): “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Luke 23:46 (KJV): “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” By alluding to his purported last words on the cross, Jesus is implying that the next sentence is what happened to him at this point: his mind awakened from its sleep and remembered its Creator. However, by using general language (“a Son of God who commends his spirit”), he is implying that commending our spirit into the hands of God is something all of us (not just Jesus) can do now, rather than waiting to do so at the moment of death.

vision can be perceived only by the truly innocent” (10:1), whose “hearts are pure” (10:2).

The gist of it, I think, is that when the mind awakens it realizes it is a part of the one Sonship. That Son of God is, in turn, “part of the Holy Trinity” (9:4), but that does not negate the fact that “all sense of separation disappears” (9:3). Although there seem to be “levels” within the Trinity, they are not levels that contradict oneness (9:4–5). The levels do not conflict in any way; they share one Will. When a mind joins wholeheartedly with God’s Will it becomes integrated, not only in itself, but with the other parts of the Trinity: the Father and the Holy Spirit. This singleness of purpose brings incredible clarity (“no confusion” (9:5)) and perfect peace (9:6).

The emphasis is still on our acceptance of innocence, which is an aspect of the state in which we were created by God. “The innocence of God is the true state of the mind of His Son” (T-3.I.8:1 (FIP), 17:2 (CE)). This theme has been consistently part of the discussion since the beginning of the chapter.

Paragraph 10

10 But this vision can be perceived only by the truly innocent. ²Because their hearts are pure, they defend true perception, instead of defending themselves *against* it.¹⁴ ³Understanding the lesson of the Atonement, they are without the will to attack, and therefore they see truly. ⁴This is what the Bible means when it says, “And when He shall appear (or be perceived) we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”¹⁵

A mind that is innocent has no need to defend against perceiving the truth. It has nothing to hide, nothing to fear in what might be seen (10:2). Therefore, the innocent mind defends true perception (10:2). It has no desire to attack because it understands “the lesson of the Atonement” (10:3). What lesson is that? It is a fairly clear reference to the earlier passage, which spoke of the “wholly benign lesson” of the Atonement, which we decided was: *Nothing can destroy the truth. Good can withstand any form of evil.* If you understand that lesson, how could you have any desire to attack? And knowing the truth, you will perceive truly (10:3). You will see no attacks, only calls for love.

Sentence 4 refers to a line in the New Testament. In the New International Version, it is translated, “When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2). Traditionally, it is understood to speak of the return of Jesus Christ to the world; the idea is that at the end of the world we will all receive “spiritual bodies” like that of Christ (compare with I Corinthians 15:49–53). Here it is given a very different interpretation: Its real meaning is said to be the same innocent perception this paragraph has been discussing. When we see the innocence of Christ in our brothers and sisters (that

¹⁴ Matthew 5:8 (KJV): “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

¹⁵ 1 John 3:2 (KJV): “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” The Course reinterprets this as being about seeing the ever-present Divine, rather than seeing Jesus when he comes again.

is, in the *entire Sonship*, not just in Jesus) as it truly is, we will *be* the Christ, we will know that innocence as our own. What a completely different interpretation of that Bible verse!

Paragraph 11

11 Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God. ²It arises solely from fear of the records.¹⁶ ³This is particularly unfortunate, because frightened people are apt to be vicious. ⁴Good teachers never terrorize their students. ⁵To terrorize is to attack, and this results in rejection of what the teacher offers. ⁶The result is learning failure. ⁷Sacrificing others in any way is a clear-cut violation of God's Own injunction that you should be merciful even as your Father in Heaven is merciful.¹⁷

The idea that sacrifice is “totally unknown to God” (11:1) is certainly a liberating idea for me, as it is for most people who come out of traditional Christian or Jewish backgrounds. (Although Judaism does not view the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, it does share a basic belief in sacrifice as a way of “appeasing” God.) Our devotion to God hardly seems real to most of us if we have never sacrificed anything for God’s sake; sacrifice is the “proof” that we really mean business. But all this is the projection of our own minds. It is how *we* think God thinks. He knows nothing of sacrifice. As Workbook Lesson 343 says, “I am not asked to make a sacrifice to find the mercy and the peace of God.”

Fear—there’s that culprit again!—is at the root of thoughts of sacrifice. We are afraid that God is keeping that list (the records) and checking it twice (11:2). And fear can make us vicious, even towards ourselves (11:3). Why are we driven to sacrifice? Because we are afraid of what God will do if we don’t do it. We are trying to “make good” believing that we have somehow “made bad.” We believe in “sin” in ourselves and think that sacrifice will help make up for the wrong we have done.

Good teachers, Jesus tells us, don’t terrorize their students because it leads to learning failure (11:5–6). As he presents himself in the Course, Jesus epitomizes such a good teacher. His point is that demanding sacrifice from one’s pupils is not an effective teaching technique.

Sentence 7, “God’s own injunction,” refers to Jesus’ saying in Luke 6:36. This is another unmistakable indicator that the same Jesus who spoke in Palestine nearly 2000 years ago is the one now speaking to us in this Course. He told us to be as merciful as God. When we indulge in sacrifice we are being unmerciful to ourselves, and that goes against his injunction to be merciful.

¹⁶ This means being afraid of “the records” of one’s past thoughts and deeds.

¹⁷ Luke 6:36 (RSV): “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Paragraph 12

12 It has been harder for many Christians to realize that this commandment (or assignment) also applies to *themselves*. ²In other words, though Christians generally (but by no means universally) recognize the contradiction involved in victimizing others, they are less adept at ensuring their own inability to victimize themselves. ³Although this appears to be a much more benign error from the viewpoint of society, it is nevertheless inherently dangerous because once a two-edged defense is used, its direction cannot be self-controlled.

Mercy is not just for others but also for ourselves (12:1–2).

Buddhism teaches a particular form of meditation called “metta” meditation, that focuses on offering peace, freedom from suffering, and mercy to others, very much like Workbook Lesson 108. I remember the first time I participated in such a meditation. The person guiding us had us focus first on other individuals in the room, then on friends and family not present, then on the community, and finally on the entire world. He had us visualizing ourselves as if we saw the earth from space, and we opened our heart and enfolded the entire planet with our love and mercy. It was very moving. But then, he told us: “Look down now on that planet once again, and see your own self sitting here in this room. And now, offer that same mercy to *yourself*. Say to that self, sitting in this room, ‘May you be at peace. May you be free from suffering. May you quickly find your way home.’”

As I attempted to follow those directions I dissolved into tears. I realized how hard I had been with myself, how harsh, how unforgiving, how relentlessly demanding. And my heart opened with mercy for myself. I recommend the experience to all of you who read this!

The danger in withholding mercy from *ourselves* is that, once we do so, we are much more likely to withhold it from others (12:3).

Paragraph 13

13 It is obvious that these individuals have not been able to transcend the misperception of the need for sacrifice, or they could not possibly be willing to sacrifice themselves. ²Anyone who is unable to leave the requests of others unanswered has not entirely transcended egocentricity. ³I never “gave of myself” in this inappropriate way, nor would I ever encourage you to do so.¹⁸

¹⁸ This originally referred to the American psychic Edgar Cayce, who in the latter part of his life was deluged with requests for psychic readings, many for gravely ill children. In response, he gave many times more readings than was safe for his health and as a result died at the relatively young age 67 (see Cameo 15). The “egocentricity” involved in this was apparently that Cayce was driven to sacrifice in order to make up for his own perceived lack of worth.

People who sacrifice *themselves*, Jesus asserts, have failed to transcend the belief that sacrifice is *necessary* (13:1). Remember, “Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God” (11:1). He says that the inability to “leave the requests of others unanswered” is a symptom of lingering egocentricity (13:2). That seems at first to make no sense. We may think that *not* answering the request of others for our help is egocentric. Notice, however, that he uses the word “inability.” Do you feel as though you *always* have to say “Yes” when someone asks for your help? Perhaps this is really your ego, always trying to “look good.” You may be afraid of other people judging you as unspiritual if you were to tell them, “No, I can’t help you this time.” Giving of yourself in this way is “inappropriate,” and is something Jesus never did, and which he does not encourage us to do (13:3).

Notice how this paragraph continues the downplay of the whole idea of sacrifice. For us to fully accept that Atonement needs no sacrifice on the part of God, we must realize that sacrifice is never asked of us.

Paragraph 14

14 I have been correctly referred to in the Bible as “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.”¹⁹ Yet those who represent the lamb as bloodstained (an all-too-widespread conceptual error) do not understand the meaning of the symbol.²⁰ Correctly understood, the symbol is a very simple parable or teaching device, which merely depicts my innocence.⁴ The lion and the lamb lying down together refers to the fact that strength and innocence are not in conflict, but naturally live in peace.²¹ “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” is another way of saying the same thing.²² Only the innocent *can* see God.

The idea of a bloodstained lamb is something that was based on the practice of animal sacrifice in Judaism from 2000 to 6000 years ago. One significant example is one that occurred during the Exodus from Egypt. The Jews were instructed to take a lamb for each household (it could be shared by smaller households), a lamb “without blemish” that would be slaughtered on a particular night. They were then to smear blood from the lamb on the doorposts of their homes and take the lamb inside to cook and eat.

¹⁹ John 1:29 (KJV): “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

²⁰ There are three New Testament references that liken the blood of Christ to the blood of a lamb: 1 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 7:14 and 12:11. Here is 1 Peter 1:18-19 (RSV): “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

²¹ Isaiah 11:6 (KJV): “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” This passage about the wolf lying with the lamb and the calf lying with the lion has passed into common usage as being about the *lion* lying with the *lamb*.

²² Matthew 5:8 (KJV): “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

“In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’S Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:11-13 ESV)

“When I see the blood, I will *pass over* you.” This is the origin of the Jewish feast of Passover.²³

As I have already said, and as Ken Wilber states (see Appendix), these legends were written sincerely, in true faith, but they were coming from minds not yet evolved beyond the levels of myth and magic. Even by Jesus’ day, it was a mistake to apply these concepts to the death of Jesus. Humanity, for the most part, has evolved past any idea of blood sacrifices. As applied to Jesus, the lamb symbolizes not sacrifice, but innocence (14:1–3).

He then brings in another “lamb” symbol from the book of Isaiah (see Footnote 40 in the CE), in which a predicted age of perfect peace is symbolized as a lion lying down with a lamb (and not eating it). He says it “refers to the fact that strength and innocence are *not* in conflict, but naturally live in peace” (14:4). Again, the lamb symbolizes innocence, not sacrifice. He then quotes one of the Beatitudes from the Gospel according to Matthew 5:8 (14:5) as another example showing the truth that “Only the innocent *can* see God” (14:6).

Paragraph 15

15 There has been some controversy (in human terms) as to whether seeing is an attribute of the eyes or an expression of the integrative powers of the brain.²⁴ ²Correctly understood, the issue revolves around the question of whether the body or the mind can see (or understand). ³This is not really open to question at all. ⁴The body is not capable of understanding. ⁵Only the mind knows anything. ⁶A pure mind knows the truth, and this *is* its strength. ⁷It cannot attack the body, because it knows exactly what the body is.

²³. By the way, the Jewish biblical scholar Richard Elliott Friedman, in his book *The Exodus*, presents a theory that argues for the reality behind the exodus story but drastically revises it. As the cover flap puts it, “The biblical account of millions fleeing Egypt may be an exaggeration, but the exodus itself is not a myth.” Using archeological research and genealogical analysis, he shows that only the tribe that became known as Levites actually fled Egypt. The other eleven “tribes” actually came from Canaan. There was no “conquest” that wiped out everyone in Canaan. The people there were absorbed into Israel, converted to the worship of Jehovah.

²⁴. In other words, is seeing a matter of merely receiving sensory information or a matter of putting that information together—i.e., interpreting it? Jesus’ answer is that it is the latter.

Paragraph 15 expands on the idea that only the innocent can see God. Jesus first addresses the question of *what* sees: the body's eyes or "the integrative powers of the brain" (15:1). Is seeing (in the sense of knowing) a matter of sensory input, or does it occur as the mind *interprets* or *integrates* the input? He points out that it comes down to "the question of whether the body or the mind can see (or understand)" (15:2). The answer should be obvious: "The body is not capable of understanding" (15:3–4). The only aspect of us that *knows* anything is the mind (15:5).

Innocence, then, as the criteria for seeing God, must be an aspect of the mind. "A pure [innocent] mind [the lamb aspect] knows the truth, and this [its innocence] *is* its strength [the lion aspect]" (15:6). The lion and lamb lie down together. (None of this is changed by the fact that the Isaiah passage actually speaks of "the *wolf* and the lamb.")

It's a bit odd to me that he then adds, "It [the mind] cannot attack the body, because it knows *exactly* what the body *is*" (15:7). The body was symbolized by the lion, and a lamb would hardly be attacking a lion! As for the second half of the sentence, my best guess is that the mind knows very well that the body is an illusion *in the mind*. To attack it would be to attack itself.

Paragraph 16

16 This is what "a sound mind in a sound body" really means.²⁵ ²A sound mind is *not* out for blood. ³It does not confuse destruction with innocence, because it associates innocence with strength, not with weakness. ⁴Innocence is incapable of sacrificing anything, because the innocent mind has everything and strives only to protect its wholeness. ⁵This is why it cannot project. ⁶It can only honor others, because honor is the natural greeting of the truly loved to others who are like them.

The words in quotation marks are a translation of a famous Latin phrase (see Robert's footnote): "This," that is, the real meaning of the quoted phrase, is that a pure, innocent mind cannot attack the body. "A sound mind is *not* out for blood" (16:2). He is reaffirming what he said back in 4:6 about the "wholly benign" lesson of the Atonement. The mind's strength is *innocence* (16:3). Innocence is not weak, subject to destruction; it is *strong*.

He states that "innocence is *incapable* of sacrificing anything." In itself, that is startling. What about innocence makes this true? Understanding this will, I believe, turn our conception of what innocence *is* on its head. He explains: It is "because the innocent mind *has* everything and strives only to *protect* its wholeness." The orientation of innocence is the *opposite* of sacrifice. Sacrifice means giving up something you have, but all of the strength of innocence has only one purpose: to preserve its wholeness, to hold on to the "everything" it possesses.

²⁵ A famous Latin quotation (*Mens sana in corpore sano*) from the Roman poet Juvenal, who framed it as one of the chief things to pray for in life, often used as a motto for educational institutions. In the Course's interpretation, it means an innocent, harmless mind that neither attacks others nor attacks its own body (with sickness).

We are whole—already whole and always whole. That's how God created us. Ken Wilber says that wholeness is obvious because it is always present. It cannot be “attained” any more than you can “attain” your liver or your feet. Wholeness can only be recognized. “Enlightenment is but a recognition, not a change at all” (W-188.1:4). A pure mind strives only to hold on to its wholeness. It “cannot project” (16:5) because it has no need whatsoever to attack; there is nothing it needs to take from another. It has everything. All a pure mind can do is to honor others because they are whole as it is whole. “Honor is the natural greeting of the truly loved to others who are like them” (16:6).

Paragraph 17

17 The lamb “taketh away the sins of the world” only in the sense that the state of innocence, or grace, is one in which the meaning of the Atonement is perfectly apparent. ²The innocence of God is the true state of the mind of His Son. ³In this state, your mind *does* see God, and because you see Him as He is, you know that the Atonement, *not* sacrifice, is the only appropriate gift to your own altar;²⁶ where nothing except perfection truly belongs. ⁴The understanding of the innocent is truth. ⁵That is why their altars are truly radiant.²⁷

In what sense does the lamb, the symbol of innocence, take away the sins of the world? The state of innocence makes the meaning of the Atonement perfectly apparent because “The innocence of God is the true state of the mind of His Son” (17:1–2). Accepting the Atonement is recognizing our innocence, the very innocence of God (17:2). When we connect with our true state of innocence our mind “*does* see God.” Seeing God as He is, a loving God and not a judgemental one, we know that we do not need to lay sacrifices of any kind on our inner altar. The only gift to lay on that altar is the Atonement. Nothing but perfection belongs there (17:3).

As Robert points out, some of this material on sacrifice concerned Edgar Cayce. Jesus allows that Cayce's work was a major step in the celestial speedup, but says his notes are flawed by an inability to fully accept the Atonement for himself. He was a light, but a dim one. The altars of those who do accept the Atonement “are truly radiant” (17:5). (See Robert's Cameo 15 for the full story on Cayce.)

²⁶ This is a possible reference to Hosea 6:6 (KJV): “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”

²⁷ See Cameo 15: “Edgar Cayce.”

APPENDIX

The Corruption of Christian Doctrine

Based on a lifetime of study of the Bible and the reading of dozens of books about it, I have concluded that Jesus *never* taught that his death was a sacrificial offering to a God Whose “justice” demanded that sin must be punished to somehow make things right. Even among evangelical Christians, many have trouble understanding how subjecting Jesus (God the Son, in their theology, a part of the Trinity) to suffering, death, and hell could somehow pay for *their* sins, although that is the clear teaching of their form of religion.

There are passages in the gospels that seem to support this “substitutionary atonement” theology. I believe that this misunderstanding crept into the thinking of early followers of Jesus very early, probably in the first generation of Christians, and that these passages were insertions made by writers whose minds had already been led astray.

The disciples never fully understood Jesus’s message. They believed that he was the Messiah as they interpreted the Hebrew scriptures, thinking that God had promised a new king, a descendant of David, who would lead the nation of Israel to overthrow the rule of the gentile empires that had enslaved them. They expected a great war to be led by the Messiah to eliminate all of God’s enemies and restore Israel to a position of world dominance. When Jesus was arrested and put to death, they were shocked and their hopes were shattered. According to the gospels, they all fled into hiding and none of them attended the crucifixion or burial. The only person who appears to have understood Jesus’s message from the beginning was Mary Magdalene.

Even if we assume that the resurrection appearances of Jesus gave the disciples new hope, it does not necessarily show that their basic expectations were changed. They still expected a material, military messiah. In fact, the notion that Jesus would some day return (the Second Coming) to take up his messianic role, engaging in a great final battle with forces led by the devil, was dreamed up to carry on their misunderstandings.

In my comments on the first paragraph, I quoted several passages from the New Testament epistles (which appear after the gospels) that clearly support the idea of substitutionary atonement. This needs some explanation, especially for anyone who has been taught that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

Paul wrote his epistles before his death in the 50s, while the first gospel was written at least ten years later, likely after 70 CE. This means that Paul was spreading his teachings before anyone had written down Jesus’ actual words. In Paul’s works, he only quotes Jesus twice. Since Paul never met Jesus, never heard him teach, and only spent a few weeks with the original disciples before embarking on his missionary journey to non-Jewish nations, his teachings are his own and not necessarily reflective of Jesus’ teachings. It’s likely that Paul’s ideas influenced the content of the gospels, making it seem like Jesus taught them when he did not.

For a detailed review of the way modern scholarship has abandoned many traditional beliefs, see the book *Unbelievable!* by John Shelby Spong.

Let me also include here a lengthy quotation from Ken Wilber's recent book, *Finding Radical Wholeness*. It indicates how such ancient ideas as "Vengeance is Mine," which led to the notion of Substitutionary Atonement," first came into human minds.

We will also see, to anticipate another point, that human development includes several stages of growth and evolution, which brilliant researchers like Jean Gebser have described and named—for example, archaic, magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic, integrated. Humanity itself is moving through those stages (including the lower stages of magic and mythic on the way to higher stages such as rational and integrated—with humanity today just reaching the beginning of the integrated stage). We'll be looking at those stages more carefully later, but right now I note that I will claim that almost all of the magical and mythic stories in the Bible were written when humanity was at those earlier stages—the magic and mythic stages—some two thousand to six thousand years ago. Thus, at the time they were written, they were not mistakes or hallucinations or delusions, but they were written by humans at the earlier magic and mythic stages of development—and they honestly and sincerely meant what they wrote. At that point, I will soften my harsh criticism of those religious views—it's like yelling at a five-year-old—but without changing the essential point that they are indeed products of earlier, lower, and largely outmoded and outdated (and hence indeed "unbelievable") stages of human evolution and that none of these beliefs are required for a direct experience of real Wholeness.

Wilber, Ken. Finding Radical Wholeness: The Integral Path to Unity, Growth, and Delight (pp. 7-8). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.

Example of how "waking up" is seen differently at each stage of "growing up."

So let's start. It might initially sound fairly odd, but you can be at an egocentric stage 1 of Growing Up and nevertheless have a real Waking Up experience. For example, if you are Christian, you might realize that your Real Self is a genuine Christ consciousness (using "Christ consciousness" in its very cleanest, nondual, unifying sense), but if you are at an egocentric stage of Growing Up, you will tend to believe that you, and only you, are actually Jesus Christ. Sadly, our institutions are full of such unfortunate souls (often called "schizophrenic"). I've often repeated the story that Ram Dass used to tell of his brother, who was institutionalized for just that reason. Ram Dass said that as soon as you met his brother in person, you could immediately see that he had indeed had a very genuine and very deep Enlightenment. Ram Dass was just back from India, where he had met several major teachers who had had this experience of Waking Up Oneness, and he said that it was completely obvious and unmistakable in his brother. Due to his cultural Christian background, his brother interpreted this realization, acceptably enough, as a

pure Christ consciousness, but he could not acknowledge the possibility that other people could have this realization—including Ram Dass, who spent a great deal of time trying to convince his brother otherwise, to no avail. So this is a straightforward example of someone who had a genuine Waking Up experience—the person directly felt a true Oneness with the entire world and realized their own Christ consciousness—but who interpreted this experience through a very primitive, egocentric level of Growing Up—only they can have this experience. They instantly interpreted this Oneness as an extension of their egoic self (just like they do with everything else). The experience was real; the explanation was primitive. The awareness was of a selfless Self; the interpretation was by a selfish ego.

It was an authentic state of Waking Up; but it was an archaic stage of Growing Up. It was an authentic Self because, according to the mystics, the Real Self enters the fetus at some point between conception and birth; some Christian mystics have put this at around four months. In any case, by the time a human being is born, they already have a true Witness, although they will not become aware of this Real Self until they have a genuine Waking Up experience. And because Waking Up and Growing Up are indeed relatively independent, and because the Real Self is a changeless, boundless, ever-present awareness, a real Waking Up can occur at virtually any stage of Growing Up, including the egocentric stage—where, despite their limited capacity to take other people's perspectives, someone can still awaken to their own ever-present Real Self and feel that they are one with everything.

As a person continues to grow and develop, by the time they have reached the ethnocentric stage 2, they have learned to take the role of other; they have learned to see the world through another person's eyes. We saw this with the two-colored ball experiment, where the person's identity expands from egocentric (or self-centered) to ethnocentric (or group-centered). There is a shift from concern with just myself to concern for a whole group (for example, one's family, clan, tribe, nation, or religious affiliation, and so on)—in short, a shift from me to us, from egocentric to ethnocentric.

A person at this structure-stage can indeed have a genuine Waking Up. But if they are, for example, a fundamentalist Protestant (and fundamentalist means "ethnocentric," no matter what belief, religion, or philosophy), then they will think that only those who have accepted Jesus as their personal savior can have this Waking Up experience of being "reborn." Other people might think that they have had this experience, but they really haven't—in fact, it is very likely that their experience is demonic in its source—it's not the real thing, whatever it is. And remember the historical examples of this: some cultures that codified Waking Up (Hindu and Buddhist monasteries) had slaves, because that was acceptable when interpreted by ethnocentric structure-stages (even for those with a Waking Up experience).

Recall that Waking Up is a direct, 1st-person experience of being one with everything, but it tells you little about the relative truths of anything. It will definitely tell you that you are one with all beings, but it won't tell you what the perspective of any of those beings is (whether it is egocentric, ethnocentric, worldcentric, integral)—and thus those perspectives will not enter into any of the person's considerations, which, historically, is

exactly what happened. In all of these examples, we see a genuine Waking Up, but it was interpreted, for instance, through an ethnocentric stage. Thus, a Christian mystic of the Middle Ages might have a profound Waking Up and realize their own Christ consciousness and their Oneness with everything yet still firmly believe that all unbaptized children will burn in hell forever (or, at best, be sent to limbo). That's an example of an authentic Waking Up but a crude and limited ethnocentric-stage interpretation. (And yes, many ethnocentric Nazis were extremely interested in paths of Waking Up, including really nasty Nazis like Himmler, who plugged straight into a Deity mysticism with a bunch of Aryan gods, and could do so precisely because Waking Up and Growing Up are relatively independent.)

If the person keeps growing, they will move from ethnocentric to worldcentric, from care to universal care, from an ethnocentric “us” to a worldcentric “all of us.” Because of this, when their Growing Up mind looks, for example, at those human beings who are being treated as property—namely, slaves—they are collectively outraged by it. A person at this Growing Up stage may—or may not—have a Waking Up experience. But in any event, they will—to stay with the Christian example—begin to interpret Jesus Christ not as the one and only son of the one and only (ethnocentric) God and the savior of the world but instead as just one (worldcentric) World Teacher among many other World Teachers, all of whom have something important to teach us. Even if this person has a genuine Waking Up experience, they nonetheless will often say that they are Christian because, when they use their spiritual intelligence to interpret their Waking Up experience, it interprets reality according to its own structure, which in this case is worldcentric. And in this case, that intelligence is most comfortable with the Christian explanatory scheme, and so they use that scheme—as it is worldcentrically interpreted—for their narrative content (although they will also be completely open to incorporating aspects from other World Teachers, such as perhaps adopting a Buddhist mindfulness practice). This can be a real Waking Up, but it is interpreted through a high level of Growing Up—that of a worldcentric stage that includes all of humanity.

Notice that during Vatican II, the Church admitted (I'm paraphrasing) that comparable religious salvation to that offered by Christianity can be had by other religions. This is a staggering leap in growth from their nearly two-millennia-old ethnocentric claim that their religion is the one and only true religion to an acknowledgment that Spirit is universal, worldcentric, and open to all humans regardless of race, color, sex, or religious creed. (One can't help but think of Voltaire's scream “Remember the cruelties!”—the cruelties inflicted by the Church on millions of people when it was in its ethnocentric stages, from the Spanish Inquisition, to witch hunts killing tens of thousands of women, to the Crusades. Voltaire's lament became the heartfelt battle cry of the Enlightenment, which was the first major worldcentric social movement in human history—which is indeed why it ended slavery.)

Now you can clearly see the difference between Waking Up and Growing Up and that the stage of Growing Up you are at is incredibly important because it will interpret your Waking Up experience. It's true that an experience of a total Wholeness, which includes “all of us,” is the core nature of the Waking Up experience at any of these major stages.

That is, each stage of Growing Up has an experience of Waking Up in which it feels that it is “one with its world”—but “its world” keeps expanding in each stage of Growing Up. It grows from just “me” that can have this realization of Oneness (egocentric), to just “us” that can have this realization (ethnocentric), to “all of us” (regardless of race, color, sex, gender, or religious creed—worldcentric). So a profound sense of Oneness and Wholeness is indeed present in a Waking Up experience at each and every stage of Growing Up, but Growing Up does indeed grow, unfold, and evolve through 6-to-8 major structure-stages—moving from “me” to “us” to “all of us” to “integrated.”

Wilber, Ken. Finding Radical Wholeness: The Integral Path to Unity, Growth, and Delight (pp. 61-66). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE Text restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.