

Ross Hostetter

“Integral Christian Spirituality”

Episode 4 of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity

EvolutionaryChristianity.com



Ross Hostetter is an attorney, mediator, executive trainer, corporate consultant, and former General Counsel of the Integral Institute. A leading advocate of Integral Christianity, he is co-founder and director of the Boulder Integral Center, in Colorado.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is an **excellent introduction to Integral philosophy**, and it superbly illustrates how Christianity can be made fresh and enticing for postmodern minds (and beyond) by acquiring both **an evolutionary understanding and a “stages of development” perspective** that is one of the hallmarks of the Integral worldview. Using a developmental perspective in reviewing Christian history, horrific abuses in former eras no longer need stay hidden in the closet.

This episode, as well, uniquely calls forth reflection and discussion about the ways in which any expression of a religious tradition will necessarily manifest as **a syncretic collage of both theological doctrine and the norms and noble ideals of a particular cultural milieu**. “Americanism” is the cultural milieu that syncretically merged with the Protestant faith that shaped Hostetter’s childhood and youth in rural Illinois in the 1950s and ‘60s. He appreciates, greatly, the noble ideals and social fabric that Christian Americanism gave him as a child—but he also missed, what he now calls, **“authentic spiritual experience.”**

Much of the latter half of the interview explores, both in his personal story and generically, why and how he combines his understanding of Integral theory with his faith tradition in his advocacy for Christianity to evolve in ways that would make authentic spiritual experience more available today. His own spiritual experience transformed his understanding and relationship to **God, which he now speaks of as “a field of love.”** So this is an excellent interview to explore how personal experience can profoundly re-shape our concepts of God.

Hostetter demonstrates how the developmental approach can be used in group discussions for safely exploring participants’ personal **journeys out of scriptural literalism**. An Integral approach to development is ideal for this purpose because it does not judge earlier

stages as wrong; rather, it “**transcends and includes**” them all as vital contributors to the present.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Any groups wishing to explore the implications of Integral theory for Christian faith and worship will find this episode exceedingly helpful. Because Hostetter presents a model of “stages of development” — not only in cultural evolution but also within the growth and maturation of individuals — this interview is highly recommended for youth, young adults, and parents and educators of children. Youth and young adults will see new possibilities for interpreting their own life stories in the way that Hostetter frames his own “hero’s journey” from childhood through maturation (which is also the theme of his forthcoming novel). As well, the storytelling mode of instruction along with abundant laughter make this episode very attractive for groups that would otherwise shy away from relentlessly serious modes of presentation.

This particular audio is also highly recommended (as is Ian Lawton’s) for theologically liberal groups or seminarians who are themselves looking for more “authentic spiritual experience” and/or revitalizing the centrality of Jesus in liberal Christian faith. This conversation may be too challenging for conservative Evangelicals, however, because Hostetter expressly claims that some doctrines are “unbelievable” — and because the host, Michael Dowd, launches into a parody of taking otherworldly-sounding language literally (see Questions 8 and 10 below).

BLOG COMMENT

Carol Staton says:

All of the speakers so far have been very good, but this is what I was hoping to hear—someone taking it beyond simple evolution vs. the creation story in the Bible. As a lay person without lots of letters after my name, I would love to be part of an open-minded Christian Evolutionary community, and I’m sure there are others who would as well. I hope Ross will be open to forming such a community, so I can join.

KEYWORD TOPICS

Integral Christian spirituality, **Integral philosophy** (and worldview), **directionality** (in evolution), **progress** (in evolutionary time), **the Great Story**, **consciousness** (evolution of), **consciousness** (developmental stages of), **traditionalist consciousness/culture** (as a developmental stage), **syncretic religion** (combinatorial), **“Americanism”**, **progress** (philosophical idea of), **Inquisition** (syncretic roots of), **Christianity** (historical development of), **New Atheists**, **spiritual experience** (“authentic” forms of), **behaviorism** (critique of), the **Sixties** (spiritual experimentation during), **spiritual development** (stages of), **contemplative**

tradition (of Christianity), **wilderness** (as evocative of spiritual experience), **biblical inerrancy** (arguments against), **mentors** (importance of), **“hero’s journey”** (as way of interpreting one’s life story), **God as love**, **love** (as the core doctrine of Christian faith to carry into the future), **postmodernism** (benefits and limitations of), **cultural evolution**, **faith** (as distinguished from “belief”), **supernatural beliefs** (critique of), **“Good News”** (traditional v. evolutionary understandings of), **plate tectonics** (as new understanding of creation), **evidence** (contrasted with “belief”), **evolution** (as profoundly shifting one’s faith), **“Second Coming”** (as escapist view of reality), **evolutionary impulse**, **emergence** (as evolutionary process that brings forth novelty), **embodiment** (as a good thing in religious interpretation), **mechanistic paradigm** (as de-sacralizing nature and putting God at a distance), **immanence** (of God v. transcendence), **Richard Dawkins**, **Galileo** (trial of), **dominator mindset**, **evolutionary Christianity** (key features of), **stages of faith**, **creativity** (as fundamental to the universe)

BIOGRAPHY

Ross Hostetter is part of the founding circle at Boulder Integral. Ross has enjoyed a distinguished career as an attorney, mediator, and professional trainer spanning 30 years. He came to Boulder to become General Counsel of the Integral Institute. Much of his life has been devoted to formal theoretical study and the full-bodied experience of many states and stages of development, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual line. Ross is working at Boulder Integral to create a matrix of shared agreement, structure, practice, and open-hearted community that will express the possibilities of the Integral worldview. He and his partner Mary have been married for 24 years and are raising three children together. The website for Boulder Integral Institute is <http://www.boulderintegral.org>

SUPPLEMENTARY VIDEO

Ross Hostetter talks about his youthful “rite of passage” in the wilderness and the essential role played by a mentor, beginning at 4:30 mins: <http://vimeo.com/2474983>

SUPPLEMENTARY WEBPAGE

Listener comments to this audio, along with Ross Hostetter’s responses, can be found (and new ones posted) at the following url:

<http://evolutionarychristianity.com/blog/general/ross-hostetter-integral-christian-spirituality>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. **Integral Christian Spirituality.** Ross Hostetter is one of the leaders in what has come to be known as “Integral Philosophy.”

Question 1A: *From this interview, did you get a sense of what “Integral philosophy”? What do you recall are its most distinctive features?*

Question 1B: *At the end of the interview, Ross characterizes how an Integral view transcends the liberal v. conservative dichotomy. He says:*

Liberal and conservative are really just polarities between the conserving and innovative poles of a given situation. If you stay in the conservative pole too long, you're going to have all the problems of conservatism: You're going to get inbred, you're going to get violent, you're going to get fearful. If you stay in the innovative pole constantly, you're never going to get anything done; you're never going to get any traction. You're just going to have ideas after ideas that never get enacted. But a combination of those two, a way that we can ride those polarities and be able to see them as two sides of a single unity, is going to be a really important skill. That's a syncretic skill. And if either side wins, it's a disaster.

Did you find this example of the Integral perspective attractive? Why or why not?

Question 1C: *Integral philosophy grounds Ross's perspective — and he is also a Christian. So, in this interview, he identifies the features of Christianity that he considers of prime importance for expression within an Integral worldview. What are those features? Do you agree that they are of **central importance for Christian expression** in our own times? What, if anything, from traditional Christianity seems to be missing from his Integral version of the faith — especially anything that you, yourself, might not want to leave behind?*

Question 1D: *Ross Hostetter obviously has an enthusiasm for evolution, which is enmeshed with his Integral worldview. In addition to the word “**evolution**”, he uses the word “**development**” quite a bit. What are the similarities and distinctions between these two terms — and why they are important concepts within Integral philosophy?*

2. **“Historical horrors” of Medieval Christianity.** Consistent with his Integral philosophy, Ross Hostetter pays attention to the **developmental stages of Christianity** through the centuries — and he does not ignore the “horrors.” He says,

Christianity has teamed up with a lot of different things over time, as you know. When it teamed up with monarchy and an idea of an absolute ruler that was an absolute authority, and did things like suppress the truth and root out heresies, it wasn't a particularly good version of Christianity. It produced all kinds of historical horrors: the **Inquisition**, all of the problems that we associate with medieval Christianity, a lot of the things that the **New Atheists** look at and look back at: **the trial of Galileo**, the burning of the library at Alexandria, and the suppression of truth. These are all examples of what a religion that's not working well does.

Question 2A: *What comes up for you when you read about the shadow side of the Christian faith tradition? Do you find it easy or difficult to acknowledge these “historical horrors”? Please elaborate.*

Question 2B: *If a historical perspective is vital for realistically understanding modern forms of Christianity — and for charting how the faith might continue to develop in fruitful ways — at what point in the **religious education of a child or youth** should these unsavory aspects of the tradition be brought to their attention? What harm to the individual (and to society) might be attributed to failure of Christian religious educators to teach, in safe environments, about the times and places where Christian teachings went awry?*

Question 2C: *Do you recall **when you first learned about some of the worst offenses** carried out in the name of Christianity? Were you able to assimilate that historical understanding on your own — or did you benefit from some assistance? Or are you still reluctant to think about Christianity’s role in crimes against humanity — or nature? What about the violence against homosexuals that is erupting in parts of Africa today and which is carried out by those who use the Bible to justify their hatred and violence?*

3. **Syncretic religion — Christianity plus “Americanism.”** Ross Hostetter, uniquely in this series of interviews, emphasizes that religious traditions are expressed in very different ways, depending on which other cultural norms or noble ideals they happen to team up with. When Christianity teamed up with autocratic rule in Medieval Europe, the **Inquisition** and other horrors ensued. But Ross applauds the syncretic form of Christianity that he grew up with in the 1950s and 1960s in **small-town America**. He says,

Christianity, just like other forms of religion, can sync up with things that make it more benign and more useful. In my particular upbringing, they were syncing up with **a type of American religion which had to do with the idea of progress**, the idea that America was a city on the hill, that it was a beacon to the world, that wars were always just, that its people had the best idea in the world: It was our idea to spread democracy and freedom in the world. I was born in 1954, and so the generation that was raising me was the generation that won World War II. Basically, twelve million men and women went out there and conquered the world. And they really felt that they *had* something.

Question 3A: *Ross introduces the term of “**Americanism**” to refer to the cultural worldview that was blended into his childhood experience of Christianity in America. Did his description of Americanism call up any memories or emotions for you? Did it give you any new insights into your own experience of Christianity?*

Question 3B: *Did you find Ross’s concept of “**syncretic religions**” useful in reflecting on how Christianity has been expressed through history? If yes, how so? If no, what was missing for you?*

Question 3C: *What new or hoped-for cultural norms or ideals would you like to see Christianity absorb to some degree **in its next phases of development**?*

4. **The quest for “authentic religious experience.”** While grateful for the Christian merger with “Americanism” that he grew up in, Ross Hostetter recalls that something important was missing for him. He says,

One of the things that particular environment could not provide was any sort of **authentic religious experience**. It was not really about a spiritual experience; everything was secondhand. Folks weren't looking for spiritual experience and wouldn't really know what to do with it. The pastor didn't have one. It was all just about trying to find some way to be better people and it was also pretty social.

Question 4A: *How do you recall your own experience of religion (if any) in **your childhood** and youth? Was “authentic religious experience” part of it? If so, how did that manifest for you at that time? If not, did you access such experience on your own in some other way?*

Question 4B: *How do you understand “authentic spiritual experience” and how important is such experience to you? How (if at all) do you most reliably **access** it? How would you describe to others **what form(s)** it takes for you? Or, if you feel it is lacking, can you describe what it would mean to you if you could access such experience?*

5. **The importance of mentors.** Ross Hostetter tells the story of his spiritual development by including mention of a mentor. He says,

I had a chance to get trained to be a guide at a canoe base up in Canada. There, **I had a great mentor** — Billy Finucane, who I'm going to mention for the record. He was a beautiful mentor to me, **who really cared about me in a way that allowed me to transform** from a weak, whiny little kid into somebody that was powerful and independent — not only in physical strength but in mental strength. I could go out on my own in long canoe trips into the wilderness — which I did.

Question 5A: *How important has a mentor been for you — and at which stages in your life?*

Question 5B: *Share a story (if you can) about how you were mentored and how you still carry the blessing or benefit with you today.*

Question 5C: *What can parents, educators, and other adults do — if anything — to help a child, youth, or young adult **discover a mentor**? Is it possible for an adult to envision in advance who might mentor a particular child? How does a child discover and bond with a mentor? And does that mentor need to be an actual flesh-and-blood person? What about **mentors drawn from fantasy stories, current celebrities, or famous people from previous times**?*

6. **God is love.** Ross Hostetter tells of the pivotal spiritual experience of his life, which happened on a **solo canoe trip** in the wilds of Canada. He says,

On those long **vision quests** — on the order of three weeks out in the deep Canadian wilderness by yourself — things happen out there! It's interesting: we kind of get what we ask for. I had a

spiritual experience that was very profound, where the field that is sitting underneath everything became revealed. **I felt like I was in this field of love that was penetrating everything.** It was like, “Hello, God! *This* is who you are!” [laughter] “You’re interconnecting everything — the trees and me and the Aurora Borealis in the sky and the spiral arm of the galaxy up in the night sky.” There’s just this pulsating openness, this field of love.

Question 6: *Our religious traditions tend to give us concepts of God or ultimacy that we accept in a rational way. But sometimes deep experiences, such as Ross had, provide us with understandings that we carry forward in a **heartful** and awesome way. Calling to mind your own deepest experiences, **what sense of God or ultimacy** have you acquired — and how does this compare to what you learned as a child?*

7. **Seeing the world through filters.** Ross Hostetter attributes to his youthful mystical experience in the Canadian wilderness the understanding that we do not see the world directly, but through **filters of interpretation**. He says,

One of the things that an experience like that does is you realize that there are other ways to see the world and that you are **seeing the world through filters**. You begin to realize that you could see something differently in the world depending on your **state of consciousness**. That got me interested in “state” work, in meditation and ways to try to stabilize the experience that I’d had. It also teed me up for the next big level of spiritual awareness, which is the **postmodern** level, where you realize that **your reality really is constructed and you’re seeing through a social system**, a pre-constructed way of seeing, and that there are other ways of seeing.

Question 7A: *If we understand that we actually are “seeing the world through filters,” as Ross Hostetter discovered, and if we can regularly access that understanding, to what extent might it help us **navigate the challenging differences** we face? For example, what about when we find ourselves in an escalating argument that centers on who actually is “right” about some interpretation? Or perhaps we are arguing about something very personal — like an interaction you had with someone that led a misunderstanding and hurt feelings? Please elaborate.*

Question 7B: *Have you discovered **methods**, or have you been taught ways, to see through a different set of filters — as in stepping into the shoes of the other and seeing and feeling their point of view when something goes amiss? What ways best work for you to access this relational skill?*

8. **Literalism as “unbelievable.”** Ross Hostetter says,

Once you come into a scientific level, or rational stage, of understanding, a lot of literalism becomes impossible to believe. The fact that the Earth was created in seven days: *impossible to believe*. The idea that there is a propitiating God who needs to send down his son to create a human sacrifice so that we can be freed of our sins: *very difficult to believe*. Virgin births: *difficult to believe*. An awful lot of things become very difficult to believe or are contrary to the evidence.

Question 8A: *Is this sort of understanding of the Bible **comfortable or difficult** for you to hear? Please elaborate.*

Question 8B: *If this sort of argument does not raise your faith hackles, was there ever a time when it did? If so, how did you **shift** out of that stage of faith?*

Question 8C: *What, if any, worldview assertions that you hear today bring up **resistance** in you?*

Question 8D: *Overall, **where are you on your faith journey?** Do you feel you have arrived at your fullest maturation of spiritual development and understanding — or do you sense something “more” may be in your future? If the latter, do you have intimations of what **the next stage** for you might be? Do you have a sense of when and how you might search for it with enthusiasm, rather than with fear and trepidation?*

Question 8E: *Have you explored the idea of “**stages of faith**” or “stages of spiritual development” before? If so, what **framework** do you like to use when telling the story of your own personal faith journey?*

9. **Importance of “believing in difficult things.”** Ross Hostetter, who is theologically liberal, says, “I think it's hard for people who are in the rational or scientific [stage] to understand how somebody who believes in the Bible can continue to believe it. The important thing, I think, is to realize that believing in difficult things is really important. It's an important part of our spiritual heritage.” He then goes on to say,

I think that one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that believing in something that is difficult to believe is really a very good characteristic. **The problem with it is with the object of that belief.** If you have to believe in something, like, the world was made in seven days, in spite of all the evidence, that's the wrong object for Christian belief. If, however, you are believing in something that is difficult to believe, like that all humanity could come together in a single brotherhood and sisterhood, that the reality of **love** can change the world, that my individual actions can make a difference — those are things that are very difficult to believe. . .

And so believing in something that we can actually begin to accomplish or that we can effect through our actions or the way we interact in the world is, in my view, the right thing to believe in — and it's the thread that needs to be followed for Christianity to continue to *mean* anything.

Question 9A: *Do you find helpful Ross's take on specifically how it is important to “believe in things that are difficult to believe”? Why or why not?*

Question 9B: *Ross characterizes the process of evolution as happening when “something is being brought into existence that was not there before.” He then speaks about cultural evolution in this way. He says, “**Cultural evolution** is this capacity to bring forth some new form of culture that was not there before. And it takes believing; it takes that version of faith.” In a way, Ross takes a common notion of religious belief as believing in something that was*

believed in the past, and then he transforms it into a future orientation — belief in something that is possible to achieve for the future, and that will transform some aspect of the world for the better. Do you find helpful this revised version of “faith” and “belief”?

10. **“Supernatural is unnatural is uninspiring.”** The host of this series, **Michael Dowd**, contributes the most in this particular interview when he challenges Ross Hostetter’s linkage of “faith” with “belief.” Dowd says,

I see faith and trust as synonyms. Beliefs can be the antithesis of faith. It's an attachment of the mind to something being a particular way, rather than this openhearted, openhanded trust in reality.

For Michael Dowd, his insistence on **linking the word *faith* with the word *trust***, rather than the usual word, *belief*, is important for this reason. Dowd says,

The way I'm thinking about ***all the religious traditions of the world evolving*** — not just Christianity, my own tradition, but other traditions as well — is integrating our best evidential understanding of reality and then **reinterpreting the night language** (the poetry, the myth, the symbols) of the particular tradition, in a *this-world* realistic way. So, it's not about merely supernatural, otherworldly things; **it's about *this world***. It's about **the *real* quality of our lives and our relationships**. For me, that's where this evolutionary understanding has made the biggest difference — both for me personally and also in the tens of thousands of people that Connie and I have interacted with while we've been living on the road for the last nine years.

Dowd caps off his multi-part argument identifying *faith* as *trust* — not as *belief* — in a very **provocative** way. Dowd says,

Supernatural is, by definition, *unnatural*. **Supernatural and unnatural are synonyms.** For most people, when they think about it deeply, *unnatural* is pretty uninspiring. . . .So, is *this* the gospel? Is *this* God's great news for humanity?:

An unnatural king who occasionally engages in unnatural acts, supernatural interventions, sends his unnatural son to the Earth in an unnatural way. He's born in an unnatural birth, lives an unnatural life, is killed naturally, and then unnaturally rises from the dead and appears in unnatural ways to his followers — to some of his followers — for 40 days, and then unnaturally zooms off to heaven to be back with his unnatural father, to sit on an unnatural throne, and to unnaturally judge the living and the dead. And if you profess to *believe* in all this unnatural activity literally, you and your fellow believers get to go to an unnaturally boring place for an unnaturally long time while everybody else suffers an unnatural torturous hell forever.

Now, if *that's* the good news, is it really any wonder that the New Atheists are riding bestseller lists, and that young people are leaving the church by the millions? **Our traditions shouldn't be trivialized that way—to think that it's all about the unnatural realm.**

Question 10A: *What came up for you when you listened to Michael Dowd's parody of Christian doctrine interpreted in a literal “supernatural” (unnatural) way?*

Question 10B: *What might it mean for the Church if more people interpreted supernatural-sounding language as pointing metaphorically to **real things and real dynamics in the real world**?*

Question 10C: *What about Dowd’s advocacy for using the term “**faith**” to mean “**trust**” rather than “belief”? Is that an important distinction for you? When you yourself use the term “faith,” what do you mean by it?*

11. **Evolution changes everything.** Ross Hostetter says,

Evolution really does change everything! It's been said to be the best idea anybody's ever had. It is a big idea. I'm just beginning to come to grips with the implication of that idea — not only for Christianity, but in my own life.

Question 1A1: *Does your own experience of learning about the evolutionary history of the universe and of our Earth lead you to agree with Ross? Or is there, instead, little of **practical importance** that you have drawn from the evolutionary worldview?*

Question 11B: *How does your understanding of the role of evolutionary processes affect how you live your life, or how you experience faith?*

12. **The “hero’s journey.”** In several places during the conversation, Ross Hostetter uses the phrase “the hero’s journey.” He also mentions that the novel he just completed uses the hero’s journey as its narrative structure.

Question 12A: *Have you encountered the phrase and concept of “the hero’s journey” before? If so, did it affect you in any way? [NOTE: The great mythologist of religion **Joseph Campbell** helped bring that phrase into wider public consciousness in the 1980s.]*

Question 12B: *Joseph Campbell advocated for individuals to interpret their own life story as a kind of hero’s journey — and specifically to use this understanding **to access courage** for moving through challenging times and for taking bold steps during life transitions. Do you sense that you have options in how you interpret life and especially the times of great challenge? If yes, how so? If no, why not?*

13. **Earthy, fleshy forms of Christianity, Jesus, Eucharist.** Ross Hostetter presents a central feature of his own understanding of Christianity (and his view of how it will most likely shift for others in the future) as interpreting core doctrines in more “**embodied**” and “fleshier” ways. He contrasts this “embodied” stance to more “ascending” notions of Christianity that emphasize an escape from earthly troubles to somewhere else. Ross therefore predicts,

Christianity is going to become much more of a bottom-up religion, a religion of the flesh, which I think it *could* have been from the very beginning, because **Jesus of Nazareth** was a very fleshy

man. It's the whole embodiment — using blood and spit and mud and sleeping outside. I think this is a fair reading of the New Testament. Jesus wasn't into this whole ascending spirituality, where we're going to climb all these steps to the temple, and then we're going to get inside a little room, and then inside the little room there's going to be a Holy of Holies. No. That's the ascending path. He was turning that upside down. So I think there's going to be a recovery of that, a different sort of Jesus.

Question 13A: *Is this more “embodied” form of Christianity something that attracts you — and is it something that might benefit how Christianity shows up in the world? In what ways?*

Question 13B: *In the most **provocative** part of his personal faith story, Ross Hostetter speaks of his personal shift toward a more embodied interpretation of Christian practice. He recalls,*

I was a lay Eucharistic minister, and what you do is give out the **Eucharist**, the body and blood of Christ. In this particular church, it was a beautiful ceremony. People were coming up, and they had their palms out and their eyes largely closed. Especially in the early service, people would come up and just put their tongue out, and you'd have to put the wafer on their tongue. And they were up *receiving*: the body of Christ, the blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation, all of that. And clear as a bell one Sunday morning, I had this inner voice say, “You know, I'm also equally present in shit on a stick.”

What does his story bring up for you? And what learning do you think that he himself derived from that incident? That is, why does he regard that personal epiphany as a good thing — not as something wrong or shameful?

NOTE TO DISCUSSION LEADER: **If the “shit-on-a-stick” epiphany generates a lot of negativity**, you might ask for a volunteer to read aloud a comment that Ross Hostetter posted on the community blogpage about his audio, when someone likewise drew offense. Ross wrote:

Well, It looks like my story about what happened to me one Sunday during **Eucharist** is the one that has garnered the most attention. I want to note that what I related was a story about what actually happened to me, not a theological statement about the Eucharist. My personal sense of that moment was that it was that it was a form of revelation (issued when I was all dressed up, being a good boy, and doing everything I was supposed to do just right) that was a shocking reversal of my understanding. The **Jesus** I have met in the gospels (often different than the one I meet in Church) seems to be doing this same ‘shocking reversal’ thing to pretty much everyone he meets, and especially seems to delight in unsettling everyone’s settled ideas about religion and how we get to God. Indeed the Jesus Seminar uses the shock value of statements attributed to Jesus to determine their authenticity (the more reversing of traditional understanding, the more authentic).

So I mentioned that Eucharistic moment because it was a seminal one for me, pointing me in a different direction, away from the ‘ascending’ form of spirituality (the one that tries to get to God by being higher, more refined, more ‘pure’) toward ‘descending’ spirituality that finds God in the bowels of the earth, its processes, its emerging life and creativity.

14. **Postmodern forms of Christianity as weak.** One of the characteristics of **Integral philosophy** is that it critiques and lauds both liberal and conservative forms of faith. Ross Hostetter, for example, says of postmodern liberalism:

Postmodernism requires everything to get put onto the same level. It destroys hierarchies. It **requires everybody to get weaker**. One of the things that is happening to Christianity in the postmodern world is that it actually is getting weaker. **Jesus** now is just another spiritual teacher. He doesn't have anything particularly better or worse to offer than the Buddha or some other spiritual teacher. **Postmodernism weakens Christianity.**

One of the things that I think we're trying to work on from an **Integral** standpoint is how to **reclaim Christianity's power**. That's a real challenge, because you are not going to do it on the basis of textual inerrancy.

Question 14A: *Do the forms of liberal Christian faith that you are familiar with seem to be flawed in the way that Ross asserts? Have you yourself felt some of this “weakening”, this “lessening” as you have journeyed in your own faith? Please elaborate.*

Question 14B: *How might liberal forms of Christianity **reclaim a strength** and power in the faith — without stepping “back” into forms of scriptural inerrancy or church authority?*

15. **Living “inside” the creativity of God / universe.** After “deconstructing” postmodern forms of liberal Christianity, Hostetter enthusiastically advocates for a re-invigoration of Christian faith by seeing ourselves as “living inside” the creative process — as **feeling the creative forces of evolution working within us**, not just outside of us and not just way back at some time in the past. He suggests that, if Christianity were to evolve in this way, then it would be “the cool Christianity of the 21st century.” “It would get more people to be living *inside* that creativity,” he says.

Question 15A: *Do you understand what Ross is saying well enough so that you can sense his enthusiasm? Can you **step into his shoes** of understanding — whether or not you agree with his perspective?*

Question 15B: *If you yourself were to try on this perspective of “living inside the creativity” of God, of the Universe, of the whole evolutionary process, how might that shift the way you see your own life, and **the way you step into your own future**?*

Question 15C: *For those who have made the shift that Ross has made — the shift into feeling the creativity of God/Universe flowing through themselves — some describe this shift as a fundamental **shift in identity**, of who they feel themselves to be. Can you sense how that would happen? Might that be something you would welcome into your faith experience? Or, perhaps, has that shift in identity already happened to you — and how? Please elaborate.*

16. **Maturing beyond a “Santa Claus” stage of faith.** Ross Hostetter draws from his own childhood certainty in the existence of Santa Claus to explain his view of how individuals proceed through stages of faith.

Question 16A: *Do you recall when your own understanding of **Santa Claus**, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, or any other childhood belief began to crumble? Was that an emotionally difficult transformation for you?*

Question 16B: *Ross continues his story by using the **Integral perspective** to name how individuals tend to **mature** beyond that Santa Claus stage — into what he calls the “rational” stage, and then into the “postmodern” stage and beyond into positive action and creating meaning for oneself. Did this segment in his interview generate any response or insights in you? Are “**stages of faith**” something you might like to learn more about?*

17. **Bringing it all together.** Near the end of the interview, Ross Hostetter makes a statement in which he brings together most of the themes and topics already discussed. He says,

The future of Christianity is going to be evidence-based. I think the challenge for Christianity is that it's going to have to become *real*. If we're talking about **the experience of Christ**, or having some portion of the experience that the founder had — and, by the way, I don't think we can really *have* his experience. I think we're three or four levels of consciousness above where humans were 2,000 years ago, so Christ couldn't operate a computer or drive a car or probably have a conversation with the linguistic complexity of the one that we're having. Those words weren't even there. Those concepts weren't there. The idea of evolution wasn't there. But this *state* experience of this **oneness**, this **love** — folks are going to *have* to have that. And not second-hand, because people aren't going to settle for the second-hand thing anymore.

Question 17A: *Whether or not you agree with his perspective, do you appreciate the way that he brings it all together — of how all the threads come together?*

Question 17B: *What is your **overall assessment of your experience** listening to (or reading) and then really thinking deeply about this particular interview? What, if any, ideas or stories in it especially touched you? Which, if any, insights would you like to weave into your own faith perspective, your own way of experiencing the world? About which topics would you like to learn or ponder more?*

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