

Focus on the Kingdom

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Doctrine on Trial

by Ken Westby

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Heresy trials in centuries past sentenced hapless Christians to burn at the stake. Things are much more civil and bloodless nowadays, but religious trials are still occurring. You may be aware that traditional Christianity is receiving a well-deserved critique of some of its most cherished doctrines.

One such doctrine concerns the Openness of God. Namely, can humans interact with God to influence Him to change His plans, or to do or not do something that He otherwise would? This hits right at the crux of whether our prayers to God have any effect upon God.

Traditional notions of God's nature, made dogma in most Protestant and Catholic teaching, hold that God is unmovable, not subject to the influence of mere mortals. Coupled with the notion that God is also all-knowing, timeless, and has determined all things, this view holds that there is no reason for Him to be moved or open to being moved at man's request, since what will be will be. God has set the future and nothing happens that is not according to His perfect will.

We may not understand His will, but this view assures us that there is some greater purpose being worked out. A child is run over by a truck and dies and we are to be comforted that somehow it fits in God's good plan. Everything happens for a purpose: some will be lost; some will be saved.

Never mind that in this view all the evil in the world must also fit into what God has ordained. Fate, as determined by God who controls and knows everything, is the future set by God. You don't know why God would make the human race and then set things up so that the vast majority never get "saved" and end up burning in hell forever (according to their view). Well, have faith that there must be a good purpose out there somewhere in the all-knowing mind of God.

Predestination is the word for it, and it is the centerpiece of Calvinism and is believed by many to be the way God has set things up. It is a pathetic, unbiblical notion that presents a distorted, even blasphemous picture of our Holy and Good God.

Open Theism

This short article can't do justice to describing what Open Theism or the Openness of God approach is about, but I can summarize. Basically, it is the opposite of theological determinism/predestination (Calvinism). It presents a more biblical understanding of God's nature and his willingness to work with and interact with those made in His image.

The Bible says God "repented"¹ or changed His plans due to human request. This is a problem for those embracing classical theism. As William Hasker writes:

"The notion of divine repentance is pivotal for the differences between classical theism and open theism. If God repents, then God undergoes change. If so, then God is not absolutely unchangeable, and certainly is not timeless. Divine repentance is closely associated with expressions of divine sorrow and regret over a decision previously made, or at least over the consequences that have flowed from such a decision.

"But a God who can experience such sorrow and regret is emotionally affected by His creatures; He is by no means impassible [divine impassibility: the supposed attribute of God's perfection that requires that He be completely self-contained, not influenced in any way by creatures, and in particular incapable of any suffering, distress, or negative emotions of any kind]. Furthermore, divine repentance is typically a response to actions and decisions made by human beings which were not in accord with God's intentions. If this really occurs, then God is not all-controlling but rather has placed some of the control in human hands — control that, in this instance, has been exercised contrary to what God wished to have happen.

"And finally, divine repentance of this sort strongly suggests that a previous divine decision has had unforeseen consequences. But if this is true, it negates the view that God has certain and comprehensive knowledge of the entire future. It is entirely understandable, then, that the proponents of classical theism have found the biblical references to divine repentance to be problematic, and have mustered all their interpretive resources in order to dispose of them in some acceptable manner."²

¹ Obviously not in the sense of repenting of sin, but meaning changing His mind.

² "Implications of Divine Repentance for the Attributes of God," opentheism.info

A few biblical examples of what I mean by Open Theism will help illustrate this openness on God's part to hear and act on behalf of human requests, whether prayer (in the case of Elijah who prayed to stop rain and three years later to start rain), or in direct interaction with God such as Abraham and Moses had.

Most of God's prophecies are conditional — dependent on how His creatures respond. Jonah was instructed to tell Nineveh it faced destruction for its sins. Yet upon hearing the coming judgment, the nation repented and God changed His mind, to Jonah's chagrin, and didn't destroy them. Was this a sincere reaction of a loving and merciful God, or just a deceptive ploy since He never really intended to destroy them, which is the common explanation of traditional determinist theism.

Jeremiah received from God the word that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem, which in time they did (Jer. 32:4; 52:12-14). But did it have to go that way? Jeremiah also predicted that the city would be spared if Zedekiah would surrender instead of holding out (Jer. 38:17-18). Zedekiah did not surrender; the city was taken and burned. If the latter was a conditional prophecy, which seems obvious, then so was the former. There could have been a different outcome depending on human reaction to God's intentions.

Is God often disappointed in His children? God told Jeremiah, "I thought that after [Israel] had done all this she would return to me, but she did not...I thought you would call Me 'Father' and not turn away from following Me. But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to Me, O house of Israel" (Jer. 3:7, 19-20).

Often God is bitterly disappointed. He did all possible to make Israel a fruitful vineyard, His chosen people. "He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:7). He had high hopes for King Saul, but Saul used his free will to reject God's leadership.

He wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; cf. Tit. 2:11), yet it appears that not all will be saved, as Jesus spoke of those evil facing a resurrection to a second death (John 5:29). God always wants good for His creation, but He made His sentient creatures (including angels) with freedom, free will. When it is used to reject His goodness, He is affected as in the days before the flood: "The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain" (Gen. 6:6).

God knows what He wants to do and the ultimate victory will be His, as the closing chapters of Revelation picture. But I think we would be surprised at the openness of God to work with us, and how the future is partly set and partly open. This is true in our lives and in the larger world. This is why our lives

count, why our prayers count, for they are heard and answered by God. If everything in life were predetermined and set, why pray? We pray; God hears. ✧

Open Theism Verses

Gen. 6:6: "The Lord was sorry He had made mankind on the earth."

Gen. 22:12: "For now I know that you [Abraham] fear God because you did not withhold your son, your only son, from Me."

Exod. 4:9: "If they do not believe even these two signs or listen to you..."

Exod. 13:17: "Lest the people change their minds..."

Exod. 16:4: "...so that I may test them. Will they walk in My instruction or not?"

Exod. 32:14: "The Lord changed His mind over the evil that He had said He would do to His people."

Num. 14:11: "How long will this people despise Me, and how long will they not believe in Me?"

Deut. 8:2: God "has brought you these forty years through the wilderness so that He might, by humbling you, test you to see if you have it within you to keep His commandments or not."

Deut. 9:18-20: "I [Moses] was terrified at the Lord's intense anger that threatened to destroy you. But He listened to me this time as well."

Deut. 13:1-3: "The Lord your God will be testing you to see if you love Him with all your mind and being."

1 Sam. 2:29-30: "The Lord, the God of Israel says, 'I really did say that your house and your ancestor's house would serve Me forever. But now the Lord says, 'May it never be!'"

1 Sam. 15:10-11, 35: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned away from Me and has not done what I told him to do."

1 Kings 22:20: "The Lord said, 'Who will deceive Ahab?'"

2 Kings 20:1-6: "You are about to die; you will not get well...Look, I will heal you...I will add 15 years to your life."

1 Chron. 21:15, "God sent an angel to ravage Jerusalem. As he was doing so, the Lord watched and relented from His judgment. He told the angel who was destroying, 'That's enough! Stop now!'"

2 Chron. 32:31: "God left him alone to test him, in order to know his true motives."

Judges 2:21-22: "I will no longer remove before them any of the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died, in order to test Israel. I want to see whether or not the people will carefully walk in the path..."

Isaiah 5:3-7: “He waited for justice, but look what He got — disobedience! He waited for fairness, but look what He got — cries for help!”

Jer. 3:6-7: “Even after [Israel] had done all that, I thought that she might come back to Me. But she did not.”

Jer. 3:19-20: “I thought you would call Me ‘Father’ and would not turn back from following Me.”

Jer. 7:31: “That is something I never commanded them to do! Indeed, it never even entered My mind.”

Jer. 18:7-11: “If that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it...If that nation does what displeases Me and does not obey Me, then I will cancel the good I promised to do to it.”

Jer. 19:5: “Such a thing never even entered My mind.”

Jer. 26:3: “Maybe they will pay attention and each of them will stop living the evil way they do. If they do that, then I will forgo destroying them as I had intended to do.”

Jer. 26:19: “The Lord changed His mind...”

Jer. 32:35: “It never even entered My mind.”

Jer. 38:17-18, 20, “You must surrender to the officers of the King of Babylon. If you do, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down...But if you do not...this city will be handed over to the Babylonians.”

Jer. 42:10: “I will relent of the disaster that I did to you.”

Ezek. 12:1-3: “Perhaps they will understand...”

Ezek. 20:21-22: “I decided to pour out My rage on them...but I refrained from doing so.”

Ezek. 22:29-31: “I looked for a man from among them who would repair the wall...but I found no one.”

Ezek. 33:13-15: “Suppose I tell the righteous that he will certainly live, but he becomes confident in his righteousness and commits iniquity...Because of the iniquity he has committed he will die.”

Joel 2:13-14, “Who knows? Perhaps He will be compassionate and relent.”

Amos 7:3, 6: “The Lord changed His mind about this.”

Jonah 3:10: “God relented concerning the judgment He had threatened them with and did not destroy them.”

Jonah 4:2: “I know that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and one who relents concerning threatened judgment.” ✧

A Focus on the Kingdom reader asks, “Which of Plato’s writings can I use to open the eyes of someone who adamantly holds to the immortality of the soul?” The following article expertly answers that question.³

Platonic Christianity (Part 1)

by Edward Acton

*“What harmony is there between Christ and Plato?”
(2 Cor. 6:15, adapted)*

You may not have heard of “Platonic Christianity.” We don’t think you will find a book with this title in the library. In fact it is not a frequently used term, even in theological circles. It is a topic unfortunately, and perhaps intentionally, avoided. It refers to a serious issue concerning certain popular traditional evangelical doctrines, and for this reason please read this presentation in prayer and open-mindedness to what the Lord might be wanting to reveal to us.

What does the term “Platonic Christianity” mean? It must refer to a combination in some manner of Platonic philosophy and Christian doctrine. But where do we find such a combination? What has Plato to do with the Bible? “What communion has light with darkness...What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor. 6:14, 16).

We wish the question were harder to answer. The fact is, it is surprisingly easy and astonishingly revealing. Christianity has openly accepted certain Platonic doctrines which are contrary to biblical teaching. In fact these Platonic elements are now so universally believed that their origin is rarely suspected. Their disagreement with Scripture is either not known or not mentioned. Actually to suggest that certain traditional doctrines are of Platonic, not biblical, origin sometimes results in one being classified as a cultist or heretic.

Yet recognized Church historians record the acceptance of Platonic doctrines by the Church in its early centuries. They note the wholesale fusion of the religion of the New Testament with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy in the late fourth or early fifth centuries A.D. In this introduction it is sufficient to say that the area of Christian doctrine most damagingly affected by Platonic influence is the doctrine of man, his nature and destiny.

In this section of this study we will explain the term “Platonic,” and draw attention to the Platonic doctrines

³ Edward Acton was a missionary in North Africa. This is from a 1988 presentation. The audio is at our website focusonthekingdom.org under “Links,” then “Podcast.”

which seem to have been espoused by Christians and to the contrasting biblical teaching.

The Meaning of Platonism and its Teaching Concerning the Nature and Destiny of Man

The term Platonism refers to the philosophy of Plato (427?-347 B.C.), one of the greatest Greek philosophers. The areas of his philosophy which have most gravely influenced Christianity are his teaching concerning (1) the nature of man (anthropology), (2) death (thanatology), and (3) future events (eschatology).

In regard to man Plato teaches anthropological dualism which states that man is composed of two separable parts, an inferior material and mortal part, the body, and a superior immaterial and immortal part, the soul. He considers the soul to be the real person; to him man is a spiritual being. Here are his own words:

“Man’s concern is not for the body that dies, but as far as he can he stands aloof from that and turns towards the soul.”⁴

“The soul is most like the divine and immortal...the body is most like the human and mortal.”⁵

Plato teaches that only the body dies, not the soul (the real person). Death is the separation of the soul from its “prison,” the body. Here again are his words:

“Do we think there is such a thing as death? Is it anything more than the separation of the soul from the body?”⁶

(Quoting Socrates) “Don’t let him worry for me, or say at my funeral that he is laying out Socrates. Be confident, and say that you are burying my body.”⁷

Plato anticipates bliss in God’s presence. He quotes Socrates as saying:

“When I have drunk the potion, I shall not be here then with you; I shall have gone clear away to some bliss of the blessed.”⁸

Then Plato says himself:

“When the man dies...the visible part of him, the body, will dissolve and disappear...but the soul, the unseen part, goes to another place noble and pure and unseen...to the presence of the good and wise God, where, if God will, my own soul must go very soon. It goes away into the unseen, which is like itself — divine and

immortal — where, on arrival it has the opportunity to be happy, freed from wandering and folly and fears and wild loves and all other human ills.”⁹

The Contrasting Teaching of the Bible

The Bible teaches that man is a simple unit of “dust.” We read in Genesis 2:7, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.” God said to Adam, “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Abraham testified, “I am nothing but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27), and David, “He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14).

Into the nostrils of this formed dust God breathed the “breath of life” or “life-spirit” as recorded in Genesis 2:7: “the breath or spirit of life” (Amplified). Interestingly enough Job, using the typical Hebrew poetic way of expressing a truth by the employment of synonyms in parallel lines, says, “The spirit of God has made me [Amplified: ‘stirred me up’], and the breath of the Almighty has given me life” (33:4). He says, “As long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils” (27:3). The man of dust was thus animated by the “breath (or spirit) of life,” as stated in the last section of Genesis 2:7: “Man became a living soul” (or “being,” NASB, NIV, Amplified).

A simple equation may assist:

DUST + BREATH = A LIVING BEING

Note that the inbreathing of God’s breath did not add a second element to the nature of man; it did no more than animate the dust. Dr. Eugene Carpenter in *The Handiwork of God in Creation* states very emphatically:

“The breath of life is merely a way of saying that man was animated by God’s impartation of breath. The Hebrew word ‘nismah’ does not denote some divine element that God imparted to Adam. God did not impregnate an already living being with divine elements in order to make man. Nowhere is ‘dust’ used to indicate a previously living being.”

The Bible defines and describes death both as an event and as a state. It states clearly that when God takes back the life-breath (or life-spirit) which he loaned to man, nothing is left but dust. Note some of the Scriptures which deal with the event of death. Job states, “If it were His intention and He withdrew His spirit [His breath], all mankind would perish together and man would return to dust” (34:14-15). Words

⁴ *Great Dialogues of Plato* (trans. Rouse), p. 467.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

almost identical are found in Psalm 104:29: “When You take away their breath they die and return to their dust.” In Ecclesiastes the statement is made concerning both man and animals, “All are of dust, and all turn to dust again” (3:20), and “The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [breath] returns to God who gave it” (12:7).

As an equation this conception is the inversion of the creation equation above:

A LIVING BEING – BREATH = DUST

Note also the biblical description of the state of death. In the first place the Bible makes it clear that the dead are totally unconscious. “The dead know nothing” (Ecc. 9:5). “His spirit departs,” the Psalmist says, and “his breath goes forth [‘leaves him,’ Amplified]...in that very day his thoughts perish” (NIV: “his plans come to nothing”) (Ps. 146:4). “The dead do not praise the Lord, neither any that go down into silence” (Ps. 115:17).

The most used biblical term describing death is “sleep.” Job’s understanding is informative. He refers basically to the fact that the dead are “asleep,” but he also makes clear that the great future event of purification and “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) will be the time of their awakening: “So man lies down and does not rise; until the heavens are no more they will not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep (14:12).

The term is later used by Jesus concerning Lazarus: “Our friend Lazarus is sleeping” (John 11:11). Peter in reference to David says, “David, after he had served his generation, fell asleep” (Acts 13:36). We should note in passing that Peter had said earlier concerning David that “he is dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day...[He] did not ascend to heaven” (Acts 2:29, 34). The dead are thus awaiting the resurrection at Christ’s return.

Again we remark on the knowledge of Job as we quote his anticipation of that next great event: “All the days of my appointed time, I will wait until my change come. You will call and I will answer You; You will long for the creature Your hands have made” (14:14-15, NIV). Daniel was told, “Rest, and at the end of days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance” (12:13, NIV).

Future events for the Old Testament believer begin with the resurrection. The Bible indicates that this is the same for New Testament believers. They are included in the “many” of Daniel 12:2: “Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life.” Abundant confirmation is presented in the New Testament. God who “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus” (Heb. 13:20) will bring also from the dead, as He did Jesus, “those who have fallen asleep” (1

Thess. 4:14). Romans 8:11 repeats almost verbatim: “He who raised up Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies.”

Twice in his writing to the Corinthians Paul states that God who raised the Lord will also raise us (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14). “Then will be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor 15:54). Note also the saying of Jesus: “The gates of Hades will not prevail” (Matt. 16:18).

Anticipation of the resurrection also reassures believers of their earthly rule and inheritance, proclaimed according to Matthew 25:31-34 by the Son of Man as he comes in glory and “sits on the throne of his glory”: “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Peter briefly describes the scene of the renewed earth, and what he had earlier called the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). “We, according to the promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

These positive promises and proclamations, along with such negative statements of Jesus as, “No one has ever gone into heaven except...the Son of man” (John 3:13), and “Where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33), show how the Platonic hope of being in the “presence of God” at death is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

What is man? Psalm 8:4 — A Resume

Man was made on the earth	Gen. 1:26-27
Made of earth	Gen. 2:7; Ps. 103:14
Made to rule the earth	Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:6
Made to inherit the earth	Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:29
Will die on the earth	
Will be buried in the earth	Gen. 3:19; Job 34:14-15;
Will become earth again	Ps. 104:29; Ecc. 12:7
Will sleep in the earth	Dan. 12:2
Will rise from the earth	Isa. 26:19
Will be judged on earth	Pro. 11:31; Isa. 24:21; Mt. 25:31-46
Will be rewarded on earth or punished on earth	Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12 Pro. 11:31; Mt. 16:27; 25:41-46
Will be reinstated as ruler over the earth	Dan. 7:27; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 12:42-44; 19:12-19; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10
Will inherit the earth or Be consumed from the earth	Ps. 37:9,11,18,22,29,34; 115:16; Gal. 3:29 Ps. 104:35 ✧

From Amillennial to Premillennial

by Dennis Baldwin, retired pastor, North Carolina

The recent discussion about amillennialism has brought to mind some thoughts which I would like to share. This subject covers over 65 years in my life.

I was converted in an Advent Christian Church and baptized at age 11. I didn't know then but have since learned that I was "amillennial" — meaning no millennial reign of Christ, no 1,000-year reign, no "giving account" of the lost before the judge, and only one universal resurrection, which means that the dead in Christ will *not* rise first (against 1 Thess. 4:16), and not only those who belong to Christ will be raised at his coming, but *so will everyone else* (against 1 Cor. 15:23). I believed that Jesus would come, and I really thought he would come very soon (it was the late 50s). In my thinking, he would then raise *all* the dead and give eternal life to those who belonged to him, and change those who were living at the time of his coming from perishable to imperishable. It was my understanding at that time that anyone other than those who were dead or alive in Christ would immediately be judged unworthy of everlasting life and be sentenced to death, then and there, without a chance to "give account" to the judge. Then the Kingdom would immediately be established on the earth made new, all in the "twinkling of an eye." And that was it. I saw the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of all mankind, together with the judgment and the inauguration of the eternal Kingdom as one great conglomeration. There was no expectation of the "golden age" spoken of by the prophets in the OT and Jesus in Revelation 20.

As a teen I began to really study the Bible. And it did not seem that all things "eschatological" were adding up in the amillennial church that I attended. We began to think about these verses:

John 5:28-29: A resurrection to life and a resurrection to judgment = 2 resurrections.

Rev. 20:1-10: Some will come to life and reign with Christ for 1,000 years. During this time Satan will be chained, and the rest of the dead will not come to life until the 1,000 years are completed. One resurrection being symbolic and the other literal did not add up.

1 Thess. 4:16: Christ will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Phil. 3:11: Paul aimed to attain to the "out-resurrection," (*ex-anastasis*), the advance resurrection out from among the dead, as Jesus was raised out from among the dead.

Matt. 12:36-37; 1 Cor. 4:5: When the Lord comes he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. There is no time in the amillennial understanding for a day of judgment.

These and many other Scriptures called for a change in thinking. Our church had decided years before that the teaching of the Trinity and the pre-existence of Christ (which were being widely accepted among the Advent Christian Churches in those days and are officially accepted now) were not biblical, but it seemed to the pastor and some of the elders that there was much more to consider. From then on, our understanding of eschatology began to change.

Like many of you, I have often been unable to find the answers to my questions because I didn't know what questions to ask. After years of seeking, I was able and willing to ask the following questions:

1. Who or what will the saints govern and reign over? Each other?? **"The overcomer** will be given authority over **the nations** and will rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 2:26-27). "The nations will serve and obey **them [the saints]**" (Dan. 7:27). How will we with the Messiah govern **the nations** if there are no nations?

2. Why do **Isaiah 2 and Micah 4** not fit anywhere in amillennialism? This passage is unusual because it is repeated in 2 prophets:

"In future days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the most important of mountains. All the nations will stream to it; many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the LORD's mountain'...He will judge disputes between nations. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks."

Has that happened yet? Is it going to happen? **YES!** If so, when?

3. Why do I have to get into such a hurry after Jesus comes? When it says **1,000 years** (6 times), what's wrong with believing it? Will I be held accountable if I simply believe what it says?

4. If the words of the prophets are not part of my eschatology, then do I not have **an incomplete eschatology**? Jesus and the NT writers depended on the information given through the prophets (Matt. 22:40; Luke 24:27; Acts 24:14). The prophets saw a **golden age** linked to the Messiah.

5. How is it possible to work **Isaiah 65** into amillennialism? It doesn't fit! That chapter includes: "Never again will an infant live just a few days, or an old person not live out his days. For the youth will die

at the age of 100, and anyone who fails to reach the age of 100 will be considered cursed” (65:20).

6. When Paul said “the dead in Christ will rise **first**,” what part of “first” don’t I get? (1 Thess. 4:16; see also 1 Cor. 15:23).

7. How can Satan be currently deceiving the entire world and not deceiving it at the same time? (Rev. 12:9; 20:3; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

8. How can people who have been “beheaded,” that is killed literally, be a description of Christians being converted individually? (Rev. 20:4)

It is remarkable to me that some are now embracing the amillennial model which I left. Jesus said, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city” (Rev. 22:18-19). So it is very important what one does with Revelation 20. I left the amillennial camp and am glad now to be a part of the heritage which includes the millennial reign of Christ, the golden age perceived by the prophets, and the two resurrections as prophesied by Jesus in Revelation and in the gospels. It took me a lot of searching to sort out these truths. We must now work diligently to **keep and share that faith**. We can’t share it if we don’t earnestly contend for it. ✧

Don’t Leave Your Brain at the Church Door!

by Carlos Xavier

One major problem that continues to plague Christendom is people “leaving their brains at the church door”! This is particularly true when it comes to telling the world who God and His only-begotten Son truly are.

For example, we all know that singular pronouns and verbs are used according to the laws of grammar. Words like “he” and “himself” convey objective facts about how many persons are being referred to. Yet, many Trinitarians insist that “Myself” (Isa. 44:24), “one LORD” (Mark 12:29) or “one God” (John 5:44) can mean more than one single person/individual!

The fact is that the doctrine of the Trinity can only make “sense as a mystical or spiritual experience...It was not a logical or intellectual formulation but an imaginative paradigm that confounded reason. [For many] the Trinity is simply baffling” (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*).

The *Oxford Companion to the Bible* is right to state, “the NT offers no *new* doctrine of God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is now the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Thus, all OT theology is implied in the NT.” So Jesus did not alter the Shema! (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29).

Those words from Catholic and Protestant notables are supported by the words of Jesus himself, in his prayer to the one God, his Father in **John 17**:

3: “Now this is the life of the age to come: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus the Messiah, whom you have sent.”

Note his prophetic last words in this chapter, as paraphrased by The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition:

“O just and righteous Father, although the world has not known You and has failed to recognize You and has never acknowledged You, I have known You [continually]; and these men understand and know that You have sent Me. I have made Your Name known to them and revealed Your character and Your very Self, and I will continue to make [You] known” (John 17:25-26). ✧

Comments

• “I’m always following your YouTube channel, and I also believe in One God as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did. To God be All the Glory, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.” — *Philippines*

• “In the beginning I was an Adventist, but after abandoning the non-biblical doctrine of the Trinity, I was removed from membership. I studied with Oneness Pentecostals and many other anti-Trinitarian societies, but my understanding is that God is One Father! Jesus is His Son; the Spirit is a power from above.” — *Czech Republic*

• “My friend and I have a teamwork of sharing and teaching to groups and individuals God’s truth of biblical unitarianism, whenever the Lord God opens the door of opportunities. Whatever good there is, or ever has been, in my life is all due to our God and Father Who loved and called us by His matchless mercy and grace.” — *Philippines*

“The Old Testament does not ‘spiritualize’ salvation, but rather understands it as God’s deliverance of people and land from all that destroys life and the consequent **restoration of people and land to flourishing**. And while God’s salvific [saving] purpose narrows for a while to one elect nation in its own land, this ‘initially exclusive move’ is, as Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim puts it, in the service of ‘a maximally inclusive end,’ the redemption of all nations and ultimately the entire created order.”

Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 2014, p. 25.