

# Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 13 No. 6

Anthony Buzzard, editor

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## 2011 Theological Conference 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference Thurs-Sun, May 12-15, 2011

This 20<sup>th</sup> annual conference at Simpsonwood Retreat Center promises to be an outstanding gathering of lovers of the Abrahamic faith and the Kingdom Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah. We are delighted to report that we will have a number of visitors and speakers from overseas — Australia, Germany, South Africa and England. The word of the Kingdom and the creed of Jesus are making an impact on a daily and ever-growing scale, thanks to books going out, in several languages, weekly at Amazon, and the astonishing power of the many websites now making the faith known to a potential of some 2 billion people. The increase in getting the message out is a constant source of joy. What a marvel is this amazing Internet.

Do take the time to spend these few days and encourage especially those who are new to the Abrahamic circle. Robin Todd will be with us to keep us posted of the fruit borne by his fine efforts to unite scattered believers. Small home fellowships are beginning to emerge, with a Restorationist flavor, as they recapture the vision of the Kingdom of God Gospel of Jesus and the ancient unitarian heritage which Jesus proclaimed as the “greatest of all the commandments.”

There is a worldwide dearth of hearing the Gospel as Jesus defined it and preached it. It is about the coming Kingdom, and its impact when fully embraced and made the center of our efforts (cp. Luke 4:43) still transforms lives and energizes. Paul described the Gospel as “the word which is energetic and active in you” (1 Thess. 2:13).

You will enjoy meeting familiar conference participants, and you will meet new family in the faith. How important it is not to “forsake gathering together.” We are responsible to each other not to sit on “islands” and operate as soloists. We must not forget that Christianity is to be done corporately. We will all learn much from what we hear and experience at the Conference. Please do not underestimate the joy you bring to others by attending. We will also celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special communion service.

**To register** please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 678-833-1839 or mail the form on the back page by **April 18**. The non-refundable deposit is \$50 per individual or couple.

**Registration deadline: April 18**

### Conference Cost

Includes 3 nights, all meals, snacks, conf. fee, and tax

Single	NEW Couple Rate	Double (per person)	Triple (per person)	Quad (per person)
\$340	\$505 per couple	\$260	\$245	\$230

### Transportation (Judy: 678-485-8492)

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Simpsonwood for \$25 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

Airport to Simpsonwood		
Thurs, May 12	1:00 pm	3:30 pm
Simpsonwood to Airport		
Sun., May 15	1:00 pm	

Please arrange your arrival time on Thursday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Sunday, May 15, we will provide 1 shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you **not book your return flight prior to 3:30 p.m.**

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Thursday and ends with lunch on Sunday. Driving directions to Simpsonwood Conference Center are at [www.simpsonwood.org](http://www.simpsonwood.org) The address is 4511 Jones Bridge Circle NW, Norcross, GA 30092.

### Post-conference Class

Anthony Buzzard will teach “The Titanic Struggle over Defining God, His Son and the Kingdom” from Sunday afternoon, May 15 to Tuesday, May 17. The cost for the class is \$179 for credit or \$75 for continuing education. The total cost for room/meals at Simpsonwood for Sunday and Monday nights is \$214 single, \$160 double (per person). Please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 678-833-1839 before **April 18** to register.

## Robertson’s Word Pictures: Think About This

There is much of great value in many of the learned Dr. Robertson’s comments on the text of the New Testament. I have access to this on my BibleWorks software and can refer to the Word Pictures easily. If we consult him on the absolutely fundamental

opening statement about the Gospel as Jesus preached it, I suggest that we are in for some disappointment. He writes:

**Mark 1:14-15:** “Mark adds here also: ‘and believe in the gospel’ (*kai pisteuete en to euaggelio*). Both repent and believe in the gospel. Usually faith in Jesus (or God) is expected as in John 14:1. But this crisis called for **faith in the message of Jesus** that the Messiah had come. He did not use here the term Messiah, for it had come to have political connotations that made its use at present unwise. **But the kingdom of God had arrived with the presence of the King.**”

It is quite untrue to say that Mark intended us to believe that the Kingdom of God had come. The Kingdom of God had not arrived! It was at hand. We are to pray “Thy Kingdom come” (see Rev. 11:15-18 for its real arrival at the seventh trumpet). If one simply takes any translation of the Bible and works one’s way through the many Kingdom texts in Mark, one finds that the Kingdom of God is the great event of the future. It is a Kingdom which we will enter finally at the return of Jesus.

It does make a difference what one believes. “Belief or disbelief in the message of Jesus made a sharp cleavage in those who heard him. Faith in the message was the first step; **a creed of some kind lies at the basis of confidence in the Person of Christ, and the occurrence of the phrase ‘Believe in the Gospel’ in the oldest record of the teaching of our Lord is a valuable witness to this fact**” (Swete).

Indeed, Robertson’s famous *Word Pictures* contain valuable insights into Scripture. But I am not convinced that he grasped the Gospel about the Kingdom. On Matthew 19:28 he is uncharacteristically uncertain. He says that “it is unclear” what Jesus meant by promising the 12 apostles positions sitting on thrones in the future Kingdom, judging (administering) the 12 tribes. Then on Matthew 20:20 he comments (rightly, I am sure) that the mother of James and John had Matthew 19:28 in mind when she asked for top positions for her sons in the coming Kingdom. Robertson says that the mother of James and John had taken Matthew 19:28 “in a literal sense.” But Robertson confesses to being “unclear.”

But, may I ask, what in the world would be the meaning of Jesus’ tremendous statement about sitting on thrones in the Kingdom, if Jesus meant this in a *non-literal* sense?! We are not told, and I think this is because Robertson was unable to accept these marvelous promises of Jesus for the future. Not understanding them or believing them, he just waffled his way out of them by speaking of them as non-literal. Meaning what? What is a *non-literal* throne and what are *non-literal* 12 tribes and what is a *non-literal* future regenerated world in which the Messiah is to be king?

And what is the point of a non-literal promise of administrative responsibility with Jesus in that Messianic Kingdom to come? The Gospel of the Kingdom suffers terribly at the hands of some commentary. Did they understand what the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Christian Gospel, is about?

Jesus commended those who accept the Kingdom of God with childlike simplicity and belief. He warned that unless they do, they will not enter the Kingdom: “I tell you the truth, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it” (Luke 18:17). (Show this to your friends!)

But in much popular evangelicalism, is the Kingdom of God ever clearly offered to the potential convert? Are they not just invited to “ask Jesus into their hearts”? Or “believe in Jesus,” or “accept Jesus”? Is that in fact preaching the Gospel at all? Can one accept Jesus and have little idea of the Gospel as Jesus and Paul defined it? Is “Jesus died for my sins” anything like a whole Gospel? Especially since Jesus preached “the Gospel” for most of his ministry without (at that stage) even mentioning his death and resurrection.

And what about the constant reference to “heaven” in the language of churches? What happened to the royal places and a regathered Israel? I think Peter would have been shatteringly disappointed at the prospect of disembodiment in a vague “heaven.”

Mark 4:11-12 seem to get precious little coverage. Yet in those verses, along with the astonishing saying of Jesus in Luke 8:12, Jesus lays down a clear principle: There can be no repentance and forgiveness in the absence of an intelligent reception of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. Matthew 19:28 is one of many of Jesus’ clear statements about what the Kingdom of God is like. Based on Daniel 2:44 and 7:14, 18, 22, 27 and scores of texts in the prophets, the Kingdom of God is the revolutionary government of God to be introduced at the *future visible* (contrary to the Jehovah’s Witnesses concept of an invisible Kingdom!) arrival of Jesus back on earth (Acts 1:11; Rev. 11:15-18).

It goes without saying of course that Jesus’ death for our sins and his resurrection are indispensable parts of the saving Gospel. But grasping the truth about the Kingdom of God (not heaven at death) also formed the core of Jesus’ and Paul’s Gospel preaching (Luke 4:43; Acts 20:25; 19:8; 28:23, 31). Accepting the Gospel is the only way to salvation (Luke 8:12). ✧

## Do Souls Go to Heaven?

The celebrated *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* tells us: “No biblical text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at the moment of death” (Vol. 1, p. 802).

*Christian Words and Christian Meanings*, by Dr. John Burnaby of Oxford: “Greek philosophers had argued that the dissolution which we call death happens to nothing but bodies, and that the **souls** of men are by their native constitution **immortal**. The Greek word for immortality occurs only once in the New Testament, and there it belongs to none but the King of Kings [it occurs actually a second time in regard to our Christian future: 1 Cor. 15:54]...**The immortality of the soul is no part of the Christian creed, just as it is no part of Christian anthropology to divide soul and body and confine the real man, the essence of personality, to a supposedly separable soul for which embodiment is imprisonment...Jesus taught no doctrine of everlasting life for disembodied souls**, such as no Jew loyal to the faith of his fathers could have accepted or even understood. But Jewish belief was in the raising of the dead at the Last Day” (pp. 148-149).

*(Why then do churches constantly say that disembodied souls have gone to heaven or hell?)*

*How to Enjoy the Bible* by E.W. Bullinger, on 2 Cor. 5:8: “It is little less than a crime for anyone to pick out certain words and frame them into a sentence, not only disregarding the scope and the context, but ignoring the other words in the verse, and quote the words ‘absent from the body present with the Lord’ with the view of dispensing with the hope of Resurrection (which is the subject of the whole passage), as though it were unnecessary; and as though ‘presence with the Lord’ is obtainable without it!”

*Law and Grace*, by Professor A. F. Knight: “In the Old Testament man is never considered to be a soul dwelling in a body, a soul that will one day be set free from the oppression of the body, at the death of that body, like a bird released from a cage. The Hebrews were not dualists in their understanding of God’s world” (p. 79).

*Families at the Crossroads*, by Rodney Clapp: “Following Greek and medieval Christian thought, we often sharply separate the soul and body, and emphasize that the individual soul survives death. What’s more we tend to believe the disembodied soul has escaped to heaven, to a more pleasant and fully alive existence. **We mistakenly** envision the Christian hope as an individual affair, a matter of separate souls taking flight to heaven. But none of this was the case for the ancient Israelites” (pp. 95, 97).

Martin Luther: “I think that there is not a place in Scripture of more force for the dead who have fallen asleep, than Ecc. 9:5 (“the dead know nothing at all”), understanding nothing of our state and condition — against the invocation of saints and the fiction of Purgatory.”

Dr. J.A.T. Robinson: “Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying” (*In the End God*, p. 104).

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, Sermon on the Parable of Lazarus: “It is, indeed, very generally supposed that the souls of good men, as soon as they are discharged from the body, go directly to heaven; **but this opinion has not the least foundation in the oracles of God**. On the contrary our Lord says to Mary, after the resurrection, ‘Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to my Father.’”

While the Jehovah’s Witnesses and others are labeled cultists because they say that the soul does not go to heaven when a person dies, the records of early church history are testimony to the fact that “orthodoxy” is the real culprit.

Did the early church teach the separation of a conscious soul from its body at the moment of death and its immediate departure to heaven? (I am not here discussing the consciousness of the soul as church fathers sometimes misunderstood it, but the question of its immediate *location* at death.)

Here are the words of Irenaeus of the mid-second century: “Some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the prearranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption. They thus entertain **heretical** opinions. For the heretics, not admitting the salvation of their flesh, affirm **that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens**. [Note that it is the “heretics” who teach that the soul goes immediately to heaven at death. Today, according to present orthodoxy, it is the heretics who teach that souls do *not* go immediately to heaven or hell. This makes Irenaeus as well as John Wesley a heretic — see quotation above!] Those persons, therefore, who reject a resurrection affecting the whole man, and do their best to remove it from the Christian scheme, know nothing as to the plan of resurrection. For they do not choose to understand that, if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in Whom they profess to believe, did not rise again on the third day, but immediately upon his expiring departed on high, leaving His body in the earth. But the facts are that for three days, the Lord dwelt in the place where the dead were, as Jonas remained three days and three nights in the whale’s belly (Matt. 12:40)...

“David says, when prophesying of Him: ‘Thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell (grave).’ And on rising the third day, He said to Mary, ‘Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father’ (John 20:17)...How then must not these men be put to confusion, who allege...that their inner man [soul], leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? [Irenaeus thus reckons today’s teaching as

shameful!] For as the Lord ‘went away in the midst of the shadow of death’ (Ps. 86: 23), where the souls of the dead were, and afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up into heaven, **it is obvious that the souls of His disciples also...shall go away into the invisible place [Hades]...**and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event. Then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, bodily, just as the Lord rose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. As our Master did not at once take flight to heaven, but awaited the time of His resurrection...so we ought also to await the time of our resurrection.

“Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain orthodox persons are derived from heretical discourses, they are both ignorant of God’s dispensations, of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the earthly **Kingdom** which is the beginning of incorruption; by means of this **Kingdom** those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature” (*Against Heresies*, Bk. 5).

Irenaeus thus condemns the whole “orthodox” tradition about what happens at death — the tradition, that is, which eventually swamped the biblical teaching from the third century onwards. It remains firmly entrenched in most denominations.

The protest of **Justin Martyr** against what *later* became orthodoxy, and remains so to this day, is no less incisive: “They who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh...As in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion [i.e. the soul can have no separate, active existence]. For what is man but the reasonable animal composed of body and soul? Is the soul by itself man? No; but the soul of man. Would the body be called man? No; but it is called the body of man. If then neither of these is by itself man, but that which is made up of the two together is called man, and God has called man to life and resurrection, He has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and body...”

“Well, **they say, the soul is incorruptible**, being a part of God and inspired by Him...Then what thanks are due to Him, and what manifestation of His power and goodness is it, if He purposed to save what is by nature saved?...but no thanks are due to one who saves what is his own; for this is to save himself...How then did Christ raise the dead? Their souls or their bodies? Manifestly both. If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was requisite that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But now He did not do so, but raised the body...”

“Why do we any longer endure those unbelieving arguments and fail to see that we are retrograding when

we listen to such an argument as this: **That the soul is immortal**, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived. For this we used to hear from Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Saviour said this and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing beyond what we heard from Plato, did He bring us?” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

Justin thus implies that teaching an immediate survival of the soul in heaven or hell is Platonism, not Christianity. Justin is here refuting the arguments of Gnosticism which denied the resurrection of the flesh. Traditional Christianity has taken a similar, but slightly different tack by including in the creed a belief in the resurrection of the body, while **also** teaching an immediate salvation of the soul alone in a conscious, disembodied state. This is said to be the real person, albeit disembodied. Such an idea is flatly contradicted by Justin and Irenaeus and is identified by them as pagan.

Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*:

Trypho: “Do you really admit that this place Jerusalem shall be rebuilt? And do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the Patriarchs...?”

Justin: “I and many others are of that opinion, and believe that this will take place, as you are assuredly aware; but on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith think otherwise. Moreover I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical and foolish...I choose to follow not men or men’s teachings, but God and the doctrines delivered by Him. For if you have fallen with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit the truth of the resurrection...who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, **and that their souls when they die are taken to heaven**, do not imagine that they are Christians...But I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and others declare...We have perceived, moreover, that the expression ‘The Day of the Lord’ is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general and the eternal resurrection of all men would take place.”

The Latin church father Tertullian (often known as the father of Western Christianity) is another who would disagree strongly with modern “orthodoxy” about what

happens to the soul at death. He protested against the idea that the soul leaves the body at death and goes to heaven:

“**Plato**...dispatches at once to heaven such souls as he pleases...To the question, whither the soul is withdrawn [at death] we now give the answer...The Stoics place only their own souls, that is, the souls of the wise, in the mansions above. Plato, it is true, does not allow this destination to all the souls, indiscriminately, of even all the philosophers, but only those who have cultivated their philosophy out of love to boys [homosexuals]...In this system, then, the souls of the wise are carried up on high into the ether...All other souls they thrust down to Hades.

“By ourselves the lower regions of Hades are not supposed to be a bare cavity, nor some subterranean sewer of the world, but a vast deep space in the interior of the earth, and a concealed recess in its very bowels; inasmuch as we read that Christ in His death spent three days in the heart of the earth, that is, in the secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth, and enclosed by the earth, and superimposed on the abysmal depths which lie still lower down. Now although Christ is God, yet, being also man, ‘He died according to the Scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15:3) and ‘according to the same Scriptures was buried.’ With the same law of His being He fully complied, by remaining in Hades in the form and condition of a dead man; nor did He ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself. [Nothing is said in the Bible about Jesus altering the condition of the Patriarchs while he was in Hades.]

This being the case you must suppose Hades to be a subterranean region and keep at arm’s length those who are too proud to believe that the souls of the faithful deserve a place in the lower regions. These persons who are ‘servants above their Lord, and disciples above their Master’ would no doubt spurn to receive the comfort of the resurrection, if they must expect it in Abraham’s bosom. But it was for this purpose, say they, that Christ descended into hell, that we might not ourselves have to descend thither. Well, then [they say], what difference is there between heathens and Christians, if the same prison awaits them all when dead? [But I say] How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father’s right hand, when as yet the archangel’s trumpet has not been heard by the command of God? When as yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise? [1 Thess. 4:13ff] To no one is heaven opened. When the world, indeed, shall pass away, then the kingdom of heaven shall be opened” (*Treatise on the Soul*, ch. 55).

Another “Church Father,” Hippolytus (ca 170-236), certainly did not think that souls were in heaven:

“But now we must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained...The righteous **will obtain the incorruptible and unfading Kingdom**, who indeed are at present detained in Hades, but not in the same place with the unrighteous...Thus far, then, on the subject of Hades, in which the souls of all are detained until the time God has determined; and then He will accomplish a resurrection of all, not by transferring souls into other bodies, but by raising the bodies themselves” (*Against Plato, on the Cause of the Universe*, 1, 2).

Modern scholars realize that the view of death which has prevailed (and is now promoted in church constantly) is not biblical. Far from it, it is, amazingly, actually “pagan” and “Gnostic.” Moreover, as the above quotations from the early apologists for Christianity show, the idea of going to heaven or hellfire immediately at death was a novel, heretical doctrine not taught by the church for some three hundred years after Christ. In a standard text of *Christian Dogmatics* we read:

“The hellenization process by which **Christianity adopted many Greek [pagan] thought patterns** led in a different direction as the eschatological hope came to be expressed in Hellenistic categories. Irenaeus said: ‘It is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away in the invisible place allotted to them by God and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event. Then receiving their bodies and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come into the presence of God.’ Irenaeus’ statement contains the concept of an abode or purgatory in which the soul of the dead remains until the universal resurrection. We should not denounce this as a deviation from biblical teaching, since the point of the assertion is anti-Gnostic. Irenaeus wanted to reject the Gnostic idea that at the end of this earthly life the soul immediately ascends to its heavenly abode. As the early fathers fought the pagan idea that a part of the human person is simply immortal, it was important for them to assert that there is no rectilinear ascent to God. Once we die, life is over.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a further impressive protest against the popular idea that the dead survive as conscious “souls” in heaven. One might expect that such protest would initiate a wide-scale reform amongst the clergy. Alan Richardson writes in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*:

“The Bible writers, holding fast to the conviction that the created order owes its existence to the wisdom and love of God and is therefore essentially good, **could not**

<sup>1</sup> Braaten/Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, p. 503, section written by Hans Schwartz, Professor of Protestant Theology, University of Regensburg, Federal Republic of Germany.

**conceive of life after death as a disembodied existence** [as millions of sincere believers are now taught in church to think of it!] (“we shall not be found naked,” 2 Cor. 5:3), but as a renewal under conditions of the intimate unity of body and soul which was human life as they knew it. Hence death was thought of as the death of the whole man, and such phrases as ‘freedom from death,’ imperishability or immortality could only properly be used to describe what is meant by the phrase eternal or living God ‘who only has immortality’ (1 Tim. 6:16). Man does not possess within himself the quality of deathlessness, but must, if he is to overcome the destructive power of death, receive it as the gift of God who ‘raised Christ from the dead,’ and put death aside like a covering garment (1 Cor. 15:53-54). It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that this possibility for man (2 Tim. 1:10) has been brought to life and the hope confirmed that the corruption (Rom. 11:7) which is a universal feature of human life shall be effectively overcome” (pp. 111-112).

The fundamental confusion about life after death which has so permeated traditional Christianity is brilliantly described by Dr. Paul Althaus in his book *The Theology of Martin Luther*:

“The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection of the Last Day. It is this which first calls the dead into eternal life (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:21). This resurrection happens to the man and not only to the body. Paul speaks of the resurrection not ‘of the body’ but ‘of the dead.’ This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands death as also affecting the whole man...Thus [in traditional orthodoxy] the original Biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from **Hellenistic**, Gnostic dualism. The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects the whole man has had to give way to **the immortality of the soul**. The Last Day also loses its significance, for souls have received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological tension is no longer strongly directed to the day of Jesus’ Coming. The difference between this and the Hope of the New Testament is very great” (pp. 413-414).

That difference may be witnessed in contemporary preaching at funerals which, though claiming the Bible as its source, reflects a pagan Platonism which the New Testament, the early church fathers and modern informed scholars reject.

Can belief in pagan ideas, promoted in the name of Jesus, result in a knowledge of Truth which leads to salvation? (2 Thess. 2:10). Is not this obvious paganism of Christianity a cause for alarm and a reason for returning to the Truth of the Bible? ◇

## Voices of Protest

“No responsible NT scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus, or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writer of the NT. It was in fact, slowly worked out in the course of the first few centuries in an attempt to give an intelligible doctrine of God” (Dr. A.T. Hansen, *The Image of the Invisible God*).

“The idea of the second Person of the Trinity knowing what it is to be God-forsaken has only to be stated to be recognized as absurd” (Tom Harpur, *For Christ’s Sake*).

“The NT does not actually speak of triunity. We seek this in vain in the triadic formulae of the NT...Early Christianity itself...does not yet have the problem of triunity in view” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 108-9).

“It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity formed no part of the original message. St. Paul did not know it, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed” (Dr. W.R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul’s, *God in Christian Experience*, p. 180).

“It must be allowed that there is no such proposition as this, that one and the same God is three different Persons, formally and in terms to be found in the sacred writings, either of the Old or New Testaments; neither is it pretended that there is any word of the same significance or importance as the word Trinity, used in Scripture with relation to God” (Dr. South, *Consideration on the Trinity*).

“It must be owned that the doctrine of the Trinity as it is proposed in our Articles, our Liturgy and our Creed, is not in so many words taught us in the Holy Scriptures. What we profess in our prayers we nowhere read in Scripture, that the one God, the one Lord is not only one person, but three persons in one substance. There is no such text in Scripture as this; that the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. None of the inspired writers has expressly affirmed that in the Trinity none is before or after the other; none is greater or less than the other” (Bishop Smallridge).

“Most of those who profess and call themselves Christians, both in this country and in the rest of the world, are in the habit of saying that Jesus is God. It is taught by the creeds. The average Englishman holds this opinion in a vague and loose sort of way. He has not thought out exactly what he means by it. So he carries about with him in his mind four propositions: 1) Jesus Christ is God. 2) God is our heavenly Father. 3) Jesus Christ is not our heavenly Father. 4) There are not two Gods. Yet he has never considered how to reconcile these

four separate opinions of his together. It has probably not occurred to him that they are inconsistent with one another...The average Englishman has not troubled himself with the matter” (Richard Armstrong, *Trinity and Incarnation*).

“Aquinas admitted that rational arguments for doctrines such as the Trinity were bound to be unconvincing and thus they made those who proposed them the laughing stock of unbelievers” (Charles Freeman, *A.D. 381*).

If one takes away the idea of an eternal Son (and there is no “eternal Son” in the Bible), “There is no eternal Father-Son relationship, only an eternal God-Word relationship, which is conceptually very foreign to the doctrine of the Trinity as it has always been understood. The historic Christian understanding of the Trinity [without the eternal Son idea] essentially collapses” (David Abernathy, quoted in “The Son and the Crescent,” *Christianity Today*, Feb. 2011).

“The Deity of Jesus was denied in the early church by the Ebionites and the Alogi and also by the dynamic Monarchians and the Arians. In the days of the Reformation the Socinians followed their example. The same position is taken by Schleiermacher and Ritschl and by a **host of liberal scholars**, particularly in Germany, by the Unitarians and by Modernists and Humanists of the present day” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p.94). ✧

### Has Theology Driven Them Mad?

One (*echad*) is an “inherently plural word”! (*The Trinity* by Seventh-Day Adventists Whidden, Moon and Reeve, p. 76).

“1+1+1=One: The keystone of biblical theology” (Norman Gulley, PhD, representing 23 million SDA’s).

### Comments

“Thank you for your articles and willingness to share. God answered my prayer on who Jesus really is. Finally free after 38 years of error in orthodox churches, I now have the truth on who Jesus is.” — *Australia*

“Thank you so much for your wonderful *Focus on the Kingdom*. We don’t know of anyone in southern Oregon that has a fellowship that we agree with in God’s truth. Every church around this area is ‘Heaven Bound’ and Jesus is God. How can people believe these clearly mistaken teachings?” — *Oregon*

“I am thankful we live in the day of the internet! The Trinity would still be true for me, if it wasn’t for the internet and the video ‘Jesus Is Still a Jew.’ So I’m listening to you play the oboe as I read one of your articles. ‘Gabriel’s Oboe’ is good background music while reading your John 1:1 article at 21st Century Reformation ([www.21stcr.org](http://www.21stcr.org))

“I sat down recently with a local Christian pastor who is Jewish by physical descent (from an Evangelical

Free Church). During his sermons, he often speaks Hebrew to bring history and perspective to a text. So I wanted to ask him about the doctrine of the Trinity. One afternoon we spent several hours together, walking through, in my opinion, the beauty of God the Father and Jesus the Messiah. Although the Jewish pastor could speak Hebrew, he could only see the Messiah as God in the flesh. I wanted to share with you what he warned me about in the end. He warned me to be careful that I am ‘not making a God in my own image.’ Can you believe that? He thought the non-Trinity belief could be an attempt at making God into man’s own image! I mustered as much gentleness as I could when I responded to him by saying this, ‘Is it possible that is what happened when we made Jesus, a man like us, to be God himself?’

“Last fall, the pastor of our former home church (Southern Baptist) and I spent several months debating the Trinity. In the end, he said, ‘I fear the trajectory of where your new belief will take you.’ Well, I will tell you where it has taken me thus far: my family thinks I’m crazy, my Christian friends don’t call anymore, everyone thinks I have joined a cult, and I can’t find a local body anywhere that will have me in the pew. However, God is more mysterious and beautiful than ever. Jesus is the King who holds my heart closer than ever. And, the Bible, the words of God—the freshest air my spirit has ever breathed in. People have asked me if I would ever go back to believing in the Trinity. Here’s my response: Once you saw the earth from space, could you go back to believing it is flat?” — *South Dakota*

*My comment: Try asking your pastor friend gently: How many YHVHs is he proposing we should believe in? If he says “One,” then follow with this: “OK, you agree that the Father is YHVH and you say that Jesus is YHVH. How many YHVHs does that make?” We have found that this way of putting the “problem” can work wonders. To a Jehovah’s Witness who is sure that Jesus is Michael the Archangel, point to Daniel 10:13 which says that Michael is “one of the chief angels.” So then are there others of the same rank as Jesus?*

“Since I watched the video *Jesus Is Still a Jew*, I’ve been thinking about the whole Trinity thing in a number of new ways. It’s not that the doctrine and what it purports to teach were unknown to me, but Buzzard’s discussion of it illuminated the matter in a new way, which pretty much clicked today — a big ‘aha moment.’ That doesn’t happen all that often any more in matters of religion, so a note of thanks to you for providing it.”

“You have turned me completely around on the Trinity. More and more I see it all the time. Hard to imagine something can be right in front of you, but *indoctrination* keeps you from it — and deception as performed by Augustine on John 17:3. Thanks!” — *California*

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