

# Integral Christian

INTEGRAL CHRISTIAN

INTEGRAL THEORY

INTEGRAL SPIRITUALITY

INTEGRAL CHRISTIANITY

ESSENTIAL  
CHRISTIANITY

A 2ND TIER  
CHRISTIANITY

## Integral Christianity

### Christianity and the Integral Model

We can use the [integral model](#) to gain a more complete understanding of both the Christianity as a religious tradition, and the experiences of individual Christians.

Let's begin by looking at the Wilber Combs Lattice.

The Wilber Combs Lattice	Nature Mysticism Self = The Individual Body/Mind & Ego	Deity Mysticism Self = The Individual Soul	Formless Mysticism Self = Formless Bliss	"I Am" Nirvana Self = The Witness, The True Self	Nondual "One Taste" "Self" = The Suchness of All Things
	GROSS	SUBTLE	CAUSAL	TURIYA	TURIYATITA
Violet & Ultraviolet: Transpersonal	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Teal: Integral Kosmocentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Green: Pluralistic Worldcentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Orange: Rational Worldcentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Amber: Mythic Ethnocentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Red: Power Gods Egocentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
Magenta: Magic Egocentric	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳

On the horizontal axis, many Christians experience what would be characterized as experiences of [subtle states of consciousness](#) -- feeling God's presence and Spirit. On the vertical axis, individual Christians may be at a variety of [stages of development](#), and at different stages in different [lines of development](#). There are many different institutional Christian denominations, at various institutional stages of development.

We will consider four fundamental aspects of the Christian faith – scripture, God, sin, and Jesus Christ – and how our understanding and experience of each of these may evolve as we move through the stages of development that go up the left-hand column on the Wilber Combs Lattice.

### Scripture

#### At the Amber, Mythic Stage:

Amber is the concrete literal stage, which means that at amber we take every word of the Bible to be the literal word of God, received by direct revelation from God to his

prophets. Because God is eternal, all-knowing, and unchanging, all of the commandments given by God in the Bible are in effect today. All events described in the scriptures, including the miraculous and supernatural events, are all taken to be literally true.

### **At the Orange, Rational Stage:**

At orange we begin to test our beliefs about scripture against objective evidence and rational thought. We may examine scientific, historical, and archaeological evidence related to the development of scripture. This may cause us to reevaluate our amber beliefs about scripture and come to new conclusions. For example:

- We may come to see scripture not as a literal history of God's interactions with humans, but rather as a history of humans' understanding of God – as a record of human beings trying to make sense of their world, or express their most profound experiences.
- We may come to view scripture as a historical or literary document, rather than as the divinely authored word of God.
- We may appreciate the value of the teachings found in the scriptures without having to take them literally.
- We may look for symbolic, rather than literal, meaning in scripture.
- We may reject the value of scripture altogether.

### **At the Green, Pluralistic Stage:**

With its emphasis on the cultural construction of reality, at green we look to the wider cultural context in ancient history when the Bible was written to better understand the development and meaning of Judeo-Christian scripture.

With green's emphasis on equality, at this stage we may become sensitive to racist, sexist, and oppressive aspects of scripture. For example:

- The idea that black skin is the result of a curse from God.
- The negative things Paul and other New Testament writers say about women.
- The sexist language throughout scripture that refers to God and all of humankind in exclusively male terms.
- Paul's statement in the New Testament that slaves should submit to their masters because their masters' authority over them comes from God.

At green we may come to understand these troublesome aspects of scripture not as the word or will of God, but rather as a reflection of the culture in which the scriptures were developed.

With green's emphasis on multiculturalism, at this stage we also become open to the truth and wisdom found in the scriptures of other spiritual traditions, and may look for the commonalities and unifying teachings found in all of the world's scriptures.

## **God or Heavenly Father**

### **At the Amber, Mythic Stage:**

At the amber stage God is understood to be the literal mythic God of the Bible – a white haired man who lives in heaven and intervenes in the lives of humans to bring about his purposes. He is the creator, ruler, and preserver of all things. He is perfect, has all power, and knows all things. He is aware of each one of us individually and he intervenes in our lives, in answer to our prayers and faithfulness, based on his love and

wisdom, though we may not always understand his ways.

### **At the Orange, Rational Stage:**

At the rational stage we begin to test our beliefs about God against objective evidence and rational thought. With the move from amber ethnocentrism to orange worldcentrism, and in light of the terrible suffering endured by millions in the world today, at orange it may become increasingly difficult to maintain belief in a loving God who knows us personally and will intervene to help us and "our people" if we ask, but who does nothing to alleviate the terrible suffering of millions of other people.

Because of this difficulty, at orange we may feel the need to revise our understanding of God, to better fit with our real life experiences. For example, we may come to understand God as the life force that permeates the physical universe, and find peace and personal power in learning to flow with this force, rather than struggling against it. Or, God may be understood as the unseen energy and force of Love itself, in all the ways Love manifests. In this view, to the extent that we love, we experience God.

Some of us may come to believe that if God does intervene in human affairs, it is only through human beings choosing to act in response to God's spirit or love within them. In the language of the integral model, there are two different aspects or faces of reality – the manifest realm of existence (the gross physical, subtle, and causal realms), and the unmanifest realm of the Absolute. The manifest realm arises from the unmanifest realm. In other words, everything in existence is an expression of Divine Spirit, or the Absolute. From this perspective, all of the physical realm, including human beings, is the Divine made manifest in the world of form.

If this is the case, then as the manifest expressions of God in the relative world, we – human beings – are the way that God manifests and intervenes in human affairs to relieve suffering. This view is expressed in the following words from St. Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
No hands but yours, no feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out on the world;  
Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good;  
Yours are the hands with which he blesses humankind now.

At orange some of us may find the idea of Deism more credible than the idea of Theism. Deism is the belief that God exists and created the physical universe, but does not intervene in its normal operation. Deists typically reject most supernatural events (prophecy, miracles) and tend to assert that God does not intervene in the affairs of human life and the natural laws of the universe. What organized religions see as divine revelation and holy books, most deists see as interpretations made by other humans. Deists believe that God's greatest gift to humanity is not religion, but the ability to reason.

In addition to all of these possibilities (and no doubt many more that are not listed) some of us at orange may become atheist, or agnostic, and may view the material world as ultimate reality.

### **At the Green, Pluralistic Stage:**

At green we realize that our experiences of God are at least partially culturally constructed, as are the many different experiences of God or Ultimate Reality found in every spiritual tradition the world over. We realize that our Christian image of God as a bearded white male is culturally constructed. Someone in the Hindu tradition may have a subtle state vision of a God with 10,000 arms, which fits with their cultural understanding of the Divine. Both are experiencing the same God, but their perceptions of that God are filtered through their cultural filters.

With green's emphasis on gender equality, at this stage we may no longer be satisfied with the belief in an exclusively male God.

And with green's interest in exploring states of consciousness, at this stage we may come to understand God as a state of consciousness, or as Consciousness itself.

## Sin

### At the Amber, Mythic Stage:

In the amber worldview, sin is understood as a failure to obey God, as God is understood in scripture and in one's denomination. To sin is to willfully disobey God's commandments or to fail to act righteously despite a knowledge of the truth (see *James* 4:17). In the amber view, all of us sin, and our sin or unrighteousness separates us from God.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [Jesus Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *1 John* 1:8–9.

### At the Orange, Rational Stage:

At this stage we subject our ideas about sin to rational examination. Do they make sense? Would God really exclude me from heaven forever for sin? Is there any sin that could make me forever reject my own children? Do I love my children more than God loves me?

At orange we may come to view sin as behavior that arises from ignorance, or from mental or emotional dysfunctions that are better treated with education or psychotherapy than repentance. If we have this understanding, we may revise our understanding of Satan as well. Instead of being a literal spirit personage who is at war with God, perhaps Satan is an archetype for our collective projected human shadow.

If our view of God shifts to atheism at orange, then we may come to view sin as merely unethical or illegal behavior, with no Divine involvement or repercussions.

### At the Green, Pluralistic Stage:

At this stage we see that our notions of sin are partially culturally constructed. There are some acts that are forbidden in all or almost all cultures, and these may have a biological basis. Other acts are seen as sinful in some cultures, but not others. At green we may realize that our notions of sin, and the behaviors that cause us to feel shame, are in part based on our cultural biases.

Because green is the stage concerned with inclusion and peace, sin at this stage may be viewed as behavior that marginalizes or excludes people, or oppresses them. Or, sin may be viewed as behavior that damages the web of life itself, which includes the natural world and all sentient beings.

## Jesus Christ, and the Second Coming of Christ

For Christians, the foundational experience of our faith is the experience of Christ's atonement. This experience has the power to change our hearts and minds and make us "new creatures in Christ," as Paul explains:

14. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

15. And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

16. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

18. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

19. That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. *2 Corinthians* 5:14-19, New King James Version.

This foundational personal experience of Christianity has traditionally consisted of:

- Realizing our sinful state, or our separation from God.
- Having faith that Christ's atonement can rescue us from this separation from God.
- Repenting of our sins, and seeking God's forgiveness.
- Receiving God's forgiveness, symbolized by baptism.
- Receiving the gift of God's Spirit to guide and transform us as we become "new creatures in Christ."

Viewed through the lens of the integral model, this direct first-hand experience of God's presence, love, and forgiveness is a subtle [state experience](#). Because of the nature of Jesus' teachings about what it means to be his disciple ("As I have loved you, love one another"), the change of heart that is at the foundation of this personal experience is also usually accompanied by transformation on the vertical axis, in the [moral line of development](#). Specifically, we experience growth from the [red egocentric stage](#) to the [amber ethnocentric stage](#) when we submit ourselves and our lives to the Christian mythic God. This transformation takes place as we move beyond our own egoic interests and desires, and surrenders our life to a higher cause and purpose – in this case, a surrender to God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This transformation is described in scriptures such as:

And But as many as received him, to them who put their trust in him, he gave the power to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of humans, but of God. *John* 1:12-13.

My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love. This is how he showed his love among us: he sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him. This is what love really is: not that we have loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. If God thus loved us, my dear friends, we also must love one another. God has never been seen by anyone, but if we love one another, God dwells in us; God's love is brought to perfection in us. *1 John* 4:7-12.

This act of surrendering to something larger than our individual, egocentric self and moving from red to amber in the moral line can be an important initial step on the path to self-transcendence. It has the power to make us better people. The transformation from egocentric to ethnocentric may be devalued because it seems to fall relatively low on the developmental scale. But remember that we are each at different levels of development in different [lines](#). There are many adults who are at orange or green or teal stages in the cognitive line, but who may still be at the red, egocentric stage in the moral line.

The importance of the amber level of moral development is beautifully illustrated in the movie *The Constant Gardner*. In the actions of the pharmaceutical company, we see orange technology in the hands of a company that lacks a basic amber moral grounding. And in the tribal raiders seen at the end of the movie we see red lawlessness and violence desperately in need of an amber moral grounding.

The surrender to God experienced in Christianity, coupled with the experience of receiving God's unconditional love and a deeply felt commitment to love others as God loves us, can lead Christians who are ready beyond amber ethnocentrism (where my religion is the only true religion), into the orange and green worldcentric stages of moral development.

[Click here](#) to listen to a clip from the [Integral Spiritual Center](#) of Ken Wilber talking about the transformative power in the practice of surrendering to God in 2nd person. In this clip Ken uses terms from Hinduism. He uses the terms Shiva (the Hindu supreme God) and Shakti (the Hindu supreme Goddess). In Christian terms, surrendering to Shiva or Shakti would be understood as surrendering to Heavenly Father, or to Christ. This clip blends what we have learned about [states of consciousness](#) with what we have learned about [God in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person](#).

We experience God or Spirit in 1st person when we are the Witness of the small self. We experience God or Spirit in 2nd person (the experience of God that Christians are familiar with) when we surrender the small self to God, or the True Self.

The main point Ken makes in this clip is that when we are identified with our "self" as the small individual egoic self (when we have not yet awakened to our true nature as I Amness or Christ Consciousness), then the path and practice in a God in 2nd person tradition such as Christianity is to surrender our small self to God (or in other words, to surrender the small self to the Self with a capital "S"). This surrender can result in the transformation that is described in the passages above from the New Testament.

Let's take a closer look at how our understanding and experience of Jesus Christ can evolve over time as we move through stages of development.

### **At the Amber, Mythic Stage:**

At this concrete literal stage of development, Jesus is understood to be the only Son of God in the flesh. This makes Jesus the unique "Son of God" in a way the rest of us are not. Because of this dual nature, Jesus was not fully mortal or subject to death as the rest of us are, but willingly chose to lay down his mortal life for us. Somehow, his mortal death overcomes all death, so that everyone will be resurrected.

In the amber Christian view Christ atones for our sins by paying the penalty for them, thereby overcoming our separation from God that is the result of sin. At amber the "Second Coming of Christ" means that Jesus will literally, in his resurrected, glorified body, return to earth to reign personally during a thousand year millennial period of peace on the earth.

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" *Acts 1:11*.

Since Jesus' ascension into heaven, amber literal believers have looked forward to his Second Coming. When Christ comes again, he will come in power and glory to claim the earth as his kingdom. His Second Coming will mark the beginning of the Millennium. This will be a fearful, mournful time for the wicked, but it will be a time of joy and peace for the righteous.

### **At the Orange, Rational Stage:**

For devout Christians, their understanding and experience of Christ form the bedrock of their faith. In amber, to even think about questioning this basic foundation can feel like heresy. But at orange we begin to test our beliefs about Jesus against rational thought and objective evidence. The amber understanding of Christ and his atonement is based on certain fundamental assumptions about the nature of God and human beings. In orange, these assumptions are openly subjected to rational inquiry. For example:

- If Jesus is the unique Son of God in a way that I am a not, how am I ever



supposed to be come fully like him? He is different than me in a fundamental way that is beyond my control. If he is a half-God and half-human, and I am 100% human, how can I ever become fully like him?

- Who is it that demands "justice" in the form of someone suffering and dying in our place because we are imperfect? Why would God demand this? Didn't He know when He fathered our spirits that we would not be perfect? If so, why does He demand that either we are perfect and sinless, or else someone must die?
- What is it about God that makes him unable to view our sins with "the least degree of allowance," when he knew from the start we would all be imperfect human beings, except for Jesus? What kind of parent sets up a system in which He demands something from His children that He knows from the start they will be incapable of achieving?
- Why is it that God cannot tolerate having imperfect and/or "unclean" people in his presence? Isn't God bigger than that? Is the Being or perfection of God so fragile that it can't exist in the presence of an imperfect child?
- Were all of us perfect in the pre-existence, before our mortal birth? How did God tolerate our being in his presence then?
- Why would a parent set up a system that says, in effect, "I know that all of my children except one will make mistakes and be imperfect. If the perfect one agrees to suffer punishment in place of all of the imperfect ones, then I'll forgive the imperfect ones and let them back into my presence." Does this make sense?
- How does having someone else be punished in our place teach us anything? How do we learn and grow from our mistakes if someone else suffers and pays for them?

At orange we may also become interested in evidence from academic sources about early Christianity and the historical Jesus. Examples of this include the work of [The Jesus Seminar](#), the recently discovered [Nag Hammadi](#) texts, and [Elaine Pagels'](#) work.

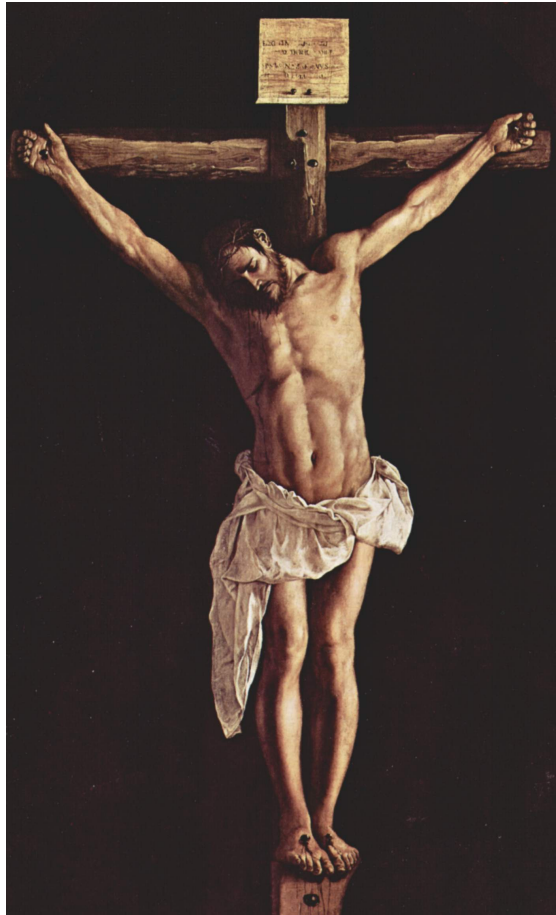
As a result of this investigation, we may revise our understanding of the historical Jesus. For example:

- We may conclude that many of the miraculous events in Jesus' life were added to the scriptural record by others, long after his death.
- We may conclude that Jesus never claimed that he was the unique Son of God in a way the rest of us are not.
- We may conclude that the whole amber version of the atonement is a human construct developed by religion to control people's behavior.
- We may conclude that it's not possible, based on the evidence available at this point in time, to draw definitive conclusions about the historical Jesus.
- We may conclude that it's possible Jesus may not have been a real historical figure, but rather was a synthesis of several ancient God myths. For example, Jesus as portrayed in the book [The Jesus Mysteries](#).
- We may conclude that the transforming power of Christ's atonement that we have experienced in our lives may be independent of the literal truth of the events of Jesus' life as told in Christian scripture. The Jesus story may be a transformative mythic archetype that speaks to us on a deeply intuitive level.
- The transforming power of Christ that we have experienced in our lives may be the power of unconditional love to transform hearts and lives, rather than the power to meet God's demands for justice or perfection.
- Christ's "at-one-ment" may be the ongoing working of God's Spirit within us to

make us at-one with God, not by overcoming some refusal on God's part to allow imperfect beings in his presence, but rather by transforming our hearts with his love, so that we can love as God loves. Jesus said, "As I have loved you, love one another. **By this** shall all people know you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." *John 13:34-35*.

Orange brings the cognitive ability to take "as if" and [third person perspectives](#), so another possibility at orange is that we may begin to look at accounts of Jesus' life symbolically, rather than literally.

[Click here](#) to hear Ken Wilber talk about the Jesus story as a symbolic, mythic archetype. To purchase the CD sets that are the source of the clips on this website (*Kosmic Consciousness* and *The One Two Three of God*) [click here](#).



**A mythic archetype of the death of the separate egoic self-sense.**





**A mythic archetype of awakening to our true nature  
as Christ Consciousness, which is at-one with God.**

Looking at the Jesus story symbolically rather than literally can yield a wealth of new meaning and depth. For example, let's reconsider the passage above from 2 *Corinthians*:

14. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;
15. And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
16. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.
17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
18. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,
19. That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 2 *Corinthians* 5:14-19, New King James Version.

Read symbolically, this passage could be understood as saying that we become new creatures "in Christ" when we die to our exclusive sense of identity as individual beings of flesh and bones, and awaken to our own deepest and eternal nature as Christ Consciousness, as Jesus did. We are freed of the transgression that results from our ignorance of our true nature, and reconciled to or made at-one with God, through the recognition of Christ Consciousness. All things then become new.

Recently discovered Gnostic texts from early Christianity suggest that one group of early Christians may have had a similar symbolic understanding of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The word *gnosis* comes from the Greek word for knowledge, and refers to the direct, first-hand knowledge of spiritual realities experienced by an

enlightened or awakened person.

"...the image of the resurrected Christ represents the realization of Gnosis. ...In the Greek language, the word for resurrection, anastasis, also means 'awakening,' so the idea that resurrection represents spiritual awakening was obvious. 'The resurrection of Christ' symbolically represents 'awakening the Christ within.' *Jesus and the Lost Goddess*, by Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, pg. 76.

"The Jesus we relate to...is a mythic 'archetype' through which we can reach the 'Christ Consciousness' within ourselves...However, we have to be spiritually ready before we can hear this message as positive rather than negative, as giving us what we have really been looking for rather than taking something away."

"Many people desperately want to believe in a miraculous saviour who has literally incarnated to rescue them. There is nothing wrong with this. The miracle worker is a stock character of ancient myths, used to inspire hope for something more than the mundane in those unable to see that the whole of life is a staggering miracle. The image of the divine Godman was deliberately designed to appeal to spiritual beginners who have yet to discover that this mythical figure represents their own true identity.

"The message is not, 'Look out, you are clinging to an illusion.' The message is:

Relax. You are not drowning. You can let go, because life is actually completely safe. Just experience Gnosis and...your ignorance will be dispelled. Just know who you really are and you will have absolutely no fear... Discover the Christ within yourself and you will always be One with God." *Jesus and the Lost Goddess*, by Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, pg. 57.

In this symbolic view, the incarnation of Christ can be understood as the incarnation of the Divine I Am in each one of us – as Christ Consciousness descending or falling into sleep in human form. Like Jesus, we are each fully human and fully divine. In this view, humanity's "sin" (including any "original sin") is our ignorance of our true nature, and sinful behavior is behavior that results from lack of awareness of our true identity as Christ Consciousness and our oneness with everything in existence. Human beings are reconciled to the Divine when we awaken to our true nature, which is already at-one with God.

If we understand the Jesus story symbolically rather than literally, we no longer look for the "Second Coming of Christ" to take place in an amber, literal way. Instead, we realize that this Second Coming takes place within each one of us, when we realize our own true nature as Christ Consciousness, which is always at-one with God.

### **At the Green, Pluralistic Stage:**

At green we may continue the exploration that began in orange by examining the various cultural contexts in which beliefs and doctrines about Jesus have developed over time. For example, how did the political realities of the ancient Roman Empire shape the doctrines about Jesus that came to be viewed as orthodox "truth" only centuries after his death?

Because this is the multicultural stage, at green we may explore commonalities between the transformation we experience through Christ, and the transformative experiences of those in other faiths.

We may also have an interest in exploring the stories of the founding figures of other spiritual traditions, and seeing how they relate to our stories about Jesus. When we compare the miraculous events of Jesus' life with miraculous stories told about the founding figures of other faiths, it can be problematic to view the miraculous stories

told about our founding figure as literally true, while viewing the miraculous stories told about the founders of other religions as obviously not literally true, or even possible. For example:

- The story that the Buddha was born out of his mother's right side, took seven steps, and announced that this was his last birth.
- The story that Dionysus, also called the Son of God, was born of a mortal virgin woman, who was impregnated by one of Zeus' lightning bolts.
- The stories of Osiris and Attis, human/divine God-men who died and were resurrected on the third day.
- The story of the birth of the Hindu God, Shiva: Brahma and Vishnu were arguing about which of them was the more powerful God. Their argument was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a great blazing pillar whose roots and branches extended beyond view into the earth and sky. Brahma became a goose and flew up to find the top of the pillar, while Vishnu turned into a boar and dug into the earth to look for its roots. Unsuccessful in their search, the two gods returned and saw Shiva emerge from an opening in the pillar. Recognizing Shiva's great power, they accepted him as the third ruler of the universe.

At green we may realize how problematic it is to immediately dismiss these supernatural stories from other traditions as obviously metaphoric and not literally possible, while maintaining that ours alone are literally true.

Having considered these core aspects of the Christian faith, we will now consider what is most essential in the Christian faith and experience.

**Next:** [Essential Christianity](#)



Domain Registration