

THE ONE BODY
OF CHRIST
IN A QUANTUM AGE

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Introduction

Who are you? When I told some people I was writing a book about contemporary physics and spirituality, that was the first thing they asked me. Who are you?

To be clear, they were not asking about me. They already know who I am, for better or worse. They were asking about you. “Who do you think will read this book?” That was pretty direct. Or they might frame it in a softer way. “Who is your intended audience?”

Of course, I didn’t know who you were. I still don’t. I could only tell them who I imagined you might be. I felt that most of you would be what has long been termed “religious” people, and which now frequently is understood to be separated from others called “spiritual” people. If they are imagined to be two different groups, I presumed they would both be interested. But that is a very large group, and it has many subdivisions—people who still go to church, people who used to go but now don’t, people who still go but are floundering, people who found other denominations, or started them, people who never went to any church but always felt some kind of pull in that direction. All such people might be interested in a book exploring the common ground between science and spirituality.

I imagine that the people in those groups have a range of feelings about my topic. Some are probably skeptical about my treating two such diverse topics as if they went together. Others might feel the opposite, wondering why anyone would think they wouldn’t go together. I imagine that a large number of people in these groups would like to know more about one or the other, spirituality or science. They may have read books or articles that have sought to connect the two, but the connection was too complicated, too simplistic, or too obscure to be helpful. At times, I think I was in at least one of those groups, which probably include people like me, who have begun their own search for the connection and are looking for more information.

You may not, however, belong to any of the above groups. I imagined that some people would read this book believing there is no place in science for religion or spirituality at all. They may want to read the book to affirm their convictions or to give spirituality one last chance, even though they seriously doubt that it will be worth their time. In contrast, there may be people who would read this book hoping that I would once and for all cut religion's ties with a kind of science that could not possibly be in keeping with God's will. My guess is that this latter group will be deeply disappointed.

Finally, I imagine that some who read this book will be seekers, a group for whom I have great affection. They are people who have left open the box that asks for definition. They are believers, but maybe for too much. They are skeptics, but not able to really let anything go completely. They are people who don't color within the lines or maybe don't see the lines to begin with. For them, quantum theory may be a vast wonderland of possibilities, feeding on theories spawned from science fiction, where all things are possible. And there may be some who want to know what exactly is possible. Where is reality truly delineated?

So, who are you? I think you could be anybody, and you could have any number of reasons to believe that this might be a book that will prove important. I know writing it has been very important to me.

You may want to know who I am and why I wanted to write this book. Let me say, first of all, I am not a scientist, nor do I have any degree in quantum physics. But I do have some experience with spirituality and the spiritual journey that I believe we are all on. I am an ordained Franciscan friar who has spent several decades doing what I love to do, offering retreats and workshops of all sorts to gatherings and groups, as well as walking with many individuals on their spiritual path in the companionship called spiritual direction. It has all been a great gift that I have cherished very much.

In the process of acquiring the spiritual and theological education and formation to enable me to follow this path, a guiding belief of mine has been that theology, religion, and spirituality should harmonize with psychology and the human sciences. The studies I pursued, therefore, sought not so much to find a place in the academic world, but rather to make myself available for more direct work with groups and individuals who were walking along the spiritual path. In the course of these years, I have come to see that my guiding belief was still too narrow. For our world to be complete, spirituality and psychology also need to harmonize

with the physical sciences. It was a simple realization: if spirituality and psychology could not fit into our understanding of physical reality as a whole, what was the point?

I, therefore, set out some years ago to understand quantum theory, which seemed to me to be more spiritual (read: indefinite) than the physical science that so baffled me in high school. As anyone who has studied quantum theory knows, it has remained rather indefinite, but, for me, it has also proved to be both enlightening and enriching. Therefore, it seems that making both quantum theory and holistic spirituality more accessible to all the groups I mentioned above, and doing it in such a way that the two disciplines could converse positively or at least frankly with each other, is a valuable effort to make.

We truly live in a global village. We hear this very often, and it is affirmed for us every day in a number of ways. People of different ethnic groups, each with their own cultures, living in other countries (or our own), and possessing different beliefs and values, are interacting with us all the time, if not physically, then through electronic communications of all sorts. We can be anywhere in the world in a matter of seconds in a number of ways. Some of the older folks among us have not yet fully allowed this reality to seep into their awareness. Some of the younger folks may not see why anyone would be surprised by that; it is all they have ever known. Whether anyone intends it or not, this contrast in itself has created a world of generational and experiential gaps. Both science and religion have been affected by it in different ways.

Needing to communicate with each other in this global village, we are challenged by both culture and language. As significant as the generation gap may be, our various cultural gaps have far greater impact. Culture lies beneath education and rationality. It is in our bodies, in our emotions, wedded to our lived experiences. Rational thinking cannot fully grasp it. Culture is conveyed through language, verbal and nonverbal. The culture of science and the culture of religion are only two of the many cultures that surround us, but they are important to our lives and our world. This book cannot fully bridge the gaps that exist between them, but my hope is that this conversation between science and religion may be helpful to further understand the ways in which we are currently dividing our world and our communities of faith.

This book is not an apologetic, a term that only theological types would probably recognize. It is not seeking to defend religion. It is not

an attempt to critique science from a broadly Christian or a specifically Catholic doctrinal point of view. It is not attempting to prove or disprove either religious faith or physical theory. I envision it as more of a dialogue, or a conversation, allowing both science and spirituality to speak. Therefore, you may find yourself agreeing with some things presented or disagreeing with them. At least, be aware of where you are. I will not always be neutral myself, but I think you will know when I have questions about certain positions.

In our global village, we are immersed in an interfaith age. We are continuously being confronted with, and learning more about, the full spectrum of spiritual and religious beliefs and traditions, which is both challenging and necessary. Although I can attempt to present a variety of scientific positions on certain aspects of quantum theory (doing, I am sure, an inadequate job on all positions), I have no intention of adequately representing an overwhelming accumulation of religious beliefs. Instead, I can only speak for myself and for what I have experienced.

I am the product of a Christian—Roman Catholic and Franciscan—formation and background. As a young adult, I made a commitment to enter a male Franciscan religious community, and that decision has greatly influenced my spiritual journey as it has progressed forward to the present. Although I hope to remain open and accepting of all positions, I speak with this language and come from this worldview.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part is meant to set our historical context and identify some general themes and concepts of science and religion. The second part explores the development of quantum theory, beginning primarily with its historical roots and turning to a thematic background. You might be substantially unfamiliar with quantum theory. You might even feel a sense of anxiety or fear of the sciences in general and expect to feel stupid. I urge you to resist that feeling as unnecessary. I don't presume previous knowledge of either science or religion in the journey ahead, and I try to anticipate apprehensions. The third part of the book approaches quantum theory from the point of view of the human perceiver, you and me. It addresses mystery, neuroscience, and the development of consciousness. It concludes with some reflections on the individual spiritual journey, along with some comments concerning quantum theory and the communities of faith.

As for spirituality, it is addressed on the first page of the first chapter, and I think I touch on it on just about every page after that.