

# Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 4 No. 3

Anthony Buzzard, editor

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## Join Us in Atlanta

We begin by announcing details of our eleventh annual Theological Conference to be held here at Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, Georgia from February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002, **starting in the morning on that Friday**, until Sunday, February 10th (ending at lunchtime). We extend a warm invitation to you and your friends to be with us here in Georgia for this occasion.

Thanks to the Internet and other means of outreach, our circle of friends of the Truth of the Abrahamic faith has been extended. We are hoping that we will all make brand new acquaintances as well as renew old ones.

The tragic state of the world compels us all to tighten our grip on faith and above all to become better informed about what we believe, and how to help others to understand it. We need to be empowered with a greater confidence. There is nothing like a conference to provide a “spiritual tune-up” enabling us to increase our influence for good in the world in which we are all responsible to be lights.

For the day-time sessions on Friday (Feb. 8th) we have invited two creation scientists to come and present their understanding of Genesis and its relation to creation. Particularly we want to be able to field our questions to them on issues of chronology, dating of fossils, dinosaurs, the flood, and the age of the earth. This will be a unique opportunity to become informed in this crucial area of creation and science. My own interest in this subject was piqued when R.K. Smith of Brush Creek Church of God, Ohio showed me a set of videos with the Australian scientist Ken Ham and his colleague Dr. Gary Parker. Dr. Parker and another professor of science, Dr. McCombs, will lecture to us on creation with emphasis on the question of the age of the earth and of man. There will be ample scope for interaction with the speakers.

*Dr. Gary Parker is a Professor of Biology at the Institute for Creation Research and an internationally renowned speaker on creation. As an atheist who taught evolution to his biology students, he was very critical of Christians who compromised with a literal reading of Genesis, hoping to convert them to evolution. Since becoming a Christian, he still is critical of those who compromise with the*

*Bible, but he now uses his knowledge of evolution to show how the facts have failed to support the theories put forth by evolutionists.*

*Dr. Charles McCombs is a PhD Organic Chemist trained in the methods of scientific investigation, and a scientist who has 20 chemical patents over 21 years. After becoming a Christian, Charles took the time to look at the evidence which is supposed to prove that evolution is true. He quickly discovered that there is no truly scientific proof for evolution, just theories based on unreasonable and/or preexisting assumptions for the age of the earth. Charles has given his talks in churches large and small from New York to Florida.*

The remainder of the weekend we will devote to issues of Abrahamic faith and the principal doctrines we hold dear — some history, some Christology and some prophecy and also the relation of the Christian to the state. Modern scholarship has been undergoing a quiet revolution in exactly the areas of Christology and eschatology which have been our own prime concerns. There is in fact a massive amount of support for our “unorthodox” understandings amongst scholars past and present. It may well be that as a group we lack a sufficient depth of understanding of what is involved in the great framework doctrines of the Bible. Strengthening our understanding and our vision of what we can do to repair the current doctrinal confusion would seem to be an urgent task for us all. We will invite various speakers, some already known to us and others who are newer to our circle, to address us. Again there will be plenty of opportunity for questions and discussion. As usual there will be scope for any who wish to give a brief story of their own faith journey. In the past these stories have been such an inspiration.

Accommodation for the weekend in Atlanta is available at the Fairfield Inn. If you would like to take advantage of the special block prices, please phone the Inn at the number below. We will provide transportation from Hartsfield Airport to the College and also run a van from the Fairfield, which is some five minutes from ABC. Continental breakfast is available at the Fairfield Inn.

Rooms may be booked (\$49, 1-4 people) at the Fairfield Inn, Morrow (cut-off date **Jan. 31**). Please

phone Fairfield Inn at 770-961-6044 and refer to the group name “Anthony Buzzard.” The cost of the conference is \$29 before Jan. 20<sup>th</sup> and \$39 after (\$19 and \$29 for full-time students). See form on page 7.

We are convinced that your visit to Atlanta to meet and encourage others will prove to be a time of enrichment and growth. We have a large number of testimonies to the fact that past gatherings of this sort have indeed been an inspiration. For further information or any questions please phone Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261. ☩

## What Sort of Worship Does God Expect?

by Brian Wright

As a typical teenager, I would often respond to questions from my father with a carefully crafted response designed to discourage further questioning. This technique allowed me to return to my own pursuits. My defense mechanism was the phrase “I don’t know,” best said with a blank facial expression. My father once countered this brilliant strategy with a unique phrase that still rings in my head some 25 years later, “Why don’t you try using your head for something besides a hat rack?”

I think most people would agree that there is nothing new about children rebelling against their parents. Anyone who reads the Bible knows that God’s children have been in rebellion since the Garden of Eden. What I have come to realize is that God responds to his rebellious children in much the same manner as my father responded to me. Let me give you an example.

God spoke to Isaiah concerning his rebellious children, “Make the *mind* of this people dull, make their ears heavy and close up their eyes, lest their eyes see, lest their ears hear, lest their *minds* understand, and their health be restored” (Isa. 6:10, Moffat). Did you catch the sense of God’s complaint to Isaiah about the dullness of the people? Matthew’s citation reveals that the people were to blame: “they have closed their eyes” (Matt. 13:15).

God wants them to investigate the Scriptures, listen to what the Scriptures say, meditate on the message and receive the message in *the mind* (intelligent reception and *belief*).

Like a smug teenager, popular religion tends to ignore God’s admonition. In order to boost sagging attendance figures, religious leaders in many denominations have compromised by giving people what they want rather than what they need (II Tim. 4:3). They appeal to their mentally and physically exhausted audience’s desire for respite from the

pressures of life. Their method is often characterized by an emphasis on mind-numbing repetitions, theologically deficient songs, followed by short, doctrinally non-substantial sermons. There is little intellectual stimulation and thus little of the constructive, health-giving doctrine which Paul insisted on. The modern approach has proven effective in filling buildings with content worshipers whose faith is based largely on emotion, at the expense of knowledge and understanding. But the contented should consider God’s warning, “My people are dying for want of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6).

A well-known television preacher has gone on record condemning doctrine as divisive, something to be avoided. He gleefully counsels his listeners to rejoice in singing and shouting before the Lord and let God sort it out later. He is of course right that doctrine divides and that God will sort it out later (Matt. 7:21 and 25:32), but his words lead his unsuspecting congregation into a false sense of security. Is it any wonder that Jesus asked if he would find *the faith* when he returns? (Luke 18:8). And what of Paul’s urgent desire to save his fellow religionists from the delusion that zeal is enough to save? What they needed was knowledge (Rom. 10:2: “they have an enthusiasm for God, but it is an enthusiasm *without understanding*”).

This is not a plea to remove singing, music, and emotion from religious services. Rather, it is an appeal to reject the easy, anti-intellectual broad-path worship of popular religion that leads to destruction. My appeal is that we embrace the more rigorous and demanding narrow path of worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23, 24) — a policy which will lead to life in the age to come, life in the coming Kingdom of God on earth. This requires that we allow the presence of the Holy Spirit of Truth in our lives, and that we use our *minds* for something besides a hat rack. The Father will be pleased that his rebellious child has turned to him and heeded his admonition to listen, think and *learn*. ☩

## Keys Which Unlock the Bible

A fundamental, systematic error pervades most of the standard literature available to Bible students. This has to do with the crucial question of the identity of God and the Messiah Jesus. Just what is the relationship of the Son of God to God?

We make no apology for our continued attention to the matter of “doctrine.” This is a major, major issue which currently helps to keep the entire Muslim

and Jewish world away from the Jesus of the Bible. Those of us who claim to follow Jesus and love him and his teaching cannot remain unequipped to deal with this cardinal question of the identity of the God of the Bible and the Messiah Jesus. Jesus himself was doggedly insistent that worship be conducted within the biblically prescribed framework, and not according to tradition, however widespread, respectable or hallowed.

The book of Hebrews chides those who understand Truth for not being well enough instructed to become teachers of others. A Christian has a duty to others in excess of, or at least equal to, his duty to feed himself. Hebrews 5:12: "By this time you ought to be teachers." Truth is meant to be shared — everywhere (Luke 9:60).

Paul labored in Athens to move his Greek audience away from belief in God as a "What" to belief in the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who is a "Who," a Person! Note the subtle approach of Paul: "What you worship but do not know, I am now proclaiming to you: The God *who* made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:23, 24).

It is a considerable irony that leading proponents of "orthodoxy" today betray the very same tendency which Paul strove to correct when they inform the Bible-searching public that "God is one *What* in three *Who's*."<sup>1</sup> Such a definition of God is not from Scripture at all, but from the world of Middle Platonism. It is Greek philosophy which promotes God as a "What," and it is contemporary fundamentalism which (often heavy-handedly) requires church members to acknowledge the "one *What*" presented as what they call the "Triune God." That God was not known to Jesus or Paul.

Doctrine in some quarters is held to be a bad thing! It is supposed to divide believers and distract from what is held to be vastly more important: the cultivation of Christian character. Carried to its logical conclusion, this (very false) argument leads to the notion that all that matters in the Christian faith is the exercise of "love." Issues of "theology" would then fall into the category of "intellectual" non-essentials. They should be relegated (so goes this misleading line of thinking) to the province of academic discussion only.

In no other field of human endeavor would anyone argue that theory is unimportant — that practice is all that counts! Jesus was a rabbi and teacher and insisted

at all times on right understanding. He also pointed to the *fatal* dangers of "tradition" mounted against the truth of Scripture (see Mark 7:6-13). Jesus was the ultimate system-bucker and whistle-blower. He suffered the fate of all those who expose the errors of large monopolies, which regard themselves as custodians of unimpeachable truth. Jesus' opposition came mainly from the established religious authorities of his day.

Would he be any less at loggerheads with unbiblical "tradition" today? We suggest that the Bible elevates "theory" to the highest possible position. The Bible never says that we should just "love" and not worry about "doctrine." Paul constantly urged that "coming to the knowledge of truth" is the way to salvation. In fact "coming to the knowledge of truth" is an alternative way of describing what is necessary to *be saved*. "God wants all men to be *saved* and come to the knowledge of the Truth, namely that there is One God and one Mediator between God and man, the **man Messiah Jesus**" (I Tim. 2:5). Peter made "obedience to the truth" a necessary foundation for "ferveat love" (I Pet. 1:22). Jesus came indeed "**to give us an understanding** so that we could come to know God" (I John 5:20). Paul warned that those who do not "love truth" will not be saved (II Thess. 2:10ff. etc.). Jesus, in the most alarming of all his teachings, predicted that the majority believe themselves to be following him when in fact he does not recognize them at all: "Many will declare to me in that future day: 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, did we not exorcise demons in your name, did we not perform many wonderful works in your name?' And I will respond to them: 'Depart from my presence, you evildoers: I never recognized you'" (Matt. 7:21ff.). The only way Jesus offered for avoiding such a catastrophic outcome was that we pay attention to "these words of mine" (Matt. 7:24), "me and my words" (Mark 8:38), "**me and the Gospel**" (Mark 8:35).

These words, surely, invite us to profound self-examination. It is entirely possible, Jesus said, to imagine that one has **the faith of Jesus** when one does not possess it at all. How could this be? Jesus went on immediately to warn of false teachings, teachings offered as Christian, *which are not Christian at all*.

Our only recourse is a passionate examination of the teaching of Jesus and the development of skills of discernment which will equip us to tell the difference between what is true and what is false (II John 4:1-6). If we do not follow this advice, we may repeat the very mistake made by Adam and Eve. As we

<sup>1</sup> Cp. James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, p. 27. So also "the Bible Answer Man," on radio.

remember, they were more attracted to the persuasive, twisted arguments of the Devil than they were to the Creator's Truth.

Such an exercise in discernment requires dedication and persistence. It would be folly to begin by assuming that majorities are bound to be right. For well over 1000 years the Roman Catholic system of belief was held as the only "gospel truth" over wide areas of the earth. But Protestants are committed to the belief that such teaching was and is not biblical. The question is, did mainstream Protestantism really recover the faith once and for all delivered to the saints? (Jude 3). Should one have such unquestioning confidence in a Luther or Calvin? Many do.

In Muslim countries there is only one main option in terms of a belief system: Anyone who questions the all-pervasive teachings of Mohammed runs the risk of rejection. But does that majority really possess truth?

We suggest that a reasonable investigation of the biblical faith will begin with the fundamental question about who God is. Jesus after all agreed with his Jewish compatriots that defining God properly was the object of the first and most important commandment of all. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord." Jesus presented a supreme proposition and urged us to grasp its meaning (Mark 12:28ff.).

A massive, contrary, Greek-influenced tradition developed from the second century onwards. This was later built into the great creeds of the mainstream Roman Catholic Church (at Nicea, 325, and Chalcedon, 451). It required Christians to submit to the dogma that God is "three Persons in One God."

Was this development a faithful reflection of the belief of Jesus, or was it a departure into paganism and mysticism? In reply, we propose to demonstrate that current theological systems overlook an obvious fact. They do this by their dogmatic insistence that since Jesus is called "Lord" he must also be Deity, the One God. The argument is repeated over and over again. It appears in literature both scholarly and popular. Jesus is Lord. Therefore he must be God.

The facts of the Bible, however, require a more careful analysis. Does it really follow logically and necessarily that calling Jesus "Lord" means calling him the supreme God? Or does the current theological theory simply read that idea into the Bible? Does it impose itself upon Scripture, instead of reading Truth *out of* Scripture?

An outspoken defender of what he thought was the only orthodoxy was Dr. Gordon Clark. In a number of vigorously written booklets he defends the Westminster Confession, believing that it faithfully

relays the teaching of the Bible. Dr. Clark's insistence on the need for intelligent investigation of the Bible is beyond praise. We agree with him wholeheartedly that the following verses require of the Christian a wholehearted commitment to reading, studying and meditating on the Bible:

"These words are to be in your heart, and you are to teach them diligently to your children, and you are to talk about them..." (Deut. 6:6, 7).

"He [the king] is to read from the book of the Law every day of his life..." (Deut. 17:9).

"His delight is in God's instruction [the Torah] and in that instruction he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2).

"O how I love your instruction. It is my meditation day and night" (Ps. 119:97).

"My eyes precede the night watches so that I may meditate on Your word" (Ps. 119:148).

"Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39).

"Make them holy through Your truth; Your word is the truth" (John 17:17).

"These were more noble-minded and they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what they were hearing was true" (Acts 17:11).

"Let the word of the Messiah dwell in you richly with all wisdom" (Col. 3:16).

"Jesus Christ came to give us an *understanding* [Clark calls this the most intellectual word found in the Greek language] that we might know God" (I John 5:20).

"I can vouch for them [the Jews] that they have an enthusiasm for God, but it is an enthusiasm without *understanding*" (Rom. 10:2).

The exhortation provided by this sampling of Scripture is unmistakable. A Christian cannot afford to be neglecting his primary duty before God: to read and study and think about what he believes.

Urged on by the Westminster Confession and unable to break away from the tradition which molded his thinking, Clark then gives us his understanding of who Jesus is. He quotes this critically important testimony: "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' And Jesus replied, 'You are blessed, Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"

Clark then says: "Note here not only that Peter asserts Christ's Deity; and not only that Jesus accepts Peter's confession and indeed calls it a direct revelation from the Father, but note also that Matthew as author records the event, and this recording is inspired — the words God breathed out onto the

manuscripts. There is another form of phraseology that supports Jesus' preexistence and Deity. Matthew 22:44 with its parallels and Acts 2:34-36 quote Psalm 110:1: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Many other verses refer to Jesus as Lord. They are too numerous to list and too well known. But two will be given nonetheless. Rom. 10:9: 'If you will confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord...' II Cor. 13:14: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...'"

Clark then goes on: "About two centuries before the birth of Jesus, the Rabbis in Alexandria, where the large Jewish population had largely forgotten Hebrew, translated the Old Testament into Greek. This translation, called the Septuagint [LXX], uses the Greek word *Kurios* [Lord] of the Hebrew *JHVH* [Yahweh]. The New Testament, which frequently uses the Septuagint translation, applies this Greek title to Jesus, the Lord Jesus. **Thus the authors of the New Testament books identify Jesus as Jehovah**" (*The Atonement*, pp. 28-30).

This argument appears repeatedly in standard textbooks defending the traditional teaching that Jesus is Jehovah (Yahweh). It suffers however from a fatal flaw. It entirely omits to tell the reader that the Greek word *Kurios* (Lord) **does not in fact, in the Bible, apply only to God**, but designates equally human beings, who certainly are not Deity. The quotation from Clark above invites the reader to follow a simply syllogism: *Kurios* (Lord) is the word for the Lord God in the Old Testament. Jesus is called Lord in the New Testament. Therefore Jesus is God.

The facts are quite otherwise. And the whole theory of the "Deity" of Jesus collapses when it is understood that *Kurios* (Lord) is the official designation of Jesus as the *human Messiah*. Both Jesus and Paul would be alarmed to hear that some were proposing that Jesus is God. They would greet with an amazed horror the common notion that God is more than one Person — that He is really three Persons. Such a theory would destroy the foundations of revealed religion (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29ff.).

"Jesus is Lord" positively does *not* mean that Jesus is God. The reason is simple. There is only one Person who is God, in the absolute sense. Thousands of Bible verses designate God as one Person and Jesus described Him, in good Jewish fashion, as "the only one who is truly God" (John 17:3). Paul, echoing Jesus, set forth the clearest declaration "that there is one God — the Father" (I Cor. 8:4-6.). That text should surely silence all objections.

Astonishingly many Bible readers appear unwilling to accept the simplicity of the biblical creed. Another voice has somehow intervened to drown out the plain words of Jesus and Paul. What has happened is the unfortunate imposition of a chilling dogma (chilling because it has frequently been enforced with threats of death), that belief in God as *Three Persons* — eternally Triune — is absolutely necessary for salvation. Failure to subscribe to this enigmatic proposition about God, of which Jesus and Paul knew nothing, is widely announced as a failure worthy of eternal torture in hell!

This magazine hopes to encourage a growing concern that Christianity's central dogma about God is not in fact the product of good Bible study but rather a curious novelty developed from the early second century under the baneful influence of Greek philosophical thinking centered in Alexandria, Egypt. In that learned city the Jews had already compromised their Hebrew-based faith by mixing it with Hellenism. The post-biblical church fell for the same trap and combined Greek cosmological thinking with the theology of the Bible, producing a hybrid notion of God. Later this was imposed on all believers. Dissidents and non-conformists were banned and banished, and sometimes murdered for their protests.

Professor J.H. Ellens of the University of Michigan provides the information needed for understanding that unfortunate historical development in his booklet *The Ancient Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Theological Development* (The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, at the Claremont Graduate School, Occasional Papers, No. 27). Ellens summarizes his findings: "It seems patently true that the agenda of the ecumenical councils of the Christian Church, which permanently shaped the dogmatic tradition of the Christian faith [in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity]...was not a biblical agenda. It was rather a special type of Hellenistic and Neo-Platonist agenda...It is time, therefore, for the Christian Church to acknowledge that it has a very special type of material which constitutes its creedal tradition. It is not a creedal tradition of Biblical Theology. It is not a unique, inspired, and authoritative word from God. It is, rather, a special kind of Greek religio-philosophical mythology...It should be candidly admitted by the Church, then, that its roots are not in Jesus of Nazareth...Its roots are in Philonic, Hellenistic Judaism and in the Christianized Neo-Platonism of the second to the fifth century" (pp. 38, 39).

The systematic flaw to which we referred at the beginning of this article can be readily detected and abandoned. It is a matter of a devastatingly important distinction. The New Testament from cover to cover insists on belief in Jesus as the Lord *Messiah*, *who is not the Lord God*. That distinction is plainly stated in a solemn divine utterance about the dignity of the Messiah. Psalm 110:1 sets the stage for the whole New Testament picture of who Jesus is. And that Psalm was designed as a safeguard against any confusion. The one God, the LORD (Yahweh) speaks to another individual who is called *adoni* (*my lord*). Readers should be alerted to the misleading capital letter (in some versions — the error is corrected in RV, RSV, NRSV, NAB, NEB, JPS) on that second “lord.” The capital letter invites the reader to think that this second “lord” is in fact the Lord God! The original, *adoni*, however, is invariably a title which tells us that its recipient is *not God*, but a human superior. It is this *non-Deity* title for the Messiah which attracted the interest also of Jesus in his discussion in Mark 12:35-37. Jesus instructed his Pharisaic audience to ponder *in what sense* the Messiah can be at the same time the son of David and the lord of David. We today must urge readers to consider *in what sense* the Messiah is the *lord* of David. The wrong answer to the question appears in those translations which write “Lord,” giving the impression that the original was ADONAI (which it is not) meaning always “the Lord *God*” (all 449 times in the OT).

The right answer is found in the 195 occurrences of this Hebrew word “my lord” (ADONI). In no case is it ever a form of address to *Deity*. Therefore Jesus is the human lord Messiah, not Deity, but the “man Messiah,” the unique mediator between the One God, his Father, and mankind (I Tim. 2:5). Such is the most fundamental of all biblical truths, and it provides a guide to the whole divine story encompassed by Scripture. Psalm 110:1 should be pondered and understood at all costs. Christians should verify these facts and be prepared to share them with others.

How then was this precious truth about the identity and relationship of God and the Messiah eclipsed? The culprit is Greek philosophy, blended — no doubt in the interests of being “ecumenical” — with the unique Hebrew-based faith of Jesus and the Apostles.

It was the Greek intellectuals who surmised that there was an ultimate God who was far too removed from the world to have created it (He could not sully his hands with “wicked” matter!). So then, there must

be a “second god,” who performed the actual creation of the world. From the second century AD, from the school of philosophically trained “church fathers” there emerged the idea that the Son of God must be that *preexisting* creator of the world. It is not by chance that the leading neo-Platonist of the second century, Numenius, uses exactly the same language as the church father (ostensibly teaching the Bible) Justin Martyr. Both speak of “another God,” a non-human intermediary between the ultimate, distant God and the world.

With this theory, the shape of Christianity was permanently altered. Furthermore, the results were later forced upon the believers. With this view of the cosmos, Jesus was for the first time presented as preexisting as “another God” (the language of Justin Martyr). If this were so, then he could no longer be the Son of God *who came into existence for the first and only time in his mother’s womb* (see Matt. 1:18, 20, “begotten”; Luke 1:35).

With the new philosophically conceived model of the universe, Jesus was no longer the human Messiah. An imaginative, fictional “halo” was added to him, and he ceased to be *the man* Messiah, the promised descendant of David, the prophet to arise in the House of Israel as *brother* to Israel. Moses had declared expressly that the Messiah would not be *the God* of Israel! (Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22; 7:37 make the point unmistakably — the Messiah cannot possibly *be* God.)

Christian Bible readers need this most fundamental insight — that Jesus was truly *a man*, not, as the official creeds say, most philosophically and confusingly, “man,” but not “*a man*.” Did you know that your Trinitarian church is committed officially to the belief that Jesus was “man” but not “*a man*”? The matter deserves careful investigation. ✠

## Resolving the Amill./Premill. Debate

Scientific exegesis of the Bible, which abides by the plain meaning of words and the established principles of syntax, would quickly resolve the unfortunate arguments which have raged over Revelation 20:1-6. The dispute is over the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Saints. Does this passage describe a “reign” of the faithful which follows individual conversion (amillennialism) or does it present us with a collective resurrection of the faithful from literal death followed by a future reign with Christ?

The amillennial view, popular since the time of Augustine, contends that “those who came to life” (*ezesan*) and “began to reign as kings” (*ebasileusan*, Rev. 20:4) are believers “coming to life” at conversion and baptism and “reigning” in their present Christian life. This reading of the passage overlooks a rather obvious fact: the ones who “came to life” are “*those who had been beheaded*” (*pepelekismenon*, v. 4).

Revelation 20:4 contains the straightforward proposition that “those who had been beheaded came to life and began to reign with Christ for a thousand years.” The perfect participle (“those who had been beheaded”) is followed by the main verb “came to life,” implying, of course, that the beheading *precedes* the coming to life.

The sentence construction follows a normal pattern in which “the perfect participle [‘the ones who had been beheaded’] expresses an action *antecedent* to the main verb [came to life]” (Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1927, p. 230). But the point is perfectly obvious without any appeal to the technicalities of grammar.

It hardly needs to be stated that at conversion one does not come to life after being beheaded! However, one obviously does come to life *in a resurrection* after being martyred. The fact that the proposition in Revelation 20:1-4 describes a beheading *prior to* a rising from death proves that a *literal resurrection* of literally dead persons is meant.

A parallel construction in John’s gospel does not present us with the slightest difficulty. In John 11:44 we read of Lazarus that “he who had been dead came forth...” The perfect participle (“he who had been dead,” *tethnekos*) naturally implies that the death of Lazarus *precedes* his coming to life and coming forth from the tomb. No one would suggest that Lazarus came forth before dying! Yet amillennialists commit themselves to this sort of misreading in Revelation 20:1-4. They maintain that the statement that “those who had been beheaded came to life” means that “those who would later be beheaded had already come to life at conversion.” This makes a nonsense of plain language, and appears to “take away from the words of the prophecy,” by altering their obvious sense, a procedure which will have the direst consequences (Rev. 22:19).

The “amillennial” evasion of the description of martyred saints coming alive again in resurrection to reign for a thousand years stems from antagonism towards the ancient doctrine of the millennial reign of Christ and the Saints. This triumphant rulership of the world will be initiated by the return of Christ and the

resurrection of the faithful to inherit the Kingdom of God on the earth (cp. Rev. 5:10).

Our point was well made by the *Century Bible*, pub. London, Caxton. In this commentary, C. Anderson Scott noted that some “understand the ‘first resurrection’ in a wholly ‘spiritual’ sense, as equivalent to a resurrection ‘from the life of sin to the life of righteousness.’ This is indeed the theory accepted by most Roman Catholic theologians from Augustine downwards, making this first resurrection a symbol of admission within the church, the sphere of safety from the evil one. To this there are two fatal objections:

“1) This resurrection is plainly the reward or result of martyrdom and follows not the beginning but the end of the Christian life...

“2) [As Henry Alford argued, *Greek New Testament* on Rev. 20:1-6], If in a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave, then there is an end of all significance in language and Scripture is wiped out as a testimony to anything.”

The Augustinian twisting of Revelation 20:1-6 (amillennialism) is part of the concerted program of commentary which has not liked the idea of the coming Messianic reign of Jesus and the saints on earth. It has therefore tried to get rid of it, but at the expense of plain language. An essential element of the Gospel of the Kingdom is that Jesus is coming back to reign with the saints on the earth. “Don’t you know [many do not!] that the saints are going to manage the world, and if the world is to come under your jurisdiction...” (I Cor. 6:2, Moffat). For Paul this is one of the ABC’s of the faith. It needs to be restored after being buried under the Platonic “spiritualizing” tendencies of Augustine and his followers. ☩

“I was driving to Tennessee for the birth of my first grandchild. I believe I was somewhere in Arkansas when I ‘surfed’ onto Anthony Buzzard’s radio program. He was discussing ‘heaven’ — the concept that it will be here on earth as opposed to ‘somewhere up in the clouds.’ I was amazed and very excited about that premise. I would love for my husband to hear it the way I did.” — *Texas*

## 2002 Theological Conference Registration Form

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