

Introduction for *Beyond Jesus: My Spiritual Odyssey*

By Patricia Pearce

Jesus has become an obstacle to our spiritual evolution—not because of who he was but because of who we have made him out to be. Viewing Jesus as “the one and only Son of God,” we deny our own divine nature and distance ourselves from the Christ consciousness accessible to us all. Not only is this projection of our divine essence onto a solitary individual unhelpful, it is the antithesis of the message Jesus was attempting to impart.

This issue was brought home to me one morning when I was still a pastor. I was alone in the sanctuary rehearsing the gospel story I had memorized for our upcoming Sunday worship—a story about Jesus’s disciples arguing with one another about who among them was the greatest. Jesus called them together and, attempting to convey the essence of his teaching, took a child in his arms and said, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

As I told the story aloud in the vacant sanctuary, I was suddenly overwhelmed by a tremendous grief. The odd thing was, the grief didn't seem to belong to me. It seemed to flow from a source beyond me, and the words in the story that triggered it and kept repeating themselves over and over in my mind, were, "Not me. Not me. Not me." The magnitude of the grief drove me to my knees.

I felt in that moment that I had become an available vessel for a great sorrow—sorrow that the religion born in Jesus's name had come to be focused not upon what he wanted to impart, but upon him.

Whether my experience in the sanctuary that day was a transcendent encounter or simply a realization breaking forth from the depths of my own psyche isn't important. In either case, it speaks to something my own spiritual journey has led me to believe: when Christianity makes Jesus the point, it misses Jesus's point.

Christian tradition has typically viewed the gospel story I was reciting as a morality lesson: we should concern ourselves, as Jesus did, with the welfare of the vulnerable. But I no longer believe he was giving a morality lesson or was speaking figuratively when he took that child in his arms and in essence said, "This is me." I believe that such was the state of Jesus's consciousness. He did not experience any separation between himself and the child. He knew he *was* the

child, the child *was* him.

In the absence of separateness there is no such thing as specialness, which is why the disciples' argument about which of them was the greatest was meaningless. They were caught in the delusions of ego, which sees itself as separate and hungers to be special—precisely the delusion from which Jesus freed himself when he came to see his true—*our* true—nature.

However, this argument about who was the greatest not only continued; it eventually became superimposed upon Jesus himself. For centuries, those who refused to confess that Jesus was the greatest among us suffered unspeakable consequences at the hands of inquisitors and kings. Christianity, in other words, came to be shaped by the beliefs and values of the ego consciousness Jesus was urging us to abandon.

If we consider Jesus to be a doorway, as many people do, then we must ask: What is he a doorway to? One does not stop at a doorway, nor fixate upon it. One moves through it to the other side. That is its purpose.

When we focus our spiritual journey on Jesus himself—when we stop at the doorway—we fail to see what he was showing us about *our own* nature. We abdicate the power he was demonstrating it was possible to attain when we shed the limited and limiting ego. We deprive ourselves of the beautiful and ecstatic experience of our own oneness with Ultimate Reality.

Jesus was able to be a conduit for divine purposes because he himself had moved beyond Jesus. He had moved beyond the narrow confines of a particular identity and into the full realization that he—that *we*—were and always had been one with the Source of Being.

I believe it is both possible and essential that we do the same, because only in the light of awakened consciousness can the collective nightmare of the ego and its empires ever dissolve.

This book is written as a memoir. In the pages to follow, I share a bit about my upbringing in mainstream Protestantism, the events that led me to seminary and then the ministry, and the spiritual awakenings that caused me to see Jesus in a new light—epiphanies that ultimately made it impossible for me to stay in the institutional church.

It also tells the story of how my spirituality has been deeply influenced by what I have witnessed in the political realm. From the impoverished regions of the Andes, where I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer, to the federal prison where I served a sentence for nonviolent civil disobedience when the United States invaded Iraq, I have seen how our political systems are an outward manifestation of the beliefs we hold about who we are and about the nature of reality. As our consciousness matures, those systems will also undergo a profound change.

While this book is written as a memoir, it is also a manifesto pointing to

what we might become. Each of our lives is a hologram, holding the patterns of the evolution of our collective existence, so while the details of any life story are particular, the narrative arc is one we share. We are participating in a great unfolding on this planet, the emergence of a new consciousness that sees through the fallacy of separateness. As the beliefs of a previous age dissolve and the structures and institutions spawned by those beliefs crumble, a new world will become possible, one in which we take our place as co-creators in a cosmos awakening to itself.

This book is an offering to the emergence of that new world—to the great flowering of our spiritual potential that Jesus demonstrated, and the promise it holds for our collective future.

Beyond Jesus: My Spiritual Odyssey is available on [Amazon](#), [B&N](#), or from your local [independent bookstore](#).