

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 26, Number 4

October • November • December 2006

Eckankar
Confucianism

Hare Krishna

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Jehovah's Witnesses

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Judaism

Neopaganism

MOONIES

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Islam

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BAHA' I FAITH

Buddhism

Scientology

Satanism

In this Edition:

Office Notes	2
Dear Reader	3
<i>By Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland</i>	
With This Issue	5
Antichrists and the Antichrist	6
<i>By Rev. Bob DeWaay</i>	
Christadelphian Cult	18
<i>By Dr. David L. Larsen</i>	
Question from Readers	21
<i>By Rev. Steve Lagoon</i>	
Atheists, Agnostics/Statistics	24
Book Review	26
Quiz on the Trinity	28



*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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OFFICE NOTES

Since the last edition of The Discerner, the ministry of RAS has experienced changes in the office administration. Shawn Ruth, who served as Office Manager, left the ministry in November. We are grateful for Shawn's service and wish him well. RAS is working again on a volunteer basis as in years gone by. We welcome your phone calls and emails and will continue to provide answers as promptly as possible to them.

Over the past 60 years, RAS has had many great friends who have given moral and financial support to this ministry. Recently we lost one of them when Reverend John Ballentine, former pastor of the Bryant Ave. Baptist Church in Minneapolis, passed on to his heavenly reward. We thank God for men and women of his caliber who have strengthened and sustained us in times of testing and stress.

We face 2007 with the resolute conviction of the need for this kind of ministry. We continue to stand with scores of people who struggle with aberrant teachings and movements that are afflicting the Church of Jesus Christ in this hour. Please remember us before the Throne of Grace and with your gifts as we defend and advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you!

DEAR READER

Christmas is still in the air as I write these words. My thoughts, however, go beyond the Christmas story and relate to Biblical stories and miracles in general. Let me explain:

It is common practice in churches, be they liberal or conservative, to read the Christmas stories from the Gospels. But it seems quite incongruous for pastors/Christian leaders to eloquently read the Bible while really denying the Christmas story in their hearts. For example, they deny oftentimes the veracity of the virgin birth of Christ, the angelic appearances to Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men following a star. This holds true of other Biblical stories as well - Jesus' miracles, the resurrection of Christ, His appearances to His disciples, and the power demonstrations of God's Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, etc. How can preachers and expositors of God's Word say one thing and really believe another? There seems to be a certain mental schizophrenia or ethical confusion that allows this to happen.

In many churches the Apostles' Creed is regularly recited. But are its tenets really treasured in a believing heart? Recently we read from the Nicene Creed in one of our church's services. There is no text where the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ and His relationship to the Trinity are better accentuated. The same holds true for the deity of the Holy Spirit as declared in the Constantinople Creed. But do we really believe in the Trinity? Or do we succumb to the rational thinking of the Jehovah's Witnesses who indicate their unbelief in their tract: "1 + 1 + 1 = 3" - in other words, they would tell us that trinitarian Christians are "tri-theists" or those who believe in three gods. However, the true trinitarian formula, acknowledged creedally through the centuries as Biblical is: "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit", three Persons in one Godhead, having one substance and purpose.

Years ago a Lutheran pastor told me that the German belief system operates on two levels: Level 1 is the accepted church formulations that ordinary church people can relate to

in the pew and is often defined as “cultural Christianity”; Level 2 is the belief system that the pastor accepts rationally and is often termed “scientific faith”. He went on to say that most German pastors operate on both systems, but basically, most belong to Level 2.

Neither “cultural Christianity” nor “scientific faith” is adequate, satisfying, or Biblical. True believers accept the totality of God’s Word as His message to mankind. The Word of God is absolutely true, it should not be explained away or watered down, and is fully adequate for all questions of faith and practice.

Where there are honest mental reservations, let us follow the adage of an ancient church father: “credo ut intelligam” - I believe in order to understand. It’s amazing how believable and enriching God’s Word is to our hearts when we follow this principle.

Wishing you God’s blessings in your faith and practice in 2007,

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

For some time I have been looking for a text on the “Antichrist” that both encapsulates both a Biblical definition and an adequate description of this unusual person in Scripture. In Biblical eschatology/theology the personage called the “Antichrist” certainly plays a central role in the culmination of events both prior to and subsequent to the Second Coming of Christ. Rev. Bob DeWaay, a well known Christian apologist in the Twin Cities, presents a concise, clear, and Biblical analysis of the Antichrist. Your comments are welcome and should be addressed to the author’s website.

The Christadelphians are a relatively small cult at the present time. However, as we have observed over the years, even a small heretical sect can wreak pernicious confusion in the Christian Church. We are thankful for Dr. David Larsen’s informational and anecdotal account of this group.

Steve Lagoon has again done some research for us on an issue troubling a reader. As Eastern Orthodoxy comes more and more into focus in the Western world, questions relating to its doctrines arise. Purgatory is the area of attention this time. Lagoon’s comparative study of Orthodoxy with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is helpful.

A felt need today is knowing how to refute atheism, agnosticism, and skepticism with cogent and convincing arguments. There are many books that aid us in this regard, but our former Board Member, Rev. Ervin Ingebretson, in his book review, recommends the reading of Ron Rhodes’ new monograph: “Answering the Objections of Atheists, Agnostics, and Skeptics”. A statistical table from Google adds a factual dimension to this theme.

A little quiz on the Trinity concludes this issue. How did you score?

Critical Issues Commentary Issue 63
**ANTICHRISTS AND THE
ANTICHRIST**

By Bob DeWaay

“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.” (1John 2:18)

It might surprise many that John considered himself to be living in the last hour with contemporary “Antichrists” and that he saw the need to warn Christians about such individuals. Many consider an “Antichrist” to be a person who is “against” Christ. If that were the case, it would seem odd that any Christian would be fooled by such a person. However, careful study of the Scriptures reveals that Antichrists are subtle. They actually present a message which can fool many Christians.

In **1John 2** we learn these facts about Antichrists: 1) their primary target is Christians; 2) they arise from within the visible church; 3) they claim to have a special anointing; 4) they claim access to supernatural knowledge not available to ordinary Christians; and (5) they have a defective doctrine of Christ, though they claim to believe in Him. If we compare John’s teaching to other New Testament passages on this topic we will find that many Antichrists operate in our day, and their target is the Christian church. It stands to reason that Satan’s deceptive practices target the church, since the world is already under his sway. *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1John 5:19).*

Antichrist and Christ

That “Antichrists” arise from the visible church and work to deceive professed Christians might seem rather odd to many. The reason for this is that it seems implausible that people who are “against” Christ would find credence with those who claim to love Christ. Even cults do not claim to be “against” Christ, they just change their definitions of who He is. Therefore, how could an “Antichrist” get a hearing with Christians? The answer lies in the Greek prefix “anti.” It can mean “against” but also can mean “in place of.”¹ Both concepts

are combined here in the sense that the method “Antichrists” use to oppose Christ is to set themselves up as specially anointed teachers. Their opposition is subtle. Their teaching about Christ is always unbiblical. John wrote “*They went out from us, but there were not really of us . . .*” (**1John 2:19a**). This shows that they were a part of the church and considered “Christian.”

So in the “last hour” Antichrists arise from within the church, going out deceiving many. John used the term “last hour” twice in **1John 2:18**. In the original there is no definite article. The phrase “last hour” is qualitative² and is describing the nature of the days between Christ’s first and second advents.³ Throughout church history there have been “Antichrists.” They exalt themselves, claim special anointing, and distort the Biblical doctrine of Christ. The early church historian Eusebius said that the gnostic heretic Cerinthus was a contemporary of the apostle John, and Cerinthus claimed special revelations.⁴ The early church father Irenaeus said that this Cerinthus denied the virgin birth and claimed that the Christ (anointing) descended on Jesus at His baptism and left Him at His crucifixion.⁵ It’s likely that gnostic teachers like Cerinthus were the “Antichrists” John had in mind.

1John 2 emphasizes the term “Christ.” In the Greek “the Christ” literally means “the anointed one.” Antichrists are claiming to be “anointed ones.” John tells us in **1John 2:20**: “*But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know.*” The gnostic heretics claimed to have special spiritual knowledge. The “Antichrists” John mentioned claimed special knowledge based on their special anointing. He reassures his Christian readers that they all are anointed and have knowledge of the truth (see verse 21). Therefore, those teachers who arose from within the church, claiming a special anointing, and claiming to have unique knowledge because of that anointing were offering something Christians do not need. They are already anointed and have access to the truth that is in Christ and all the revealed truth that is in God’s Word. The Antichrists with their grandiose claims have nothing to add but lies and deception. So it is in our day.

In the two places in the New Testament where the “anointing” and Christians are mentioned, it teaches that all true Christians are anointed by God. One is this passage in **1John** and the other is **2Corinthians 1:21,22**: “*Now He who estab-*

lishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.” The word “anointed” in the Greek is “*Chrisma*.” Therefore the “*antichristos*” is one who claims to have special “*Chrisma*” which in fact all true Christians already have. We do not need whatever they claim to have. They claim a superior spirituality, special anointing, special revelations, and do not openly claim to oppose Christ. If they did they would never find followers in churches, which are their primary target. Even Mormons do not claim to oppose Christ. They merely “substitute” their doctrine of Christ for the Biblical one and claim to have received special revelations (the Book of Mormon).

To avoid deception we need to keep something very clear in our minds. According to the New Testament, there is only one specially anointed one (remember “anointed one” is merely a literal English translation of the term “Christ”). The anointed one is Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 1:9** cites **Psalms 45:7** to prove that Jesus was the true Messiah: “*Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore, God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.*” All who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit — who have believed the gospel — are anointed by God, but not in the unique sense the Christ is. Likewise we all have knowledge of the truth and have no need for any supposed “anointed one” who claims to give us teachings we would otherwise have no access to: “*And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him*” (**1John 2:27**). Sadly, in our day many Christians run off to hear preachers claiming special anointing and revelation knowledge. These Christians apparently do not realize that the Bible specifically warns against such preachers.

How Antichrists Deceive

To help us understand how “Antichrists” arise from within the church to deceive, let us summarize what we have learned from **1John**. Antichrists claim to have a special anointing from God, beyond that of “ordinary” Christians (shown by the fact that the term “christ” means “anointed one” and that John assures his readers in two verses that they all have an anointing from God). They claim to have special “knowledge” that is

spiritual in nature and goes beyond the teachings of the New Testament (shown by the fact that John told his readers they already have knowledge of the truth). They likely do not directly oppose Jesus Christ or they would never have been part of the church. John saw the fact that they went out as evidence that they were false. Had they been active and vocal opponents of Jesus Christ they would have been obvious heretics all along. Rather they oppose Him subtly by setting themselves up as “anointed ones” who would substitute themselves for Christ’s unique role in the lives of His people.

By studying other passages in the New Testament we find out more about the deceptive qualities of the false “christs” who arise in the last days. They also do signs and wonders to convince people that their claims of being special “anointed ones,” i.e. “christs,” are true. Jesus warned: *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘there He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect”* (**Matthew 24:23**). Notice that as in 1.John, the targets of their deceptive lies are Christians. Have you ever heard people say, concerning some contemporary “prophet,” “Here is the anointed one”? Have you heard preachers claim to have received special anointing from God that provided them with spiritual knowledge that goes beyond the teachings of the Bible? I have heard these claims many times. According to Jesus we should never believe people who make these claims. They often get by with their deceptive ways simply based on a simple fact that English Bibles generally transliterate the Greek work “*Christos*” as “Christ” rather than translate it to the English equivalent “anointed one.” Also thrown into the equation is the fact that the Greek “*Christos*” is a translation of the Hebrew word for “messiah.”

Many people are not aware of this so they don’t realize that contemporary preachers are making unbiblical claims that put them into the category of “Antichrists.” They merely see them as “anointed teachers” who have come with power and revelation knowledge. They do not deny Jesus; they claim to believe in Him. As I will show later, some claim that Jesus gave them their special anointing, revelations, power to do signs and wonders, and sent them to be His special “anointed ones” to solve our problems. It is totally amazing that in their scheme of things Jesus Christ is sending out people who fit the Biblical description of Antichrists!

So we see that doing signs and wonders also is part of the deceptive scheme of Antichrists. Some validly ask if this means that all signs and wonders are deceptive. The answer is “no.” Signs and wonders that were truly from God took place in the book of Acts. There is a very clear distinction, however, that we must be aware of. All true signs and wonders, as those in the gospels and Acts, point to one clear truth: that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. False signs and wonders point to some preacher as being a supposed “great man of God.” Those doing false signs and wonders have defective doctrines about Christ, and use the signs to promote themselves or their unbiblical teaching. In Acts, when God did signs and wonders, the teaching that accompanied them was that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead and showed Him to be the true Messiah. Modern day “prophets” have little interest in such things.

Paul also wrote about false teachers that arise in the last days. In **2Timothy 3:7,8** he mentions those who are “*ever learning and never come to the knowledge of the truth*” who are like the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses. Clearly that means by the use of false signs. There are many in our day who are a part of the “signs and wonders” movement who seemingly despise “doctrine.” They can be heard ridiculing “dry, dead” churches that teach doctrine but do not have the power to do signs and wonders. Again, they play on ignorance to find followers. The term “doctrine” simply means “teaching.” People will listen to a preacher go on for an hour claiming that “doctrine” is “dead” and worthless. Yet the one making these claims is “teaching.” The irony is that the teaching that “doctrine” is dead is in itself “doctrine.” They are merely substituting a “doctrine” that they came up with out of their own minds, or claim to have received by revelations, for Biblical doctrine. Thus they “*never come to the knowledge of the truth*” because they refuse to submit to the truth that was once for all given to the saints.

Paul warned Timothy elsewhere about those who claim special “knowledge” but who have gone astray: “*O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’— which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith*” (**1Timothy 6:20,21**). This is not about modern “science” which some have assumed, based on the

King James translation of this verse, but about “*gnosis*” or ancient Gnosticism like that which John warned against. The false teachers claimed special spiritual knowledge and used it to promote themselves. As we saw in **2Timothy 4** they also used supernatural signs to gain credibility.

The Doctrine of Christ

Because “Antichrists” are ultimately usurping Christ’s unique role, they always have a defective doctrine of Christ. There are many ways this has been manifested in church history. As I mentioned earlier, the gnostic heretic Cerenthus claimed that the “christ spirit” came on Jesus at His baptism and departed at His crucifixion. John’s second epistle also shows his concern about the doctrine of Christ and its distortion by “Antichrists”:

*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting (**2John 1:7-10**).*

John is concerned about the doctrine of Christ, particularly as it has to do with His incarnation. The reason the incarnation (“coming in the flesh”) is so very important is that it proves that Jesus was the promised Messiah who came from the lineage of David, as well as the eternal “Logos” (**John 1:1**) who existed with God and as God from all eternity. Thus Jesus is unique (John calls him the “only begotten” in **John 1:14** which implies “unique one, only one of his kind”).

Antichrists will always distort the Biblical doctrine of Christ in some way. If the “Christ spirit” came upon Jesus at His baptism, then others might be anointed like this and become “christs” as well. If all the things about Jesus’ bodily existence are not believed, then His uniqueness is questionable. For example, if Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified and buried, and bodily raised on the third day, and will not appear on earth again until He comes with the armies of heaven with glory and power to judge the world,

then there is no other Christ that can appear in history. He is unique. Likewise if Jesus' eternal deity is denied, then some ordinary human might achieve "christ" status. God cannot "become God" by definition. He is eternal. Neither can God cease being God, because by definition true deity has no beginning or end, but always is.

Antichrists, in order to become substitute "christs," must find a way to deny the uniqueness of Christ, otherwise their claims would be obviously false. The Mormons claim that God was once as we are, so that we can become "gods" as He is. In that context they will agree with the idea of the deity of Christ. They think a man can achieve godhood, so why couldn't Jesus Christ. However, their definition of deity is unbiblical and their "Christ" is not unique as the Biblical Christ is.

I have encountered false teachers who have come up with another way to deny the uniqueness of Christ. They hold to the so-called "kenosis" doctrine, that Jesus literally "emptied" Himself of deity and lived on earth **only** as a man. One pastor told me quite frankly: "Of course Jesus was only a man like us on earth, otherwise it would not be fair." I asked, "What would not be fair?" His answer: "Then He would have an edge in doing miracles." Somehow this pastor got the idea that Christianity is about doing miracles and Jesus came to show us what is possible if any man has enough faith. There are various versions of this teaching popular in our day. The claim is that there is nothing essentially different between Jesus when He walked the earth and us, other than that He was a little better at doing things or had more faith.

For example, consider what the *defacto* founder of the modern "Word of Faith" movement wrote about Jesus Christ:

Jesus in His earth walk, as the Incarnate Son of God, beginning with His baptism, lived exactly as every child of God should live today. God wasn't anymore His Father than He is ours. . . . He was the Son of God. You are a son of God. He was Deity. You are a partaker of the Divine nature, that is Deity. . . . The difference is that Jesus gave the Holy Spirit right of way in a sense of which we have never yet learned."⁶

Notice that Kenyon claimed that the difference between Jesus and us is that we just have not learned to give the Holy Spirit a way to work through us the way Jesus did. The obvi-

ous error in this is that the gospel writers were claiming the exact opposite. Not only did John call Jesus the “only begotten,” but throughout the Gospel of John Jesus’ miracles are used to prove that He is unique, and is the only true Christ. The other gospels make the same claim. If Jesus learned, after His baptism, to do things through the Holy Spirit that any of us could, then there can be many “christs.” If Kenyon and his followers are right, the miracles of Christ no longer demonstrate that He is uniquely the Christ, but merely that He is a forerunner of many possible “christs.” This is a good example of a twentieth century “Antichrist” teaching.

What Motivates Antichrists?

The context of **1John 2:18** where we are warned about Antichrists is instructive. John had just finished warning us about the lusts of the world (**1John 2:15-17**). Antichrists are motivated by the things of this world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. Simply put they are motivated by pleasure, possessions or power. They offer a better life in this temporal world at the expense of “doing the will of God.” They claim that the “anointing” and the revelations that they get from it are going to help us have a better life in this world. We can get the things we want, ascend the social ladder, and enjoy life like the supposed “successful” people they claim we could be if we only had what they have.

Peter confirms that the false teachers of the end times will be like this:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep (**2Peter 2:1-3**).

These false teachers also have a false doctrine of Christ (denying the Master), they promote a sensual version of faith, and they are motivated by greed, exploiting their followers with false words. Antichrists tell people what they want to hear to gain advantage for themselves through their worldly motivations.

Antichrists and Antichrist

The Antichrists that arise in church history are not the end of the story. John told us that, “[A]ntichrist is coming” (from **1John 2:18**). That there are Antichrists throughout church history does not mean there will be no literal “Antichrist” at the end of the age. That which characterizes Antichrists shall be embodied in its fulness in Antichrist. Paul calls Antichrist “The man of lawlessness” (**2Thessalonians 2:3**). This person is the Beast of **Revelation 13** and the “little horn” of **Daniel 7:24, 25**. He shall deceive the world for a time. He will make a covenant with the Jews (**Daniel 9:27**) at the beginning of the great tribulation. But after three and one half years he will break it by setting up the “abomination of desolation” (**Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15**), and declaring himself to be the only object of worship (**2Thessalonians 2:4**).

Some deny that there will ever be a literal Antichrist, but merely see the Antichrist spirit at work throughout the church age. However, since there are so many clear references to him (those quoted above are a sampling), it is hard to believe that John and Paul were not talking about a literal person. John clearly distinguishes between Antichrists and Antichrist (**1John 2:18**). This poses a problem for those who do not take future prophecy literally. It is interesting how they try to solve it. For example Lenski, (quoted earlier) who is usually a very able, conservative Bible scholar does not hold to a literal great tribulation or literal millennium. Here is what he writes about “Antichrist” of **1John 2:18**: “The great Antichrist is the papacy.”⁷ Yet he does affirm that “Antichrist is a single man.”⁸ The papacy is an institution and a series of men, it’s hard to see how as such it fulfills the prophecy of a coming “Antichrist.”

Antichrists are forerunners of Antichrist who as such operate under the same spirit and principle. That there will be a literal Antichrist who embodies this evil, worldly, and Satanic spirit is in keeping with Biblical prophecy from the Old and New Testaments. It is helpful to see how it also follows the Biblical themes of “already — not yet” and “the many and the one.”⁹ Just as Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God for redemption, Antichrist is the ultimate fulfillment of the evil hopes of the world for one world religion, a religion of man for which the rebellious world has been looking since the tower of Babel.

Conclusion

We have discussed the principles of Antichrists from a Biblical perspective. Some may wonder if there is any real application in our day. As a matter of fact, there are popular teachings that show remarkable similarities to those warned against in **1John**. For example, a book entitled *Understanding the Anointing* claims that Jesus didn't have a mortal body until Gethsemane. This teaching comes from the unbiblical "identity" doctrine (that Jesus became just like us and then went literally to hell as a mortal man to fight Satan so that we could become just like Him).¹⁰ The author of the book on the anointing writes: "Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He took upon His spirit nature our sins and our diseases, His body became mortal, and they could kill Him."¹¹ He also wrote previous to this: "The reason Jesus could have the Spirit without measure was because His body was not mortal."¹² This is a doctrine of Christ very much like the one John warned us would characterize Antichrists: "*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist*" (**2John 1:7**). The Bible does not teach that the nature of Jesus' body changed at any given point from His virgin birth to His crucifixion nor does it say that it was not mortal.

This is not the end of the problems with this teaching. The author also claims to have received special anointing from Jesus Christ Himself. In a section called "A Special Anointing," he claims that Jesus appeared to him and the following happened: "He laid His hand my head and said, 'I've called thee and have anointed thee and have given unto thee a special anointing to minister to the sick.'"¹³ Then the words of Jesus are quoted: "This anointing will not work unless you tell the people exactly what I told you."¹⁴ So a contemporary teacher has a special revelation from Jesus that we have no access to except through him. He also claims that he has to tell us about Jesus' appearance to him and Jesus' word or we will not have faith like we need.¹⁵ Jesus is further directly quoted, "[Y]ou tell them you saw me. Tell them I spoke to you. Tell them I laid the finger of my right hand in the palm of each one of your hands. Tell them the healing anointing is in your hands."¹⁶

Here is a popular teacher who has an unbiblical doctrine of Christ, who claims a special anointing beyond what ordinary Christians have, claims special revelations and knowledge, claims that we can only get this information through him, and has written down supposed words of Jesus as direct quotations, thus adding to the Scriptures. In the second paragraph of this article I outlined five things found in **1John 2** about Antichrists. You can compare the teachings in this popular book and draw your own conclusions. People who promote such teachings enjoy huge followings, including many unsuspecting Christians. Do you see why John warned the church about Antichrists?

Issue 63 - March/April 2001

End Notes

- ¹ A.T. Robertson *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. VI; (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1933) 215 explains: “‘*Anti*’ can mean substitution or opposition, but both ideas are identical in the word ‘*antichristos*’”
- ² R.C.H. Lenski *Commentary on the New Testament - 1-2 Peter; 1-3 John; Jude* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1966; Hendrickson pub. edition, 1998) 429.
- ³ Simon Kistemaker *James and I-III John* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1986) 274.
- ⁴ Eusebius *Church History* book III chapter 28.
- ⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, book I, chapter 26. Here is what he wrote about Cerinthus: “He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.”
- ⁶ E. W. Kenyon *In His Presence*, (Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society: Seattle, 1944) 22.

⁷ Op. cit., Lenski, 432.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The same Hebrew conceptions help us understand Messianic prophecy. For example consider how the seed of Abraham is the many (his Hebrew descendants), but also anticipates the one (the seed of Abraham who blesses all the families of the earth, i.e. Messiah). The seed of David is a series of descendants beginning with Solomon, but the ultimate “Seed of David” is Messiah. This Hebrew conception of the many and the one is likely at work in John’s understanding of Antichrists and Antichrist.

¹⁰ See D.R. McConnell *A Different Gospel*, (Hendrickson: Peabody, 1988) chapter 7 “The Doctrine of Identification, The Born-Again Jesus, and The Atonement of the Devil” 116-131, for a thorough examination of the false Christology of Hagin and others of the Faith movement.

¹¹ Kenneth E. Hagen, *Understanding the Anointing*, (RHEMA Bible Church: Tulsa, 1983) 135.

¹² Ibid. 134.

¹³ Ibid. 136, 137.

¹⁴ Ibid. 137.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Critical Issues Commentary

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THE CHRISTADELPHIAN CULT

*By David L. Larsen
Professor Emeritus of Preaching,
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The Christadelphian cult has never garnered a large following but along with its offshoots has been a persistent and pernicious source of deception to this day. At last count there were some 6200 professing Christadelphians in the United States, but this movement has significant and complex inter-relationships with other aberrant religious bodies and hence bears close analysis. Some estimate as many as 35,000 in Great Britain.

The father of the founder, John Thomas, was born in England in 1782 and professed conversion under the powerful preaching of Rowland Hill in London in 1798. He prepared for the ministry and served independent churches in Scotland and England and a Baptist church. The younger John Thomas like his father did some medical study and wrote some monographs denying the immortality of the soul. He rejected a literal hell. There was some influence by the noted Unitarian scientist and clergyman, J.B Priestly, at this time. The whole family migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio and here the younger John Thomas broke with his Baptist father and became an associate of Alexander Campbell, prime mover of the "Restoration Movement" (rootage of the Churches of Christ in our time).

In 1837 the younger Thomas broke with Campbell on several issues (including conditional immortality) and itinerated about and settled finally in St. Charles, Illinois, west of Chicago, where he edited a paper and became involved with the Millerites who expected Christ's return in 1844. He came to feel that a paid ministry was heretical. He now taught that Christ was not the eternally-begotten Son of God but only so since his baptism (an adoptionist Christology). He taught that Christ was the King of Israel and that believers are now the adopted children of Abraham. His mission to England in 1848 secured a much larger following. He viewed Britain as the protector of the Jews but ultimately defeated by Russia in the Crimean War then occurring. This did not happen and was

embarrassing.

The Jelling of the Movement

Upon his return to the United States he gathered his followers together in New York City. An avowed pacifist, he predicted the Lord's return sometime between 1861-68. This was a time of Civil War unsettledness and the failure of his prophecies decimated the movement. He adamantly maintained that traditional orthodoxy was in error and that he had recovered "the long lost faith of the Apostles." He died in New Jersey in 1871. The movement he founded has been called Christadelphianism.

Leadership of the following in England was assumed by Robert Roberts and in the United States by Thomas Williams. Numerous issues strained their relationship including the extent of Scriptural inspiration, the sinlessness of Christ and "resurrectional responsibility," i.e. who will be raised and at which resurrection. Christadelphian participation in the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893 gave them some exposure to a broader public. To this day their "ecclesias" (the name they give to their assemblies) are of two kinds: amended and non-amended reflecting these earlier and unresolved conflicts in the movement. Some are called "Berean Ecclesias" because they followed A.H. Zilmer, who came out of Lutheranism. Another break-off is the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith, headquartered and with a school in Oregon, Illinois, south of Rockford. In my pastoral years in Rockford we had some adherents of this latter group attending who were non-Trinitarian, believing that Christ was not divine by nature and that he died for his own and not another's sins. As adopted children of Abraham, they require circumcision.

The Gyration of the Movement

The Christadelphians are still predictably very Zionistic and apocalyptic in their perspective. Some are King James only but not all. The unamended group has run a college in Arkansas and its teachings have spread to Australia and New Zealand. Fortunately this amalgum of error has lacked any central control. They tend to rent facilities, sponsor radio broadcasts and hold summer conferences and camps to keep some sense of solidarity. They have a doctrine of pre-Adamic humanoids and that "Elohim" (one of the Old Testament names for God) is, in fact, a class of beings distinct from God

or humans. Since they are adopted Jews, they view all non-believers as Gentiles. They still speak of the 1848 turmoil in Europe as precursive to Armageddon. They taught that Stalin was the Gog of Ezekiel 38. Without any trained or responsible ministry, they tend to be amorphous and inconsistent. They still tend to be millennial and hold that “the little horn/beast” in Daniel and Revelation is the Pope and Catholicism. Small breakoffs include the Church of the Blessed Hope in Cleveland and the Megiddo Mission Church in Rochester, New York. Interestingly, former president Lyndon B. Johnson had many relatives who were Christadelphian (He had Campbellite affiliation). Another connection is called “The Holy Congregation” and was founded by a Swedish immigrant, Albert Dahlstrom, who sent apostles to centers like Rockford, Illinois, Seattle, Minneapolis, etc. He was deported because of his dalliances with women but a small group of his followers still meets.

The appeal of the movement is its quest for purity in a severely compromised world and a professing Christendom rent and torn by concession and capitulation to a godless society. But where is the gospel of Christ and any semblance of adherence to historic Christianity? Their hymnbook contains hymns not written from within their group. They do not vote and most do not watch television. Strong commitment is demanded and disfellowshipping is common. They are showing less aversion to higher education but forbid labor union affiliation for their members. For years they had a book store in San Mateo, California. It is generally classified as “a stable Adventist sect,” but its durability despite its divisions shows that the enemy of our soul still finds it a tool of deception worth perpetuating. Let us hold to Scripture and pray for these deluded souls.

++ I have drawn heavily and largely followed the doctoral dissertation CHRISTADELPHIANS IN NORTH AMERICA (Lewiston, NY: The Mellen Press, 1989), by Charles H. Lippy, a professor at Clemson University. An invaluable resource.

QUESTION FROM READERS

By Steve Lagoon

I have a friend who is in the Eastern Orthodox Church. I am confused about their view of Purgatory and the Apocrypha. Could you clarify their view on these matters?

Your confusion is understandable, as anyone who researches these questions will soon discover. Reference books offer widely different answers to these questions. This lack of clarity is likely a result of the ambiguity of the Orthodox Church itself on these topics.

As to Purgatory, Timothy Ware, an Orthodox scholar, sums up the Orthodox view this way:

“What exactly is the condition of souls in the period between death and the Resurrection of the Body at the Last Day? Here Orthodox teaching is not entirely clear, and has varied somewhat at different times. In the seventeenth century a number of Orthodox writers . . . upheld the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, or something very close to it. . . Today most if not all Orthodox theologians reject the idea of Purgatory, at least in this form [Roman Catholic form in which souls in Purgatory undergo expiatory suffering to render satisfaction for their sins].

The majority [of Orthodox theologians] would be inclined to say that the faithful departed do not suffer at all. Another school holds that perhaps they suffer, but, if so, their suffering is of a purificatory but not an expiatory character; for when a person dies in the grace of God, then God freely forgives him all his sins and demands no expiatory penalties: Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is our *only* atonement` and satisfaction. Yet a third group would prefer to leave the whole question entirely open: let us avoid detailed formulation about life after death, they say, and preserve instead a reverent and agnostic reticence.” (Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1993, p. 255).

As to the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Eastern Orthodox

Church generally considers it to be canonical Scripture. The New Oxford Annotated Bible states:

“The Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize several other books as authoritative. Editions of the Old Testament approved by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church contain, besides the Deutero-canonical [what Protestants call the Apocrypha] books, 1 Esdras, Psalm 151, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees.” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Bruce Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, Editors, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991, 1994, Introduction to the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, p. 4).

Geisler states:

“Apocrypha most commonly refers to disputed books that Protestants reject and Roman Catholics and Orthodox communions accept into the Old Testament.” (Norman Geisler, *Apocrypha*, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI, 1999, p. 28).

However, there is ambiguity here as well as Geisler shows:

“The Greek Church has not always accepted the Apocrypha, nor is its present position unequivocal. Not until the synods of Constantinople (1683), Jaffa (1642), and Jerusalem (1672) were these books declared canonical. And, even as late as 1839, their Larger Catechism expressly omitted the Apocrypha on the grounds that “they do not exist in the Hebrew.” (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago IL, 1968, p. 172).

Kohlenberger adds that:

“Catholics and Orthodox have a larger Old Testament canon, one derived from the Greek Old Testament, the LXX, which was the Bible of the early church. The LXX [which contains the Apocrypha] remains to this day the official Old Testament of the Orthodox Church . . . To the Orthodox, it the Apocrypha is a canon secondary in authority to the Hebrew Canon.” (John R. Kohlenberger III, *Words About the Word*, Regency/Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 1987, pp. 25, 27).

Daniel Clendenin agrees:

“While the Councils of Jassy (1642) and Jerusalem (1672) said that the apocryphal books were “genuine parts of

Scripture,” Orthodox theologians, though acknowledging their importance more than do Protestants, generally place them on a “lower footing” than the rest of the Old Testament.” (*Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Daniel B. Clendenin, Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI, 1994, p. 109).

So, it would seem for most Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Apocrypha is considered Scripture, but is less authoritative than the rest of the Old Testament (whatever that may mean!). For Roman Catholics, these beliefs (the Apocrypha and Purgatory) are symbiotic, for they base their beliefs in Purgatory on passages in the Apocrypha. Protestants reject the Apocrypha as Scripture and therefore reject any doctrines derived from it. The Eastern Orthodox Churches, seem to be caught in limbo between these two (Protestant and Roman Catholic) views.

TOP 20 COUNTRIES WITH LARGEST NUMBERS OF ATHEISTS / AGNOSTICS

(Zuckerman, 2005)

Country	Total country population (2004)	% Atheist/ Agnostic/ Nonbeliever in God	Number of Atheists/ Agnostics Nonbelievers in God (minimum - maximum)
China	1,298,848,000	8 - 14%*	103,907,840 - 181,838,720
Japan	127,333,000	64 - 65%	81,493,120 - 82,766,450
Russia	143,782,000	24 - 48%	34,507,680 - 69,015,360
Vietnam	82,690,000	81%	66,978,900
Germany	82,425,000	41 - 49%	33,794,250 - 40,388,250
France	60,424,000	43 - 54%	25,982,320 - 32,628,960
USA	293,028,000	3 - 9%	8,790,840 - 26,822,520
Britain	60,271,000	31 - 44%	18,684,010 - 26,519,240
South Korea	48,598,000	30 - 52%	14,579,400 - 25,270,960
Canada	32,508,000	19 - 30%	6,176,520 - 9,752,400
Spain	40,281,000	15 - 24%	6,042,150 - 9,667,440
Ukraine	47,732,000	20%	9,546,400
Italy	58,057,000	6 - 15%	3,483,420 - 8,708,550
Sweden	8,986,000	46 - 85%	4,133,560 - 7,638,100
Netherlands	16,318,000	39 - 44%	6,364,020 - 7,179,920
Czech Republic	10,246,100	54 - 61%	5,328,940 - 6,250,121
Taiwan	22,750,000	24%	5,460,000
Australia	19,913,000	24 - 25%	4,779,120 - 4,978,250
Hungary	10,032,000	32 - 46%	3,210,240 - 4,614,720
Belgium	10,348,000	42 - 43%	4,346,160 - 4,449,640

Source: Zuckerman, Phil. "Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns", chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. by Michael Martin, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK (2005).

These figures are based on responses to survey questions about beliefs. There may be overlap between people who self-identify as adherents of an organized religion, while at the same time hold beliefs which categorize them as an atheist. Opinion surveys are typically the only reliable method for determining the numbers of atheists in an area, because atheists are rarely affiliated formally with membership organizations. Officially released statistics from some Communist governments are often merely manufactured estimates without an empirical or statistical basis.

Figures shown above are the total of "soft core atheists" (don't believe in god, but believe there might be life after death) and "hard core atheists" (disbelieve in god and disbelieve in life after death), but do not include agnostics ("softest core atheists": "Might be God... might be a life after death").

Note that these terms are from Greeley's statistical study and are noted here not as an endorsement of the terminology, but so that statistical researchers will be able to identify which columns are the source of the data in the summary tables presented on this page. "Agnosticism" and "atheism" are widely accepted as have different meanings. Based on the questions used in the survey, Greeley's category "softest core atheists" fall under the common definition of agnostics, which is why their numbers have not been included in the "atheist" totals.

When using statistics to make a presentation, it is often troublesome to remove them too far from the context from which they were originally presented.

The statistical incidence and classification of atheism among world religions is discussed on the [Major Religions of the World](#) page.

Send comments, questions, etc., to webmaster3@adherents.com. This atheist/atheism geography and statistics web-page was created 4 August 1999. Last modified 27 March 2005.

BOOK REVIEW

ANSWERING THE OBJECTIONS OF ATHEISTS, AGNOSTICS, AND SKEPTICS

By Ron Rhodes

Reviewed by Rev. Ervin D. Ingebretson

The author presents a storehouse of information in an orderly manner for the reader concerning the three non-Biblical world views that may surround us in our daily living.

In presenting the material, Ron Rhodes has employed a very helpful format. Each chapter has a specific subject for which the author makes a clarifying statement. He then allows the atheistic groups to raise objections to the author's explanation of the subject material. Upon hearing the objections, the author answers each with a Biblically framed response, providing a clear application of the involvement of the supernatural. In responding to the objections the author often quotes outside sources who lend additional professional help to the response.

These three groups refuse to acknowledge any presence of the supernatural. Their interpretation of the material is confined to the natural realm which they analyze as cause and effect. They rely heavily on science to explain natural causes. Often they will apply natural selection to aid their interpretation.

The author gives many examples of God's involvement. The atheistic groups question the character of God citing Old Testament atrocities condoned by God. It is in effect character assassination of God. The author responds with examples in the Old Testament of God's severe judgment of sin and also of his mercy extended to people.

Countering their disbelief in God the author concludes with an important invitation to seek a personal relationship with God. He clearly identifies the human problem as sin. Jesus, doing the Father's will, endured the cross, bearing the sin of the human race. A sample prayer of confession and acceptance are offered as guides to this profession of faith.

The author advises that any interaction one may have with these anti-supernatural groups should be done with gentleness and respect.

Ron Rhodes is to be complimented for his extensive and well-organized response to the objections raised by these three groups. His final appeal to effect change in hearts regarding belief in God demonstrates the true spirit in which he wrote this book.

QUIZ ON THE TRINITY

- Which of the following statements is “not” true?
 - The word “trinity” appears in the Bible.
 - The Mormons believe that the Holy Spirit has a corporal body.
 - Christian Scientists believe that the Holy Spirit is a magnetic force.
 - Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus was Michael the Archangel in the Old Testament.
- Which early church council affirmed the deity of Christ in 325 A.D.?
 - Carthage
 - Nicaea
 - Jerusalem
 - Chalcedon
- Which person or group in the early church espoused the correct view of the Trinity?
 - Docetists
 - Sabellius
 - Gnostics
 - Athanasius
- The true meaning of the Trinity is
 - The Son is the Father, the Father is the Son, the Holy Spirit is the Father, i.e. there is one person with three aspects
 - Three equal Persons but united in one substance and one purpose.
 - Three equal Persons, united in one purpose, but separate in substance
 - Three Persons, united in one purpose, but not equal.
- Which is “not” an argument for the personality of the Holy Spirit?
 - Jesus’ references to the promised coming of the Holy Spirit
 - Christians should not grieve the Holy Spirit

- ___c. New Testament references that closely connect the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- ___d. The benediction: “The Lord be with your spirit”
6. Who of the following New Testament leaders acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God?
- ___a. Gamaliel
- ___b. Apostle Thomas
- ___c. Roman centurion
- ___d. Caiaphas
7. Who of the following church leaders denied the reality of the biblical Trinity?
- ___a. Mary Baker Eddy
- ___b. Martin Luther
- ___c. Charles Taze Russell
- ___d. John Wesley
8. Which of the Four Gospels especially emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God but also His unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit?
- ___a. Matthew
- ___b. Mark
- ___c. Luke
- ___d. John
9. Which great hymn declares the Trinity as truth?
- ___a. Amazing Grace
- ___b. It Is Well with My Soul
- ___c. Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
- ___d. How Great Thou Art
10. The necessity of belief in the Trinity is-
- ___a. open for conjecture and debatable
- ___b. absolutely necessary for faith and practice
- ___c. relatively unimportant over against other doctrines
- ___d. makes doctrine too binding and threatening

Answers: 1. (a); 2. (b); 3. (d); 4. (b); 5. (d); 6. (b,c); 7. (a,c); 8. (d); 9. (c); 10. (b).

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