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HERESY

**What It
Is and
Why to
Avoid It**



Opening Prayer



O GOD of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favourably upon thy whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; and by the tranquil operation of thy perpetual providence carry out the work of [our] salvation; that things which were cast down may be raised up, and that all things may return into unity through him by whom all things were made, even thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



[St. Elias the Prophet \(Brampton, ON\)](#)



Introduction, Top Heresies 5, 4, 3, 2 ...

Review

How to get at our question...

- ⦿ Definition, Magisterial pronouncement, Historical analysis ...
- ⦿ Pathology and treatment
 - How do certain Christian teachings make individual Christians and even churches sick unto death (John 11:4)
 - Remember: Not ALL diseases are fatal, but SOME are
 - Goal: To bring fulness of life!
- ⦿ “Top 5 Heresies”: Primary diseases that are fatal to Christians and will prevent fulness of life

Number 5 Fatal teaching concerning the Holy Spirit

- ⦿ Diminishment (Pneumatomachians) and Over-emphasis (Montanism)
- ⦿ Fatal because
 - A creature (less than fully God) can only bring knowledge, comfort, help, etc. but can not make us fully divine. Only God can do that.
 - Over-emphasis on the Holy Spirit “puffs up”, causing us to lose sight of Christ-like service and the Father’s giving

Treatment?

- ⦿ Begins with
 - A full witness from Scripture
 - The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed concerning the Spirit
- ⦿ And continues with
 - Teaching and practicing what it means to be full heirs with Christ; living fully free lives in Christ
 - Discerning and checking “puffed up” Christians without quenching the Spirit’s work; ensuring that Christ-like service is the mark of the Christian

Number 4:

Fatal teaching concerning Jesus

◎ Who is Jesus?

• Jesus isn't God:

- Perhaps God chose a good man and “adopted” him or Jesus is God's first and best creation (Col 1:15) (Adoptionists, Arianism)
- This is fatal because if Jesus is not God, we haven't encountered God but only one of God's agents

• Jesus isn't man:

- He only “seemed” to be like us. A holy God could never have become like us (Docetism, Monophysitism)
- This is fatal because if Jesus is not man, God did not know sin as we know it, did not die as one of us, did not raise the man Jesus to reign in heaven, and has not made us co-heirs with Jesus.

Treatment?

◎ Begins with

- The full witness of Scripture
- The full and expanded creedal formula: The Nicene Creed plus the theological expansion that happened at Chalcedon (the two natures: God and man)

◎ Continues with

- Learning what it means that Jesus is Lord of all peoples and societies and nations
- Exploring the full freedom Christ has gained for us from sin and judgment
- Learning what it means to be adopted as fully divine heirs in Christ and to be thankful

Number 3: Fatal teaching concerning God

- Healthy teaching about the Holy Spirit and Jesus needs the solid foundation of healthy teaching about God
- Fatal teaching about God
 - Inability to think of God outside of our own experience (Monarchian - single power - views)
 - Thinking of God in philosophical terms (impassivity - unsuffering)

Why is it fatal?

- ⦿ Because it starts with our view of God, which is corrupted by sin, in order to fashion what we think of as God
 - Monarchian views start from how humans see the world around them and organize themselves in society (one ruler)
- ⦿ Refuses to deal with how God has wanted to be known by us
 - From all eternity as a fellowship, a communion (not a mon-arch)

Treatment

- ◎ Starts with
 - Determining from full witness of Scripture how God presents Himself
 - Credal formulations of full witness to the “Trinity” : a puzzling, mysterious, enigmatic understanding of God, like nothing in this fallen world!
- ◎ Continues with
 - Being transformed (Rom 12:2) from our corrupted thinking about God by God’s revelation of Himself and about who we are in God’s image.
 - God is from eternity always in communion and always life-giving
 - We should only think of Jesus in relation to the Father and the Spirit, etc.
 - The work of God is constantly to bring life
 - Humans were created in the image of that God and were intended always to be in communion and to share in life-giving
 - “I” do not exist independently of “you” in the Body of Christ.
 - Our Christian task in the image of God is constantly to bring new life into being (family, conversions, service, teaching....).

Number 2: Fatal teaching concerning salvation

◎ Jesus +

- In addition to Jesus' saving work on your behalf, you must do something (e.g., Judaizing Christianity / Works righteousness)
 - We are not talking about faith properly understood
 - It is fatal because more keeps getting added to Jesus as necessary for salvation (never enough)
- My ability to know God / Jesus / truth correctly saves me (e.g., Gnosticism)
 - We are not talking about knowledge properly understood
 - It is fatal because without God's grace first we cannot know anything properly

Treatment

◎ Initial treatment

- The full witness of Scripture
- Credal formulations:
 - Start with us acknowledging / owning (“We believe”) who saved us:
 - The Father
 - The Son
 - The Spirit
 - Continue with us acknowledging the form that our salvation takes: “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” [“we”],
 - Visualized in the form “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” (for we were dead, and died once to death)
 - Expresses that our salvation is completed in the form of “the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Ongoing treatment

● Proclaiming true Faith

- True faith is not Jesus +. It is acknowledging (“owning”) that God has saved us (not anything that we have added to Jesus or done or can do ourselves)
- We are SECURE in that faith: “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1, like Abraham, who saw, trusted, and followed)

● Practicing true Faith

- Thanksgiving (Eucharist) for the Father’s self-giving of the Son (John 3:16), Christ as the “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom 3:25), and the Spirit as the one who, as Lord, brings us into fullness of life in our freedom as full heirs with Christ
 - Thanksgiving that we were dead and have all been adopted by God (brought out of death)
 - Visually lived out in Baptism: Died once and for all with Christ to death / raised with Christ to be fully alive (Romans 6)
- Mission: Now, having been made free, we are to go forth and bring life to the world by bringing others out of death to adoption as full heirs with Christ and with us (Jesus breathing the Spirit on the disciples in the upper room, John 20)
 - The world around us is fallen; it is not beyond redemption (against the Gnostics)!
 - But it will not be saved because we are righteous. (See on the film Noah.)

Fatal teaching concerning knowledge

Heresy number 1

Knowledge is one of the highest values of the modern period

- ◎ Modern science
 - Experimentation and induction (vs. deductive observation)
 - KEYWORD: Experience
- ◎ Technology
 - Using knowledge to gain scientific control of more and more aspects of human life and the world (from agriculture to industry)
 - KEYWORD: Management
- ◎ Modern society
 - Using knowledge to gain power to govern peoples and lead our own lives
 - KEYWORD: Choice

The problem with modern knowledge

- ⦿ Modern knowledge-based approaches to life have brought about great benefits (among others):
 - The extension of the scientific method into all fields
 - Extension of transportation, medical treatments of humans, plants, and animals
 - Correction of abuses by absolute monarchies and unjust political systems
 - We certainly do not want to go back to a time when these were not realities in our world.
- ⦿ But, human knowledge is not perfect (healthy and free of error). If it were, knowledge-based approaches to life would be fine.
 - Human knowledge is flawed (corrupted by sin). Because it is unhealthy, when it is applied without controls it leads not to freedom but to an oppressive and corrupt system of thought in which...
 - Reality can only be what science says it can be.
 - Life can and must be managed to get the most out of people or nature.
 - “My” choices become primary, overriding any common good (“we”).

Churches' adoption of modern knowledge as fatal

- ◎ Modern knowledge is fatal in the church
 - It forces all that we know about God and His purposes into the categories of fallen reality and fallen human thinking about reality
 - It leads to managerial approaches to all of life, including God's creation and church-life
 - It leads to the continued isolation of individuals who live according to their choices

Examples

- ⦿ Mainline Protestant churches, including Anglicanism
 - The presence of this fatal disease overlaps historically with the appearance of Protestant churches, including “Anglicanism”
 - It is a question whether you can have “Anglicanism” without it being tainted by this fatal disease to a greater or lesser degree!
- ⦿ Evangelicalism
 - Evangelical revivals of the 18th century were great movements of God’s Spirit but they also occurred at a time when science was making huge advances
 - Evangelicalism not just a response to science but an adoption of fundamental knowledge-based approaches: emphasis on evidence in the human person of God’s action be it experience or gifts of the Spirit (Pentecostal movements)
 - Evangelical worship becomes more “human” and “I” centered (NB: Evangelical choruses and prayers; absence of Scripture reading)
 - Emergent church
- ⦿ Elements in Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy
 - Roman Catholic liberalism
 - Orthodoxy’s (over)emphasis on the empirical leading of the Spirit
- ⦿ This fatal teaching is and will lead to the death of Christians and churches.

What is the treatment?

- ⦿ Not a conservative (traditionalist) return to some past “Golden Age” , but ...
- ⦿ Discernment of unchanging essentials:
 1. Truth
 2. Transcendent worship
 3. Evangelism

1. Truth

- ◎ Fatal teaching is based on a view of knowledge that says that only what is empirifically verifiable (by experience) can be considered to be true
- ◎ Healthy teaching is that
 - truth cannot be determined from observation and experience in the fallen world alone
 - It is not just a question of better ability to measure (e.g., what is happening in this room...)
 - Truth can only be discerned through a transformed mind (Rom 12:2) that enables us
 - To read Scripture accurately (vs. Pharisees)
 - To embrace orthodox essentials about God (5, 4, 3) and our salvation (2) from Church teaching through time and space
 - The ecumenical confessions of faith
 - There is no local magisterium (no “Anglican” truth)
 - To recognize truth wherever it is found in God’s creation
 - “All truth is God’s truth” (Arthur Holmes)

2. Transcendent Worship

- ◎ Fatal teaching is that, on the basis of what we know works (in a fallen world)
 - We manage our services of “worship” as aesthetic expressions (experience, feelings, experimentation), and
 - We do so by choosing what works for “me”
- ◎ Healthy teaching is that true worship is a transcendent expression of God Himself as He has chosen to be in relation to us
 - *“Beauty ... is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor.”* (Benedict XVI)

3. Evangelism

- ⦿ Fatal teaching focuses on our perception of the needs of a fallen world and our ability to respond by managing (“technology”) the needs
- ⦿ Healthy teaching seeks the transformation of individuals and corporate bodies (families, tribes, businesses, sports groups, neighbourhoods, cities, countries, the world) through discernment of God’s truth for His world
 - Life-giving creation and blessing of the world
 - Creation, Abraham....
 - Humanity created in God’s image
 - True healing from a fallen state (including knowledge!)
 - Healing in a full, Trinitarian, life-giving sense, including renewal of minds, life-changing miracles.... “Transforming broken lives into world-changing disciples”
- ⦿ There can be no healthy teaching (i.e., orthodoxy) without evangelism!

The challenge and promise of healthy teaching

1. About knowledge:
 - Fullness of life comes as we discern and receive God's truth, discern the beauty of God in worship, go forth and bring life to others who are dying or dead
 2. About salvation
 - Fullness of life comes as we delight in having been rescued from death and learn who we are as God's offspring in Christ's likeness (John 1:12-13)
 3. About God
 - Fullness of life comes as we unlearn what we think we know about God and know God as God has wanted to be known (eternally in Trinitarian fellowship and life-giver)
 4. About Jesus
 - Fullness of life comes as we recognize Jesus as fully human (knowing fully our human experience and sitting at God's right hand as ruler of the nations) and fully divine (fully forgiving humanity as no single man could do and making us fully divine heirs)
 5. About the Holy Spirit
 - Fullness of life comes as we learn how we who have been rescued are being led into fuller freedom daily as divine heirs
- ⦿ Healthy teaching is a continual challenge since we live in a sinful world that tries to shape our thinking rather than have us shape its thinking
- This will always be hard work and a challenge
 - To teach in this way is not for conservative traditionalists who look back but for bold, courageous, full heirs with Christ, prepared to be witnesses (*martyrs*) in this world as we live, fully alive in God.

Concluding remarks

- ◎ Prayer for the remembrance of [Bishop Tikhon of Moscow](#) (considered a saint in some Eastern churches)
 - Holy God, holy and mighty, you call us together into one communion and fellowship: Open our eyes, we pray, as you opened the eyes of your servant Tikhon, that we may see the faithfulness of others as we strive to be steadfast in the faith delivered to us, that the world may see and know you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise unto ages of ages. *Amen.*