

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Natural Christology:
The Necessity of Christ by Analysis of Natural Religion**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics

“The views expressed in this thesis do not necessarily represent the views of the institution
and/or of the thesis readers.”

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Abstract

The hero's journey [or the monomyth] and the perennial philosophy are two conceptions of human experience that popularize a single old idea: a common human plight recurs across time through humanity's socio-cultural variety. The monomyth highlights this through narrative modes; the perennial philosophy does this through religious modes. Both distillations have garnered a Christian counterattack, being thought to dangerously depart from the gospel in their essence as they nonetheless borrow its language and timbre. Yet, their incorporation of the gospel ventures beyond appropriation. Supposing these secular notions esteem the recurrent human journey with any alacrity, a careful apologetic discerns and utilizes an advantageous middle-area of Christological knowledge that lay between the revealed Christ of Scripture and the shared errors of these two conceptions.

The continual reappearance of a mythic-hero and of created religious examples to model them bookend two sides of a puzzle: a portrait of the hero best understood in light of the historical Christ on one side, and a religious mode of dying-to-self summated as the practiced "kenosis" of humanity on the other. However, that hero and their kenosis reflect the salvation found for the human soul through the kenotic exemplar of the revealed, historical Christ. This is the "Natural Christology" of the human race; its abductive propositions are to God the Son as those of natural theology are to God in general. Natural Christology may be apprehended by Christian apologetics from emergences of the perennial philosophy in popular religion and the monomyth in popular stories. Proper discernment allows these destructive manifestations of secular culture to serve the ends of drawing the lost to the only condition that fully satisfies their partial portraits of human character; only the historical reality of a heroic Savior's death and resurrection may meaningfully grant godly perfection to those who are identified in His kenosis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“What we need is not only the belief in the one God but also the awareness of the one mankind, the awareness of the unity of humanity.”

— Viktor Frankl¹

Christians are a bunch of misfits. When Christ’s Spirit moves to unite the diverse peoples of every tribe and tongue, differences naturally form between the members of His one body. Yet, an irenic foundation also emerges for Christians to gather around and ground these differences upon: the ground of the revealed Christ. Contemporary apologetics uses this common ground in two ways: to negatively remove ideas about what cannot lead to God and to positively orient a view of Christ as the sole, focal, saving end. However, these uses hold an untapped, overlapping region of utility; isolating key elements in false views creates an outline of Christ as an effectual, persuasive means in itself. If Christ is who the lost seek as the veiled end of their overt longings, though they search in places He does not dwell, then there remains some form of Christological knowledge in their soul available to natural reason and able to be used in apologetics today.

The Needle’s Eye

In its original form, Christianity was a thing proclaimed to those who had never heard it: Christ died and then rose again, set your trust on Him. Apologetics follows after this, distinguishing true from erroneous beliefs: both within the faith (inter-ecclesiastical) and without it (normative apologetics).² In these endeavors, Christ is the starting place of agreement between

¹Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 140.

²Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 1-4.

Christian denominations and a natural candidate for a dividing line between true or false Christianity in normative apologetics. This seems wise. Who Jesus of Nazareth was and is (i.e., one's Christology) is not only the qualifier of Christian orthodoxy but also of one's eternal salvation. If Jesus rose from the dead, one must respond rightly to His claims about Himself, the world, and about life, death, and the hereafter. This, simply, is Christianity. (1 Cor. 2:2).

Of course, Christians do not merely hold that Christ returned to life. This would be extraordinary, but not unique. Christian Scriptures are replete with miraculous resuscitations (e.g., Elisha in 2 Kings 4:32, or Lazarus in John 11:43). The contrast is that Jesus was not merely resuscitated to mortality but resurrected *through* it to a new kind of life: an imperishable life. After rising, those others died. Jesus is understood to have surpassed death into life everlasting.

The Centrality of Christ

Flowing from witnessing His power over death, Christians take Christ at His word. They take His direction in regard to understanding the Old Testament: a record about Himself (e.g., John 5:45–47 and Luke 24:26–27). They understand Him to mysteriously be both their Lord and their God (John 20:28). They understand salvation to come exclusively through Him (Heb. 1:3 and 2:3). Where Christians differ between themselves, is over tenets not directly entailed by these Christocentric principles. To clarify: ideals that spring *from* a true faith but are not essential to its *origination*, may thereby be considered non-essential to normative apologetics.

Perhaps such matters are essential to Christianity and to inter-ecclesiastical discussions, but they are accidental to the normative field. Normative apologetics focuses on bringing people into the gates of Christianity where those fruits should grow. Thus, the Christocentric gospel in *salvation* is central, while other differences may appropriately refer to *Christianity* (living-out a saved life). A practical way to frame this contrast involves the outline between the “visible”

church and the “invisible” churches.³ The invisible church refers to those who are *actually* saved in the sight of the Most-High God (called Christians or not), while the visible church refers to those who called Christians (be these saved or not).⁴ Through this lens, the essential ingredient of the invisible church is Christological: the gospel, while additional ingredients remain necessary for the visible Church (which may be grown by the hidden, invisible trait).

This clarification being made, a suitable introduction to Natural Christology is visible enough to transition to its focal theme. As the knowledge and confession of Christ is the saving part of the redeemed soul, by which the visible Church refines the invisible believers among them, how much more should this Christological centrality be reflected when apologetics turns outward to seek cultivate the invisible Church from beyond the borders of Christianity? Rather than deferring the needfulness of Christ to a matter removed after preceding apologetic steps (e.g., defense of God’s existence), perhaps an identification of Christ may take place within even natural and secular evidences as the primary *means* of approaching Him as the primary *end*.

The Apologetic Conditions

Unfortunately, the common ground of Christology within the visible Church has been wielded rather like a weapon against those outside of her. This move by Christians is intuitive but flawed. It seems instinctive because the core of what an unbeliever must accept *is* the Christological proposition. Thus, it is reasoned that unbelievers must not presently accept it *at all*. But this intuition is partly false. It is fallacious to assume all Christological propositions are totally denied by those outside Christ, merely because orthodoxy has not yet been fully reached.

³Gerard Loughlin, "Visible and Invisible: George Tyrrell and Christ's Bodies," *New Blackfriars* 99, no. 1084, (2018): 733.

⁴Loughlin, "Visible and Invisible," 735.

Residual and partially flawed Christological positions may be held outside the visible Church, either owing to one's hidden participation in the invisible or (as is the focus here) because one is being drawn to it by a hidden sense of its needfulness or beauty. By definition, one who is drawn to Christ is expected to find His call echoing through their soul, at least in a limited (i.e., naturally-resonate) manner. Importantly, one may hold elements of the true Christology (false in sum, but valuable in part) that function toward its fuller ends. An apologetic method is needed to specifically identify and employ these strands of innate Christologies toward the salvific one.

Two Current Tactics

Apologetics currently employs two broad tactics. Methods either lay wide, natural appeals (e.g., how natural reason or phenomena incline belief in God or otherwise) that lead finally to Christ, or else they charge directly to presenting Christ (viz., how a non-Christian is in a state of sin before God) and call the listener to receive Him as savior.⁵ Both of endeavors arrive at the targeted knowledge of faith in Christ regardless of their bents; both seem biblically viable and also able to succeed.⁶ However, the ability of God to use *any* means does not seem opposed to the responsibility of Christians to use their *best* means. Accordingly, two questions address a needed narrowing of the gap between these two approaches. First, is it possible to find a middle ground between the “beating around the bush” of natural appeals and the “confrontational and direct” linear presentations? Second, if so, what would this approach look like?

⁵The wide variety of approaches (presuppositional, evidential, classical, etc.) still alternatively take either the short or long roads: direct (to Christ) or —direct (to Christ); this is not prescriptive, however.

⁶Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 479.

One New Tactic

All apologetics also holds a two-pronged end: to *build bridges* to faith and to *destroy obstacles* between the soul and faith.⁷ The first, positive prong leads a person toward principles or truths of Christ. The second, negative prong clears away stigmas and other debris that cloud the lost from correctly understanding Him (e.g., false portrayals in media, or poor reflections of Him in Christians). The clearing prong reveals the nature and beauty of the salvation one finds. The building prong actually carries them there. Stanchions of false belief exist in the world; the apologist must highlight these in their interlocutors' awareness. Yet, non-Christian worldviews may also hold fruitful stepping stones toward salvific knowledge: that is, positive material.

Such positive inroads often take the form of what is called *Natural Theology*: appeals to natural law or common reason. Yet, appeals to Christological knowledge are still made at the final stages of this process. Natural theology weaves a long bridge that ends at Christ, introducing Him once all other ground has been laid. These methods assume some knowledge is natural or common to human beings about God in general, that is profitable toward Christ in particular. Each step is only as valuable as that end it achieves. The necessary step always remains the Christological one. Accordingly, the question is raised: may any natural knowledge lay far closer to this final step of Christ? May an appeal thereto aid apologetics?

Natural theology uses natural laws or reason, but what about natural religion and culture? These are often thought as purely destructive secular constructs. Is that really so? After laying groundwork to establish who the revealed Christ is, He will act like a sifter through which these natural evidences will be poured. While much sand may fall through, any gold that is caught would confirm this hypothesis and reveal useful overlapping areas.

⁷Michael Suddith, "Reformed Epistemology and Christian Apologetics," *Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (2003): 300.

This natural data to be sifted through comes by means of two, related secular ideologies: the narrative theme of the hero's journey⁸ and the religious theme of the perennial philosophy.⁹ These bookend one naturally recurring path that humanity senses it must follow to find fullness of life. Importantly, it seems that once this naturally occurring cultural and religious path is detailed alongside the revealed Christ, its conclusions are found to logically imply the needfulness of the Christian position. The power of Christ's resurrection must obtain in reality in order for this natural path to hold the value for the human condition it intuitively appears to.

Anticipated Resistance

If these ideas could be used as arguments for Christ's necessity, Christianity as a whole has been slow to take hold of their utility. Their unseized cord, has been left open to enemies of the faith who have used it as attacks against the peculiarity of Christ. This is the pitfall of the purely direct apologetic method: the apologist clears so much away that anything good in the natural awareness of the lost person is called evil. Yet, if they were seeking Christ, what they had *rightly* sensed of Him would then be called false along with their other errant notions. In human terms, this overstep of the apologist is to blame (i.e., the Spirit's primacy notwithstanding). Apologetics requires greater courage. It must step past mere defense of Christ's particularity amid cultures and into a positive argument thereto by the very means now waged against it.

The Need for Natural Christology

This new method accordingly moves past negatively rejecting claims (viz., that state Christ is merely one among many hero-types, resurrecting-god myths, or avatars of the perennial

⁸Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (New York: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008), 12.

⁹Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945).

philosophy) and into a positive apologetic implementation of those types and themes: showing how their prevalence and scope creates an argument for the historical Christ.¹⁰ Should human beings experience a need for a real divine hero, championing a real kenotic identification and apothotic salvation, who may satisfy these parameters but the Christ of Scripture? These natural elements provide a methodological bridge through the realm of human experience, directly to the needfulness, truth, and beauty of Christ. Its central proposition may be abbreviated as follows.

The Case for Natural Christology

There exists a meaningful degree of natural Christological knowledge outside the Church, which is comparable (both in extension and in limitation) to the degree of natural theological knowledge outside the Church, and may thereby be appealed-to in as a most excellent bridge to the reality of the revealed Christ of history, and in particular the needfulness of His resurrection. An apologetic method facilitating conversations from this knowledge may then be understood as a Christology that is natural in composition and abductive toward the final salvific trust in Christ: a *natural* Christology. As the true Christ fulfils the aim of this knowledge, being the only plausible candidate to be the way to God and hero of humanity, then *Natural Christology* succeeds.

¹⁰This is contrasted from two different responses: from refutations offered by Christians against these unitive claims and from affirmations of the unitive conclusions by non-Christians.

Chapter 2: Method & Arguments

“Because of its explanatory power, Christology has an integrating force of its own.”

— Marilyn McCord Adams¹¹

Establishing framework is critical when exploring new territory. This scaffolding process begins outward: outlining the extensions and limitations of the Natural Christology proposition, its terms, its apologetic anchor, and its arguments. Once accomplished, a spiral will move through middle regions of evidential comparisons and finally to an inner circle of arguments and refutations that mirror this initial, outermost tour of methodology.

Scope of Natural Theology

Within the Church, Christians are divided on whether or not *natural theology* has a place in apologetics.¹² Those who practice the direct tactic may view natural theology as too man-centered. In relying on human reason, it could overlook the work of the Spirit in seeking and saving the lost. Those who hold this position may find similar issues with this project. *Natural Christology* operates somewhere between natural theology and direct tactics. So, should those of the direct persuasion consider any methods that are less-direct to be unchristian, they may disapprove of this move *a priori*. Addressing this group, the appeal of this method will merely be to highlight where the revealed knowledge of Christ may be precisely applied.

Natural Christology does not aim to label unbiblical Christological ideas as salvific; Christ alone may save. To clarify, natural theology merely locates any knowledge discoverable

¹¹Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 1.

¹²Dulles, *A History*, 345-6.

about God from the created order, or through human reason and contemplation.¹³ It is contrasted in this manner with revealed theology, that looks only at those things God has made known about Himself through Scripture.¹⁴ Apologetically, natural theology appeals to a person's natural reason, using these natural evidences about God to guide them up to Christ. Like a mountaineer making a great climb, the natural theologian leads an unbeliever in successive circles around the mountain. Here is where the camp rejecting natural theology has worthy arguments.

If the eternity of one's damnation or salvation is at stake, a matter of haste is introduced. Long circles are not fitting things. Perhaps, it is also questionable how much the natural person's reason, at odds from God, can grasp them the wonders of that God. Even if the category of natural theology is not an empty set, the endeavor would be failed at that start.¹⁵ Conceding that one cannot eventually "believe in him of whom they have never heard" nor again may "hear without someone preaching" to them the knowledge of Christ in which they must trust to be saved (Rom. 10:14–16), an assumption is still being made by this refutation of natural theology. It is fallacious to equate the essential value of the gospel-as-ends with a means of direct presentations. An intensity of objective does not demand an intensity of rhetoric; rather, what is conducive to successful ends may rightfully differ in tact (Mk. 4:4-9).

The gospel-only apologist may risk over-spiritualizing their approach through appeal to its simplicity. This mistake is earnest. It may even succeed. Yet, successful cases do not alone justify methods. Assuming that the successes of either method erase successes of the other is logically fuzzy. There can be more than one path up a mountain if each road attains the needful

¹³William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Chichester, U.K., Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.

¹⁴F[ount] LeRon Shults, "Wising Up: The Evolution of Natural Theology" *Zygon* 47, no. 3 (2012): 547.

¹⁵Andrew Ter Ern Loke, "Theological Critiques of Natural Theology: A Reply to Andrew Moore," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 61, no. 2, (2019): 212.

peak: the salvific knowledge of Christ. This project denies neither approach. In appreciation of the direct, and by application of natural methods, it adds something new.

The Road Ahead

The success of Natural Christology's arguments lay in how well they mirror the success of natural theological arguments. Thus, after the natural data of Christology has been introduced, some defense of natural theology methods must occur and then applied to it. This transitive approach to defending a new apologetic grounds its viability upon the strength of natural theology in a two-way connection: the strength of Natural Christology's argument is as weak as are natural theology's. Natural theology extends in some useful ways, while it is limited in important others. Acknowledging that natural theology is not in itself able to arrive at a saving faith (i.e., it requires revealed knowledge to succeed it from Scripture), the term "Christology" must be clarified as distinct and broad.

Defining Christology

Thus far, the term Christology has been provisionally defined as necessary to induce conceptual scaffolding. It is now prudent to trisect Christology further. These three divisions will be called: a working Christology, the gospel, and natural Christological data.

A Working Christology

A working Christology (simply: *a* Christology), refers to current operating degrees of knowledge with regard-to the true Christ. This may be accurate, fallacious, clear, opaque, biblical, or progressive. Its essence lay in conceptions of a needful savior. Perhaps they regard Jesus specifically: His degree of humanity, divinity, and function in making men holy. Perhaps not. As everyone holds a working theology: well-rounded or poor, biblical or cultural, negative

(atheistic) or positive (theistic), so everyone holds a working Christology. In the absence of the historical Christ, alternatives arise that people use to operate in His place. “Christology” stands without valence toward or away from Christianity; it will be qualified as follows otherwise.

The Gospel Christology

One chief way in which the term Christology will be regularly qualified is by substituting the term “gospel.” Not to be confused with biblical or unbiblical uses of this term, “gospel” hereafter denotes the set of all concepts and propositions equitable with a *salvific* Christology. This includes biblically informed confession, and trust in the historical Christ, especially the belief in His real divinity, death, resurrection, and joining Him therewith in order to commune with God.¹⁶ Teleologically, this gospel is the final purpose of apologetics. Particularly, the endeavor of Natural Christology is to facilitate the acceptance of this gospel, so understood.

Natural Christological Data (NXD)

The term “natural Christological data” hereafter refers to: any knowledge of the true Christ available to human beings outside of Scripture, or prior to the presentation of the gospel. It is an overlapping domain, composed definitionally of the useful intersection of working and salvific Christologies. As a datum [NXD] it merely constitutes this information. The focal Natural Christology, proper [NX] constitutes apologetic application of NXD *away* from erroneous notions in one’s working Christology set *toward* the gospel.¹⁷ NXD is *more* than a working Christology; it prioritizes and adjudicates between private and erroneous categories in view of the gospel. NXD must be correct in content even if is limited in scope. Similarly, NXD

¹⁶Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 561.

¹⁷“Natural Christological information,” “natural Christology,” or “NXD” refers to this *data*, while “NX” or “Natural Christology” refers to the titular *apologetic method*.

is *less* than the gospel; as NX uses NXD to decrease the gap between working Christologies and the saving gospel, it must be discernably narrower than the gospel itself.

Key Question

Accordingly, what degree of Christological knowledge *is* natural? As with natural theology, this set could be empty: all non-salvific ideas could be entirely distinct from saving ones. In such a case, the initial Christological objective for apologetics is purely negative: clearing all working conceptions in the unregenerate soul; the positive replacement of the gospel comes after. However, if NXD obtains, then some false ideas hold overlaps with the salvific and NX may employ them positively. First, NX operates with the *methodological* assumptions of natural theology but with fewer *categorical* assumptions external to the gospel. Second, NX facilitates reintegration of bypassed natural categories later on: a single zig-zag up the mountain. Isolating humanity's natural awareness of needing a savior, it reduces the initial demands of changing opinions about reality that are peripheral to one's initial acceptance of Christ's call.

Key Positions

To argue persuasively, NX assumes certain, reasonable tenets of Christianity to be true in advance, and then remains persuasive by minimizing Christian terminology. It exchanges Christian words for secular ones when referring to any theological or psychological concepts where secular equivalents are available. NX holds three positions to accomplish this. First, it assumes Biblical historicity narrowly upon pre-resurrection events about Jesus' life and the lives of His disciples. This position is held by Bock, who quotes E. Earle Ellis stating:

There are few if any historical or literary grounds to suppose that the Gospel traditions created events in Jesus' life or, indeed, that they mixed to any great degree oracles from the exalted Jesus into the Gospel traditions; [rather,] if a proper historical method is followed, [and] proper presuppositions observed [then] the Gospels of the New

Testament will be found to be a reliable presentation and faithful portrait of the teachings and acts of the pre-resurrection mission of Jesus.¹⁸

Second, NX holds two ideological conclusions to be false: universalism and pluralism.

Third, NX supplies a qualified inclusivism (which it calls ultimate exclusivism) in the place of these conclusions. In these ways, it considers one's epistemic access to faith.

Christ's Historical Reality

The persuasiveness of NX relies on the historicity of Christ (as does, it is argued, the whole of the Christian religion), but does not require assent to the historicity of the whole New Testament [NT]. Only a limited degree of facts must be assented to from the NT in order for NX to function. A shrewd apologetic distils the facts Christianity rightfully holds down to those sufficient to argue for the gospel; trust in the gospel is a sufficient initial domino for the rest. Accordingly, NX argues only from NXD as much as possible, relying on grounds assented to outside of Christianity. This minimization to specific facts about Christ and the apostles is persuasively expedient toward the contested point in those accounts: the resurrection of Jesus.

NX uses areas of the NT where detractors of the historical resurrection offer less debate to demonstrate the saturation of concepts taught by Christ; these will be considered evident for the purpose at hand.¹⁹ Conceding that the writers of the Gospel accounts wrote with theological intent, and not merely "as disinterested historical" depictions or "modern biographies,"²⁰ it does not follow that the Gospels are unfaithful to their expressed intent of communicating historical

¹⁸Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 216.

¹⁹Multiple references in each of the four Gospel accounts will be offered to defend the core propositions being argued for in the presentation of the revealed Christ of Scripture, in order to overcome this point of possible disagreement between the Christian arguing for the NX and their secular interlocutor.

²⁰Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), ch.2, conclusion – para.6.

truth.²¹ The overwhelming majority of scholars on NT historicity agree on the following propositions: Jesus was a historical figure who lived and taught in ancient Palestine,²² He was crucified on a Roman cross,²³ His followers *claimed* He rose from the dead and met with them.²⁴ After this, His following expanded: including, but not limited to, His former enemies.²⁵

Only one position is contested by biblical scholars today: the targeted item of His physical resurrection. The remainder of facts are established without appeal to exclusively Christian beliefs. The gospel understands Jesus to have really lived on earth, really died and was buried, and then really rose to never-ending life. The juncture of this gospel and human beings involves identifying with Christ's earthly reality (viz., to live with Him and die with Him) to thereby partake in His heavenly reality (viz., to trust that they may rise with Him). Assent to this heavenly reality is the target; NX merely holds it to accurately reflect what is taught in Scripture.

Pluralism & Universalism Rejected

The next position opposes ideologies that reject the “uniqueness of Jesus” and assert that many “religions can provide independent salvific access to the divine Reality” without Him.²⁶ Two conclusions are being specifically rejected here: pluralism and universalism. Pluralism considers many religions or ideologies to be ultimately equitable in behavioral content or

²¹Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 215.

²²Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 281-6.

²³Ibid., 302-6.

²⁴Ibid., 318-28, 371-2.

²⁵Ibid., 463-4.

²⁶T[imothy] R. Phillips, “Christianity and Religions: Pluralism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 233.

modes;²⁷ many *paths* are the same. Universalism holds that many religions or ideologies are ultimately salvific in nature;²⁸ many *destinations* are the same. Both stand in opposition to the Christian belief in the *exclusivism* of salvation found in Christ, and are summarily rejected.

The NX project stands at odds with pluralism and universalism [PU], arguing abductively in favor of the gospel *over* competing Christologies in view of the cultural and religious data. NX cannot indicate that everyone is ultimately saved, any more than natural theology indicates all fully know God. The Christian's claim is that: being-in-Christ implies one-is-saved; this must not be confused with NX's argument that: the existence of real salvation implies the existence of a really resurrected, historical Christ. Such universalist conclusions would involve affirming NX's logical consequent. All or many religions are not the same in content as some perennial philosophers suggest. Rather, certain facts exist do persist across time and demand an account. This concession is strategic, not capitulatory, for it leads to a salvific knowledge of Christ that is *ultimately* exclusive. Salvation is ultimately limited to Christ invisibly, not to the Church visibly.

High Christology for the Lowly

The final position is a distinction between the gospel and Christologies that critically capitulate to PU claims. To frame these errant Christologies, a conservative and liberal response may be considered as Christological collections both distinct from the NX.

The Conservative Claim

The conservative claim, being faithful to Christ, rises to arms at any mention of His being one among many. Certainly, a natural reaction to the PU attack states the converse position of

²⁷T[imothy] R. Phillips, "Christianity and Religions: Pluralism," in *Dictionary*, 232.

²⁸Jerry Root, "Universalism," in *Dictionary*, 1232.

particularism: *no, Christ is totally set apart from all others and so must His followers be*. In truth, these inclusive similarities have been misappropriated in the past; some have employed the natural data to argue that one should consider “Jesus as simply the one who perfectly acts out God’s ever-present love for a rebellious humanity” rather than holding Him as “the one who actually constituted” true salvation.²⁹ However, this appropriation of NXD does not seem intuitively *necessary* from the supposition that Christ is ultimately essential for salvation; it is merely *possible*. NX argues that the opposite conclusion is more reasonable.

The belief that risks exist in considering salvation to lay beyond Christianity (but not beyond Christ) may arise from preferences for clarity of open categories over the ambiguity of hidden states of grace before God. Yet, avoiding such ambiguity garners a situation in which the latent *value* of the NXD is twisted by maluses. It is needlessly discarded if it may have been used prudentially for good ends; it is tragically abandoned if its value is hijacked and used against Christ. A clear line has been drawn, but one which does not accurately dissect good from evil. Some good is lost, but much evil is gained. Openness to some risk in this may be an essential fact of the good; the preclusion of all risk eliminates also good’s fullness. Apologetics is not the locus for this precision, but rather the administration of the faith *within* the Church. The Church ought to make plain what Christian life should be. However, apologetics must cast the widest net possible, navigating cultural barriers that ought not bar the truth and beauty of the gospel.

The Liberal Claim

The liberal claim has similar flaws. It makes one too many concessions to the opposing side in an attempt to proselytize. Before long, even if some form of gospel-sounding, Christianly-worded, message is supported, its core necessity has been undercut by arguments that

²⁹T[imothy] R. Phillips, “Christianity and Religions: Inclusivism,” in *Dictionary*, 233.

defend an ultimate sameness of higher religious philosophies. Some undercutting would not always be harmful if something singularly exclusive remains about the finely-tuned mode of salvation (i.e., being afforded only through Christ). However, defenders of such claims range from liberal Christian ideologies to the secular philosopher of religion, and their results boil down to making Christianity palatable by removing its distinctions. If a needful path for human growth or salvation is kept in name but changed in content to no longer facilitate that growth or salvation, it falsely equivocates the original, potent form.

The NX Claim

Accordingly, NX navigates the conservative and liberal impulses by more precisely using the similarities between the natural and revealed data. Its precision works between two preliminary arguments. There is a contra-universal claim, and a contra-plural one. Contra-universalism, *a state of salvation from sin and death to eternal life upon a person's soul* [S] implies *the historical necessity and transcendent reality of Christ, His physical resurrection and its power* [R] to exist, such that it may meaningfully be applied to them. Without R, there could be no S; if and when S obtains, this is evidence of R. As the NXD affirms S, it therefore implies R. The reverse is not the case: that R implies S (universalism). Claims about modes of applying R take place external to this in the second claim. Contra-pluralism, the natural data shows only a *total self-disregard where one lets go of, or sacrifices their own soul* [K] mutually entails an *attainment of any meaningful application of salvation on one's soul* [A]. States of salvation [A] are always paired with states of self-emptying [K] in a baffling manner that allows that self to *remain* and receive its salvation. Naturally, this elicits a contradiction. K seems to entail A, and A also K; however, A involves enlivening all that K must lose. The conditions of K preclude those of A.

NX investigates this intuitive yet contradictory impulse further, and eventually suggests that R resolves the contradictions that $K \leftrightarrow A$ alone creates. At present, it is clear that K (total self-disregard) is the sole mode of A (applying salvation), and other modes are eliminated (the acceptance of which would be pluralism). This outlines a finely-tuned NX claim: faithful to the gospel's vitality while observing the gospel's heart. So, the NXD comes to light. When it does, its equivalencies reveal a natural provision the Spirit has woven in the human heart to be tapped by NX. The apologist connects such hearts and cultures to Christ will grasp those threads where they appear. Matters conducive to a saving knowledge of Christ must be rightly discerned from those which truly reject Him. Otherwise, apologetics risks placing avenues for His acceptance out-of-bounds and refute that very cord in the heart of men which longs to truly know Him.

The gospel has a high Christology: the revealed and historical Christ is divine. Yet it is for the lowly: by entering into humanity, God is near to those who are humble and not the proud. NX moves in the downward direction with the sweet scent of Christ without denying the supremacy and power of His name. The ultimate necessity of accepting the true, historical Christ is the only uncompromised hill upon which the person of faith must die. Glimmers of true faith found beyond Christianity may work draw them directly to the Cross, and thereafter entrust to that Cross their fashioning into His likeness.

Delimitations

Natural Data Sets

In this initial argument, an exhaustive look through the Christological content of religions and cultures is not as necessary. Rather, a brief analysis of the working-Christology of humanity may center on two central propositions articulated in the mid-twentieth century, which bookend a recurring theme of popular thought. These primary data are the archetypical ideas alternatively

postulated and collected by Aldous Huxley³⁰ and Joseph Campbell;³¹ each argues for a secular iteration of the great theme as a valid mode of understanding reality. These volumes proved to be formative emergences for thought today; thus, they provide staging grounds for analyzing NXD as is relevant for apologetics and launching NX's riposte upon their PU conclusions. If this narrower argument proves viable, any broader exhaustive NX may be easily extended.

Epistemic Access

Natural theology assumes all human beings to have a reasonable epistemic access to the data of nature, providing common ground for an argument of God's existence and some of His attributes.³² Any marring on the human being's faculties will similarly be assumed insufficient in making natural evidences unusable *a priori*,³³ such that the conclusions drawn by perennial philosophy and the monomyth are *cultural* data which by comparison with the gospel. This natural religious and cultural data argues toward Christ just as other natural data argues toward God. Should conditions of epistemic access assumed by natural theology be met, they remain for Natural Christology.³⁴

NX may therefore be categorized as a "Cultural Apologetic" that "examines modern culture to ask why Christian faith is *a priori* unthinkable to many, and then challenges these cultural assumptions on different fronts in order to gain rational leverage."³⁵ It chips away at the

³⁰Huxley, *The Perennial*.

³¹Campbell, *The Hero*.

³²Ibid., 210-4.

³³Loke, "Theological Critiques," 212.

³⁴Marilyn M. Adams and Robert M. Adams, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford University, 1990), 153-5.

³⁵W. G[ary] Phillips, "Apologetics: Other Approaches," in *Dictionary*, 84.

foundations of this presumption by means of one's own culture and anthropology of the good life or salvation, and then illuminates its dependence upon the gospel. The necessity of the Spirit's work in regenerating the heart and mind of the lost remains congruent with any natural (non-Scriptural) means the Spirit employs.³⁶ The *narrow net* of direct presentations and the *wide gate* of the indirect, are exchanged for a *narrow gate* that lays at the end of a *wider net*. NX claims that many roads may lead a person to the one Christ, while only that revealed, objective, true, and historical Christ may open the path to the salvation of God.

Moves & Arguments

This conclusion will be approached by five central logical moves. First is an isolated presentation of the Christ of Christian Scriptures; second, are observations of the perennial philosophy and the monomyth, taking secular Christologies and analyzing them for regularity, specificity, and scope; third, is an expounding of arguments of natural theology with attention to method; fourth, is an application of this method upon a cross-section of the data from steps one and two, highlighting their overlaps, distinctions, and the plausibility of their conclusions; fifth, will be the arguments themselves: three triangulating lines of reasoning. Briefly introduced here to complete an outer framework, each argument works ordinally in abductive tandem to trace the outline of the revealed Christ. They may also serve as falsification criteria for NX as a whole.

Argument 1: Need Implies Needed

The summarized first argument is: *the need implies the needed*. C. S. Lewis observed that where human beings have a real *need* (e.g., hunger, loneliness, or exhaustion) there always exists

³⁶Loke, "Theological Critiques," 211.

a real *means* to meet that need (viz., food, companionship, or rest).³⁷ Lesser versions of this need may be met insufficiently (e.g., junk food or toxic relationships), however a full need-met is possible inasmuch as the need is real. It seems a need is found for a savior. Thus, a savior exists in a meaningful way.

Argument 2: Human Hero & Divine Savior

This second line regards the perennial/monomythic data. It takes a closer look at the aforementioned need to better identify what the solution must be like. According to the NXD, the human need appears bifurcated into two distinct and competing demands: first for a human hero and next for a divine savior. NX narrows all possible solutions offered in response to the first line of reasoning to these two recurrent, if contradictory, alternatives.

Argument 3: The Prevalence of Christ

Finally, the third line observes how the historical Christ of the Christian faith provides an occurrence in history of a union for these themes and a resolution for their contradictions. Specifically, this historical Christ may rightly be considered singular out from the plethora of competing figures offered by either the perennial philosophy, the monomyth, or by other major world religions. If Christ is the *most* reasonable candidate for such a complex need to be filled, then He is (at least) the *most* likely solution. However, and furthermore, if He is the *only* fully reasonable candidate, then He is the *only* answer.

³⁷C[live] S[taples] Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980), 137.

Chapter 3: The Revealed Christ

“Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way...’”

— *John 14:5-6, ESV*

The New Testament [NT] expresses the gospel through four, successive accounts of Jesus Christ. Each depicts His major activity on Earth paired with His legacy after death. Together, they outline the behavioral transformation and deliverance of humanity He brings, which the rest of the NT knead out: the targeted gospel knowledge, being a trust and knowledge in Christ. This, then, is the narrow scope of this present analyzation. The only question is: who did the writers of the NT *believe* Jesus to be, and *what* did they hold He accomplished for humankind?

The Truth: Ministry & Death

These four NT accounts are the good news of Christ according to four different authors, traditionally understood as: the two apostles Matthew and John, and the two apostolic amanuenses, Luke (of Paul) and Mark (of Peter).³⁸ These texts are primary in discussions of the NT’s depiction of Christ’s ministry and his death; for expediency, this section represents a cross-section of these four texts with little further regard paid to their divergence. Even should distinctions occur, their collection remains the historical foundation of Christianity; thus, these four Gospels are Christ’s *significant* depictions. The NX method reasons toward them, because what is retained across time holds intrinsic weight, and it lends further to in favor of the events described in the NT being likely, or even necessary, to have occurred historically.

³⁸Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 41.

Jesus' Origins

The Gospels describe Jesus' lineage simultaneously as the direct descendent of David, a great human King of ancient Israel (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32-33, 2:31), and also as the son of God, coeternal with God Himself (Mark 1:1; John 1:1-2). Jesus has origins regally ancient in human terms as well as in spiritual, heavenly terms.³⁹ Yet, these identifications with godhood and kingship are contrasted with his humility of birth: born to a woman out of wedlock (Luke 1:34-35; Matt. 1:18-19) in a stable and laid in a trough (Luke 2:12-17), his parents then fled as refugees from a king who sought His life (Matt 2:12-15), and He only returns to His country to grow up in the backwoods regions His countrymen considered disreputable (Matt. 2:23, Luke 2:39-40).⁴⁰ Both His glory and obscurity attend an understanding of fulfilled prophetic announcements in the Old Testament [OT] of the coming messiah (Matt. 1:22-23, 2:6, 3:3).

Jesus' Temptations

Christ entered the public eye via His baptism, a commencement performed by His cousin, John the Baptizer and seen by the Gospel writers to fulfill prophecy (Luke 3:4; Mark 1:2-3; John 1:23; Matt. 3:3). The Baptizer is quoted to say, “for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He [Jesus] might be revealed to Israel” and afterward that “I myself did not know him, but He who sent me said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who is the Son of God’” (John 1:31, 33). The divine presence having affirmed Christ (Mark 1:10-11; Matt. 3:13-17), He then engages with demonic temptations in the wilderness beyond the river (Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-3). Moving directly from confirmation of His sonship, He departs all

³⁹Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 67.

⁴⁰R[ichard] T[homas] France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 140.

comforts: home, food, and friendship; Satan, unsuccessfully tempts Him three times by these very things: with food, with prestige, and with power (Matt. 4:3-10; Luke 4:3-12). Christ denies these temptations by quoting the OT: denying food in favor of rightness with God (Luke 4:4; Matt. 4:4), denying prestige in favor of trusting God's plan for Him (Luke 4:12; Matt. 4:7), and denying Satan's power of the world in favor of worshiping God alone (Luke 4:8; Matt. 4:10).

Jesus' Teachings

Returning from His divine commencement and human temptations, Christ begins a traveling ministry consisting of parables, platitudes, and polemics that generally focus on four themes: the blessedness of one's lowliness (Matt. 5:2-12; Mark 9:35; Luke 6:20-26; John 13:13-17), the goodness of self-transcendence from the powers of evil (Luke 6:27-42; Matt. 5:21-6:34; Mark 7:20-23, 9:42-49), a heavenly mindset involving a repentance (or a changing of one's mind),⁴¹ and His acceptance as God's exclusive avenue for salvation (Matt. 7:1-27; Mark 13:10-13; Luke 6:43-49, 13:3-5, John 3:3-15, 5:39-47). In addition to these general ones, He also proclaimed three, specific themes to those who had begun to follow His way. These three were: an abandonment of worldly values (Matt. 8:22; Mark 10:21-23; Luke 9:48, 12:22-40), an expectation of persecution and death (Luke 9:23-25, 12:49-53; Matt. 10:16-39, 17:24-28; John 15:18-25, 15:20), and the gift of eternal life after death (Matt. 11:27-30; Luke 14:14; John 6:40, 11:25-26, 17:2-3).

Jesus' Crucifixion

After this, all accounts have Jesus entering Jerusalem, being captured by the nation's elders, convicted of heresy and sedition, and crucified on a cross until dead (Matt. 26:47-27:50;

⁴¹C[arl] G. Kromminga, "Repentance," in *Dictionary*, 1012.

Mark 15:1-37; Luke 22:24-23:24; John 19:16-23). Such concludes an overview of His life and ministry on Earth as recorded in the Gospels: the first datum of the salvific Christology.⁴² These facts are not much contested (excepting the variance of their order or His quotations).⁴³ However, the exactness of Jesus' message is the present matter for comparison, not His diction. The next fact is one most central to Christianity, and most contested outside it: the resurrection.

The Life: Resurrection & Legacy

One of the architects of the Christian Church, the apostle Paul, put the matter succinctly in a letter, saying "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins," and "if in Christ we have hope for this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17, 19). Accordingly, the resurrection was of central importance. Even should the nature of resurrection be a miracle incompatible with materialistic worldviews, such statements regarding Christ's resurrection may only be taken one of three major ways.

Clarifying Limitations

First, those writing the NT may have believed that Jesus achieved merely spiritual power at death, and that the resurrection was not physical; second, the whole matter of eternal life was an invention disbelieved by the writers; or third, the writers believed Jesus physically rose from the dead, attaining a spiritual power from which He "gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). Given quotations like those above, it appears *prima facie* as if the writers believed in a physical resurrection event. Thus, Natural Christology does not *assume* Jesus rose, but does find the NT

⁴²Jesus' performance of miracles, such as healing, was intentionally omitted. While common across the NT, they are peripheral to an NX apologetic. Secular views commonly demand miraculous events have physical explanations; affirming miracles other than Christ's resurrection places excess demand on interlocutors' beliefs.

⁴³Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, ch.8, para.17.

writer's claims to evince *their belief*. This belief adds to NX's abductive plausibility. In the same way, the independent transmission of each Gospel is not essential (though helpful). Establishing that these accounts were transmitted from as early as thirty-five years after Jesus' death,⁴⁴ sufficiently argues that they were in circulation during the Church's formation, not after it. Whatever Christ passed had down, these documents are the progenitors of Christian ideology. The Christianity that filled the world and overcame the might of Rome by its very weakness, is the Christianity that the NT chartered. Thus, these accounts are inseparable ripples from the original event. *Something* happened to these people, instigating them to expand their Jewish identity and become people "belonging to the Way" in devotion to the NT's Christ (Acts 9:2).

Jesus' Resurrection

In each account, Jesus was buried in a tomb behind a stone, on Friday before sundown (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:45-46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40-42). On the Sunday following, His followers found the stone removed, His body gone, and white-robed messengers proclaiming He had arisen (Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-14). Some immediately saw Jesus at the tomb or on the road (Matt. 28:9-10; Mark 16:9-13; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:15-18); all saw Him corporately in the following weeks: eating, laughing, and teaching as before, though scarred with wounds and changed to a new kind of life (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-61; Luke 24:36-45; John 20:24-21:18). On these points, the founding documents of Christianity cohere.

Jesus' Followers

With proclamations of resurrection, the Gospel's theological narratives of Christ conclude and the remainder of the NT takes over. Of this remainder, only one other book

⁴⁴Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, ch.5, sec.2, subsec.1, para.1.

contains narrative; “The Acts of the Apostles” (or: Acts) is a second volume to Luke’s Gospel that picks up where it leaves off.⁴⁵ Acts views the legacy of Christ’s resurrection in the life of early Christians and frames the rest of the NT: encouraging letters that discuss Him. The post-resurrection NT claims that Jesus left Earth and ascended to a heavenly realm (Acts 1:9; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 4:14, 10:12-13; Rev. 5:3-8); He was given the dominion and authority over the world and a glory He once shared with God (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2, 17:22-24; Jude 5-6; Rev. 1:17-18). Undeniably evincing this authority, the Church expanded and grew; its growth came remarkably in conjunction with, and owing to, the very persecution decreed for it by Jesus (Matt. 10:16-25; John 15:18-20, 16:20-23, 17:14-19; Acts 5:17-18, 7:57-60, 12:2-3, 14:19, 16-34, 28:23-31; 2 Tim. 3:12). The apostles’ lives were drastically changed: each martyred professing the resurrection and Christ’s lordship,⁴⁶ in fulfillment of Jesus’ calling. They suffered for and founded His church that today comprises a majority of the world’s organized religious practice.⁴⁷

Jesus’ Impact

This early martyrdom and spread of Christianity are central. Many may mistakenly die for their religion’s authority; yet martyrdom by tales long-passed down an inundated from birth is quite different from dying for what one *knows* to be a lie: a lie they would have created. That the apostles went to their deaths proclaiming Christ, even Paul who formerly attacked Christians, separates Christ from other religious leaders venerated as divine well after their deaths.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁵Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2012), 21-2.

⁴⁶Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 336.

⁴⁷Pew Research Center, “Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050,” Size & Demographic Characteristics of Religious Groups (last modified April 2, 2015).
www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/.

⁴⁸John Hick, ed. *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London, England: SCM, 2012), 106.

begs one to take their teaching seriously. These martyrs taught more than the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; they extended past record and into a meaning and value gained by the events for those who trust Christ as spiritually effectual for their own relationships with God. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were not thought as trivia, but as what mysteriously affected the life, death, and resurrections of those identified with Him. Thus, this second key datum of Christ legacy leads naturally to the third and final one: the practices of following in His likeness.

The Way: Kenosis & Eternity

Jesus' teachings fundamentally shift one's perspectives, question worldly prestige, challenge intuitive systems of power, and upset the struggle of nature and natural man. Altering one's schemas in such repentance, or *metanoia*, is the beginning step of faith. One displaces trust in the love, power, and wisdom of self and trusts rather in the love, power, and wisdom of God.⁴⁹

The Twin Dimensions

Christian life has two key dimensions. Both correlate and connect with Christ's nature and life. First is the *mimetic* dimension; here, Christians try to live life as a reflection of Jesus' life on Earth. Second is the *metamorphic* dimension; a power over death and change to new life overcome the Christian, which is mysteriously imparted by His death and resurrection.⁵⁰ These dimensions operate in harmonious tandem. Christians see peace restored between them and God through the Spirit of God within, unlocked by identification with the life and death of Christ.

⁴⁹Joel C. Daniels, "Christology, Evolution, and Cultural Change," *Anglican Theological Review* 96, no. 3 (2014): 445.

⁵⁰Christina Gschwandtner, "Mimesis or Metamorphosis? Eastern Orthodox Liturgical Practice and its Philosophical Background," *Religions* 8, no. 5 (2017): 2-5.

Thus, this identification is more than mere symbol. It reflects a transformational reality.⁵¹ An identified oneness with Christ *in the present* is the catalyst for a decreed oneness with God *that is becoming*. In other words, “Christ’s human actions and sufferings [...] ‘prepare’ the way for God to give grace in two ways: by making satisfaction to the Father for our sins by his suffering and death and by becoming an ‘efficacious example’ that attracts and guides us to virtue.”⁵² So then, what constitutes this identification to new life both now and after death?

Identified by Death

If identification with Christ is the key, then to misidentify Him is to remain apart from God. Fortunately, Christ clarifies that “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross [daily]⁵³ and follow me (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) and “whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke. 14:27). Crosses are instruments of death; subjects of crucifixion would first carry their cross’s beams of wood out to where they would die of suffocation hours later: their lungs filling with liquid and effectively drowning them if exposure to the elements and fatigue did not come first.⁵⁴ Christ attaches His identification to a sharing in this suffering and death of His.

The Apostle Peter explains that “Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,” (1 Pet. 3:18). Therefore as “Christ suffered in the flesh,” on Christians’ behalf, they should “arm themselves in a similar way of thinking, for

⁵¹Dulles, *A History*, 275.

⁵²David J. Moser, “The Flesh of the Logos, Instrumentum divinitatis: Retrieving an Ancient Christological Doctrine,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 23, no.3, (2021): 312.

⁵³Luke 9:23 adds “daily.”

⁵⁴Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 691.

whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” and should “not be surprised at the fiery trial [...] as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:1, 12-13). Afflictions of this kind are not an oddity for true Christians, but normative. Well and good. Left here, Christianity is merely a morbid asceticism. Christians are just carrying crosses up mountains, symbolically or otherwise, and dying daily to themselves.

Identified by Love

Complimenting this, Christ continues: “it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Matt. 5:43-44), and “love your enemies and do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27), and again “a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:33-34), and finally “as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love” (John 15:9). Here, Christ details how His way is a shift away from the normal, worldly, negative acts of merely avoiding wrong to others and leaving them be. Instead, He transforms this into an active love toward others, *especially* those who do one harm.⁵⁵

Certainly, the reality of death and darkness can lead one to despair: the default pit for human beings to escape or avoid. Yet, this mode seems balanced by an ideal: a hypothetical perfection of life and light that may give one overwhelming experiences of the reality of love. Christ’s claim is that between and beyond these two ideas is a specific kind of death and darkness that alone leads to a realized state of life and light. Though beyond the natural ken of humanity, this is the reality Jesus’s highlights by statements such as: “greater love has no one

⁵⁵Darrell L. Bock and Gary M. Burge, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1996), 22.

than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Access to a new reality is being made known through in His own death and love for humankind: “you are my friends, if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). His command? “Love one another” (John 15:17).

A Focal Text

The apostles’ writings all encircle this theme: a wedding of the *mimetic fruits* of love in the Christian life to the *metamorphic roots* of faith and union with Christ’s death.⁵⁶ Identification with His death, darkness, and self-denial finds harmony with one’s newness of life, love, and light. One central passage from Philippians holds a three-fold merit as a useful summary of this theme for the project at hand: it speaks directly to the revealed heart of the matter of identifying with Christ; it unites the Christians’ union with Christ’s suffering to their union with Christ’s glory; and it holds weight by constituting one of the earliest known Christological creeds of the NT.⁵⁷ Thus, it may be rightly taken as summative of this crucial, cruciform thesis. The following creed comes from the apostle Paul’s letter to the Church at Philippi, where he draws this crucial connection between Christ’s lowliness and Christian’s new life:

So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory

⁵⁶Gschwandtner, "*Mimesis or Metamorphosis*," 14, 19.

⁵⁷Isuwa Yohanna Atsen, "A Tapestry of Global Christology: Weaving a Three-Stranded Theological Cord." *PhD diss.*, Trinity International University, (2019): 246.

of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:1-13).

This creed distills to three key segments, highlighted by the breaks in paragraphs above.

First, Christians are called to participate with the Spirit. They “take comfort in love” by abandoning ambition and conceits that promote self over other, looking self-sacrificially first to others: “being of the same mind, having the same love [and] being in full accord” with them.

Secondly, the nature of this sameness is not mere ubiquity, but a sameness rooted in a shared mind of Christ: He who emptied Himself of the *glory* rightful for Him to hold in His godhood. What is shared, is a shared self-emptying of Christ in opposition to the empty or vainglorious false pursuits of human beings. He did not empty Himself of a *thing* but of *Himself*.

Such self-emptying is a far-cry from the human mimicry of self-abandonment; in this human mode, one gets rid of all things they have *and* may even lose who they are. Yet, Christ is here shown not to abandon His divine identity by becoming something He was not, nor to dispel His character or personality becoming someone He was not. Rather, He demonstrates supremacy by gaining exaltation through His very humility.⁵⁸ That is, He humbled His whole self.

By taking *on* humanity, His character and power as God is revealed most clearly *to* humanity. By taking on death, His ultimate power of godhood is shown most potent through death. It is for this critical reason that such totally selfless “humility is a uniquely Christian virtue;”⁵⁹ it does not merely abdicate self, but transcends self. A thing beyond the self is finally demonstrated to human eyes. It comes into humanity so that humanity’s pouring of self may similarly move toward gain and without any loss. Without His championing, no receptacle for

⁵⁸Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 163-4.

⁵⁹Fee, *Paul's Letter*, 154.

human self-pouring out remains, and humanity would be left to fabricate imagined imitations of this notion in their soul. But these would be illusions: the way to God had not been opened.

But Christ, being the infinite Himself in human form, opens the bridge between the mortal flesh He took on and the infinitude of divinity He retained, and displays how His own fathomlessness may become the fullness into which human beings may likewise pour their souls. Being God He cannot die. Like a stone cast against diamond, the lesser strength gives way to the greater; in His dying, it was death which died for those who trust in Him. Being both the fathomlessness into which all may be poured as well as mortal man who poured Himself out, He links human flesh with that crystal road to share in His eternal life.

Thirdly, then, Christ was exalted out from the death and lowliness He had willingly taken. He fulfils His own declaration that one who “exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11) as well as His mother’s words that God “has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1:51-53). This glory and authority claimed by Christ through the totality and perfection of His humility, becomes the ground of the mysterious transformation in the behavior and love of those identified in Him. Christians ought to work out their “own salvation with fear and trembling” in tandem with (and even owing to) the reality that “it is God who works in you, *both* to will and to work” (Phil. 2:12-13, emphasis added).

Identified by Kenosis

God works *in* those who are in Christ (1 John 4:8-12). Christ is identified by a crucial mark of humility and an emptying or pouring out of Himself. Thus, the work of God in those who are in Christ is crucially marked by a kindred humility: a pouring out of themselves

understood as taking up crosses or dying to self. This is seen in the word used by Paul in this passage; the term translated as “emptied himself” is: *ekkenosen*, coming from the Greek *keno*, meaning void or emptiness.⁶⁰

Now, there has been a rightful amount of controversy surrounding this term, especially as concerns the harmonization of Christ’s humanity and divinity. However, the aforementioned clarification showcases how the emptying (or pouring-out) is of Himself, not of any particular characteristic or attribute that is involved in His essence (i.e., His divinity). When clarified that He pours all of Himself out (not just an estranged part), the mystery unravels. Christ remains part of the fathomless Godhead; according to Christ, He and the Father are one (John 10:30): a oneness proclaimed while He on Earth. While human, He was yet one with God. Thus, He cannot have lost this thing.

But what then? If all that He *is* remains, what has been poured out? Consider the infinitude of God. Should the infinite foundation of all existence humble itself, it loses nothing. It is infinite. What it’s humbling would gain then, is to afford an infinitude of means, everything needed, for any finite creature to ascend fully to Him who is holy (John 17:20-23). Now the claim of kenosis becomes clear.

Christ’s kenotic act denotes a pivotal letting go of Himself, properly understood as death, humility, trust, and faith. It is death, because He shows it by dying. It is humility, because it lets go of His rightful glory. It is trust, because it characterizes reliance on God as the sole source of one’s salvation. It is faith, because it leaps into the unknown, and unites the soul with God.

⁶⁰Moisés Silva, *Philippians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 102.

Owing to this breadth of meaning, *kenosis* operates for NX as a fitting summation of the metamorphic-mimetic identification.

As Christ is divine, His initial self-emptying opened a pathway down into the non-divine, being humanity. He gives up what He cannot lose in order to gain what He always had. This generates a potency of self-giving-up for the rest of humanity: they had not but now may gain all. When He then gives up this very mortality His departure relegated Him, where else could He dwell but where He always was: within fullness of divinity?⁶¹ The Christ who was “before all things, and in [whom] all things hold together” has since also become the “firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent;” to become first in literally *everything* He must champion this newness of life that divinity requires mortality to accomplish, such that “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and” yet also “through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:17-20).

Those brought into an identity with Him trust in the pathway of He who bore “our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 23:24). Those who follow Christ may rightly be understood as those who follow this second *kenosis*. To be “united with him in a death like his” is to “certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:5). Accordingly, the unifying principle for Christians lay the power of Christ’s *kenosis* (metamorphic) to empower a *kenosis* of their own in life, through death, to life eternal (mimetic).

The Kenosis of God

This then is the meaning of repentance (as the changing of one’s mind) and of faith (total kenotic reliance) in the work of Christ. The common sense of holding onto life to keep life is

⁶¹Silva, *Philippians*, 102.

reversed. Kenosis reveals that “whoever saves his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24). Therefore, the Christ of the New Testament is manifold. His teaching and death showed Him to be a faithful and good man. But there is more than this. The God who says “I am the Alpha and the Omega [i.e., the first and the last] who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8) is the same God who validated the ministry of this good man and even (as will be argued) raised Him from the dead. Following His resurrection to life and power, this mere man said of himself, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17-18).

Thus, a true analysis of the biblical Christ unveils a golden cord between the two statements of Thomas quoted at the opening of this chapter. Thomas asks to know the way; Christ’s mysterious response is that He *is* that way. The mystery is unveiled by their next conversation. When the resurrected Christ returns, Thomas puts the pieces together at last and declares Him to be: “my Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The revealed Christ of the Bible is one with God Himself.

He underwent a great kenosis: from heaven to earth, from earth to the grave, and then to heaven and life eternal. All of humanity is given this Christ as the Way, properly understood and personified,⁶² to share in His resurrection through an identification with His life and death.⁶³ In summary then: Christ is the Way, and this Way may be characterized most apologetically as the way of *kenosis*.

⁶²Where “the Way” stands as a proper title for Christ, or Christianity as His institution, it will hereafter be capitalized to distinguish it from other uses even should those uses eventually be compared with this proper form.

⁶³Martin Koci, "Sacrifice for Nothing: The Movement of Kenosis in Jan Patočka's Thought," *Modern Theology* 33, no. 4 (2017): 598.

Chapter 4: The Perennial Hero

*“Death closes in; there is nothing we can do, except be crucified—and resurrected;
dismembered totally, and then reborn.”*

—Joseph Campbell⁶⁴

Humanity forever quests to answer a two-part question asked by their very nature: how may one relate rightly to life and death, and what path leads to such flourishing? Oddly, strange commonalities emerge from the various religions and philosophies developed to address this mystery, as preserved by tradition and encoded in stories. Understood apologetically, this synchronicity becomes plain: they are secular attempts at the gospel answer. Each added attempt gathers hope for the secular seeker: the likelihood of discovery increases as convergence points grow ever narrower. For, transcendent answers to the human question seem possible only by systematically identifying what is common between the very diversity of natural ideologies.

Two Convergent Frames

The hero’s journey (or “the monomyth”) and the perennial philosophy are secular frames championed respectively by Joseph Campbell and Aldous Huxley in the mid twentieth century, that both observe an overarching narrative or praxis for human flourishing to emerge amid cultures, religions, and traditions. Furthered by contemporaries and successors, they retain unique influence on modernity as secular insights on the congruence of beliefs as useful wisdom for non-religious cultures. Both works were *collections* of multi-cultural data; their persuasiveness lay in the plentitude of coherent religious-mythic strands. Should a common

⁶⁴Campbell, *The Hero*, 12.

reality emerge, it demands to be taken seriously. Further intrinsic weight would be carried by whatever threads developed independently of one another.

Just as the account transmitted from the biblical writers is responsible for Christianity's influence on history, so may the insights of Campbell and Huxley be taken as formative for some of today's unitarian flavor of spirituality. Huxley's work on the perennial philosophy greatly influenced popular perspective on religious similitude: the more religions develop the closer they move to a single mode that reveals one path for humanity; despite postmodern attacks on organized thought, the secular world appears insulated from loss of metanarratives by cultural stanchions such as his work.⁶⁵ Campbell's insights are similarly well-known. He observes that a single story, the hero's journey, reappears in all stories and reveals something common in the human soul: that all must glimpse the hero and take up the journey. The notion that a singular story pervades all stories is no longer novel, in part because he was so impactful.⁶⁶ However, less known is that Campbell's conclusions step past observation and consider what these insights reveal about humanity: their orientation toward the transcendent.

Cross-analysis of Huxley and Campbell thereby provides a demonstrative sample of natural knowledge: distillation of two manifestations of *working Christologies* of secular western thought, for both contend their conclusions are more than coincidence; they reflect transcending, intrapsychic realities. The goals seen in the perennial philosophy [PP] and the foundations apprehended by the hero's journey [HJ] outline a single, recurrent path of humanity [RP]. Their arguments defend RP's coherence as a key take on the world's summative, working Christology.

⁶⁵Dana W. Sawyer, "Redressing a Straw Man: Correcting Critical Misunderstandings of Aldous Huxley's Perennial Philosophy," *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, (2021): 4.

⁶⁶Sarah Nicholson, "The Problem of Woman as Hero in the Work of Joseph Campbell," *Feminist Theology* 19, no. 2 (2011): 183-4.

Monomyth: The Hero's Journey

Human beings have always told stories: around campfires, after battles, to teach children, to entertain adults, to remember the past, and to forewarn the future. Yet something emerges when one looks closer. The stories that most resonate and endure showcase a mythical seed, transcending the types and names of each that touches down to the human spirit through them.⁶⁷ This raises questions: what are these stories' secrets, where do they come from, why do humans desire their sameness, and what do their commonalities communicate to them?⁶⁸ Insights from psychology, sociology, and religion all hunt down this core: this resonance, which their similitude unveils.⁶⁹ Something otherly is breaking through into human awareness. These stories are the key.

The Hero

This is why listeners experience catharsis when hearing a *good* story.⁷⁰ They are taken into it: playing out encounters with evil. They feel real triumph in the hero's successes and real shame in their failures.⁷¹ By comparison, bad stories are those which tend to deviate from the central mythic matter of the hero. The important factor to investigate quickly becomes what the nature of this true hero is; this is what Campbell and others worked to isolate.

⁶⁷Campbell, *The Hero*, 2.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Clive Williams, "The Hero's Journey: A Mudmap for Change," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 59, no. 4 (2019): 524.

⁷⁰Campbell, *The Hero*, 10–11.

⁷¹Ibid.

The true hero always transcends all the world by contact with the spiritually transcendent: passing trials and even overcoming death itself, to unveil the path for others.⁷² By this, the hero must champion what is good and right.⁷³ They must live in submission to some higher and transcending ideal.⁷⁴ Arthur's knights obey their code; Spiderman obeys a rule of responsibility. The hero is also connected with a higher divine realm from which they call others up;⁷⁵ they are the lost children of gods or spirits: half human, half divine, mixed between the common and the noble. Achilles is grandson of Zeus; Perseus is Zeus' son; both are also grounded by humanity. Superman is son to earthly human father *and* a heavenly alien father. Finally, the hero must live out the journey, proving the quality of their birthright by their ultimate task: to save the world.⁷⁶

What heroes *are* is seen in and through each of these stories. They saturate humanity, in history and fiction, because their plethora models in part what is understood fully across their variance. They fill *stories* particularly, whether real or figurative, because humans connect innately to narrative; this connection opens humanity's connection to the hero and their power.⁷⁷

Each person's own journey thus becomes an *identification* with this hero's transcendence, following them into the nobility they achieved and made real. As Campbell puts it: "we have only to follow, therefore, a multitude of heroic figures through the classic stages of the universal adventure in order to see again what has always been revealed."⁷⁸ The true hero moves beyond a

⁷²Campbell, *The Hero*, 30.

⁷³Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 52.

⁷⁴Campbell, *The Hero*, 11.

⁷⁵Rank, *The Myth*, 103.

⁷⁶Campbell, *The Hero*, 22.

⁷⁷Hannah Ascough, "Once Upon a Time: Using the Hero's Journey in Development Stories," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 39, no. 4 (2018): 535-6.

local tale into something deeper, mythic and universal.⁷⁹ When the good story is told, the great figure who transcends it attends the listener in a real way: his power indwells those who partake in him. Practically, the hero “is the man or woman [...] able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms,” for “the hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn.”⁸⁰ The locus of these “golden seeds [that] do not die”⁸¹ across all stories, lay in the human soul, revealing humanity’s essence: they are called to the journey, by modelling the hero.⁸²

The Journey

The hero’s journey always involves “detachment” from the world⁸³ and “transfiguration” of life returning back to it.⁸⁴ This single “HJ” theme takes on three key phases. These are: “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.”⁸⁵

HJ 1: Departure

In phase one, the hero makes their departure; they are distinguished from the world in this move by their dissatisfaction with that world.⁸⁶ This phase is begun by the *call*: a revelation of

⁷⁸Campbell, *The Hero*, 28.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 12.

⁸²Williams, “The Hero’s Journey: A Mudmap,” 524-5.

⁸³Campbell, *The Hero*, 12.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 12-15.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁶Freya Tsuda-McCaie and Yasuhiro Kotera, “The Hero’s Journey: Constructing Continuity from Discontinuity in Millennial Career Changers’ Narratives,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*, 1-16 (2021): 7.

their special destiny that marks out something noble in them that was perhaps once hidden.⁸⁷

Their nobility being pronounced from above, their humility is then shown by their *refusal*: here their special destiny is initially turned-down by the hero.⁸⁸ This rejection, if maintained through fear, becomes the catalyst of their downfall: a self-idolatry and slumber of spirit, that prefers to remain earth-bound; by this they could become monstrous.⁸⁹ However, the true hero always eventually realizes “that personal change will be required to address the significant problem”⁹⁰ within, and they must reject fear “despite the truth” of the danger. Accepting their call, in tandem with the initial humility of their refusal, marks their two-fold nature.

The callings of contemporary heroes Luke Skywalker (Star Wars) and Neo (The Matrix) illustrate this. Both are normal men living in the normal world. Both have a strong desire to depart it. Luke begs to leave and become a pilot; Neo follows the white rabbit to the party. Both also receive a call of destiny to depart: Ben Kenobi reveals Luke’s lineage as a Jedi, while Trinity reveals of the prophecy of Neo’s coming. Both initially reject this call: Luke cannot leave his family alone, and Neo is too frightened to risk death. Yet these rejections are not yet final or fatal: a miraculous reiteration of their calling intervenes. Something otherly aids the hero. Campbell observes that this *supernatural aid* may occur with or “without the cooperation of [their] conscious will.”⁹¹ What first called them also draws them inevitably to cross *the first threshold*. Luke finds his family destroyed; Neo finds himself captured by Trinity and company; both finally accept the call to transcend.

⁸⁷Campbell, *The Hero*, 48.

⁸⁸Ibid., 49.

⁸⁹Ibid., 49-50, 102.

⁹⁰Williams, “The Hero’s Journey: A Mudmap,” 528.

⁹¹Campbell, *The Hero*, 61.

Campbell does not expand upon what necessary distinctions exist between this final acceptance and the monstrous downfall, which would occur should their rejection have been final, apart from the intervention of fate or something divine. By omission, this distinction appears grounded in villains' choice to reject the call, and the hero's desire or nature to accept the call beyond. Humanity is faced with a challenge. Acceptance is the essence of the noble; rejection is the essence of all evil.⁹² Vader capitulates to the dilemma offered by the Emperor (between saving his wife or remaining righteous) while Luke rejects this dilemma and chooses the light beyond reason (between saving his friends or joining the Sith, he throws his lightsaber away). Agent Smith flees his doom (forever copying himself to grasp immortality) while Neo trusts his fate (choosing certain death and finding new power). The rejection of nobility leads to the very death the villain sought to avoid. The death the hero accepts leads to a transcending life.

The moment this first crossing is made, the hero's adventure moves beyond the shared normal world, "always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown," yet, facing the dangerous "powers that watch at the boundary" with "competence and courage the danger fades."⁹³ Luke dodges the empire and leaves Tatooine; Neo escapes the agents of the Matrix. Their successes only increase until their fateful doom and triumphant end.

At one point or another, all heroes must meaningfully depart from safety into chaos. It is easy to gloss over this step, but Luke and Neo always had the option to remain. Though Gautama Buddha could not forget what he saw on his legendary ventures from his father's castle, he still had to make the final choice to escape and leave comfort behind.⁹⁴ The dangerous world the hero

⁹²Knut Alfsvåg, "Unknowability and Incarnation: Creation and Christology as Philosophy of Science in the Work of Nicholas Cusanus," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, (2019): 145.

⁹³Campbell, *The Hero*, 67-68.

⁹⁴Jordan B. Peterson. *Maps of Meaning: the Architecture of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 294.

enters is a kind of death; in fact, they may actually die.⁹⁵ Yet the risking of their lives is central. A dance with death provides their initiation and contact with God, the transcendent beyond, “and therein lies his power to save; for his passing and returning demonstrate that through all the contraries of phenomenality the Uncreate-Imperishable remains, and there is nothing to fear.”⁹⁶

HJ 2: Initiation

Once entered into the unknown, the unknown detects them; it must discern if they belong there or must now be destroyed: so, the trials begin.⁹⁷ The hero must now learn the true nature of the power that calls them. The moment Luke takes off, he is zapped by practice lasers and must trust the Force; Neo enters the reality and begins practicing his awareness of the enemies hidden in it. In the dark knight trilogy, once Bruce Wayne accepted Ra’s al Ghul’s call, his fear was trained until he learned to harness fear’s power. Once Sir Gawain rejects the witch’s advances against life, purity, and his carnal nature,⁹⁸ he feels ready to offer his life to the elemental knight and rely on God’s providence for him.⁹⁹

However, the vital happening at this juncture is that the hero not only passes such trials, but does so by their divinity or the power originally destining them. The sword that was drawn from the stone, must now be trained up and taken up, whetted and wielded. These “testings of the hero” are “crises of realization by which his consciousness came to be amplified and made capable of enduring the full possession” of his inevitable death; through them “he knows that he

⁹⁵Campbell, *The Hero*, 74-7.

⁹⁶Ibid., 78.

⁹⁷Ibid., 101.

⁹⁸J[ohn] R[onald] R[ue]l Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New York: Ballantine, 1975), 67.

⁹⁹Ibid., 89.

and the father are one: he is in the father's place" in some vital, saving, and mysterious manner.¹⁰⁰ The result of trials, is a rightness found with God. The godly hero rightly discerns the mercy and grace of the transcendent beyond which they are born from; Campbell calls this the "atonement with the Father."¹⁰¹ In exposure therapy, a modern counseling practice, a person is led by a therapist to face their own "supreme ordeal," experiencing a renewed sense of self and a conquering of the formerly impossible.¹⁰² While this world is ensnared by diabolical "tight scaly ring"¹⁰³ of inescapable confusion; the nature of the ring is to employ each person's self-attachment as the locus of their destruction. "The dark side clouds everything," says Yoda; Luke must overcome his captivity to the regular rules of the world, join the Light, and confess: "the Force is my ally; a powerful ally it is." This is the essence of the final ordeal.¹⁰⁴

In the animated film, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the titular Raya is blinded by the rule of her common reality: an unforgiveness and mistrust of neighbor as enemy. This makes her unable to garner the nobility in others that would draw them all to transcend themselves. This self-abandonment to the good is modelled for her by Sisu, the last spark of divine power, who demonstrates the sacrifice needed to champion renewed grace: a death of self and entrusting of the good to the hands of the other. Raya then identifies with this sacrifice, trusting her fate to the spark of good in her enemy. This becomes the only force able to overcome the shadow of evil's blindness on the soul, instilling the very good it entrusted.

¹⁰⁰Campbell, *The Hero*, 101.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 105, 110.

¹⁰²Williams, "The Hero's Journey: A Mudmap," 533-4.

¹⁰³Campbell, *The Hero*, 110.

¹⁰⁴Williams, "The Hero's Journey: A Mudmap," 531.

Critically then, this uniting “atonement consists in no more than the abandonment” of the two-sided coin of legalism and immorality that poses in God’s place, and moving instead to “a faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on this mercy.”¹⁰⁵ Once accomplished, the enemy’s illusions fade away. All evil’s work is by illusion. It convinces that its power is absolute and that God’s power is weak or obsolete. The hero discerns this, and the illusion dissipates. He “transcends life with its peculiar blind spot [...] beholds the face of the father, understands—and the two are atoned.”¹⁰⁶ This success is critical because the hero’s function is as bridge for all others unable to transcend. “In every system of theology,” says Campbell, “there is an umbilical point [where] perfect knowledge has been impaired. The problem of the hero is to pierce himself (and thereby his world) precisely through that point.”¹⁰⁷ The rightness of the hero with God becomes available to all. Seen here is a oneness with God, *apotheosis*, the hero reveals in themselves and a *granting of the gift* to those participating in their journey.

To enact this, the hero first loses themselves in this oneness through a final and terrible death.¹⁰⁸ In the ancient Babylonian cosmogony the Enuma Elish, Marduk the divine son of the gods is anointed as their king after vanquishing and passing through Tiamat, the serpent of death in the sea.¹⁰⁹ In some mysterious way, the hero affords this identification with godhood to all those united with him.¹¹⁰ They gather and join human beings into the blessings they have won; thus, when they undergo theosis (ascension to godhood), all humans found in them may similarly

¹⁰⁵Campbell, *The Hero*, 107-110.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 124-5.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁹Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 118-123.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 137.

confess that “we and the protecting father are one.”¹¹¹ Immortality, eternal life, is gifted to those who stand in the intercession of the hero and gain unity with the everlasting God.¹¹² At their death, God gives the hero victory, and offers what they most desire: to, by this, save the world.¹¹³

HJ 3: Return

Triumphantly, this “highest and ultimate crucifixion [is] not only of the hero, but of his god as well. Here the Son and the Father alike are annihilated.”¹¹⁴ Somehow, God also perishes with the hero; their sacrifice for the world is in tandem. When this last death is accomplished, the hero’s power to return always lays in proportion to their degree of destruction. By sacrificing his trust in the power of violence inherent in the dark side and casting away his sword, Luke brought his father back from captivity to that same trap. By sacrificing his promise to keep his family whole and seeing his daughter grow up, Ironman allows the Earth to regain their lost families and to live on. By dying at the hand of the Matrix, Neo gains power over the Matrix.

The list goes on. Its resounding theme remains. The seed sown in death comes to a new life and overcomes all death by rising. Brought back from the beyond, the power won is revenant; the hero returns.¹¹⁵ Campbell calls this *crossing the second threshold*; the hero returns to the normal world: saved through death, changed, and able to change and save.¹¹⁶ They are now the “Master of Two Worlds” and able to pass between them.¹¹⁷ Campbell interestingly makes

¹¹¹Campbell, *The Hero*, 137.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 163-4.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 164.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 167-178.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

increased references to Christ in these sections of his analysis. While many of these references will be looked at later, it should be noted that Campbell lists a dearth of two-world masters in any way comparable to Christ's universality (i.e., outside of local fairy tales or fiction). This notwithstanding, something vital and mystical always occurs at the hero's re-entrance. They possess the ability to journey through death and may bestow this power to others.¹¹⁸ The return allows the one found in their power to no longer be "anxious for the outcome of his deeds;" instead, by "resting them and their fruits on the knees of the Living God he is released by them, as by a sacrifice, from the bondages of the sea of death."¹¹⁹ The hero, therefore, is the one who moves through death to everlasting life, such that those who are found in them are similarly empowered to experience a kindred immortality and freedom from their bondage.

The Central Keys

Campbell shifts from his descriptions of the journey to interpreting its significance. "Mythology," he concludes, "is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology."¹²⁰ This is why the HJ is demonstrative of the unseen, intrapsychic realms that characterize humanity; an unconscious realm or force really exists in a metaphysical way. Though metaphysical, it finds a physical touchstone via the human soul.¹²¹ Thus, even naturalists may allow such metaphysics into their worldview at less precise levels of abstraction. This mythic explanation for spiritual reality is a key way for psychoanalytically-trained individuals like Campbell to garner secular acceptance of their religious data. Spiritually orthodox power is

¹¹⁸Williams, "The Hero's Journey: A Mudmap," 535.

¹¹⁹Campbell, *The Hero*, 206.

¹²⁰Ibid., 219.

¹²¹Ibid., 222.

explained. Their recurrent qualities become useful outside of their original religious contexts through “making meaning from experiences of challenge, transition and unfamiliarity, such as career change.”¹²² This knowledge has frequently been used by organizations wishing to connect with marketed audiences,¹²³ by writers seeking to make stories that connect, or by individuals seeking meaning for their own lives.¹²⁴ Thus, the HJ as datum constitutes a *fruited* extrapolation of human experience. It begins with mythic grounding of culture and moves upward, growing from the base. The great HJ story constructs an *emergent* metaphysic: a bottom-up frame that will eventually pair and contrast with the *rooted*, top-down perennial philosophy.

HJ allows for certain mythic forms of divine power to exist: psychologically oriented entities linked inseparably with the human soul. Hence, it is Christological in nature: divinity tied with humanity. This recurrence of myth is an arrow pointing up from some hidden point that indwells and enlivens man; mysteriously, it also appears transcendent of them, such they are wired by nature to aspire and emulate it. While secular, presentations of HJ are a fusion of the religious tradition and natural-psychological data. Contemporary appraisals of the monomyth reach this same pseudo-theological balance that Campbell takes into view.¹²⁵ Such appeals are notable. This psychological God exists in a “basic paradox:” between authority over the universe when viewed according to their nature, while that same world seems fixed, fated, and rigid when viewed from within humanity.¹²⁶ The emanation of this paradox in human stories, finds HJ simultaneously theocentric and anthropocentric.

¹²²Tsuda-McCaie and Kotera, “The Hero’s Journey: Constructing Continuity,” 11-12.

¹²³ Ascough, “Once Upon a Time,” 545.

¹²⁴Williams, “The Hero’s Journey: A Mudmap,” 525-6.

¹²⁵Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 290.

¹²⁶Campbell, *The Hero*, 246.

HJ's touchstones into theology seem an untapped area for twenty-first century natural theology; for Natural *Christology*, however, they mark a transition from human experience *of* divinity to participation *in* divinity through a hero. The hero changes and saves the world by first uniting with God out from that world. Thus, the hero's journey moves a person from being without God to being with Him. Cultures differently apply this schema with varying degrees of success or fruitfulness in religious or secular manifestations.¹²⁷ Yet, the schema and its theme remain tethered. Each person, man or woman, must practically unite with this mythic hero to translate the myth's symbology into tangible growth.¹²⁸ This achieves the promised goal of the hero: rebirth from spiritual death into life.¹²⁹

Clearly, the monomyth identifies something kindred to what Christians identify in Jesus' resurrection and legacy. Human beings must transcend death through death itself, by being identified as that hero who conquers death.¹³⁰ The significant factor for Natural Christology is these myths keep the nagging notion the hero is not a *simple* man, but something extraordinary from the moment of birth.¹³¹ They are ordinary yet spectacular, beyond and yet natural.¹³² This raises a twofold question, unanswered psychological applications of the HJ: are *we* the hero that we seek, as natural philosophy and religion conclude from this data? Or is the unrestrainable cry for a hero better explained another way; does it reveal a need *in* men *for* God to be or provide that hero?

¹²⁷Ascough, "Once Upon a Time," 534.

¹²⁸Campbell, *The Hero*, 213.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 215.

¹³⁰Williams, "The Hero's Journey: A Mudmap," 536.

¹³¹Campbell, *The Hero*, 274.

¹³²Rank, *The Myth*, 52.

The monomyth implies that human beings are more than merely physical stuff. It suggests that the modern man has undergone something terrible: “the spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes,” such that they become lost to the personal and meaningless desires of whim without a vision of reality that transcends themselves.¹³³ They must put the knowledge of this tragedy to use. The takeaway of the HJ is not to resuscitate old symbols; they are corpses for the modern man and woman. Revitalization of the potent, though latent, core of them must rather be done by taking up the hero’s call today. The hero is both joined within their human soul as well as a beyond to which humanity looks.

As the hero departs, each person must confront the status quo. As the hero journeys into divine sonship, so each must abandon their self-definition and be drawn by God to a theosis as his child. As the changed hero returns, so each person must return as catalysts of this heroic truth. Each must look to the hero that transcends them, and so may become them. Both appear needful, for “the way to become fully human is to recognize the lineaments of God in all the wonderful modulations of the face of man,” for one who “shares the supreme ordeal, carries the cross of the redeemer.”¹³⁴

The Perennial Philosophy

People oriented emergently, viewing higher reality as composed of emanations beyond the scope of its natural, material parts, may find the HJ sufficient to connect natural threads to the salvific Christology. However, as this apprehension of *fruits* may not compel all persons equally, a fully persuasive argument may require more natural data. Others may be drawn by the *roots* at the base of their epistemic tree, and where a second set of data enters into play.

¹³³Campbell, *The Hero*, 334.

¹³⁴Ibid., 336-7.

The perennial philosophy [PP] is a family of ideological claims, arguing that the resemblance which developed religions and philosophical systems share is demonstrative of a shared ground of being.¹³⁵ Each manifestation reveals this one ground through different lens. Thus, an apprehension of this singular ground can be made through interreligious appraisal. What is most common between them arbitrates against what deviates; what endures across time adjudicates between the stronger and weaker manifestations of the common. Notions resembling the PP began bubbling up in the fourteenth century, eventually named as such by Leibniz in the eighteenth.¹³⁶ However, as Aldous Huxley popularized the version that gained attention in contemporary western thought, his conclusions abbreviate the PP data which NXD analyzes.

Shared Ground for Values

Cultures and people differ. Yet, an interestingly consistent set of behavioral values emerges from these distinctions. All moral codes are clearly not ubiquitous, nor are all religions perfectly harmonious. Their distinctions are not illusory or trivial. PP suggests something rather more subtle: as these differences evolve and develop, their common ground becomes known through a growing resonance of trajectory.¹³⁷ This Ground¹³⁸ is the active agent that religions typically identify as the One God or as universal Being, and works up through their fraying distinctions to nurture its patterns to recur.¹³⁹ PP is thereby a meta-religion, instructing persons of all faiths to attain the vital core of which all religion subsists: union with the divine Ground.

¹³⁵Sawyer, “*Redressing a Straw Man*,” 1.

¹³⁶Lucio Giuliadori, “Quantum Physics and Perennial Philosophy: Mirrors of Knowledge,” *Wisdom* 18, no. 2 (2021): 37.

¹³⁷Huxley, *The Perennial*, vii.

¹³⁸“Ground” is capitalized where Huxley uses it as God, any actual connection with the Trinity aside.

¹³⁹Huxley, *The Perennial*, 5-7.

If PP begins with such a pluralist flair, it quickly denounces this and any universalist conclusions. Pluralism equivocates all ideologies' behavioral modes; universalism equivocates their salvific potencies. Yet a distinction remains between *absolute* forms, that view this equitability as thorough, and *limited* forms; PP is limited in both categories. Its pluralism is moderate; it claims that the *kind of person* that higher religions¹⁴⁰ seek to produce in behavior and character bear similarities owing to a shared operation upon the Ground.¹⁴¹ The more a religious system *develops*, the more it coheres; a pluralistic trajectory exists because a common force works through them. PP's universalism is even more limited; the true goal (e.g., salvation, nirvana, rebirth, or satori¹⁴²) may not be equally attainable by all. The faiths share inklings about the final state, but this does not imply they have equal means to realize it.¹⁴³ PP hopes to nurture the best out of all religions, such that any may transcend its inherent limitations and so arrive.

This shared ground leads logically to two factors: a shared *growth* and a shared *goal*. These halves can be ascertained with a subtle knife. Contrary to the hopes of relativism, a common ground for all makes demands on all to accord with it. The notion that all religions seek a common goal disallows alternative goals as acceptable for one who would be noble.

Shared (but Difficult) Growth

Human growth is not an easy process. The higher religions concur on how true growth must take place on at least three elements. These are: the selfless love of charity, the awareness and mortification of the old self, and the grace of spiritual empowerment from without.

¹⁴⁰Huxley lists Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam as examples of such developed systems.

¹⁴¹Huxley, *The Perennial*, 10-11, 18, 21.

¹⁴²D[aisetsu] T[eitaro] Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove, 1964), 65.

¹⁴³Huxley, *The Perennial*, 23, 201, 208-9.

This *charity*, refers to a totally selfless love,¹⁴⁴ to contrast *true* love from fluffier false versions that pervade culture today. PP growth begins with a completely self-disinterested love rippling out through a person's whole life.¹⁴⁵ It is disinterested, however, not apathetic. The fullness of the love poured into a person by connection with the overabundance of the divine Ground, allows love to be poured out from that person completely selflessly; departure from self-attachments lends toward one's regeneration and conversion.¹⁴⁶

C.S. Lewis agrees with such characterization as regards Christianity in particular, stating that although "charity sounds a very cold thing to people whose heads are full of sentimentality, and though it is quite distinct from affection, yet it leads to affection."¹⁴⁷ An outpouring of true disinterested charity is the starting point of all good actions, because it alone orients a person's motivations. "Because he now loves," says Huxley of such persons, "he can do what he likes."¹⁴⁸ The next growth flows naturally from this charity within. The seed of love now planted, there becomes a needful watering of it: the process of *mortification*.

Whether pantheistic or theistic, higher religious thought agrees that "the more there is of self, the less there is of God."¹⁴⁹ Mortification is a putting-to-death of self, such that the fullness of God may reign in them. God is seen most clearly in a person who is at their most self-emptied because "theophany occurs most at the moment of utter humiliation."¹⁵⁰ Distinct from mere

¹⁴⁴Huxley, *The Perennial*, 80.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴⁷Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 131.

¹⁴⁸Huxley, *The Perennial*, 71.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 96-9.

¹⁵⁰Susie Paulik Babka, "Sunyata and Otherness: Applying Mutually Transformative Categories from Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Christology," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 35, (2015): 76.

asceticism or sadism, God is not interested in a person's pain but in their renouncement of self-will for the sake of His will toward their holiness.¹⁵¹ In truth, mortification is simply a deepened realization that man is truly nothing in comparison with this Ground; being filled with God is a coming to life; what was put to death in self had been illusory.¹⁵² Charity plus Mortification demonstrates how oneself-as-means for love must not be conflated with divestiture of oneself-as-ends. Yet, humans need a third "something other than our self-conscious personal self, by which we are helped" from charity, through mortification, toward holiness.¹⁵³ This third matter is *grace*.

While many kinds of religious graces exist, only one kind is uniquely spiritual, not merely natural or rational. The natural grace of animals is unconscious of itself; the rational grace of humans draws one higher. This final grace is this and more: the fuel of growth that completes the circle. It was presumed by charity: that God should first instill humanity with His love, and follows mortification. Contra humanism, the means are distinct from the goals themselves; these means of grace conduct the soul toward its goal: uniting with God.¹⁵⁴

Shared (but Demanding) Goal

Everyone seeks "salvation" Huxley asks, "but from what? Deliverance—out from which particular situation into what other situation?"¹⁵⁵ Many religions seem to be seeking a goal, yet PP argues that certain answers to these questions should be preferred.¹⁵⁶ "Religion does not mean

¹⁵¹Huxley, *The Perennial*, 104-5.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 168-9.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁵⁶Nicholas F. Gier, "Gandhi, Deep Religious Pluralism, and Multiculturalism," *Philosophy East & West* 64, no. 2 (2014): 322.

sectarianism,” says Ghandi, “it means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe [which] transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.”¹⁵⁷ This harmony of salvations appears distinct from mere physical survival, material prosperity, or deliverance from ignoble living (although virtues grow along the way to it);¹⁵⁸ religious modes may understand survival and virtue to be of value, but supreme value is placed elsewhere. Charity, mortification, and grace are the perennial means whose end is *theosis*: a oneness with God. Grace indwells a person with God’s love. Mortification removes debris of self. Charity lives out positively what mortification negatively: loving others from the overflow of God’s love. They triangulate the ennoblement of the heart in *theosis*: eternal life, transcendence of suffering, and in selfless-faith.¹⁵⁹

“Immortality” is nothing less than “participation in the eternal now of the divine Ground.”¹⁶⁰ As a perfected person has become united with God, they go nowhere at death; they are already with Him who is life and is everywhere.¹⁶¹ Because “preoccupation with posthumous deliverance is not one of the means to such deliverance,”¹⁶² life is better spent focusing on union with God, there true immortality resides. A true and eternal life attained *before* death is that which lasts *through* it. Their suffering also dissipates; hardships may continue, but God’s grace changes one’s response to it. The higher religions are replete with examples of this notion.

¹⁵⁷N[irmal] K[umar] Bose, ed., *Selections from Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1948): 224.

¹⁵⁸Huxley, *The Perennial*, 201.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

Buddhism claims human beings suffer from the frustration of passions that arise as the result of an illusory separateness of themselves and reality.¹⁶³ “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” asks St. James, “is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (James 4:1). Thus, suffering is linked to divisions in the human will: a snowballing separation from God whose “desire, self-will, [or] sin” generates further “craving for the intensification of the separateness.”¹⁶⁴ This separateness provides a pivotal choice: choose “selflessness and union with God, or the intensification of separate self-hood,” find either the heaven of theotic union or the Hell of “total separation from God” and thereby also total suffering.¹⁶⁵ Thus, suffering may be sanctifying (i.e., mortifying) or spiritually destructive, depending on the nature of this choice toward or away from grace. This choice is *true* faith: the final goal, and a unitive glance at all three means. False faith involves “turning to God without turning from self,”¹⁶⁶ while the targeted faith of PP is a turning *to* God that is always consequently, essentially, inseparably, and maximally a turning *away* from self.

The Recurrent Path

One can already begin to sense an overlapping theme emerge. Both PP and HJ face death and destruction, and propose to transcend the self before an immanence of the divine. It seems these secular answers to the great question reveal the hidden Christology of the human heart. They attempt the same question that the gospel answers for the Christian; however, all these answers resolve in a contradiction that only the gospel can solve.

¹⁶³Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen*, 31.

¹⁶⁴Huxley, *The Perennial*, 228.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

Chapter 5: Abductions from Nature

“His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse.”

—Paul of Tarsus (Rom. 1:20)

The methods by which NX sifts material from these natural evidences and the gospel follows that which natural theology [NΘ] applies to the whole created cosmos. NΘ reasons from the cosmos toward the plausibility or necessity of a single Anselmian divinity: an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, and personal God.¹⁶⁷ NX takes a chapter out of this cosmos: the religions and cultural stories of humanity and argues for the necessity of the biblical Christ. A brief analysis of NΘ reveals its method’s applicability from God-in-general to Christ-in-particular.

Arguments of Natural Theology

It is quite strange that human beings have religious experiences. Whether or not this tendency is a belief in an Anselmian-type God, this fact does generate some initial plausibility. Such experiences and proper ontological reasoning form an *a priori* case for God’s necessity.

Religious Experience

It is not entirely clear how disconnected human beings across culture, place, and time independently attribute comparable personhood to their surroundings or to the causation of nature, especially considering that this behavior does not appear to pervade the animal world.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷Gordon R. Lewis, “God, Attributes of,” in *Dictionary*, 492-6.

¹⁶⁸Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion*, 507.

It is a uniquely human phenomenon. Why, then? Perhaps humans have faulty wiring? Maybe it was originally a useful adaptation for sentient life to treat darkness as evil (because predators lurked there) and to treat harvest as God's gifts (because a proper psychological orientation toward selflessness produced happier lives, stronger work ethics, and thereby better harvests).¹⁶⁹

Yet, are such symbolic representations of the world *truly* advantageous over the formerly observed facts? Why would chimpanzees and bonobos first imagine darkness as evil or the sun as divine? Other animals hold far less imaginative connections between objects signified as tools, and signs as metaphysical entities with personhood; humans, however, do appear to experience innate, if limited, divinity-detection systems.¹⁷⁰ How did the first ape move past the brightness of stars and the danger of darkness into the godhood or demonic power thereof without some form of "theogonic (or god-bearing) mechanisms" at work in their psychological organization, as adaptive and demonstrative of reality?¹⁷¹

Ontological Reasoning

Such a matters could be illusory in isolation: serving functional value without any connection to a transcendent reality. Yet, this mechanism cannot be as easily discarded as some form of psychological appendix without a denial of the whole apparatus of reason itself. Humans, everywhere and independently, share religious appraisals of commonly ideated metaphysical entities transcending them: specifically a personal God who reigns above.¹⁷² Without confirming the content of diverse and private experiences as demonstrative of objects

¹⁶⁹Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 88.

¹⁷⁰Shults, "Wising Up," 546.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*

¹⁷²Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion*, 513.

properly perceived, this nonetheless grants strength to the proposition as a whole.¹⁷³ Humanity's ability to reason extends beyond this sense of the divine; by it they: attain accurate or useful models of reality, intuit moral norms and right conduct across cultures, and have self-conscious experiences of will; humanity's history of entrusting so much responsibility to this odd mechanism provides a coherent *a priori* warrant for their reason's frequent presuppositional apprehension of God.¹⁷⁴ As one rightfully presumes the existence of another, observing their features and behaviors to be emblematic of their own and reasoning from external similitude to their real internal personhood, so may they also apprehend the existence of God self-evidently from their sum total experiences of reality.¹⁷⁵ The strength of the God hypothesis only grows when viewed against competing explanations of the origin, complexity, morality, and the ability of the cosmos to sustain life.¹⁷⁶ Even without this, however, an argument stands within human reason and experience alone.

The presumption that certain invisible characteristics of reality are real (e.g., human reasoning, rightness of behavior, and that one's senses accurately reflect more than the trivium of one's synaptic matter) loses all critical footing unless such a God first exists. They remain are isolated and ungrounded presumptions. Being first presumed, however, God's existence affords to those qualities the reliability they innately appear to hold. Should a person experience a need for which nothing *natural* can satisfy, it stands to reason that a something beyond the natural exists. All other desires, which humans experience, direct them to their fulfillment.¹⁷⁷ Humans

¹⁷³Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion*, 519.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁷⁵Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1990), 269-71.

¹⁷⁶Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion*, 102, 276, 394.

desire rest; sleep exists. Humans get hungry; food exists. Humans seek a tangible purpose; needful labors exist for them to accomplish. Yet, humans also desire transcendence from nature; one is reasonable in expecting the transcendent supernatural to exist. Transposing this line of reasoning from some ambiguous transcendence into something transcendent *and* immanent known as the NX does, only strengthens its plausibility. As God necessarily exists by the fundamental nature of being itself, so must the hero exist owing to human self-being. He is as intuitive *priori* to human self-experience as God is to human experience of all nature as a whole.

Bridge to Christology

NΘ moves from generally accepted propositions down to particular theological ones. It uncovers an intellectual dissonance in natural knowledge that demands the revealed knowledge. This processed is maximized through abduction: “inference to the best explanation”¹⁷⁸ that eliminates competing alternatives, for the targeted data analyzed in NΘ is philosophical; it is not otherwise scientifically testable. Thus, it is similarly vital for Natural Christology; the anthropological claims of the monomyth and the perennial philosophy may be adjudicated by historical claims of Scripture. The RP and the gospel both understand man to be in some need. They differ in solution. Abductive preference will be given to answers that best explain the data.

Plausibility of Gorillas

An experiment was famously conducted in which participants were shown a video of basketball players passing a ball; viewers were instructed to count the number of passes, while

¹⁷⁷Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 137.

¹⁷⁸Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy: A Text with Readings*: 6th ed (Boston: Pearson Education, 2013), 28.

the actual assessment involved their detection of a large, gorilla-suited person walking between the players, picking up a ball, giving a shout, and briefly dancing.¹⁷⁹ Though clearly visible, the gorilla was largely missed by those told to count the passes. Apparently, the frame used to approach an event constricts and conforms human perception. An “inattention blindness” results from intentional misdirection of their awareness.¹⁸⁰ Focus misapplied, misses the whole; focus rightly applied, discerns reality rightly. If keeping “count of the total number of passes” were the goal, ignorance of the gorilla would be a meaningless byproduct of accomplishing that goal. It tragically remains, however, that the experimenters’ goal was gorilla detection. Something errant occurs in this unawareness, which only a righting of one’s frame and expectations may correct.

Functional Valence

Human focus appears to influence their perception and experience of reality. However, as focusing on passes did not cause the gorilla to pass from existence, it appears incorrect to say focus *determines* reality. Rather, it delimits or narrows its perception. Gorilla-ignorance must be willful, for the participants who were *told* to spot it found it easily. Now, they could not miss it.

NØ draws attention to the peculiarity of the natural data, given the perceiver’s belief that no “gorilla” is present. There *seems* to be a shout; a basketball vanishes; players move *as if* something took space between them. It could be strange choreography, camera tricks, or poor vision. Yet, when approached with eyes looking for the gorilla: the discovery of its presence best fits the problem. As attempts at truth while still counting passes is futile, any consideration of transcendent phenomena demands that the transcendent become an available solution.

¹⁷⁹Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris, "Gorillas in our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events," *Perception (London)* 28, no. 9 (1999): 1066.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 1064.

Thus, NΘ's function is in its *valence* toward the plausibility of God, not in its logical certainty. It gathers and expresses common knowledge, turning focus from counting passes toward gorillas. One may still refuse to look. One could hear rumors about gorillas, yet continue to count and conclude that the gorilla others have seen was illusory. Similarly, competing explanations of the NΘ data do remain *possible* (albeit through any number of mental backflips and contortions). God may continue to non-exist for any who would rather He not. The same is true of Natural Christology.

The conflicts generated by the recurrent path [RP] provide abductive preference for the gospel and the resurrection. Other possible alternatives remain, but remain less plausibly. They are shown to ignore data or break Occam's razor in an effort to interpret the NXD down to the natural RP rather than up to the supranatural gospel, as it appears more rationally disposed.

Natural Christology does not claim to magically accomplish what Scripture says belongs only to the work of Holy Spirit in the hearts of those outside of Christ. One may certainly *prefer* that the gospel not be true; accordingly, they may *prefer* to make more assumptions of the unknown in a defense of a non-gospel resolution of the natural data. Yet, should one's stumbling block be other than the revealed Christ and His resurrection, Natural Christology will work like natural theology in showing the resurrection's relative explanatory scope and power.

The success of Natural Christology as an apologetic relies in its demonstration of an inherent *valence* in the natural data of human culture toward the revealed strand of Scripture. Partial apprehensions of Christ by intuitive cultural access to the natural knowledge of the RP (of which HJ and PP are examples), provides a secular frame of the human condition and its need for salvation. Such data are stepping stones, reducing the epistemic distance between the soul and the nature of its Savior leading to the very ledge from which faith makes its fateful leap.

Chapter 6: Christological Syntheses

“[Any who] imagines he can obey the second of the great commandments without taking time even to think how best he may love God with all his heart, soul, and mind, are people engaged in the impossible task of pouring unceasingly from a container that is never replenished.”

—Aldous Huxley¹⁸¹

Poets and philosophers often remark on the peculiar and wonderful dichotomies of humanity. David calls humanity both dust and yet alike angels; Shakespeare muses sardonically how such animals may yet be near to gods. Humanity lays at an eldritch crossroads. A uniform experience of *otherness* grips its introspections: a spirit tethered to the carnal. The hero's journey and the perennial philosophy highlight this very middle placement: between the lowly and the noble. They seek to chart a course, the recurring path that rises between them.

The Way of Things

Campbell's argument moves from commonalities of between myths, cultures, and even holds personal anecdotes of conversations with his psychiatric clients about their dreams as evidences on par with these traditions, concluding that what is most common reveals what is most true. That is, the HJ traces the RP bottom-up. By contrast, Huxley moves top-down. He asks what themes of more developed and widespread religious thought are spiritually successful and coherent. He notes and adjudicates between these strands, reasoning again by the emergent norm. Both assume the plausibility of this method beforehand; assuming a common trajectory is meaningful, one may trace it. Assuming there is a common ground, one may seek it. Both

¹⁸¹Huxley, *The Perennial*, 301.

recognize this. Deviating mythologies are revelatory of the HJ by their omission;¹⁸² when religions depart from the PP, their departures necessarily precipitate their downfall into error.¹⁸³ The real oddity is that these claims resonate at all. How do these core strands retain their intrinsic weight when the only defense against the appearance of divergent stories and religions rely on these apparent *ad hoc* rescues? Perhaps there is more at work.

The HJ shifts goal-posts *from* a method seeking commonality to defining (ignoring) deviations from consideration. The PP commits a related bootstrapping: presuming any religious benefits concerned with selfhood are erroneous by defining the eternal selflessly. The question certainly seems *begged*. Yet, perhaps this rather *raises* a notion: something is taken for granted by the secular world. A reality hides in their claims' midst, making them plausible overall but unfounded when it is explicitly precluded. Here glimmers Natural Christology, whispering its answer. Using the HJ and PP's method of "emergent-norms" to synthesize them into the RP, two themes emerge that frame the answer: the descent of God, and the ascent of Man.

The Descent of God

Given human religious experiences, it is not odd that humanistic and psychological appropriations of religion still use divine language. Campbell and Huxley employ "God" to get-at anything transcendent perceived by their collections, precisely because "God" retains useful intellectual baggage: humans have a psychological tendency to view reality through a theological lens.¹⁸⁴ Purely Freudian dissections of the soul down to parts are disorienting; nothing remains to tap into; the soul cannot grasp itself and move after goals. The Jungian approach accordingly

¹⁸²Campbell, *The Hero*, 30.

¹⁸³Huxley, *The Perennial*, 23.

¹⁸⁴Shults, "Wising Up," 246.

employs zombified symbols of old ideals in just this way. Campbell's psychoanalytic tactics closely resemble Freud: using patient's dreams and related mythic data (e.g., turning the Oedipus myth into a complex);¹⁸⁵ Huxley follows Jung, defending psychological access to the divine Ground. However, symbolic-representative forms and emblematic-metaphorical ideations of the transcendent are by no means the exhaustive conclusions of psychology.

Humanity's transcendent sense of a divine Ground does not appear evidently reducible to a God of inner-forces like Campbell and Freud, nor to the symbolic like Huxley and Jung. That which humanity senses within, but which empowers them from and toward without, must transcend mere archetypal representations of it; this "unconscious God" must also be a real one, even if many human beings remain unconscious of it.¹⁸⁶ The hero learns that God is one with themselves; the perennial philosopher knows the Ground orients their growth toward itself. Both gods precede oneself and then gather them to return. This is still a far cry from the Christian God, the fountainhead of all noble things,¹⁸⁷ yet it begins to discern His shadow. Psychological evidence of God does not point to a merely psychological God; the RP's demand for God's transcendence as both ground and goal, alpha and omega, disallows sleights of mind that reduce Him post hoc. If something empowers man to what is nobler and higher than man, it must lay beyond man. Even if the RP holds contradictory notions of God, it knows God must descend.

This transcendent God descends at some stage of the human process to ennoble them: He becomes man, empowers man, and guides man. Contrary to claims that *only* in Christianity does God approach His people (i.e., rather than leave the people to climb toward Him), the descent of

¹⁸⁵Philippe Van Haute, "Freud Against Oedipus," *Radical Philosophy* 188, no. 188 (2014): para.1-2.

¹⁸⁶Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, 61–2.

¹⁸⁷Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 66.

God into the human sphere is a naturally saturated theme linked with the hero's arrival. The *actual* difference in Christianity is that their hero is *both* the chosen person of God on whom He descends to empower *and* the God Himself descended. Thus, Christianity is correctly thought peculiar, but only with this added subtly. The operations of their God's descent are the unique thing: He is the one chosen to rise. Drawing attention to the limits of this similitude allows the power of these stories to highlight its truth. The monomyth explicitly affirms that God goes down. The perennial philosophy knows man requires preemptive divine love to kickstart their own love. What stands unique is not this recurring descent, but the means of ascent thereafter.

The Ascent of Man

In the RP and in the gospel, the hero rises to noble states of salvation. The human hero of the RP must rise from mediocrity to nobility. The divine Christ of the Gospels must ascend. Yet, oddities emerge from the RP when taken in isolation of the gospel: without equating Christ as hero with Christ as God. Conflicting juxtapositions pervade in the recurrent hero's needful nature: both noble and common in origin, both passing *and* critically failing their initiatory trials.

Through Death

The RP claims that the hero's failure is not final (God intervenes in the HJ) or not meaningfully fatal (the goal requires a dying-to-self that leads to life in the PP). But it *certainly* seems final to the hero: they really fail. Failure is the essential crucible of ascent. It is also *certainly* fatal: the human hero always ascends through their ultimate mortal descent. Death is essential to life in God. By ascending through means of death, the greatest weapon of their foe, nothing remains to harm them. This is why kenosis always takes center stage. It tickles some hidden sense of humanity persuading beyond all reason that death, which was the enemy,

becomes the gain of those who meet it nobly.¹⁸⁸ Squaring up to this intuition, raises important questions. How may death defeat death? How may the hero grant this power to others? Can anyone truly be that hero, or are they unique among men?

A Revelatory Dichotomy

In the process of offering a feminist critique of Campbell, Nicholson makes an interesting statement. Campbell claims being-the-hero is available to men and women equally,¹⁸⁹ yet she finds he “does not adequately deal with the woman as hero,” speaking at one time of heroic patterns available to both genders while at others expressing that men lack “the recall to nature” that occurs “automatically” in women.¹⁹⁰ These investigations on Campbell are quite revelatory. Nicholson’s case that he holds women as lesser may be unwarranted in view of his affirmation that “God, when he created man in his own image created him male and female”¹⁹¹ suggesting that the mythic portrayal of the heroic figure is androgynous.¹⁹² However, he *also* portrays the hero and God as typically masculine. Nicholson, noting this contrast from a feminist perspective, holds that it deserves a reevaluation of his mythic themes. However, a theological perspective highlights something else entirely. Namely, the dichotomy reveals that there are *two* heroes.

Campbell sees an androgynous humanity needing return to God. He also feels their hero-exemplar is archetypally masculine in championing their return. How may the heroic response of

¹⁸⁸Koci, "Sacrifice for Nothing," 611.

¹⁸⁹Nicholson, "The Problem of Woman," 187.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 189.

¹⁹¹Campbell, *The Hero*, 146-7.

¹⁹²Ibid., 131.

men be the same as women, while mythical significance fixates on a transcendent-male hero as “active warrior,” distinctly from transcendent-female heroes as “receptive dreamer”?¹⁹³

The hero who moves from humanity to divinity overlaps with, but is distinct from, the transcendent hero that empowers them. When human heroes ascend to God, they reflect a divine hero who descends to humanity. Campbell thinks this peculiarity reflects less on any essential differences of men and women, and more about the spiritual relationship between humanity and divinity. Though male and female sexes “are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), mythic genders reflect a transcendent relationship: humanity shares participation in the feminine with respect to the divine, who is respectively masculine (Ezek. 16:6–14). This dichotomy generated, between the genders’ share in God’s image as human heroes and the mythic frame of God and the true hero as masculine, demands a solution. All humanity *must* ascend, but only God *can*.

The Kenotic Bridge

Thus, the RP exists in contradiction. No piece can be removed, both pieces conflict, and each piece must succeed. The “inexhaustible idea of a perfect—divine—man who lives in truth and, due to his commitment, has to die and, later, be resurrected”¹⁹⁴ refuses to operate as a harmless model or as imagined schema. God must descend to humanity; humanity has always been born from God. The hero is divine and noble yet mundane and humble. God is the goal of the creaturely heroes who unbecome themselves to unite with Him; God is already within the righteous divine-hero who experiences His love. The hero dies physically, but lives on spiritually; they metaphysically die to themselves, and physically live on in power. They leave Earth, dissolved into theosis; they remain on earth, letting-go of theosis to maintain God’s

¹⁹³Nicholson, “The Problem of Woman,” 189.

¹⁹⁴Koci, “Sacrifice for Nothing,” 607.

presence on Earth. “The sufferer within us is that divine being [...] the hero, the fit candidate [who] undergoes the initiation ‘like a man’” and was also “the father: we in Him and He in us.”¹⁹⁵ Yet, it is *also* true that “if one is oneself one’s god, the God himself, the will of God, the power that would destroy one’s egocentric system, becomes a monster” and self-idolatry will become their downfall.¹⁹⁶ If two propositions both obtain in humanity’s recurring path, yet contradict one another, factors must exist that resolve them at another level or from a reality external to them.

Huxley and Campbell speak quite differently about this hero, avatar, or incarnate God at different times,¹⁹⁷ appearing to sense this duality without addressing its inconsistencies. They missed the gorilla at the center of the stage. At one time, the hero must fail the confrontation with their initiating mortifications; at another, they are the reincarnation of one already perfected by the trials, returning to show the way. How may they falter, if they are perfectly born from above? How may they lead humanity higher if they are not fully human? Perhaps they fall only symbolically, to demonstrate the path? Why then did Christ not stumble, if He was the greatest hero of the West? Campbell says deviations reveal deep significance. So be it then.

The Resolution of the Cross

If the realities of natural religion fully considered generate these nagging and contradictory notions, then they point to resolutions beyond themselves. The gap at the center of the religio-cultural basketball court is that *two* things exist at once: a hero who gained full theosis and other heroes called to follow them as their transformative models. As a consequence, the mode of attaining salvation involves: a loss of the soul in order to gain the soul, a loss of life to

¹⁹⁵Campbell, *The Hero*, 137.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁹⁷Huxley, *The Perennial*, 49-50.

gain life, and a loss of self to gain fulness of self. Only in the kenosis of Christ, being God who kenotically becomes man, may resolution to the gap between the basketballs be found. “Kenosis does not point to God ceasing to be God, but rather a way in which God is known” by a “movement toward the other” in incarnation.¹⁹⁸ Because of this, He necessarily “preserves the alterity of the other”¹⁹⁹ and opens the way which all men seek in their soul and have sensed *must* exist. God becoming man allows human beings to rise to theosis without subjecting them to the pride of thinking themselves to *be* God: the self-idolatry Campbell and Huxley warn against.

Granting the RP’s contradictory kenotic assumptions, only the gospel resolves them. By “taking the *form* of mortal man,” Christ preserves humanity’s otherness and secures the RP’s presumption that K²⁰⁰ should mutually entail A.²⁰¹ By *bestowing* life, humans may pay the kenotic toll and yet gain all from Him. This resolves why *two* people appear described by the RP.

The first is the true and saving hero [H_S]: properly identified by a full theosis undergone descent into humanity. These are the conditions met by proposition R.²⁰² The second are the human heroes [H_H], who identifies with H_S and achieves their salvation.²⁰³ These are the selfless conditions understood by K to grant salvation, absolved of contradictions through R. The gospel bridges the two beings by kneading out two familiar conditions for successful H_H identification with H_S: a mimetic synthesis and a metamorphic synthesis, summated as the way of kenosis [K].

¹⁹⁸Babka, “Sunyata and Otherness,” 78.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Prop. K: “total self-disregard where one lets go of, or sacrifices their own soul.”

²⁰¹Prop. A: “the attainment of any meaningful application of salvation on one’s soul.”

²⁰²Prop R: “historical necessity and transcendent reality of Christ, His physical resurrection and its power.”

²⁰³Prop S: “a state of salvation from sin and death to eternal life upon a person’s soul.”

Mimetic Synthesis

The first synthesis addresses the behavioral modifications of H_H . The mimetic model is formally simple and essentially lofty: in all that one does, be like H_S .²⁰⁴ Of course, the RP makes it clear that this is no easy journey. The primary means by which one outwardly mimics H_S is through the mortifying, deathly trial. Christ, the revealed H_S , “made himself nothing” and gained the “highly exalted” theosis and the “name that is above every name” in the kenosis hymn of Philippians 2; yet Paul frames this in light of the character of those who follow Him (Phil.2:7, 9). Followers of Christ “do nothing from rivalry of conceit but in humility count others more significant than” themselves, owing to a shared “mind” that views His kenosis as prescriptive (Phil. 2:4-5); they live out this focal humility from the “encouragement in Christ,” the “comfort from love,” and the “participation in the Spirit” they share (Phil. 2:1). PP charity and the HJ call match these mimetic types. However, one’s call and charity always demand the inward change of an H_H : empowerment that meaningfully accomplishes their outward modeling of H_S . There is always an essential match between the inward soul and one’s outward action.²⁰⁵

Expectedly then, Paul bookends this hymn by professing his own ongoing struggle of self-emptying. Paul is “hard pressed between the two” choices of remaining in the present world and finally abandoning himself to joining with Christ, even though he holds that “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-23). He also knows his ascension lay “not [in] that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 4:12). Paul struggles and fails, yet charges to know Christ “and the

²⁰⁴Gschwandtner, “Mimesis or Metamorphosis,” 5.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 13.

power of his resurrection” that he “may share in [Christ’s] sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11).

Metamorphic Synthesis

Paul, a great expression of the H_H , has his whole soul set upon the model of Christ as H_s . However, he maintains that Christ’s power lay in His resurrection; his mimetic aspiration targets a metamorphic sharing of Paul’s own resurrection. This is crucial. Presently, H_J assumed the monomyth expressed something that evokes a deeper reality of vital, transcendent, value. PP assumed that the sublimity of the Ground’s incarnated expressions of spiritual power. But these forms lack a crucial matter: a *tangible* claim to the nature of true growth and eternal life.

The gospel not only reconciles the mystery of the two heroes, it unites the mimetic growth with a metamorphically empowered eternal life.²⁰⁶ Here, that is “in Christ, there is a perfect match between soul and body, invisible and visible, incorporeal and corporeal. In him, they are no longer two divergent natures, but they are perfectly integrated, albeit without confusion.”²⁰⁷

If human beings sense the plausibility of the behavioral and teleological prescriptions of the recurring path while delimiting any revealed modes, they trip into an irresolvable quagmire. They understand they must die, empty, or become nothing; yet, honest assessments reveal that forms of empowering theosis must *precede* them: an ennoblement. The gospel provides this in a historical, tangible, point in time. The inner kenotic drive and participation thereinto comes only by means of the outer “power of his resurrection” and Christ’s call therefrom (Phil. 3:10).

²⁰⁶James J. Stamoolis, “Theosis,” in *Dictionary*, 1191.

²⁰⁷Gschwandtner, “Mimesis or Metamorphosis,” 19.

“Syntheses-Synthesis”

The mimetic means, which the recurring path prescribes as productive toward its metamorphic end, presumes a degree of divine calling, empowerment, and heavenly love humanity cannot self-generate. A metamorphic catalyst necessarily instills the mimetic trajectory toward a final metamorphosis. However, the naturally limited conflation of the two heroes makes this calling difficult to secularly locate. The H_S has this calling intrinsically, being God. The H_H , who needs it, is left to either fabricate a calling internally, conclude it imaginary, or dismiss it as a pleasant fiction. Understanding these heroes as Christ and Christian (viz., Christ and little-Christ), makes sense of how fitting these recurrent religions and philosophies otherwise seem. One divine hero calls back to God. One human hero seeks after God. The H_H does not need to violate the exhortation to avoid imagining themselves *as* God. Rather, needing theosis, H_H considers candidates to satisfy the H_S 's top criterion: divinity. Transitivity, when the H_H unites with the H_S , they unite also with their union: a union with God.

So then, for the core propositions of the RP to be affirmed, the gospel must also be affirmed. Christ must physically and spiritually trailblaze kenosis by means of His theosis, such that humanity in uniting with Him partakes in kenosis and unites to God through Him. Being man, Christ can die; being God, He cannot be bound by death. Accordingly, a bridge is fastened between death and eternal life, that lay in God alone. When such saved-humans are annihilated through the emptying of themselves, they no longer succumb to the void of nothingness; by being voided of self they find the fullness of God's life. Koci puts its two-fold impact this way:

Kenosis is the engagement with negativity in which the person experiences her own finitude in self-surrender. Yet there is also a second layer. Kenosis is a revelatory event which discloses the mystery of nothing not only in a moral sense (the person humbled and hanged on the cross) but in the ontological sense.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸Koci, "Sacrifice for Nothing," 604-5.

Campbell says Muhammed and the Buddha are “universal heroes”²⁰⁹ like Christ, yet neither seem to fulfill this two-fold role in reality. Human’s connection with the real must come through death, yet death breaks their connection with life. Should death kenotically function as an apotheotic tool, humanity needs a champion to unlock passage through death back to life. Beyond mere fiction, there seems no good candidate apart from the historical Christ.

Emerging Natural Christology

An already theotic Christ completes the journey, making it an effectual path for human beings. If Campbell’s claim that deviations from the normal whole story reveal something critical,²¹⁰ then Christ’s success against temptations in the desert and the garden stands out. Abiding in Christ’s finished journey, the human hero not only has a model for mimetic growth by participation in His heroic rise, but also a metamorphic source of power to enable this identification. Huxley says religions that excuse wrongful actions do not attain the final theosis,²¹¹ but only those who completely die-to-self are united with God. If so, how are *any* able to accomplish such perfection outside of another’s intercession? To avoid an infinite regress of intercessors, one must resolve upon a hero who is God Himself and descends to pave the way.

Here, the Christian claim identifies the power of resurrection. It seems a resurrection must take place for the kenotic path to become as viable as it intuitively appears. Should a sacrificial model *really* shelter human heroes, Their power must occur in history and yet always have occurred, such that all humanity may abide in them. Christ is the “lamb who was slain from

²⁰⁹Campbell, *The Hero*, 30.

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Huxley, *The Perennial*, 249.

the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, New International Version) as timeless God. Nonetheless, His death lay in time and against the power of that world as truly human. He is the true object of faith and the source of salvation for all who come before *and* after Him (Heb. 11:13-16, 11:39-40). He unites the hero’s call and the perennial philosopher’s grace with human life.²¹² A need for an actual historical Christ takes shape: one whom adherents of the path in ages past anticipated, whom adherents since look back to, and who bridges the mimesis of the RP into a tangible metamorphosis. This consideration constructs an argument in the following fourteen premises.

Inasmuch as K (summarized as the way of true kenosis) leads to and yet is also uncovered by A (the attainment of a saved state: S), it is the case that:

$$1. K \leftrightarrow A$$

Of course, A attains the eternal life or salvation of S, yet K is life’s sacrifice as the mode of attainment. Understanding this loss of life as death [D], such that any presence of life, eternal or otherwise, is $\neg D$. D becomes the negation of S. Accordingly, it is that case that:

$$2. (K \rightarrow D) \cap (A \rightarrow \neg D)$$

$$3. D = \neg S$$

On its own, this suggests that any attainment of S involves a logical impossibility, for attaining S involves K. But this cannot be. K is rendered impossible through its mutual entailment of a proposition that negates its implications. Should K obtain in natural religion, the impossible must become possible: D and $\neg D$ must coexist. Precisely, the D implied by K must

²¹²Joseph M. Rivera, "The Call and the Gifted in Christological Perspective: A Consideration of Brian Robinette's Critique of Jean-Luc Marion," *Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 6 (2010): 1057.

become $\neg D$, such that K still entails A. RP claims this power is unlocked by an H_S , and the set of all souls identified in Him [equitable to H_H in the plural] access His transmutation of D to $\neg D$.

$$4. H_S \rightarrow (D \rightarrow \neg D)$$

$$5. H_H = \{\text{souls identified with } H_S\} \quad [RP]$$

Next, K reenters, being effective in making oneself H_H to the degree it unlocks an H_S 's power: the overcoming of death through death. This demands an H_S first unlock this power himself, by R or some other unknown way.²¹³ The gospel holds that R not only demonstrates how D implies $\neg D$, but also generates the conditions of H_H : allowing K to grant this implication to objects identified in H_S . Being unknown naturally, RP must assume an H_S exists (spiritually or otherwise) to make K successful; NX allows this assumption for the time being.

$$6. H_S \quad [RP]$$

$$7. (K \in H_H) \rightarrow (K \rightarrow D \rightarrow \neg D) \quad [HS: 2, 4, 5]$$

$$8. (K \rightarrow \neg D) \quad [Sim: 7]$$

$$9. (K \rightarrow \neg D) \cap (A \rightarrow \neg D) \quad [HS: 2, 8]$$

$$10. (K \cap A) \rightarrow \neg D \quad [Sim: 9]$$

$$11. (K \cap A) \rightarrow S \quad [Id: 3]$$

It becomes that RP relies entirely on assuming proposition 6: a H_S who conquers death, is one with God, and shares this with all. Yet, without any positive evidence for it, the alternative that K fails (or is illusory) becomes more plausible. The warrant of R, a historical resurrection to

²¹³Far from a concession, the NX asserts that the only alternative to the Resurrection in this argument involves appeals to ignorance.

validate the H_S , allows K to succeed. For H_S 's salvation to transcend death and unite H_{HS} with God, the H_S must overcome death through full resurrection, not mere resuscitation. Their union with God *must* prevail. Therefore, if the RP affirms salvation obtains, so must the H_S 's resurrection.

12. $S \rightarrow R$ [NX]

13. S [RP]

14. $\therefore R$

Natural religion recurrently holds that one must dissolve within God to be saved; they must also embody God within themselves. How can the self be dissolved into a God that is actually mere symbol, mere nothingness? How may the self be changed by this nothingness-God unless all that was *considered* to be nothing in Him was actually the ultimate thing: God and His anointed, chosen one (viz., His Christ)?

What is as nothingness in comparison to creation, is in fact the true thing. As creation is as nothing to it, when it becomes nothing to itself it unites with the real thing: Christ, the true God. Processing the kenotic terms of the RP in view of the gospel appears to satisfy its every claim. Accordingly, the NXD outlines the *way of kenosis*. It constitutes a pouring out of God into nothingness and death, which empowers humans identified in Christ's sufferings and death mimetically to be metamorphically united with the eternal life He gained by being the true hero of all myth and wisdom: He whom all have known must one day come to be. In view of these propositions for the necessity of His resurrection, NX now makes the case that all natural religion and philosophy argue exclusively toward the revealed Christ.

Chapter 7: Natural Christology

*“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens,
that he might fill all things.”*

—Paul of Tarsus (Eph. 4:10, ESV)

Paul’s first contact with the Hellenistic world garnered mixed results: some disbelieved the resurrection, others were interested, and others believed (Acts 13:45-51). Yet, any belief at all seems remarkable. What spoke to the hearts of these pagan cultures, such that without Jewish law, customs, and history, they came to trust in Jesus (Acts 13:42-44)? Quite plausibly, the core notions of Christology run deep in human blood. If the Bible’s theological and anthropological premises hold true, that humans have a limited access to God by the natural light of reason but that Christ is God fully revealed and come to earth to redeem His people, then it stands to reason that this perennial hero, this embodiment of divine wisdom, this Way, is none other than Christ.

The NX Arguments

Understanding this, the secular knowledge of the heroic model and human growth should not be *inherently* suspect to Christian apologists. It may be correct in part, and a useful starting place on which to plant the gospel in full. This is not to say that Christians need no discernment when it comes to secular appropriations of biblical ideas. Rather, they model Paul: fluidly integrating each culture’s poets and philosophers as evidence against their own conclusions.

Quoting a poem written to Zeus,²¹⁴ Paul argues: “in him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Acts

²¹⁴Schnabel, *Acts*, 736.

17:28). Certainly, no Christian today asserts that the Zeus of the Greek pantheon equates to the one God, any more than the deity of Islam compares to the Father. Rather, it is clear that Paul reappropriates this poem apologetically.

Christians may act in his example and similarly apply truths from secular schemas. One's inability to trust the gospel without the Spirit, leaves unchanged the fact that if God is the origination of all reason, morality, and personhood, then any grasp of logic, ethics, or worthy desires of will should reflect Him. Without subjecting the folly and absurdity of the Cross to the limited standards of worldly wisdom, everything prior to His stumbling block may apologetically highlight the abductive necessity they generate of Him. Christian's only "unreserved allegiance" lay in their trust that His gospel sufficiently "redefines, or better still, redeems our cultures."²¹⁵

Deviations in a secular system do not inhibit all their truth, even should noetic blockage or blindness remain. Cultural information regarding heroes and saviors remain useful inroads to the necessity of Christ's historical resurrection. This overture in place, the three, key sub-arguments may form the premises of Natural Christology's overarching case: human experience of need implies an available fulfillment, the RP data of natural religion is best understood if Christ is held as the Way, and Christ's historical prevalence beats out competing alternatives.

Argument 1: The Hero Called Jesus

The NXD suggests two different heroes. The H_S (or Savior) receives a call through their divine oneness; they enter, save, depart from, and then lead the world to salvation. The H_H (or human heroes) are ordinary persons, the intended audience to unite with H_S and attain salvation.

²¹⁵Atsen, "A Tapestry of Global Christology," 260.

Who then is Christ?

Campbell states that the hero must receive a call to adventure, reject this call, be dragged into it anyway, and then begin their confrontation. To elucidate this, many myths, folk stories, and anecdotes are depicted in which an H_H undergoes these steps. Interestingly, Campbell's main appeals to Jesus' story are always in the latter, death-and-rising, half of the journey and not in these earlier rejections and failures.

Pointedly, Christ does not reject His call. He immediately accepts. He requires no divine rescue: He is the one tempted and the one who delivers. Perhaps Christ fits elsewhere? Huxley says fully enlightened, perfected beings may return and empower others.²¹⁶ Maybe Christ operates in this category; the claim He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) distinguishes Him from other gurus: even the Buddha took time to arrive at his nirvana.²¹⁷ It is little surprise then, that Huxley and Campbell both prefer to refer to Gautama Buddha as their example of choice over Christ, all things being equal.²¹⁸ Christ's story has a dearth of tangible, relatable experiences. How may one apply the story to their lives where He astounded elders at a young age (Luke 2:47, 52)? One can, however, leave comfort, pursue awakening, and seek insight.²¹⁹ Stories that highlight Christ's peculiar suitability for metamorphic power hold this tension for direct human mimesis.

The Savior and the Hero

A better comparison to the Buddha's own journey would be the apostle Paul, not Christ. Given His divinity, the Christian tradition does not rely on its H_s as both the perfection to

²¹⁶Huxley, *The Perennial*, 49.

²¹⁷Campbell, *The Hero*, 24.

²¹⁸Huxley, *The Perennial*, x.

²¹⁹Campbell, *The Hero*, 24.

identify-with and the example of *how* to identify with Him. Such is the RP's quagmire. Instead, Christ chose select exemplars: apostolic pillars of His forming church (Eph. 2:20-22), like Paul. Despite Campbell's appeals to Jesus as being on par with Muhammed and Gautama, Jesus just deviates too much in the build-up. The way the Christian tradition treats Paul is really a far better fit with the H_H of the monomyth.

Paul spent his early life studying and growing in knowledge, demonstrating aptitude in reasoning by his writings, and even used this power *against* Christ's followers (Phil. 3:3-6). However, this rejection of purpose is met by his own heavenly calling: a voice from heaven knocks him off his horse, changing his will toward serving Christ (Acts 9:3-9). This awakening change of Paul is far closer to Muhammed's angel and the Buddha's tree. What is remarkable about Paul's blinding light is who that calling divine agent in the story actually was: Jesus.

The H_H can be clearly seen in Paul, Peter, and John; their rejections, confusions, callings, failures, sanctifications, mortifications, demises, and ennoblements are all there. Christ is continually and notably the divine agent in these stories. He is the emblematic symbol of the *perfected* hero for them, but not of the parts of the *journeying* hero. If two categories are shown here, then Christ must be understood to take the role of the H_S in the biblical story but never the H_H. He is the incarnate avatar: that divine, heroic perfection guiding humanity toward God.

Unto Eternal Life

Defenders of the perennial philosophy and the hero's journey believe they should be taken seriously. Yet, if they are, they create an inescapable dilemma between the path they propose and the needs they generate. To journey and become an H_H, an H_S must precede as their model: to call and keep them in the RP as He ennobles and delivers them. Humans share a need

for a real savior wherever real connection with the divine Ground is breached,²²⁰ to effectively ensure mimesis by commending their faith, and providing metamorphic kenosis through His eternal power over death. This is the first NX argument: this need implies the potential reality of the needed. Should a genuine need obtain in human experience (e.g., hunger, exhaustion, loneliness) then a meaningful fulfillment thereof also obtains to fill it (viz., food, sleep, friendship).

The monomyth argues toward humanity's genuine need for a hero of the way; the perennial philosophy outlines both the needed way and the one who walks in it. Through any distillations by time and transmission, this story's products in culture remain coherent; it does not seem reasonable that distinct human cultures could have arrived upon it at random. It remains more plausible that the state of affairs spoken to by the recurring path shares a guiding cause, a shared common ground. However, is such ground metaphysical or prospective-historical? That is, is it grounded in human nature *only* or was it instigated in history and then passed on?

Both are likely. Without a steadying, metaphysical anchor, the continuity of the monomythic-heroic core across time would be dubious. What keeps cultures from changing the story beyond recognition but some internal, common tug, deep in human psychology? However, this seems an insufficient cause to originally generate the idea. It is too specific, too precise, too contrary to reason, and too unambiguous in its particulars to arrive without a historically oriented catalyst. Mere psychological *disposition* cannot instigate a unitive experience of heroic expectations in human awareness.²²¹ Hence, both are needful. Metaphysical ground is a sufficient

²²⁰Wendell G. Johnson, "Christology as a Function of Epistemology: A Bibliographic Study in the Theology of Paul Tillich," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 17, no.4 (2018): 130.

²²¹Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, 65.

mechanism of transmission but not origination; historical ground, a prospective matter-of-fact, must work on humans from without to initiate and foreshadow the hero in their soul.

One candidate for external production would certainly be the proto-evangelion described in the early chapters of Genesis; God turns to the serpent, in the hearing an Eve and Adam who had unleashed its evil, declaring that, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15, NIV). At the least, this ancient story represents something deeply mythic in the lowest levels of human consciousness: a real enemy and the means to conquer it. At most, it outlines exactly how the enemy’s fatal wounding of the hero will become the hero’s very counter-strategy to fatally destroy the enemy.²²² For the Hebrew term translated alternatively as “crush” and “strike” are actually the same word: “to ambush;” they are rendered differently in English because words like “kill” or “destroy” wouldn’t fit both objects: the serpent’s head and chosen offspring’s heel.²²³ Yet, the similitude remains in the Hebrew. What the serpent does to the hero rebounds back on itself; the death of the enemy comes by their own hand against the hero. So is the resurrection: a destruction of death by death itself. Were this tale bestowed to humanity so early on (and so reflecting an objective estimate of their need for a hero to conquer evil by kenosis), it would catalyze the phenomena now observed. It would run deep in human psychology and endure through their indirect transmissions of its exact details.

Such a self-sacrificial hero is humanity’s ancient need. The naturally recurring story evidences a need that demands a solution: for their need to be real, the solution must also be real, while if no solution exists then this expression of need is futile, harmful, or false. Yet it appears

²²²In a liberal estimate, this text speaks mythically of rivalries between monkeys and snakes; the most conservative estimates hold it as a clear foretelling of Christ who would conquer the devil through His own death.

²²³Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 159-60.

self-evident to human experience that this story has power and meaning: that it is a *real* need. Therefore, *a hero must obtain*. As all real needs have realizable provisions, a meaningful manifestation of a savior either has been or may be realized. Witnessing the agreed upon elements of Christ, He is a strong candidate for such a savior; the only element He'd need to be perfect would be a real resurrection. Putting humanity's need and Christ's candidacy together with how a resurrection is consistently connected with Him in the earliest accounts, His resurrection becomes necessary to entertain.

Argument 2: The Wisdom Called Kenosis

In addition to the metamorphic necessity and Christ's plausibility of fulfillment in the prospective-historical dimension, it also seems that the mimetic content of the kenotic pattern is most clearly identified in Christ as its metaphysical ground. Christ appears in history as more than that which merely *inspires and models* human kenosis. He must really actualize the tether of the transcendent, the living Way, such that its intuitive and perennial wisdom corresponds to reality. If it is granted that this philosophy pervades the religions of the world and holds value as RP claims, then it does require grounding: a thread between the physical and the metaphysical.²²⁴

This Single Thread

The philosophy's coherence evidences an origination from common tradition and held by a common metaphysical thread restraining diverging strands to an essential similitude. That thread endures enough to be perceived despite the inconsistencies of particular religions. All higher faiths accordingly contain this kernel of golden truth: the self must pour into God through a beautiful unmaking.²²⁵ The journey departs and sacrifices one's self-dependent trust in the

²²⁴C[live] S[taples] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 28.

familiar, comfortable world; the philosophy discerns how the fruits of this journey involve mortification and purgation of one's brokenness, lostness, sinfulness, or selfness in death. Popular ideologies may circulate and promote ease of life, as if conducive toward life's flourishing; yet the inability of this to satisfy the deepest longings of the heart toward kenosis are strong enough to convince generation after generation that the truest path to life involves some sacrifice: emptying oneself, hard work, and a holy suffering that transcends suffering itself.

Given this study of the RP, it is no surprise to find that these pairings of opposing messages recur together: one has already arrived yet one must strive ahead, one is identified with God yet one must seek after God, God must reach down yet man must ascend. This is the critical and golden thread of kenosis. It is the embryotic element of the gospel that forms the ideological bridge of Natural Christology: a heroic exemplar must rise, such that to strive into identification with Him mimetically *is* to abide or rest in His resurrecting power metamorphically.

Folly of Kenosis

Kenosis, being the pouring out of oneself as nothing into the fullness of God as all, forms this central way. It is as wise in its truth as it is foolish at first pass; it is both moral in its full application as it is shameful when grasped partially; it is good and pleasing to the spirit as it also inspires trepidation when first entertained. Kenosis is ultimately the nexus of the true, the good, and the beautiful life: the noble path naturally sensed by humanity. Yet it lay beyond a veil: it runs contrary to their natural reason, morality, and affection.

It seems *reasonable* that one should ascend to God by ascending, yet this perennial insight suggests that one ascends to God and godliness most by descent. It seems *good* that one should take pride in acting rightly, because it is rightful to do. However, this recurring journey is

²²⁵Shults, "Wising Up," 544.

forever downward in trajectory, considering that humility continually unfolds its beauty as one mines is fathomless depths. It seems *pleasing* that one should grow taller, get better, be stronger, and achieve in life. Yet as the soul matures it finds Christ's call more pleasing: to follow Him down, down, and further down into His likeness and in His Way.²²⁶

It remains to ask what elements are essential for truth, goodness, and beauty to break into reality, and which are accidental. Certainly, one can *comprehend* this process and even fabricate a self-deprecation in life which does not seem to arrive at this three-fold noble goal. This is the very trap that Huxley describes at length, often called legalism in Christian circles; both Christianity and the perennial philosophy identify this in the Pharisees of Jesus' day. A kenosis that makes "pouring out" a thing one *does* disallows its avenue as *ceasing* to resist repentance from the start. The targeted ground of kenosis, unto which the poured-out self goes, would become the very self that is being dispensed with.²²⁷ This is obviously fruitless.

Huxley condemns any who would seek to transform this kenotic and holy path into a work one does and takes up through selfness.²²⁸ How should anyone avoid the pitfall of selfness, if they are the *only* self who wills their own holiness? Any versions of the perennial religion and the hero's journey that begin without a needful apprehension of finished work empowering their salvation from without, are left by necessity to attempt it from within. This is a kenotic contradiction. Salvation must attain outside them, such that emptying of themselves is not mere emptying to nothingness, nor movement back to oneself, but an emptying to the fullness of God. He is as true fullness in comparison to all other things which are as nothing to Him.

²²⁶Andrew Murray, *Humility: the Journey Toward Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Bethany, 2001), 40-41.

²²⁷Casey Spinks, "The Ontology of the Offense Rowan Williams and Johannes Climacus on Christology and Ontology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 90, (2021): 20.

²²⁸Huxley, *The Perennial*, 271-2.

The fullness outside humanity must possess a will, such that it may ferry them to theosis while maintaining the selflessness of their kenosis. Here, Huxley speaks against his own conclusions: without a transcendent and personal God empowering true kenotic faith and love, a person seeking the Way will ultimately burn-out in failure. They have nothing by which to replace self but self. This is a false form of kenosis: a self-trust characterized by rejecting the gospel as the evident conclusion to the NXD, resolving to maintain the very self-idolatry they know must be cast off.

Begging the Question

Accordingly, the HJ and PP are found wanting by their own standards when taken in isolation of an actual resurrection of the Christ of history. The Scriptures call this gospel a wisdom of God that is like foolishness to men (1 Cor. 1:27-30, ESV). This certainly seems to be the case with the resurrection. The idea that a man did rise from the dead is beyond the natural reasoning of human beings; yet, that same human reasoning outlines a void of necessity: a gap around which reason cannot invade without consent to this revealed resurrection. Reason's very inability to breach the demands of the spiritual problem elucidates what the nature of the solution will be: it will stand beyond reason's powers to affirm or prove, but not in contradiction with its maxims.

In this way, the resurrection is an immediate folly. Yet it is one which afterward successfully proves many of the intuitions natural wisdom provides. Therefore, the RP evinces the resurrection as philosophically necessary by demanding death be overcome by a savior. One may not hold kenosis as *valuable* for living the noble life without assenting that an intervention from beyond is *necessary*. Kenosis' object must be other than its subject. This is the second NX argument; the needed savior must come from beyond humanity. They must be divine.

The perennial intuition of kenosis as the most valuable path for human beings does not seem founded evidentially; it is almost presuppositionally founded, as like the ontological case for God Himself. It shares metaphysical grounding with human reason and nature themselves. Kenosis is a parallel truth to human awareness. Emerging here are true and false kenotic forms: an acceptance of the NXD's upward call to the gospel, or a rejection downward to the otherwise self-contradictory RP. All things hinge on this point. False kenosis uses the language of a pouring-out of self, in order to attain freedom *for self*²²⁹ and disguise its escape from abiding in God. True kenosis pours-out the self and comes to abide in God in the process; it knows attaining *freedom from self* in God is the only meaningful *freedom for self*. Without this external and transcendent divine object, guises of self-emptying ultimately cannibalize themselves. Even should all higher religions approach and maintain this *idea*, Christ-less attempts to implement it obfuscate and frustrate its power by using a self-sufficient means to bootstrap their own deliverance.²³⁰ Iterations of the recurring path suggest that divine life must ground them; one finds true life in letting go of it. So, the Ground must not be themselves. From it they come; to it they return. One lets go of the false life, now that true life has been shown to them in Christ.

Prevalence of Christ

In this way, one may best apply their knowledge of the Way advantageously to the ends of a truly *salvific* kenosis. That is, a sense of the Way prior to a knowledge of Christ may lead to a knowledge of that Way as Christ. True kenosis shows that the “emptying of the self” must not become perfume worn over one's self-righteousness; true self-emptying may take up objects that

²²⁹Suzuki, *An Introduction*, 67.

²³⁰Spinks, “The Ontology of the Offense,” 30.

are disguises for that original self.²³¹ Instead, true kenosis requires a historical object to empower it metamorphically through His own kenosis: being both outpouring soul and transcendent God who takes in the outpoured. What object stands within and without humanity, but Christ? However, all this raises a third and final question: why *only* Christ? The first NX argument shows a savior must eventually exist; the second shows they must transcend humanity. A third argument, looking historically, finds no other candidate for a universal, trans-national, once-for-all, savior-hero to prevail. It also contends that Christ's fulfillment of the needed criteria and essentially irreversible defining of all understanding of that criteria thereafter, makes expecting another yet-to-arrive savior improbable. The world is not missing its hero.

Argument 3: The Way as Christ

Although other religious leaders have taught messages accepted across other lines of religious thought, none come close to Christ.²³² His acceptance and approval is what one would expect to find in a true candidate for championing kenosis and laying down a bridge to God that calls men beyond themselves. One would expect them to mysteriously be a figure of controversy and narrowness, as well as one revered by all. Kenosis appeals to all by their hidden sense of its noble nature; it also repels all owing to its demanding objectivity and the death of self. So too is Christ. This is the third NX argument: as Christ has impacted history in a way fully consistent with expectations of the promised hero, irreversibly defining human knowledge of the hero thereafter, He remains the best and only candidate for the hero in reality.

²³¹D[onald] A[rthur] Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, IVP, 2020), 172.

²³²Future application of the NX could view specific aspects of NXD: the rising-and-dying gods myths that predate Christ. This project merely argues such imitations reflect the true thing's prevalence in and upon history.

World Impact

When the hero returns, says Campbell, they may be met by a changed world, by rejection and anger, or by indifference.²³³ Christ has all three. Significantly, He contemporaneously has all three within singular groups, by means of accepting certain aspects of His ministry and rejecting others. Christ is uniquely the most accepted and lauded figure of all religious thought as He is also an unending nexus of frustrating tension and challenging distinctions. The distinctions are well attested in popular thought as defenses of rejecting His call; but what of His acceptance?

It is marginally significant that a majority (viz., a third) of the world calls themselves Christian by religion. But this consideration is not totally striking. Islam runs a close second (viz., a fourth).²³⁴ Far *more* significant is the related question: how many of the world's religious ideologies *revere* Christ or figures of religions external to their own? Here the picture changes.

Islam reveres the historical person of Christ as a great prophet of God; Muhammad renders him a person to be understood as a sure pointer to the eternal Way of God, not divine but certainly righteous.²³⁵ Hinduism also appreciates Jesus;²³⁶ Swami Vivekananda considered Jesus a great yogi, He may even rightfully understand Himself to be one with God in some sense.²³⁷ Buddhism follows suit in this regard of Christ;²³⁸ notable and influential Buddhist monk Thich

²³³Campbell, *The Hero*, 29.

²³⁴Pew Research, "Religious Composition."

²³⁵Qur'an 43:61-64.

²³⁶Hinduism holds an eclectic variety of views, considered by some to be grounded in the Veda scriptures. Though these scriptures predate Christ, eclectic and notable gurus of modernity, such as Vivekananda, variously refer to him. As the whole of Hindu thought appreciates all, assent of the Hindu learned may especially be employable toward capturing Hindu appreciation as a whole.

²³⁷David J. Neumann, "Christ as Yogi: The Jesus of Vivekananda and Modern Hinduism," *Church History* 90, no. 1 (2021): 129-30, 136-7.

²³⁸As with Hinduism, Buddhism has diverse sects. However, Thich Nhat Hanh represents a unique fusion of both Theravada (formal traditional) and Mahayana (spiritual mysticism) schools of Buddhist thought.

Nhat Hanh²³⁹ places Christ beside the Buddha himself as enlightened bodhisattva teachers foundational in humanity's spiritual heritage and owed veneration.²⁴⁰ Even certain prominent atheists²⁴¹ are obliged to contrast their disdain for the religious with an appreciation of Christ.²⁴² Considering only Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism by their numeric popularity, these together compose nearly eighty percent of the world population,²⁴³ effectively grounding the claim that Jesus Christ is a *globally* revered figure of human history.

Rejection, owing to the great difficulty of choosing self-abandonment in God,²⁴⁴ is naturally also found in Him. Many pick out pieces of Christ they like with no regard as to *why* those elements are desirable: without questioning if or how they are valuable apart from the whole. Complimentary and peculiar desires to assent to His value and goodness exist in tandem with rejecting of His traditions. This is certainly conjoined with some distaste for the sinfulness seen in Christians; an improper wielding of His name does little favors.²⁴⁵ But this is precisely the focus of Natural Christology. True acceptance of Christ will mature into a love for one's fellow broken human beings; the reverse is not so. Rejection of the church need not be a rejection of Christ, even should acceptance of Christ lead necessarily to an acceptance of those He loves: His

²³⁹Mathias Schneider, "Mindfulness, Buddha-Nature, and the Holy Spirit: On Thich Nhat Hanh's Interpretation of Christianity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2021): 279-80.

²⁴⁰Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1997), 6.

²⁴¹Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference, 2006), 283-4.

²⁴²The non-religious do not have a homogenic esteem of Christ. Yet, if they may be thought at least *marginally* informed by prominent spokespersons for atheism, who approve of certain teachings of Christ, the addition of their 15% of the global population would close the gap to a *global* 95% of organized reverence.

²⁴³Pew Research, "Religious Composition."

²⁴⁴Huxley, *The Perennial*, 98.

²⁴⁵Neumann, "Christ as Yogi," 125.

bride, the church. One expects to find the true savior to be both challenging and accepting, both renown and also rejected. This is what is seen of Christ. Therefore, Natural Christology has discerned the gospel out from natural religion by this threefold case.

The Concise NX

The perennial wisdom from heroic myths reveal humanity's need for theosis. They reveal this theosis is only attainable by means of true kenosis: a selflessness gained by identification with an empowering death and rise by a hero. This divine hero becomes the manifestation of that sole recurring path, the only way humanity may unite with God. He is the ontological ground for kenosis' transcendence, and the pragmatic ground for its tangible power in human lives.

Christ is the best candidate for such a hero in History, rendering all others past, present, and future unlikely. His very emergence into history irrevocably frames all future expectations thereof after Him. For as much as He fulfills and clarifies the murky cloud of stories that preceded Him, He also cannot be amputated from attempts at imagining those stories after Him.

Furthermore, if the stories say a hero is one with God and yet must become so, then two different heroes appear are shown in the story: the true hero who is divine, and human heroes who unite with Him and so with God. For the core propositions of the perennial wisdom, natural religion, and human myths to succeed as meaningful, the Gospels' accounts of resurrection must also succeed as historical. Therefore, it remains reasonable to hold to the revealed account of Christ's resurrection from the dead as the necessary mode of realizing kenosis: the Way of all mankind. This is Natural Christology: one finds Christ's essential fitness to fill the true heroic role by linking His coalescence of the natural Christological data within human beings to the spiritual reality it speaks to at His historical resurrection. Without Him, these kenotic hopes of the human soul are fruitless. With Him and in Him only do they find their fullness.

Chapter 8: Apologetic Bridge

“This mythic life is symbolically represented by the savior—the individual who embodies the essential aspects of the mythological drama. In the Western tradition, for better or worse, like it or not, that individual is Christ.”

—Jordan B. Peterson²⁴⁶

Two points of defense remain for Natural Christology’s case: its *limitations* and the final counter-argument *refutations* against errant applications. Both involve drawing an apologetic bridge toward the true kenotic way and away from the false. In this manner, the valence the recurring path bears upward to Christ is clarified from rejections that remain without Him.

Limitations

Natural Christology clarifies the biblical line of true faith by identifying what data is available that corresponds meaningfully to Christ outside the visible religion of Christianity. The focus at this stage is accordingly not the outward label of Christianity but the inward Christianity: the being “in-Christ” regardless of one’s religious label. Only the kenotic deference of self upon His finished work justifies a person before God, empowers their growth toward God, and grounds their life in God. This is saving faith.

A Wide Net

Noting this, Natural Christology asserts an *ultimately exclusive* view of the gospel. While a simple exclusivism calls saved only that which is called Christian, in order to *reject* the

²⁴⁶Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 383.

pluralistic and universalistic notions that all religious paths are equivalent, an ultimate version maintains this rejection while *affirming* that particular tenets of common, natural, kenotic knowledge (i.e., NXD) may function apologetically toward faith in Christ. Outward changes entailed by such a saving faith remain, for the tenets of kenosis must be empowered by the supernatural spirit of Christ to produce fruit, eventually leaving no room for “anonymous Christians” that reject Christ as their mediator with God.²⁴⁷ Kenosis remains what that natural knowledge *senses* and *desires*, yet that implies the Christian gospel. Stripped of Christianized terms, it gains apologetic potency, cutting through other religious or cultural labels toward the essential seed of trust in Christ. C.S. Lewis perhaps had a similar potency in mind when distinguishing between followers of Aslan (viz., Christ) and those of Tash (viz., antichrist).

Aslan, explains that:

If any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name of Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted [...] unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.²⁴⁸

Any faith that is ultimately in *self* is antichrist regardless Christian labels; any non-Christian faith judged true by standard of kenosis must ultimately lead to the revealed Christ as its sought-for object. Normative apologetics' focal aim must therefore remain on Christ. A person's interior faith, if a real trust, is sufficient bedrock for the eventual dismissal of any external forms ultimately incoherent with Him (i.e., residual vestiges of other religions). Conversely, mere dismissal of cultural forms does not, itself, seem essential to true faith (Acts

²⁴⁷T[imothy] R. Phillips, “Inclusivism,” in *Dictionary*, 233.

²⁴⁸C[live]. S[taples]. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 189.

8:34-40). A refusal to be *called Christian* is distinct from refusals to *trust in Christ's Spirit*, as Jesus Himself said:

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come (Matt. 12:30-32).

No other *person* be given to save humanity; yet it is union with Christ's Spirit not His outward vestiges that saves. The apologist must gather with Christ, casting a wide net rather than drawing the line of salvation tighter. Casting the net too narrowly likely makes one against Him. The narrowness of the ultimately-exclusive gate must not be confused with the narrowness of the preceding and instrumental net, as Christ again says:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.

"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things?"

They said to him, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:47-52).

The good and the bad are brought in together by the human worker; they are sorted out later by the heavenly worker.²⁴⁹ The disciples who have "*understood all these things*," are trained by this wisdom to bring out of His gospel-treasure both rich traditions and new applications for the cultural moment.²⁵⁰ A resounding theme of the apostles in the cultures they witnessed to involved revealing how contemporary symbols and motifs were actually misguided searches for Christ.²⁵¹ So it should be for Christians today. As religions develop, kenotic principles will

²⁴⁹France, *The Gospel*, 539.

²⁵⁰Ibid., 541.

²⁵¹Carson, *The Gospel*, 107.

emerge and expose a need for Him; yet He must intrude upon faiths as their object in order to make that faith saving. Thus, it becomes arbitrary to seek any line between Christian and non-Christian apart from being *in* Christ or *outside* Him. NX demands utter precision and clarity with regard to the division of the true and the false forms of kenosis: what is Christ and what is antichrist. Then it highlights where one's kenotic knowledge has erred along the way and direct a course-correction.

A Knife's Edge

Therefore, the NX apologist navigates a subtle and dangerous art: using what glimmers of the good remains without calling evil: good. Those outside of Christ are outside of God's approval and must turn from their ways and rely only on Him (Titus 1:9-2:1). But this balance is essential to outline; it is the knife's edge between the saved and the lost. Accordingly, for Natural Christology to maintain its wide net, removing all cultural hurdles barring one from Christianity apart from the sufficient "stone of stumbling" of Christ in the soul (Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8), it requires knife-like precision between the true kenotic Christology and its most precise mimics.

The False Core

Subtle inversions of Christianity exist that upturn noble Christlikeness into an "antichrist" faith. Dwelling near to the true, they become an enemy hardest to recognize and thwart. Yet, such false faiths must not be conflated with weak or immature ones. As a helpful tool, the same three mystical modes²⁵² demarcate growth all religions. Since they pervade the true and yet also have reflections in the false, they are helpful starting points for the NX's knife. These stages are:

²⁵²D[ennis] D. Martin, "Mysticism: the Mystical Way," in *Dictionary*, 807.

the simple faith of youthful fundamentalism,²⁵³ mature piety of matured reductionism,²⁵⁴ and a noble kenotic faith returning to simplicity.²⁵⁵

In true faith, a sincere but naive affection for God in childhood is followed by a turn into genuine doubt and loss by awareness of how such faith can mislead one in naivete, which finally flourished into a transcendence of doubt into a better and fuller love than one had at first. Yet the false forms mimic and mirror these. A rigid black-and-white thinking for the impassioned youth becomes a sobering detachment after viewing the equanimous nature of things; this may develop into a surpassing of those distinctions by considering some ultimate harmony between them. The pattern of growth recurs in both. The simple faith must mature and not succumb to mere obedience to one's ideals. The mature piety must look past how their old fundamental faith was immature and see what lay ahead, or else slip into a jaded religion as a the truly wise view. The noble always glimpse the beauty of kenosis and must look to Christ. Without Him as the true object of their faith, they are left to substitute themselves as an internal and subjective hero.

They are left with pseudo-kenosis: the antichrist. Huxley was certainly correct to state that "as usual, the corruption of the best is the worst."²⁵⁶ The further up this chain one goes, difficulty distinguishing right from wrong is compounded by an increase of danger. However, the net must remain wide. Seeking to eliminate all possibility of false belief, may move the line of salvation behind those who are saved; this would be the graver error. For the enemy has made good use of this overlapping naturally Christological area; secular resurgence of religious appropriation employs Christ as a means of a false kenosis precisely because the Church has

²⁵³P[eter] H. Davids, "Purgative Way, the" in *Dictionary*, 972.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, "Illuminative Way, the," 591.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, "Unitive Way, the," 1232.

²⁵⁶Huxley, *The Perennial*, 99.

retreated to the clearing and granted the NXD ground. Rather, let the false core be laid plain and the line be drawn where Christ planted His cross at the crux of history and human hearts.

False systems of salvation, “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5), use the kenotic idea and trust in Christ in word but ultimately fall back upon the self they seek to cast off. Like Elsa in *Frozen 2*, the mysteries of the eternal and transcendent are thought to have been plunged and searched out to such terrible extremes; something faintly kenotic is lay in the mystery that “when all is lost, then all is found.” Yet, without Christ, this journey concludes with a near-miss, reconciling the dichotomy between H_H and H_S by turning back to themselves, saying “you are the one I’ve been searching for all of my life.” Grown weary by the hunt at the finish line, one stays tragically unwilling to trust the hero and trusts only in themselves, disguised and reflected back. Imagining themselves to be God, they think theosis is found by trusting in themselves. They come close, but forget that a return to selfness proves their kenosis incomplete and critically deviates from the path that calls beyond themselves.

The True Core

Accordingly, the true and salvific core of Christology is a knowledge of self that turns Christ-ward in self-transcendence. It knows only an actualized Christ can achieve the kenosis they sense deep within, while any self-emptying without the Cross tethering the transcendent in history is merely an imagined progress. The false kenosis must eventually state that the sensed demand for two heroes, a heavenly model and their human mirror, are actually one: themselves. Yet, the true kenosis squares up to this awareness: the heroic in themselves requires an external savior-hero to fill the need of theosis that their present enmity with God cannot attain.

It may be right to confess that in “the different streams of human life a faith-response to Jesus can express itself in a wide variety of religious myths, [such that Jesus] is not the property

of the human organization called the Christian church, nor is he to be confined within its theoretical constructions,” without consenting that an “awareness of the mythological character of this language” implies that Christianity must abandon “its literal interpretation of the idea of incarnation.”²⁵⁷ One ought not to ignore Christ's claims to being the sole gate to God for the sake of interreligious convenience.

If Christ's resurrection did occur, a refusal to trust Him and call others into this trust is nothing less than religious enabling. Christianization is not the matter; the one who is in Christ and died with Him will be saved regardless their degree of Christianization while those who deny Him do so at their own peril regardless of any personal attempts at holiness. Christ must be real, His incarnation and resurrection, for the kenotic way to maintain its intuitive viability as the ultimate and highest path for human fullness. The ultimate narrowness of the gate is not conflated with a narrowness of the path. For any death outside of the one who conquered death does not seem a fit mode to transcend death. The true salvation line may be hidden in the soul, but it is certainly composed of this dying and living with Christ, whether hidden or revealed. A biblical response to this knowledge, is shown by Paul, who says:

Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor. 5:11-15).

All those who are in Christ live with Him; this apologetics accordingly provide a bridge from the natural knowledge of Christ to this hidden, inward, saving line. The guise of selflessness is exchanged for devotion to a really self-transcendent God; Christ's power is no

²⁵⁷Hick, *The Myth of God*, 113.

longer thought of in purely physical means but is now set toward the heart of things. “From now on,” says Paul, “we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16). The soul must be poured out and made nothing such that it is brought to deliverance and oneness with its ultimate place.²⁵⁸

One cannot pour themselves anywhere but back into themselves unless a champion exists outside of them: able to demonstrate the means, provide a locus into which the pouring is placed, and catalyze its process. Controlled by Christ’s love, one is compelled to confess and effect the gospel: that He died for all, so that in dying with Him all would also live with Him. This is the salvific core of Natural Christology. Being naturally evident to men’s reason, and devoid of any plausible historical alternatives aside from the Jesus of Christian Scripture, the recurring path showcases His candidacy to lead men into true kenosis and so bring about their union with God.

Refutations

Having clarified how the NX holds intrinsic weight toward true kenosis, three iterations of false-kenosis must be shown where they are currently at work in Western culture. This is because these ideas occupy the higher tiers of religious maturation: notions hard to distinguish from the highest forms of the true. Accordingly, these could be levied as counter-arguments from faithful Christians against the NX. Refuting them effectively rebuts the strongest attacks against NX: the messiah complex, the natural archetype, and the false-Christ.

Myth-Makers: Contra “Messiah Complexes”

In Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, a young, royal heir finds himself caught up in a prophecy that comes to dominate his future. Paul Atreides, is forced to flee into the desert of a hostile planet

²⁵⁸Murray, *Humility*, 49.

with his mother, who belongs to an ancient order: a sisterhood called the Bene Gesserit.²⁵⁹ There he is taken in by Fremen, native tribes of the land, who had been visited by the Bene Gesserit generations back. As a result, their tribes expected a coming figure called “the One Who Points the Way,” a son of a Bene Gesserit who leads them to salvation.²⁶⁰ With his mother’s aid, Paul steps into this role in order to save their lives, rising by his talent in statecraft, special attributes of human reason, as well as by this mythic story set for him.

However, it was the sisterhood who orchestrated the myth all along. The Fremen’s faith, while honest and pure, was misguided by this “manipulator of religions” beyond their ken.²⁶¹ Paul Atreides was gifted and trained to *operate* as a messiah and bring life to this myth, but the myth’s *origins* were crafted by the order: inclining Fremen culture to be easily radicalized and mobilized by a savior and as a tool of their higher power. When Paul becomes the Fremen’s “Mahdi” (“messiah” in Arabic) the book’s message becomes clear.²⁶² The messiah myth is best understood as a destructive complex; it preys on uninformed peoples, unable to see through its fictive nature. Accordingly, this idea is a second-tier view of religion: a matured reductionism.

Naturally, of course no one is arguing that illuminati are poisoning the cultural waters of the world with messiah stories across the ages. Conspiracy theories make unpromising arguments against the NX. A stronger version of this idea would be that the relative success of some ancient iteration of the hero myth, perhaps created by propagandists for a long-forgotten king and, had marginal success in a ruler’s political elevation and has thus been continually

²⁵⁹Frank Herbert, *Dune* (Radnor, PA: Chilton, 1965), 50, 55.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 197-9.

²⁶¹*Ibid.*, 192.

²⁶²*Ibid.*, 105.

reappropriated. After a great deal of time and saturation throughout cultures the world over, Christ simply stepped into these myths, very much like Paul Atreides did.

In this perspective, *all* cultures co-generated the story by trial and error. It just worked best. Like natural selection, mythic frames where the hero escaped death were selected out in favor of ones that conquered death through their own death; stories where they accept the call without divine assistance were set aside for those in which God reached down to empower them; philosophies that erred toward legalism or antinomianism were supplanted by middle approaches of intrinsic virtue flowing from divine love. The resoundingly good story was proven across the test of time. Incidentally, when a certain Galilean man at the turn of the first century proclaimed His message in perfect harmony with this story and lived out a tragic death in keeping with its main themes, any spectacular nature of His own person, attributes, and being must simply be understood as factors contributing to the cohesion He maintained with that story. Being in such perfect keeping with the story thus far, it could not be helped by those who followed Him but to invent, or even truly believe, that he also should rise and then to saturate the world with this idea.

Now, even if this may be fine internally,²⁶³ it fails to answer a single central item. Namely: *why* is this story particularly effective in galvanizing the human race? To observe a state of affairs as real for human beings and call this a “complex” does not explain away its perennial potency in human psychology. Continuing the hypothetical, even tracing the original transmission of this idea to an ancient king would insufficiently answer the question of its psychological grounding. Why was the story so effective? This points to a reality still more foundational than its emergence in history; although this false kenosis outlines an external,

²⁶³The prophetic data of the Hebrew scriptures is being intentionally avoided; although potentially evidential, as *special* and not *natural* revelations they lay beyond the targeted data of the NX apologetic. NX seeks to address these scriptural arguments through the next metaphysical question.

historical, origin of the Way, it fails to account for its internal, transcendent origin. Accordingly, the “myth-makers” argument, that Christ merely stepped into a human messiah complex, fails in explanatory scope and remains questionable in its explanatory power.

Psychic-Symbol: Contra “Natural Archetypes”

In consideration of what arguments could explain those internal devices, the strongest candidate appears to be the existence of innate, fundamental archetypes linked to the ontological genesis of human beings. As such, the historical Christ reveals a “real” intra-psychic phenomenon made evident by use of fitting symbols of the hero. This Psychic-Symbol view is particularly pernicious; unlike the second-tier, reductive approach to the NXD of the Myth-Maker view, it moves closer to a third-tier, holistic approach, implementing Christ in both name and even in some doctrine to generate an antichrist, man-centered, natural religion. Both Campbell and Huxley approach the data from this angle. Huxley uplifts physical sacraments as ties to the transcendent, but holds one should not overly attach to them.²⁶⁴ Campbell states that:

We do not particularly care whether [...] Jesus Christ ever actually lived. Their stories are what concern us: and these stories are so widely distributed over the world [...] that the question of whether this or that local carrier of the universal theme may or may not have been a historical, living man can only be of secondary importance.²⁶⁵

This kenotically-inverted view to the NXD has gained recent acclaim in the work of Jordan B. Peterson. He apprehends humanity psychologically as did Campbell (and Huxley to some extent), yet integrates a stronger amount of biblical material. Thus, he taps into the cultural familiarity of biblical stories to find psychological principles that better people’s daily lives. Naturally, faithful Christians who are plagued with jaded reproaches of their faith by a scientific

²⁶⁴Huxley, *The Perennial*, 267-9.

²⁶⁵Campbell, *The Hero*, 197-8.

and nihilistic Western culture (second tier) find his biblical self-help a welcomed thing. At first pass, any promotion of the Bible or Christian ideas is thought commensurate with the salvific gospel. Integration of the sacred by Peterson becomes a haven for Christians to feel at home in the secular world. Yet, this ideology may be an example of third-tier pseudo-kenosis. Hence, it is most deceptive. A use of Christ's centrality that subtly flips kenosis back upon the self, is the core of the false.²⁶⁶ Thus, Peterson's view of the NXD should be considered further.

In his initial academic work, Peterson details what his lectures accomplish in laymen's terms: showing how Christ fits into an applied psychological framework for apprehending and responding to reality properly. He argues that human beings are metaphysically organized around Jungian-style archetypes: deeply rooted, phylogenetically instantiated, models of behavior inseparably linked with humanity's evolutionary development.²⁶⁷ Archetypes allow humans to connect with the Real more meaningfully than scientific reductions because reality appears psychologically constituted for humans: by structures of valence. This suggests that the relationship to the world humans primarily hold is one of function, purpose, or meaning, not as mere collections of *things*.²⁶⁸ Second tier views allow for initial clarity, but one must move to the holistic third tier to find peace. In other words, when a person first looks at a car, they do not see its parts (e.g., axle, wheels, seats) nor even its totality (e.g., as a car), but first perceive its emergent valence (e.g., "that which gets me around" or "my sense of freedom"). People see the

²⁶⁶In fairness to Peterson that his appropriations of biblical data seem to be done in earnest. His recent statements involve his wife's witness of Christ to him; as she is a believer, and if a husband can be sanctified by the prayers of a believing wife (1 Cor. 7:14-16), Christians ought also to pray that he uses his voice in the popular ear to denounce humanly oriented means of self-salvation, which are otherwise detrimentally interlinked with his work.

²⁶⁷Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 105.

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 149-50.

archetype of the car: a kind of platonic form rooted in and accessed through biology rather than through spirit. It exists in metrics of value and functions toward a real and final purpose.

Peterson considers Christ to be the most sublime archetype of human growth, perfection, life's meaning, and connecting with the Real.²⁶⁹ The name and idea of Christ holds power today because a metaphysically real archetype-Christ is actively at work within human beings, transcending any second-tier nihilism they impose on reality. These structures retain value not by locating the Real, but by correctly estimating the real archetype (e.g., Christ) within humanity and appreciating reality in light of them. Thus, this mode of interpreting the Christological data makes a fatal flaw; dealing only with the present experience of the human moment, no room is left to appraise the historical nature of Christ as connected with this archetype.

In an almost neo-gnostic disconnect, the Psychic-Symbol view of the NXD correctly observes the attraction of Christ across history to be a timeless spiritual force.²⁷⁰ However, the question is still raised: *why Jesus?* Should the ordering principle of all reality (the Logos of the West and the Tao of the East) be appended by the human sphere through various agents,²⁷¹ what has that got to do with Christ, a person rooted in a tangible, moment in time? This is where this natural-archetypes, for all their subtlety, comes up short.

Without connection to Christ's historicity, His name would merely do what was done before Him. He simply stands as a placeholder for the metaphysically transcendent Way, Logos, and Tao that brings fullness of natural life. Yet, if seeking this Way is now inseparably identified with Christ's legacy, even this maladaptation of the NXD provides grounds for acceptance of the

²⁶⁹Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 369-70.

²⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 384.

²⁷¹*Ibid.*, 100.

gospel; if the Christ of history is indeed the *lapis philosophorum*²⁷² which all seek after as their manner of spiritual metamorphosis, one would do well to heed Him fully and not exchange His council for a reduced natural religion. It may be the case that all nature is renewed through fire,²⁷³ and that without the flame of Christ's kenotic mortification there can be no apothecic deliverance. However, it does not seem that case that any "obedience to the universal logos can contradict the concrete logos"²⁷⁴ as manifested in tangible reality. Christ as a personal tool for transmutation to godhood is incompatible with His calling to be poured-out as a tool fit for the hand of God.

False-Christ: Contra Summa

These two former counter arguments fail for opposing and overlapping reasons: the myth-maker lacks transcendent ground, and the psychic-symbol lacks historical ground. Thus, a final argument seeks to combine their strengths. This is the False-Christ view. An inverted mirror of the revealed Christ, it existentially apprehends a transcendent archetypal-Christ to be that metaphysical reality which generates the myth and preserves its integrity until a historical Christ happened to fulfill them. At the risk of throwing in the towel, it must be asked: what is this position's meaningful difference with the salvific view? To accept this False Christ, one concedes the metaphysical reality of a hero with whom human beings must unite, as well as the historical occurrence of Jesus as a heroic exemplar whose power and legacy endures today.²⁷⁵ NX certainly holds much in common; yet departs on one obvious point: the resurrection.

²⁷²Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 445.

²⁷³Ibid., 491.

²⁷⁴Johnson, "Christology as a Function of Epistemology," 130.

²⁷⁵Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 427.

This summative rebuttal attempts hold facts without entailing any unwanted beliefs. It holds NXD insufficient to evince the resurrection. However, it is clear this claim simply ignores any demands the NXD creates and is unwilling to observe the void at the center of its puzzle.

Firstly, the defender of this False Christ view must be pinned down on this matter: what is the nature of the salvation, deliverance, or rebirth that RP intends to attain? If a merely physical and natural end, where do its claims of *ultimate value* enter? This comes from without, not within. If the salvation something spiritual or transcendent, how does it achieve this while limited to natural means? Without an event that bridges the natural and the beyond, such as is the resurrection, why the fuss about heroes and union with psychological gods? With a resurrection, however, the heroic swells up in the soul. With a real story, a real myth, the natural means that conduct humanity's sensations of the transcendent are affirmed. Without it, a dark place indwells the mind: a closet hiding the monster of futility. One must forever avoid it, lest its fictions are found illusory, and by doubt it loses even its functionality. In the revealed view, it is not reality that is suppressed but the self at conflict with it. In the false, one stuffs away their phantom and pretends at life; in the true, one realizes that reality is frightening and beyond their control: they must not hide in the closet themselves. The truly heroic lay in facing this mystery of Christ and stepping into its reality.

Secondly, one must consider what Christ says of His own rising: its need and reality. While these two counter arguments have venerated the historical Christ in accordance with His candidacy as physical ground for the transcendent, they ignore the historical teachings He gave about this accordance. In so doing, what could possibly supply this physical-metaphysical link apart from resurrection: not just resuscitation, but His ascension to a higher eternal life? Jesus is clearly seen to teach that His one great sign to the world would be that "just as Jonah was three

days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). This so clearly implied resurrection, that His own disciples told Jesus off for saying such absurd things; He had to correct their error (Matt. 16:5). Like the modern mind, they reasoned that death is final: to die is to fail.

Contrary to popular thought, an actual resurrection flabbergasted their reasoning just as it would someone today.²⁷⁶ When Jesus said ““The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day,”” the disciples “were greatly distressed” (Matt. 17:22-23). Any propitiator of the false-Christ argument is left in an awkward position if they do not wish to avoid Jesus’ historical teachings. Why would a great teacher believe or say such things about themselves? Naturalistic or even psychologically emergent perspectives do not allow for a physical resurrection to occur; yet if less than a physical resurrection was implied (or eventually occurred) why the bewilderment of His disciples? It seems that a rejection of the resurrection lay not in the expressed bewilderment at its miraculous nature, though indeed it was a miracle. It rests instead in a preference to go on believing what one likes about reality: a real resurrection removes the heroic process from a fantasy that one manipulates in their mind and moves it into a dangerous reality one must face down.

The false-Christ theory fails to give full justice to the very Jesus it claims to have operated as the hero of history; anything justifying the metaphysical He supposedly reflects is sidestepped. What basis remains for His kenotic way to hold value for the soul? This unitive perspective presumes transcendence *a priori* and adjudicates this presumption by *a posteriori* appeal to the historical Christ as its model. Yet this seems inverted. How may a good person, even a perfectly good one, provide credible evidence that the recurrent path transcends the

²⁷⁶France, *The Gospel*, 620-1.

merely natural? Instead, should a hero conquer death, this alone would demonstrate their capability to bridge the natural to the transcendent. The recurrent is proven effective: a perfect following thereof resulted in the transcendence of He who championed it.

No natural enemy outmatches death. Death is nature's chosen champion. Thus, no miracle short of overpowering death makes credible a person's claim to powers beyond nature (or beyond death). In essence, Hume's classic argument²⁷⁷ regarding the historical inability to prove the resurrection is the same grounds for contending that this alone could sufficiently convince anyone that the eminently transcendent had broken immanently through to them.

Unless the resurrection is ruled out presuppositionally, no strings of other unjustified natural events are more likely.²⁷⁸ The most probable event the evidence *points toward* should not be confused with the most probable thing the historical evidence *allows*. The impossible appears a weightier claim over naturally-possible but unjustified alternatives. The needful reality of the true hero to lay down the bridge for the rest of humanity to have a real metamorphosis eviscerates natural alternatives from being plausible and contending explanations. Without resort to relativistic internal estimations of the kenotic way that lack metaphysical transcendence (myth-maker), or by departures from reliance on the historical grounding of Christ and His teachings (psychic-model), what explains the explosion and unstoppable power of the faith that followed His crucifixion? The resurrection of Christ is as impossible to gain historiographical verification of as it is impossible to avoid philosophical consent to the historical necessity of. Therefore, this unitive counter-argument also fails beside the null-hypothesis of the resurrection.

²⁷⁷R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 33.

²⁷⁸Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, ch.5, sec.4, para.17-27.

Applications

Turning the corner from these strongest counter arguments, encapsulated by the false Christ view of the recurring path, it then remains for the NX apologist to employ secular language and cultural knowledge thereof toward discussions of the humility and saving faith (viz., the way of kenosis). Those outside of the Church who may not respond to Christianized language, may still have a sense for the essential Christological core. So long as this core is not abandoned, and the false deviations are cut off along the way, this natural-cultural evidence remain conducive toward the revealed Christ and His resurrection as needful toward salvation. Such wide nets require a careful knife. Yet, Christians are encouraged to attain and practice this art of Natural Christology as a faithful way to steward the legacy of the apostles in their witness to this current, jaded but questioning, age of the world.

Should God open a door for revealing this mystery of Christ, what may this door be, but the particular apprehension of nobility by kenosis as the perennial journey of humankind? What is this perennial journey but identification with the true hero? Who is this hero but the historical Christ? How may Christ be proven to be both man and God, the bridge between worlds, the justifier of the ungodly, the friend of sinners, the promised hope for those who abide in Him, and the exalted and narrow gate to God, but by His resurrection from the dead? Natural Christology rightly discerns the line between the saved and the lost. By clearing away the baggage that obstructing the plain view of Christ's nobility, its method allows the apologist to know how they "ought to answer each person" and to walk "in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time" (Col. 4:5-6).

Chapter 9: Conclusion

*“What we have of God will be our real humility,
because humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all.
The holiest will always be the humblest.”*

—Andrew Murray²⁷⁹

The grand turn of the soul to seek its deepest need has been documented across culture and time by the perennial philosophy: a central pattern developing from each instantiation of civilization and religion. Humanity’s monomythic story marks a quest to identify with the hero, and their oneness with God, to share in His conquest over death and to share His prize: eternal life. As these themes find perfect and surpassing nexus in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture, it is little wonder His legacy has taken the world by storm.

The Logos, the Tao, & the Way

In both the East and the West, philosophers and religious thinkers have long discerned a central principle at the heart of all things. Some divine Logos transcends and unites all things toward purpose, life, and order. Some preexisting Tao pervades the natural world, defines its character, laws, and patterns. This one thing is evinced by the balance and beauty emerging from the cosmos; when known, it illuminates a truth that tempers us across our lives. That Logos is a fire, which mortifies and makes holy renewal through death into life. That Tao is a river, which guides the soul to pour itself out and brings them into accord with the way things are. That Way is a light, which eternally calls for kenosis and union with the infinite. It forms a mystery at the

²⁷⁹Murray, *Humility*, 63.

heart of human beings: how may the unmaking of self, turn it holy? Why does kenosis attract all when it also demands all?

But the nature of this Way sensed within, guides the soul to locate itself where the Way obtains without: in the historical Christ. Even within the bounds of natural and cultural evidence, one may discern where the metaphysical and transcendent kenosis abductively leads to all that Christ proclaimed and symbolized. The historical account of an inbreaking hero is fulfilled in Jesus' life. And the resurrection stands between these two heads: for the historical hero of the physical world there meets and affords complete value to the other-worldly philosophy of trust outside oneself. As secular apprehensions of divine Logos and the eternal Tao speak to one single and ancient Way, the apologist must employ the perennial mystery shown in the historical hero of Christ through Natural Christology in their witness of His truth, goodness, and beauty.

Heart of Christlikeness

The love of Christ must compel the apologist to leave no obstacle for the searching soul but the stone of Christ. This Stone is a sufficient and sure foundation, being merely the above-surface peak of the fathomless Rock of Ages. The soul who trips over this critical matter is the only soul outside of Christ and outside of salvation, while the soul who trips over Christ's *name* or over Christianity as an *institution*, but accepts the gospel *core* retains a saving faith. Here, then, is the final matter of all true or false religion: *reliance upon* or *divestiture of* self. Any faith truly without oneself is upon Christ regardless of its name, while faith without Christ is truly upon oneself regardless of its mask. All true practice equates to a trust-fall on Christ's oneness with God on one's behalf. This is faith. This is humility. This is kenosis.

When lived, it grows the fruit of His Spirit: a kenosis that abides in His vine. This kenosis “means giving up self, taking the place of perfect nothingness before God.”²⁸⁰ Such making nothing of oneself by humility makes one enraptured with, structured by, and oriented toward the trifold nobility of Christ: holiness in life on earth, death, and life thereafter. It shifts one’s concern from conforming reality to their liking toward being conformed by the highest marker of reality: who is God.²⁸¹ No disguising of self as God will do; He must be that on which the self stands. So, this total faith is exactly like a trust-fall. No one imagines that an act of ceasing to stand, or of ceasing to grasp self, is work, law, or labor. Rather, it is the end of work: the end of striving. Any attempt to accomplish kenosis fails at the start. It is a *trust* fall; but then, a fall unto what? It is fruitless to imagine selfless dependence is prudent unless a sure foundation lay outside of self to fall on, a sure ground to stand on, or strong arms to entrust our souls unto.

The perennial philosophy, which pervades the faith and practice of humankind, may be summated as attempting this art of kenosis: a pouring-out of oneself unto something transcendent. So too, it seems the monomyth saturating human stories speaks to something higher; we become a hero only by trust in the Way, the *true* hero. Yet, if these are sound estimates, a true Savior-hero must fulfill kenosis in reality to actualize them. Only then may others emulate His way, transcending death through death, and so become tethered inexorably to the life He gained with God.

Reflecting on the prevalence of Christ through history, how perfectly His account resolves the dichotomy of divine and human heroes, and considering the answer He offers to the perennial mystery of the soul’s destiny, one is provided an abductive case for the revealed Christ

²⁸⁰Murray, *Humility*, 84.

²⁸¹Lewis, *The Abolition*, 77.

of Scripture to be the only hero of true kenosis. This similitude observed, the apologist may confront the merits and true glimmers of kenosis that reside in the myths and religions of the world as reflections fit to guide all He has called to join the real story. Should any truly seek to lose themselves in and toward God, the Way has been made for them. If this Way obtains as the true path for humanity to ascend, then Christ's resurrection must obtain in history as its descending anchor in humanity.

Ever After

Therefore, let the Christian conversation with regard to natural knowledge of Christ be reopened. One must be tactful in navigating the apologetic value of this approach: extending a hand to the lost that validates their innate sense of Christological need, while carefully maintaining a robust commitment to the ultimate exclusivism of Christ. Wrongful applications of these insights and capitulations do wage war against this cause. However, as the perennial story itself implies, one always risks destruction on the road toward abiding in the living God.

At the heart of Christlikeness lay this kenosis: a holy trajectory of humble faith by which humanity is brought through death to immortality. Yet, what distinguishes deaths-unto-death from that death-to-self which finds eternal life? Should this needful kenosis really exist, its safe passage is afforded only by the resurrection of Jesus in history. Being perfect God and perfect man, He remains the Way for all men to find God. Should one merely empty themselves into nothing, they die; but should they pour themselves through the narrow gate of Jesus Christ, they share in the glory prepared for Him by the Father above. Let everything be counted as nothing compared with the surpassing glory of this eternal mystery! At long last, revealed at the center of all ages, the soul has found its worth in Him.

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