



THE GOSPEL FOR THE POSTMODERN WORLD VI:

Reflections on “The Gift Abused” I¹

GOD CAME TO EARTH as Jesus Christ to terminate the divine predicament of his necessary use of command, possession and power in the process of creating a relational (covenantal) universe out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).² Also, he came as Jesus Christ to inaugurate his self-emptying love for, with and to all others.³ The fundamental question is, Why was God’s Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit misunderstood by Christ’s own followers and then used to perpetuate command, possession and power?⁴ To resolve this problem we need to review the history of mankind.

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Primitive God-Consciousness and Mythology

In primitive times, during the era of possessive god-consciousness, the mind of mankind was preoccupied with mythology — “a notion based more on . . . convenience than on fact.”⁵ For example, in ancient times mankind believed that the universe was composed of three layers — the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth (see Exodus 20:4). The heavens above were the home of gods and goddesses and of other celestial beings such as angels. The earth abounded with living creatures, including human beings. The underworld was the habitation of demons and of other strange creatures.

Ancient mythology commonly assumed that celestial beings came to the earth in the form of human beings. This is called anthropomorphism. For example, the ancient Greeks believed that “vague spirits assumed human shape and entered the local mythology as gods and goddesses.”⁶ The Egyptians

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were convinced that the celestial gods emanated downward until they assumed the role and human form of the Pharaohs.⁷ In the *Enuma Elish*, the Mesopotamians were convinced that the god, Ea, and his wife had a son, Marduk, who “was eventually elected to battle Tiamat and her army of dragons and serpents. . . . Marduk proceeded to battle and vanquish Tiamat. . . . From Tiamat’s corpse, Marduk triumphantly created the universe.”⁸ Another example of anthropomorphism is the Hebrew myth recorded in Genesis 6:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. . . . There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. —Genesis 6:1-4.

Greek Philosophy and Judaism

When possessive god-consciousness was withdrawn (ca. 2000-1000 BCE), the gods apparently vanished. Traditional mythology collapsed. Soon thereafter the Egyptian monarchy irretrievably fell, Mesopotamia collapsed, and First Temple Judaism crumbled. However, Grecian civilization survived, since under succeeding schools of philosophers — Socrates (470-399 BCE), Plato (427-347 BCE), Aristotle (384-322 BCE), etc. — the Greeks reversed their thinking. They introduced philosophy — “loving wisdom” — and contended that mankind was destined to reach the celestial realm and become deified through proper instruction, called *paideia*. Shortly thereafter Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), who had been a pupil of Aristotle, conquered much of the then-known world and brought with him the principles of Greek philosophy and *paideia*. With the rise of the Roman Empire, the imperial cult emerged, which attributed deity to the emperor and his deceased predecessor.

Meanwhile, the Hebrews had adopted Greek philosophy and, in fact, claimed that Moses was the first true philosopher. In Second Temple Judaism the Temple was no longer a metaphor for God’s becoming human but was the symbol for mankind’s divinization. For the Hebrews the Torah was the ultimate *paideia*. Not

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surprisingly, the Hebrews translated the Torah and the entire Tanakh into Greek. This translation was known as the Septuagint and became an accepted version of Hebrew Scripture for hundreds of years. Not long after, the Pharisees took the Greek concept a step further and declared that the Torah was divine and that God himself therefore dwelt within their hearts. They construed this conclusion from the prophetic words of Jeremiah:

. . . [B]ut this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach [= *paideia*] no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me . . . — Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

The Pentecostal Gift Misunderstood

In this context it should not be surprising that the followers of Jesus Christ misunderstood the Pentecostal “tongues . . . of fire” (Acts 2:3), the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the multilingual consequences as their own deification with the right to command, to possess and to exercise power. It was this historical event that later led the three great monotheistic religions to adopt the concept of the ultimate deification of mankind. Tragically, these misconceptions have shaped history for the last 2,000 years.

Endnotes

1. See “The Gospel for the Postmodern World V: The Gift Abused,” *Outlook* (March 2008).
2. See “The Divine Predicament,” *Outlook* (January/February 2005); “The Gospel for the Postmodern World III: The ‘Other Side’ of God,” *Outlook* (January 2008).
3. See “The Gospel for the Postmodern World IV: The Gift of God,” *Outlook* (February 2008).
4. See “The Gift Abused.”
5. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1976), s.v. “mythology.” See Julian Jaynes Society, “Summary of Evidence,” at www.julianjaynes.org/evidence_summary.php. See also Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976); “Origins,” *Outlook* (September 2001); “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (October 2001); “‘Life Is Bound Up,’” *Outlook* (April/June 2002) “Atonement I: Prehistoric,” *Outlook* (March 2006).
6. *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Survey of Mythic History,” in “Greek Mythology,” at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mythology.
7. See Karl W. Luckert, *Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).
8. A Bernard Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1988), p. 154.

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