

# An exegesis of rowan williams' interiority and epiphany: a reading in new testame...

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Rowan Williams Exegesis In the essay “ On Christian Theology,” Rowan Williams, discusses the psychological processes of interiority and the way the self is formed through an integral process of “ becoming”. William contrasts this with what some schools of psychology, religion, and self-realization posit as an “ authentic self”. 1 This discussion is a classical one and dates to the earliest days of Buddhist philosophy where wisdom born of meditation and direct perception of mental processes established that there was no existent “ self,” as entity, object, or ideal existent form. The authentic self Williams describes as being related to a process of unpeeling an onion, but in the center, after the last layer is removed, there is nothing at all remaining. 2 The authentic self schools would see conceptual and experiential layers of being as both interior and exterior aspects of self-realization. This view includes a type of ideal or archetypal identity related to the fingerprint of the soul, the absolute singularity of the individual as an autonomous being. For Williams, and others such as Walter A. Davis whom he cites, the self is not a hidden diamond or an actual ideal form that is “ unearthed” in the process of self discovery; rather the self is constructed, representing the integral synthesis of all the knowledge, awareness, experience, and emotion that has become part of that individual’s identity. In “ Inwardness and Existence Subjectivity in/and Hegel, Heidegger, Marx, and Freud,” Walter A Davis writes: “ No depth exists in subject until it is created. No a priori identity awaits us... Inwardness is a process of becoming, a work, the labour of the negative. The self is not a substance one unearths by peeling away layers until one gets to the core, but an integrity one struggles to bring into existence.” 3 Williams establishes his concurrence with Davis’s thesis as a

central aspect of his essay, and then engages in a personal monolog regarding his own subjective experience of interiority as it relates to the stream of consciousness and inner dialog. Williams draws upon the aspects of ' self-to-other' and ' self-to-self' conversations in their relation to the synthesis of knowledge into identity through understanding. Williams focuses on the aspects of " integrity" as they relate to the inner life, and he sees this as a process of self-harmonization through which all of the different aspects of experience are integrated into self-identity through interior reflection and contemplation. 4 Williams then discusses the manner through which individual identity and understanding fuel social behavior, such as reactions to identity patterns or social groupthink as manifested in larger environmental and social structures. This polyphony of identities in modern culture leads to rivalries and attempts by groups to control the moral and political dialog in civil society, as well as individual identity. From this, Williams develops the need for tolerance in ethics and behavior. 5 Recognizing this need, Williams then begins a discussion of Christianity as an a priori which changes the nature of this debate. " To the extent that the Christian Church is an embodying structure for an ethic of shared accountability and common interest, it needs closer examination in this connection. In the next part of this essay, I shall be suggesting that the narrative (not simply the recorded teaching) of Jesus functions in such a way that it mediates historically the meaning of a non-negotiable and therefore non-competitive presence 'before' which ethical discourse is conducted; and that, when conducted systematically in that light, the character of ethical discourse itself is significantly affected." 6 Williams relates tolerance to the

mystical state of non-duality that Jesus taught in the New Testament, where there is equanimity of mind joined with universal love for all beings that is comparable to the Divine Light that shines upon all beings equally. 7 From this realization related to metaphysics or cosmology as they fuel or provide a foundation for ethics and morality, there is a symmetrical joining of the Macrocosm (Divine Light) and Microcosm (Mind). Thus, Williams discusses the moral foundation of tolerance in divine love, universal love, or Agape, as Jesus taught this in the New Testament. For Williams, this is also used as a symbol for representing “ God’s Grace” as an a priori in the natural universe, and thus a legitimate foundation for ethics and morality. 8 In establishing the natural base of Divine Love as the basis of our shared environment, Williams is then able to build the process of universal return through which the individual is re-established with agape through Christian teachings. Christ mediates the return of the individual to a state of “ heaven on earth” which is a mental and spiritual awakening to this selfless divine love and light. Through this, one can understand the importance of Christian teaching and understanding, as they relate to the processes of interiority and contemplation. Williams then shows how shared patterns of individual understanding form the basis for the development of Christian community. 9 Williams claims he is not intending to create a natural philosophy but rather to establish God’s grace through divine, non-dual love that is independent of any individualistic activity or becoming as the a priori on which a social sense of justice, ethics, morality, and community can be created through shared Christian subjectivities. Williams’ discussion of the beliefs of St. Paul and the ideal relation of a ministry through which a pastor awakens or re-

introduces the community to divine grace functionally through the teachings leads to paradox and mystery. <sup>10</sup> This paradox for Williams relates to the interiority of God, which he ultimately concludes, like the Self, is a constructive and synthesizing process of teachings that are reflected in understanding of Christian theology and its relation to cosmology in the basis of morality, ethics, and justice in society. <sup>11</sup> Sources Cited: Williams, Rowan. Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics. In 'Modern Theology' 13: 1 January 1997, Source: rowan-williams-interiority-epiphany.pdf.