

Who are you, Lord? (Pt. 2) Sunday 11th May 2025, John Gay

'At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.'" (John 10:22-26)

Back in 2006, when I was a curate at the parish of Wilton in Taunton, the church had what was a reading group that read a book and discussed it. One book we covered was 'Quantum Theology' by Diarmuid O'Murchu. This was the latest 'thing' in those days and as usual, there were views, sometimes put forward with vigour and passion, but always with space for another to make themselves heard. The discussion, we were led to believe, was at the cutting edge of debate on the subject in hand.

The idea, as I understand it, is that we can treat theology in the same way as Quantum Theory deals with the sciences and physics in particular. Quantum theory puts forward the idea that while Isaac Newton's laws of physics are fine in a general sense, once one starts to look at the minutiae of modern physics they are not capable of measuring or explaining phenomena accurately. We need a different way of looking at things.

Quantum Theology suggests that we need to look at theology in the same way. If the conventional view of God doesn't stand up to scrutiny by some, then we have to find another avenue by which 'God', whatever God is, can be experienced. God in this context can be anything from the real creative maker to a mere whimsy and figment of our imagination, though why people would pray to something that isn't there beats me. In short, according to Quantum Theology, God becomes whatever we want God to be. And there lies the great danger, because by defining God according to our own wants, needs and desires, little by little we end up with a God that is nothing other than a word in our vocabulary, or worse, reflects our own person, sins and all.

Some years ago, I visited a lady who was in her last hours, to pray for her. She was breathing, but there was little other sign of life. She was a widow and a churchgoer in the past. Her family were around the bed. The reaction of the family was interesting. They talked lovingly to her about the things of the moment. They told her that soon she would be able to see her husband again, the other side of this life.

That, of course may be true, but that was all the hope they seemed to have to grasp hold of as the lady slipped away. I wanted to tell them that there was so much more than just that. I wanted to tell them that believers in Jesus can look forward with every confidence to meeting him, Jesus himself, the other side of this life. The Easter event was the culmination of God's work in the redeeming to himself of a world that was lost.

I wanted to tell them that God is a real being who forms real relationships this side of eternity and not just beyond this life. He is not just some vague notion of something, or even nothing, out there somewhere.

I wanted to tell them that Jesus is the one who, as we come to the end of our life here, looks at our long list of sins and asks: "I note these but do you believe in me". If our answer is "Yes", he screws up the list and throws it into his very large waste paper bin. He has his Father's authority to do this. The "Yes" is enough. This lady, God willing, might see not only her husband, but God in the person of Jesus Christ and have confirmed what she understood already; she is loved, she is forgiven, she is saved.

But what did the family believe? My mistake was not asking them. I should have done. They were very grateful I had come and for the prayers, but why and for what? What, if anything, did they

believe in? I didn't know; I don't think they did either. Does it matter what they think? According to Quantum Theology, no it doesn't. But the Bible tells us it does.

Our gospel reading gives it straight. The Jews are looking for the Messiah, that is the one who is going to come to lead them out of Roman occupation. That is what they want. Here is Jesus. They have heard him speak the things of God. They have seen the works of God in his healing and miracles. Yet they do not recognise him as God because they are preoccupied with what they want rather than what God wants or offers them. God offers them life with him forever. The Jews want a political deliverer only for the here and now. Life for them is life without the Romans in town.

So they ask: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answers: "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

So, what does Jesus have to say about those who believe in him? That they hear his voice; they are known by him; they follow him; Jesus gives them more than just life here, he gives them eternal life; they will not perish and no-one can take them from his hand.

No-one else that is. We are part of his flock. Once in Jesus' fold the only way the believer can leave the fold is if he or she removes themselves from the fold. They stop believing or turn after other gods. Basic 10 Commandments stuff.

What does Jesus have to say in this passage about non-believers? Nothing at all. By their unwillingness to acknowledge the holiness of God through lack of belief in his existence and his character, they condemn themselves by their unbelief and unless they turn again will remain condemned. That is Christ's judgement. The wrath of God is not something that God does to someone, but rather something people inflict upon themselves. Unbelief is an affront to God's holiness, the worst. He will not tolerate it. Unbelievers are like goats who follow their own will and not the voice of the shepherd.

Does this shock you? There are some believers called Universal Salvationists who think that everyone will be saved because God is a loving God who doesn't want to lose a soul. Well, God is a loving God who doesn't want to lose a soul. He is a loving God and merciful with it. He doesn't want to lose a soul, but he owes us nothing. He has no obligation to save us at all.

Jesus teaches us that the redemptive love of God needs two to tango. The dance of love is not for him as one alone. The Trinity itself is the example of this. The three dance in relationship as one, though they each have their respective entities. God wants to dance with us, but have we got our dancing shoes on?

The Bible tells us he does love us as a start and will be merciful and save us if we turn to him and believe in him. This is called God's grace. This is God's gift to us. This grace reminds us who the Lord truly is; merciful redeemer and lover of our souls

If we refuse his grace though and go stubbornly our own way, in the opposite direction, we do not allow ourselves the possibility of an eternal relationship with God. That is what the Bible, the word of God teaches. Don't take my word for it, read it for yourself. The great marvel of the Protestant Reformation is that you don't have to believe my say-so or anyone else's. It is God's word and it is there for you to read.

According to Quantum Theology you can more or less believe in whatever you want and call it God, because QT relies on what you, the subject, feels. It focuses on the individual's wants and

needs first and puts God in a rather poor second spot. I am afraid the Bible teaches us that that just won't do!

We may be sceptical about the promises of our politicians and the manifestoes they present at election time; but they are thought up by people and can easily be broken if expedient. God's word, revealed in Jesus, the risen Christ and handed down over the centuries, remains true however.

There are those who dispute the findings of Quantum Theory and the fad of Quantum Theology has, indeed, come and gone. God's word though, in the Bible is still with us and God keeps his promises to those who believe in him as many saints down the centuries before have found to their eternal joy.