

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Who Cares?

I sometimes wonder if anyone cares about God. The Bible says that “God cares about us” (1 Pet. 5:7), but do we care about God, about the teachings of His inspired prophets and his last “word” to the world, through the Lord Jesus Messiah? Do we care passionately about the teaching given by Jesus? Or have we been systematically told that Jesus preached to and taught **only Jews!** No lie is greater than that! Jesus is the founder of the Christian faith we claim, and if we do not believe in what he taught (in addition of course to what he later taught us through Paul) we are floundering in chaos. Jesus is the first preacher of the saving Gospel (Heb. 2:3), and he preached the Gospel *first* to his colleague Jews (Matt. 15:24). This same Gospel is now equally for us all. “This one and only Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in the whole world,” Jesus said (Matt. 24:14). He promised to be with all who faithfully teach everything he taught, until the “end of the age,” which is of course the Second Coming, the single future arrival of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20). If this is not lucidly clear to you, kind reader, nothing is clear!

Millions of churchgoers across the world go weekly to church ostensibly to learn about Jesus and the faith he taught. Millions of churchgoers emerge reinforced in a conviction drawn not from Jesus at all but from Platonic philosophy. Does anyone care?

Woven into what we call our Western Christian outlook is the belief that when we die our conscious, separable soul leaves the body and ascends to heaven. “When we all get to heaven...” So runs the title of a popular hymn, and its message is repeated and reinforced in an unending succession of sermons at funerals and other occasions — and in ordinary daily language.

Does anyone care that this endemic teaching is false to the Bible we claim as our Christian guide? If the evidence of simple texts in Scripture (“Lazarus is sleeping. Lazarus is dead. I am going to wake him up,” John 11:11, 14) will not persuade the would-be disciple of Christ, who can do it? Do you and your children really find Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10 difficult? People who are dead know nothing at all. There is no activity at all in Sheol, “gravedom,” the world of all the dead. The dead are dead, not alive! There is no point at all in praying to dead persons.

Jürgen Moltmann, “the foremost Protestant theologian in the world” (*Church Times*), tells us that

our Christianity has been infected by paganism. It happened in the second century. But does anyone care?

“In the degree to which Christianity [in the second century] cut itself off from its Hebrew roots and acquired Hellenistic [Greek] and Roman form, it lost its eschatological [future] hope...It merged into late antiquity’s gnostic [pagan] religion of redemption [salvation]. From Justin onwards [150 AD], most of the Fathers revered Plato as a ‘Christian before Christ’...God’s eternity now took the place of God’s future, **heaven replaced the coming kingdom**...the immortality of the soul displaced the resurrection of the body...People ceased to hope for ‘the redemption of the body’ (Rom. 8:23)...They now hoped for the soul’s final deliverance *from* the body...”

“In the world of late antiquity, Christianity encountered the Platonic dualism of soul and body in the form of the gnostic contempt for the body...The soul, condemned to life-long incarceration in the body, yearns to be freed from this prison. It does not long for the prison to be changed into a home in which it likes to live. In this gnostic [pagan] form, the Christian hope no longer gazes forward to a future when everything will be created anew. It looks upwards, to the soul’s escape from the body and from this earth, into the heaven of blessed spirits [“When we all get to heaven...”].

All the Greek and Latin Fathers had to fight against this contemporary gnostic [pagan] religiosity, and *most of them succumbed to it*, developing a Christian spirituality which went half-way to meet these religious requirements...*And this is so even today*...A gnostic spirituality in fact replaces the original Jewish and Christian vitality of life reborn out of the creative God” (*The Spirit of Life*, p. 88-89, emphasis added.).

Ponder those words. “In this *gnostic [paganized]* form, the *Christian* hope...” Do you see what has happened? Gnostic paganism reappeared in the guise of “Christian” faith. But the switch of labels ought not to conceal the true nature of such religiosity. It is still Platonism — dressed up as the teaching of Christ. Lots of scholars and historians know this well!

In the Bible and the mind of Jesus, no one emerges from death except by resurrection of the whole person from the grave. And the great event of resurrection belongs to the *future* at the last trumpet, only when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:23, 50-52; Rev. 11:15-18). **No human beings go to a bodiless immortality in heaven at death, and in the Bible no human person is currently being tormented in a subterranean hell.** Such popular

beliefs could never have caught the imagination of churchgoers if the biblical view of our destiny had been retained.

“Heaven in the Bible is never in fact the destination of the dying,” said a leading NT scholar at Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Do churchgoers care enough to raise a protest? Many see gnosticism in the rise of the contemporary New Age movement. But gnosticism is a little closer to home. It is embedded in the “evangelical” faith of millions. Every sermon which preaches the “soul” off to heaven at death reveals that early intrusion of gnosticism via mystically-minded “church fathers.” There is a hidden paganism in the belief system of many who claim to believe the Bible only!

The faithful are not in heaven. They are waiting to be resurrected. There is only one way to be “with the Lord.” It is described with precision by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. “*In this way* we shall come to be with the Lord” — through resurrection, not before! And only on the occasion of the one return, Second Coming of Jesus. Paul in verse 15 was discussing the one future Second Coming of Jesus.

Perhaps it is that churchgoers find no comfort in the future return of Jesus to raise the faithful dead from death. It appears that Plato’s view is more comforting. This should be openly admitted, and the gnosticism/paganism recognized for what it really is. It should be repented of and the truth embraced, with enthusiasm, in its place (2 Thess. 2:10).

It makes no sense in this amazing information age that we should cling to the “Christian” hope in a *gnostic* form. Those who care about Jesus and the truth will surely wish to distance themselves from the corrupting influence of pagan philosophy and its falsehood about the “immortality of the soul.” If the church “loves the truth” — a condition for salvation itself (2 Thess. 2:10) — it ought to abandon wholesale a tradition which is no more than a thinly disguised gnostic Platonism. Christians presumably believe in Jesus and his teachings. At least that is what they claim! And Jesus the Jew cared nothing for the speculative and mystical outlook of Plato. He said nothing about the natural immortality of the soul. As a Hebrew he believed in the *acquisition* of immortality only via resurrection of the whole person *in the future* when he returns at his one Second Coming to inaugurate his worldwide Kingdom on earth (Rev. 5:10; 20:1-6, 9; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

But does anyone care? We really cannot risk not caring. Loving Jesus means loving what he taught. A major part of loving the truth is “loving his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). ✧

## Inventors of Words

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

This is an informal piece somewhat motivated by feedback from a beloved brother in Christ — feedback to a recent article of mine “Clear as Water.” All types of feedback are always welcome about the topics I address.

As a Christian emerging from The Way International (TWI) or Way Ministry (and ex-Way) background, I am still a **continual witness to the devastation caused by inventing and falsifying words**. Though we did not falsify words according to certain other traditions (for example, converting “**one**” to mean “a plurality” of three) we were guilty of many twisted, misleading **word** inventions!

Here are just a couple of examples — from among almost countless possibilities:

(a) We converted *apostasia*, “falling away” (2 Thess. 2:3, KJV) into meaning “the departure of the saints from the earth to be with Christ.” We ignored Paul’s use of “apostasize” or “forsake” in the KJV of Acts 21:21. We boldly transformed the Scripturally clear idea of “apostasy” or “departing from a teaching/doctrine” into the hypothetical event of the unbiblical “pre-tribulation rapture” — departing to heaven!

(b) “Wrath” (in reference to God’s righteous judgment against those who reject Him: 1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10) was converted into a synonym for tribulation, affliction, trouble, or distress (1 Thess. 3:3; Acts 14:22). Tribulation is something which clearly **we should expect!** By no means can one **honestly** twist the expected “tribulation” (experienced by living in this fallen world) into being a synonym for God’s righteous future judgment or “wrath.”

As you probably know, the above two examples were part of a TWI theological version of supporting a comfortable, self-serving “pre-tribulation rapture.” This was “miraculously” accomplished by blatantly **falsifying** a handful of word meanings! I was just one of thousands of people who were deceived by this insidious error for decades!

Though I do not engage in bashing people for making what might be unintentional mistakes, I believe that being alert about **twisted word meanings** is one important key to resisting Satan’s deceptions. Our spiritual enemy obviously desires that we believe and practice lies, instead of changing to love and obey the truth.

I believe that anyone from a TWI (or ex-Way) background should be continually “on guard” regarding such attacks; we did not previously have a good “track record” about understanding and practicing the integrity of Biblical words. (That is a vast understatement!)

<sup>1</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, p. 104.

I previously (two years ago) used an informal comparison to illustrate what could happen if one fails to distinguish **figurative** word uses from **literal meanings**. A student reads about “walking with God” and “walking by the spirit.” That person somehow fails to realize that “**behaving** according to God’s guidance” (as indicated by those two phrases) is a **metaphorical** usage of “walk.” When he later reads, “Joe walked to the store,” he wrongly interprets it to mean, “Joe was spiritually in harmony with God on his way to the store.” That reader has totally **ditched** the **literal** definition of “walk” — which means to put one foot in front of another (to physically move forward). If that reader gets defensive and dogmatically asserts, “The phrases ‘walk with God’ and ‘walk by the spirit’ **prove** that ‘walk’ means ‘to behave according to God’s guidance,’” he merely “proves” his inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish **figurative** uses from **literal** meanings. None of us would consciously make such a mistake with the word “walk.” Why not? We instinctively know that “walk” has a specific, **literal** meaning.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the above scenario is **exactly parallel** to what has been done with the word “baptize” in TWI and ex-Way settings. The literal idea of “baptize” is **ditched** (to suit a theology of rejecting “physical baptism”), while a figurative (ambiguous) definition is adopted. Since “baptize in water,” “baptize in holy spirit,” and “baptize in fire” are used early in the gospels, one (either subconsciously or intentionally) **plugs in** his/her definition of ‘baptize’ (and ‘baptism’). (Personally, I know that I did this subconsciously for over 42 years.) According to my own previous, habitual thinking, “baptism” was an unspecific term meaning “immerse” into whatever. I might then adamantly defend this wrongly assumed definition by saying something like this: “**Fire** does not include the idea of water in it! So ‘baptize’ in and of itself does not imply anything about water!”

Of course, “fire” does not include the idea of water. Nevertheless, “**water**” really is embedded in the term “baptize,” because “baptize” comes from an old term meaning **literally** to wash by dunking (or submerging) into water. (The lexicons and I do not lie!) Using “baptize” — in holy spirit, fire, or suffering — is very simply **not literal**, just like “walking with God” is not a **literal** use of the word “walk.”

By the way, the marvelous concept of “walking with God” is not diminished by noting that “walk” is used figuratively. By the same token, Jesus’ wonderful action of “pouring forth holy spirit” is not in the least diminished by noting that “baptize” is used in a figurative way.

It is not up to us to **invent word meanings** or “morph” terms out of their originally intended meanings. We must not use **our traditional views** on “research principles” to spin our own theology (as we did so **badly** for so long in TWI!) Our huffy-puffy, dogmatic assertions do not — for a moment — change Yahweh’s clear use of **literal** and **figurative terms**! Our “right” to infer and declare meanings does not overturn God’s clearly-expressed, **sensible** use of words. It is certainly not our job to **coerce** other people into jumping on board questionable, theological bandwagons — by promoting distorted word definitions! Whether we like it or not, we could incur the serious guilt of leading others into disobeying God and Jesus.

For example, let’s say that Jesus really **did** command his disciples to physically baptize people (Matt. 28:19), and that’s why Peter, Philip, Ananias, and Paul did so. Let’s say that **I**, in contrast to first-century believers (having **plugged in** a false, generic definition for baptize), proclaim, “I don’t see **water** at all in Jesus’ command!” What have I actually done? If I influence others, I’ve boldly led them to **disobey** Jesus! It is Satan who wants to mislead us (through twisted **word** distortions) — to the end that we mislead others!

This sly trickery — with word distortions in this case — is conveniently supportive of yet another old, twisted TWI doctrine: the delusion that mere physical baptism was **replaced** by superior spirit baptism! This “replacement” idea is just as thoroughly unbiblical as the “pre-tribulation rapture”! Though I was entrenched in this slippery deception for decades, this is really **not** a difficult error to correct (once one really looks at the simplicity of Yahweh’s correct word usage: literal and figurative).

By the way, I do not write this as representing the *status quo* of any group at all. I do not believe it is Christian **at all** to use the “agreements” and “decrees” of any church group, small or large, to bully and coerce others. Also, I do not “wield” any so-called “ecclesiastical authority” to intimidate or shush-up any who disagree with me. Anyway, I honestly don’t believe such tactics would be acceptable before Yahweh.

I’m just a Bible student who became alarmed to see how I had been previously misled into disobeying God. I knew I should share this information with others, no matter what, instead of keeping my mouth shut (which is what I “naturally” desired to do!).

By the way, I totally forgive anyone for ever dealing very quickly with me using defensive hostility, bureaucratic brush-offs, “eye-rolling” condescension, etc., instead of merely **considering** these ideas (with no obligation at all to agree to them). There is a time when I also would have proudly, arrogantly defended the old, “Way” mindset about this topic. Nevertheless, I believe

that just prayerfully **considering** the possible need to change attitudes (and actions) about this topic might end up being important before the Lord God.

I've tried very hard not to **impose** my observations on anyone, and I've really attempted **only** to send them to brothers and sisters who have expressed friendly openness to receiving them.

By the way I do not monitor people's responses to my ideas, or "excommunicate" anyone (in any way) who does not see eye-to-eye with me about anything — at any time. There is certainly nothing Christian about social ostracism due to differing views and disagreements. Please, do not misinterpret my "urgency" of tone in writing this. For example, if I teach emphatically about the importance of persisting in prayer, I am not therefore accusing anyone of failing to persist in prayer! ✧

## The End-Time Order of Events

In an extended discourse recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, Jesus replied to the straightforward question of the disciples. "Tell us," they asked, "what will be the sign of your *parousia* [Second Coming, arrival] and end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). This is a perfectly intelligible question, and the parallels in Mark and Luke express the same idea. Jesus then gave an extended sermon on what should be expected to happen *before* his dramatic, visible Second Coming (Parousia). Jesus began by warning them never to be deceived by false alarms and false teachers (Luke 21:8). He described the troubled life that disciples should expect in view of opposition to the truth. Jesus himself had experienced rejection even from his own family. Jesus then said that the end was not yet (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). He presented his students with a clear sequence of events. He warned of international warfare, famines and earthquakes. He noted that these things were merely the beginning of the birth pangs leading to the coming Kingdom, which will mean the rebirth of the world (Matt. 19:28). In verse 9 he warned of fierce opposition: "You will be hated by all nations because of my name." Back in verse 6 he had said that none of these events is in fact the end, that is, the end of the age, i.e. his Second Coming.

A key sign would be the worldwide preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations, and then the end of the age would come (v. 14). This end of the age is to be marked by the appearance of an abominable person, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place. Jesus alerted the listener/reader to the vital importance of the facts about the Abomination of Desolation. In verse 16 those who are in Judea are to flee with utmost urgency. Jesus described this brief time of extreme distress as the Great Tribulation (v. 21). Note carefully that this could not be

an extended period because the Great Tribulation is a time when it is particularly stressful for pregnant women.

A major key to Jesus' understanding of the sequence of events is verse 29. It would be "*immediately after*" that one great and unique tribulation that cosmic signs would announce his Parousia (Second Coming). The Messiah was emphatic that the Parousia would be not local but universal, and as visible as the lightning flashing from east to west (v. 27). Following the cosmic signs which would appear *immediately after* the Great Tribulation (v. 29; Mark says "*in those days, after that tribulation,*" 13:24), the Son of Man will appear visibly at his future Parousia. All this was in direct reply to their question in Matthew 24:3. The rest of the lecture on the end-times consists of warnings that none of us knows when these future signs will manifest themselves. So we must be always watchful and active.

Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 repeated the message of Jesus and was in perfect harmony with him. He warned that the Man of Sin, the personal Abomination of Desolation (Mark 13:14) would have to appear *before* the Second Coming. If that Man of Sin has not yet appeared as the final wicked agent of Satan, then the Second Coming cannot happen. All of this material is not something for specialists in prophecy alone to be preoccupied with. It is at the heart of the Christian message which we all claim to believe and teach. We are to live by every inspired word of God, not just the words that *we* think are important. ✧

## What is the Trinity? by Dale Tuggy A Book Review by Dennis Baldwin

In his epilogue, Dr. Dale Tuggy makes this acknowledgment: "The issue of the Trinity is hard. You must judge why this is so. Is it because we've made it hard by our confused speculations, or is it instead because the tripersonal God is beyond our understanding?...The correct understanding of the trinity, whatever that is, must have been preserved. Find it. Keep reading. Keep thinking, and asking for God's guidance" (p. 137).

Even though this is at the end of the book it seemed a good place to start, as I now can make certain assumptions. The topic of the Trinity is a very hard issue for many of our family and friends. This does seem the first step to "the correct understanding" of such a very important issue: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

Dale is careful to allow the reader to think for himself/herself as he posits the information he shares. He admits to, after much study and reflection, having

come down on the side of accepting the “monotheistic” view of God, and Jesus as truly the Son of God. Dale informs the reader as to how he arrived at his conclusions. The reader will be greatly benefited from this reading and study. Dale brings good credentials to the table but does not flaunt his knowledge gained during years of scholarship.

### A Call for Heterodox Thinking

Dale is a philosopher by trade, which to me brings out something very interesting. It seems we can thank philosophy for at least some of the difficulty, despite Paul’s warning in Colossians: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

In chapter six Dale refers to this statement from *The Southern Baptist Faith and Message*, Sec. II: “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.”

### But What Is an *Ousia*?

“The core of trinitarian theology (the theology of the Trinity) was first officially affirmed in 381, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different ‘Persons’ but the same in *ousia*” (*What Is the Trinity?* p. 69).

Dale writes that “the word *ousia* was a technical term in Greek philosophy...A certain party of catholic bishops (at the 325 and 381 councils) took a philosopher’s word and made it the centerpiece of their theology” (p. 71). It seems interesting to me that a philosopher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is working to make some sense of this travesty. Dale has some fun with it when he says: “If it is important for us to believe that ‘God is one *ousia* in three Persons,’ we must not only be able to pronounce sentences like that, but must also grasp their meaning. It’s not enough here to point at the alleged experts, and say that we mean whatever they mean. And it can’t merely amount to claiming that God is one in some way and three in another way” (p. 98).

What did the catholic bishops at Nicea mean by the term *ousia*? Simply saying that it means “essence” does little to clear the fog. Was there not a biblical term available which could have conveyed the thought more clearly? *What is the Trinity?* attempts in chapter 7 to clarify this “technical term in Greek philosophy” which weaseled its way into the minds of these dedicated religious minds of the fourth century. The bishops at the time and since have struggled to help themselves as well as others understand the meaning of *ousia* by adding “substance” to the equation, which makes the fog even thicker.

Remember from page 8: “He that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity...We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the [divine] substance.” Chapter 7 offers 9 “candidate meanings of *ousia*.” This review offers a small piece of the book’s interpretation of the 9 meanings:

### Candidate Meanings of *ousia*

1. The Father and Son are the same being/entity.
2. The Father and Son each has the universal essence *divinity*.
3. The Father and Son have one individual essence of divinity between them.
4. The Father and the Son share the property *being the one God himself*.
5. The Father and the Son are constituted by the same kind of matter.
6. The Father and the Son are constituted by the same portion of matter.
7. The Father and the Son are two parts of a whole (the third part being the Holy Spirit).
8. The Father and the Son are very qualitatively similar.
9. Between the Father and the Son there is but one person, namely the Father.

“We see nine options here...Each claim is different, although the claims are related to each other in various ways...But which of these did the ancient bishops actually have in mind?” (p. 78). Dale deals with the interpretations biblically as well as trying to understand the “ancient bishops,” as they were attempting to harmonize their interpretations with the “*shema*” from Deuteronomy 6:4 (affirmed by Jesus in Mark 12:29) as well as Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. They start by professing belief in “one God the Father all powerful...And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (p. 79).

### Enter a Bit of Logic

Dale wonders how the Trinity (according to apologists) could have been only implied in the New Testament and then kept secret until the fourth century (p. 127). How could this “tangled chain of reasoning have remained tangled for so long, beyond the sight of so many dedicated readers?” (p. 128).

How could such an important issue to God’s self-revelation “remain unpacked...the trap not sprung, the conclusion not drawn, for hundreds of years?” Dale asks. “It would seemingly require that God, as it were, struck blind the readers of the New Testament until the time was right for the fullness of trinitarian revelation.” This would in fact place “a correct understanding of the one God beyond Jesus’s apostles...Didn’t these receive ‘the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’?”

And didn't they faithfully pass on *Jesus's* theology?" (p. 130).

Good questions are asked. "What would I expect the Scriptures to say, and what would I expect them not to say, if they in some sense teach that God is a Trinity?" (p. 131). Why did Jesus miss so many opportunities to confess to the 12, "Look fellas: I am God and don't you ever forget it"?! Why did Jesus always refer to God as "Father"? Also, what questions do you think should have been asked and answered in the Bible if there was such a major change in God's revelation of himself to his creation?

"Most of the New Testament comes from the apostles and their immediate circles, those directly taught by the Lord Jesus, and those directly taught by them. Listening to him requires listening to them" (p. 132).

### The First Chapter Last

The first chapter begins with a story about Jephthah from Judges 12:4-6. It seemed that the men of Ephraim threatened Jephthah and the men of Gilead, who gained control of the Jordan River crossing. They gained the upper hand by requiring the crossing Ephraimites to pronounce the word "shibboleth" which they had trouble with because they could only say "sibboleth." 42,000 men lost their lives because they could not pronounce a word correctly. Even today, "to say that a word or sentence is a 'shibboleth' suggests (but doesn't require) that its users don't know what it means, so that the 'shibboleth' is *only* a marker of group membership...For many, phrases like 'the Trinity,' 'God is triune'...serve as markers of Christian identity" (p. 6).

Trinitarian creeds have been elevated to high status. "He that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity...We worship one god in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the [divine] substance." And "If anyone says that it is possible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the church which is different from that which the church has understood and understands: let him be anathema (First Vatican Council 1869-1870)" (p. 8). Don't think for yourself; we will think for you or you will be lost! And millions have allowed it to continue without giving serious thought to "What if it is wrong?"

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1).

Dale's closing thought: "The foundational question is: Who is the one God? Building on that, you can then get clearer on how Jesus relates to him." Actually, Jesus posed it as an eternal life issue. It just does not get any more important than that, don't you think?

"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

### Houston, We Have a Problem

"The creed finishes its claims about the Son: '...for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human.'... 'Became incarnate' is unclear...Did he become the soul of a certain human body? Or did this spirit somehow form one person with both a body and a normal human soul? Or were there two selves in Jesus, the man, the human self, and this eternal spirit, the direct creator, the two of them somehow cooperating in what *looked like* the earthly life of one self? This creed doesn't answer such questions...*Until one admits there is a problem, it can't be solved...* We should set aside the apologists' habit of making confident assertions about 'the' doctrine...Whether or not you ever work your way through this material, you, the thinking Christian, need a place to settle your mind. The only alternatives would seem to be confusion or avoidance" (p. 17-23).

Dale Tuggy's book "sticks rigorously to relatively *uncontroversial* logical, historical, and biblical points, so as to help you navigate through the options." ✧

### Comments

- "Many thanks to you for all your continued support with all the edifying and instructive words in the monthly *Focus on the Kingdom*. Early this week, I received the July 2017 issue. Thank you so much for the variety of articles. I tried to share them, making photocopies to send to others, especially some of our Bible schools and seminaries still embracing the doctrinal wound of Trinity theory. Some just can't address some of the sensitive issues implied. It is amazing that we now have people from all walks of life embracing the unpopular truths of the Gospel of the Kingdom. May the Lord continue to bless you and all your family and all volunteers and supporters of your great work." — *Nigeria*

- "My story is that throughout my life, my parents have been going to an apostolic church. So I was brought up in the apostolic faith. Through my childhood and youth, I had a vague concept of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit — in a constellation of a Triune God, of course. I remember asking some Bible school teachers how the Trinity thing worked, but was told that we just couldn't understand God. So I just stopped asking at some point, I guess. As a charismatic church, they viewed the gift of speaking in tongues as a necessary sign of having received the spirit, but I remember that I never experienced this mystic language automatically floating out of me, as it seemingly did with all the other people around me. So I started faking it just to fit in, and

someone else told me that I now had the spirit. I then got baptized as well. In my late teens and early twenties, I mentally broke with this faith. I continued to go to my youth church for a while, but soon I found a girl that I married, and then I stopped going all together. My life was soon on a very different path and I was becoming increasingly more and more focused on my own pleasures and ambitions. I got divorced and married another woman (my current wife, who I love more than I can express), and we have two children. Nine years ago, something in me had just had enough. I decided to clean up my life. I sought back to what I had known as a child. I started reading my Bible again and started seeking different forums and sites with different views. At first I joined the state church (which in Denmark is a Lutheran/Anglican church), and I then got baptized again. Soon however I came in contact with an ex-JW, who had written a lot of interesting articles and posted them on his website. That opened my eyes to a lot of new things. He showed me how God could not be a triune God, that the dead are sleeping, that the myth of a flaming, eternal hell is not found in the Bible, and much more. He did however still believe in a pre-existing Jesus. (Maybe Jesus was Michael and maybe not. He had not made up his mind about that yet.) He also wrote a lot about where many of the traditions in the church came from — for instance, the mother and child worship, with references to Nimrod and Semiramus and the myth about Tammuz; all the sun symbols used in the church, the priest's robes, the use of candles, the hymns, the bells and much more. All this led me to leave this church again. And because of my new acquired knowledge, I had a very difficult time at Christmas, knowing that all I was told about this fantastic tradition — our celebration of the birth of our savior — was in fact lies and mostly disgusting pagan rituals, as I saw it. I could have nothing to do with it. I told my family that I didn't want to celebrate Christmas anymore, and I wouldn't have anything to do with it. This became a difficult and stressful time for our family and nearly cost me my marriage. We worked through it and I can now enjoy the Christmas holidays for what they are — a good time spent with family and friends. (But I still won't dance around a tree!) My wife is not a Christian, but she accepts my faith. Last year, I saw Sid Hatch's YouTube video about his reasons for not believing the Trinity. That was what led me to Sir Anthony's work in Restoration Fellowship. By revelation through the spirit of God, one day my eyes were opened, and I saw that Jesus was a real human being, who began his life in Israel two thousand years ago. That changed my perspectives radically. All the pieces fall into place — the atoning death, the second Adam, Jesus being the first of the brethren, the Kingdom promise. Everything made sense all of a sudden. So that's my story so far. My

situation is that I don't have much fellowship here where I live, other than online and by email. I've come in contact with a small group of people here in Europe. I'm in contact with two other people here in Denmark. Unfortunately they live in the opposite end of the country. But we're corresponding via email a lot. But there's no doubt that it is difficult when you don't have a 'real' fellowship. It is something that I struggle with. At times I find it disheartening and discouraging. In fact, I struggle with this very issue these days. I would really appreciate if you would pray for me, about this. I have two websites — one in Danish and a similar in English. The content is articles and books. On my Danish site, I've got some of Sir Anthony's articles, but also a few other authors. I've got Eric Chang's *The Only True God* and *The Only Perfect Man*, and Sir Anthony's *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* and Sean Finnegan's *The Habits of a Disciple* are on the way. I'm hoping to be allowed to translate Bart Ehrman's *How Jesus Became God*, and *When Jesus Became God* by Richard Rubenstein. When I'm not translating I'm corresponding with other people, like JW's or just anyone who wishes to have a sincere talk about what the Bible teaches. Recently, your videos with Antwan and his wife have helped me in my correspondence with some JW's. So thanks very much for the great and important work that you do." — *Denmark*

- "At 73 years old, I am still dreaming that some of my Bible-reading colleagues and friends will be able to establish a local fellowship in the Philippines where we can worship God and discuss freely His Word, using the books and articles published by Restoration Fellowship. Together, we will endeavor to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and distribute free of charge the highly enlightening articles from your website." — *Philippines*

- "My previous Christian church-going experience revolved around a few ideas. We believed Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead, we should love our neighbors, get with the full church program, be baptized, pay our tithes...avoid tribulation by aligning our identity with God, and when we die we meet him in heaven, being reunited with other relatives we have lost along the way, and live happily ever after with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These ideas still remain commonplace, give-or-take, across the Christian churches in my country...I cannot remember any sermon being preached about a physical Kingdom of God on earth...Then someone gave me the book I'm reading, *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah*, and frankly I was gobsmacked! I clearly remember reading it while I was on a ferry heading for a camping trip. As the salty wind was blowing on my face I began to smile, and if I could have eaten that book I would have!" — *Australia*