

Introduction

“The deity of Jesus is *inherently* unJewish. The witness of Jewish texts is unvarying: belief that a second being is God involves departure from the Jewish community.”¹

“According to the New Testament witnesses, in the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, relative to the monotheism of the Old Testament and Judaism, there had been no element of change whatsoever. Mark 12:29 recorded the confirmation by Jesus himself, without any reservation, of the supreme monotheistic confession of faith of Israelite religion in its complete form.”²

Born and bred as a member of the Church of England (Anglican), I attended church with family, and at boarding school, dutifully every Sunday. The hymns were beautiful, the buildings many centuries old, the list of clergy dating back for half a millennium. The ten-minute homily on Sunday came very far short of giving us a biblical education. At 20 years old, I went to Oxford to gain a suitable qualification in modern languages (German and French). It was at that time that I was invited to attend an evangelical “get saved” meeting. I was curious to know what that “acceptance of Jesus in my heart” meant. This event brought me to my first serious investigation of Scripture, where I found in Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom the irrepressible hope and promise that Jesus, in addition to having died for the sins of the world, will, at his spectacular return, bring about the worldwide peace which has so obviously not been produced by current political effort.

Some 60 years after my first engagement with the Bible, after a degree in theology, and a career as teacher of the Bible and its languages in a small Bible college, I have gained the strong impression (as have many others) that the Jesus of history and his impassioned proclaiming of the Gospel of the Kingdom were unknown to us in those Church of

¹Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, p. 176.

²Dr. Martin Werner, *Formation of Christian Dogma*, Harper and Brothers, 1957, p. 241.

England days. The biblical plot and story had been drastically distorted. Perhaps not surprisingly, church-going is now reduced to a tiny handful of my fellow Englishmen. It appears that what we got of “Bible” was heavily filtered through a mass of alien tradition. We were allowed only a severely censored version of Scripture.

Concluding that Jesus was a Jew and a claimant to Messiahship, and believing that his claims were and will be entirely vindicated, I have attempted to read the New Testament in its very Jewish, Messianic context. I soon noted, by reading widely, that scholars of all stripes fully admit that the Jesus of actual history and of “Church” are often poles apart. In some cases those experts are less than accessible or straightforward enough to register a clear complaint, much less an urgent call for reform and restoration. As watchdogs their bark has been tragically feeble. The consequences of “bucking the system” may be costly.

Dr. J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge was fearlessly correct when he stated that “heaven is never in fact used in the Bible for the destination of the dying.”³ This powerful observation should point to the dire need for a careful examination of what we learned, uncritically, in church. The future of our blighted earth, and the promise of a state of international peace, when nations will “never again learn war” (Isa. 2:2-4), when the Sandhursts and West Points of today’s system will become curio museums, at the time when the Messiah makes his spectacular return to this earth as the royal Davidic king who alone can produce peace — this is rather obviously the compelling goal of the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. It is also the core of the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom which was preached in advance to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), who has never yet inherited the land promised to him personally, as well as to his “seed” (Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:13, 39). But he will, along with all the faithful.

The land promise, Kingdom of God promise, is the theme which drove Jesus and all the biblical writers. The vision of nations at peace I found rivetingly interesting as soon as I was exposed to Scripture. The claims of the monotheistic Jew Jesus to be the Son of Man, Son of God and the long-promised lord Messiah (Luke 2:11), the one who will eventually bring order to our chaotic world, I have found irresistible for

³J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, Fontana Books, 1968, p. 104.

the past 60 years. I fear only that the appalling complications which Greek philosophically influenced Gentile church leaders imposed, from the second century onwards, on the essentially simple teachings of the Bible, have rendered intelligent reading of Scripture in its own original context almost impossible.

This translation, then, has as its premise the conviction that the Church today, in its preaching, teaching and tradition, generally gives you a strongly Greek philosophically-influenced version of the New Testament. This unfortunate departure from the original faith of Jesus and the Apostles dates from the second century AD, that is, after the canon of the New Testament closed with the book of Revelation. A full reformation and return to the beliefs of the New Testament Church did not occur in the 16th-century Reformation under Luther and Calvin.

The tragic lapse from apostolic truth leads you away from the original New Testament community's essentially simple account of the faith — “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Voices of protest and alarm, among many, may be cited in support of our thesis:

Eberhard Griesebach wrote: “In its encounter with Greek philosophy Christianity became theology. That was the fall of Christianity.”⁴ Anglican Canon Goudge said: “When the Greek and Roman mind instead of the Hebrew mind came to dominate the Church, there occurred a disaster in doctrine and practice from which we have never recovered.”⁵ Anglican Dean Farrar was frank enough to concede that the Church has constantly made a mess of its attempt to interpret the Bible. He notes that “Holy Scripture contains everything necessary for salvation” (6th Article of the Church of England) and that “the plain teachings of Christ are the sole infallible guide.” He then laments the evident failure of expositors to agree on what the Bible says. “Truly, if over the whole extent of what we call ‘religion’ men have an infallible guide, they have — and that to all appearance inevitably — rendered it worse than useless by fallible expositions.”⁶

Then this marvelous insight from E.F. Scott, D.D.: “Christianity, in the course of the Gentile mission, had changed into another religion. The

⁴*Lecture on Christianity and Humanism*, 1938.

⁵ “The Calling of the Jews,” in the collected essays *Judaism and Christianity*, 1939.

⁶*The Bible, Its Meaning and Supremacy*, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897, p. 144-145.

Church...had forgotten or refused to know what Jesus had actually taught.”⁷

William Winwood Reade, British historian and philosopher, reinforces our point:

The church diverged in discipline and dogma more and more widely from its ancient form, till in the second century the Christians of Judea, who had faithfully followed the customs and tenets of the twelve apostles, were informed that they were heretics. During that interval a new religion had arisen. Christianity had conquered paganism, and paganism had corrupted Christianity. The legends which belonged to Osiris and Apollo had been applied to the life of Jesus. The single Deity of the Jews had been exchanged for the Trinity, which the Egyptians had invented, and which Plato had idealized into a philosophic system. The man who had said ‘Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is God’ had now himself been made a god, or the third part of one.⁸

If the Bible is taken at face value within its brilliant, Jewish apocalyptic setting, “sooner or later the time will come when the simple and natural will be recognized as the true.”⁹

Dr. Martin Werner’s summary of the early chaos which overcame the Messianic Jesus and his teaching deserves the widest possible hearing:

The cause of the Trinitarian-Christological problem, which so perplexed post-Apostolic Christianity, lay in the transition from the apocalyptic Messiah-Son of Man concept of the primitive Christian eschatological faith, with its sense of imminence, to the new dogma of the Divinity of Jesus. There was certainly no need nor justification...to substitute for the original concept of the Messiah, simply a Hellenistic analogy, such as that of a redeeming Divine Being...Indeed it was wholly invalid. It was a myth behind which the historical Jesus completely disappeared.¹⁰

⁷*The Kingdom of God in the New Testament*, Macmillan Co. 1931, p. 156.

⁸*The Martyrdom of Man*, 1892, p. 230.

⁹Albert Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, cited by Martin Werner, p.17.

¹⁰*The Formation of Christian Dogma*, p. 298.

Christian Beker in *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* points out that the shift from Jesus' and Paul's apocalyptic Gospel of the Kingdom "constitutes something like a fall of Christendom." He calls this rightly "a fall from the apocalyptic world of early Christianity to Platonic categories of thought." This had "a tremendous impact on the history of Christian thought," bringing about "an alienation of Christianity from its original Jewish matrix."¹¹

Translations, particularly some modern ones like the NIV (New International Version), "help" the reader to see things in the New Testament which reinforce his or her impression that later "orthodoxy" is solidly biblical. But this involves "pushing" the Greek text beyond what it actually says. This unfair process is an attempt to justify the later *departure* from the original faith. It smooths over the embarrassing difference between the original Greek Scripture of the original community of faith and what from the 2nd century developed as a tragic departure from the biblical orthodoxy of Jesus and Paul.

The most striking example of this embarrassing difference between Jesus and the beliefs of those claiming to follow him is the unitarian creed affirmed with maximum emphasis by Jesus in discussion with a colleague Jew (Mark 12:28-34). On this critical passage of Scripture the Church has adopted an alarming posture of silence! (Often it is what we do *not* say which gives away a flaw in our thinking.)

In that marvelously instructive passage of Scripture a Jewish scholar had asked Jesus about what is the *most critically important command of all*. Jesus replied by endorsing the monumentally significant creed of Israel's heritage, the core of all true religion: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (as read from the New Testament Greek, citing the LXX, Greek version of the OT). This is a unitary monotheistic and certainly not a Trinitarian creed. "One" is a quantifier, a simple, mathematical numeral, and God is defined here, as innumerable times in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as one *single* divine Lord, one Person, one divine Self, one Yahweh. He is so described by thousands of singular personal pronouns, which as we all know designate a single person. Malachi 2:10 encapsulates with delightful simplicity the totality of the Bible's view of

¹¹Christian Becker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God*, Fortress Press, 1982, pp. 107-8.

God as one Person: “Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us?”

The importance of this point needs to be repeated: The clash between the original teachings of Jesus and what later emerged as Christianity is most starkly demonstrated by the failure of Bible readers to take with utmost seriousness Jesus’ own unitarian, i.e. unitary monotheistic definition of God in Mark 12:29. In that classic passage Jesus is seen to be in total harmony with a friendly Jewish Bible scholar. In John 17:3 Jesus proposed as the key to the Life of the Age to Come (inadequately rendered in most versions as “eternal life”) that we come to recognize and know the Father as “the only one who is true God” (cp. John 5:44). In John’s writings the Father is equated with God nearly 150 times and in the New Testament it is obvious that “God” (often “*the* God” in the original Greek) means the Father and not Jesus. “God” means the Father about 1300 times in our New Testament.

The creed of Israel was never Trinitarian. Thus the fact that Jesus affirms and endorses the unitarian creed of Judaism ought to provide a provocative and life-changing embarrassment to today’s Church, which has ceased to quote and believe the creed of Jesus. It has departed from Jesus at the most crucial level of all theological and spiritual endeavor. Thus Christianity is distinguished by the remarkable characteristic that it is the only world religion which begins by discarding its own founder’s creed. Mark 12:29, and Jesus as our rabbi-teacher, not just one who provided forgiveness by dying for us, must be reinstated, if Bible study and preaching are to be honest with the Christian documents.

There are places in some modern translations which plainly depart from the Greek in order to give the impression that the later “orthodoxy” is biblically based. A classic example is in Philippians 2:5 where the Son of God is described in the NIV as “being in very nature God.” But this is a horrible imposition on the text, which says not a word about Jesus *being* God. The word “nature” here is meant to encourage the notion of a “God the Son” who is of the same “essence” as the Father. But “essence” and “hypostasis” belong to a theological vocabulary of post-biblical times, when the simplicity of the pristine belief in God the Father as “the only one who is true God” (John 17:3) had been lost.

We note too that in a very subtle way the NIV does not want you to see that the Gospel (of the Kingdom) was preached equally by Jesus and

Paul. Introducing the ministry of Jesus, the NIV reports him as preaching “the Good News,” while Paul is said to be preaching “the Gospel.” But that distinction is absent from the original Greek and encourages a discontinuity between Jesus and Paul. Both Jesus and Paul, who followed Jesus faithfully, preached the same saving Gospel of the Kingdom. It is misleading to translate *evangelion* for Jesus’ preaching as “good news” and the same word for Paul’s preaching as “gospel.” It points to a dangerous systematic error — that Jesus’ teaching has been discarded in favor of a misunderstood “Gospel of Paul.” We have failed to call Jesus “rabbi and lord” (John 13:13) when he everywhere urged us never to fall short of grasping and obeying his saving words (John 3:36; 12:44ff; cp. Heb. 5:9).

My hope is to bring into clear focus the very uncomplicated New Testament definition of God as the Father of Jesus and certainly not as triune. We want to emphasize constantly the definition of the saving Gospel as the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God**, of which Jesus was the original and authoritative preacher (Heb. 2:3; Luke 4:43; Acts 10:36). I have of course gained immensely from all of some 60 modern translations, in various languages, available on the standard software used by scholars. These translations mostly convey the sense of the Greek in varied but entirely acceptable ways. However in certain key passages they misrepresent the Greek text, in an effort to portray Jesus as God the Son, second member of an eternal Trinity.

This major objective, to define the saving Gospel as Jesus defined it, means restoring the voice and mind of Jesus to our Bible reading. At present the public never gets a clear concept of what Jesus preached as the saving Gospel. Our observation is that the “Gospel about the Kingdom,” with which Jesus laid the foundation of all sound belief (Mark 1:14-15), is virtually absent from contemporary tracts, books and websites and blogs offering “salvation.” The voice of Jesus, at the most fundamental level of defining the Gospel, has been silenced and censored.

In place of the Gospel as Jesus preached it to the public, we hear offered a very “washed out” version of the Gospel, geared largely to psychological self-improvement, or as Dallas Willard calls it, “gospels of

sin management.”¹² Popular evangelicalism has been emptied of its vivid, apocalyptic flavor, announcing the future of human society and warning of the future return of Jesus in judgment and to rule on a renewed earth. The Gospel announces God’s future revolutionary government which will put an end to all war!

Without grasping the proper starting point, following Jesus himself, Bible readers are left with a hazy conception as to the definition and content of the saving Gospel. Paul is then often twisted by a selection of a few verses taken without regard to context. Romans 10:9-10 is typical, and Jesus’ version of the Gospel is bypassed in the process. Paul did not contradict Jesus’ insistence on the necessity of believing the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). Paul concludes Romans 10 by saying that faith comes by hearing and believing the “word [Gospel] of Messiah” (v. 17), that is, the Gospel **the Messiah himself preached**. Paul is misunderstood (with the NIV, not the more accurate NASB) when he is made to say that one needs only to “hear *of*” Jesus, i.e. about him, when in fact one must “hear Jesus,” that is, hear and respond intelligently to his own Gospel of the Kingdom message.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 Paul should not be pitted against Jesus! Paul did not say there that the all-important death and resurrection of Jesus comprise the *whole* Gospel. Those facts were items “amongst things of first importance” (v. 3). After all Jesus had preached the Gospel for years without, at that stage, so much as a mention of his death and resurrection, introduced first in Matthew 16:21.

My conviction about the absence of the center of the saving Gospel from popular preaching, as the Kingdom, is trenchantly stated by a professor of missiology. Dr. Mortimer Arias observed:

We seem to be faced with what can be called **an eclipse of the reign [Kingdom] of God lasting from the apostolic age to the present**, particularly in our theology for evangelization...The reign of God is God’s own dream, his project for his world and for humanity! He made 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...**When I left the seminary the first time, I had no clear idea of the Kingdom of God and**

¹²*The Divine Conspiracy*, Harper One, 1998, p. 57.

I had no place in my theology for the second coming or parousia...

Thousands of books are printed and circulated every year on evangelization; most of these fall into the category of methodology, the “how-to” manuals for Christians and churches. Not all of this activity or activism, however, is a sign of health and creativity...It is obvious that our traditional mini-theologies of evangelization (the “plan of salvation” or “four spiritual laws” type) do not do justice to the *whole* Gospel...“The good news of the kingdom” is not the usual way we describe the Gospel and evangelization...The kingdom-of-God theme 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 as 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 reign of God!¹³

This translation attempts to restore to the Gospel of the Kingdom the central prominence it always enjoys throughout the New Testament.

It is clear that Jesus was a Jew as the descendant of David. On no account should any reader of the New Testament in its own context imagine that Jesus believed in the Trinity of post-biblical councils! In this translation I make a concerted effort to remind readers of the unitary monotheistic faith of the New Testament, the definition of the Son of God as the lord Messiah, who was born (Luke 2:11), and not a second

¹³*Announcing the Reign of God*, Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 55, 115-116, 85, xii-xviii. For further quotations from leading authorities about the almost total absence of the Kingdom of God from church Gospel teaching, see my *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* (free at our website, restorationfellowship.org) and my “Kingdom of God in the Twentieth-Century Discussion and the Light of Scripture” (*Evangelical Quarterly*, 64:2, 1992, pp. 99-115). For an excellent treatment of the NT Gospel of the Kingdom, see *The Gospel of the Kingdom* by Wiley Jones, 1879, available free at archive.org

Person of a Triune Godhead. God cannot be born and the immortal God cannot die.

A great deal of refreshing simplicity and peace of mind results from reading the writings of the New Testament community in their Jewish, first-century context. We are touching base with the original roots of the faith, and the New Testament comes alive in a brilliant way. Ignorance of the Bible produces a disastrous alienation from God (Eph. 4:18). Evidently a lot of my fellow countrymen have abandoned the Bible entirely, since they go to church regularly in the UK only at the rate of about 5%, and the rest only to be “hatched, matched and dispatched.”

The confusion caused by the later (from the early second century) fall from the original faith is gargantuan in its effects. It will take time to clear the air and defog our minds. We have been drinking toxic theology and the church needs to be decontaminated. But the effort is well worth it, although revolutions are never without pain.

Religion from the second century developed its own “improved version” of the biblical drama presented in Scripture. The Bible itself is a gripping drama, portraying the great Plan of God to bestow on human persons the gift of indestructible life, immortality. There will be peace on earth when the nations are required to beat swords into plowshares, and learning to make war will never again be permitted. No one will be permitted to take a gun and shoot his neighbor. This sounds like good sense and Good News to me!

From the second century, the emerging Catholic Church created its own embroidered version of the Bible’s original plot and thus lost the plot for itself and its billions of followers. At the same time the “improved version” created a powerful and wealthy hierarchy designed to suppress the ignorant and guarantee a huge prestige to its priest leaders. They capped this effort finally by declaring the chief leader, the Pope, to be infallible when speaking officially.

The spectacular drama of the *origin* of the unique Son of God, Jesus Messiah (*genesis*, Matt. 1:18), provided in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, was given an additional tabloid twist when Mary, a teenage virgin, was said to be herself always sinless (the doctrine of “the immaculate conception”) and permanently a virgin, without sexual experience for her whole married life. Jesus’ half-brothers had then to be denied that status and turned into cousins (or children of Joseph by a

previous marriage). Mary was said to have been assumed to heaven bodily without dying.

The Roman Catholic Church assumed power over the secular state as the Kingdom of God coming in advance of Jesus at his future Second Coming. In Scripture the nations of this present world system are never the Kingdom of God. The saints are *not* ruling at present (though they will), and Jesus is the only ultimately legitimate King and world ruler. The system of faith promoted by the “new improved version” of the biblical drama elevated priests as the only ones educated to minister the mysteries of the new faith. The laity were put under guardians.¹⁴ The control of millions of minds was ensured and theological education was denied to all but leadership. The permanence of this massively powerful tradition was thus guaranteed. Harnack, as a master historian of the Christian faith, records the astonishing facts about the early “history of the suppression¹⁵ of the historical Christ by the pre-existent Christ, of the Christ of reality by the imagined Christ in dogmatics, finally the victorious attempt to substitute the mystery of Christ for the person himself.”

The Protestant reformation in the 16th century was provoked by the obvious abuses of the inherited system, to call for change, but its reform was partial. The same mysterious triune God continued to replace the single God of the Bible, the Father of Jesus. Jesus’ unitarian heritage and definition of God, long suppressed by tradition, was not permitted in general to resurface from under the rubble of tradition which held the minds of the masses under its sway.

Heaven (or eternal hell) at death for “immortal souls” continued to replace the biblical vision of resurrection into the Kingdom of God on a renewed earth, which was the heart of the Hebrew dream of peace on earth, as well as the heart of the saving Gospel of the Kingdom announced by Jesus and the New Testament community.

¹⁴See Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. 3, p. 10, translated by Neil Buchanan, Dover Publications, 1961. The original German of *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* is found in the 1883, 4th ed., pub. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p. 704.

¹⁵Note that the standard English translation “softens” the German “Verdrängung” (suppression) to “replacement” and the German “gedacht” (imaginary or imagined) to the vague “of thought.”

A smaller more radical wing of the Reformation was cruelly suppressed when it challenged the theology of the major Reformation led by Luther and Calvin. Englishman John Biddle, a school-master who exposed the error of the Trinity, had the “honor” of having an act of the British parliament passed against him and he died in prison. His crime was merely to have pointed to the unvarnished simplicity of Jesus’ own definition of God in the Shema, the “Hear, O Israel” of Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. The brilliant Spanish scholar Michael Servetus was burned at the stake at the instigation of Protestant reformer John Calvin, in an act of unrepented brutality. Servetus’ “crime” was having shown that the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine. Does the public know of this atrocity in the name of religion?

The emerging Church achieved an enormous success by adding a number of show-stopping features to its version of the biblical drama. However the casualty in this unfortunate development was the original divine drama of Scripture in two acts, offering to suffering mankind the hope of immortality and a place of responsibility in the future Kingdom of God on earth, when Jesus returns to take up his position on the restored throne of David. The original storyline and plot of the divine drama in the pages of Scripture was replaced with a dazzling but perverted story, a mixture of paganism and Scripture. Once we lose the plot of the astonishing drama, Scripture becomes confusing, Church tradition takes over and intelligent Bible reading is obstructed.

Professor J. Harold Ellens makes our point, based on the clear testimony to what the Church has done with its central figure:

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**...not in the central tradition of biblical theology...Its roots are in Philonic Hellenistic Judaism and in the Christianized **Neo-Platonism** of the second through the fifth century. 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 with neither a divine nor a unique revelation from Jesus Christ nor from God.¹⁶

The “complication” of God through the addition of two other Persons to the God known to Jesus led inevitably to the complication of the Messianic personality of Jesus. Once he became God, true monotheism was violated. The result:

Jesus Christ was now no longer a man of flesh and blood like ourselves, but a [preexisting] heavenly being of supernatural origin in human form. With the help of a metaphysical system taken over from Greek philosophy, Christological dogma came into being, and an attempt was made to describe the person of Jesus Christ in the form of the so-called “doctrine of two natures.” “Jesus Christ, true man and true God.” So men said...From the very beginning right up until the present day the Church has been tempted to stress the “divinity” of Christ so one-sidedly that his “manhood” threatened to become a mere semblance. In this Jesus Christ was made an historical abnormality...What happened to this Christ was no longer the fate of a man, but the fate of a remarkable shadowy fairy-tale figure, half man and half God...Man has woven a golden veil of pious adoration, love and superstition and spread it over the rugged contours of God’s action in history.¹⁷

Theologians lost themselves in a maze of obfuscating language, and indignation at this lamentable exercise was well expressed by Harvard Professor Andrews Norton in 1833, in his *Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*. He begins with a scathing attack on the complex issue of how Jesus can be 100% God and 100% man at the same time:

The doctrine of the Communication of Properties, says Le Clerc, “is as intelligible as if one were to say that there is a circle which is so united with a triangle, that the circle has the properties of the triangle, and the triangle those of the circle.” It is discussed at length by Petavius, with his usual redundance of learning. The

¹⁶*The Ancient Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Theological Development.*

¹⁷Heinz Zahrnt, *The Historical Jesus*, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 29.

vast folio of that writer containing the history of the Incarnation [and Trinity] **is one of the most striking and most melancholy monuments of human folly which the world has to exhibit.** In the history of other departments of science, we find abundant errors and extravagances; but orthodox theology seems to have been the peculiar region of words without meaning; of doctrines confessedly false in their proper sense, and explained in no other; of the most portentous absurdities put forward as truths of the highest import; and of contradictory propositions thrown together without an attempt to reconcile them. A main error running through the whole system, as well as other systems of false philosophy, is that words possess an intrinsic meaning, not derived from the usage of men; that they are not mere signs of human ideas, but a sort of real entities, capable of signifying what transcends our conceptions; and that when they express **to human reason only an absurdity**, they may still be significant of a high mystery or a hidden truth, and are to be believed without being understood (p. 78).

From Cambridge in recent years comes an impressive analysis of the disaster that occurred when the Jewish Jesus was replaced by a pre-existing eternal Son. The consequences of the process of reinterpretation by which the Son of God became identified with “God the Son” are far-reaching indeed. Professor Lampe points out that when the Son was projected back on to an eternally existing pre-human Son, and when the holy spirit was turned into a third “hypostasis”:

The Christian concept of God then becomes inescapably **tritheistic**; for three “persons” in anything like the modern sense of the word “person” mean in fact **three Gods**...The effects, especially in popular piety, have been even more far-reaching than this. The Nicene Creed speaks of “Jesus Christ” in person, not the Logos, as pre-existent...It is thus the Jesus of the Gospels whom the imagination of the worshipper pictures as pre-existing in heaven and descending to earth...[There is] the absurdity of the picture of Jesus reflected in much traditional devotion which is essentially that of a superman¹⁸ who voluntarily descends into

¹⁸Very much like a Hindu avatar.

the world of ordinary mortals, choosing, by a deliberate act of will, to be born as man...God the Son is conceptualized as Jesus, Son of God; the obedience of Jesus, the Servant of God and Son of God, the true Adam indwelt and inspired by God's spirit, is attributed to God the Son; God the Son becomes eternally the subject of Jesus' self-dedication to his Father's will, and eternally the object of the Father's love...This means in effect the **abandonment of monotheism**, for such a relation between God the Son and God the Father is incompatible with the requirement of monotheism that we predicate of God one mind, one will and one single operation.

Professor Lampe was a specialist in the post-biblical development of the Trinity and observed also that "the interpretation of Jesus as pre-existent Son and of the Son as a pre-existent Jesus causes inconsistency and confusion...This doctrine, which follows from the identification of Jesus with a pre-existent personal divine being, is ultimately **incompatible with the unity of God.**"

Equally problematic for a true monotheism and a genuinely human Messiah is the Trinitarian concept of the Son as "assuming human nature." Professor Lampe reminds us that "a person is created by his relationships with other people, and especially by his interaction with his parents and family." What happened then to the first-century Galilean Jew Jesus? He was lost and replaced by a philosophical abstraction whose identity as the son of David, and thus the true and only Messiah, became irrelevant.

The Christological concept of the pre-existent divine Son...reduces the real, socially and culturally conditioned personality of Jesus to the metaphysical abstraction "human nature." It is this universal humanity which the Son assumed and made his own...According to this Christology, the eternal Son assumes a timeless human nature, or makes it timeless by making it his own; it is a human nature which owes nothing essential to geographical circumstances; it corresponds to nothing in the actual concrete world; Jesus Christ has not, after all, really "come in the flesh."¹⁹

¹⁹Lampe, *God as Spirit*, Trinity Press International, 1983, pp. 132, 136-138, 140-144.

The observant reader will note that the professor rather obviously assigns to the orthodox doctrine of Jesus the label of antichrist. It was the Apostle John who late in the New Testament period warned that any reduction of the human individual Jesus Christ to a personality not essentially human is a menace to true faith (1 John 4:2-3). The Jesus to be confessed, as distinct from other Jesuses, is the one who has truly “come in the flesh,” as a fully human person. Luther set the pattern for reading into John’s “theological test” the post-biblical definition of Jesus. Luther mistranslates 1 John 4:2 as “Jesus Christ coming *into* the flesh.” The doctrine of the Incarnation was thus imposed on John.

Christianity is defined by God’s purpose. The divine Plan is discovered in the purpose statement of Jesus in Luke 4:43. There he stated that the One God had commissioned him for the express purpose of announcing the good news or Gospel about the coming Kingdom of God. The purpose could have a frightful negative outcome. Jesus expressed this in Matthew 8:11-12. He warned his fellow countrymen that they ran the risk of a colossal failure. “When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and yourselves being rejected, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” To avoid this catastrophic negative outcome Jesus exhorted the people, and us all, to pay the closest attention to his teachings, which provide the only route to rescue and salvation — living forever.

Jesus’ first and last words are critically important. He begins by issuing a first and fundamental command, that we are to repent and *believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God* (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus’ last words summarize and reemphasize the all-important matter of obedience to his teachings. These are found for example at the conclusion of his public ministry in John 12:44-50. The words/Gospel of Jesus are the criterion for our future judgment. We neglect them at our peril, since the words of Jesus are the words of God who commissioned and inspired him:

And Jesus **cried out and said**, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. **If anyone hears my words and does not keep them**, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The

one who **rejects me and does not receive my words** has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment — what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (John 12:44-50, ESV).

Christianity is based on our making a choice between two different ways. The principle is beautifully encapsulated by John 3:36, where belief in Jesus is equivalent to obedience, and unbelief is refusal to obey. These stark alternatives are laid out for us in the introductory Psalm 1. Two contrasted lifestyles are depicted here, the one leading to disaster, an extinction of life, and the other to indestructible life, immortality in the future Kingdom of God on a renewed earth. We all have to choose. (In Calvinism the word “choose” has been emptied of intelligible content.)

As early as the second century would-be followers of Jesus began to lose the central storyline of God’s great unfolding drama, embodied in the Gospel of the Kingdom and the work of Jesus Christ. The influence of alien Greek philosophy confused the drama of salvation. The person of Jesus was replaced gradually by an abstract “God the Son,” who by definition really could not be a true human being, since his origin was antedated prior to his actual origin as Son of God in the womb of his mother (Luke 1:35). Once this new form of belief, affecting the central creed of the Bible, had been worked out over a period of centuries, it was enforced on pain of death and excommunication. At the Council of Nicea in 325 anathemas were attached to any who might question the Church’s central dogma.

Readers of English versions of Scripture sometimes express their desire to have a “literal translation” of the original. What they really need is one that conveys the sense of the original (in this case Greek) faithfully into the target language. There are occasions when a “literal,” “word for word” translation is the least desirable. In fact it can lead to nonsense! What if I render the English “I am pulling your leg” literally, or “I have a frog in my throat” word for word. The misunderstanding will be obvious. “I am mad about my flat” can well mean in British English that “I am excited about my apartment.” In the USA it pictures a

person angry about changing a flat tire. “Jane and John have broken up” means in the UK that their school term is ended. In the USA quite a different sense would be conveyed. The list could be multiplied. “Bouncing off the wall” does not need to be translated literally into another language. It will mislead.

More seriously, a literal word for word translation in John 17:5 is misleading. Jesus’ words translated word for word, “glorify me with the glory I had with you” lead or mislead the reader to think that Jesus was with the Father before he came into existence, was born! The Hebrew idiom “to have something with someone” means to have a reward promised and stored up in advance. Jesus warned that ostentatious performance of “good works” will mean that we “have” (present tense) “no reward with the Father” (Matt. 6:1). This means of course that if we do well we now have a reward stored up for the future, a reward to be given at the return of Jesus. Jesus in the very same discourse in John 17 spoke of *having given* glory to Christians who were not even born when he made that promise! (v. 22). It was the same glory which had been promised to Jesus by the Father. It is glory prepared and planned in heaven with the Father ready to be bestowed in the future. Jesus asked in John 17:5 to be rewarded with the glory promised to him at the completion of his ministry. It was a glory stored up and promised by God from the beginning. It was not a glory to be “restored” to him, since he had never yet had it.

This issue is parallel exactly to the misleading idea conveyed by the NIV in some places. In John it takes liberties with the text in the interests of inherited dogma. It makes Jesus say what he did not say. The NIV renders John 16:28, 13:3 and 20:17 as “going back,” or “returning” to the Father. But the historical Jesus had not been there yet! There is a world of difference between “going,” which is what John wrote, and “going back.”

Another example of misleading translation is found in many versions in Luke 23:43. It is a matter of punctuation. Since Jesus had not yet been to the Father on the Sunday of his resurrection (John 20:17), he could not have promised the thief a place in his presence that day, the day of his death. Jesus was abandoned to the grave, the world of the dead, until his resurrection on Sunday (Acts 2:27, 31, 32). The thief had asked to be remembered when Jesus comes back in the future, inaugurating his

Kingdom. Jesus' promise goes beyond the request and assures him on that very day, that he would indeed be with Jesus in that future Kingdom of God, the paradise restored (Rev. 2:7). "I say to you today [you don't have to wait until the future for this assurance], that you will be with me in the future paradise of the Kingdom" (cp. Acts 20:26). In this way one verse will not be made to contradict Luke in 14:14 and 20:35, where rewards are not given until the resurrection. Nor will that one verse be made to contradict and confuse the rest of Scripture.

There are of course verses which in their sublime simplicity and clarity ought to be definitive. Most striking of these is Luke 1:35 where the words of the angel define with precision the meaning of the title "the Son of God." Very few verses come with their own "built-in" definition, but Luke 1:35 does. No footnotes are needed, no special glossary. Luke 1:35 includes its own lucid explanation. Gabriel defined how, why and where Jesus is to be Son of God. Son of God is who he is "because of," "precisely because of" (*dio kai*) the miracle worked by God in the womb of Mary. It is "for that reason" and no other that Jesus is the Son of God. This defining statement rules out at once any possibility of an "eternally begotten" Son. Luke and Gabriel could not have been Trinitarians, and nor was Jesus (Mark 12:29; John 17:3).

The celebrated commentary on Luke by Godet got it right when he stated:

By the word "therefore" the angel alludes to his preceding words: he will be called the Son of the Highest. We might paraphrase it: "And it is precisely for this reason that I said to you..." We have then here, from the mouth of the angel himself, an authentic explanation of the term Son of God, in the former part of his message. After this explanation Mary could only understand the title in this sense: a human being of whose existence God Himself is the immediate author. It does not convey the idea of preexistence.²⁰

Alas, the Church disregarded the explicit theology of Gabriel. Alas, too, Godet did not, as he should have, provoke a complete rethinking of Christology. Instead there has occurred a flurry of plain contradictions of the text, to uphold beloved conciliar "orthodoxy." A striking example of

²⁰*Commentary on Luke*, Funk and Co., 1881, p. 58.

these is the statement of Dr. John MacArthur: “I do not believe that the virgin birth alone proves that Jesus is the Son of God. In other words, *Jesus is not the Son of God because He was born of a virgin*. He was born of a virgin because He was the Son of God. Jesus existed long before Mary.”²¹ Note that MacArthur is in direct opposition to Scripture and Gabriel. J.P. Mackey rightly criticizes J.G. Davies when he says that “this creative act did not bring into being a new person.” Mackey says, “With this kind of cobbling any theological conclusion could be ‘proved from Scripture.’”²²

So brain-breakingly complicated and abstract were the terms of what became the official creed that unitarian scholar and poet John Milton was moved to lament the appallingly confused language in which it was presented as dogma:

Christ himself therefore, the Son of God, teaches us nothing in the Gospel respecting the one God but what the Law had before taught and everywhere clearly asserts Him to be, his Father. John 17:3: “This is eternal life: that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” 20:17: “I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God.” If therefore the Father is the God of Christ and the same one is our God, and if there is no God but one, there can be no God beside the Father...Though all this *is so self-evident* as to require no explanation — namely that the Father alone is a self-existent God, that a being which is not self-existent cannot be God — it is wonderful with what futile subtleties, or rather with what juggling artifices, certain individuals have endeavored to elude or obscure the plain meaning of these passages; leaving no stone unturned, recurring to every shift, attempting every means, as if their object were not to preach the pure and unadulterated Truth of the Gospel to the poor and the simple, but rather by dint of vehemence and obstinacy to sustain some absurd paradox from falling, by the aid of sophisms and verbal distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the schools.²³

²¹“Unleashing God’s Word One Word at a Time,” Issue 3.

²²*The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, SCM Press, 1983, p. 277.

²³John Milton, *On the Son of God and the Holy Spirit*, British and Foreign Unitarian Association, pp. 15, 16, 20.

Sir Isaac Newton was no less scathing about the very non-Jewish definition of God as Trinity:

Newton became almost obsessed with the desire to purge Christianity of its mythical doctrines. He became convinced that the a-rational dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation were the result of conspiracy, forgery and chicanery...[Newton maintained] that the spurious doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity had been added to the creed by unscrupulous theologians in the fourth century. Indeed, the Book of Revelation had prophesied the rise of Trinitarianism — “this strange religion of ye west, the cult of three equal Gods” — as the abomination of desolation.²⁴

Bible readers need a fresh reading of the New Testament, with some of the encumbrance of later “orthodoxy” which now blocks a clear understanding, removed. No translation is final, of course. There is no perfect translation. There are scores of different ways of conveying the same propositions. Most of the New Testament is perfectly intelligible in many of the different versions. Readers of the Bible should avail themselves of various translations. No one translation conveys all of the truth. Some do much better than others.

Some contemporary commentary on the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation of “God the Son” becoming a man ought, we suggest, to shock readers into the realization that something has gone terribly wrong.

Dr. Jim Packer is well known for his evangelical writings. In his widely read *Knowing God*, in a chapter on “God Incarnate,” he says of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation:

Here are two mysteries for the price of one — the plurality of the persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and the most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. “The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14); God became man; the divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make

²⁴Karen Armstrong *The Battle for God*, Ballantine Books, p. 69.

noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. *Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation.* This is the real stumbling block in Christianity. It is here that the Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses...have come to grief...If he was truly God the Son, it is much more startling that he should die than that he should rise again. "'Tis mystery all! The immortal dies," wrote [Charles] Wesley...and if the immortal Son of God really did submit to taste death, it is not strange that such a death should have saving significance for a doomed race. Once we grant that Jesus was divine, it becomes unreasonable to find difficulty in any of this; it is all of a piece and hangs together completely. The Incarnation is in itself an unfathomable mystery, but it makes sense of everything else that the New Testament contains.²⁵

Had the lucidly simple description of the Son of God proposed by Luke been allowed to stand as the official doctrine of the Son of God, the course of the Christian faith and of church history would have been vastly different: "the holy thing begotten in you will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35) was easy enough. But when evangelicals rewrite the biblical story and read into it an eternal Son of God, this is the result. Charles Swindoll, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

On December 25th shops shut their doors, families gather together and people all over the world remember the birth of Jesus of Nazareth...Many people assume that Jesus' existence began like ours, in the womb of his mother. But is that true? Did life begin for him with that first breath of Judean air? Can a day in December truly mark the beginning of the Son of God? Unlike us, Jesus existed before his birth, long before there was air to breathe...long before the world was born.

Swindoll goes on to explain:

John the Baptist came into being at his birth — he had a birthday. *Jesus never came into being*; at his earthly birth he merely took

²⁵J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, Intervarsity Press, 1998, p. 46-47, emphasis added.

on human form...Here's an amazing thought: the baby that Mary held in her arms was holding the universe in place! The little newborn lips that cooed and cried once formed the dynamic words of creation. Those tiny clutching fists once flung stars into space and planets into orbit. That infant flesh so fair once housed the Almighty God...As an ordinary baby, God had come to earth...Do you see the child *and* the glory of the infant-God? What you are seeing is the Incarnation — God dressed in diapers...See the baby as John describes him “in the beginning” “with God.” Imagine him in the misty pre-creation past, thinking of you and planning your redemption. Visualize this same Jesus, who wove your body's intricate patterns, *knitting a human garment for himself*...Long ago the Son of God dove headfirst into time and floated along with us for about 33 years...Imagine the Creator-God tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes.²⁶

Dr. Swindoll then quotes Max Lucado who says of Jesus, “He left his home and entered the womb of a teenage girl...Angels watched as Mary changed God's diaper. The universe watched with wonder as the Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him.”²⁷

No one opening a New Testament and reading the matchless story of the origin of Jesus will be misled into thinking that “God was born,” or that as a Roman Catholic priest said on television, “God came to Mary and said, ‘Will you please be My mother?’”

We offer this version of the New Testament with a view to restoring the truth that God is one Person, that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God by miracle and that the saving Gospel is about the Kingdom of God, as Jesus preached it, and about all that Jesus said and did to instruct in the way that leads to indestructible life in the future Kingdom of God. Jesus of course spoke in Paul too and the other writers of New Testament Scripture. And none of these writers discarded the precious writings of the Hebrew Bible, but developed the truths of the New Covenant, working from a base in the Hebrew Scriptures which Jesus had endorsed as inspired canon in Luke 24:44.

²⁶*Jesus: When God Became a Man*, W Publishing Group, 1993, p. 1-8, emphasis added.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 10, quoting Max Lucado, *God Came Near*, Thomas Nelson, 2004.

If we are seeking the mind of Christ the obvious place to start is with Mark 1:14-15, Jesus' opening first command to us all. "Jesus came announcing the Gospel of God. He said, 'The time predicted has come. The Kingdom of God is coming soon. Repent and believe that Gospel about the Kingdom.'" God's Gospel is the Gospel of salvation which originates in God. God's saving Gospel **about the Kingdom** was preached by all the New Testament writers and of course first by Jesus himself (Heb. 2:3). God issues the ultimate statement about the Kingdom, and His great immortality program is modeled in the man Jesus and taught by him as saving Gospel in addition of course to his substitutionary death and resurrection. The "testimony of Jesus" in Revelation means Jesus' own Gospel preaching which one must hear to be saved (Rom. 10:14-17; Luke 8:12); "the Gospel of the age to come" (Rev. 14:6); the Kingdom about to begin (Luke 21:31; Rev. 11:15-18, cp. Luke 19:11ff).

Repentance means a complete reorientation in thinking and understanding, and in lifestyle. The first command of Jesus is thus to believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God, which is the empire of the Messiah, certainly not just a figurative kingdom "in the heart." Some translations such as Ferrar Fenton's correctly render Daniel 2:44, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will establish an everlasting **empire**, which is indestructible, whose sovereignty will not be transferred to another people." Thus also in Daniel 7:17, 18, 22, 27:

Those four great beasts which you have seen are four **great empires** which will be established on the earth. The saints of the Most High will afterwards take the **Empire** and possess it forever and ever...The time came for the saints to possess **the empire**...**The empire** and dominion and grandeur of the **empire under the whole heavens** will be given to the Holy People of the Most High. All nations will serve and obey them.

Hence the reward of the faithful in the New Testament is nowhere said to be to "go to heaven," but to "have the governorship of ten towns" or "five towns" (Luke 19:17, 19). Jesus echoed this same Gospel promise when he said to the apostles: "You who followed me, in the new birth, when the Son of Man will sit on his throne of glory, will sit on twelve thrones reigning over the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Paul was surprised that his converts had forgotten the elementary truth

that the saints “are going to govern the world” (1 Cor. 6:2). Jesus will be Head of State in the coming Kingdom and the saints will be his assistants, associate rulers, princes (see Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 18, 22, 27; Isa. 32:1).

“In Revelation the eternal messianic Kingdom is placed *on a renovated earth* so that Christ comes to his people on earth rather than gathering them to a heavenly abode.”²⁸

In order to get off to the right start with Bible reading, it is essential that Jesus’ saving Gospel of the Kingdom be understood. What better place to define the Kingdom than with the gospel of Matthew? The analysis of Matthew’s phrase “Kingdom of God”²⁹ offered by Professor W.C. Allen of Oxford is lucidly clear. And since the Kingdom is the key term for understanding all New Testament preaching, we offer the professor’s following fine statement. To misunderstand “Kingdom” is to misunderstand the whole New Testament teaching about the Gospel which saves us, and leads to immortality.

The Kingdom — **the central subject** of Christ’s doctrine...With this **he began** his ministry (4:17), and wherever he went he taught this as good news [**Gospel**] (4:23). The Kingdom, he taught, was coming, **but not in his lifetime**. After his ascension he would come as Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31)...and would sit on the throne of his glory...Then the twelve Apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). In the meantime he himself must suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. How else could he come on the clouds of heaven? And his disciples were to **preach the Good News [Gospel] of the coming Kingdom** (10:7; 24:14) among all nations, making disciples by [water] **baptism** (28:18). The body of disciples thus gained would naturally form a society bound by common aims...Hence the disciples of the Kingdom would form a new spiritual Israel (21:43) [cp. Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3]...

In view of the needs of this new Israel of Christ’s disciples...who were to await his coming on the clouds of

²⁸David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Rev. 17-22, Thomas Nelson, 1998, p. 1069.

²⁹Or its exact synonym “Kingdom of Heaven.”

heaven, it is natural that a large part of the teaching recorded in the Gospel should concern **the qualifications required in those who hoped to enter the Kingdom when it came...**[Thus the parables] convey some lesson about the nature of the Kingdom and **the period of preparation for it [sowing before harvest]...**[The parables] taught lessons about the Kingdom of the heavens **in the sense in which that phrase is used everywhere else in his Gospel, of the Kingdom which was to come when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven.** Thus the parable of the Sower illustrates the varying **reception met with by the good news [Gospel] of the Kingdom as it is preached amongst men.** That of the Tares also deals not with the Kingdom itself, but with **the period of preparation for it.** At the **end of the age** the Son of Man will come **to inaugurate his Kingdom...**There is nothing here or elsewhere in this Gospel to suggest that **the scene of the Kingdom is other than the present world renewed,** restored and purified.³⁰

The last sentence of our quotation makes the excellent point that Matthew (and the whole New Testament, indeed the whole Bible) does not expect believers to “go to heaven,” but that Jesus will **come back to the earth** to rule with them on a renewed earth (Rev. 5:9-10; Matt. 5:5; Dan. 7:14, 18, 22, 27). The perceptive reader of the New Testament will note the striking difference between the biblical view of the Kingdom, and thus of the Gospel of salvation, and what in post-biblical times was substituted for it: a departure of the faithful at death to a realm removed from the earth. (Bishop Tom Wright tries to have both systems when he speaks of “Life *after life* after death.” Better to shed the philosophically based life before **resurrection**, which **always** means coming not from life, but from death!) There can be no resurrection from the dead, if a person is not really dead!

The popular idea that the Kingdom is mainly a “spiritual” state of mind or lifestyle *now*, or social ethics expecting to bring the Kingdom in *now*, is false to the New Testament. Joseph of Arimathea, a Christian,

³⁰W.C. Allen, MA, *The Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. II, p. 144-45, emphasis added. The same view of the Kingdom is expressed by Allen in his commentary on Matthew (*The International Critical Commentary, St. Matthew*, T & T Clark, 1907, pp. lxxvii-lxxxi).

was “waiting for the Kingdom” after the ministry of Jesus (Mark 15:43). Luke 19:11-27 teaches us to connect the arrival of the Kingdom with the **future return of Jesus** (cp. above: “The Kingdom, he taught, was coming, but not in his lifetime”). So say leading analysts of the Gospel records.

Luke 21:31 presents the Kingdom of God as the event to **be introduced at the Second Coming**. This is exactly Revelation 11:15-18 — the Kingdom of God beginning at the future, seventh, resurrection trumpet (=last trumpet, 1 Cor. 15:23, 52-55).

We may add a further statement from a recognized authority on Luke:

It cannot really be disputed that Luke means by the Kingdom a **future** entity. The spiritualizing interpretation according to which the Kingdom is present in the Spirit and in the Church is completely misleading...It is *the message* of the Kingdom that is present, which in Luke is distinguished from the Kingdom itself. He knows nothing of an immanent [i.e., already present] development on the basis of the preaching of the Kingdom.³¹

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* gets the emphasis on the future right, and thus clarifies the Christian Gospel, and thus the Christian faith:

“The Kingdom of God is at hand” had the inseparable connotation “judgment is at hand,” and in this context, “repent” in Mark 1:14-15 must mean “lest you be judged.”³² Hence our Lord’s teaching about salvation **had primarily a future content: positively admission into [entrance into] the Kingdom of God and negatively, deliverance from the preceding judgment [fire]**. So the Kingdom of God is the highest good of Christ’s teaching...Man’s nature is to be perfectly adapted to his spiritual environment and man is to be with Christ (Luke 22:30) and with the patriarchs (Matt. 8:11). Whatever the Kingdom is,[?!] it is

³¹Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, Harper and Row, 1961, p. 122.

³²The popular notion of an unending, torturous hell-fire for the wicked is utterly unbiblical. The fate of the incorrigibly wicked, after full exposure to the Gospel, is annihilation, ceasing to exist. See Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, Providential Press, 1982 (foreword by F.F. Bruce).

most certainly not exhausted by a mere reformation of the present order of material things.³³

Equally clear is Eduard Schweizer:

Mark 1:14-15: Mark gives a brief summary of the preaching of Jesus. Preaching and Good News (Gospel) are Mark's favorite expressions. **The Gospel call of Jesus is accurately summed up** in 1:15, where the association of repentance and faith reveals the language of the church (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 20:21). Mark's concern is to make clear that in this preaching Jesus continues to go forth into the world and this call, therefore, is being directed also to the one who reads this Gospel today. Consequently this section serves as **a caption** to the whole Gospel (cp. the epilogue).

The Kingdom of God. When Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near, he is adopting a concept which was coined in the OT. Although it denotes God's sovereignty over creation (Ps. 103:19; 145:11ff), it **refers primarily to God's unchallenged sovereignty in the end time (Isa 52:7)**...Judaism spoke of the reign of God which comes after the annihilation of every foe [Isa. 24:6] and the end of all suffering...In the New Testament the **Kingdom of God** is conceived **first of all as something in the future** (Mark 9:1, 47; 14:25; Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21; Luke 22:16, 18; 1 Cor. 15:50; Luke 21:31, *et al*) which comes from God (Mark 9:1; Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11). Therefore it is something man can only **wait for** (Mark 15:43), seek (Matt. 6:33), receive (Mark 10:15; cp. Luke 12:32) and inherit (1 Cor. 6:9ff; Gal. 5:21; James 2:5), but is not able to create it by himself...In the acts and words of Jesus the future Kingdom has come upon him already. It is decided at that very moment whether or not he will ever be in the Kingdom...**Repentance is nothing less than a whole-hearted commitment to the Good News [of the Kingdom].**³⁴

Ernest Scott, D.D., Professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary, on the other hand reveals the hopeless confusion into which the Church has fallen in regard to Jesus' Gospel and thus the

³³*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, 1929, Vol. 4, p. 2667.

³⁴*The Good News According to Mark*, John Knox Press, 1970, p. 45-47.

Christian faith. He seems uncertain about the Gospel, but gives us a good sense of what it meant to Jesus and his followers:

It seems almost impossible to define the Christian “Gospel.” Sometimes it is identified with our religion as a whole, sometimes with some element in it which is regarded as central. To accept the Gospel is to believe in the atonement or the love of God, or the revelation in Christ or the fact of human brotherhood [!]. Yet it is well to remember that the word which is now used so **loosely** had at the outset a meaning which was **clearly understood**. “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand.’” The Gospel underwent a marvelous development...but the Good News has always been essentially what it was at the first — **the announcement of the Kingdom**. It is evident from the manner in which Jesus made the announcement that he took up an idea which was already familiar. He did not explain what he meant by the Kingdom, **for he could assume that all his hearers were looking forward to it**. Their hope for it had been newly stimulated by John the Baptist...They had long been thinking of the Kingdom and wondering when it would come, and a prophet had now arisen who declared that it was close at hand...**In the religion of Israel we must seek for the immediate origin of the Kingdom idea of Jesus**...The idea persisted long after the royal house was firmly established that the reigning king was only the vice-regent of the invisible King...Israel had been chosen by a unique God who was known as yet only by His own people, but was nonetheless King of the whole earth. **The day was coming when all nations would own His sovereignty**...On the higher levels of prophecy the purified Israel of the future is conceived as attracting all nations by its high example, to the service of the One God. More often it is assumed that Israel when fully disciplined will be restored to God’s favor and advanced by Him to the sovereign place (Acts 1:6). As King of this preeminent people God will reign at last over the world...On the one hand God is already King. On the other hand it is recognized that the Kingship lies in the future...They look for **a coming day** when He will overcome

all usurping powers and assert Himself as King. So the prophets keep before them **the vision of a new age when the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested**. In that happy time Israel will be exalted, the cause of justice will be established, the earth full of the glory of the Lord. Nature in that day will be restored to its pristine glory, and the wolf will lie down with the lamb, and cattle will feed in large pastures. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun. He [and His Messiah] will reign from Mount Zion and all nations will serve Him. King over a righteous nation, He will extend His dominion over the whole earth.³⁵

The admission of one of today's leading evangelical scholars, N.T. Wright, confirms the chaos into which the Gospel had fallen:

In one sense, I have been working on this book on and off for most of my life. Serious thought began, however, when I was invited in 1978 to give a lecture in Cambridge on "The Gospel in the Gospels." The topic was not just impossibly vast; **I did not understand it. I had no real answer**, then, to the question of how Jesus' whole life, *not just his death* on the cross in isolation, was somehow "gospel." Fifteen subsequent years of teaching in Cambridge, Montreal and Oxford have convinced me that this question...is worth asking.³⁶

But the question is just as mystifying to millions of Bible readers. This ought not to be so.

Further authorities point us in the right direction: "In the Book of Acts the Kingdom of God was still the general formula for the substance of Christian teaching."³⁷ This formula is absent from evangelical tracts promoting salvation.

On the lips of Jesus the term Kingdom of God unquestionably summarized the very heart of his Message. "The Kingdom of God is the central theme of the teaching of Jesus, and it involves his **whole understanding** of his own **person and work**."³⁸ Luke 4:43 is repeated

³⁵*The Kingdom of God in the New Testament*, Macmillan Co., 1931, pp. 11-21.

³⁶*Jesus and the Victory of God*, Fortress Press, 1996, Vol. 2, p. xiv.

³⁷*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 855.

³⁸Alan Richardson, *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, SCM Press, 1950, p. 119. "Golf tournament" and "tennis tournament" would be meaningless if "golf" and "tennis" are not understood.

by Paul in Acts 20:24-25 where Paul defines his own ministry as the Gospel of the grace of God = the **preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.**

“The Kingdom announced by the Messiah who is the Son of Man is possible only through his death and will be finally and fully realized **on earth only at his glorious return. This is indeed the heart of the Gospel.**”³⁹

The essential understanding conveyed by Jesus’ teaching is captured by these propositions about Messiah: “The Son of God came to give us an **understanding** so that we might know God” (1 John 5:20). “By his knowledge My servant will make many righteous” (Isa. 53:11).

The New Testament is based on the Old. Jesus came to:

1) Proclaim the **Gospel about the Kingdom of God** (Luke 4:43; John announced the same Gospel of the Kingdom, Matt. 3:1). This is the whole reason for Christianity, including, of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus commands believers to continue announcing the same Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 28:19-20).

2) Confirm the Abrahamic and Davidic promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:8).

3) Give us an understanding that we might know God (1 John 5:20).

4) Make people righteous, right before God, not only by his death but by his knowledge (Isa. 53:11; Dan. 12:3).

5) Invite whoever will believe in God’s plan for themselves and the world to prepare now to rule the world with Jesus when he returns. “Don’t you know the saints are going to manage the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2, Moffat; see also Dan. 7:14, 18, 22, 27; Rev 3:21; 2:26; 5:10; 20:1-6; Matt. 5:5; 19:28; Isa. 16:5; 32:1).

6) Sow the seed message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. In Luke 8:12 and Mark 4:11-12, an intelligent reception of the Kingdom Gospel is the necessary condition for repentance and forgiveness. Without a clear statement about the Kingdom how can anyone repent and believe Jesus?

In post-biblical times the original faith in the Gospel of the Kingdom suffered massive alteration, turning the Gospel into something quite different. Greeks rather than Jews became leaders in the church, and they imported alien Greek philosophy into the church’s teachings. Galatians

³⁹Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 1-13*, 1993, p. 214.

3:8, which defines the Christian Gospel as the content of the promises **made to Abraham**, about land, progeny and blessing, is missing from contemporary versions of the “Gospel.”

Billy Graham was mistaken when he claimed that “Jesus came to do three days’ work, to die, to be buried and to rise.”⁴⁰ This dictum would render the Gospel preaching of Jesus virtually unnecessary. A fatal “dispensationalism” underlies much popular preaching. 1 Timothy 6:3, 2 John 7-9, Hebrews 2:3, and John 3:36 are fair warning.

Perhaps the most profoundly disturbing saying of Jesus is the one in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me ‘lord, lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven [Kingdom of God]; rather it is those who do the will of my Father in heaven. There will be many who say to me on the day of judgment, ‘lord, lord, did we not preach for you and drive out demons in your name, and perform many miracles with your authority?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never recognized you. Depart from me, you who practice wickedness.’”

This statement is made in the closest connection with Matthew 7:13-14, where Jesus warns: “Enter [the Kingdom] through the narrow entrance, because wide is the entrance and broad the way which leads to destruction, and many go that way. But small is the entrance and narrow is the way which leads to Life [in the Kingdom], and only a few find it.” And then in the very same breath, Jesus said, “**Beware false prophets**, who come in sheep’s clothing, but inside are vicious wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits” (7:15-16). (Compare the parable of the sower to see what seed is necessary to produce true fruit: Matt. 13:19: “the word about the Kingdom,” Mark 4, Luke 8).

Now connect this to Jesus’ other reference to people saying, “lord, lord”: “Why do you call me ‘lord, lord,’ and **you refuse to do what I say**? Let me give you an example of someone who comes to me, hears my words, and does them. He is like a man building a house...” (Luke 6:46-48). The one *hearing the words/teaching of Jesus but not doing them* is building his house without a foundation. Only the ones hearing and obeying the word/words of Jesus are the true Christians.

⁴⁰“What is the Gospel?” Roy Gustafson, Billy Graham Association, 1980. Equally unbiblical is Billy Graham’s notion of the prospect for believers of “polishing rainbows in heaven” and “preparing heavenly dishes” (*Hope for the Troubled Heart*, Harper Collins, 1993, p. 214).

So then, the strong and alarming warning of Jesus is simply this. It is fatal to address Jesus as “lord,” if we do not also lay the foundation of believing his Gospel-teaching and teachings, the Gospel of the Kingdom. In other words Jesus without his Gospel of the Kingdom word and words is a false, counterfeit Jesus. Calling Jesus “lord” and not believing his teachings and words is the fatal trap into which we must not fall. False prophets are those who speak of Jesus, but not of his Gospel-teachings/words. When the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom” is absent, beware! Be alarmed!

This central and dramatic warning was so essential that it was repeated by both the Apostles Paul and John. In 1 Timothy 6:3, Paul said, “If anyone comes to you and **does not bring the teachings of Jesus,**” be alarmed and beware. You are being scammed!

John repeated exactly the same apostolic warning in 2 John 7-9: “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, who do not accept that Jesus Messiah has come as a fully human being. This is a deceiver and an antichrist...Everyone who in the name of ‘progress’ **does not remain in the teaching of the Messiah,** does not have God. The person who remains in **his teaching** has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring **that teaching,** do not welcome him into your house or greet him as a fellow believer.” We are to distance ourselves from anyone who does not stress, emphasize and insist on the **Gospel teaching and teachings of Messiah Jesus.**

Now please listen to these statements from recent times:

Dr. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries (he died in 2007):

Many people today think that the essence of Christianity is the teachings of Jesus. That isn't so. The teachings of Jesus are somewhat secondary to Christianity. If you read the epistles of the apostle Paul, which make up about half of the New Testament, you'll see almost nothing whatsoever said about the teachings of Jesus. Not one of his parables is mentioned. In fact, throughout the rest of the New Testament there's little reference to the teachings of Jesus. In the Apostles' creed, the most universally held Christian creed, there is no reference to the teachings of Jesus or to the example of Jesus. In fact, in recounting Christ's earthly life, the creed states simply that He was ‘born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was

crucified, dead and was buried.’ It mentions only two days in Jesus’s life — that of His birth and that of His death. **Christianity centers not in the teachings of Jesus but in the person of Jesus as the incarnate God who came into the world to take upon himself our guilt and to die in our place.**⁴¹

Also from Kennedy:

But Jesus says, “I am the way.” **It is not the teachings of Jesus, it is not the preaching of Jesus,** it is not the example of Jesus, it is not the Sermon on the Mount, it is not the Beatitudes, or anything else that He taught or said that is the way. The way is Christ Himself, the divine second Person of the Trinity, the Creator of the galaxies that came into this world.⁴²

This is a huge and glaring falsehood, since Paul preached the same Gospel of the Kingdom as did Jesus, to all, Jews and Gentiles alike, in Acts (14:22; 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31).

Now this equally astonishing and alarming statement from another top evangelical scholar, Dr. Harold O.J. Brown:

Christianity takes its name from its founder, or rather from what he was called, the Christ. Buddhism is also named for its founder. And non-Muslims often call Islam Mohammedanism. But while Buddhism and Islam are based primarily on the *teaching* of the Buddha and Mohammed, respectively, **Christianity is based primarily on the person of Christ. The Christian faith is *not* belief in his teaching,** but in what is taught **about him.** The appeal of Protestant liberals to ‘believe as Jesus believed,’ rather than to believe in Jesus, is a dramatic transformation of the fundamental nature of Christianity.⁴³

That is a colossal lie. You cannot believe in Jesus and not believe his teaching!

Then also C.S. Lewis. Lewis denies Jesus while claiming to follow him! He wrote: “The **Gospels are not ‘the gospel,’** the statement of the Christian belief.”⁴⁴ So then the words of Jesus are not the Gospel! This

⁴¹ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *The Presence of a Hidden God*, 2008, chapter “How I Know Jesus Is God,” p. 82, emphasis added.

⁴² “*The Only Way*,” *Daily Truth* devotional, emphasis added.

⁴³ *Heresies*, 1984, p. 13, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Introduction to J.B. Phillips’ *Letters to Young Churches*, p. 9-10, emphasis added.

must be the ultimate falsehood, the ultimate deception. So Jesus has to be rescued from “church”!

Dr. James Dunn:

Hurtado does not think it **necessary for Jesus to have thought and spoken of himself in the same terms as his followers thought and spoke of him** in the decades subsequent to his crucifixion, in order for the convictions of those followers to be treated as valid by Christians today; though he also notes that most Christians probably think that there was ‘some degree of continuity’ between what Jesus thought of himself and subsequent Christology.⁴⁵

Has he read the New Testament?!

Professor Richard Hiers made this amazing admission: “Interpreters of Christian **persuasion have ordinarily not been especially interested in what Jesus intended and did in his own time.**”⁴⁶

Note this carefully from Dr. H.A. Wolfson, leading authority on what the post-biblical “church fathers” did:

The Church Fathers’ conception of the Trinity was a combination of Jewish monotheism and pagan polytheism, except that to them this combination was a good combination. In fact, it was to them an **ideal combination of what is best in Jewish monotheism and of what is best in pagan polytheism**, and consequently they gloried in it and pointed to it as evidence of their belief. We have on this the testimony of Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great figures in the history of the philosophic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. His words are repeated by John of Damascus, the last of the Church Fathers. The Christian conception of God, argues Gregory of Nyssa, is neither the polytheism of the Greeks nor the monotheism of the Jews, and consequently it must be true. ‘For the truth passes in the mean [middle] between these two conceptions, destroying each heresy, and yet accepting what is useful to it from each. **The Jewish dogma is destroyed** by the acceptance of the Word and by belief in the Spirit, while the polytheistic error of the Greek school is

⁴⁵ *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* p. 93, fn. 2.

⁴⁶ *Jesus and the Future*, 1981, p. 1, emphasis added.

made to vanish by the unity of the nature abrogating this imagination of plurality' (*Oration Catechetica*, 13).⁴⁷

The church fathers admitted that they were rejecting the Jewish (and Jesus') understanding of God. They worked out the later fearfully complicated definitions of God, and Jesus in relation to God, and found themselves caught in a web of impossibly difficult arguments, trying to explain how God can be one and at the same time three.

But the easy truth is this: "There is no indication that Jesus would have understood the 'Father,' from whom he felt himself to have been sent and to whom he probably felt himself to be related in a special way, differently from the monotheistic God of Judaism."⁴⁸

"The Shema was the prayer which all pious Jews were expected to recite three times daily...It occupied a similar special position in late Judaism to the Lord's prayer in Christianity." That is very true, but then Dr. Anderson speaks of "the Church that did not any longer recite the shema. But here at least in his statement of the first commandment, Jesus stands foursquare within the orbit of Jewish piety."⁴⁹

But on what authority was this fundamental teaching of Jesus defining the one true God discarded? The Church did not abandon the lord's prayer! Why abandon his creed?

The process of restoration is furthered when people earnestly **seek the original meaning of the Kingdom of God as preached by the original (human) Jesus**. The Gospel itself is all about the Kingdom of God, as well as the death and resurrection of Jesus, and "Gospel" should never be divorced from the Kingdom. The pagan notion of "heaven" for "souls" at death has replaced the hope of the Kingdom coming on earth. That paganism must be banished from the Christian vocabulary if the Bible is to be understood.

This necessary return to "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) can be facilitated by the constant use of what might be called "comprehensive summary verses," which encapsulate the basic, non-negotiable truths of Scripture. These would be a new set of "John 3:16's." For example, brilliant summaries are supplied by John 3:36;

⁴⁷ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, p. 361-363.

⁴⁸ Karl-Heinz Ohlig, *One or Three? From the Father of Jesus to the Trinity*, Lang, 2000, p. 31

⁴⁹ Hugh Anderson, *New Century Bible Commentary on Mark*, p. 280.

Hebrews 5:9; Acts 8:12; Luke 8:12; Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 28:18-20, and many others. These verses, which are strikingly absent from contemporary preaching, will provide a framework within which the complete biblical story of man's destiny will become clear to Bible readers.

Harper Collins' Bible Dictionary states: "The Gospel is the proclamation of the Kingdom announced by Jesus (Mark 1:14-15) and now proclaimed by the church." But is it? Do churches preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God?

One might say that the churches are playing golf with the club held upside down. A complete restructuring is needed. No cosmetic alterations will solve the problem. There is a fatal flaw in the foundation of what we know as the faith. The Kingdom Gospel is missing in current preaching, or at best hopelessly vague.

Gary Burge says in the *NIV Application Commentary*, "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."⁵⁰ It ought to be, and must be if Jesus in Luke 4:43 is really heard. And Paul in Acts 20:24-25; 19:8; 28:23, 31 (cp. Acts 8:12).

Do seminaries understand the Gospel?

Over the course of the past year, faculty from each of Fuller's three schools have met together to discuss the question: What is the Gospel? A dozen years ago, the late Robert Guelich made the question the topic of his inaugural address, noting that years of professional work has returned him again and again to this fundamental subject. Guelich told the story of an encounter with the founder Charles Fuller after a seminary forum, with the "inspiration of Scripture" as its topic. Fuller commented that he longed for the day **when the seminary would host a forum on the question: "What is the Gospel?"**⁵¹

This is an amazing and instructive admission. The fact is that they really are not sure what the Gospel is, and yet they say they are saving people by preaching "it." The plain fact is that the Gospel of the

⁵⁰Gary Burge, *Letters of John*, NIV Application Commentary, p. 62.

⁵¹*Theology, News and Notes*, Fuller Theological Seminary, spring 2004.

Kingdom, including of course the covenant-ratifying and atoning blood of Jesus and his resurrection, is the Gospel. Until the “heaven” at death teaching, which is Plato’s and not Jesus’, is dropped, how can progress be made? And how can we be sure that anyone is saved by believing the teaching of Plato and calling it the teaching of Jesus? Is God as sloppy as we are with our thinking?! Is He so indulgent that He really does not care as long as we are sincere, although ignorant — of the nature of man, his destiny, the identity of God as the one God of Israel (Mark 12:29) and Jesus as the Messiah lord, not God (Luke 2:11)? And Jesus’ own definition of the Gospel?

Shailer Matthews, D.D., Professor of Theology, Chicago Seminary, saw how essential a part is played in the teaching of Jesus, by the Kingdom:

It is a serious error to hold that **the Kingdom of God** plays no important role in apostolic Christianity. Such a view both lacks historical perspective and is at variance with the entire thought of the literature of apostolic Christianity. The very name of the new movement, *Christianity*, would suggest the contrary opinion. So far from the eschatological Kingdom of God being a secondary element in the early church, **it is its great conditioning belief.** The preaching of the first evangelists was not a call to ethical ideals or an argument as to certain truths. Rather it was the proclamation of a message [about the Kingdom]...As regards the person of the Messiah, there is of course no question that the early church believed that Jesus was the Christ who had gone to heaven, whence he would come to introduce the new age and the new Kingdom. **This was the very core of the entire Christian movement...To think of Jesus as deliberately using a term [Kingdom of God] with a meaning different from what it would have been for others is not only to raise a question as to his morals, but as to his capacity as a teacher.**⁵²

How very *much unlike* popular evangelism the New Testament data on the Gospel of the Kingdom sounds!

⁵²*The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*, University of Chicago Press, 1905, pp. 144, 155.

I make no apology for repetition. Churchill said: “If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time — a tremendous whack.”

I have adopted in this translation what I admit is a somewhat shocking practice of placing a lower-case “l” on “lord” when the reference is to Jesus. The point is to remind readers of the fundamental distinction between the Lord God (YHVH) and the lord Messiah (Luke 2:11). This is based on the Bible’s favorite umbrella text in Psalm 110:1 where YHVH, the one GOD, addresses an oracle to the predicted Messiah, who is David’s son and also his lord (*adoni*, “my lord,” not Lord). In 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 Paul echoes the unitarian creed of Jesus in Mark 12:29. He defines God as the Father from whom all originates, and then adds his definition of Jesus as the one “lord Messiah.” Psalm 110:1 and its very easy distinction between the one Lord YHVH and the non-Deity lord (*adoni*, “my lord,” all 195 times not Deity!) lies behind Paul’s thinking, as it does behind all the thinking of Jesus (Mark 12:28-37). On no account should the two lords of Psalm 110:1 be muddled, resulting in two who are “Lord God,” an obvious violation of monotheism. *Adoni*, my lord, is the deliberate and unambiguous non-Deity title for Jesus, the man Messiah (1 Tim. 2:5, etc.).

Sometimes the New Testament text does not make it clear whether the Lord God or the lord Messiah is intended. This affects nothing of vital importance, since Jesus and God are working in harmony (John 10:30), Jesus being the supreme agent of God his Father, who is also Jesus’ God (Heb. 1:9). The point of using lower case for the lord Jesus is to remind readers over and over again of the central truth provided by the oracle of YHVH in Psalm 110:1. The relationship between God and Jesus is firmly established by the contrast between YHVH, the One God of the Bible, and the non-Deity figure now appointed to sit at the right hand of YHVH, pending his return to the earth to rule in the future Kingdom. Jesus is the *adoni*, “my lord” of Psalm 110:1 and his relation to the Father is repeated continually in the New Testament, summarized by Paul’s un-complex creed in 1 Timothy 2:4-5: God “wants every person to come to the knowledge of the truth, namely that there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, Messiah Jesus, himself

man.” This is the task of a Church desiring to be faithful to Jesus and Scripture.

For those readers of this translation who might be skeptical that the long-held, cherished traditions of Christianity could be radically mistaken, the words of the leading Christologist, Dr. James Dunn, are suggestive:

There is of course always the possibility that “popular pagan superstition” became popular *Christian* superstition, by a gradual assimilation and spread of belief at the level of popular piety (we must beware of assuming that all developments in Christian thought stem from the Pauls and Johns of Christianity).⁵³

It may well be that “orthodoxy’s” massive dependence on John and Paul ought to raise our suspicions that the Bible is being used selectively and thus misleadingly to bolster the status quo. The reader is invited to assess this issue with a Berean attitude (Acts 17:11). Luke in that verse commends a searching, noble-minded approach suitable to all those invited to rule the world with Jesus in the coming Kingdom on earth.

Finally, I suggest that the popular definition of God as “three in one” tends to keep millions of Jews and Muslims at arm’s length from the real, historical, now risen Jesus of Nazareth, for whom unitary monotheism was the basis of true faith (Mark 12:29; John 17:3). Is it not time for intelligent worshipers of God in church to make clear to themselves the meaning of their public confession of belief in Jesus as “begotten, not made,” lest that confession run the risk of being mere tradition learned by rote, and words without meaning?

I leave the reader to consider again and take to heart the astonishing admission of missiologist Mortimer Arias quoted previously: “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!” I suggest that the Gospel of the Kingdom be given its actual biblical meaning as the Kingdom of David to be restored, that is by the greater son of David, Jesus Messiah (1 Chron. 18:14; 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8; 21:7; Isa. 1:26; Mark 11:7-10).

⁵³*Christology in the Making*, SCM Press, second edition, 1989, p. 251.