

On this journey I have had many wonderful experiences and met many wise and compassionate souls. One experience I would like to share with you took place about two years after I took up the project of writing this book. I was staying in the guesthouse of a Cistercian monastery in Georgia, reading, praying, and enjoying occasional fellowship with some of the monks. One evening at dinner a new visitor showed up at the guesthouse. George and I immediately connected like long-lost brothers, even though he was a Pentecostal fundamentalist from South Carolina who had given up job and possessions to follow Jesus and I was a Yalie from Connecticut trying to write a book about Christian theology. He had a strong personal presence and was intensely interested in my salvation. I accepted our encounter as the workings of the Holy Spirit. Over a period of several days we prayed together many times; one evening in particular stands out above the rest.

George believed that I needed and deserved a personal, direct encounter with Christ, unmediated by my complicated ideas about meditation and theology. He asked me to imagine that I was kneeling before Christ dying on the cross; and so I did. In my mind's eye I beheld his human form wracked with pain, and I vividly imagined his terrible sorrow at being rejected by those whom he had come to serve. George asked me to imagine myself moving closer and kneeling beneath his feet; and so I did. He asked me to imagine that a drop of Christ's blood fell from his feet and landed on my head; and so I did.

Suddenly, my eyes popped wide open and I exclaimed, "He's in bliss!" Christ's humanity was in no way diminished, but I was suddenly aware that his divinity was unfathomably vast. His body hung on the cross, suffering in intense agony; but his Spirit was untouched, whole, and complete. I had somehow, for a moment at least, penetrated into the mind of Christ; and it was all-pervading joy. It was as if his human torment – overwhelming to us – was a thin layer of darkened gauze surrounding an infinite ocean of radiant peace. His suffering was not diminished, but it was as nothing compared to the unlimited tranquility of his Spirit. Man and God together in one holy being, dying in pain he was nonetheless wholly free. Death was real for him on the material plane; yet his eternal cosmic Spirit, beyond all form, remained unchanged and full of grace. For him, death truly had no sting (1 Cor 15:55).

From that moment I *knew* that Christ was real and that in some mysterious way I could participate in his life; that the boundaries between his life and mine only *seem* real. Although I am but a mortal human being and he is the eternal Son of God, we are one. To me, this is the supreme and most precious mystery of the Gospel message.



I have written this book in the hope that it will increase your desire to unravel this mystery and build your confidence that you can penetrate into its heart. I offer this small book to you with the prayer that you take up the radical challenge of the Gospel message and come to *know* God, not just believe in him; that your faith lead you beyond the conventional teachings of your particular religious community into the radiant presence of God; that you are blessed with the awareness of God's complete forgiveness and limitless love; that you come to know who you are in God's eyes; and that, in the words of St. Paul, you become "filled with the utter fullness of God" (Eph 3:19).