

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 2 No. 9

Anthony Buzzard, editor

June, 2000

Where Things Went Wrong

In our last issue we tackled what is perhaps the most significant question for believers today: Is the faith they have received from the various “Christian societies” they belong to a true reflection of the faith of Jesus himself? It is common to avoid thinking of Jesus as a *theologian and thinker*. But he was certainly that (“You call me rabbi and Lord and you do well” — John 13:13). He was in fact the founder/teacher of the new movement, a growth and final flowering from Old Testament Judaism, which we call Christianity (I mean by that *biblical* Christianity as distinct from any other forms of Christianity, and I do *not* mean that such Christianity implies adherence to the provisional Law of Moses). Jesus was recognized above all as a rabbi, an authorized teacher and prophet — the ultimate prophet sent by God. He was in fact the prophet promised to Moses when God had said: “I will raise up for you a prophet from amongst your people [Israel] like me [Moses] and I will put my words in his mouth. To that prophet everyone must eventually submit, or perish” (see Deut. 18:15-18 and its quotation on important occasions in Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Thus Jesus and his theology are of superlative importance to Christians, as well as his death and resurrection. The latter validates his teaching as being what he claimed it was: a direct and final word from the One God of Israel, his Father (John 17:3; 5:44, these verses represent the crystal clear *unitary*, non-Trinitarian monotheism of Jesus and the Christian movement he initiated).

Jesus laid down the terms of the New Covenant faith and then went to his death to ratify that covenant. Just as Moses had given all the words of the covenant and then poured blood on the book of words and on the people (Exod. 24:1-8), so Jesus gave all the words of the New Covenant and (as the final “Moses”) shed his own blood, giving his very life, to bring into action the new arrangement made with the apostles and through them with us. “Just as my Father has *covenanted* with me to give me a Kingdom so I now *covenant* with you to give you the Kingdom, and you are to eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom and be

promoted to royalty, taking your thrones to administer the twelve tribes of Israel” (see Luke 22:28-30)

Thus the Kingdom of God to come at the return of Jesus is the heart of Jesus’ *covenant*. “Fear not, little flock, it is my Father’s great pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Jesus’ whole mission envisaged the Kingdom to come. The Kingdom to come, its preparation and its membership were his constant preoccupation. And it is for that Kingdom, and for those who will administer it with him in the coming New Age at his return, that he died the excruciating death of a criminal at the hands of both Jews and Romans.

The Gospel about the Kingdom (Matt. 3:2; 4:17, 23; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; 8:1; Acts 8:12, 20:25; 28:23, 31, etc.), it follows, is simply the announcement of and invitation to prepare now for participation in the future Kingdom to be established on a renewed earth when Jesus comes back. Repentance (Mark 1:14, 15) means abandoning our own thinking and doing and reorienting ourselves to the Messiah’s Kingdom program: “Repent because the Kingdom of God is at hand,” “Repent with a view to embracing the Kingdom Gospel” (see Mark 1:14, 15), not just “repent and be a ‘good’ person”! What a privilege to join the Messiah’s campaign and introduce him and his program to others. How could anyone turn down his offer to us to assist him with “fixing” the world, finally and successfully in that grand future of the New Age of world history coming?

If the News of the coming Kingdom was not made clear to you as you grew up in a Christian society or denomination, why was it not? A child reading the New Testament will see that Jesus’ passion was the Good News about his Father’s coming Kingdom. Jesus preached the Kingdom as the Gospel. He had in mind, as did Paul in Romans 10:15 (quoting Isa. 52:7 about the coming Kingdom), the great Messianic passages about the future of Israel and the world when Jerusalem

In This Issue

More Evidence of a Corrupted Christianity... 5
Bible Rage..... 5
John 1..... 7

would hear the marvelous news “Your God has become King [i.e., the Kingdom of God will have started]; He has assumed rulership of the world. The end of slavery to sin and foreign domination has arrived” (see Isa. 52:7 and its context). The Gospel language in that wonderful text tells us all about the content of the Christian Gospel: It has to do with the time coming when God will “restore Zion” (this explains the apostles’ excellent and informed Kingdom question in Acts 1:6; cp. Luke 24:21). It has to do with the time coming when God will “comfort his people and redeem Jerusalem” (Isa. 52:9). No wonder, then, that the faithful were rightly expecting the redemption of Israel and Jerusalem (Luke 1:71-73; 2:25, 38; cp. Luke 24:21, Acts 1:6; on this latter text see our whole chapter 9 in *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*, from 800-347-4261).

The Gospel has to do with the time coming when the Lord “bares His arm in the sight of all the nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation [or victory] of our God” (Isa. 52:10).

Once again, did this Gospel of the Kingdom come across to you loud and clear as you grew up in church? If it did not, we need to explore the reason for an extraordinary eclipse of the Gospel as Jesus preached it, i.e. “the faith of Jesus.” (Apparently he himself doubted if such faith would survive the ravages of false teaching that he knew would tend to swamp and obscure precious Truth — Luke 18:8).

In our last issue, we quoted what we think are most telling and important statements from Professor Ellens of the University of Michigan. He calls attention to the yawning gap between the Message of the New Testament and what finally emerged in the creeds of Christendom, which nearly everyone who goes to church has accepted as valid — often with no personal examination. Ellens wrote:

“To describe a theological connection between the text and message of the New Testament, on the one hand, and the fourth and fifth century formulations of Trinitarian doctrine on the other, is a precarious and circuitous enterprise at best and, in the worst case scenario one might devise, it is patently impossible to demonstrate any authentic connection whatsoever...One might persuasively argue, I believe, that, taken for face value and on its own merit, independent of later philosophical developments, the text of the Bible does not make the Trinity of Chalcedon possible...The synoptics have no divine Trinity...One is still at a loss to find in Scripture a personalistic Trinity.”

Professor Ellens goes on to say that a careful reading of the earliest “church fathers” shows a marked tendency to redefine God and the Son of God in terms of alien Hellenistic concepts:

“The perplexity of this problem, for a scholar who stands in the scriptural tradition of the Protestant Reformation, is greatly increased by standard patristic studies. It becomes readily apparent upon any diligent reading of the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, that they believed that they were struggling with more than epistemological issues. They believed that, as they pursued the slowly developing formations of Trinitarian thought and divine Logos theory through the unfolding of the early Christian centuries, they were not simply dealing with issues of rhetorical metaphor and symbolic language. They understood that their quest for understanding God had to do with describing an ultimate and objective reality. The formulators of the conciliar [i.e. related to the Church Councils] tradition theology, in all of its ramifications, intended to provide the Church with a description and **definition** of the nature of God’s existence and of God’s historical reification and manifestation in Jesus of Nazareth. They appealed to Scripture to accomplish this, but neither their largely allegorical exegetical method nor the integrity of their motions of evidence or documentation is persuasive. Obviously they came to their task with a *predisposed theological or philosophical bias and with arbitrarily determined method*, in consequence of which the just claims of the scriptural documents themselves were not given objective force” (emphasis added).

In other words — and one does not have to grasp every word of the argument to see the main point — biblical Truth got lost in the theological shuffle. The process by which the loss of a biblical understanding of God and Jesus took place can be traced to the *pervasive influence of Greek philosophy* upon the Mediterranean world and on the post-biblical Christians:

“The very atmosphere of the ancient world was filled with the thought forms of Greek philosophy and religion...One could not ask significant questions about life, history, knowledge, and meaning without taking into account and reflecting the thought-frames of Hellenistic method and perspective...It was the theology of Africa, particularly of Alexandria with its historic library, university center, and Catechetical School which most directly influenced the theological formulations of the councils from Nicea to Chalcedon. Not only are the towering figures of Tertullian and Athanasius significant in this regard, but also the influential role of such figures as Eusebius of Caesarea

and the Cappadocian Fathers at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), was shaped by the doctrinal tradition of Alexandria. The philosophical and theological force of Clement and Origen and their Catechetical School molded the perspective of such key figures in Africa as Tertullian, Cyprian and Athanasius, as well as the Asians: Eusebius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianz.”

Professor Ellens calls for a candid, open investigation of these facts with a view to “coming clean” about the real origins of much which is believed to be apostolic and Christian:

“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...nor in the central tradition of biblical theology...Its roots are in Philonic, Hellenistic Judaism and in the Christianized Neo-Platonism of the second to the fifth centuries. Since this is so, the Church should acknowledge to the world of humans seeking Truth and to the world of alternate religions, that the Christian Church speaks only with its own historical and philosophical authority and appeal and neither a divine authority nor a unique revelation from Jesus Christ nor from God.”

[His point is that what developed as orthodoxy is nothing more than a Christianized paganism whose roots are not truly biblical.]

“I am claiming that to ground the Christian faith in Greek philosophical speculation is fatal to the traditional formulations of the essence and warrant of the faith itself. It separates the faith from its biblical, historical foundation and from any substantial grounding in the authentic realities of the historical Jesus...It is fatal to attempt to create an ultimate footing for the traditional formulations of the Christian truth in a comprehensive Biblical Theology. What interests me here, therefore, is the fact that such early Christian theologians as Origen especially, after the example of Philo, wanted to build a biblically-based Theology and Christology but separated their theological enterprise substantially from the imperatives of Scripture to achieve the objective of systematizing their theological *Weltanschauung* [worldview] in the language and categories mandated

by their cultural milieu and its Neo-Platonic philosophical imperatives and possibilities.”

(These quotations are excerpted from Harold Ellens’ excellent short work: *The Ancient Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Theological Development*, Occasional Papers, Claremont Graduate School, no. 27, Sept 1993, reprinted July 1999. Citations are taken from pp. 30-39.)

May we now apologize to Professor Ellens and our readers for inadvertently omitting the source of our quotations in the May issue of “Focus.”

Our strong sense is that this professor of the history of Christian ideas provides a kind of rallying cry to all those many Americans and others scattered around the world for whom much of traditional orthodoxy makes very little sense in the light of what they find in the Bible. There are very good reasons for this. The faith as promoted by much “orthodoxy” is not orthodox biblical Christianity at all: it is a mixture of the Bible and heavy doses of Greek philosophical, speculative tendencies which went from bad to worse as the centuries progressed. The final result was a grand muddle and confusion over:

Who the God of the Bible is

Who Jesus is and the truth about his relation to the One God

What the Gospel as Jesus introduced it is primarily about

What the destiny of the Christian is to be

The relationship of Christian to present world-systems

Division over these issues in the course of subsequent Church history is traceable to the obvious alteration of biblical Truth which came about progressively when the faith lost its Hebrew foundations and sailed out into the sea of Greek philosophical speculation. The clear lines of biblical Messianism (Jesus after all claimed to be the Messiah!) were blurred, and what has come down to us is vague and uncertain in many respects. That lack of clarity affects the welfare of those who would like to serve God and understand the Bible. This need not be. We must disentangle the teaching and the faith of Jesus from the strangling tentacles of Greek pagan thought, much of it in the form of neo-Platonism, which has invaded even many of our translations of the Bible (in certain key texts). Note for example how much clearer our reading of the New Testament would be if we abandoned the Platonically-influenced mistranslated phrase “everlasting” or “eternal life.” A leading biblical theologian wrote:

“The conception in John’s Gospel of salvation is exactly the same as ‘life’ or ‘eternal life,’ which in biblical Greek does not mean ‘eternal life’ in any Platonic sense, or even ‘everlasting life’ (as if the emphasis were on the duration), but ‘the life of the Aeon [Age]’ — i.e. ‘the Age to Come’” (Alan Richardson, “Salvation,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*).

“Everlasting, eternal life” is much too vague a phrase to denote the all-important goal of the Christian — to gain a place in the Coming Age of the Kingdom of God on earth, to be initiated with the return of Jesus. The biblical Greek phrase *zoe aionios* (pronounced in modern Greek as *zoe ayonios*) is a phrase drawn from Daniel 12:2. It unpacks for us the destiny of the Christian disciple. The influence of that one text on the thinking of the New Testament is massively important. “The Life of the Age to Come” means the indestructible life of immortality to be bestowed on all the faithful at the future resurrection. A germ of that immortality is received at rebirth (John 3; Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8:11ff. — the parable of the seed of rebirth) now, and it transmits to us nothing less than the indestructible life of God Himself. The resurrection of *all the faithful of all the ages* will occur as a single, stupendous event (I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 4:13; Rev. 20:2-6). (There is in the Bible no “extra” resurrection/rapture *before* the great tribulation, as confusingly taught in some circles.)

Jesus never promised as a reward to anyone “heaven” as a place removed from the planet. Jesus promised *the Kingdom* of Heaven or the Kingdom of God (which is the same thing exactly) as the reward of the faithful. Jesus offered the earth as the inheritance of the Christian and rulership with him in that new earth coming (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10). Once these primary texts are ignored, chaos results as is seen by what a biblical scholar observed as “the hopeless confusion of evangelicals over eschatology” — what the Bible promises for the future.

Once again, “heaven” as distinct from the *Kingdom* of Heaven/God should be dropped from church vocabulary, since it is an unbiblical term and is never used in Scripture of the goal of the believer. The ubiquitous presence of “heaven” in the language of modern churches points only to the unfortunate penetration of Platonism into Christian thinking. It was Plato and the neo-Platonists who drastically and permanently affected church tradition in post-biblical times, via Platonically-trained “church fathers.” Plato taught the “immortality of the soul” of every human person. The Bible does not teach that the soul of man

is immortal. The false doctrine of the immortality of the soul, found in the creeds of both Protestants and Roman Catholics, creates the need for a place for departed, disembodied souls at the moment of death: hence “heaven” and “hell” as the immediate destination of the good and the evil. But the dead are not at present in heaven or hell. They are “sleeping” in the world of the dead known in the Greek Bible as Hades. Dropping the term “heaven” and reintroducing the phrase “Life in the Age to Come” or “Life in the future Kingdom” will help to peel off the layers of confusing tradition that presently clutter and obstruct a clear reading of the New Testament. Whenever you come to the word “eternal” or “everlasting” (note how often this occurs in Hebrews as an adjective), read “pertaining to the future Age of the Kingdom of God on earth.” The objective of the Christian is not “eternal life” but “life in the future Kingdom of God via the resurrection.” You will begin to think like the Hebrew writers of the Bible. What’s more, you will no longer be misinformed by the phrase “everlasting destruction” or “everlasting punishment” in Matthew 25 and II Thessalonians 1:9. The real meaning is “the punishment or destruction to be meted out in the Coming Age,” which gives quite a different sense.

Why not engage your friends in the interesting question of the real origin of their beliefs. Direct them, perhaps, to our website and its back issues of “Focus on the Kingdom” and invite them to pull out a standard authority such as the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. A classic article on “Christianity” tells us the truth when it says, speaking of what happened to the faith as it abandoned its Hebrew, biblical origins:

“Like all concepts the meaning of religious terms is changed with a changing experience and a changing world-view. Transplanted into a world where Greek ideas were prevalent, inevitably the Christian teaching was modified — indeed *transformed* [but Jude would hardly have approved this transformation when he pleaded for “the faith once and for all delivered”]. Questions which had never been asked came to the foreground and the *Jewish presuppositions tended to disappear*, and the Messianic hopes were *forgotten* [the New Testament emphasizes again and again the need for a clear grasp of the content of Christian hope] or transferred to a transcendent sphere beyond death [the Platonic notion that disembodied souls survive death in full consciousness]. When the empire became Christian [so they claimed] in the fourth century, the notion of a Kingdom of Christ on earth to be introduced by a great struggle [the glorious return of the Messiah in power] all but disappeared, remaining only as the faith of obscure groups. As thus the background is changed

from Jewish to Greek, so are the fundamental religious conceptions...[The result of the changes which came over the original faith was a new mould of thought]. These moulds of thought are those of Greek philosophy, and into these were run the Jewish [biblical] teachings. We have thus a peculiar combination — the religious doctrines of the Bible, as culminating in the person of Jesus, run through the forms of an alien philosophy.”

It appears to us that this information sounds an alarm. Did not Paul warn of the danger of philosophy (Col. 2:8) and of knowledge falsely so-called (I Tim. 6:20)? Is the mould of an “alien philosophy” an acceptable form of the faith of Jesus and the Apostles? We are not of course by any means the first to raise such questions. We could multiply quotations such as the one above from the learned Professor of Philosophy and the History of Religion of Union Seminary. Countless scholars have documented the extraordinary changes that happened to the faith immediately following the writing of the New Testament. We simply say that responsible Christians owe it to themselves and their families to be informed of what has been going on. The Bible, and Jesus in particular, constantly urge vigilance and attention to what we hear and believe. We are to examine all things carefully against the gold standard of Scripture. ✧

More Evidence of a Corrupted, Platonized Popular Christianity

“One of the great ironies of Christianity is that the Church has come to identify the Platonic doctrine of the soul with the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In opposition to the pagan notion of the natural immortality of the soul, the early Church spoke of the resurrection of the body. In fact, the Apostles Creed explicitly rejected pagan notions of the immortality of the soul, when it limited discussion of the afterlife to the resurrection of the flesh. The [later] spiritualization of the resurrection of the body into the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is a corruption of the biblical insight concerning the future. Berkouwer says that this spiritualization of the resurrection into a one-sided interest in ‘heaven’ is the product of a self-centeredness in regard to salvation that collapses the biblical cosmic perspective into a privatized concern in which the resurrection is suspended as an interesting but isolated event

irrelevant to redemption. Modern evangelicals miss the cosmic, earthly and bodily reality of the [Bible’s] promise of the future, because our vision of the future is more informed by selfish self-absorption and individualism of Western culture than it is by the biblical proclamation of the resurrection of the body and the restoration of creation. Once we have answered the question, ‘What happens to me when I die?’ the future is a done-deal. Such self-centered concern comes close to the very heart of what Scripture calls sin” (Dr. Michael Williams, *The Presbyterian*, 1999).

We trust that our readers will ponder deeply the above criticism of standard Christianity. The point made above (in the somewhat heavy language of professional theology) amounts to this: What is taught in churches about how a Christian will go to heaven individually the moment he dies is not the teaching of the Bible. It has however been the teaching of the professing churches for some two millennia. The New Testament ought to be a corrective to this Platonist, pagan notion that we are innately immortal creatures and that a “soul” can go on living consciously without a body. The trouble is that most churchgoers care little about these issues and are interested mostly in what comforts them personally whether or not that comfort is true and biblical. The issue is, does Jesus approve such a corruption of the Bible in his name? ✧

Bible Rage

There is an ugly side to history — even, or perhaps especially, the history of Christianity. Few know that John Calvin committed a judicial murder. He authorized the Roman Catholic Church (he himself being a Protestant reformer) to sentence to death a brilliant young scholar who protested against the confusing doctrine that God is “three-in-one.” The following account appeared in a letter written to a South Carolina newspaper:

Calvin was one of the most notable of the Protestant “reformers” (you’ll understand in a few moments why I suggest that “notorious” rather than “notable” would be a much more accurate characterization). He was a high-profile crusader against the abuses (also well documented) of the Catholic Church. However, Calvin had a very dark side. Having arranged to be installed as a Protestant leader in Geneva, Switzerland, he established a dictatorship, becoming a civil and religious autocrat. Geneva was nicknamed Protestant Rome and Calvin himself the Pope of the Reformation. Thus he broke with the real intentions of the Reformation, instituting a Protestant theocracy. His church was the depository of the only

truth. Calvin could never consider any opposing or different view, or any dissent in doctrinal or political matters, declaring them to be a crime against the state and church. As such they deserved to be punished by the civil authority with the utmost severity and cruelty.

There was no limit to Calvin's power. He exercised his authority and hegemony; and anyone persisting with heterodox teachings had to die at the stake. Calvin desired to maintain in perfect order his theocracy. Yes, that's "die at the stake," as in perish by fire. Calvin introduced an absolute control of the private life of every citizen. He instituted a "spiritual police" to supervise constantly all Genevise. They were subject to periodical inspections in their households by the "police des moeurs." Calvin managed to destroy the normal bonds between people and simple decency, inducing them to spy upon each other. His method of intimidation and terror was so refined that it involved control of every petty activity.

By way of specific example, one of the persons who ran afoul of Calvin's regime was a Spaniard named Michael Servetus. Servetus was raised in the Catholic religion and trained in civil law and medicine. His writings leave little doubt that he was exceptionally well educated, schooled in both Hebrew and Greek. He was appalled at the pomp and adoration given to the Pontiff in Rome. After coming under the influence of the early Reformation, Servetus continued his energetic study of the Bible and became one of the first Protestants to attack the doctrine of the Trinity. That "T" word was to become the source of unanticipated and unmitigated horror for Servetus. He declared that the Catholic dogma of the three divine Persons in the Godhead was a construct of the imagination, a monster compounded of incongruous parts, metaphysical gods, and philosophical abstracts. This accusation attracted the notice of Calvin who responded that Servetus "deserved to have his bowels ript out, and to be torn to pieces." Not a nice thought. Calvin, true to the spirit of Constantine, vowed to kill him when it was in his power to do so. Ironically, although Servetus was largely sympathetic to the Protestant cause, he soon found Protestant Germany and Switzerland off-limits to him.

Calvin arranged to have Servetus arrested (in another irony, by the Catholic Church!). Calvin later admitted: "I do not conceal that through my exertions, and by my council he was thrown into prison." Calvin would have better served his modern apologists had he not written an account of his dealings with Servetus. Servetus experienced the full force of the ruthless

Calvin. After suffering cruel privation and humiliation throughout kangaroo court proceedings, he was condemned, on October 26, 1553, "to be led to Champel and burned there alive on the next day together with his books." And just what were his crimes? They were his advocacy of antitrinitarianism (there's that "T" word) and antipedobaptism (against the baptism of infant children).

And no ordinary execution was this to be. No cruelty was spared on Servetus as his stake was made of bundles of the fresh wood of live oak still green, mixed with branches still bearing leaves. He was seated on a log, with his body chained to a post with an iron chain, his neck bound with four or five turns of a thick rope. This way Servetus was fried at a slow fire for about half an hour (according to eyewitness accounts). He suffered a cruel death for daring to enunciate his honest, well-studied disagreement with a hallowed Church tradition whose supporter felt threatened. Time has not succeeded in erasing this fearful blot from established Christianity's record.

No less an intellect and student of the Bible than Thomas Jefferson had this to say about the "T" word: He remarked that the Trinity is "an unintelligible proposition of Platonic mysticisms that three are one and one is three, and yet one is not three and three are not one. I never had sense enough to comprehend the Trinity, and it appeared to me that comprehension must precede assent." Albert Schweitzer had the same thing in mind when he wrote: "The great and still undischarged task which confronts those engaged in the historical study of primitive Christianity is to explain how the teaching of Jesus developed into early Greek theology."

As we contemplate the meaning of Memorial Day this weekend — that is that others gave their lives to preserve our priceless freedoms, including thought and expression — wouldn't it be wonderful to have an open and honest examination in the pages of the *Aiken Standard* of some of Christianity's cherished, but perhaps not biblically sound, dogma? As a humble truth-seeker, I would find this to be a precious blessing.

Most sincerely yours,

RLG

P.S. For those who may see this and have an interest in exploring the subject further, I recommend two recent references from which I have borrowed liberally: (1) *The Case of Michael Servetus: The Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience*, Dr. Marian Hillar, Edwin Mellon Press, 1997. (2) *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, Sir Anthony Buzzard and Mr.

Charles Hunting, International Scholars Publications, 1999, 1-800-347-4261.

The spirit of unreasonable dogmatism is one of the ugliest of human follies. It is reasonable to inquire: What spirit is that which actually murders a theological opponent? Does the New Testament ever hint at such a Christian right? Granted that God through Jesus will one day execute the unrepentant, does God ever extend that authority to a human person before judgment day?

A strong indication of a spiritual warfare surrounding the Bible was seen in the recent extreme action taken against innocent children:

“A suit filed in Houston’s federal court on May 18 by Matthew Staver, president of Liberty Counsel, accuses a middle school teacher of violating the rights to free speech of two students and ‘belittling religious literature in their presence.’

“According to Staver, when the teacher noticed the students’ Bibles cradled in their arms, she took them to the principal’s office and called their mother. The mother was then threatened that if she did not report to the school within a short period of time, child protective services would be called. When the mother arrived, the teacher pointed to the Bibles, shouted that they were garbage and threw them in the trash. The two girls have been receiving homeschooling since the incident. In a separate incident at the same school, three other students were denied their First Amendment rights when they were halted by school officials from carrying books with covers listing the Ten Commandments. Staver points out that federal guidelines, established in 1995 and 1999, allow students and education officials to bring religious materials into school for use during lunch and other unscheduled class times” (from *The Pastor’s Weekly Briefing*, June 2, 2000). ✧

“You understand with your heart” (Jesus in Matt. 13:15).

“As a man thinks, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).

“Contrary to popular thinking, the dominant function of the heart is not emotional. The heart, according to Scripture, is first the place where the human being **thinks**, secondly where he wills, and only thirdly where he feels. This was confirmed by H. Wheeler Robinson, who counted 822 uses of the word heart for some aspect of human personality. According to his categorization, 204 of the 822 uses refer to intellectual activity, 195 to the volitional aspect, and 166 to an emotional state” (*The Common Made Holy*, by Neil Anderson).

John 1 Properly Translated by the Late Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford

Some people say, “I don’t need scholars. I just read my Bible.” This statement contains a hidden fallacy. The Bible you read (unless you are reading the Greek and Hebrew) comes to you via a scholar or scholars who have decided to translate it in a certain way. But you may not know that other equally distinguished linguists and scholars offer a very different understanding. Many think that John 1:1, 2, 14 mean “In the beginning was the Word — that is, the Son of God — and the Son was with God and all things were made by him, the Son...and the Son became flesh.”

But here is what John really intended according to other scholars and based on John’s very Jewish background in the Hebrew Bible:

“In the beginning was the purpose, the purpose in the mind of God, the purpose which was God’s own being... this purpose took human form in Jesus of Nazareth” (G.B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 332).

This translation avoids the appalling complexities of Trinitarianism, which no one can explain. John did not teach that the Son was alive before his birth. What “preexisted” was a Purpose — God’s *logos*, or Purpose — not the Son. The Son first came into being when he was created as the Second Adam in the womb of his mother Mary — by miracle. He is indeed the promised “seed of the woman.” The Jewish people believed only in preexisting Purposes, not in preexisting Persons. The capital W on Word in your Bible comes to you because of the decision of a scholar, who expects John to teach that the word was a Person preexisting. There is no such capital letter in the Greek text of John — and no need to think of the word as other than a “word/promise/purpose.” Word had occurred 1655 times in the Old Testament and never meant a Person, not once! “As a man thinks, so is he.” “As God thinks and plans, so is He.” Thus “the word was God and all things came into being through the word.”

COMMENTS

“I appreciate your clear, informed and logical approach to Bible teaching on the radio and in your writings. The Bible when properly expounded is not the impossibly convoluted book with a thousand different opinions that we might wrongly judge it to be if we look at divided Christendom.” — *Washington*

“I have been following, learning and studying with you on the topic of the Kingdom on the High Ministry World Radio Network for the past few weeks. The broadcast has a very clear signal free of atmospheric interference. You are right to the point in what you say. I agree with you that the plan of salvation/gospel of the Kingdom has not been taught and preached correctly. As it was in the Garden of Eden human beings easily cling to the wrong choice: disbelief, lies and delusion.” — *Singapore*