NONDUALITY AS A DEFINITION OF CHRIST

Paper Presented

at the

SAND CONFERENCE
- Science and Nonduality -

San Jose, California
October 22, 2015

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Background
I never knew Hinduism and Buddhism existed until 1961 (age 30) when I took a class called “Eastern Philosophy” at USC. The visiting Oxford Professor spent a single talk on each subject and I never thought about it again. It was not until I first met Fr. Thomas Keating in 1982 -3) that I heard the term “nonduality” that he defined as “not-two and not-one”. He said “nonduality” was the Eastern term for what, in Christianity, we call a “Unitive State” - generally regarded as far as one can go this side of the grave. While this is an egoless state of being – really the state every mature person was intended to live out his earthly existence – this Unitive State is not, however, nondual. Man’s oneness with God does not make him God - for heaven’s sake!! While God is man’s true center of being (center of all being in fact), man is not God’s being! In truth, man’s Divine Center is empty of all self, God is literally no-self. God is no part of man nor is man part of God. Where man’s original self-center was “I exist, I am myself” (ego-self), God has taken its place so now “we exist, we are” is self’s abiding unitive experience of life with God. It is man’s oneness with God that is his “true self”, and until he comes to this state he is not free to be the “whole” human being God created him to be. Obviously, this unitive state is not God’s experience - God’s enlightenment, realization or whatever you want to call it. Anyone who thinks this is a nondual state-of-being has never experienced it.

So what is this “nondual state” the Eastern religions talk about? I do not have the slightest idea, I’ve never been able to figure out its thinking in this matter. Though I’ve done a lot of research, what they call “nondual” certainly is not “nondual” as I see it. Because “nondual” makes no sense to me, I regard it as the error of assuming God is the true nature or essence of everything that exists - human, animal, plant, the whole cosmos – and that, like other religions, it tends to make God into man’s own image – i.e., God is self, mind, soul, consciousness, energy, love, you name it. Those who assume such a view could never have honestly seen God - because nothing in this universe - including one’s self - is God. God is so utterly “Transcendent” to all man knows and sees, that if God did not deliberately reveal Itself to man, he would never know God exists.

MONISM
To assume that God (call it Brahman, atman, consciousness or whatever) is the one identical nature, essence or substance of all that exists, and regard everything that appears “other” or “different” as dual, this is the general assumption of a Monistic belief system. While there are a number of different Monistic views, the Advaita doctrine is regarded as the ultimate representation of Monism. The basic framework of its assumptions, its particular ways of thinking and methodology, constitute a paradigm accepted by members of a particular group or discipline. In this case, Advaitic Monism is a belief system said to be widely held by the eastern religions, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Monism gives no consideration to different levels of existence, but dumps all being into an Impersonal Divine Ocean to which there is nothing honestly transcendent. (If God transcends all, how can God be all? For the Monist, all God “transcends” is non-existent). But even worse, Monism gives no place to the greatest of God’s creations – Mankind. Created Theocentric, literally a microcosm of the macrocosm, yet, for a Monist, Man (in essence) is no “different” than a rock or a cow! This, at least is one way to avoid having to deal with “others”, “differences” - changes, duality and multiplicity. To declare the marvelous diversity of creation an illusion, an error, a passing fantasy with no reality, literally saps the divine life out of God’s wondrous creation! To get rid of all that “appears” is to get rid of its Creator. It is one thing to see God in others and throughout creation, but quite another to declare it is either “really” God, or just a fantasy, when, in truth, it is neither.

It seems Monism has a skewed definition of “reality” limited to God alone. “Reality”, however, is defined as the state of things as they presently exist - whatever that state may be. It refers to an experiential truth as a fact verifying that something exists - regardless of “what” it is. What exists does not have to be God in order to be real – i.e., to exist! The opposite of reality, of course, is illusion, fantasy and idealism (a purely notational idea of reality) which is really the Monistic idea of “things”. But who can fathom buying into such a paradigm? Probably it is only for those wishing to be “liberated” from this world – what other reason could there be?
The reason nonduality seems to be an excuse for those who have yet to see God, is because it cannot deal with the truth that **God is no part of man and man is no part of God.** Monism avoids having to face the fact that man, of himself, has no eternal life and must depend on God, not only for his earthly existence, but his eternal existence as well – should God deign to grant it! The reason Monism makes no distinction between man’s earthly and eternal life is because it assumes man is really God already, so who needs God or has to depend on God for a thing? Talk about hoodwinking the gullible! Yet, this is the essence of Monistic “nonduality”!

**MONOTHEISM**

In rather sharp contrast to Monism is “**Monotheism**”, the basic belief of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These religions claim to be premised on God’s revelation to man – why? Because God so utterly transcends man and all that exists, that left to himself, man cannot encounter God. Unless God takes the initiative, all man’s efforts are in vain. While I can say nothing of this revelation on the part of Judaism and Islam – religions I never lived nor studied - I have much to say about the Christian revelation, more especially, its revelation of Christ. Though incapable of any monistic idea of “nonduality”, I do see how Christ could fit this definition (nondual) within the Christian **Monotheistic** framework. The Truth of Christ cannot fit into Monism because it lacks the Monotheistic paradigm where to be **human** is the microcosmic **summit** of God’s creation. Man is no drop in the ocean, on the contrary, with the revelation of Christ, man’s eternal destiny is the greatest of God’s revelations.¹

### BASIC MONOTHEISM - the background against which Christ was revealed.

*Infinite Existence - Eternal*  
*Uncreated*  
*Source and Ground of all that exist - Creator*  
*Immutable (Unchangeable)*

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**The Great Divide**

*Finite, contingent existence - non eternal*  
*Created (Dependent origination)*  
*Mutable (Changeable)*²

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**Infinite Existence** (God) is **Uncreated**, having no source, no beginning or end. Since everything man knows has a beginning and end, is perishable, changeable and impermanent, it obviously has no eternal life of its own, but depends on God for its existence. Should God withdraw from the created, then of course it would cease to exist.³ Because God is the Source of created existence, whatever God creates is **not Itself**! There can be no passing over the Great Divide between the created and Uncreated, God cannot become created any more than the created can become Uncreated. So even though God is the true existence (or being) of the created, **nothing created is God’s existence or Being** - man, after all, never created himself or even asked to exist. Even the Platonic idea of God emanating rays like the sun, the rays are not the sun, source or cause - St. Augustine noted, **“I beheld all things below God and I saw that they neither absolutely exist nor do not exist, they exist because they are from thee, but do not exist because they are not what thou art.** For that which truly exists abides unchangeably. (immutably). Confessions, Ch. VII. This is reminiscent of some monistic views, the only problem - there is nothing “nondual” about it!

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¹ So “God exists”, what is that to me - us, all creation - do we have any eternal life?” Though man has always believed there was something eternal about himself, what proof can he offer? The answer is something only God can reveal; and for those who know this revelation - **everyman’s eternal life in and with God is Christ.**

² Seen in a positive light, man’s mutability and impermanence is the process of his transformation, whereas immovable permanence of the created is stagnation and rot.

³ The idea God created “from nothing” is impossible - “nothing can come from nothing”. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “nothing”, it doesn’t “exist”. It’s when people realize their own mortal nothingness (as in the Passive Dark Night of the Spirit) that they realize they have no existence of their own and are then poised for God to be revealed as their deepest experience of Life and Being.
Although in the Unitive State man can say “God is my true being, he cannot say “I am God’s Being” - big difference! 4 CIRCLES illustrate how this goes: The Divine Center is the Source and Ground of all creation. With God as the Center, like spokes in a wheel, all creation is inter-related (even interdependent). Nothing outside (or around) this Divine Center is God. But now consider this circle as “self” – initially, one’s whole experience of life and being - and then journey to the bottom to discover the center of your being is empty of self, that at bottom you are nothing, nothing but a helpless mortal. At this point God, the Ground of your life and being, fills this empty center, and from here on, God is your deepest experience of life and being. (Needless to say, none of this is God’s experience!)

So while basic Monotheism agrees God is Being-in-Itself and that nothing created is (or has) “being-in-itself”, the Monists’ mistake is thinking man’s Divine Center is part of himself - thinks this Divine Center is his self! “Thou art that” is thought to mean you are your own Divine Center - which makes you God, of course. But this is a gross error of interpretation - “Thou art that” means you are your experience of God. Like being stuck with a needle, it is your experience of the needle (God), while the needle (God) is neither you nor your experience of it! Any “center” or experience man thinks is himself is just that and nothing more. A Divine Center, on the other hand, is empty of self, has no self - is no self. Anyone who has seen this Divine Ground – of-Being knows it is not himself!

Given this Monotheistic Background, the unique Christian revelation is that

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THE LINE THAT DIVIDES IS ALSO THE LINE THAT UNITES
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The term for this mystery is ___________________ “Christ” ________________

The line that divides and unites represents a union of opposites - Uncreated and created, Infinite and finite, mutable and Immutable. The formal statement of this mystery – Christ - is: “perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man - of one essence in Godhead, and one essence in manhood, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, mixture, division or separation, the difference of natures by no means removed because of the union... each nature being preserved and coalescing in ... the one same Christ”. (Council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D. ) 5 (The heresy of “Monophysitism” is to regard Christ as either wholly human or wholly divine – i.e., of one essence or nature, that is).

Regarding a union-of-opposites, the Jewish mystic, Philo of Alexandria (30BC -50AD), noted that “Heraclitus’ (600 B.C.) notion of unity was the oneness of opposites, a hidden harmony better than the visible because the fairest harmony results from differences. It is the tension of opposing forces that makes the structure one. The interchange of opposites with one another is itself proof they are only different manifestations of the same thing. The changeless unity in which all multiplicity inheres. Logos (God) is the substance that creates, sustains, and in the end, perhaps, reabsorbs into Itself.” So where the union of two of the same nets nothing but the same, a union of differences or opposites generates an ontological genre of its own – Christ, that is. (Since monism recognizes no differences, it can never speak of any real “union” or “oneness” since all things are the same essence anyway!)

What Christianity means by “Incarnation” is God creating Its own human nature eternally one with Itself. What God created and united to Itself was not the humanity of any individual, but Man’s common universal human nature. (By “universal” is meant what all human beings have in common minus anything that could make for particularity, individuality or differences) The orthodox fathers’ put the Incarnation this way - “Logos (God) did not assume (unite to Itself) some particular human being, but man’s common human nature, yet a nature that appeared in one individual”, (Cyril of Alexandria 376-444 A.D). Or “Christ did not become a mere man (individual),

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4 So long as man has a self he can say “God is my true existence”, otherwise, without self, there is no one for God to be the Center of. Without self the entire unitive experience of Life and Being is gone forever. The falling away of a divine center (and its circumference) leaves behind only the “walking dead”. Perhaps one of most shocking final “truths” is that God has never been one with any individual being, self or person – never! God is solely one with man’s original universal human nature, i.e., God’s own human nature - Christ, that is.

5 Deliberately omitted were the terms “prosopon” and “hypostasis” because there is no time here, to go into them.
nor is it orthodox to say he assumed a particular man, but rather, that God assumed man-in-general or the whole human nature” (Theodore the Studite -759 A.D.) Obviously, there is only one human nature, not different kinds or even particular ones - for “what is common to all is proper (particular) to none.” Christ’s human nature is no particular human being, but the one common nature of all human beings - “Universal Man” Cyril called it. If one were to ask “what is the difference between God’s “universal” human nature and the human nature of a “particular” man - say, the man Jesus?” - the answer is: “God’s human nature is universal, person-less (selfless) and genderless, above all, it is an eternal “hypostatic union” unlike any earthly union man can have with God. 7

CHRIST’S NONDUALITY
Where the term “union” implies the joining of two or more, the term “oneness” – which also implies more than one – articulates a closer bond than a union formulated 1+1 = 2. To speak of the eternal (or heavenly) Christ as a “oneness” of divine and human natures defies any numerical formulation.

- Thus one divine nature and one human nature 1+1 = 1 Christ - there are no two or multiple Christs.
- And just as God is not a numerical (quantitative) one, so too, Mankind is not a numerical (quantitative) one. Thus neither the essence of God nor Man is a numerical one, for neither are quantitative or individual.
- This means Christ is neither one God nor one man, but the oneness of God-and-Man. As Philo might have put it: only a union of opposites can give us one “Christ” - the incarnate manifestation of nonduality.

To regard Christ as the “oneness” of two natures (finite and Infinite) as a numerical duality, however, implies two quantitative numerical one’s. But universal human nature is not a numerical one among many - nor is God a numerical one among many. So the oneness of God and Man is not a numerical duality. Different essences are not different in number, but in “being”.

The essence of God is basically unknowable, and while man has many definitions of human nature, only its Creator knows its ultimate essence - man’s creation, after all, isn’t over until it is over. The Early Christian Fathers believed man was created to be more than he is now, this “more” being the transformation of his individual humanity into God own universal humanity – transformed into Christ that is. This means going beyond all that makes for differences, surrendering one’s whole being - self, person, one’s entire identity - for God to make Its Own.

So we do not ask “who” Christ is, but “what” Christ is? “Who” only refer to a particular person, an individual self – John, Jill, you or me - whereas ‘what” refers to the essence of “what is” - in this case, the oneness of divine and human natures. Because of this union of essences, Christ is a “what” and not a “who”. Christ is not who God is, nor who some individual is, rather, “what” Christ is, is the eternal oneness of the unknowable essence of God and Man. Keep in mind, Essence is prior to individual, and where God only creates essence (what man is), it is man’s individual self “who” creates his own person - “who” he is or becomes. God creates no self, no particular “who” or “person”, God only creates man’s undifferentiated human nature. It goes without saying, God never created a Hitler or a Mother Teresa, rather, it is each human being using his own mind and free will “who” creates his own “incommunicable” (unique, like no other) person. In truth, God has never created “who” anyone is.

6 “Hypostatic Union” is the traditional term reserved for God’s eternal oneness with man’s universal nature, a union beyond any individual personhood - such as the “Unitive state” solely intended for man’s earthly life. Huge difference between some man’s human nature - yours, mine, Jack or Jill’s - and God’s own human nature!

7 Some Christians mistakenly think the individual man Jesus is the only human being God ever united to Itself, and thus, only the individual man Jesus is Christ. This view denies that the Incarnation was God creating Its own human nature and not the human nature of some particular individual. Because Essence comes before individual, God had to be united to the essence of Mankind prior to there being any individual. Thus, as an individual man, Jesus would have had to exist either after the Incarnation or prior to it - no Incarnation there.

8 Man doesn’t know the essence of matter, much less the essence of an immaterial soul - psyche, self, life, or whatever one wants to call it. Strictly speaking, Christ is the oneness of two unknowable essences – God and man.
When I first read that “spiritual adepts” should continually ask themselves “Who am I?”, I thought it was a joke. But that the assumed answer should be “God is who I really am” (or “I am really God”) - what fool could fall for a thing like that? Man is born knowing exactly who he is - “I am myself - that’s ‘who’ I am”. I am no one else, not an animal, not Almighty God, just myself, a human being, exactly what God willed me to be, no more, no less.9 To spend a lifetime trying to figure out how you could possibly be God, is not just a wasted life, but the crime of perpetuating a monstrous, false monistic idea!

According to Aristotle, an “individual” is a “numerical one” (a physical entity) that refers to “who” someone is, whereas the essence of human nature, being universal, refers to “what” something is. So you can count individual heads (“who’s”) but not human natures (“what’s”). As a universal, Christ’s humanity is not “who” some individual is, but what Man is. So whatever the unknown essence of God and man, their eternal oneness is what Christ is.

That - refers to existence or being
What - refers to essence
Who - refers to individuals, particulars - numbers

**GOD IS “THAT” AND NOT A “WHO”**

**Monism mixes up “That” and “What” - existence and essence.** While it is true to say God is the true existence of all that exists, it is not true to say God is the essence of all that exists. To hold there is no difference between “What” God is and “what” the cosmos is, is the definition of “pantheism”. God may be the true existence of a tree, but God is not the essence of a tree – God is not “what” a tree is! Pantheism is not just the belief God is the existence of all things, but the essence of all things as well – big difference between “that” something exists and “what” it is that exist. But so long as Monism claims God is the same essence as man and the cosmos, then so long is Advaita Monism a Pantheistic belief system - no getting around it. There can be no talk of a “Source” without talk of its “result”, “effect” or “consequence” - which Monism notoriously fails to do.

Monotheism holds the essence of God (“what” God is”) to be unknowable – i.e., beyond man’s faculties to grasp. None of man’s conceptual ideas or terms can define God - nor, for that matter, can any of man’s unmediated experiences of God. The difference of how God makes Itself known to man and how God exists solely-in-Itself (without man or the cosmos) no man will ever know! So be wary of those who tell you “what” God is, they’re only pulling your leg!.

**Conclusion**

*Because the human nature God created and united to Itself is man’s universal essence prior to individuation,* the problem is how to think of Christ, image or speak of Christ when Christ is not one individual being. Since neither God nor Mankind is an individual being, the union of the two does not constitute one individual being - nor two. And since no one can point to the Uncreated or to Universal Man (the created), how, then, can one ever point to Christ - i.e., the oneness of Created and Uncreated? This is the (intellectual) problem of Christ endemic in the Incarnation, yet a problem that constitutes the true mystery of Christ and the greatest of God’s revelations.

“The bottom line is that the human mind cannot conceive or grasp the reality of the “oneness” of two disparate natures. It will either make these natures “one” or sandwich the two together (a duality). It is because the “oneness” of natures neither constitutes a numerical one nor a numerical two, that the mind is at a loss. To collapse everything into “one something” seems to be the way the mind works”.10 But if to the mind “oneness” has no concrete or sensory reality, still, it’s Truth is the greatest of great realities, the mystery of Christ being the mystery of everyman’s ultimate “place” in the Godhead (Trinity). As the “sum of creation ”Christ is the essence of the eternal oneness of Uncreated and created, Infinite and finite – God and man.

9 St. Irenaeus (125-202 A.D.) said of the Gnostics, “They seek to become divine before than have even become human!”
10 A quote from “The Real Christ” by the author.