

Coming Out as Embodiments of God Herself: Why is It so Difficult?

A presentation delivered by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott at Sisterly Conversations (for Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Women of Faith and Our Allies), Kirkridge, September 7, 2013

This presentation is dedicated in loving memory of three of our beautiful sisters who now live on The Other Side: Barbara Nissley, Elizabeth Carpenter, and Marie Marchant.

As some of you may know, I was brought up in a fundamentalist family where I was taught that my heart is so evil that I could never trust my own instincts. This of course left me open to the control of “leaders” who dictated the will of God to me. But as I have described in my various books, I have since learned to read the Bible in a liberating fashion rather than an oppressive fashion. I have experienced the fact that God is truly Love, and that Her final judgment will be that we are innocent and good, just the way She created us. According to Romans 8:35-39, nothing we have done and nothing that has been done to us was ever powerful enough to separate us from the love of God. That love was embodied in Jesus the Christ (the Anointed One), and also was embodied in other great prophets in other religious traditions. But in Christianity, it is specified that God’s love was incarnated in the body of Jesus, so that by joining ourselves with Jesus we, too, became incarnations or embodiments of God’s love.

Unfortunately, many Christians have set Jesus apart as the unique Son of God before whom the rest of us are supposed to grovel in helpless adoration. But the first author of the Christian Scriptures, the Apostle Paul, insists that Jesus was “the firstborn of many brothers [and sisters]” (Romans 8:29) and in fact that Jesus was “the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). The point here is that all of us are to be “gather[ed] together as one ... in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). In this way we become one universal family, a siblinghood of Christed Beings or Anointed Ones. To acknowledge Jesus as Lord is not intended to subordinate us to priests or leaders who claim spiritual superiority, but rather to grow up into Christedness ourselves by listening to the divine voice at the deep center of ourselves. As Ephesians 4:13 says, God’s will is that each of us should “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (The Inclusive New Testament). Other religions have other ways of expressing similar insights, but in

our culture, the chief resistance to what I'm talking about is going to come from Bible-thumping Christians. So I am trying to provide you with biblical evidence of the fact that we are intended to become nothing less than Her perfect Presence within our imperfect bodies, as channels of Her Life and Love to those with whom we share this planet.

When you look in the mirror, do you see the Holy One looking back at you through your eyes? The medieval mystic known as Meister Eckhart said, "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me." Yet I have known hundreds of Christians who are appalled at any implication that we human beings are extensions or manifestations of God's self – embodiments of the Divine Presence – incarnations of the Holy One, just as Jesus was during his life on earth.

When I was first coming out, I trembled because of the fear of God's anger that had been instilled in me by my church's oppressive interpretation of the Bible. But somewhere along the line I had picked up from the Hebrew Scriptures several promises that God had loved people while they were in the womb (Isaiah 44:2) and in fact had loved us even before She made the earth (Isaiah 51:16). So I spent lots of time sitting in front of a large mirror, looking into my own eyes, and saying to myself, "God knew you before She made the earth. She knew and cared for you in your mother's womb. She knew you would be lesbian before you were fully formed, before the earth was formed. And She loved you just the way you are." I repeated that until I began to believe it, and then I began to share that truth with other people. And decades later, when I realized that I was not only lesbian but also bi-gendered, a masculine woman and therefore transgender, I did a similar exercise. I told myself that "God knew you would be transgender before you were born and before the planet was born. And God formed you and extended Herself into you as exactly the masculine woman you are."

I challenge you to do a similar exercise right here and now. Please close your eyes, name your sexual identity and your gender identity, and imagine yourself looking into a large mirror. ... Look into your eyes and say something like this: "God knew I would be (here, name your sexual and/or gender identity) before She formed me and even before She formed the world. And she loved me then and loves me now, just exactly the way She created me." ...

O.K. Now, once we have come to believe that we are God's incarnations in exactly the body and sexuality and gender She created us to be, it should be easy enough for us to come out and tell people that God inhabits and loves them just the way they are – and that the reason we are sure of that is that we also are embodiments of God Herself, made in Her image and pronounced good (Genesis 1:31). This coming out should be easy, right?

Wrong!

Why, then, once we are convinced of the original blessing that we were created holy in our deepest eternal Essence – why is it so difficult to share that Good News with others? I think there are many reasons.

For one thing, we are afraid of sounding arrogant by claiming we are equal to Jesus. And indeed, Jesus is ahead of us because he embodied perfect trust, perfect oneness with his heavenly Abba, whereas we still struggle and will achieve total perfection only when we are gathered back into our eternal home. But it is not arrogant to claim that God's will is being done in us on earth as it is in heaven. Quite the opposite: It is arrogant to deny what the Scriptures tell us is God's truth.

For another thing, we don't want to make other people feel as if we think we're better than they are. For instance, when Walt Whitman wrote, "I celebrate myself and sing myself," he hastened to add that what he celebrates about himself he celebrates about his readers also. Like Whitman, we must be careful to recognize the essential divinity of our sisters and brothers whenever we assert our own eternal connection to the Holy One who is our Source and Sustenance, who lives within us as we live within Her (Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 3:3 and 3:11; Acts 17:28).

Perhaps the deepest blockage to our coming out as divine embodiments is the widespread belief in Original Sin. We may have been created good, we are told, but then we became evil when we disobeyed God and got ourselves thrown out of the Garden of Eden in the bodies of our forefather, Adam, and our foremother, Eve. But I believe that the "fall" that is described in Genesis Chapter 3 is the failure to trust the presence of God within ourselves. The serpent-ego convinces us that God is separate from us and is holding out from us the most delicious fruit.

It is precisely this lack of trust in God's love that caused my parents to teach me to distrust my most profound intuitions and instincts. And the exercise we did a few minutes ago is intended to begin the healing of that dreadful distrust in the divine ground of our own Being.

The blessed fact is that we human beings are not strong enough to overturn the will of God, who created us good (Genesis 1:31). We can certainly *imagine* ourselves separate from God, and we can certainly behave cruelly and selfishly as we imagine that separation. But in reality we have never left Home, and by sharing this Good News with others, we bear witness to the glorious connectedness of a worldwide spiritual family.

Several of my cousins remain fundamentalists, and one of them expressed shock that I am not afraid of God's judgment. She believes there is a great gulf fixed between a good God and an evil human race, to be bridged only by God's punishing Jesus for human evil. However, we also have a cousin-by-marriage who happens to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist. So when my fundamentalist cousin told me that we sinful human beings ought to fear God's anger, I responded, "Well, what would our novelist cousin feel if we told her we really love and adore *her*, but we think her *novels* are disgusting!" Any writer feels most praised when readers praise specific aspects of their written works. So why should God feel honored when we *dishonor* the works She has created?

Going beyond these theological and interpersonal roadblocks to coming out as incarnations of God's love, we also encounter internal personal roadblocks to that coming out. As women, for instance, we are taught that we aren't as intellectual and skillful as men, so we'd better have pretty bodies to justify our presence in society. And religious imagery exalts males over females by using exclusively masculine pronouns for God and utilizing images like God as King, Master, Warrior, and Father, failing to lift up the female images of God, even the ones that are used in the Bible. When we add to the female put-downs all the put-downs of lesbians, bisexuals, and transwomen as existing in defiance of God's will, it is no wonder that we feel embarrassed to come out as manifestations of God! God is holy, and until love overcomes the socialization that describes women and queers as *not* holy, we will quake to come out and fear to assert our own holiness.

Back in the late 1960s and early '70s, when the second wave of the women's movement was at its height, women meeting in support groups discovered that it was relatively easy to admit their failings to one another, but much harder to claim their own wonderful qualities.

Back then, women tried to help one another believe themselves to be equal to the male half of the population (and sometimes superior). But I am arguing for a different reason to hold up our heads in joyful pride. I am saying that we must learn to trust in our Eternal Identity – we must become confident of our invisible but unassailable connection to our Divine Mother – so that we can connect to ourselves and others as the Holy Beings we are.

A Zen Buddhist named Ann Dannelly has summarized what I'm driving at. She says, "[I am helping to heal the planet] by living from a place of knowing that I'm intrinsically good. I wish everyone would wake up and realize, 'Who I am is authentic goodness,' because the most radical act you can do to save the planet is to stop believing in the voices of self-hate ... You have the wisdom inside of you. Do everything you can to honor that. Honor the Light in you, and don't let anybody talk you out of it.'"¹

Jesus knew it would not be easy for his followers to come out as extensions or incarnations of our Creator. For that reason, Jesus fervently prayed that his followers would "all ... be one as you, Abba, are in me and I in you; I pray they may be one in us" (John 17:21). So the next time you think it might be arrogant for you to recognize that you are a beloved child of God, as Jesus was, tell yourself that you are simply answering *yes* to the prayer that Jesus prayed: namely, that "the love you [Abba] have for me may live in them, just as I may live in them" (John 17:26). To say *yes* to the prayer of Jesus is not arrogance. It is trust. It is faith.

¹Birthing God: Women's Experiences of the Divine, by Lana Dalberg (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2013), pp. 78-79.

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