Jesus and Differentiation of Self

in the New Testament Gospels

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Introduction

Murray Bowen introduced the concept of *differentiation of self* to classify human functioning, from the lowest possible levels to the highest potential level, on a single dimension (Bowen 1994, 472). Bowen's scale extends on a continuum from the lowest possible level of "undifferentiation," represented as 0 on the scale, to the highest theoretical level of "differentiation," which is 100 on the scale. People on the lower half of the scale live in a "feeling" controlled world. Feelings and subjectivity dominate the reasoning process most often. According to Bowen, at lower levels people orient primary life goals around love, happiness, comfort, and security (Bowen 1994, 474).

On the other hand, people in the upper half of the scale exhibit more of an autonomous self. Emotional fusion in close relationships dominates life less, while more energy is available for goal-directed activity. In the upper half of the scale people are increasingly able to distinguish between feelings and objective reality. Bowen postulates that in the range between 50 and 75 on the scale one would expect to find people with increasingly defined convictions and opinions on most essential issues, but who are still sensitive to opinions of other around them. Even at this level people base some decisions on feelings in order to avoid the disapproval of others.
Bowen says,

> When the scale was first devised, the 100 level was reserved for the being who was perfect in all levels of emotional, cellular, and physiological functioning. I expect there might be some unusual figures in history, or possibly some living persons who would fit into the mid-90 range (Bowen 1994, 474).

Bowen's hypothesis is that a 75 on the scale would be a very high level of functioning and that those above 60 would represent a very small percentage of the population.

What, according to Bowen, characterizes the "high-scale people"? These people are clear about the difference between feeling and thinking. Their routine way of making decisions is on the basis of thinking rather than feeling. High-scale people are capable of engaging in goal-directed activity in relationships. The high-scale person is more impervious to praise or criticism and has a more realistic evaluation of his own self. The

high-scale person can maintain emotional objectivity in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, and yet remain actively related to essential people in the system. According to Bowen,

> The differentiating force places emphasis on "I" in defining the foregoing characteristics. The "I" position defines principle and action in terms of, "This is what I think, or believe" and, "This is what I will do or will not do," without impinging one's own values or beliefs on others. It is the "responsible I" which assumes responsibility for one's own happiness and comfort, and it avoids thinking that tends to blame and hold others responsible for one's own unhappiness or failures. The "responsible I" avoids the "irresponsible I" which makes demands on others with, "I want, or I deserve, or this is my right, or my privilege." A reasonably differentiated person is capable of genuine concern for others without expecting something in return, but the togetherness forces treat differentiation as selfish and hostile (Bowen 1994, 495).

Differentiation of self has been described as the ability of an organism to steer its own course in the face of the pressure of its important social system to be for the system.

If the highest level of the scale of differentiation is indeed reserved for that being that is "perfect in all levels of emotional, cellular, and physiological functioning," then who might approach that ranking?

Christian theologians have attempted to understand Jesus as both human and divine. The ancient councils wrestled with balancing those two ideas that are held in tension in the New Testament. Although much attention has focused on understanding what it means to speak of Jesus of Nazareth as the divine one, the attempt to grasp the implications of his humanity is equally fascinating.

Luke, Paul, and the author of Hebrews present Jesus as the True Man, the Second Adam, the one who fully bears the image of God. They understood Jesus to be what all humans were intended to be. For Paul, Jesus' life provides the standard against which all other lives are measured.[1] The goal of Christian living becomes achieving "conformity to Christ."[2]

What would one expect to discover about Jesus' humanity if his life and teachings were compared to Bowen's description of a highly differentiated self? A comparison of the life of Jesus recorded in the New Testament gospels with the Bowen concept of differentiation of self demonstrates a high level of differentiation of self.

The four New Testament writings called "gospels" provide the only historical sources for studying the life of Jesus. Some disclaimer has to be made in using the material contained in the New Testament gospels for such a study as this.

- First, the gospels are not scientific biographies of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They are brief, containing only six hours or so of teaching and accounting for no more than the events occurring during approximately fifty days of Jesus public life, which may have extended as long as three years. These documents contain little information on Jesus' early life, focusing instead on his last three years, and particularly on his last week.

- Second, the NT Gospels are not unbiased accounts. They do not pretend to be. Rather, they proclaim a message about Jesus. They present a theological interpretation of who Jesus was and what he did, not a psychological profile. The gospel writers unapologetically believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Israel and they proclaim that message by telling his story. In this sense they may be regarded as "narrative Christology" (the doctrine of Christ's person and purpose communicated in story form).

- Third, these accounts of Jesus' words and works were not intended to supply material to study the functioning of Jesus, so to use them in this way might be said to misuse them.

Nevertheless, this study proceeds with a naïve approach that will take the gospels' portrait of Jesus at face value, accepting the reporting of his words and deeds as accurate and the narrator's comments and evaluations as reliable. Whether one understands these documents to describe the historical Jesus or whether one sees Jesus in the gospels as more of a literary figure, the question of his level of differentiation would remain a valid subject for study. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the New Testament are taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.[3]

Synoptics[4]

Since differentiation of self is a process managed in the context of one's extended and nuclear families as well as a phenomenon placed in our generations, it is appropriate that Matthew's gospel opens with a genealogy. Matthew roots the story of Jesus in the multi-generational story of the people of Israel, particularly in the story of the family of David (Matt 1:1-17).

The opening story of the New Testament is a family story: betrothal, divorce, pregnancy, marriage, sexual relations, and birth are central components in the prologue of Matthew's story of Jesus (Matt 1:18-25). Joseph's decision not to divorce Mary, but to proceed with the betrothal and marriage, despite what must have been tremendous social pressure to do otherwise suggests a high level of functioning in his life. According to the story, Joseph follows his dreams, his inner sense of what is right, rather than what might be assumed to be the togetherness forces of his family and society.

Likewise, Mary, Jesus' mother, knows the truth of her pregnancy and is able to proceed through that experience without shame, identifying herself as the "handmaiden of the LORD" (Luke 1:38). Mary's condition takes her to her relative, Elizabeth, who, despite being well past the normal age of childbearing, is also pregnant. The two of them share their joy and expectation. Joseph and Mary's ability to take a position provide a reason to think that Jesus was the eldest son of two fairly well differentiated parents.

Matthew narrates nothing of Jesus' experience between approximately ages two to thirty. Luke's story of Jesus, however, hints at the process of maturity occurring during the years of adolescence (Luke 2:41-49). At age twelve, Jesus travels to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. He becomes separated from his parents who do not discover his absence for an entire day. When they miss him, they look for him among their relatives and friends. They eventually find him on the third day in the Temple area, sitting among the rabbis, listening and asking questions. When Mary asks, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been *anxiously* [emphasis mine] searching for you?", the adolescent Jesus replies non-anxiously, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). The young Jesus is able to take an "I position" with his anxious parents, demonstrating already a growing differentiation from them and a growing awareness of that relationship that would serve as the organizing principle of his life.

The parents do not understand the meaning of their son's words, however (Luke 2:50). Jesus spends the next eighteen years or so in Nazareth in his parents' home. There, Luke observes, Mary reflects thoughtfully on all these events (Luke 2:51). Meanwhile, Jesus continues to grow in "wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

At some time during those eighteen years, it may be assumed, Joseph, Mary's husband, dies. When the adult Jesus appears in the story Mary is still a character in the narrative, but Joseph is referred to only in the past. Jesus, as the eldest son in the home, has taken up the role of head of household for a time. This fact implies that his leaving home so radically to seek the baptism of John and to pursue his calling as Israel's Messiah might be understood to be a significant act of differentiation from his family of origin. Togetherness pressure to remain at home and care for his mother might have been intense. This act certainly carried the potential of traumatizing the nuclear family. Their anxious reaction will be observed later. That this decision was rooted in differentiation of self rather than in emotional cutoff may be see from the way in which Mary continues to be a part of Jesus' life and ministry all the way to the cross.

Matthew picks up the story of Jesus at approximately age thirty when Jesus seeks out John (a relative) to be baptized by him and thus to identify with his message. When John the Baptizer refuses to baptize Jesus because he recognizes in him a higher degree of holiness than his own, Jesus insists. He defines himself and his own sense of obedience to God (Matt 3:15). Jesus takes this strong "I position" with a man widely believed to be in the

line of the ancient Hebrew prophets, a man Jesus himself will describe as "more than a prophet," and as the greatest "among those born of women" (Matt 11:9, 11).

For literary and theological purposes, apparently, Luke chooses to insert the genealogy of Jesus between his telling of Jesus' baptism and his narration of Jesus' trial in the desert (Luke 3:23-38) rather than at the beginning of the story as Matthew does. From the perspective of Bowen Theory, however, it is significant that Luke locates these acts of differentiation of self, represented by baptism and trial, in the context of his multigenerational story. Differentiation of self takes place in the context of one's nuclear family and the generations that have produced it. When Jesus determines to leave home and engage a mission he believes is his divine destiny, he does so as part of the multigenerational story of Israel.

The story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness provides another example of Jesus' well-defined self. Three times tempted to exchange self for other things, Jesus refuses. The temptations involve the suggestion that he refuse suffering, that he rely upon the spectacular to gather a following, and that he approach the Kingdom of God as a material, political entity (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). All of this runs counter to the way that Jesus approaches life, and he stands on his beliefs.

Bowen distinguishes between "basic self" and "pseudo-self." Basic self is not negotiable in the relationship system. Neither is it changed by coercion or pressure, to gain approval, or to enhance one's standing with others. Although tempted to make such an exchange, Jesus repeatedly refuses. In the struggle to settle clearly the manner in which he carries out his mission, Jesus opts for a radical commitment to what he understands to be God's will for himself, and refuses to negotiate other approaches (Matt 4:1-11). These same temptations will surface repeatedly in the story of Jesus' life, and in each instance he refuses to compromise. In other words, he acts out of solid, or basic self.

Examples of Jesus' well-differentiated self abound in that portion of his teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:28; cf. Luke 6:20-49). The section dealing with inner righteousness versus legalism is classic (5:17-48). Rabbinical teaching methodology required the teacher to have "a place to stand." He needed to be able to ground his teaching either in the Scriptures or the Oral Tradition. That is, a rabbi was not his own authority. The crowds who hear Jesus deliver these teachings respond with amazement because, "he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28). That authority shows up in his series of repeated statements concerning his interpretation of the Law: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, . . . but I tell you . . ." (5:21-22; 27, 31-32; 33-34; 38-39; 43-44). The "I" in each instance is an emphatic construction in Matthew's original language, emphasizing the contrast between the previous teachers and Jesus.

Jesus not only differentiates himself from the other rabbinical teachers by offering his own teaching without "a place to stand" in earlier writings and teachings, he also clearly confronts the behavior of those teachers (5:17-20; 6:2-4, 5-15, 16-18). Jesus will do this in great detail again later in Matthew's story (Matt 23:1-39).

Jesus' well-differentiated self permits him to say "no" to would-be followers who are themselves not so well-differentiated (Matt 8:20-22). Jesus rejects even the request to place burying one's father ahead of the kingdom: "Follow me," he says, "and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt 8:22). Jesus allows a rich young man to walk away despite his concern for the fellow (Matt 19:16-22; Mark, Luke). In each of these cases, Jesus acts firmly on principle. He understands the Kingdom of God to call for undivided loyalty, and he refuses to accept half-hearted commitment.

Jesus *seems incapable of being driven to an anxious response to situations in life* (Matt 6:25-34; 8:23-26,). Every response, no matter how severe the crisis, appears to be a thoughtful one. This kind of behavior demonstrates the functioning of one very high on the Scale of Differentiation.

When pressured by the religious establishment to conform to certain practices Jesus believed to be contrary to the spirit of God's Law, Jesus flatly refused based on conviction (Matt 9:10-13; 12:1-14). When pressured by the crowds to stay with them, he acts instead on the basis of his internal sense of mission (Luke 4:43). When pressured by John and his disciples to answer a very direct question concerning his identity as Messiah, Jesus instead turned the question back into John's head. John would have to decide for himself what he believed concerning Jesus' role in the story of Israel's redemption (Luke 7:21-23). Jesus soon requires his closest disciples to make the same decision (Luke 9:18-21).

Jesus calls those who follow him to clearly differentiate themselves from their own family of origin. He models that call in his own life. In one episode, his mother and brothers come to "speak to him" (Matt. 12:46). Mark says they came to "take charge of him" because they believed he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). When someone tells Jesus of their presence, he replies, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Then, indicating his disciples, he stated: "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; cf. Luke 11:27-28).

Jesus' teaching method often reflects differentiation of self. Using a method that might be described as *indirection*, Jesus frequently refuses to think for others, forcing them to reach conclusions for themselves. When an expert in the Law tests him with the question, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" The lawyer returns an answer that Jesus agrees with, namely, that one should love God wholeheartedly and that one should love his neighbor unselfishly. Jesus commends the answer and tells the man to go and live what he knows to

be true. The lawyer wishes to press the issue and so asks Jesus for a definition of "neighbor." Jesus replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan, but once again turns the thinking back into the head of the lawyer with a question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus' heavy reliance upon parables as a teaching method might reflect his understanding that ultimately every hearer had to make decisions regarding his or her beliefs and responses to his message (Mark 4:3-34). The methodology forced the issue.

In addition to the use of parables, Jesus relies heavily upon questions as a didactic tool that preserves self and permits others to think for themselves. He often answers questions with questions. He pushes his disciples to define themselves more clearly by means of questions. He frustrates his opponents' attempts to define him by means of questions as well.

When Jesus' friend Martha attempts to triangle him into a conflict with her sister Mary, Jesus reflects again his degree of differentiation of self by refusing to be drawn in. He calls attention to Martha's anxiety and leaves Mary to her own choices (Luke 10:38-42). When a man attempts to draw Jesus into a conflict between himself and his brother over an inheritance, Jesus refuses to become part of the triangle and confronts the man with his own greed, forcing him to deal with himself (Luke 12:13-21).

While it is not so difficult to find examples of emotions in the descriptions of Jesus (for example, compassion [Mark 1:41] or anger [Mark 3:5]), it is a challenge to find anything in Jesus' story that resembles the kind of anxious reactivity that is so regularly the experience of less well-differentiated persons. He repeatedly responds to emotion with thoughtful, helpful, and appropriate behavior.

As Jesus approaches his final trials, he agonizes in the Garden of Gethsemane over "drinking the cup" of suffering and death (Mark 14:32-42; Matt 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46). Even here in the face of the ultimate anxiety, facing an early and painful death, Jesus struggles against the pressures of "togetherness" and chooses that which will separate him from his family and disciples because it is God's will for him. This decision, like his resistance of the temptations that he had faced earlier, requires an unusually high level of differentiation on the part of Jesus.

As Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of Jesus they consistently reflect the life of a highly differentiated person. Jesus' teachings contained in those stories reflect this as well.

Jesus Teaching and Differentiation of Self in the Synoptics

Jesus' teachings contain several ideas related to the effort at differentiating

a self. First, followers are called to choose, as he has done, a commitment to the will of God over the pressures to conform to family demands (Matt 6:24, 33; 10:37-39). Jesus says,

> Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Such a commitment would require a well-differentiated self and goal-oriented behavior. Jesus recognizes that the effort to differentiate from one's family of origin could have cataclysmic consequences in the family system:

> Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matt 10:33-36; cf. Luke 13:51-53)

He tells his followers that in the process of proclaiming the kingdom, they are going to meet resistance from their own families, just as he has (Matt. 10:21). While not advocating emotional cutoff from one's family, Jesus is teaching that the togetherness forces that would pull one away from commitment to the Kingdom of God must not have the final say. One must choose to stand with the principles of the Kingdom even when pressured to do otherwise.

A second aspect of Jesus' teaching that relates to the project of differentiating a self is his admonition to those in his kingdom to *work on themselves, rather than on others*. He says, for example,

> Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matt 7:1-5)

He focuses his disciples thinking upon their own reactivity rather than upon the behavior of others. This kind of focus leaves intact the boundaries of a high level self.

A third aspect of his teaching that intersects the project of differentiating a self is his instruction to kingdom citizens to live life without anxiety. He teaches his disciples that such a non-anxious approach is possible through learning to trust God. He teaches specific practices, such as prayer and meditation, as a means of dealing with one's anxiety. People high on the Scale of Differentiation live with less anxiety. Jesus is urging his disciples to the same high level quality of life that he lives.

Fourth Gospel

The differences between the way the story of Jesus is told in the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel are many and they are significant. Given those differences, the fact that both traditions describe a life that is so well-differentiated stands out all the more.

Nothing is clearly told in the Fourth Gospel concerning Jesus' early childhood or adolescence. The story opens with his appearing as a grown man. Nevertheless, the first account of Jesus' miraculous power involves a family setting. At a wedding celebration in the town of Cana, Jesus' mother (who, by the way, is never called "Mary" in this writing, only "the mother of Jesus") informs him that the supply of wine has played out. She requests nothing of him directly. His response to her, however, is a differentiating response: "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come?" Then, in his own time, Jesus proceeds to perform the initial sign in this gospel's story, the transformation of water to wine (John 2:1-11). The story raises questions that it does not answer fully. Clearly, however, John intends the reader to understand that Jesus' decision to transform the water into choice wine was not done in response to maternal pressure, but in response to a sense of divine timing.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke present Jesus' teaching as focused on the Kingdom of God. That subject is seldom mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, however. The focus of Jesus' teaching in John is upon Jesus himself. The parables of the kingdom so characteristic of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are noticeably absent in the Fourth Gospel. They are replaced there by the "I Am" (*ego eimi*) sayings of Jesus, which are not to be found in the other three. Many of metaphors of the kingdom in the Synoptics have a parallel in the "I Am" sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

These sayings are all phrased in emphatic terms: "*ego eimi*" (I myself am, I and no one else). This is clearly reminiscent of the speech of God in the latter part of Isaiah as it appears in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation version Old Testament. Jesus very speech serves to define himself to both his disciples and his opponents.

John, like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, presents Jesus as a self-determined leader. He will not be pressured from outside. He engages in no exchange of self, no negotiating in order to be accepted. He will neither be controlled nor coerced into performance of miraculous signs (2:4, 18; 4:48; 6:26). He will not be pressured politically (6:15). He will

not adjust his claims or demands in order to be more popular (6:41, 52; 60-71). He will not let the challenges of his own family members direct his plans (7:2-9).

And even his death is not something that happens to him, rather he claims that it is his own choice (10:11, 17-18). That claim is lived out in the story of his last hours. His final evening with his disciples, which involves a dramatic demonstration of humility, is prefaced by the narrator with these words:

> It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:1-5)

The story of the events of his last hours with his disciples, and his arrest and trial, makes it increasingly clear to the reader that Jesus is the one in charge, not the police, priests, or procurator (18:1-11; 19-24; 33-19:12). Even in death Jesus demonstrates a remarkable control of self as events around him unfold, placing his mother's life in the care of one of his closest friends (John 19:26-27).

Jesus does not offer his disciples extensive ethical instruction in John. The Fourth Gospel contains no text even remotely similar to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teaching throughout the story focuses primarily on his self-identity. The only ethical teaching in the Fourth Gospel is Jesus' "new commandment": "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (13:34). The working out of this commandment is left to the individual disciple to think through. Although the commandment focuses one's attention on relationship with others, *the model for how to be for others is Jesus' own differentiated life*.

In summary, the Gospel of John presents Jesus as a person whose differentiation of self functions at the highest level, even during times of anxiety and stress.

Conclusion

Jesus, as presented by the four New Testament evangelists, reflects well the concept of differentiation of self as observed and described by Murray Bowen. Although there could have been no intentional gathering of examples of this on the part of the writers of the four stories, many of the teachings and actions reported in those narratives reflect just such a life. They portray Jesus as a person who functions in relationship ultimately to the will of

God as he understands it, and not in terms of the togetherness forces of family, friends, or foes that pressure him to do otherwise. The fact that this portrait is consistent among the gospels indicates that such character was deeply imbedded in the earliest church's memory and tradition regarding Jesus' life. The same could not be claimed for other early church leaders, such as Peter or Paul, whose lives described in the gospels and Acts are not idealized, but are presented with both flaws and virtues.

If science and the Bible are both reliable sources of knowledge regarding human life, they would be expected to converge on many points. If Bowen Theory is accurate and if Jesus is human as well as divine, one would expect his earthly life to portray a high level of differentiation of self as Bowen described it. An examination of the accounts of Jesus' life in the four gospels does, in fact, demonstrate the expected convergence.

Implications

As far as human relationships are concerned, Jesus lived a life marked by a high level of differentiation of self. He was intimately connected with family and friends and even managed to maintain significant contact with his opponents. Yet, he was not determined by their emotional reactions. He operated with a clear commitment to the will of God as he understood it. Commitment to God's will, or to the Kingdom of God, which Jesus both lived and taught his followers, functioned for him as a *principle* against which all the pressures of his life were evaluated.

For Jesus, however, this was not a commitment to some abstract principle, but to a *relationship*. God, as Jesus spoke of him, was not an impersonal spirit, but his Holy Father. Jesus lived to do the Father's will. He sought to please the Father. In this sense, Jesus, whose life represents a high level of differentiation of self as regards his earthly relationships, was *totally determined* by his relationship to God. It was this relationship of dependence and obedience to the Father that provided for Jesus the ability to live a life so well differentiated from family, friends, and foes.

Jesus' life demonstrates the way in which relationships are at the heart of what it means to be human. He reduced the entire teaching of the Law and Prophets to a relationship of wholehearted devotion to God that results in a relationship of unselfish love for one's neighbor. It is that primary relationship to God that then governs all others. Does surrender of self to God, which Jesus called for, makes it possible for one to live among others and surrender less self in human fusions? Is it possible that an increasing "fusion" of self in relationship to God, is the only legitimate dependency? Is there a Relationship that one is not done in by when self is given over to it? Is there a Relationship that makes it possible for all other relationships to be engaged without being done in by them? The implications of Jesus' life lead in that direction.

Questions for Further Study

1. How is the process of differentiating a self related to the project of Christian spirituality that pursues "christlikeness."?
2. Is one's spirituality enhanced by the experience of differentiating a self in one's family of origin? How?
3. What is the role of one's faith in God or God's will in the process of differentiating a self?
4. How does the practice of classical spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, meditation, solitude, etc.) affect the capacity of an individual to overcome togetherness forces in life and to be able to be *with* others without having to be *for* them?
5. How does the theological concept of Jesus as the bearer of true humanity relate to Jesus as one who reflects a high degree of differentiation? Does being fully human involve being a more fully differentiated self?

References

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[1] Eph 4:13 "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

[2] Romans 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

[3] *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

[4] The term "synoptics" is used in biblical studies to refer to the first three gospels in the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are called "synoptics" because they tend to view the life of Jesus in a similar, though not identical manner. Some degree of literary dependency exists among these three writings. Explaining that dependency is referred to as "the synoptic problem." For many years, the most widely accepted theory is that Mark wrote first ("the priority of Mark") and became a source for both Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke are thought to have used another source in common, referred to as "Q." This hypothetical source is believed to have contained primarily sayings of Jesus. Additionally, both Matthew and Luke have material unique to themselves, indicating that other sources were available to them. Alternatively, some have argued for the priority of Matthew, who then became a source for Luke. Mark would then have been produced last as a kind of condensed version of the other two. Biblical scholars continue to research these issues. In contrast to the "synoptics," the gospel of John is often referred to as "the Fourth Gospel," because it represents a perspective and a set of traditions independent of the other three.