

Jim Burklo

“Open Christianity and Progressive Faith”

Episode 8 of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity

EvolutionaryChristianity.com



Jim Burklo is Associate Dean of Religious Life at the University of Southern California. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, he is a leading voice in Progressive Christianity. His books include *Open Christianity: Home by Another Road* and *Birdlike and Barnless: Meditations, Prayers, Poem, and Songs for Progressive Christians*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This dialogue excels in presenting **easily accessible and practical aspects of Progressive Christian faith**. It is one of the most forthright in **denouncing supernatural concepts of God and biblical “miracle” stories**, as Burklo links supernatural beliefs to lingering problems with Christian “exceptionalism” and “exclusivity.” Highlighted, as well, are Progressive Christian emphases on **direct and authentic spiritual experience** (including mystical), **social service as spiritual practice**, and experiencing **God as love** and through social service infused with love. The importance of **interfaith experience and dialogue** is also emphasized, as is the need for Christianity to shed its sense of being the one and only right religion. The **New Atheists** are discussed (pro and con) in this conversation perhaps more than in any other.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for any theologically and socially liberal context. Because theology is not a focus, but the practical aspects of faith and spiritual experience are, this dialogue is well suited for church discussion groups. It is also strongly recommended for groups who want to explore the importance of direct spiritual/mystical experience (including participant recounting of mystical experiences from childhood).

BLOG COMMENTS

Bruce says:

This was a revelatory conversation for me, as it refers to a body of work that thought leaders have been constructing/deconstructing for a long time: New ways to worship, communicate, and connect; the difference between socially progressive and theologically progressive; that the practice and discipline of prayer and meditation are identical to soulful service. I've heard Jim's testimonial before, but hearing this one was the best! Direct experience, direct encounter of divine love.

Earl Arnold says:

I particularly appreciated Jim Burklo's talk, since he didn't have a background in literal interpretation of Scripture. Like me, he grew up in a home and church atmosphere that, while it might not hold together faith and science, didn't see a great antagonism between them. So Jim didn't have a lot of baggage he had to get rid of, to appreciate the insights we've been gaining into evolution. That resonated with my own experience.

KEYWORD TOPICS

Progressive Christianity, crises of faith, interfaith, postmodern deconstruction (of faith, problems with), **reconstruction** (of faith), **mystical experience** (importance of), **childhood awe and wonder** (importance of), **Sermon on the Mount** (as conversion experience), **love** (centrality as divine principle), **Stephen Jay Gould, "non-overlapping magisteria", Loyal Rue, Ian Barbour, integration of faith and science, Daniel Dennett, New Atheists, religions as "maps of reality", Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Scotty McLennan, personal God, Teilhard de Chardin, noosphere, cosmic evolution, evolutionary trajectory, Robert Wright, Moses** (the burning bush), **Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Fundamentalism** (reason for birth of), **biblical literalism, John Robinson, Jim Adams, Fred Plumer, Hal Taussig, The Center for Progressive Christianity, Jim Wallis, Progressive Christians Uniting, Michael Zimmerman, Evolution Sunday, Joan Roughgarden, supernaturalism** (problems with), **Christian exceptionalism, religious exclusivism, Science News, social justice, social service** (as a form of prayer)

BIOGRAPHY

Jim Burklo is the Associate Dean of Religious Life at the University of Southern California. Reverend Burklo received his B.S. in Social Relations from UC Riverside, his M.Div. from San Francisco Theological Seminary, and his ministerial ordination from the United Church of Christ. He currently teaches at USC's School of Social Work and he is a faculty mentor for the Professionalism and the Practice of Medicine course at the Keck School of Medicine.

For eight years he served as the ecumenical Protestant minister for the United Campus

Christian Ministry at Stanford University, where he supervised student projects, retreats, and internships related to spirituality and social justice. Burklo serves on the executive council of The Center for Progressive Christianity. He is the author of two books, *Open Christianity: Home by Another Road* and *Birdlike and Barnless: Meditations, Prayers, Poems, and Songs for Progressive Christians*.

While at Stanford University, Burklo served as vice-chair of the Community Working Group-Opportunity Center, which built a \$24 million housing complex for Palo Alto's homeless residents. He previously served as executive director of the Urban Ministry of Palo Alto, an interfaith nonprofit cooperation serving thousands of homeless people annually. He was also associate director of the Ecumenical Hunger Program, an interfaith hunger relief agency based in East Palo Alto. Previously he pastored Sausalito Presbyterian Church, known for its progressive theology and creative liturgy, and College Heights Church, known for its commitment to spiritual growth through interfaith exploration.

Burklo's professional webpage: <http://jimburklo.com/>

SUPPLEMENTARY VIDEO

Two short videos of Burklo speaking on the growth of the “spiritual but not religious” category:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8iGbOqJQIk&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlqOVm8pmtI&feature=related>

SUPPLEMENTARY WEBPAGE

Listener comments to this audio can be found (and new ones posted) at the following url:

<http://evolutionarychristianity.com/blog/general/jim-burklo-progressive-evolving-christianity/>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. **“Not a wall between religion and science.”** Because Jim Burklo, a “progressive” Christian, works in an **interfaith capacity with the students** at Stanford University, he regularly counsels students through **crises of faith** and encourages interfaith dialogue. As well, the need to reconcile science and religion is an important faith concern. He says,

I've always been interested in finding other ways to express Christianity and practice the heart and soul of the faith, while recognizing that it's time for another way of looking at the scripture and the tradition—in light of the fact that **there are other religions in the world that are as good for other people as ours is for us**, and in light of the fact that **science matters**. For a lot of us, we want to have a connection that's **not a wall between religion and science**, but find bridges that do not deny in any way the knowledge and wisdom of science, and at the same time are reflective of our spirituality, our spiritual experience.

Question 1: *Where would Jim Burklo's approach to issues in science-and-religion put him in the **classification of "Four Types"** established in the 1960s by Ian Barbour? Note: Refer to the Ian Barbour dialogue to refresh your memory on the four types.*

2. **Interfaith experience and crises of faith.** Burklo speaks of his experience helping students of all faiths at Stanford University,

Students would come to me with the big questions. Most of my job was to **listen** to them and be supportive of them **as they went through their own journeys**, but they would often ask me for my opinion, my point of view about matters spiritual and religious. Many of them were going through **crises of faith because it was the first time they'd been exposed to other religions** or other ways of looking at the Bible or sacred literature. For some students, that's very shocking. And I'm sure you've been through that, Michael, as a pastor yourself—it's a shattering kind of experience.

Question 2A: *What were the circumstances in your own childhood or youth in which **contact with children or adults of other faiths** (or no faith) first caused you to question the truth claims and priority of your own faith? Did you experience any particularly challenging episodes in that journey? If so, please say more.*

Question 2B: *How comfortable are you now with **Christianity's truth claims** and/or with fully accepting the other faiths as being no less valuable? For example, one listener posted this comment on the Burklo dialogue blog page, expressing concern about a fully interfaith, "progressive" approach to Christian truth claims:*

Shirley says: Jim mentions the 8 points presented by the TCPC in an effort to present a new approach to the practice of Christianity. Point two is as follows: "Recognize the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the way to God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us." While I can appreciate that many of the world's religions may share common beliefs and values, I have a hard time contemplating the possibility that all religions could lead to the end. In John 14:6, Jesus responds: "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" But if as progressive Christians we should avoid taking the Bible literally, then what is the significance of this verse, and how can I make peace with the claim that Jesus is not the only way?

Question 2C: *At what point in Christian religious education should **children/youth** be educated about other religious faiths? If a child or youth then asks, *Why should I be a Christian and not a _____*, what should be the response?*

3. **Deconstruction requires reconstruction.** Jim Burklo highlights the importance of reconstructing a faith edifice after theologically liberal and progressive Christians bring the walls of Christian orthodoxy gently or crashing down. He says:

Those of us in the theologically progressive world have been very good at blowing holes in the great battleship of orthodoxy—with cannons. We've been good at **deconstructing** some of the constructs of Protestant orthodoxy, in particular, and Catholic too, and generally blowing open issues that have been a problem for a long time.

So we've been good at *destruction*, but we have a lot of work to do in terms of *construction and connecting the heart with all of this, and finding new ways to worship with heart and soul*. That's something I take very seriously and have tried to work on for the last ten years.

We've got to find a way to **communicate our faith in a positive way**, and I think it's happening. That's the exciting part, that there's a whole movement across the country, around the world, to find new ways to express old ideas and experiences—but to put them in terms and ways of expression that honor tradition and at the same time recognize the best that science and history and social progress can bring us. It's all about coming up with a **positive message**.

Question 3A: *DECONSTRUCTION* - *In your own faith experience, what have been the primary doctrines or dogmas of religious orthodoxy that you felt the most urgency around shedding? How difficult was that process of deconstruction? Did it leave you with residual resentment against the institutions that nurtured you in orthodoxies? Or are you mostly appreciative of your earlier faith stage? Please elaborate.*

Question 3B: *RECONSTRUCTION* – *What people, books, or institutions helped you rebuild a new structure of faith? Was there a long and painful time in the interim, between deconstruction and reconstruction? Where are you now on your deconstructive/reconstructive faith journey? Have you gained anything important on that journey by way of this “Advent of Evolutionary Christianity” series?*

4. **Childhood awe and wonder.** Jim Burklo includes in his brief telling of **his personal faith journey** the importance of awe and wonder in his childhood experience of the world. He says,

I was a child who always had a sense of the **mystical**, always had a deep sense of the mystery and the numinous in the world. A phrase I wouldn't have used when I was ten years old, but in retrospect would now, was having a sense of **awe and wonder at nature**. I was a rock collector, and all I wanted to be as a kid was a geologist. I'm looking around my office now; it's full of rocks—some of them, I picked up as a child. They're a real connection with my past. But I always had a **sense of the holy** and the wonder and the mystery of nature. My parents say that when I was a kid, I would sleepwalk into their bedroom and recite the geologic eras to them.

Question 4A: *Recollecting your own childhood, can you easily recall an example of feeling the “numinosity” of the actual world? Call to mind **an experience** that was more than a childhood fascination, but something that was indeed a special one-time or episodic experience. Please briefly describe.*

Question 4B: *If you can recall a numinous childhood experience, how might you now interpret it shaping or **portending some aspect of your adult life**? If you cannot recall such a childhood experience, do you feel a nostalgic sense of missing—or perhaps did adult experiences of the numinous provide you with such gifts? Please elaborate.*

Question 4C: *Can parents, teachers, and other adults establish environmental contexts that enhance the possibilities for children to experience profound relationship and wonder with the*

world around them? Or is the most important requirement **free and unstructured alone time** for a child in the unmediated natural world? (e.g., the “last child in the woods” concern).

5. **Bible passages that spur religious awakenings.** In recounting his own faith journey Jim Burklo tells of his **drifting away from faith as a teenager**, but then a sudden awakening occurred upon his hearing a particular Bible passage read while he was **backpacking in the Sierras** as a guest in an otherwise Fundamentalist youth camp. He recalls,

Then we got to the top of Kearsarge Pass in the Sierra, this spectacular mountaintop experience, and the leader, of course, pulls out the Bible and what is he going to read? **The Sermon on the Mount.** Well, he read the part about **loving your enemies**—and this was right in the height of the Vietnam War, and I was an anti-war protestor in high school—so I heard the part about loving your enemies, and it went straight into my heart. It was like an explosion inside, a direct experience of **Divine love.** I was sure I had experienced God directly. I fell silent. I said hardly anything more the whole trip, because I was so completely boggled by the idea that you could have love so strong that you could love your enemies. *That's* what God is: God is loving your enemies—including loving these Fundamentalists that I was with.

Question 5A: *Have you had any profound experiences when a particular Bible passage or other religious reading had a similar effect on you? If so, how was your experience similar to or different from that of Jim Burklo's experience? If not, consider Jim's story: Besides the awesome natural splendor, what preliminary experience that Jim speaks about may have been essential for setting the stage for the **awakening** to occur?*

Question 5B: *Jim concludes his story,*

At the end of the trip, I had to thank these folks that I thought were completely wrong about everything—almost. The one thing they were right about is that there is this **Divine love.** It is a very powerful, real thing—and that's what it's about.

That was a moment for me; **that was my conversion experience**, if you will. That's what set me on the path of my life. I never did agree with the theology of those folks, even at the time, but there was something that we had in common. And I still believe that. There's a way that we can connect across theological divisions at the level of the **heart.** I believe that still.

*How does this part of his story affect you? Where do you find **the most resonance with your own life experience**?*

6. **Love as a divine principle.** Jim attributes his awakening to **the centrality of “love”** as a divine principle in the universe. This was the turning point for his **regaining of faith.**

The wall that had existed before, between what I was learning about **science** and what I was experiencing or thinking about spirituality and religion was gone. Everything came together through love—and the **love** was there in the stones and the lakes down below, and in the sky. It was all one.

At the very end of the dialogue Jim talks about “direct experience with the Divine...”

... the Divine in the wonderful biblical sense that **love is God and God is love**, and that we are to be humble in the face of this overwhelming love. It is a love so great that it extends to enemies, a **love so great that it binds the universe together and urges it forward toward creativity** and consciousness.

Question 6: *Several other speakers in this series also point to **love** as a primary attribute of their sense of **God's presence** in the world and/or as a pervasive felt presence that accompanied a key numinous, spiritual experience for them. Have you similarly had a profound sense of relationality and goodness in the world beyond human-to-human expressions of love – whether or not “love” is your term of choice to characterize such experience?*

7. **Religion as a “map of reality.”** The host, Michael Dowd, advocates an **evolutionary understanding of religion in a functional way**. Citing philosopher of religion **Loyal Rue**, **Dowd** says,

All religions are mythic maps of “how things are and which things matter.” Said another way, **religions are mythic maps of what's real and what's important**. If you abide by the map, you'll experience personal wholeness, and your group experiences cultural coherence. It's a way of cutting through the understanding some people have—like **Daniel Dennett**, for example. I think one of the fatal flaws, in my opinion, of Dennett's otherwise good book *Breaking the Spell* is that his understanding of religion is inadequate. It's not accurate. He basically sees religion as belief in otherworldly entities.

Question 7: *Are you attracted to or repelled by the prospect of understanding religious doctrines, faith, and practices from an **evolutionary** standpoint? And has this possibility ever occurred to you before? Overall, what does this passage by Michael Dowd call up for you?*

8. **The “New Atheists” as having a role to play.** Quite commonly in this series, a speaker will mention the New Atheists in a critical way. Almost always, Michael Dowd as host challenges that characterization. Here is their short dialogue:

Jim: And that's a problem with all the new public atheists. It's a lack of awareness, even of Progressive Theology—that there's a world of Christians who don't put up that wall or create the conditions where a wall would need to exist. Atheists don't seem to know that we're here.

Host: I think the New Atheists have a role to play.

Jim: Absolutely.

Host: I sometimes think about it this way: The faith that **Sam Harris** claims is ending, in his book *The End of Faith*, deserves to end. It's not faith anyway; it's not trust. It's attachment to beliefs. The God that **Richard Dawkins** says is a delusion, *is* a delusion. God is not a supernatural terrorist who blesses some and smites others, who roots for one football team over another. These are trivial notions of ultimacy, of God.

Jim: Yes, and even in more orthodox or traditional Christianity there are so many flavors and nuances that are just left out of the discussion among the **New Atheists**. I think that's unfortunate. Have you seen Scotty McLennan's book, *Jesus Was a Liberal*?

Host: No, I haven't.

Jim: You might enjoy that, because it's a response to the four public atheists, and it's beautifully done. He's the Dean of Religious Life at Stanford, and he's a gentle, generous soul. The way he honors the contributions of these folks, but also responds to the strawman they've created, is beautifully done. It's a nice response.

Question 8A: *Coming into this educational series, had you heard of and formed an opinion of the so-called “New Atheists”? If so, what was it? If not, to what extent are you curious to learn more about them, based on what you have heard here thus far?*

Question 8B: *What is your response to Dowd's central point here about how he agrees with the New Atheists? [Note: If you google “Thank God for the New Atheists” you will see that Dowd has delivered sermons and published articles using that title—and that bloggers and others have commented on that prospect.]*

9. **Deconstructing an interventionist God, reconstructing an awe-inspiring God.** Jim Burklo is in full agreement with Michael Dowd that eliminating an interventionist portrayal of God is a faith gain rather than a loss. Jim says,

A lot of folks think that **if you take God out of the picture as the manipulator of the universe**—getting in there and somehow tinkering directly to create humans without evolution—that somehow when you take that kind of God out of the equation, then there's no magic, mystery, wonder, awe. And that is *not* the case. I think it's even more amazing that you can have a process as simple, in a way, as **evolution**. That this simple algorithm could generate such staggering diversity, complexity, and intelligence, and that this could come out of a process like that, I think is staggering. That's awe-inspiring in the extreme.

Question 9: *Are you similarly excited about setting aside an “interventionist” view of God—or are you less than enthusiastic, even opposed, by that prospect? Please elaborate.*

10. **Is there room for a “personal” God in Progressive Christianity?** A listener posted this criticism of Dowd's and Burklo's jettisoning of an interventionist aspect to God:

Jeff says: What I fear in going all the way into progressive Christianity is **the loss of God as person**, the one I can talk to and who hears me. The one I even hear from sometimes but without speech. I have read in Hinduism that some see God as impersonal and they are right and that others see God as personal and they are right. **Is there a place in progressive Christianity for a personal God?**

Jim Burklo responded online to the comment this way:

Jim Burklo says:

I'm so thankful to Michael Dowd for putting this forum together. His interview with me really got me thinking about this topic again, in greater depth. In response to some comments about whether or not there is room **for the supernatural, for a personal God, for miracles** — these are important issues.

Certainly there is room in the progressive Christian world for people who have such perspectives, and I don't want to denigrate anyone who holds on to these traditional beliefs. I think there is a way to bridge some of these gaps. For instance, as Michael's work so beautifully puts it, the miraculous is all around us, all the time, in the processes of nature. Nature itself is "super" without necessarily requiring us to believe in the supernatural. Also, the natural world includes non-material phenomena. Mind is a non-material **emergent property** of the material processes of the brain. So mind or soul is natural, without being material.

Regarding the **miracles of and about Jesus**, I start with the presumption that they are very potent myths, because that's what they appear to be. If somehow they could be determined to be factual, I would then assume that eventually they could be explained in terms of natural processes. But this does not in any way deny the spiritual significance of these stories. All of them have meaning and importance far beyond any calculation of their historical veracity. The "miracles" are the stories themselves, packed with potency for our lives, thousands of years after they began to be told.

On the question of a **personal God**, I like Peter's response from the Hindu tradition, which deeply honors "jnana" or intellectualism as well as "bhakti" or devotion. I follow both paths. I experience God in nature in a profoundly personal way. I often go into rapturous bliss while taking hikes in the mountains of Southern California, feeling the universe around me as a person, The Person, the ultimate lover – not just a series of objects or sights I encounter along the trail. I am overwhelmed totally by God, from within and without, through the air and the sky and the earth and from within my own body. If you hike up to Nordhoff Ridge from the town of Ojai on a clear winter day, you, too, can meet God in person! You can meet God walking down the sidewalk in South Central LA (where I work), for that matter.....

Editor's Note: You can access this online dialogue at:

<http://evolutionarychristianity.com/blog/general/jim-burklo-progressive-evolving-christianity/>

Question 10A: *Do you appreciate Jim Burklo's perspective on a "personal God"? Why or why not?*

Question 10B: *Michael Dowd's elaboration of his views on a personal God can be found in several of his blogposts: (1) "[God is a Divine Personification, Not a Person](#)" (2) "[Religion is About Right Relationship to Reality, Not the Supernatural](#)". If you do look at those resources, what is your response to Dowd's views?*

Question 10C: *How would you answer the question, "Is there room for a personal God in Progressive Christianity?"*

11. **Experiential faith and direct encounter with divinity.** Jim Burklo describes what has come to be called "Progressive Christianity" in a way that emphasizes its continuity with past

Christian experience:

In one sense, Progressive Christianity is no news. It's just **Christianity with its roots all the way back to Jesus. It's rooted in Jesus; it's rooted in the Scripture; it's rooted in the many traditions of the Church.** I think there's a kind of thread that runs from the very beginning—before the beginning—of the Christian Church that ties things together with this present movement of theologically Progressive Christianity. I would say that's **the mystical tradition of the faith.**

By mystical, I don't mean hocus-pocus magic; I mean direct experience, **direct encounter with Divinity, experiential faith.** That's a thread that's very strong in the Bible itself, in the New Testament, and certainly in the Hebrew Scriptures. There's a thread that runs all the way from the beginning of direct experiential encounter—Moses with the burning bush. “Who are you?” asks Moses to the bush that was talking. “I Am that I Am,” answers the bush. That would be a very profound mystical idea or experience that's being described there. You run that all the way through the Hebrew Scriptures, through the prophets, through Jesus, through the early Church, through the great mystical teachers of the Church—Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich. There's a thread there that's focused on how we encounter and experience God directly in **prayer**—as well as **in service to each other.** It's **not so much focused on the dogma** and doctrine, important though that is for the history of the Church and so much a part of our matrimony and patrimony, if you will, of the faith—but much more **focused on experience and practice.** I think that's how I would describe the connection with Progressive Christianity today.

Question 11A: *Based on your own experience, what are **the pros and cons** of a religious movement that centers less on doctrines of faith and more on “direct encounter with divinity”?*

Question 11B: *Having heard earlier about Jim Burklo's youthful direct encounter with divinity while hiking in the mountains, do you have a better appreciation of what he is trying to say in this passage? Overall, how important is that example of **personal story** for helping you understand not only what Jim is trying to say but also why he regards direct experience as central to Progressive Christianity?*

12. **Progressive Christianity: social witness and religious pluralism.** Beyond having an emphasis on direct religious experience, Jim Burklo characterizes the substantive aspects of Progressive Christianity in this way:

I think what happened is that there was a crying need felt by many in the last fifteen or so years to make explicit what it means to embrace **a religion that “takes the Bible seriously because we do not take it literally,”** that embraces the **social witness of the Gospel** every bit as much as the personal, moral witness, and that recognizes that other religions may be as good for others as ours is for us—the pluralistic approach to religion. All that came together in this idea of Progressive Christianity.

He continues,

The gist of it is that we are Christians who take our tradition seriously but recognize that other traditions bring people to God as ours does for us. We recognize that there are a lot of ways to read the Scriptures, and that there's **not just one way** that one must follow in order to be Christian, and

that there's room at the Communion Table for all of us. We **accept gay and lesbian people** as they are. That's a big part of Progressive Christianity—a welcoming of gay and lesbian people, as they have been created by the divine evolutionary process.

Question 12A: *What aspects of Progressive Christianity already apply to **your own faith** development? Where do you differ—and why? What, if any, aspect of your faith that is very important to you would seem to “go missing” from a Progressive Christian stance? Or, if you are nonreligious, where is Progressive Christianity still “too religious” for you?*

Question 12-Supplement (for teachers): *If you are assigning questions as homework, you may wish to have students look at “**the eight points of Progressive Christianity**” at this webpage: <http://www.tcpc.org/about/8points.cfm>*

13. **Problems with “supernatural” interpretations of Christianity.** Jim Burklo says,

One of the several elephants in the room in Christianity is the whole topic of the miraculous and the supernatural. I really believe that **as long as Christianity is unable to shake itself from the shackles of supernaturalism, we're going to have problems.** We're going to have problems with integrating our spirituality with what we know about science. We're going to have problems with **exceptionalism**, the whole idea that Christianity is the only way. Thus we're going to have problems with religious **exclusivism**. It's just going to keep coming up again and again and again until we realize that the real miracle of this world is the fact of existence itself. That's a jaw-dropping miracle. To hang our faith on whether or not Jesus really walked on water or really physically rose from the dead is not only going to lead us down a blind alley in faith, it's also going to contribute to a misunderstanding of our relationship with the natural world.

Question 13: *What comes up for you when you think about Jim Burklo's criticism of **supernatural interpretations** of various tenets of Christian faith?*

14. **Soulful service as a form of prayer.** Social justice and social service is a big component of Progressive Christian practice. Jim Burklo says,

Prayer and meditation practice is virtually identical to the practice of soulful service to other people. The discipline you've got to follow in order to be a good social worker or social justice advocate is identical to the work you have to do in prayer. It's about **standing back and observing, with love and without judgment.** If you can do that in your social action, and if you can do that in your prayer life, you will experience God directly.

Question 14: *Have you had any direct experience of what Jim talks about here: that “soulful service” is not just an outward good; it can have the same inward effect and experience of the divine as prayer? If yes, please share your experience or thoughts on this.*