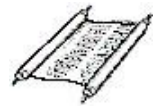


Hope Unfolding



“The unfolding of Your word gives light”

Psalm 119:130

Number 2

February 1, 2004

Volume 1

In This Issue:

- The Author of Matthew’s Gospel p. 1
Matthew didn’t write Matthew, scholars say.
- All Paths Lead to God p. 1
President Bush’s political correctness
compromises scripture.
- The Shepherd or the Shark? p. 4
A picture is worth a thousand words.
- Barna Poll: Life After Death p. 5
Revealing thoughts of Americans about the
afterlife.

All Paths Lead to God

Speaking at a joint news conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Nov. 20 2003, President Bush was asked, “Mr. President, when you talk about peace in the Middle East, you’ve often said that freedom is granted by the Almighty. Some people who share your beliefs don’t believe that Muslims worship the same Almighty. I wonder about your views on that and Mr. Prime Minister’s, as a man also of faith, I’d like to get your reaction to that.” Prime Minister Tony Blair responded noncommittally: “I believe that if people are given the chance to have freedom, whatever part of the world they’re in, whatever religion they practice, whatever faith they have, if they’re given the chance to have freedom, they welcome it.” Bush was more direct with his answer: “I do say that freedom is the



Almighty’s gift to every person. I also condition it by saying freedom is not America’s gift to the world. It’s much greater than that, of course. And I believe we worship the same God.”

Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America, responded to Bush’s statement with one word: “Alhamdulillah,” or *Thanks be to God*. He added, “We read again and again in the Koran that our god is the god of Abraham, the god of Noah, the god of Jesus. It would not come to the mind of a Muslim that there is a different god that Abraham or Jesus or Moses was praying to.”

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? There are at least two central tenets of Christianity that Muslims cannot accept. The first is the divinity of Christ, and the second is the triune nature of God (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

The assertions that God is Trinitarian and that Jesus is

continued on p. 3

The Author of Matthew’s Gospel

The world never tires of trying to discredit the Bible. One of its most vigorously pursued agendas has been to prove the written Word to be mythical fiction. The Gospels, say modern scholars, were written long after the events described in them occurred, and were not authored by eyewitnesses to those events. In his book *The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, J. C. Fenton wrote:

It is usually thought that Mark’s Gospel was written about A.D. 65 and that the author of it was neither one of the apostles nor an eyewitness of the majority of the events recorded in his Gospel. Matthew was therefore dependent on the writing of such a man for the production of his book. What Matthew has done, in fact, is to produce a second and enlarged edition of Mark. Moreover, the changes which he makes in Mark’s way of telling the story are not those corrections which an eyewitness might make in the account of one who was not an eyewitness. Thus, whereas in Mark’s Gospel we may be only one remove from eyewitnesses, in Matthew’s Gospel we are at one remove further still. [p. 12]

The Gospel of Mark, then, is said to have been the prototype from which Matthew was drawn. Eusebius

continued on p. 2

The Author of Matthew's Gospel *(continued from p. 1)*

quoted from Papias on the Gospel of Mark:

He [Papias] had also inserted in his work other accounts given by the above-mentioned Aristion [an Ephesian disciple of the apostle John] respecting our Lord as well as the traditions of the presbyter John. To those desirous of learning them, we shall now add to the extracts from him already given a tradition which he set forth concerning Mark, who wrote the Gospel, in the following words: "And John the presbyter also said this, Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy but not however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord but as before said, he was in the company with Peter, who gave him such instructions as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses: wherefore Mark had not erred in any thing, by writing some things as he has recorded them; for he was carefully attentive of one thing, not to pass by anything that he had heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts." Such was the account of Papias, respecting Mark. [Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.14-16]

Papias, cited above, wrote in about AD 130, and by then the Gospel of Mark had already been established as holy scripture. According to Irenaeus, Papias had heard the apostle John first-hand, but Papias never made that claim himself. He said that "he received the doctrines of faith from their intimate friends" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3). These friends included the daughters of Peter and other eyewitnesses to the teaching of the apostles. Papias wrote, "I do not think that I derived so much benefit from books as from the living voice of those that are still surviving" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4).

Critics reason that Mark was written after the death of Peter, traditionally at Rome in about 65, and after the fall of the Temple in 70, the event it "pretended" to predict. They place the date at about AD 75 to 80 (in truth, Mark was probably written sometime in the 50s). If Matthew was based on Mark, then Matthew had to have been written at a later date. Fenton wrote:

The earliest surviving writings which quote this Gospel are probably the letters of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who, while being taken as prisoner from the East to Rome about A.D. 110, wrote to various churches in Asia Minor and to the church at Rome. Ignatius refers to the star which appeared at the time of the birth of Jesus, the answer of Jesus to John the Baptist, when he was baptized, and several sayings of Jesus which are recorded only in this Gospel (12:33, 15:13, 19:12). It seems almost certain that Ignatius, and possibly the recipients of his letters also, knew this Gospel, and thus that it was written before A.D. 110. [*The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, p. 11]

If Matthew was written between AD 75 and 80, it couldn't have been written by the apostle of the same name. But *was* Matthew written after Mark? Eusebius, again quoting Papias, wrote, "Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16). Irenaeus wrote, "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).

Though these ancient references verify the authorship of the gospel, they are discarded by scholars because the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek, they claim, and relied largely upon Mark rather than upon author's first-hand experience (an excellent example of circular reasoning). They fail to note that because the original manuscript of Matthew, the *autograph*, is lost, we cannot know for certain in which language it was written. In fact, it is possible that he wrote in both languages, the Greek being directed at Hellenistic Jews.

But there is more evidences that the Gospel of Matthew was written before, or contemporary with, the Gospel of Mark. Clement, writing in 95 or 96, quoted from Matthew (in *The Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians*, or *1 Clement*). This earlier reference is, however, conveniently dismissed by critics as an allusion "to a general collection of Jesus' sayings which is now lost" (Robin Fox, *The Unauthorized Version*, p. 124). There is, of course, absolutely no evidence for this supposition.

Another early reference to the Gospel of Matthew has been in the news lately. A literary tale from the Jewish Talmud, dated to AD 72 or earlier, quotes brief passages that appear only in the Gospel of Matthew. Israel Yuval, in his 1999 book *Passover And Easter: Origin And History To Modern Times*, wrote that Rabban Gamaliel, a leader of rabbinical scholars in about 70 A.D., is "considered to have authored a sophisticated parody of the Gospel according to Matthew."

In the story, Jesus is called a Nazarene and also "Yeshua Ben Pandira," which means "Jesus born-of-a-virgin" in a combination of Hebrew and Greek. His father was a carpenter, his mother was a hairdresser, and Jesus was a magician who

“led astray Israel.” Further, the story relates, he was “hanged” on the eve of Passover. One detail has it that a daughter, whose father had died, offered a golden lamp as a bribe to a Christian judge known for his honesty, hoping to share her father’s estate with her brother. When the judge suggested that dividing the estate would be proper on the basis of a new law that had superseded the ancient Law of Moses, Gamaliel argued that the judge is wrong and he loosely quoted a statement attributed to Jesus in Matthew. Gamaliel replied, “Look further in the book, and it is written in it, ‘I have not come to take away from the Law of Moses nor add to the Law of Moses ...’” Gamaliel wins the case on the basis of that argument.

Travers Herford, author of *Talmud and Midrash*, called Gamaliel’s story a “brutal parody of Christian belief.” He mentions a second reference to Matthew, in the reaction of the woman who lost the case, despite the golden lamp she gave as a bribe. “Let your light shine as a lamp!” she says, throwing a sarcastic barb at the judge. Gamaliel’s tale casts further doubt on the long-held “scholarly” theory that Matthew was written by someone other than Matthew after the apostle had died. If Gamaliel quoted the Gospel of Matthew, then Matthew had to have been written before AD 72.

Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew was written by the apostle Matthew in about AD 50. Eusebius wrote, quoting Origen’s commentary on Matthew, “The first [Gospel] is written according to Matthew, the same that was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who having published it for the Jewish converts, wrote it in the Hebrew” (*Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.4). The Gospel of Mark was written sometime later, probably after 50 but certainly before 70, the date of the destruction of the temple (cf. Mark 13:2). The author of the gospel was John Mark, who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first great missionary journey (Acts 12:25).

* * *

All Paths Lead to God (*continued from p. 1*)

included in the Godhead are basic to Christianity. Muslims do not, in fact, believe in that God. Islam portrays Allah as a single whole who cannot be divided into multiple parts. They see Jesus as a prophet, one of many. According to the Koran, “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not ‘Three’ - Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son.” (Surah 4.171) “They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God.” (5.73) “The Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fights against them. How perverse are they!” (9.30) “And say: Praise be to Allah, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence.” (18.1)

That the Muslims do not worship the God of the Bible is also demonstrated by their denial of the Bible as God-revealed. The Koran, according to Islam, is the only divinely-revealed scripture in the history of mankind which has been preserved to the present time in its exact original form. Both the Old and New Testaments have been so corrupted by human intervention that they are no longer able to serve as a guide to one’s life (Surahs 2.23-24, 2.2-5, 5.14-15, and 10.36-37). “O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who takes them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guides not wrongdoing folk.” (5.51)

Bush’s postmodernist view strives for a politically-correct pluralistic inclusiveness that will meet with the world’s approval. *Postmodernism* denies the existence of an absolute, objective, or universal truth. It holds that truth is subjective and that every opinion should be held in equal respect. Postmodernism, then, is diametrically opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether Bush himself actually holds these views or is simply trying to “keep the peace” is hard to say. It is God’s will that Bush is president, as He “removes kings and establishes kings” (Dan. 2:21; see also Rom. 13:1). Though we are to submit ourselves to the government (1 Pet. 2:13), human institutions cannot be our spiritual guides. “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We are to pray for Bush (1 Tim. 2:1-2), but he is a politician and not a theologian.

Earlier, Lt. Gen. William G. “Jerry” Boykin, the new deputy undersecretary of Defense for intelligence, had come under fire from the media for being “an outspoken evangelical Christian” with a “penchant for casting the war on terrorism in religious terms” (*Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 2003). Discussing the battle against a Muslim warlord in Somalia, Boykin told an audience, “I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol.” In June, Boykin said of President Bush: “He’s in the White House because God put him there.” He also said, “Our spiritual enemy will only be defeated if we come against them in the name of Jesus.” Radical Islamists hate the United States, Boykin said, “because we’re a

Christian nation, because our foundation and our roots are Judeo-Christian ... and the enemy is a guy named Satan.” For these Biblical views, the media has labeled Boykin an extremist and a closed-minded zealot.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is only one way to God, and that is through His Son. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (Jn. 3:36) “Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (Jn. 14:6) “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) “For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” (Eph. 2:17) “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5) “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” (1 Jn. 5:11-12)

To imagine that the true God is the same god that Islam worships is to deny the truth of Scripture. There is only *one* God, and that is the God of the Bible. While the world may call this view closed-minded, it is, in fact, open-minded (Lk. 24:45). The Bible speaks of attempts to please the world, such as President Bush’s statement: “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (Jas. 4:4) There is one thing that the postmodernists get right, and that is that *all* paths lead to God. The path that leads to eternal life is narrow and few find it (Matt. 7:14), but wide is the path that leads to the Lord on His great white throne and eternal judgment (Matt. 7:13, Rev. 20:11-15).

* * *

The Shepherd or the Shark?



The fish has been a symbol of Christianity since the early church. It is especially suitable considering that Christians are to be “fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). The Greek word for fish is *ichthys* and the letters of that word (iota, chi, theta, upsilon, and sigma) form an acronym for *Iesus Christos, Theou Uios, Soter*, or “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” Early followers of Jesus, under persecution, adopted a secret symbol – the

fish – to mark locations for worship. The simple shape of the fish consists of two arches joining at one end and intersecting at the other. It was said that one Christian would draw the first arch, which would remain unnoticed by unchristian passersby. Eventually another Christian, knowing what the arch represented, would complete the fish. Both parties then knew they could assemble without fear.

The fish, then, is a symbol of Christianity in name only, that is, it represents the names Jesus, Christ, Son of God, and Savior. The fish is not a Biblical symbol or metaphor for Christ, but rather an historical one. In the Bible, Jesus is pictured as both the Lamb (Isa. 53:7, Jn. 1:29, 1 Pet. 1:19, etc.) and the Shepherd (Eze. 34:23, Heb. 13:20, 1 Pet. 2:25, etc.).

A new symbol has become popular in the Muslim nation of Egypt. It takes the form of a shark with part of the *shahadah* (“There is no God but Allah”) written within. Stickers bearing this symbol are becoming more and more common in that country. Given the absence of historical precedent, this symbol can have only one meaning, that of a predatory killer whose prey consists mainly of fish. This picture is consistent with the teachings of the Koran. “Those who believe do battle for the cause of Allah; and those who disbelieve do battle for the cause of idols. So fight the minions of the devil. Lo! the devil’s strategy is ever weak.” (Sura 4.76) “Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.” (9.29) “O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey’s end.” (9.23)



It is a thin disguise when ravaging wolves come in shark’s clothing (Matt. 7:15).

* * *

Barna Poll: Life After Death

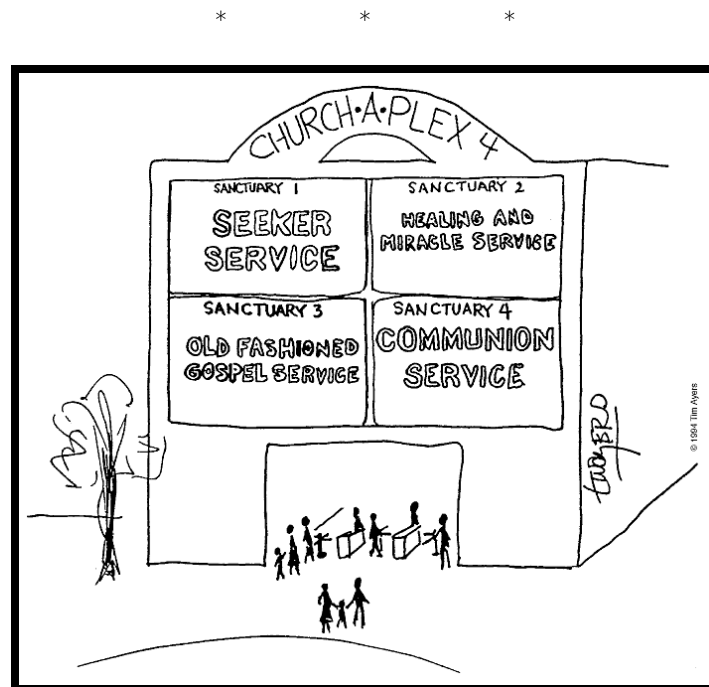
A recent study from the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California (based on data compiled in September 2003, October 2002, and October 2001) revealed that 8 out of 10 Americans (81%) believe in an afterlife of some sort. Another 9% said that there may be life after death, and one out of every ten adults (10%) said that death is the end of one's existence. A large majority (79%) agreed with the statement "every person has a soul that will live forever, either in God's presence or absence."

The survey also explored peoples' views of Heaven and Hell. 76% said that Heaven exists and 71% said that there is such a thing as Hell. Of those who believe in Heaven, 46% described it as being "a state of eternal existence in God's presence," 30% said it is "an actual place of rest and reward where souls go after death," and 14% claimed that Heaven is just "symbolic." Of those who believe in Hell, 39% believe that Hell is "a state of eternal separation from God's presence," 32% say it is "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death," and 13% describe it as "just a symbol of an unknown bad outcome after death."

Most Americans do not expect to go to Hell. 1/2 of 1% expect to go there upon their death. 64% believe they will go to Heaven. Of those, 43% believe they will go to Heaven because they have "confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior," 30% believe they will go to Heaven because they are basically good or have observed the Commandments, and 6% believe they will go to Heaven because "God loves all people and will not let them perish." Not surprisingly, there is a negative correlation between education and income with belief in Heaven and Hell (Matt. 19:24).

What is surprising is that the poll revealed that among self-confessed "born again Christians," 10% believe in reincarnation, 29% say it is possible to communicate with the dead, and 50% believe that a person can earn salvation based upon good works. Also, half of all atheists and agnostics say that every person has a soul, that Heaven and Hell exist, and that there is life after death. One out of every eight atheists and agnostics believe that accepting Jesus Christ as savior probably makes life after death possible.

The data in the report were based on national telephone surveys among random samples of 1000 or more adults. "Born again Christians" were defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.



Copyright 2002 Tim Ayers and Christianity Today International. Used with permission.