

# Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 6 No. 5

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February, 2004

## Faiths or One Faith?

Current concern over the nomination of a Democratic candidate illustrates America's uncertainty about what "the faith" and "the Gospel" are. Politicians recognize that voters generally care about the spiritual life of potential leaders. An investigation into the faith journeys of the various candidates provides us with typical histories of uncertainty and disunity. There is little clarity about where the Christian faith really lies — in this or that denomination, in churchgoing or no churchgoing, in Jesus or some vague spirituality, in one faith or many faiths. All brands of "belief" seem to be represented. None must be promoted as better than others. This "ecumenical" outlook is typical of the populace as a whole.

*World* magazine (Jan. 24, 2004) heads its article "Keeping the Faiths," faiths, plural. But can we honestly refer to *faiths* in the name of Christ? Is there more than one Christianity? Is not denominationalism really an admission that we have departed from the standard of the New Testament? Is an appeal to the Golden Rule, which appears in all the great religions, as the *only thing* that really matters in faith, a valid justification for the "ecumenical" view that "all religious paths lead to the same God and the same salvation"?

It would be comforting to think so. But it seems to us that the New Testament is dead against such an idea. First of all the biblical writers are consistently pessimistic about the state of things this side of the Second Coming. Satan is said to be "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). The sublunar space is described by Paul as the residence of demonic forces, "cosmocrats" (Eph 6:12), the first-century word for astral deities who control much of what goes on here below. John's final comment on the state of the world is this: "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19) — hopelessly given over to the Devil. "Satan is now the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). Are these the statements of gloomy prophets only, or do they represent reality and the only truly intelligent world view?

For those of us committed to Scripture as the revelation of the divine mind, these ominous statements must carry much weight. Not that Jesus has not overcome the world nor that believers in Truth cannot

"take courage." But how do we arrive at Truth amidst all the claims and all the competing Christian (and other) voices?

It is clear that runners for political office have not solved this problem. Here is what *World* magazine discovered when it investigated the spiritual journeys of the Democratic candidates, who surely must be reckoned amongst the most intelligent and gifted of their generation — able in some measure to command the respect and admiration of thousands of other human beings.

One candidate began as Episcopal, but now does not go to church. He has spent time with Judaism and the Congregationalists. His favorite New Testament book is Job. Another seeker for public office is a convinced New Ager, vegan and devotee of Shirley MacLaine. His strength lies as he said in being immersed "in contemplation of a world beyond our experience, one of spirit, of mysticism, one which sees the potential of the country as unfolding in a multidimensional way." Another candidate was raised as a Baptist and converted to Roman Catholicism and now attends a Presbyterian church, but still sometimes goes to Mass. Yet another runner is Roman Catholic and claims to be very private about his religion and very rarely attends Mass. Another is a Methodist, formerly a Southern Baptist who fell away from church in his college years, returning to the Bible after a tragic death in his immediate family. He says he is "very, very careful" not to allow his faith to influence his policies. Yet another candidate started preaching in a Pentecostal church at the age of four and was ordained by the congregation at the age of nine. He says he believes in gay marriage and would be willing to perform the ceremony. The most religiously dedicated of the candidates is not Christian but Jewish and would not be willing to work or campaign on the Sabbath.

The New Testament presents a very stark contrast to the current muddle over what Christianity is. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, issued an urgent warning even before the end of the first century that Christians should make a strenuous effort to hang on to the one true faith. He described genuine spirituality, the religion based on Jesus and his teaching, as "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Jude obviously understood the Christian faith to be a single, clearly defined deposit and tradition handed down from Jesus and the Apostles. It was a fixed entity. It had been

defined “once and for all” and it needed to be conscientiously clung to. It was a faith needing to be contended for with urgency. “Loved ones, I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation [in the singular]. But I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once and for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).

To be a Christian implied a constant battle for an exclusive truth. Why? “Admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 4).

New Testament Christianity is never a mass of conflicting opinions, nor a plethora of divided denominations. The ideal for which Paul strove is made utterly clear. After reminding the Corinthians that they had been “enriched in Jesus with all speech and knowledge” (I Cor. 1:5), he immediately appealed to them “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10). He went on to deplore the incipient denominationalism reported by Chloe’s family: “There is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas [Peter],’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided...were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (vv. 11-13). The implied answer of course is that Christ is not divided and that division in Christianity points only to one thing: something has gone wrong with the faith. Alien elements have been introduced into it. The teachings of Jesus have been distorted and perverted. The result is division and disharmony. The faith is no longer recognizable as one religion.

What has gone wrong? In our New Testament survey class at Atlanta Bible College I mention that the most terrific words of Jesus are found at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. “Struggle to enter [the Kingdom of God] by the narrow way, because the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to Life and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13, 14). And then in the same breath, as an explanation for the difficulty of walking the narrow path: “Beware of false preachers who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is

cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not every one who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day [the future day of the arrival of the Kingdom] many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not preach in your name, and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty miracles in your name?’ And then I will make this announcement to them, ‘I never recognized you; depart from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt. 7:15-23).

Who will deny that these words of Jesus are alarming? The road to destruction is the popular one, and it is filled with professing “Christians.” The “many” will have been thoroughly convinced that they were preaching and even performing exorcisms and miracles *in the name of Jesus*, as his representatives, and yet will suffer the bitter disappointment when Jesus comes back that they had been completely deceived.

I think that the words of Jeremiah 23 were in Jesus’ mind when he uttered these extraordinary warnings. “‘Woe to the pastors who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!’ says the Lord. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the pastors who care for my people: ‘You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away and have not attended to them. Behold I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and I will bring them back to their fold, and they will be fruitful and multiply [they will also bear good fruit]...Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch [the Messiah] and he will reign as king and act righteously and he will execute justice and righteousness *in the land*. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in security. And this is the name which will be given to him, “The Lord is our righteousness”...Then they will dwell in their own land’” (23:1-8).

Jeremiah is appalled at the deceptive power of the religion of his day. “Concerning the preachers: my heart is broken within me...because of the Lord and because of his holy words” (v. 9). It is the wholesale departure from Scripture which is so painful. “For the land is full of adulterers...their course is evil and their might is not right. ‘Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness,’ says the Lord” (vv. 10, 11). The rest of the passage should be consulted: “Do not listen to the words of the preachers who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they are speaking visions of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those

who despise the word of the Lord, 'It will be well with you' and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil will come on you.' For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive His word, or who has given heed to His word and listened?" (vv. 16-18).

We have here firstly a brilliant picture of the Messianic future presented in page after page of the prophets and thoroughly confirmed by the New Testament. But Jeremiah's description of the Christian future is far removed from the popular teaching about Christian destiny.

The Christian future has nothing to do with "going to heaven" at death. The biblical vision is constantly directed towards a renewed and peaceful society *in the land* and on the earth. Jesus is coming back to the earth. He is not swooping down towards the earth and then doing a "U-turn" to disappear again by departing into the heavens. That would not be a Second *Coming* at all. It would be a temporary visit, a sort of "drive-by" episode which does not correspond at all to the promise that "this same Jesus will come in exactly the same way as you saw him leave" (Acts 1:11).

It is not Jesus who makes a "U-turn." He will not snatch up the saints and make off to heaven with them. It is the raptured saints (post-tribulation rapture: "immediately *after* [post] tribulation he will gather the elect" — Matt. 24:29-31) who are to ascend in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus as he comes towards the earth. It is those raptured believers who make the U-turn and escort the arriving dignitary to the earth. Jesus belongs on the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. Gabriel promised that Mary's miraculously begotten son would inherit that royal throne and reign as king permanently in the land restored (Luke 1:32-35). This has plainly never happened.

Is that picture of the royal Davidic climax to God's amazing plan for the earth clear in the minds of churchgoers? Clarity on that point involves clarity on the Gospel itself. The Gospel as Jesus preached it was about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the restored Kingdom of David (Acts 1:3, 6; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). The Gospel announces in advance the solution to the intractable question of who owns *the land*. The answer of course is that the land belongs to God, and He has graciously conferred the right to rule in and over it to His Messiah Jesus. And the Messiah himself has with equal generosity agreed to involve the Christians in the supervision of that coming Messianic government of the world, with headquarters in a renewed and peaceful Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-6; Dan. 2:44; 7:27).

This truth is hardly central in the popular gospel of today. This unclarity about what the Gospel is, we suggest, lies at the root of all the confusion and division demonstrated by current denominationalism. While the word "Gospel" is heard often, a *definition* of the Gospel which matches the New Testament is conspicuous by its absence. Gospel is equivalent to Christianity. The Christian faith *is* the Gospel, and there is only one Gospel, to be guarded and preserved with all the strength we can muster. Paul was bitterly opposed to a distortion of the Gospel. It brought forth by far his toughest apostolic denunciation — on any who would dare to pervert the sacred, saving Message. Galatians 1:6-8 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different Gospel — not that there is another Gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a Gospel contrary to that which we preached to you let him be accursed."

The Gospel presented by the New Testament has a very clear label. It is called by Jesus and by the Gospel writers "**the Gospel about the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven**" (the two expressions are synonymous). Matthew reports that first John the Baptist announced the saving Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 3:1, 2). By Kingdom John obviously meant the day of reckoning when the Messiah would return and "burn up the chaff," those who did not bear fruit as good "trees," and welcome the wheat, the true believers, into the barn of the Kingdom. Two outcomes. Two alternate destinies: The barn or the bonfire. No wonder the people were amazed at this teaching! Jesus followed John's ministry with precisely the same Gospel proclamation. He too preached "*the Gospel of the Kingdom*" throughout all Galilee (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). This task of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom was Jesus' career activity. His own mission statement was declared with simple clarity when he refused to remain in one location. "I must preach **the Gospel of the Kingdom of God** to the other cities also: that is the reason for which I was commissioned" (Luke 4:43).

Would this not then inevitably be the mission statement of the Christian churches? Did not the Great Commission mandate the continuation, during the temporary absence of Jesus, of everything that he had taught as Gospel: "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I taught you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). "This **Gospel of the Kingdom** will be announced in all the inhabited earth and then the end [of the present age] will come" (Matt. 24:14).

We would invite our readers to listen carefully to sermons and Bible studies. Is it clear that the current Gospel is in fact *the Gospel about the Kingdom of God*? Do pew sitters, if asked to define the Gospel, instinctively take their cue from Jesus' definition of the Gospel as *about the Kingdom*? Do sermons resound from the pulpits expounding not only the definition of the Gospel as the Gospel of the Kingdom but also the meaning of the Kingdom of God as the heart of the saving Message — as a synonym in fact of biblical Christianity? And is the biblical procedure for gaining entrance into that future Kingdom of God plainly stated in Christian offers of “salvation”?

We suggest that there is a glaring absence of the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom.” And if this phrase is so obviously typical of the language of Jesus and Paul (Luke 4:43, etc.; Acts 20:25; 19:8; 28:23, 31) would not the absence of this defining marker of the faith be a cause for alarm and concern?

A leading evangelism expert, Dr. Mortimer Arias (*Announcing the Reign of God*, Fortress Press, 1984), observed: “We seem to be faced with what can be called an eclipse of the Kingdom of God lasting from the apostolic age to the present, particularly in our theology of evangelization.” He adds: “The Kingdom of God is God's own dream, His project for the world and for humanity! He makes us dreamers and He wants us to be seduced by His dream and to dream with Him...It is not we who dream but God who dreams in us.”

Arias admitted: “When I left the seminary I had no clear idea of the Kingdom of God and I had no place in my theology for the second coming, the Parousia...I had no concerns about the future. Thousands of books are printed and circulated every year on evangelization; most of these fall into the category of ‘how to’ manuals for churches (devising plans, strategies, methodologies and goals)...our traditional mini-theologies (the ‘plan of salvation’ or ‘four spiritual laws’) *do not do justice to the whole Gospel*. Not all this activity or activism is a sign of health or creativity...The Good News of the Kingdom *is not the usual way we describe the gospel and evangelization*...The Kingdom of God has practically disappeared from evangelistic preaching and has been ignored by traditional ‘evangelism.’ The evangelistic message has been centered in personal salvation, individual conversion, and incorporation into the church. The Kingdom of God as a parameter or perspective or as content of the proclamation has been *virtually absent*...Those interested in evangelization have not yet been interested in the Kingdom theme...Why not try Jesus' own definition of his Mission — and ours? For Jesus evangelization was no more and no less than announcing the Kingdom of God” (emphasis added).

This remarkably discerning critique of what goes under the name of “gospel” should be taken seriously. Could it be that the heart of the faith has been “guttled”

and that this tragedy could be easily identified and rectified by comparing Jesus' Gospel preaching with the content of what is now thought to be the Gospel? The definition of Christianity is at stake.

Albert Schweitzer contributed a valuable critical analysis of what has gone so wrong: “What Paul firmly grasped was later lost hold of — the inner connection between the idea of redemption in Jesus Christ and **a living belief in the Kingdom of God**. When Christianity became Hellenized [polluted and perverted by alien Greek thinking] there grew up an idea of redemption which no longer stood within that of the Kingdom of God, but alongside it. And thus it has continued through the centuries...In Catholicism and the Protestantism of the Reformers, both of which had their structures determined by the form which Christianity has taken in the process of being Hellenized, Christian doctrine is dominated by the idea of redemption based on the atoning death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Alongside this the belief in the Kingdom of God maintains a not too vigorous existence” (*Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*).

**The biblical Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel as he preached it, places the divine future clearly before the potential convert. What Jesus presents is a vision of coming judgment here on earth, never a judgment to take place in an invisible subterranean hell, and never the promise of a supercelestial disembodied existence in “heaven.”**

Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom speaks of a time when God will restore Israel and inaugurate a worldwide government based in Jerusalem. Jesus' vision is based on that of the Hebrew prophets. One of many samples of this end-time (not end *of* time!) vision is found in Isaiah 10:5-11:4:

“Woe to the Assyrian...[the instrument for the punishment of Israel, to bring her back to God and the Messiah]. When the Lord has completed all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say: ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the King of Assyria...’ The Lord God will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors. And under Assyria's glory a fire will be kindled like a burning flame. And the light of Israel will become a fire and His Holy One a flame and it will burn and devour Assyria's thorns and his briars in a single day...Now it will come about in that day that the remnant of Israel and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to a Mighty God [Divine Warrior, the Messiah]. For though your people Israel may be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant within them will return. A destruction is determined overflowing with

righteousness. For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, the Lord of Hosts will execute in the midst of the whole land. Therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'O my people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian, who strikes you with a rod and lifts up his staff...For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed to the destruction of Assyria...Behold, the Lord God of Hosts will lop off the boughs with a terrible crash...Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord will rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord...With righteousness he will judge the poor and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth. And he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he will destroy the wicked one.'

How does Paul deal with this information? He gives inspired commentary on it. In Romans 9:27, 28 he quotes Isaiah 10:22, 23, repeating the prophet's vision of the future when the Messiah returns. In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 he warns of the coming of the Antichrist and describes the destruction of the Antichrist by Jesus, using the words found in Isaiah 11:4 (above).

Paul, in other words, expects the Antichrist to be the Assyrian of the end-time and he sees the fulfillment of Isaiah 11:4 at the coming of Jesus. Jesus will eliminate the Assyrian antichrist "with the breath of his lips." All this is part and parcel of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom to which the Gospel invites us and the Kingdom which will assert divine government across the globe. The inauguration of that divine economy, the establishment of the Kingdom of God in a renewed earth, will not happen until the seventh trumpet — the trumpet of the resurrection of the faithful dead (1 Cor. 15:22, 23; 51-58; Rev. 11:15-18).

Our Christian task is to take this information to the world and prepare men and women for the Kingdom of God. One of the great barriers to understanding is the diversionary teaching about "souls going to heaven" when they die. This is not the Christianity of Jesus at all and it distracts us from an appreciation of the center of Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom.

William Strawson, a tutor in systematic theology and the philosophy of religion, made a detailed study of *Jesus and the Future Life* and dedicated 23 pages to an examination of the word "heaven" in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He concluded:

"In few, if any, instances of the use of the word 'heaven' in the teaching of Jesus is there *any parallel with modern usage*. The gospel records of our Lord's life and teaching *do not speak of going to heaven*, as a modern believer so naturally does. Rather the emphasis is on that which is 'heavenly' coming down to man...Our modern way of speaking of life with God as being life 'in heaven' is not the way the gospels speak of the matter. *Especially is there no suggestion that Jesus is offering to his disciples the certainty of 'heaven' after this life*" (p. 38).

"Heaven as the future abode of the believers is [a conception] conspicuous by its absence from St. Paul's thought. The second coming is always *from heaven* alike in the earliest (I Thess. 1:10) and the latest (Phil. 3:20) of Paul's letters...Possibly he so takes it for granted that believers will have their place in a Messianic earthly Kingdom that he does not think it necessary to mention it" ("Heaven," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*).

"Jesus was not thinking of a colorless and purely heavenly beyond, but pictured it to himself as a state of things existing upon this earth — though of course a transfigured earth — and *in His own land*."<sup>1</sup>

"The creation of the Christian religion necessarily involved a retreat from the teaching of Moses, the Prophets *and Jesus*, which more and more became a rout...As one Protestant Christian wrote: 'The great people of God's choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that *the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, instead of the Hebrew mind, came to dominate its outlook: from that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or in practice*...If today another great age of evangelization is to dawn we need the Jews again'...Christianity is a synthesis of Judaism and paganism. As such, it is a **corruption of as much significance as the ancient Israelite defection in blending their religion with the cults of the Canaanites**. Therefore, it is not for the Jews to embrace orthodox Christianity, but for the Christians, if they are to be Israelites indeed as the People of God, to review and purify their beliefs, and to recapture what basically they have in common with the Jews, the Messianic vision."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Bousset, *Jesus*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1906, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> H.J. Schonfield, *The Politics of God*, pp. 98, 99, citing Canon Goudge, *Essays on Judaism and Christianity*.

On what basis should we deny that Jesus shared Jewish beliefs?

“Many of us like to think that Jesus denied Jewish beliefs about supernatural revelation and exclusive privilege, because our minds are so profoundly influenced by the philosophical way of looking at things. But have we any right to assume that he knew the falsity of the Jewish belief? Was it false? Have we a right to assume that, because a non-Jewish universalism based on philosophical modes of thought appeals to us of the twentieth century, it must therefore be the absolute truth and the divine will? Surely we must seek for some evidence. But there is no evidence in the Gospels..., and his disciples believed as firmly in the exclusive value of the Jewish religion after his resurrection as before.”<sup>3</sup>

Commentators seem to complain in vain about the absence of the Kingdom of God from the Gospel in popular preaching:

Professor Tom Wright, the world’s most famous current writer on Christianity and on Jesus: *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, p. 251:

“The church’s use of the Gospels has given scant attention to what the Gospels themselves are saying about the actual events of Jesus’ life and his **Kingdom proclamation** [Gospel of salvation]... Therefore the church is in effect sitting on but paying no attention to a central part of its own tradition that might, perhaps, revitalize or reform the church significantly were it to be investigated... This must involve understanding what the Gospels are saying about Jesus within the world of first-century Judaism, not within the imagination of subsequent piety (or impiety)... To content oneself with a non-historical Christ of faith seems to me... demonstrably false to NT Christianity.”

Dr. Charles Taber, Professor Emeritus of World Mission, Emmanuel School of Evangelism, Johnson City, Tennessee (letter to *Christianity Today*):

“I read with the greatest interest the nine statements in *Christianity Today* attempting to answer the question, ‘What is the Good News?’ I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ Gospel in three of the four accounts: **The Kingdom of God**. Every one of these statements reflects the individualistic reduction of the gospel that plagues American evangelicalism. In addition to being biblical, founding one’s understanding of the gospel on the Kingdom of God bypasses two false dilemmas that have needlessly troubled theologians for several centuries: 1) the either-or between individual

and systematic salvation, and 2) the either-or between grace and works. On the one hand God intends to rescue *the entire cosmos* from the bondage to decay; on the other hand how can one claim to be saved who does not make every effort to do God’s will?”

Gary Burge in *NIV Application Commentary (Revising Evangelical Theology)*:

“Stanley Grenz has reviewed the failed attempts of evangelical theology to fire the imagination of the modern world. He argues for the Kingdom of God as the new organizing center of what we say and do.”

### **The Word of the Kingdom**

Jesus’ evangelism is devoid of appeals just to “accept him” or “ask him into our hearts.” His method is based on an authoritative command to “repent and **believe the Gospel of the Kingdom**” (Mark 1:14, 15). The issue is one of responsive and trusting *obedience* to the divine word of command on the lips of Jesus. Asking people to “repent and accept Jesus” is perilously vague in comparison with the express invitations to salvation issued by Jesus. To Nicodemus Jesus lays out the conditions on which we may be saved: “Unless a person is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God... unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5). Equally significant, but apparently far less well known, are Jesus’ clarifying statements about salvation in the other Gospels: “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Luke 18:17). We invite readers to see how very much clearer and more incisive are the Gospel-preaching words of Jesus compared with “unless you accept Jesus in your heart, you will not go to heaven.” Firstly “accepting Jesus” can be deceptive unless it is defined as “accepting and obeying the commands and words of Jesus.” No one hearing the statement “obey your mother” would understand anything other than “obey the words of your mother,” but in religion, a startling misdefinition abounds. Jesus can apparently be accepted but not obeyed! His first and primary command was given in Mark 1:14, 15. Repent (a command) and believe my **Gospel of the Kingdom** (another command).

Secondly Jesus promised no one “heaven,” but rather entrance in the future into the Kingdom of God *on earth*. The process of salvation was according to Jesus conditioned on the reception of his own Kingdom of God Gospel. “If they do not receive that Gospel of the Kingdom they cannot return [repent] and be forgiven” (see Mark 4:11,12) *To be continued*

<sup>3</sup> H.D. Hamilton, *The People of God*, Vol. I, p. 260.

## Dear friends of the Theological Conference,

With this letter we want to extend an invitation to our thirteenth annual Theological Conference to be held at Cornerstone Bible Church, close to Atlanta Bible College. We plan to meet from Friday, April 23, 2004, starting at 9:00 am, until Sunday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, ending with lunch together. We would love to see you here in Georgia and we have chosen the most beautiful time of the year for the conference.

Georgia is warm and beautiful in April. We think you will like the accommodation at the Hampton Inn, McDonough, and we plan to provide transportation there from Hartsfield Airport on Thursday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the day before the conference begins, and also back to the airport on Sunday. We sincerely hope you can be with us for these special days. The conference has been a success in years past because of the fascinating mix of truth-seeking persons from many parts of the world.

Thanks to the Internet, local advertising and the massive interest in the Bible around the world, Atlanta Bible College and the *Journal from the Radical Reformation's* circle of friends of the Truth of the Abrahamic faith has been extended. A large amount of literature promoting the Messianic faith of Jesus and first-century understanding of God and the Gospel is circulating. Advertising locally has brought many new students to the college. Our Trinity book — *Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* — is about to be in its seventh language.

We will be blessed by having as guest lecturer Dr. Colin Brown of Fuller Seminary. He is a distinguished specialist in the field of Christology and has expressed a great sympathy for our “unusual” views of Jesus as the human Messiah. We know you will be enriched by his penetrating remarks on John’s prologue and Philipians 2. Dr. Brown is of English descent but has been professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller since 1978. He is the general editor of the prestigious *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, the “state of the art” authority on biblical words.

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. This will lead to a greater confidence and influence for good in the world in which we are all responsible to be lights.

We plan to devote two sessions to issues of Christology and will have presentations from Alex Hall, pastor of the Abrahamic group in London. An exciting new speaker from Australia, formerly a Church of Christ pastor, will tell of his journey into our biblical unitarian faith and offer his thoughts on Babylon in prophecy. David Maas will address concerns relating to the Christian and the state.

There will be an ample opportunity for many of you to present your “faith story” from any angle you choose. These mini-presentations (10 minutes at the most, if possible!) provide some of the most delightful parts of our conference. Please do plan to give us a report on your journey of faith so far. A half-hour question and answer session follows each of

the formal presentations. As usual the proceedings will be filmed and we have noticed that much of the conference’s value lies in its extended influence by way of video. If you have any questions at all, please phone Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or email me at [anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com)

Please let your friends from all over know about this gathering. Do encourage them to come. For some this is the only opportunity of meeting with others of like-minded faith. We all benefit so much from the insights and talents of other members of the body of Christ.

Below are the details of accommodation and costs. Please note that transportation from Atlanta’s Hartsfield Airport is included in the registration fee. *Please book your flight according to the shuttle schedule below.* We plan to cater three of the meals at the conference site and suggest that you go out for the other two meals.

Accommodation is available at the Hampton Inn, McDonough. The block rate of \$69 per night may be reserved by calling 770-914-0077 **by April 7** and mentioning Atlanta Bible College and confirmation number **86416808**. The rate includes continental breakfast. A free shuttle will run from the airport to the Hampton Inn on Thursday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at **2, 4, 6, and 8 pm**. Please go to the ground transportation area and look for the Atlanta Bible College van. Shuttle between Hampton Inn and Cornerstone will be provided. Registration is \$69 **before April 7**, \$79 after. This includes three meals. **Register online** or by mail. Questions, please call 800-347-4261.

### Theological Conference 2004 Online Registration (add \$5 processing fee)

- 1.) Go to <http://www.abc-coggc.org/ABC/TC04Registration.htm>
- 2.) Choose an airport shuttle option
- 3.) Click “Register” to enter payment information (you will be directed to PayPal, a third-party secure website)
- 4.) Follow the instructions to complete your registration

### Theological Conference 2004 Mail-In Registration

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

**Return with check made out to: Atlanta Bible College,  
PO Box 100,000, Morrow, GA 30260**

\$69 before April 7 \$79 after