

## Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ – Class 27

### Heresies II – Adoptionism and Modern Variants

March 8, 2020

**Note:** for ease of accessing the web sites referenced in this handout, download your own PDF copy here: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/DBS/Sedona/AdultEducation2019.html> and click on the live links in that copy. Questions or comments? Email me at [dmc89az@gmail.com](mailto:dmc89az@gmail.com). Follow St. Luke’s on Facebook: “St. Luke’s Church Sedona AZ”.

## I. Opening Prayer

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (*Collect for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.* BCP, p. 210.)

## II. Introduction/Review

- Two main types of heresy:
  - Docetism: Jesus was fully God but **not fully human**
  - Adoptionism: Jesus was fully human but **not fully God**
- We were warned: “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you **there should be mockers in the last time**, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.” *Jude* 17-18.
- We must be on guard:
  - “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **try the spirits** where they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” *I John* 4:1.
  - “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that **ye should earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.” *Jude* 3.

## III. Adoptionism

- Adoptionism, like Docetism, arose very early in the Church’s history. It, too, was ultimately condemned by the Church Fathers and by the first four Ecumenical Councils, but it has demonstrated remarkable staying power, and is arguably the most predominant form of heresy today.
- Adoptionism adheres to the proposition that, although Jesus was fully human, he was **not** fully divine at the time of his incarnation. Instead, Jesus – by living a sinless life through sheer willpower – **earned** the right to be adopted by God as his Son, either at his baptism, his resurrection, or his ascension, depending on which theory you adhere to.

- The Gospel of Adoptionism is to “try harder.” *The Cruelty of Heresy*, by C. FitzSimons Allison. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing 1994, p. 32.
- *The Cruelty of Heresy* calls this the “Roger Bannister Doctrine of Atonement.” *Cruelty*, p. 31. Once someone shows that something previously thought impossible can be done, the barrier is broken down and others quickly follow. (Think, also, of Chuck Yeager breaking the sound barrier.)
- Jesus “became the greatest of the prophets but in no way does he release humanity from the burden of the law. On the contrary, he showed that the law can be obeyed by obeying it himself. He was **adopted into divinity and became an example** to his followers to do likewise.” *Cruelty*, p. 31.
- “Our Lord becomes a teeth-gritting Jesus.” *Cruelty*, p. 33.
- “Adoptionism makes of Christianity a religion of control rather than a religion of redemption” and grace. *Cruelty*, p. 32. It stems from human pride and encourages self-centeredness. (This latter quality is what has survived so robustly today.)
- Adoptionism harkens back to the Fall, where the Serpent persuades Eve that eating the forbidden fruit is to be desired: “Ye shall not surely die; For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and **ye shall be as gods**, knowing good and evil.” *Genesis* 3:3-4. Ye shall be as gods. Who needs God? *You* can be at the center and in control.
- Like a petulant child, the Adoptionist declares: “I can do it myself!”
- But, Jesus did not **earn** the right to be divine. He was divine from the beginning:
  - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God**...And **the Word was made flesh** and dwelt among us.” *St. John* 1:1, 14. Note that St. John leaves no opening to conclude anything other than that Jesus was fully divine from the beginning and when he was made incarnate.
  - “I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; **Begotten of his Father before all worlds**...Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, **And was made man**.” *Nicene Creed*.
- The Judaizers in Galatians (who insisted that the Gentile believers be circumcised) were classic Adoptionists, and Paul had no patience for them whatsoever: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth...having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” *Galatians* 3:1, 3. Paul even confronted Peter when he (Peter) slipped into Adoptionist mode by withdrawing from the Gentiles when the delegation sent by James in Jerusalem arrived in Antioch. *Galatians* 2:11-21.
  - “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: **for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified**.” *Galatians* 2:16.

- “**For by grace are ye saved** through faith; and that not of yourselves: **it is the gift of God**. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” *Ephesians 2:8-9*.
  - Good works are not the *cause* of our salvation; they are the *result* as we learn to be more and more like Jesus.
- A later form of Adoptionism – called Pelagianism – *denied original sin* and taught that living a sinless life was possible through the exercise of human will. That Pelagianism was characterized by exhortation and scolding is best exemplified by a 16<sup>th</sup> century work, *The Whole Duty of Man*, which was the most popular English-language devotional work for two hundred years.
  - Such nagging and exhortation to perfection ultimately leads to failure and despair. As the noted Anglican priest, Richard Hooker, wrote:
    - We cannot “possibly forsake sin unless we first begin again to love....I therefore conclude, that fear worketh no man’s inclination to repentance, till somewhat else have wrought in us love also.” *Cruelty*, p. 127.
    - That “somewhat else” is Jesus, of course.

#### **IV. NextGen Adoptionism: Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism**

- In 2005, Professor Christian Smith (a sociologist) published a ground-breaking book: *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press 2005.
- After conducting 3,370 telephone surveys and personally interviewing 267 teens, Professor Smith concluded that today’s teens follow a religious Creed which he identified as Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism. The Creed has five main points:
  - A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
  - God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
  - The central goal in life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
  - God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
  - Good people go to heaven when they die.
- Professor Smith concluded that teens generally view God as a **divine butler and therapist** to be called on only when needed.
- He also found that teens are generally not religious rebels, but neither does religious faith and practice mean much to them. Religion operates in the background of their lives. It is like the wallpaper in the living room.

- Most teens are **incredibly inarticulate about the tenets of their religious traditions** but can speak in great detail on topics they’ve been drilled on such as drunk driving, STDs, and intolerance.
- One positive result of his study was that religious commitment and positive outcomes for teenagers are strongly and positively correlated. Also, they are eminently teachable when it comes to religion, and they are highly likely to follow their parents’ examples.
- **However, alarmingly, Professor Christian further concluded that it appears that MTD is colonizing and corroding many historical religions into a “bland mush.”**
- Recommended videos:
  - *2008 Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame: “Soul Searching” (58:07)* – a detailed presentation by Professor Smith describing his methodology and his conclusions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRCaQlr9ooU&t=302s>
  - *MTD (4:17)* – contains brief – and alarming clips – of interviews of teenagers and Professor Christians summary conclusions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYAiaocufe8>

## V. Adoptionism in High Places

- “I am the Lord thy God; Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; **thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.**” (*Exodus 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 5:6-9*)



- As shown in the photo above, on October 4, 2019, during the Amazon Synod the Pope and several cardinals attended a ceremony in the Vatican Gardens during which the participants bowed down and worshiped/venerated statues of Pachamama, a pagan fertility goddess worshipped by peoples of the Andes, also known as “earth mother.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachamama>. The Pope later blessed one of the statues, and five of them were placed in the Church of Santa Maria in Traspontina, just outside Vatican City.

- Two young, Catholic men from Austria flew to Rome, and – in the early morning of October 21, 2019 – gathered up the statues and dumped them into the Tiber River from the famous Ponte Sant'Angelo, adjacent to the Castel Sant'Angelo.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoB\\_gjuZgf8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoB_gjuZgf8)
- “Legend holds that the Archangel Michael appeared atop the mausoleum, sheathing his sword as a sign of the end of the plague of 590, thus lending the castle its present name. A less charitable yet more apt elaboration of the legend, given the militant disposition of this archangel, was heard by the 15th-century traveler who saw an angel statue on the castle roof. He recounts that during a prolonged season of the plague, Pope Gregory I heard that the populace, even Christians, had begun revering a pagan idol at the church of Santa Agata in Suburra. A vision urged the pope to lead a procession to the church. Upon arriving, the idol miraculously fell apart with a clap of thunder. Returning to St Peter's by the Aelian Bridge, the pope had another vision of an angel atop the castle, wiping the blood from his sword on his mantle, and then sheathing it. While the pope interpreted this as a sign that God was appeased, this did not prevent Gregory from destroying more sites of pagan worship in Rome.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castel\\_Sant%27Angelo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castel_Sant%27Angelo)
- As recently as last month, the Pope defended the Pachamama worship/veneration as “not necessarily” idolatrous.  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/did-pope-francis-defend-pachamama-idolatry-at-vatican-in-new-amazon-synod-exhortation>
- Even so, many bishops, priests and laity severely condemned the Pachamama worship/veneration and likened it to the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, one of the most disgraceful events in Jewish history.
- While this idolatry (heresy) seems patently obvious and is easily (and rightly) condemned, be wary of adopting the attitude of the Pharisee in Luke 18 (the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector). *Anything* (money, power, children, career, leisure, television, food) which stands between us and God is idolatry, just as surely as bowing down to a wooden statute of a fertility goddess in the Vatican gardens.
  - Notice that the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is followed immediately by Jesus’ warning: “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of god **like a child** shall not enter it.” (*St. Luke* 18:17)
  - Also, notably, this is followed by the encounter between Jesus and the rich ruler. *St. Luke* 18:18-30.
- (Recommended video: *Tim Keller – The Grand Demythologizer: The Gospel and Idolatry* (1 hr.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hN9GyHKrpPI&t=2303s>)

## V. Modern Adoptionist “isms”

- *The Cruelty of Heresy*, p. 40, aptly describes Adoptionism as “the glove that fits the hand of self-centeredness.”

- No metaphor could be more appropriate for today’s Adoptionist heresies. In fact, this largely describes the general arc of the major, post-Christian religious movements today:
  - Syncretism – mixing religious traditions together into a heretical soup
  - Relativism/Indifferentism – whatever floats your boat; “meh”
  - Universalism – everyone goes to heaven (and don’t even talk to me about hell)
  - Modernism/Progressivism – doctrine must evolve to meet modern wants and needs; often tends to be highly militant and antagonistic to traditional dogma
  - New Ageism/Pantheism – God is in everything; Man is God; mind creates reality
  - Moralistic Therapeutic Deism – God as divine butler and therapist
- All of the above “isms” tend to deny original sin and put self squarely before God. They are, therefore, essentially Adoptionist in nature, although elements of Docetism are often also involved (as in Progressivism).
- As a result, many orthodox leaders and theologians believe the crisis in the Church today is at least as bad, if not worse, than the crisis it faced during the Arian heresy

## **VI. What’s an Orthodox Christian to Do?**

- “Although it is true that heresy tends to burn itself out as it is tested in reality, the same can be said of a fire in one’s house. Heresy needs to be corrected before unnecessary and preventable harm is done.” *Cruelty*, p. 46.
- Complacency is not an option; in fact, it is a sin.
- Suggestions by Pastor Tom Brock, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod:
  - Read your Bible daily [*e.g.*, Daily Offices; in-depth Bible study]
  - Join a Bible-believing church [like St. Luke’s]
  - Pray for the Church:
    - That those churches which honor God’s word will grow
    - That those churches that don’t honor God’s word will repent
    - If they won’t repent, that they will shrink
      - Modern examples of turnarounds cited by Pastor Brock: the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s.
    - The *Book of Common Prayer* can be very helpful here:
      - “[S]end down upon our Bishops, and other Clergy, and upon the Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and, that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing.” (*A Prayer for the Clergy and People*. BCP, pp. 18 and 32)
      - “More especially, we pray for thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.” (*A Prayer for all Conditions of Men*. BCP, pp. 18,19 and 32, 33.)

- “O gracious Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldst be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen. (For the Church. BCP, p. 37.)*
  - “O Lord Jesus Christ, who saidst unto thine Apostles, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; Regard not our sins, but the faith of thy Church; and grant to it that peace and unity which is according to thy will, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.” *Amen. (Collect. BCP, p. 49.)*
  - “...beseeching thee to inspire continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord: And grant that all those who do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity and godly love....Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all Bishops and other Ministers, that they may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments. (from *Prayer for the Whole State of Christ’s Church. BCP, p. 74.*)
  - See also the Opening and Concluding Prayers in this handout.
- Take heart: **ultimately, truth, orthodoxy and Christ will prevail:**
    - “[W]hen he, the Spirit of truth, is come, **he will guide you into all truth.**” *St. John 16:13.* (The Four Ecumenical Councils proved this promise to be true, but it was not an easy road.)
    - “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and **the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**” *St. Matthew 16:18.*
    - “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: **and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.**” *St. Matthew 28:19-20.*

### VIII. Concluding Prayer

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succor, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (*Collect for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. BCP, p. 212.*)

**Next class – April 10 (Good Friday):** The Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo

## Appendix

### 2 Peter 2 (English Standard Version)

#### False Prophets and Teachers

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

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); 9 **then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.**

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, 11 whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like **irrational animals, creatures of instinct**, born to be caught and destroyed, **blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant**, will also be destroyed in their destruction, 13 suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. 14 **They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed.** Accursed children! 15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

**17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.** 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Link to audio version: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/audio-bible/esv/2-peter/>