

The Divine Focus

Introduction

Equality in the Godhead

The teaching of the Bible is that there is one God, not many gods, and that the Godhead comprises of three Persons, who share the same essence but subsist as three different Persons. A technical definition of the Trinity would be, '*[God's] indivisible, personal essence exists eternally and necessarily as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and that these three are not merely nominal distinctions but personal subsistences in the divine essence.*'¹

In studying Scripture we see that each Person of the Trinity has a clearly defined role which includes what may be tentatively called 'subjection' of one to another, and yet each Person in the Trinity is equally and fully God.

In the decree we see these roles played out. Each is active in creation, and yet creation is said to be by through and for Jesus Christ:

By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. Col 1:16

The Father initiates the work of salvation and yet salvation is accomplished by all three Persons of the Godhead, each with a different role: the Father predestines, plans and chooses, the Son accomplishes redemption and the Spirit applies it to the elect in time.

The Father sends the Son (1 Jn 4:9-10), while both the Father and the Son send the Spirit (Jn 14:16, 15:26, 16:7; 2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6). In the work of salvation Jesus is subject to the Father (1 Cor 15:23-28) and only does what his Father tells him to do (Jn 5:30). The blessings of salvation, achieved by Christ, come from the Father (Eph 1:3). Yet Paul strongly affirms that Jesus is equal with the Father:

Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. Phil 2:5-7

Within the realm of salvation Jesus is the pre-eminent focus (Col 1:18) since he achieved redemption and was given authority by the Father to rule God's kingdom (Matt 28:18; Phil 2:9). Christ is better than angels, Moses, the Tabernacle, and the whole OT worship system. But this does not make the Son greater than the Father or the Spirit. Heaven worships the Son for his salvific work (Phil 2:10; Rev 5:12). In fact both the Father and the Son are worshipped in heaven and earth (Rev 5:13, 7:11-12).

Similarly, sins against Jesus Christ can be forgiven but sins against the Holy Spirit cannot:
Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be

¹ Alan Cairns, 'Dict. of Theological Terms', art. 'Trinity'.

forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age to come*. Matt 12:31-32

But this does not make the Spirit greater than the Son.

So each Person of the Trinity adopts a role in the decree that sometimes gives the appearance of subjection to the Father or to the Son, but this is only apparent and not actual. The emphasis of the Bible is that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God and they all equally share the same divine essence.

The Christian's focus

Since all this is true, it behoves Christians to focus upon God and respect the role that Scripture gives to each person. Since the Spirit's role is to glorify Christ in salvation, we do not centre upon the Spirit and do not pray to him. Since the Son achieves all that the Father wills, we do not pray to him directly but we pray to the Father through the Son. However, we worship the Son since he is the focus of salvation and accepted worship on earth.

Thus Christ taught his disciples,

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Mat 6:6-9

So He said to them, 'when you pray, say: Our Father in heaven'. Lk 11:2

The apostles continued in this manner:

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'. Rm 8:15

That grace ... may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Cor 4:15

I pray to God. 2 Cor 13:7

God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Gal 4:6

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eph 3:14

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Eph 5:20

Let your requests be made known to God. Phil 4:6

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Col 1:3

Giving thanks to the Father. Col 1:12

Giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Col 3:17

We bless our God and Father. Jm 3:9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 1:3

You call on the Father. 1 Pt 1:17

[Jesus Christ] has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. Rev 1:6

So Christians should understand the roles of each Person of the Trinity and give each the reverence that is due. But the centre of our focus is God; it is God who is sovereign; it is God who gives grace; it is God who has blessed us; and it is God who keeps us going to the end.

**That you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Rm 15:6**

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God. 1 Cor 6:20

Errors of focus: historic movements

It is symptomatic of heretical church movements that they give a wrong focus to their worship or preoccupation. This is not surprising since these movements are full of doctrinal errors, but most people fail to understand that their whole focus is wrong regarding God. Here are some examples.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism denies the Trinity and substitutes myths for it.

Gnosticism is dualistic (matter evil, spirit good) being a mixture of Greek philosophy and Eastern mysticism. The supreme god emanated from the good spirit world. From him proceeded a number of finite beings (Aeons or angels). One of these gave birth to the creator-god or Demiurge who created the evil material world.

In 2nd century Christian Gnosticism (e.g. Marcion or Valentinus) Christ was an Aeon who taught the knowledge (*gnosis*) to release captive spirits from the material world. He was never human but only appeared so (Docetism). The NT confronts the incipient Gnosticism that was already arising in the 1st century in books such as Colossians and John's letters.

Chief errors

Denial of the Trinity, denial of the doctrine of God, denial of the Son.

Ebionism

Derived from the Hebrew word for ‘poor’, which was originally applied to all Christians but then, in the 2nd century, specifically to a sect of Jewish Christians that legalistically emphasised the Law of Moses.

This radical sect was ascetic. It acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah but rejected the idea of his divinity and the virgin birth; Jesus was just the last of the great Hebrew prophets. It was one of the first church movements to deny Christ’s deity. They taught that when Jesus was baptised, Christ (Messiah) came upon him in the form of a dove and then left him just before the crucifixion. Overstates the humanity of Christ.

The Ebionites only used Mathew’s Gospel and rejected all of Paul’s writings.

Chief error

Denial of the divinity of Jesus.

Arianism

Founded by the Alexandrian priest Arius [250-336].

Arians worship the Father and deny the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son was created by the Father before time and out of nothing and was therefore not existent, co-eternal nor consubstantial with the Father. Jesus was the first and greatest creature.

Overstates the humanity of Christ.

Chief error

Denial of the eternality of the Son and his equality and same essence with the Father.

Adoptionism

Christ was a mere man who, by God's decree, was born of a virgin, was given supernatural power at his baptism and because of his character and work was raised from the dead and then adopted into the Godhead.

A later 8th century Spanish form taught that Christ was, as a man, adopted as God's son but as to his divine nature, he was the eternal Son of God. This denied the *Communicatio idiomatum*.

In simple terms we can say that Adoptionism teaches that the man Christ was adopted into the Godhead. Overstates the humanity of Christ.

Chief error

Denial of the divinity and eternality of Jesus.

Communicatio idiomatum

This Latin term, meaning the communication of properties, explains the properties of the human and divine natures of Christ. These properties belong to a single Person and both the human and divine properties are ascribed to that one Person without any confusion. Thus Christ under a human title can have divine properties ascribed to him (Jn 3:13), or when he is spoken of under his divine title can have human acts ascribed to him (Acts 20:28).²

Modalism

This denies the Persons of the Godhead claiming that they are simply modes of the one god. There are various forms of modalism, such as:

Modalistic Monarchianism

(Patrinorianism in the west, or Sabellianism in the east). 'Monarchianism' is used to denote the primacy of God the Father.

A form of Unitarianism. God is not only one single essence but one single Person. The names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' are not personal names but modes of God, relations of God in his dealings with men. God is one; the Father, Son and Spirit are modes of working (or expressions) of the one God. Christ is simply a mode of the one God with no personal existence of his own. Modalistic Monarchianism refers to the view that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are merely different names for the same divine person. While it affirmed the true divinity of Christ, it denied the Trinity. Patrinorianism³ teaches that the Father became incarnate and suffered. Sabellianism refers to Sabellius, a leading modalist confronted by Tertullian.

² For a detailed explanation of the complex aspects of this doctrine see Richard A Muller, 'Dict. of Latin and Greek Theological Terms'.

³ 'The Father suffers'.

This heresy overstates the deity of Christ.

Dynamic Monarchianism

This denies the personality of the divine Logos, making it a mere power within God, like reason in man. While operating in all men, this power was especially powerful in Christ and finally deified him (a form of Adoptionism). Jesus was a ‘mere man’ until he was adopted by God to be his Son. Christ was only a man under the influence of God. It denied the personality of the Logos and made him and the Holy Spirit mere impersonal attributes (modes) of God. Modern Unitarians and historic Socinians are Dynamic Monarchians.

This heresy overstates the humanity of Christ.

Many Pentecostals, such as Oneness Pentecostals, deny the Trinity and are modalists, including arch-heretic William Branham. The Oneness sects are Modalistic Monarchians or Sabellians.

Swedenborgianism also adopted Sabellian views.

Chief error

Denial of the Trinity.

Apollinarianism

Named after Apollinaris [c. 310-390] who strongly opposed Arianism.

He taught that Christ was divine and no human nature existed in him. He believed that if Christ possessed a human nature, he would undergo change, suffering, development etc. So, in the place of human nature, Apollinaris placed the divine Logos. Thus Christ had a true body and an animal soul but the Logos took the place of a rational spirit. The two natures of Christ could not exist within one person, therefore, the human nature had to be diminished; Christ cannot be fully God and fully man at the same time.

Therefore, Christ had one active principle alone, the divine Logos. Christ’s human flesh had no independent mind or will; the Logos replaced Christ’s human spirit. This denies that Christ had a human personality. The result is that Christ is neither God nor man.

This teaching completely rejected the Biblical testimony of the incarnation and failed to explain how atonement could work.

Overstates the deity of Christ.

Chief error

Denial of the doctrine of Christ.

Nestorianism

The heresy attributed (falsely) to Nestorius [d. c 451] is that Jesus is two persons. The virgin birth resulted in a man who was accompanied by the Logos. While seeking to affirm the true humanity of Jesus it failed to do justice to the unity of his person and to the union of the Logos with a human nature. It fails to do justice to the union of Christ’s two natures in one person.

Overstates the humanity of Christ.

Chief error

Denial of the doctrine of Christ.

Eutychianism

Jesus had neither a divine nature, nor a human nature, but a composite new sort of nature that was part human – part divine. It is an early type of Monophysitism (Jesus only had one nature).

Overstates the deity of Christ.

Chief error

Denial of the doctrine of Christ.

Monophysitism

The name means ‘one-nature’ in Greek. Christ only has one nature that was essentially divine. This was emphasised to protect the unity of Christ’s person. Christ’s human nature is diminished.

Overstates the deity of Christ.

Denial of the doctrine of Christ.

Monothelitism

The name means ‘one will’ in Greek. Monothelites were Monophysites who particularly opposed the idea of two wills in Christ, as well as two natures. They taught that Christ only had one will. Some taught that the human will was absorbed into the divine will; others that a third type of will was produced which only existed in Christ.

Overstates the deity of Christ.

Denial of the doctrine of Christ.

Rosicrucianism

A secretive 17th - 18th century society devoted to the study of metaphysical, mystical, and alchemical lore. Allegedly founded by (probably mythical) Christian Rosenkreutz ('Rose Cross') [1378-1484] according to an anonymous pamphlet of 1614. Later developed by the Lutheran theologian Johann Valentin Andrae [1586-1654].

A hotchpotch of myths and ideas including reincarnation, syncretism, Platonism, Hermetism, Alchemy, evolutionary theory etc. Many historic figures have been Rosicrucians including: Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton, Liebnitz, and Benjamin Franklin. It is also closely connected to Theosophy.

God is made up of the ‘seven spirits before the throne’ to make the triune Godhead. The Father is the highest initiate of Saturn; the Son of the sun, and the Holy Spirit of the moon. God is impersonal, the seven spirits are different aspects of the trinity (but this is an unbiblical trinity). God is not distinguished from creation. Christ is not God in the Christian sense, merely an initiate; Jesus is distinguished from Christ. The Christ-spirit is an aspect of the universal Christ, but Jesus is a man. The Holy Spirit is dispersed throughout creation. Humans are synonymous with God. Eventually, after a period of evolutionary progress, everyone is saved.

Similarities: New Thought, New Ageism, Pantheism, Nestorianism.

Socinianism

Named after the Italian theologian Faustus Socinus [1539-1604] who denied the Trinity. Socinians worship the Father but deny the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Socinians went further than the Arians by making Christ a mere man with no existence prior to his human birth. However, Socinus affirmed the virgin birth, the sinlessness of Christ and taught that all power was given to him after his resurrection and ascension, enabling Christ to be called God. However, he denied Christ's atonement and substitutionary sacrifice. Men are saved through God's mercy on the basis of their own repentance. Overstates the humanity of Christ.

Socinus also denied the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, as well as predestination, original sin, total depravity, and hell.

Chief error regarding God

Denial of the eternity of Jesus, making Jesus a created being.

The Shakers

This deeply heretical cult became dominated by occult and mystical ideas, including spiritualism, but its focus of worship was Mother Ann Lee, who claimed to be the Messiah.

Chief errors

Denial of God, the Trinity and the pre-eminence of the Son.

Errors of focus: Christian denominations

These are general principles; there are, no doubt, many individual exceptions in Christian denominations; nevertheless the observations have value.

Eastern Orthodox Church

While I have some sympathy with the striving of the Orthodox to defend cardinal Biblical issues, I have previously explained⁴ why there are several aspects of this faith that are unbiblical, not least the doctrine of Theosis whereby man becomes God. Regarding God, they centre upon the Father and treat him as the sole source of divinity. The great emphasis is upon the Father and not the three Persons equally.

Protestantism in general

Traditional Protestants focus upon the Son, and especially the humiliation of Jesus. The centre of their attention is usually the ministry and life of Jesus. Thus there is not even a proper focus upon the ascension of Jesus or the heavenly session of Christ. [How many books have you seen on the ascension?]

Many traditional Protestants also pay no attention to the Holy Spirit, except in theological treatises, and fail to appreciate his ministry in the saints; thus they live legalistic, dead religious lives (hence the criticism of Charismatics). But many Protestants also fail to give the Father the attention he deserves. It is common for Protestants to pray directly to Jesus instead of the Father.

Pentecostals and Charismatics

These do the opposite; they focus almost entirely on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his application of salvation. They don't even focus on his other work, such as in creation and providence. Everything is about being 'spirit-filled' and they invent a doctrine of the 'baptism of the Spirit' that is unbiblical and blasphemes Christ; also thereby creating two ranks of believers.

⁴ 'How orthodox is the Eastern Orthodox Church?'

What is worse is that this preoccupation with the Spirit leads to Satanic temptation to focus upon any work claiming to be of the Spirit, but is in fact demonic. For example, the famous Toronto Blessing experience (rather, a tragedy) was a fad which subjected the Charismatic churches to invasion by demonic forces claiming to be of God.⁵ The fruit alone proves that this was false, let alone all the false doctrines and practices. This was an occult invasion not a spiritual work; indeed the Charismatic Movement has been nothing but a Trojan Horse to infiltrate multiple forms of occultism and mysticism into the evangelical churches.

There have been many more examples of demonic forces pretending to be the Holy Spirit which Charismatic churches have succumbed to, but this would require a separate paper.⁶

The New Apostolic Reformation

This radical, authoritarian subset of the Charismatic Movement would claim to worship Jesus but in practice the focus of their attention is upon apostles and prophets. In the worst cases, teachers in this movement even claim that the rule of apostles over the world in the future stops the need for Christ to return to earth and bring about the end, such is the hubris of men to make apostles greater than Jesus Christ.

Roman Catholicism

While Catholics would say that they focus upon God, in practice they centre upon Mary and the Pope, or the Pope's vassals locally. You can see this in the daily rosary prayer, '*Mary mother of God*' Many parts of the church also celebrate Mary as a co-redemptrix with Christ. This is plain idolatry.

Errors of focus: Christian sects and cults

Of necessity, a line had to be drawn in the choice of sects mentioned because there are literally thousands of them. These are the main sects that need to be covered with greater length given to those that are less well known.

Anthroposophical Society

Formed by Rudolph Steiner [1861-1925], a Roman Catholic who became a Theosophist and then started his own religion. It blends Christianity with Hinduism, mysticism and spiritualism. It affirms the law of Karma and reincarnation. Some aspects of spiritual knowledge are like Gnosticism rather than Biblical doctrines.

It denies the Fall as resulting in active rebellion against God, affirming an evolutionary pilgrimage of man. It is thus introspective rather than seeking reconciliation for alienation from God.

In Theosophy Jesus is one of a number of Arphats who have appeared through history; for Steiner he is the one great Arhat that transcends all others to help men gain self-awareness.

This is a complete confusion regarding God, mixing Biblical ideas with paganism and occultism.

Similarities: Gnosticism, Hinduism.

⁵ 1 Tim 4:1, 'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons'.

⁶ See my paper, 'A Summary of Occult Inroads into the Charismatic Movement'.

Christadelphians

These focus upon the Father and fail to worship Christ. God is one essence who only exists in himself and does not share his divinity with anything else. Jesus is the son of God, but not divine; he had no pre-existence before his birth.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God who has no personal will but merely executes the will of God.

Similarities: Nestorianism, Arianism, Dynamic Monarchianism and Islam.

Children of God

The cult started by Moses David (formerly David Brandt) in California in 1972. It was renamed as 'The Family of Love' and centres on fornication.

It rejects the Trinity. While teachings on Jesus are contradictory, it affirms that Jesus had a beginning and was created by a sexual act. There is great confusion of the two natures of Christ. The Holy Spirit is not treated as a personal being and is often identified with the 'love principle' and is even treated as feminine.

Similarities: Nestorianism, Arianism.

Christian Science

Founded by Mary Baker Eddy [1821-1910] after being healed by PP Quimby and espousing his occultism and Mesmerism. The Church of Christ Scientist was formed in Boston in 1879.

While this cult claims to worship God, in practice its worship is to an abstract, pantheistic being and the main attention is upon healing by mind-control and denying the existence of pain and death. God is mind, spirit, and health. Jesus was a man and as matter, did not exist. Jesus was not God but merely an idea. Christ is the ideal truth that comes to heal sickness. The Holy Spirit is 'Divine Science' who reveals the divine principle.

God is divine principle.

Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875).

The followers of Mary Baker Eddy believed that her revelations were absolute and unalterable truths; thus they gave Eddy powers that only belong to God. This is blasphemy of the first order.

Similarities: Ebionism, Monism and Gnosticism.

Church of Bible Understanding (Forever Family)

Founded by Stewart Traill in 1970 in Allentown. Worldwide membership later reached a few thousand. Despite the original name of 'Forever Family', Traill divorced his wife as both accused each other of adultery. He married his secretary six weeks later.

Traill denies the Trinity. He affirms the three Persons but does not explain their relationship. Jesus is Saviour, but not God.

Similarities: Arianism.

Church of the Living Word (The Walk)

Founded in 1954 by John Robert Stevens [1919-1983], who was thrown out by leadership in the Pentecostal churches; so he formed his own church in South Gate, California.

Eventually seventy congregations emerged worldwide. Like Branham and Armstrong, his followers expected him to be resurrected.

Members lay aside their identity ('Transference') and become Christ, become God. Reason is disparaged.

The Trinity is affirmed but the concept of God is Pantheistic. Christ has no role as the Son of God; the church becomes Christ. The Holy Spirit enables men to become God.

Similarities: Pantheism, Gnosticism.

Church Universal & Triumphant (Summit Lighthouse)

Also see the 'I am' Ascended Masters. The 'I am' movement spawned many churches, chief of which was this one. The I Am movement blended Christianity with Gnosticism, Eastern mysticism and Theosophy. It began in the 1930s with Guy Ballard [1878-1939]. Like Gnosticism, he taught that God, being absolute spirit, could only be approached through intermediaries called 'Masters' who appeared in history to reveal the truth (cf. Theosophy). Jesus was a chief master, as was an occultist called Saint Germain with whom Ballard claimed to have contact. In fact Ballard got his ideas from a book by Baird T Spalding, *The Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East*. Thus Ballard taught reincarnation.

The movement gained millions of followers in the 30s. After media criticism and Ballard's death in 1939 the movement lost many members since Ballard had taught that physical death would not come to a person in the process of spiritual enlightenment. His wife was then convicted of fraud. The movement dwindled on after her death in 1971 and continues today. However, the most important offshoot was the Church Universal and Triumphant formed by Mark L Prophet [1918-1973] in 1958, a Theosophist, who claimed to receive teaching from another master named El Morya. Prophet claimed a direct link from the key leaders of Theosophy, the Ascended Masters, Ballard, and himself.

The movement suffered when Prophet suddenly died in 1973 and the work was continued by his wife, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, who remarried. Mark Prophet was declared an Ascended Master, who supposedly dictated teachings. Elizabeth and her husband Randall King renamed the organisation Church Universal and Triumphant, Summit House, being the publishing house. Elizabeth was renamed 'Guru Ma', 'Mother of the Universe'. She divorced King after he had an affair and married Edward Francis. The church continues to grow.

God does not exist apart from the creation; he is the source. All in creation is an emanation from God, the source. God has both male and female characteristics and is called 'Father-Mother'. God is also called 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit'. God is the 'Wisdom Power' and Christ is the embodiment of this. The Trinity is denied in its Biblical form.

Jesus and Christ are two different concepts; Jesus was a mere man. Christ is the principle of divine consciousness in every man. Jesus achieved a high level of this consciousness. Jesus is not to be worshipped.

The Holy Spirit is a de-personalised energy, a power in nature that brings knowledge of God.

Similarities: Paganism, Pantheism, Theosophy, Gnosticism, Ebionism, Nestorianism, and Hinduism.

Divine Science

An offshoot of Christian Science and one of the Mind Science sects spawned by Quimby.

It was founded in 1889 by Nona Brooks in Denver. She had been influenced by Emma Curtis, who had parted company from Mary Baker Eddy and had founded the Christian Science theological School in Chicago, which became a centre for New Thought. Another woman, Melinda Cramer, had been teaching similar ideas and teamed up with Brooks (and her two sisters) in 1898.

God is perfect mind and is present throughout the universe (Pantheism, monism) and this is the only real, authentic presence there is. Spirit is the substance of all matter, thus sin, sickness and disease is illusory because it contradicts spirit. Evil and sin is the result of a lack of knowledge of the goodness of God. Evil isn't actually real because God is everywhere. Salvation is knowledge about the spirit (Gnosticism).

The Father is the source of goodness and is everywhere. Christ is an indwelling principle, which anyone can realise; he represents the universal man. The Holy Spirit is a force that imparts illumination of self-realisation (Gnosticism). The goal is to achieve oneness with the divine (Hinduism).

Similarities: Gnosticism, Pantheism, and Hinduism.

International Church of Ageless Wisdom

Founded by Beth R Hand [1903-1977] who was originally an Episcopalian but became a student of spiritualism, the Kabbalah, Astrology and eastern religions. She originally founded three spiritualist churches but was then thrown out after teaching reincarnation and Karma. She then founded this new church in Philadelphia. In 1956 she ordained George Haas who had been the Archbishop Primate of the Universal Spiritualist Church and also a bishop in the Catholic Apostolic Church. After being licensed from the State of Pennsylvania, she began ordaining other bishops until she died in 1977. There are over 26,000 members.

This group is a syncretism of Christianity with Hinduism, Buddhism, spiritualism, Astrology and yoga.

God is the source of all things and the father of humanity. God cannot be anthropomorphic, therefore, Jesus cannot be God. Jesus is the 'wayshower' to point the way to the Father. All people are God's sons by virtue of creation not atonement. Salvation is by Karma and reincarnation; everybody will ultimately be saved (Hinduistic universalism).

Similarities: Ebionism, Arianism, Nestorianism, Hinduism, and occultism.

International Community of Christ (Jamilians)

Founded by Eugene Douglas Savoy [1927-2007] who claimed to receive revelations as a child. He later studied Judaism and Essene doctrines. Believing that Jesus was inspired by God, he began to teach hidden doctrines that Christ had not revealed in the Bible. One of these was that his son, Jamil, was the reincarnated Christ, being the fulfilment of Isa 11:6. But in 1962 Jamil died aged about 3; Savoy claimed that this was meant to happen and that he was translated into the 'world of light'.

Savoy taught that people are really 'light-beings' as ancient Egyptians and Peruvians had claimed. Christ did not come to atone for sin but to convey truth. The source of power in the universe is the sun, this power can redeem and empowered Christ's' miracles. Jesus

will return, not as a person but as a new sun. Thus this novel doctrine claims that the sun is the sustainer of God, rather than God sustaining the universe as the Bible teaches, or that God and the universe are one as in Hinduism and Pantheism.

Christ is merely a messenger to show the way pointing to the eternal sun. Many spiritualist and occult ideas are also taught.

Similarities: occultism, Gnosticism, Ebionism.

Jehovah's Witnesses (The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Russellites)

Founded by Charles Taze Russell [1852-1916].

These deny the Trinity saying that '*Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine*'.⁷ They centre upon the Father and do not worship the Son at all. The Holy Spirit is merely a divine force not a person. Jesus as God's son was not eternal. Their doctrine is subordinationist (Jesus is below God), similar to Arianism. The son was created by God and existed before he was human as the Word of God or Michael the Archangel. He was then born of a virgin but this was not an incarnation of God. Jesus did not have two natures; the Word became man. Jesus resurrection body was not physical but was a 'spirit body'; his human body was disposed of. These people use their own Bible version, which uses false translations of verses to support their heretical position.⁸

Similarities: Arianism, Modal Monarchianism.

Messianic Christianity

Also Jewish Root theology, Christian Zionism.

These groups contain a wide variety of teachings and errors, but all centre upon Jewishness and Israel based upon Dispensationalism. In the worst cases they divert attention away from Jesus on to Israel. In most cases they over-emphasise the OT and Mosaic Law and fail to do justice to the New Covenant and grace. They downplay the NT and especially Paul's writings. As a result they diminish reverence for Jesus.

Similarities: Ebionism.

Mormonism

Mormons worship angels and a plurality of gods. The Father had a material body. The Father God of the Bible is the God of Earth but there are many gods of other worlds. Each god gives birth to other gods. While advocating many gods, early Mormonism taught the Trinity, though Joseph Smith also contradicted this in sermons. The gods were men before they became gods: '*As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become*'; [Lorenzo Snow, 5th president of Mormonism.] While Jesus is a son of God, Mormons deny that he was God; he was the '*firstborn spirit child*'.

Similarities: paganism, Gnosticism.

New Thought

PP Quimby [1802-1866] was the key mentor of the Mind Science sects: Christian Science, Unity, Religious Science, Divine Science and New Thought. Quimby practised Mesmerism (hypnotism) and created a syncretism of Christianity with the occult. The prime focus was on healing based upon the claim that sin, sickness and disease existed solely in the mind.

⁷ 'Let God be True', Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1946, p100.

⁸ E.g. Jn 1:1, 'the Word was a god'. Gen 1:1 'active force' instead of 'Spirit'.

His followers broke away from the authoritarianism of Christian Science to create the other sects. New Thought was developed by Methodist Warren Felt Evans [1817-1889] and Julius Dresser [1838-1893]. Evans also began to imbibe the ideas of Swedenborg. Dresser was a great communicator who spread the teachings.

The theology was based on Platonic dualism, spirit is superior to matter. Man is divine and capable of infinite possibilities through constructive thinking.

God is immanent in the world; divinity is in all things (Pantheism). Jesus is merely a teacher who taught that God's kingdom was within all people. They reject Jesus as the Son of God and the only way to salvation. Sin is just succumbing to illusory matter. All sins and sicknesses are illusions of the mind; right thinking fixes them. This requires right knowledge (like Gnosticism).

Similarities: Ebionism, Gnosticism, Pantheism, Hinduism.

Religious Science

This is essentially monism (all is one, opposite of dualism). God is the impersonal self that becomes personalised in humanity; an impersonal mind. Individual minds are like rivers flowing from a central source (god). Thus humanity and nature are identified with each other. Jesus was a normal man who had an unusual grasp of the infinite. This 'Christ-realisation' is open to anyone. The Holy Spirit is a force within humanity.

Similarities: Ebionism, Gnosticism, Pantheism and Hinduism.

Seventh Day Adventists

Organised in 1860 following the teachings of William Miller (hence 'Millerites') who claimed that Christ would return to Earth in 1843, then 1844, then the claim that Christ did return but to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary (hence 'Adventism') came as a result of a vision.

While many in this movement would claim to worship Jesus, the reality is that the cult gives every appearance of reverencing Ellen G White, their 'prophetess' who rescued the movement with her teachings and writings (many plagiarised) after its initial downfall. One part of her teaching was the need to honour the seventh-day Sabbath, which also resulted from a vision. The movement thus rests on two false visions.

SDA teaches many errors, such as: 'soul sleep' (saints are unconscious between death and the resurrection); annihilation of the wicked instead of everlasting punishment; a false view of the atonement denying the efficacy of the cross;⁹ Satan as the scapegoat for sins; sinners contribute in dealing with sin through their efforts in probation (synergism); it denies assurance; and denial of the Lord's Day, which is called 'the mark of the beast'.

The work of Christ in redemption is denied in the Biblical sense and the testimony of God's word is thoroughly contradicted by the visions and teaching of a woman.

Similarities: mysticism.

Swedenborgianism

Initiated by philosopher, spiritualist and scientist Emmanuel Swedenborg [1688-1772], whose followers founded the Church of the New Jerusalem.

⁹ We dissent from the view that the atonement was made upon the cross, Ellen G White, 'The Great Controversy', p489.

He rejected most of the Bible and many doctrines, such as: resurrection, salvation, grace and imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Jesus is distinguished from 'the Christ'; Jesus was merely human.

The Trinity is love, wisdom and activity as attributes of one person, not three.

Similarities: Nestorianism, Modal Monarchianism (Sabellianism).

Unification Church (Moonies)

God is a self-generating abstract principle or energy, the first cause of existence. Thus God has both masculine and feminine characteristics. Jesus' death was an unfortunate accident; his body remained in the grave while his spirit rose to heaven. This is more pagan than Christian.

Similarities: Gnosticism, Dualism, Nestorianism.

Unitarians

This group denies the Trinity completely believing in a one-person god. Jesus is not God incarnate, or the Second Person of the Trinity, or even the Messiah, but a mortal man.

Similarities: Modal Monarchianism, Arianism.

Unity School of Christianity

Founded in 1889 by Charles Fillmore and his wife Myrtle, previously converts to Christian Science plus an interest in spiritualism, the occult and Hinduism. Unity later was more influenced by New Thought and the ideas of PP Quimby.

God is 'principle, law, mind' and spirit'. God, as a principle, is not separate from self; it is an emanation of the soul. This is a Hindu concept.

The Son is the second member of the Trinity and is 'Principle' revealed in the creative plan. Jesus is the name of a particular person, an ordinary man; Christ is the spiritual aspect of him. The Holy Spirit is the executive power of the Father and the Son. He is also the desire within men prompting the mind towards holiness and unity with God.

Similarities: Ebionism, Apollinarianism, Gnosticism, and Pantheism.

The Way International

Founded by Victor Paul Wierwille [1916-1985]. This elitist, mind-control cult began in the early 1950s and came to prominence in the 1970s. It currently has over 100,000 members in over 60 countries.

This group denies the Trinity. Jesus is not God the Son and the Holy Spirit is not God either but an impersonal force. It argues that the Trinity is a pagan concept teaching a plurality of gods. Their teaching is worse than Arianism in denying that Jesus existed before his human birth and that he was born of a virgin. It affirms that Jesus was created by sperm provided by God to Joseph; thus he was not co-eternal with the father; the son only existed when he was born.

Similarities: Nestorianism, Arianism.

Worldwide Church of God

The Trinity was rejected on the grounds that the Holy Spirit was not the Third Person. Jesus had one nature and after his death he did not resume his human nature but was completely spiritual.

The Holy Spirit is merely a divine force (c.f. Jehovah's Witnesses). God and humanity are not clearly distinguished in Herbert W Armstrong's theology; through prayer and obedience, humans become god. Instead of rejecting the Trinity to affirm that there is one god (as many do), this group refuses to limit god to any number (cf. Mormonism).

This church has reformed since Armstrong's death.

Similarities: Monophysitism.

Non-Christian cults

New Ageism

A multiplicity of groups. Most of these are similar to Theosophy, being Pantheistic, monist, dualist (yes this is contradictory, some groups are monist, others are dualist), mystical and occult. Many are variations of Hinduism mixed with occultism while some are witches.

The Forum (formerly EST, 'Erhard Seminars Training')

Founded in 1971 by John Paul Rosenberg, alias Werner Erhard [1935-] who changed his name after abandoning his family. He was a salesman who studied Zen Buddhism, Scientology and Mind Sciences until he claimed 'permanent enlightenment'. Thus began his teaching that things are the opposite of what they seem. It was a denial of rationalism. Each person's mind shapes reality; there is no absolute truth; truth is a lie. The world is an illusion.

Training to accept this subjective monism is by highly regulated expensive seminars. Here belief systems are ridiculed and people are psychologically abused followed by passive compliance and then hysteria. People are then suggestible and told to accept that they are perfect.

God and humanity are closely connected Humans become god and god becomes man (Pantheism). Each person becomes an individual god. There are thus many gods. Anyone is as much god as Jesus was; he is not unique. Through reincarnation everyone is eternal. The individual becomes the final arbiter of truth. There is no concept of salvation.

Rastafarianism

This is a Black nationalist movement with religious overtones that began in the 1920s with leaders such as Jamaican Marcus Garvey [1887-1940]. The name derives from Ras Tafari Makonnen [1893-1975] who was crowned Emperor Selassie of Ethiopia and was considered to be the messiah of this group and king of kings. LP Howell was a powerful preacher who took up this cause in Kingston, Jamaica.

Contrary to many white supremacist movements that claim the white race is the progeny of ancient Israel, Rastafarians claim that the Black races are the living embodiment of Israel. White races derived from a wicked ancient civilisation; the Black races are destined to rule the world.

Chief error is denying the Lordship and redeeming work of Christ for an idol.

Scientology

While this is merely an authoritarian, money-making cult, in practice the adherents reverence L Ron Hubbard, the con-man who started the movement.

Theosophy

A mixture of Platonism and Eastern religions. Teaching is Gnostic. God is Pantheistic. Jesus is divine in the sense that all people are divine. The man Jesus was merely human.

A simplistic comparison of ‘Christian’ sects

Modern sect	Historic comparison regarding God	Christian or not?
Anthroposophical Society	Gnosticism, Hinduism.	Not Christian, rather it is more pagan.
Charismatic Movement	Gnosticism, mysticism, occultism, elitism, authoritarianism.	Claims to be Christian but is severely compromised. In the worst cases it is closer to paganism. Has many deceived Christians within.
Christadelphians	Nestorianism, Arianism, Dynamic Monarchianism, Islam.	Not Christian; they do not worship Jesus and deny the Trinity.
Children of God	Nestorianism, Arianism.	Claims to be Christian but is very far from it. Denies the Trinity and practices unrighteousness.
Christian Science	Ebionism, Gnosticism, Monism.	More pagan than anything.
Church of Bible Understanding	Arianism.	Denies the Trinity, not Christian.
Church of the Living Word (The Walk)	Pantheism, Gnosticism.	Not Christian; denies the Biblical Christ and confuses the Trinity.
Church Universal & Triumphant	Paganism, Pantheism, Theosophy, Gnosticism, Ebionism, Nestorianism, and Hinduism.	Completely pagan and blasphemous.
Divine Science	Gnosticism, Pantheism Hinduism.	More pagan than anything.
International Church of Ageless Wisdom	Ebionism, Arianism, Nestorianism, Hinduism, occultism.	More pagan than anything.
International Community of Christ (Jamilians)	Ebionism, Gnosticism, occultism.	Pagan and occult.
Jehovah's Witnesses	Arianism, Modal Monarchianism.	Not Christian; does not worship Jesus.
Messianic Christianity, Jewish Rootism	Ebionism.	At best is Old Covenant; not Christian in the NT apostolic sense. The focus on Israel is blasphemous.
Mormonism	Paganism, Gnosticism.	Paganism.
New Thought	Ebionism, Gnosticism, Pantheism, Hinduism.	Paganism, Occultism.
Oneness Pentecostals, Branhamism	Modal Monarchianism (Sabellianism).	Not Christian since it denies the Trinity.
Classical Pentecostalism	Gnosticism, mysticism, occultism, elitism.	Has many variations. The worst cases are close to paganism and occultism but some folk genuinely worship Jesus.
Religious Science	Ebionism, Gnosticism, Pantheism, Hinduism.	Pagan.
Seventh Day Adventists	Mysticism.	Closer to paganism.
Swedenborgianism	Nestorianism, Modal Monarchianism.	Denies the Trinity; pagan.
Unification Church (Moonies)	Gnosticism, Dualism, Nestorianism.	Pagan.
Unitarians	Modal Monarchianism, Arianism.	Not Christian as they deny the Trinity.
Unity school	Ebionism, Apollinarianism, Gnosticism, occultism, Pantheism and Hinduism.	Pagan and occultic.
The Way International	Nestorianism, Arianism.	Not Christian; it denies the Trinity.
Worldwide Church of God (as originally formed).	Monophysitism.	Not Christian; it denies the Trinity.

Many of these sects have certain attributes, or forms, of Christianity. However, it is usually their doctrine of God that betrays their true position. While Pentecostals and Charismatics may be seen as Christians that have been compromised by deception in many areas, all the other groups are not Christian at all but only have the trappings of Christianity. Those that do not worship the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit cannot be conceived of as Christian.

Conclusion

It is the job of Christians to be entirely Biblical and not follow human fads. Thus evangelicals worship God. When they pray, they come to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. With regards to all aspects of redemption, including church life, Christ is pre-eminent. Yet believers also appreciate the work of the Spirit in their lives and seek not to grieve him through disobedience.

Thus it is clear that certain actions are simply wrong. Praying to the Holy Spirit is wrong. The common prayer of Charismatics, ‘*Come Holy Spirit*’, has no Biblical provenance. Singing to the Holy Spirit, as many Charismatic choruses direct, is wrong. Singing in the Spirit (in reality mystical, emotional chanting) is also wrong. Worshipping the Spirit is wrong.

Anything that denigrates the Father is wrong. Thus all doctrines that downplay God’s attributes are wrong. This includes Arminianism and all forms of Pelagianism (including Romanism, Finneyism and Wesleyanism)¹⁰ which deny God’s sovereignty in salvation, his immutability and other attributes. Open Theism is wrong since it denies God’s predestination and even his foreknowledge.

Amyraldism is wrong since it teaches lies about God’s decree, even if it does so hypothetically (hypothetical universalism). By affirming that God loves everyone and desires to save everyone (then he doesn’t but only saves the elect). Amyraldians (and the Neonomians of Richard Baxter, the Marrow Men or Andrew Fuller) deny the word of God, the attributes of God and deny the work of Christ to only suffer for the elect.

Authoritarian church movements denigrate God since they put the church’s focus upon a man (such as an apostle). This denies the priesthood of all believers, which was a spiritual blessing given by God and thus demeans the people of God. It also tends towards idolatry in focusing so much upon a man.

We could continue; so much in modern supposed church life dishonours God and denies the Trinity. Let us take care to ensure that all our actions serve to glorify the name of God.

Christians worship God. Anyone who alters or contradicts what the Bible teaches about God is not a worshipper of the true God and is, therefore, not a Christian.

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¹⁰ Wesleyanism is Evangelical Arminianism; Finneyism is virtual Pelagianism; Romanism is Semi-Pelagianism.