

ICEBERGS, SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

About People, World Religions and Christianity

By Michael Spyker © 2007 Text Only – for audio plus over 100 photos see website

Section 1

Hello, and welcome to this presentation about icebergs, spirituality and religion. If you are interested in human potential, the spiritual side of it, you will probably enjoy what is to follow. Please don't let the word religion turn you off. I'm not too keen on it myself but have learned to look past the usual objections. Many of the examples of how religion can go wrong are real enough. I will mention some of that. However, let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Your willingness to explore has much to do with how adventurous you are in matters of the spirit. If you don't believe in a Reality that leads beyond what you can experience through your five senses, with your feelings and your mind, then the question of religion is not one that will have meaning for you. If, however, your intuition tells you that there may well be a Reality out there that is beyond and different from earthly existence, but somehow still connected, then you will have to make a decision. You can place your spiritual intuition in the too-hard basket for now, or you can enter the search for spiritual meaning. That search is what I would like to talk about.

Let's consider the iceberg. What could that possibly have to do with the existence of a spiritual reality that may be out there somehow? It has not really anything to do with it at all. Icebergs are cold, dead and frozen. Still, the concept of an iceberg may be useful in explaining what it means to be a person living in a world that has spiritual dimensions.

You probably are aware that only about ten percent of an iceberg sticks out above the sea and thus is exposed to the weather. The way I live my life is like that. That ten percent of the iceberg that is visible could be likened to human consciousness. What we are conscious of only represents part of a person. People have a depth to their souls that is much greater. Depth psychology has proven that convincingly. Much of me exists beneath the surface, so to speak.

Similar to the weather hitting the top of the iceberg everyday life hits the awareness of people. It happens at the 10 percent consciousness level. Of course the subconscious is affected as well, but this remains mostly hidden. Daily life can be rather intense and demanding. It takes up much of our energy, particularly in our modern and fast moving world. It is quite understandable then that many people are, in iceberg terms, almost completely weather focused.

The tip of the iceberg is carried by the 90% that's below the surface. There may be a storm raging with winds whipping up the waves but below all is calm. The iceberg drifts along slowly on the deep currents of the ocean. Many writers, in explaining their experiences with divine reality, have pointed

to a deep calm in their souls once they had learned to come in touch with it. That takes some doing, but highlights the ability in people to reach out to what is beyond everyday experiences.

Another interesting observation can be made about the iceberg drifting in the sea. Both the iceberg and the sea are made of water. However, were the iceberg to have a consciousness, it might well think the sea to be very different from its own frozen mass. The reality of the sea, and its importance, may not at all be recognized by the iceberg. It reminds us of people and their perceptions on spiritual matters. If only they would be willing to explore the nature and influences of realities that are beyond their immediate consciousness, they would discover a deep spirituality, and mystery would enter into their lives.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why is this iceberg analogy helpful or why not?
- Why may it be difficult to accept that the 'sea' is for real?
- What's attractive about mystery, or the mystical?

Section 2

A good question to ask is whether the modern pace of life drags people away from their spiritual capacity. Technology makes the human race very able to look after itself and the need for a higher power to lend a hand is greatly diminished. Many people are confident that challenges of the future will be overcome towards a better world. Still, considering the wars, dictatorships and famines around the globe human ability to improve life for everyone and everything may well be questioned. In their self-sufficiency people are increasingly taken up solely with ego and identity questions, with their 10% consciousness. Little time is left for deeper reflections. They may acknowledge a certain need for human spirituality but are unable to engage with it effectively. Not a great loss, they would think. If only that were true.

Spirituality and religion have always played a major role in human history. For thousands of years people have accepted the challenge of the '90%' as a call from their deeper selves. It has resulted in many belief systems and a number of major religions. Rituals have been created in recognition and insights have been written down by those claiming special revelation. There is a wealth of sacred texts available which believers have used for good and for evil. Much good has come forth from religion. But also wars have been justified based on religious writings, and still are. Religious people aren't necessarily always the ones to be trusted with the well-being of the earth. It highlights the confusing nature of religion.

Every religion has sacred texts and rituals to give it human significance – a frame of reference, if you like. These are gateways to the divine. It is, however, very possible to attend to these rituals and read the texts with a 'top of the iceberg' mentality. It results in a culturally conditioned religious involvement that tends to worship a god of one's own preference. God then has become a vehicle

mostly to suit personal wishes and to sooth anxieties. To people in leadership it can bring a fair amount of personal power, a power that may be abused. All this may look religious, but is it genuinely spiritual? In fact, it is not. When people explain that they consider themselves spiritual but not religious, they are usually communicating their unwillingness to buy into this kind of religious culture.

That brings its own problems, for how in that case do you proceed if you would like to take your spirituality seriously? The number of books on offer at bookstores on the topic is enormous. How helpful those writings are really, without personal guidance from within a proven religious framework, remains to be seen. You may end up merely feeding your ego with spiritual stuff and still not get much down below the 10% level. It can lead to the 'God-is-me' idea, which is an illusion. Following ideas presented by the major religions and taking those seriously is wiser and safer. Perhaps religion need not be as negative an experience as popular perception has it.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- What would you expect to gain from rituals and sacred texts?
- Why can a few bad apples turn you off apples altogether?
- Are there ways to overcome such hindrances?

Section 3

It is interesting that German scholar Friedrich Heiler has recognized seven basic insights that the major world religions have in common. It shows that though each religion can be quite different in its religious perspectives, similar discoveries were made by their prophets about the positive nature of the Other Reality, about the divine. An evil side in spiritual reality, that seeks to destroy, is recognized as well.

The seven common insights are as follows.

1. There is, in fact, a transcendental Reality – a reality that extends beyond human reality.
2. People can connect with that Reality - the Reality can present itself to them.
3. The nature of the Reality is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness and goodness.
4. The Reality is one of love, mercy and compassion.
5. The way to engage most truly with the Reality is through a change of heart, a correct self-regard, and prayer.
6. Loving one's neighbor and even one's enemies is important.
7. Being involved with the love found in the Reality brings divine knowledge. A true connectedness becomes possible, that may lead to being at one with the divine.

These seven common insights may not be that easily detected unless you are quite familiar with each of the major religions. The insights are imbedded into the sacred texts, rituals, religious traditions and history. Each of the seven points presents a corporate challenge, to people as a group, as well as a

personal one. A truly meaningful spirituality is always personal and the divine is making that invitation. The believer is asked to become less self-centered and more other-centered. There is little to boost the ego. In fact, the whole dynamic seems to point away from much of what western society suggests as the way to being your own person. Can anyone actually live to the level of this divine mercy and charity? That's always been the major question. And, if the whole thing sets you up to fail, why bother? That's a fair call.

Some writers suggest that modern people are so entrenched into their 10% consciousness that the idea of seeking a deeper meaning in life has become quite foreign to them. They will pay lip service to the possibility of becoming more spiritual, but have no idea how to take even the first step. Some will find a way of adding a spiritual dimension to their lives, but it is mostly their ego-centricity dressed up with a spiritual veneer. Others become involved with the dark side of the spiritual realm and proclaim that to be the way of the spirit. None of this meets the foundational insights presented by the major world religions. It may therefore be considered inadequate as a way in which to release people from the illusions and desires that keep them anchored into a limiting existence. One that doesn't set free from the demands of the ego self, but that rather entrenches it. A spiritual journey towards real wellbeing involves the unlearning of selfish ways and the discovery of a renewed self. It's a release from ego limitations into personal freedom. That's what the seven common insights point towards. There is no other way in which to arrive at human potential in all its fullness.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- What do you conclude from the major religions having seven common insights?
- How helpful, or not, is it that the human ego is powerful?
- To be liberated from your negative self, what does that mean?

Section 4

The road to true spiritual freedom is difficult. Actually, if left to human effort alone, it's impossible. Help from the divine Reality is needed. Exactly how that help is acquired differs per religion. The extent to which such help is perceived as being available also varies greatly. The more the divine is perceived as having 'personal' qualities, the more the believer is encouraged to seek an interaction that involves dynamics like being known and understood.

The most personal are the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Monotheistic means a belief in one God rather than the many thousands of Hinduism, or the non-entity, the void, of Buddhism. In monotheism God is seen as having attributes that reflect what it means to be human. That is, God having a will and a mind; the description of God as King and Ruler, as the merciful One. However, the greater reality of God is very much beyond those concepts and exists in a realm outside of human perception. Nevertheless, God's presence on earth can be felt and connected with by the believer.

As stated in the seven common insights held by the world's major religions the nature of the divine is love, mercy and compassion. It is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness and goodness. In Christianity such attributes are expressed by God sending Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to deliver humanity and creation from the destructive power of evil once and for all. The immediate outcome of this is not yet obviously apparent today and points to an age to come.

Though having some knowledge of the world's main religions, I'm not qualified to speak for them first hand. That I can do only for the Christian faith, explaining how someone following it will be enabled to reach a potentially rich spiritual fulfillment. But this focus on Christianity may not suit you. In that case, I wish you well. Hopefully you gained some benefit from the points made thus far. If you would like to find out how an interaction with the Christian God can make a real difference, please stick with me a little longer. I promise not to hammer you with the importance of church attendance or a host of do-goody regulations. The grand design of the Christian God's redemptive plan goes much further than that. The benefits are far more personal than warming a pew on Sunday.

Furthermore, it will be of little use if you are approaching what is following with your mind only. Surely there are good benefits in thinking through information, but when discussing religion, thinking alone is not sufficient to gain enough insight. Engaging with spirituality and the religious always involves the intuitive, the non-rational, as well. Mystery is at the heart of the religious quest. Those who welcome mystery find this exciting and the best part of what it means to be spiritual. There are believers, and plenty of them, who espouse to a particular religion while not actually taking the full mystery of it on board. They are selective in what they consider to make sense about their faith. That may not be a problem when dealing with religious matters that are of secondary importance, but it becomes serious when the fundamentals are questioned and misunderstood. It's amazing in our modern scientific world how quickly rationality seeks to stake a major claim. On this basis many modern people reject any belief in what religion has on offer altogether. Books suggesting that god is better off dead are plentiful. These writers are welcome to their point of view. It's like the iceberg deciding there is no sea after all. Of course, there is an important place for rational thinking in religion. Libraries full of theological books testify to that. But thinking alone has its limits and a deep spirituality requires engagement with deep mysteries.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why is it so difficult to become truly free?
- What are the benefits and the dangers of rational thinking?
- Why would people shun mystery in their lives?

Section 5

What then is the divine design that Christian faith is based on? How does it understand divine Reality to interact with the world and with human existence in particular? I will try to explain the essence of this without becoming sidetracked by a myriad of interesting questions that could be asked.

I will not back up my explanation with a great number of biblical references though that would be possible. Such a study you are welcome to undertake later. It's well worth the effort.

The first point I would like to make is that in referring to God we are speaking about the *uncreated* – that which has always been. Now here's a mystery indeed that can blow your mind. The mind is not suited to this. Always having been present, outside the boundaries of time and matter, these are ideas the mind cannot fathom. Immediately you are confronted with a step of faith. You simply have to believe the uncreated Reality of God to be real. You may sense the truth of it perhaps by looking at the marvels of nature and the universe. But it's an intuition. You are thrown in the deep end, so to speak. Somewhat like the iceberg that detects it floats in water, but hasn't the first idea of what the sea is really like and how far and deep it reaches.

The second point of importance with regard to the Christian worldview is that there exists a heavenly realm, with angels and dark angels, and this is a *created* realm, as is the realm of time and matter, the existence of our universe. These *created* realms somehow exist in the *uncreated* God. Humanity with its ability to enquire very deeply into the realm of the universe by scientific means likes to suggest that the idea of a divine influence is an illusion. It is true that the existence of God cannot be scientifically proven. Fortunately a good number of scientists are honest enough to admit that the idea of God has validity when considering the marvels they discover in their research. Still, that isn't proof. To accept that the universe holds together in God requires intuition and a step of faith. The idea that intuition is a second rate human ability when compared to rationality is wrong. Both are valid ways of inquiry.

So there's the uncreated and the created. The nature of the uncreated is love and goodness and it is at peace. It is the created realm where the problems are. Problems, that stem from the existence of good and evil in the heavens and on earth. In the heavenly realm there are good and bad spiritual beings. On earth it's humans who have the moral capacity to practice good and evil. The real problem is much deeper though than human behavior. The very fabric of the earth has been infiltrated by evil like leaven saturates a loaf of bread. All people are subject to that, like it or not, and there is plenty of evidence about to prove that point. The degrading force of evil affects the very ability of nature to remain vibrant and survive. Eventually everything succumbs to death, which is the victory, not of evil over good, but of the dominance of evil in the created world. That's what Christianity believes.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why may people find it difficult to trust in the idea of having faith?
- Why are intuition and rationality of equal importance, or why not?
- If God is so good, there shouldn't be evil in the world. Really?

Section 6

Let's introduce another difficult concept that is central to Christianity. It's the idea of the One God who is actually three uncreated Persons together – the idea of the Trinity. The Trinity consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From a human perspective it's not possible that three persons are actually one. But why could this not be true for the uncreated realm where love and purpose are perfected to the point of complete unity? It's a rather beautiful idea that still falls well short of the complete reality of God, but at least it suggests a manageable human explanation.

An explanation, however, that presents the divine as being male which, again, is inadequate. Both female and male are represented in God, who in essence is genderless. The needed response in accepting all these ideas is a matter of faith in answer to a mystery. As is the biblical idea that the created realm exists *in* the Son of God. Somehow everything holds together *in* him and wouldn't exist apart from him. Again this a major statement to which an adequate rational response is not possible.

So, the created realm is under the destructive power of evil. In the heavens at one time a large number of angels rebelled against God and as a result became fully overcome and motivated by evil. These evil spirits are recognized by all religions. Christianity calls the leader of this demonic host Lucifer or Satan or the Devil. The demonic influence is felt in the heavens with continual warfare between God's angels and those of Satan, as well as on earth. It has terrible consequences. Human history is very much subject to the dynamics of good and evil and to consider what is happening in the world completely an outcome of human choices and actions is spiritually short sighted. There are spiritual forces in play. These forces influence human behavior in subtle but powerful ways.

As explained, the reality of evil, or sin as the Bible calls it, reaches deeper than just the spiritual realm connecting with human existence. The very fabric of nature has been infiltrated, how everything exists, lives and moves. If God is all powerful, and by nature a force of love, so completely opposite from evil, it stands to reason that God would wish to remedy the problem. But to nullify the power of evil effectively and eternally is not a simple matter. Being powerfully destructive on evil by just doing away with it, and destroying all that is influenced by it, was possible for God but lacked divine integrity. It has already been mentioned that creation exists *in* the Son of God and is not separate from God. To wipe it out as a failure is not what God is about. No, God wished to redeem the world rather than destroy it. The very legitimacy of the power of evil, after all there is a reason for its existence, needed to be defeated. It needed to be faced off once for all and at a level playing field. This is the field of the knowledge of good and evil. The field, that exists within the human person, who experiences good and evil as forces of influence. God's angels are fully good. Satan's host is fully evil. The only beings in the created realm that are asked to handle both these forces within themselves are people.

The Bible explains that human beings have been created in the image of God. An image close enough to the reality of God that it would be possible for God to present as a human being and thus access that playing field at which evil needed to be defeated. The Son of God in whom, as was mentioned earlier, creation holds together, accepted this task. He left his divinity and was born as a

baby in Bethlehem of a Jewish girl named Mary. It was a virgin birth. These days the advances in genetic engineering make the idea of a virgin birth not that incredible. God could easily have made this happen in Israel a few thousand years ago.

The child was named Jesus. His Father, though being spiritually present in the world, dwelled in heaven. His mother was of the earth. A child born to be divine as well as human, although his divinity was now subject to all the dynamics of the created world. It's the stuff science fiction thrives on. However in this case, it's not fiction at all, but absolute reality.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why might the idea of a God who is One and also Trinity be difficult to accept?
- What is your response to the personification of evil as dark angels while God's angels are working for good?
- The Son of God born as a baby is a mystery. How do you feel about this, also in light of what has been explained?

Section 7

In his early thirties Jesus Christ began to explain his heavenly Father publicly for a period of three years after which he was crucified as a criminal. His way of looking at things from God's perspective was insightful beyond common human ability. He performed miracles as a testimony of a higher power that was compassionate and could affect the world spiritually as well as physically. Jesus was highly critical of the Jewish leadership of his day. They could not see the validity of his declarations, particularly not the one in which he proclaimed himself to be the Son of God. That was a blasphemy punishable by death.

His band of followers was both amazed and horrified during the years they spent with Jesus. For them to come to grips with the reality of the man was a rollercoaster ride of insights and emotions. They were totally drawn by his compassion, his integrity and his obvious power to bless and heal. Their lives were changed beyond recognition from what he told them, asked of them, and enabled them to do. But getting the real measure of Jesus was something else altogether. Never walked there a man like this.

Before going public Jesus spent 40 days in the desert in fasting and praying facing down the temptations of Satan. He was offered supreme power over the earthly realm from the perspective of evil dominance. Jesus never questioned the legitimacy of this offer but declined the invitation. He had come to defeat the power of evil, not to embrace it. This defeat was finally achieved on the cross. It's not clear what happened there to Jesus physically, emotionally and spiritually beyond the normal suffering anyone exposed to such a barbaric death would experience. Jesus began his no-holds-barred struggle with evil the night before at a place called Gethsemane in a few hours of intense prayer that tested him to the limit. The spiritual forces against him were tremendous and an ordinary person

might have lost all sense of sanity. He felt alone and forsaken. Ever more so as his trial, the whipping, his thorny crown, the walk to Calvary and the crucifixion proceeded.

There hung the Son of God on a cross, degraded, defenseless and forsaken, even by his Heavenly Father, seemingly. What godly wisdom could possibly be behind this spectacle of evil? Evil, that terrible force, had managed to crucify onto death the Son of God in whom it had recognized a purity and compassion that it had not been able to conquer. But at its moment of triumph evil discovered itself unexpectedly utterly defeated. It was facing a human being of divine origin who was offering a level playing field at which good and evil could rage in battle. When the worst was happening to Jesus in body, soul and spirit he never allowed evil to invade his essential being. He took the full brunt of what the power of sin could throw at him but never capitulated. To that kind of defiance, to that level of mastery, Satan and his host had no answer. Jesus resisted to the point at which the fight was won, which ushered in his moment of death on the cross and ended his existence as a human being. The power of evil had been defeated. It was a lasting defeat that destroyed the moral legitimacy of evil everywhere once for all.

Those staring at Jesus in his agony did not understand any of this. After he died they took him down, laid him in a cave, and rolled a large stone before the opening. Any indication of what Jesus had actually achieved had to wait for a few days.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why might you expect the wisdom of God to be different from the way people tend to look at things?
- If you would have walked with Jesus, how might you have found to be him so very different?
- How does prayer expose a person to the spiritual realm, you think?

Section 8

The next step in God's divine plan is remembered at Easter Sunday. It is the day of Jesus' resurrection. He was dead, but now he is alive again. That had happened to Lazarus as well when Jesus performed a miracle and called him forth from the grave. Lazarus had been dead for four days. But the resurrection of Jesus was completely different from Lazarus. Jesus did not reappear as a human being to die again one day, as has happened to Lazarus. Jesus that Easter morning presented himself in a *newly created* body that to his followers may have looked quite similar to their own earthly bodies, but it was very different. How different we do not know. So different that Apostle Paul explained later that first Jesus appeared as a man born of the earth and at his resurrection as one born of heaven. It was the beginning of something altogether new. Jesus presented himself as a New Reality that had not before existed. One in which evil and suffering and death no longer would play a part. A New Creation of great magnitude had been ushered in that day of Jesus' resurrection. To the world and the whole of creation it promised a future beyond evil and death. A new heaven and a new earth will appear one day and that process has been in development from Resurrection Day, unseen to

human eyes but known to God. It is a process that is at work on earth even today and followers of Jesus are privileged to tap into its benefits spiritually – as we shall see.

Jesus' victory and appearing as the Man born of Heaven testifies to all of that. No wonder that Apostle Paul proclaimed Christianity to be meaningless without a correct understanding of the resurrection. People, who with the best of intentions declare themselves Christian, but admit to not believing that the resurrection actually happened, are missing the central point of their religion altogether. Jesus' resurrection stands as a testimony towards a wonderful eternal future for the world.

Though the human eye cannot see it, and science cannot confirm it, a New Beginning has infiltrated our present creation. Things have changed since Jesus' victory. This New Reality is not subject to death and is untouchable by evil. It is not on the road to perdition but guarantees eternal life for all that comes to exist in it, everyone who will be born of it. That's what Jesus was referring to when he proclaimed the famous words: 'You must be born again!' A new birth is on offer, not of the earth and the flesh, but of the spirit. It is a spiritual birth in the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, who comes to reside with the believer in a special way.

Different perspectives have been presented by the church over the ages on how to enter into this born again existence such as by baptism or a prayer of repentance. These are important aspects of the Christian faith to follow through on. However, to experience the dynamics of the New Reality already now here on earth is foremost a matter of the heart. Anyone who humbly seeks the presence of Jesus in this life, wishing to learn from him and follow his instructions, can be sure of being born of the Holy Spirit. It's rather a simple step to take that may feel overly simple perhaps. Can a holy God accept me just like that without reproach, warts and all? Yes, because of what Jesus has achieved. But why is my ego standing up in protest against it, warning me to be careful? A step of faith is not the stuff egos are all that keen on. That's unfortunate for Christian spirituality seeks to help and reform the ego towards greater wellbeing.

After his resurrection Jesus presented himself on earth for forty days and was taken up into heaven from then on to be present in the world only in spirit. One day he will return as he left, but nobody knows when and what exactly that will entail.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- A person in the likeness of earth, but with a spiritual body. Would that be possible?
- Anyone would love to see a world without evil and death. Why is the Christian offer of this coming about so outrageous?
- What is simple, it seems, and what is not simple, about becoming a follower of Christ?

Section 9

To Apostle John, who walked with Jesus for three years, the essence of the Christian faith is based on two undeniable facts. The first one: that God is love and that followers of Jesus must love God in turn and also their neighbor. Love is a rather emotive word in our present world. How do I know that I love God, if it doesn't feel much like how I expect love to be? To John that's not difficult. A love for God means keeping God's commandments. Basically it means living a caring and unselfish life; not perfect, just doing your best. That's not beyond anyone. Secondly, John insists on a clear acceptance of Jesus being the Son of God who came from heaven in spirit to be birthed by Mary as a human being; fully divine and fully human. Any refuting of that is anti Christian and John refers to such as the spirit of the antichrist. That spirit opposes the reality of Christ by presenting ideas that lead away from the full truth about Jesus and the Christian faith. It did so already in John's days and does these days as well. Christian scholarship can be tainted by an antichristian spirit and then is either unaware of it, or openly seeks to reshape the truth held so dear by the first Christians. That is not helpful, however clever it can appear.

Being a Christian on your own terms in accordance to what you consider reasonable will not release the spiritual benefits on offer by Jesus Christ. His mystery can be explained only to a point. It's important that a good explanation is possible, as I am trying to do right now, but finally for a full commitment to Christian spiritual reality a step beyond the rational is needed. The very nature of spirituality involves the intuitive and the mystical. A Christian must learn to live with that and be comfortable. In the process many questions may arise. Like, when deciding to follow Jesus how will that feel? Or, how do I know, whether he's present in my life or not? Can I expect God to illicit emotions that confirm that presence?

Yes, God affects the emotions but it's not really essential as a proof of divine presence. I may be sure that as I decide to follow Jesus, and talk with him about my life in prayer, the New Reality dimension born into my person is being nurtured and strengthened regardless of whether it feels that way. Over time I will notice that I am managing life better. It doesn't offer me a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but rather a steady improvement in the integration of myself as a person. I know what I seek to be about and who to call on in prayer for support of a spiritual nature. It brings meaning and hope into my life.

Developing as a Christian takes time. It involves reading about Christianity and input from other Christians who can give good advice. Usually these people will be found in a church or group that meets to worship Jesus. Finding a church community is not essential to being born of God's spirit, but it becomes important when seeking to grow in faith and learn the essentials about that. There are many good people in the church who can guide in how to best partake of everything Jesus has on offer.

In closing a few comments about two kinds of spirituality that Christian tradition has developed. This is a broad distinction with much possible overlapping. The first kind takes an affirmative,

positive approach that is attractive with bright singing and lots of high energy expressions. It dovetails well with modern culture and its greatly valued 'can-do' attitude – definitely 'can-do' with the help of God for whom all things are possible. It's a fine way of being a Christian with as a drawback that it can become self focused more than God affirming. God isn't all energy and action all the time. God actually dwells in rest and quietness.

With that in mind another kind of Christian spirituality has developed over the ages and it has been known as the negative way. Not that there is anything negative about it. Here negative refers to stepping away from all the busyness and leaving it be. It aims to become still before God without the human ego continually taking the upper hand. It is the reflective and contemplative side of Christianity. It may seem similar to Buddhism, but in its connectedness with a God who is relational, which is very unlike Buddhism, it is quite different. This more reflective spiritual approach helps you in becoming truly yourself in Christ by allowing God to work the necessary transformation quietly. In a busy world that can be very attractive.

Well, that's it from me for now. You may remember the seven aspects found in common amongst the world religions. Christianity fulfils them all and much beyond. It's the most personal of faiths presenting a God of love who cares to solve the problem of evil and death at a terrible cost to Jesus, the Son of God. A God you can relate to in the knowledge that you are most welcome. A dynamic of the Holy Spirit will be placed into your life that literally is 'out of this world' and of the world to come. A dynamic that is active even now in those who follow Jesus. It has healing powers against anxiety, despair and guilt and brings a new meaning to life and real hope. It is wonderfully good news. Hopefully you can find someone suitable to discuss this spiritual treasure with. People support is essential in spiritual matters, as is becoming familiar with the insights and instructions of sacred texts, in this case the Bible supported by Christian writings.

Be assured that becoming and being a Christian is not difficult. If you accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and what that really means, and decide that 'yes, that's for me', then just tell him in a simple prayer. The Holy Spirit will enter your life and be with you from then on. You may be sure of that. The inclination you feel to take this step of faith originates with God anyway. All you're asked to do in future is to be a non-selfish and caring person; to appreciate the support and power of the Holy Spirit within you and to keep the Scriptures as your guide. Once deciding to follow him you would wish to know more about Jesus anyway, I would think; about what he taught - and take that seriously. You're welcome to make mistakes although you will try to live wisely. Simply owe up to your mistakes in a genuine prayer and Jesus wipes the slate clean. Also set it right with people. Enthusiasm in life is allowed and you're not asked to become boring – quite the opposite. Just make sure to talk with Jesus for a while every day. He will communicate somehow.

Although spirituality engages with mystery, don't ignore common sense in all you do and decide. And, find a church or some Christians to support you. They will bring a larger perspective to what I have been sharing. That is needed as long as it encourages you and doesn't become a burden with unnecessary rules. Apostle John explains that anyone who stays close to Jesus will know how to live

rightly anyway as the Holy Spirit will make that clear in a person's conscience. It's the best way to live.

It isn't science, it's spirituality we've been talking about. Living solely by rational ideas is neither attractive nor clever. Thank God for the mysteries in life. All the very best with it and thank you for listening.

Reflection/Discussion Starters

- Why is it helpful that loving God is practical rather than a necessary feeling?
- Any idea why people would consider following Jesus for the too hard basket?
- What would decide for you whether you will live as a Christian?

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– about People, World Religions and Christianity

By Michael Spyker

APPENDIX - Selected Bible references in support of the text

The easiest modern Bible to read is *The Message* by Eugene Peterson from which these quotes are taken. Reference is made to book in the Bible the quote came from and which chapter. A far more in-depth study can be made but that's not the purpose at present.

Monotheism

Mark 12

'Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.'

Trinity

The New Testament refers to God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit constantly as the divine presence in the world. Apostle Paul ends his second letter to the Corinthians with the following blessing.

2 Corinthians 13

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.

The Uncreated and Created

John 1

The Word in these verses refers to the Son of God as a Person of the Trinity and to God's creative purposes.

UNCREATED

The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God to come one day.

CREATED

Everything was created through him; nothing – not one thing- came into being without him.

Everything created in the Son

Colossians 1

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank of angels – *everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.

Heavenly conflicts

These are just a few sentences that give insights about the heavenly realm. Much of it remains a mystery, like the timing of the information below. The reality of Heaven is undeniable as far as the Bible is concerned.

Revelation 12

War broke out in Heaven. Michael and his Angels fought the Dragon. The Dragon and his Angels fought back, but were no match for Michael. They were cleared out of Heaven, not a sign of them left. The great Dragon – ancient Serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, the one who led the whole world astray – thrown out, and all his Angels thrown out with him, thrown down to earth.

People created in God's image

Genesis 1

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature."

The human birth of the Son

John 1

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, Like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

An angel speaking to shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem the night Jesus was born.

Luke 2

The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

Tempted in the desert

Jesus' three responses to the devil at the end of a 40 days prayer and fasting time before starting his three years walk through Israel.

Matthew 4

"It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

"Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

"Beat it Satan" "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

The test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.

The wisdom of Jesus

A spiritual perspective on life that may seem negative but that encourages toward God against the limitations placed upon people by the way society looks at things.

Matthew 5

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you embrace the One most dear to you.

“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are – no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

“You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

The miracles of Jesus

Jesus performed a great many miracles. One of the most astounding may have been raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

John 11

The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, “Master, by this time there’s a stench. He’s been dead four days!”

Jesus looked her in the eye. “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

Then to the others, “Go ahead, take away the stone.”

They removed the stone. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, “Father, I’m grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I’ve spoken so that they might believe that you sent me.”

Then he shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And he came out, a cadaver wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face.

Jesus told them. “Unwrap him and let him loose.”

Jesus in Gethsemane

Jesus prayed fervently the night before his crucifixion. It was a great struggle against evil and temptation, the option of stepping away from it all.

Luke 22

“Father, remove this cup from me. But please, not what I want. What do *you* want?” At once an angel from heaven was at his side, strengthening him. He prayed on all the harder. Sweat, wrung from him like drops of blood, poured off his face.

Jesus’ last words on the cross

It tells us that Jesus knew when the battle was over and that then he left his body.

Luke 23

Jesus called loudly, “Father, I place my life in your hands!” Then he breathed his last.

John 19

Jesus said, “It’s done Complete.” Bowing his head, he offered up his spirit.

The Resurrection

When two women named Mary came to Jesus' tomb early morning they found the heavy stone rolled away from the entrance and an angel present.

Matthew 28

The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you are looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

"Now get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' That's the message."

Jesus resurrected meets the disciples

John 20

Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." Then he showed them his hands and side.

The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting: "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you."

A man born from heaven

Apostle Paul explains that the First Human Being Adam is of the earth as is humanity. The Second Adam, who is Jesus as he appeared after the Resurrection, is of Heaven.

1 Corinthians 15

We follow this sequence in Scripture: The First Adam received life, the Last Adam is a life-giving spirit. Physical life comes first, then spiritual – a firm base shaped from the earth, a final completion out of heaven. The First Man was made out of the earth, and people since then are earthy; the Second Man was made out of heaven, and people now can be heavenly. In the same way that we've worked from our earthy origins, let's embrace our heavenly ends.

A New Creation

Jesus, the Messiah, brings new life to people.

2 Corinthians 5

.... Anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle the relationship with each other.

Born from Above

Jesus explained that to enter the reality of this new life a spiritual birth needed to take place in the Holy Spirit that brings the dynamics of God's kingdom into a person's life.

John 3

Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to – to God's kingdom.

The paramount importance of the resurrection

Apostle Paul exhorts not to forget that the fresh start offered to people is only possible because Jesus did rise from the dead as the Man born of Heaven.

1 Corinthians 15

Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you came believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it – if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ – sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

A whole and lasting life

John 3

'This is how much God loves the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

Jesus' Return

Jesus assured his disciples that he would be back.

Acts 1

He told them, "You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the world.

These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared – in white robes! They said, "You Galileans! – why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly – and mysteriously – as he left.

The Holy Spirit comes on the disciples

Fifty days after the resurrection the Holy Spirit came on the disciples. It was the beginning of their zeal to spread the news of the Gospel. They spoke in prayer languages they had no idea about. This ability is still with the church and many people can speak prayer languages different from their own. Once comfortable with it, it isn't hard to do. The Holy Spirit can give ability to Christians today as happened to the early disciples.

Acts 2

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force – no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

God is Love

Apostle John encourages toward the central attitude of a Christian

1 John 4

My beloved friends, Let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God *is* love – so you can't know him if you don't love.

Love expressed

Love is an emotive word with all kinds of connotations. How do we know we love God and also our neighbor? Apostle John looks at it from a practical perspective.

1 John 5

Do we love God? Do we keep his commandments? The proof that we love God comes when we keep his commandments and they are not at all troublesome.

Avoiding the Antichrist

Apostle John recognizes an attitude that denies the full magnitude of Jesus Christ already amongst some of the early believers almost 2000 years ago. He speaks out against it with all its might calling it anti Christian.

1 John 2

So who is lying here? It's the person who denies that Jesus is the Divine Christ, that's who. This is what makes an antichrist: denying the Father, denying the Son. No one who denies the Son has any part with the Father, but affirming the Son is an embrace of the Father as well.

Faith in Jesus must include every aspect of the divine plan and not just part of it. That's not faith in Jesus according to Apostle John however pious and Christian one may talk.

1John 4

My dear friends, don't believe everything you hear. Carefully weigh and examine what people tell you. Not everyone who talks about God comes from God. There are a lot of lying preachers loose in the world.

Here's how you test for the genuine Spirit of God. Everyone who confesses openly his faith in Jesus Christ – the Son of God, who came as an actual flesh-and-blood person – comes from God and belongs to God. And everyone who refuses to confess faith in Jesus has nothing in common with God. This is the spirit of antichrist that you heard was coming. Well, here it is, sooner than we thought.

Wisdom from the Holy Spirit

There is no need to be led astray by antichristian teachings or behavioral examples.

1 John 2

I've written to warn you about those who are trying to deceive you. But they're no match for what is embedded deeply within you – Christ's anointing, no less! You don't need any of their so-called teaching. Christ's anointing teaches you the truth on everything you need to know about yourself and him, uncontaminated by a single lie. Live deeply in what you were taught.

New heavens and a new earth

When at some time a disaster of great magnitude will strike the earth and the universe Apostle Peter encourages towards hope in a far better future.

2 Peter 3

We'll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

Apostle John had a clear visionary experience.

Revelation 21

I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth.