

WHY THIS THIRD EDITION WAS PUBLISHED

In the 30 years since the second edition of *A Harmony of the Gospels in Modern English—The Life of Jesus Christ* was published, the world has dramatically changed. All societies have been transformed by the increase of knowledge and technology, affecting everyone in the world. Rapid transportation by auto, train, and airplane has made even the most remote areas of the world accessible to businessmen and tourists. Instant communication through telephone and electronic mail, and on-the-spot news reporting on radio and television, are at one's finger tips daily. Banking and business transactions are conducted around the world using computers that are linked by satellite technology. New inventions and improvements affecting everything in life are continually superseding the old, and even the relatively new, almost as fast as they can be manufactured and sold.

Through the increase of knowledge, men now have the ability to genetically alter the very creation of God. Modern research has unlocked the genetic structure of plants, animals, and human beings. As a result, thousands of plants have been genetically engineered, thereby altering the balance of nature that God has created. Significantly, men of science have also genetically engineered and cloned various animals. And now, scientists claim that they have completely mapped the human genome—the genetic code of human life. Undoubtedly, they will attempt to clone human life in the near future, and may have already begun to do so.

Seemingly awesome miracles have been achieved in medicine. Modern medicines and vaccines have apparently eradicated many diseases. Surgeons can reattach severed limbs and transplant human and animal organs. There appears to be no end to the wonders that man can do. As these human achievements increase and abound, men no longer seem to have need of God or a Savior. Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ asked, "When the Son of man comes [at His second coming], shall He find the *true* faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8)

Most people do not realize that this tremendous advance in human knowledge and achievements was prophesied thousands of years ago. In the sixth century BC, the prophet Daniel was inspired to write of these days: "But *thou*, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*" (Dan. 12:4, *KJV*). Through the centuries, from Daniel's time until now, no one has understood the fullness or the magnitude of this prophecy. Knowledge is not only increasing, but it is multiplying at such a rate that it is nearly doubling every six months—and the end is not yet in sight.

Building Toward One World Government

The rapid growth of technology and communication has broken down political and linguistic barriers between nations. Moreover, because of the dominance of the English-speaking peoples of the world, English is recognized as the universal lan-

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guage. One can go almost anywhere in the world and find that English is spoken. In addition, an entirely new language, the language of computers, has been created. It is the common language of industry, science and education. As it was at the beginning of human history, a common language is again uniting mankind.

Over four thousand years ago, when all nations spoke one language, they rebelled against God at the tower of Babel. They rejected God and His authority. As in our world today, they had advanced scientific knowledge and were capable of doing anything they imagined to do. The account is recorded in the book of Genesis: “And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, ‘Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, ‘Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’

“And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. **And the LORD said, ‘Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.** Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11:1-9, *KJV*).

Today, as at the tower of Babel, the world is again becoming “one.” We are being globalized. People of the world are coming together in one grand, monolithic civilization. As the globalization of the world continues, the sovereignty of the nations is giving way to regional alliances such as the European Union, soon to expand to twenty-five nations. Trading alliances between North America, Europe, and South America have given way to the World Trade Organization, an international agency which has been given authority to formulate rules, settle disputes and promote the smooth flow of trade between the nations.

At the same time, the United Nations is growing in power and influence over all the nations of the world. It is slowly, but surely, developing into a world government. In conjunction with the development of the UN as the world government, an international criminal court has been organized which will have power to bring individuals from any country to the bar of world justice, regardless of the laws of their native lands. Through all these forces, a modern tower of Babel is being built, which the book of Revelation identifies as “Babylon the Great” (Rev. 17:5).

One World Religion in the Making

The religious organizations of the world have not been left behind in the globalization and unity process. For over forty years, since the historic Vatican II meetings, the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and nearly all the leading Protestant denominations have been busily working to bring all professing Christians together. Currently, their dialogue is reaching out even to non-Christians. In

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recent years, Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism, have been working hand in hand to find common ground in their religious beliefs as well as in other religions.

Few realize that the modern ecumenical movement actually began in 1893 in Chicago, Illinois, with the first meetings of the World's Parliament of Religions. At that time, four hundred delegates from many of the world's religions gathered for their first conclave. One hundred years later, in 1993, 3500 leaders from nearly every religion in the world attended the second gathering, again called Parliament of the World's Religions. Their agenda was clearly spelled out, leaving no doubt that they are working toward the unity of all religions under the umbrella of a new world religion: "The Parliament, however, has two specific goals: That top religious leaders adopt a Declaration of Global Ethics [to replace the Ten Commandments of God], and that the delegates set up two ongoing interfaith organizations—a working group in Chicago and an international network as **a kind of religious United Nations**" (*Chicago Tribune Magazine*, August 29, 1993).

In addition to the sweeping efforts of the Vatican and various Protestant churches to bring about full ecumenism, other prominent religious leaders of the world have been busy. At the behest of the Parliament of the World's Religions, they have adopted a Declaration of Global Ethics and are developing a framework for a United Religions organization. As a leading force behind this movement, Episcopalian Bishop William Swing has initiated the United Religion Initiative 2000. He desires to create in the Presidio in San Francisco, California, a forum where the world's religious leaders can meet together. The goal is to unite the world's religions under a global organization affiliated with the United Nations.

Rising from the midst of this broad ecumenical movement is the worship of a mother goddess in various forms and guises. In the environmental movement and modern witchcraft, this goddess is worshiped as Mother Earth, or Gaia. Neo-pagans worship her as the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. For centuries, Catholics have worshiped the virgin Mary as the queen of heaven and mediatrix between men and God. In recent years there has been a growing movement among the clergy and laity to declare Mary as co-redemptrix, making her equal with her Son.

In concert with the ecumenical movement, the publication in 1997 of *World Scripture—A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* has created a powerful tool to further the uniting of religions. Notice these excerpts from the introduction: "A movement for a 'wider ecumenism' has begun, bringing together for dialogue leaders and scholars from all the world's religions. Theologians of all faiths are affirming the positive worth of other religions and are seeking to overcome the prejudice of an earlier time. It is now widely recognized that humanity's search for God, or for the Ultimate Reality, called by whatever name, is at the root of all religions....Thus the variety of religions would appear to be a testimony to the relativity of human beliefs rather than to the existence of the one Absolute Reality which stands behind all of them" (*World Scripture—A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, p. 1, International Religious Foundation, New York).

The effect of this book is to reduce God's existence and His inspired Word to the realm of human ideas and thoughts. The Holy Scriptures that God inspired to be

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written and preserved for humanity, have now been downgraded to the same level as the writings of demon-inspired men and their religions. Instead of upholding the Word of God as the one and only truth, the authors of *World Scripture* boast that there are many paths of truth that lead to the “Absolute Reality”: “The passages from diverse scriptures affirm that others who do not share the faith of that scripture are also following the way of Truth. Thus Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism understand the various gods to be expressions of a single Absolute Reality, and the various paths to lead to one Supreme God” (Ibid., p. 34).

Contrary to the claim that various paths are leading to the one Supreme God, the result of following the “diverse scriptures” of human wisdom is that people are being drawn away from the true God, Who sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to bring salvation to all nations.

Scholars Dismantle the Four Gospels

In concert with the ecumenical movement, the divine mission of Jesus Christ, as the Savior of mankind, has been discredited. The true Christ and Messiah, Who was God manifested in the flesh, has been relegated to the role of one among many religious prophets and teachers of wisdom. Two hundred scholars and fellows of the *Jesus Seminar* and *Westar Institute*, located in Santa Rosa, California, have been searching for the “historical Jesus.” They are downgrading the inspiration of the Scriptures, which clearly proclaim the divinity of Jesus Christ. To them, these writings are only the works of men, and Jesus was only a man. They are trying to find the historical Jesus by critically dissecting the four Gospels: “The scholarship of the Bible once belonged to the churches. It has now moved out into secular institutions and functions quite apart from, and in some respects in opposition to, the denominations. **The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar approach the Bible, the gospels in particular, as a cultural artifact** rather than as an ecclesiastical handbook. We are interested in assessing the import of the Bible, and of the pioneers and prophets who figure prominently in its story, for the society at large, rather than merely for the churches and their programs” (Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p. 297, emphasis added).

As stated by Robert W. Funk, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar view the Bible solely as a “cultural artifact”—not as the inspired Word of God. This view is particularly evident in their statements concerning the four Gospels, which they regard not as eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry, but as a collection of stories based on Old Testament prophecies and later Christian legends. The end result of this view is an outright rejection of major portions of the four Gospels, which they maintain were written at least forty to ninety years after Jesus’ ministry and death, and perhaps three hundred years later. They have systematically gone through the four Gospels and have decided by vote which passages to accept as authentic and which passages to reject as myth.

Through this process of voting, they have categorized 82-84% of the Gospel records as partial or complete fiction, and have accepted as authentic, or nearly authentic, only 16% of the events and 18% of the sayings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They expressed their opinions by voting with color codes:

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Red: The authentic acts or sayings of Jesus

Pink: A close approximation of what Jesus did or said

Gray: Stories that show minimal historical traces, or probably not what Jesus said

Black: Stories that are improbable events and sayings, or fictive creations of the writers

Based on this voting method, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar have concluded the following concerning the birth and childhood of Jesus: “Jesus was probably born in Nazareth, his hometown. **Later legends** that assign his birth to Bethlehem **were invented to satisfy an ancient prophecy.**

“**Jesus was not born of a virgin;** the Fellows doubt that Mary conceived Jesus without sexual intercourse. Jesus’ father was either Joseph or some unknown male who either seduced or raped the young Mary.

“The world census, the trip to Bethlehem, the star in the East, the astrologers, the flight to Egypt and return, the massacre of the babies, the shepherds in the fields, the kinship to John the Baptist are **all Christian fictions.**

“**The birth and childhood stories in Matthew and Luke were the last part of the gospel tradition to be created. They were not conceived, in all probability, until toward the close of the first century C.E.**” (Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 533, emphasis added.)

Because the fellows of the Jesus Seminar do not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, Who was sacrificed for the sins of the world, they adamantly reject the Gospel records of His divine begetting and birth by a virgin. They also reject every record that points to His Messiahship, as demonstrated by their evaluation of the Gospel of Mark: “Mark opens his gospel with the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness, the baptism of Jesus by John, and return of Jesus to Galilee where he began preaching. The Seminar colored all or most of these stories red. **The account of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness they colored gray: as reported, these stories are legendary, although they may reflect some actual experience of Jesus as he pondered his mission and prepared to enter public life.**

“The stories that form the turning point of Mark’s plot were **all colored black as projections of the convictions of early believers.** Those stories include Peter’s confession (Mark 8:27-30), Jesus’ predictions of his death (Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34), and the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8).

“**The stories that form the climax of the gospel narrative** [referring to the events before the crucifixion] **appear predominantly in black** [voted as not true] as well” (Ibid., p. 532, emphasis added).

To the fellows of the Jesus Seminar, Jesus was a Jew of dubious birth who rose to prominence as a religious figure in Judea at the beginning of the first century. Although they acknowledge His death by crucifixion, they reject the Gospel accounts of His betrayal, His judgment and His burial as religious myths, concocted in the imaginations of early Christians: “The Fellows believe that the temple incident, Jesus’ ar-

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rest, and his execution were all historical events. Something Jesus said or did against the temple became the occasion for his arrest. The disciples probably fled when Jesus was arrested. He was turned over to the high priest, who in turn handed him over to Pilate for judgment. Pilate probably condemned Jesus out of hand. **It is not just the content of the trial but the fact of a trial that lacks historical foundation. The Fellows concluded that most of the trial narrative was created [in the imagination of the storyteller] on the basis of Psalm 2.**

“Jesus was probably flogged in accordance with Roman practice and then crucified. However, **the narrative depiction of these events has been so heavily influenced by parallel events in the Jewish scriptures** and by prophetic texts, including the Psalms, **that we cannot extract hard information from them. As a consequence, most of the details are colored black** [classified as fiction].

“The assertion that the Romans were innocent of Jesus’ death and the Jews responsible is **pure Christian propaganda, in the judgment of the Seminar.**

“**The conspiracy against Jesus and the role of Judas, as well as Judas himself, are probably fictions.** The story of Peter’s denial is a fiction. **The two trials are fictions;** Luke has added a third trial before Herod, which is also a fiction. The mocking may be a fiction. Simon of Cyrene is a fiction. **The burial of Jesus is a fiction carried out by a fictional character, Joseph of Arimathea**” (Ibid., p. 532, emphasis added).

The fellows of the Jesus Seminar have labeled nearly every event recorded in the Gospels as fiction. After discrediting the crucifixion accounts, they proceed to pass judgment on the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is a summary of their conclusions concerning the resurrection of Jesus and His appearances afterwards, as recorded in the Gospels and the writings of Paul: “The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar designated red Paul’s claim that Jesus appeared to him, since Paul makes that claim on his own behalf. They colored the assertion pink that Jesus appeared to Simon Peter, since Paul’s report in 1 Corinthians is secondhand. **The other appearances listed in 1 Cor. 15:5-8 the Fellows voted gray or black.**

“**The empty tomb stories in all the gospels were colored black. The earlier strata of the gospels contain no appearance stories.** The actual resurrection of Jesus is depicted only in the Gospel of Peter [a Gnostic gospel], and as a fiction that report merited a black designation. **The tale of bribing the guard is likewise a fiction.**

“**The Fellows believe Mary of Magdala to have been among the early witnesses** [not an eyewitness, but a spokeswoman] **to the resurrection, although the stories in Matthew and John about the appearance to her are fictional.** In any case, Mary was considered a leader in the early movement alongside Peter and Paul.

“On the basis of a close analysis of all the resurrection reports, the Seminar decided that the resurrection of Jesus was not perceived initially to depend on what happened to his body. **The body of Jesus probably decayed as do all corpses.** The resurrection of Jesus was not an event that happened on the first Easter Sunday; it was not an event that could have been captured by a video camera.

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“The Seminar concluded that it does not seem necessary for Christians to believe the literal veracity of any of the later appearance narratives” (Ibid., p. 533, emphasis added).

Alleged Inconsistencies in the Gospels

The fellows of the Jesus Seminar cast further doubt on the veracity of the Gospel accounts by pointing to differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. They view these differences as evidence that the Gospel of John is historically inaccurate: “The first step is to understand the diminished role the Gospel of John plays in the search for the Jesus of history. **The two pictures painted by John and the synoptic gospels cannot both be historically accurate.** In the synoptic gospels, Jesus speaks in brief, pithy one-liners and couplets, and in parables. His witticisms are sometimes embedded in a short dialogue with disciples or opponents. In John, by contrast, Jesus speaks in lengthy discourses or monologues, or in elaborate dialogues prompted by some deed Jesus has performed...or by an ambiguous statement....”

“Such speeches as Jesus makes in Matthew, Mark and Luke are composed of aphorisms and parables strung together like beads on a string. In John, these speeches form coherent lectures on a specific theme, such as ‘light,’ Jesus as the way, the truth, the life, and the vine and the canes. **The parables, which are so characteristic of Jesus in the synoptic tradition, do not appear in John at all.**”

“The ethical teaching of Jesus in the first three gospels is replaced in John by lengthy reflections on Jesus’ self-affirmations in the form of ‘I AM’ sayings.

“In sum, there is virtually nothing of the synoptic sage in the Fourth Gospel. That sage has been displaced by Jesus the revealer who has been sent from God to reveal who the Father is.”

“The differences between the two portraits of Jesus show up in a dramatic way in the evaluation, by the Jesus Seminar, of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John. The Fellows of the Seminar were unable to find a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus. They did identify one saying that might have originated with Jesus, but this saying (John 4:44) has synoptic parallels. There were no parables to consider. **The words attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are the creation of the evangelist for the most part, and reflect the developed language of John’s Christian community”** (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: The Five Gospels*, p. 10, emphasis added).

The fellows of the Jesus Seminar believe that Jesus was only a wisdom teacher and traveling sage of His time, to Whom many sayings were attributed that were borrowed from earlier scriptures or stories of the day, and were never actually spoken by Him. The few sayings that they acknowledge as the “authentic words of Jesus” give such an incomplete picture that the Christ of the Gospels is virtually obliterated. Here is their conclusion: “In addition to these meager facts, we also have a compendium of teachings consisting of parables, aphorisms, and dialogues, together with a few dubious anecdotes featuring witticisms told about him by his first admirers. **The**

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authentic words of Jesus can be isolated, to a greater or lesser degree, from other words borrowed from the old scriptures or common lore and put on his lips and from words created by the evangelists under the poetic license exercised by storytellers the world over. The content of this body of authentic speech material tells a great deal about Jesus, but it does so indirectly.

“Meanwhile, **the scattered facts we can muster do not of themselves produce a Jesus who is the Christ of the Christian faith.** The authors of traditional Christian faith are Peter and Paul” (Ibid., pp. 533-534, emphasis added).

To these scholars, Christianity is of human origin only and is rooted in myths and legends, which were created or borrowed by Jesus’ admirers and written in the Gospels. They maintain that to interpret the Gospels in a literal manner does not fulfill the purpose for which they were written, and that their proper place is in the realm of mythology: “The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar are profoundly cognizant that human beings do not live by the bread of facts alone. We live by our stories—by our myths, which is only a fancy word for story—and the fictions are supposed to make sense out of a complex universe of meaning mixed with nonsense. Myths are not true or untrue; as one Fellow puts it, they are either living or dead. Literalism in biblical interpretation in tandem with scientism has helped **strangle the myths of the Christian tradition.** Historical criticism like that practiced by the Jesus Seminar is intended to **release the gospel stories from their literalistic burden.** Exposing them to historical assessment **relocates them in the realm of story and myth, so they can recover their proper function.** When we move them back within that perspective, perhaps new mythmakers and storytellers will once again find voice to celebrate the simple yet enduring story of Jesus of Nazareth” (Ibid., p. 534, emphasis added).

A New Version of the Gospels

After rejecting the entire Gospel of John, as well as most records in the synoptic Gospels, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar have taken upon themselves to produce their own version of the four Gospels together with a spurious gospel of Gnostic origin. Their book *The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: The Five Gospels*, presents the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in a new translation, color-coded according to their rating scheme for fact or fiction. They have taken a further ignominious step by placing the Gnostic gospel of Thomas alongside the four Gospels, making a total of five “gospels.” The gospel of Thomas, written in Coptic, was discovered in December 1945, along with thirteen other Gnostic codices, in Upper Egypt near the town of Nag Hammadi.

While they admit that the gospel of Thomas is rooted in Gnosticism, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar justify its addition to the four Gospels by claiming that it was one of the earlier Christian writings: “**The Gospel of Thomas reflects the outlook of the gnostic movement** in some respects. Jesus, for example, speaks as the redeemer come from God. He reminds his followers of their forgetfulness and tells them they are in need of enlightenment....

“Thomas is rooted in the Jewish wisdom tradition, such as we find in Psalms and Proverbs. It is a wisdom gospel made up of the teachings of a sage. But it is moving off in the direction of gnostic speculation such as we find in later gnostic documents.

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In these respects, **Thomas represents an early stage in Christian gospel writing** and theologizing, quite comparable to what we find in the New Testament, especially in Paul and the Gospel of John” (*The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: The Five Gospels*, p. 501, emphasis added).

Those who understand that the books of the New Testament in original Greek are the God-breathed words of God understand that Gnostic writings such as the gospel of Thomas have no place with the four Gospels. The true Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were canonized with the other books of the New Testament and have been proclaimed to the world in every generation for nearly 2,000 years. God inspired the apostles to write and canonize them, and He preserved them as part of His Word. He did not bury them in a graveyard in Upper Egypt to hide them from public knowledge. The so-called gospel of Thomas was buried for nearly 1600 years, while the four Gospels have been published around the world as a living witness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world.

When the apostle John was inspired to write the book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament that he canonized, he warned of the judgment that awaits those who presume to add to or take away from the words of God: “For I jointly [with the Lord Jesus Christ] testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, **that if anyone adds to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book** [the entire Bible]. **And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, and from the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book’** ” (Rev. 22:18-19).

In taking away from the true Gospels and exalting a spurious gospel, the scholars of the Jesus Seminar have showed open contempt for the Word of God. They have denied the salvation of God through Jesus Christ, which is revealed in the four Gospels. In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul declares that those who reject the salvation of God, and suppress the gospel of Christ, will reap His wrath: “For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ** because it is **the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes**—both to *the Jew* first, and to *the Greek*. For therein *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith unto faith, according as it is written: ‘The just shall live by faith.’ Indeed, **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**” (Rom. 1:16-18).

Suppressing the Gospel of Christ

Robert W. Funk and the fellows of the Jesus Seminar suppress the truth by claiming that the Jesus of the Gospels is a myth. They deny the divinity of Jesus Christ and His role as man’s Redeemer and Mediator before God. They view Christianity as an empty faith, built on stories and legends, which has outlived its meaning and usefulness in the modern world of science and technology: “In the global arena, the symbolic world that is ingredient to traditional Christianity no longer occupies a foundational position. As the economic and technological superiority of the West fades, **the symbols that attend the Christian myth will lose whatever appeal they once had**. Meanwhile, in the West, the old symbolic universe is on the decline....Those who cling to the old are having increasing difficulties in assigning meaning to such bibli-

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cal statements as ‘he ascended into heaven.’ Appeals to an endorsing God, to heaven and hell, to a divine redeemer, to Christ as the sole mediator between God and humankind, have begun to lose their bite and more frequently fall on unhearing ears.

“Since that symbolic world is crumbling or has crumbled, the times call for a wholly secular account of the Christian faith, not just for the sake of its appeal to the third world but primarily for the sake of those who inhabit the contemporary, scientifically minded Western world” (Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p. 298, emphasis added).

As part of his twenty-one theses, Robert W. Funk proposes a new religion that rejects the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the means for the atonement of sin: “We will have to abandon the doctrine of the blood atonement. The atonement in popular piety is based on mythology that is no longer credible—that God is appeased by blood sacrifices. Jesus never expressed the view that God was holding humanity hostage until someone paid the bill. Nor did Amos, Hosea, or other prophets of Israel. In addition, it is the linchpin that holds the divinity of Jesus, his virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, and a sinless life together in a unified but naïve package: God required a perfect sacrifice, so only a divine victim would do” (Ibid., p. 312, emphasis added).

It is clear that Robert W. Funk completely rejects Jesus Christ as divine Redeemer and Savior. He shows his ignorance of the New Testament scriptures by claiming that Jesus is not qualified to be his Redeemer: “A true savior incarnate—*incarnate* literally means embodied—a true savior embodied must submit to the same limitations imposed on the rest of us [Jesus did by becoming fully human (John 1:14, Heb. 2:14; 4:15)]. If Jesus of Nazareth is a savior, it is only because he aspired to heaven as all mortals do but was sage enough to reject the temptation and accept the limitations of his finite existence [a total denial of Jesus’ divinity (John 1:1; 17:5, 11)]. If he arrived via a miraculous birth, knew himself to be the messiah and son of God, and had foreknowledge that his death would be reversed in a few days, he is not qualified to function as my redeemer” (Ibid., p. 308, emphasis added).

Robert W. Funk and the fellows of the Jesus Seminar envision a Christianity that disavows the sacrifice of its Redeemer, the existence of its God, and the inspiration of its Scriptures. As Lloyd Geering, one fellow of the Jesus Seminar wrote, “For most of the post-Christian world, the Bible will no longer be regarded as the Word of God, but it will continue to be of value as an historical testimony to Judeo-Christian origins and as an essential resource for the understanding of past western culture. It will take its place alongside other great religious classics from the various cultures of the past. Jesus will no longer be hailed as the saviour of the world, or as a divine figure. He will stand among the great pioneering figures of the past, and his sayings and parables will continue to inspire those who take the trouble to search them out.

“God will no longer be conceived widely as an objective spiritual being—one who personally hears and answers prayers, and who guides human history from behind the scenes. God language, if used at all, will be treated as symbolic. Spiritual practices may take the form of meditation but will not be understood as conversation with an external personal being. Life in this world will be acknowledged as the

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only form of human existence. The expectation of conscious personal existence beyond death will gradually be abandoned” (*The World to Come: From Christian Past to Global Future*, p. 87, emphasis added).

The Proposed “Post-Christian” Religious System

The Christianity that Geering envisions will offer no promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Reduced to the level of all other religions of the world, it will function only as one choice among countless others for those who seek a belief system to guide their lives: “So what place does conventional Christianity have, in the post-Christian era we are now entering? It is no longer a community-held faith which shapes and motivates society. Instead, in its multiple forms, it is becoming **one set of personal options among numerous others**, including New Age religions and secular ideologies. Together they form **a vast religious supermarket** to which people may go when they are looking for a philosophy or way of life, and in which they are free to choose one tailored to their needs” (Ibid., pp. 86-87, emphasis added).

In this new global religious system that Lloyd Geering envisions, the worship of Mother Earth will replace the worship of God the Father and Jesus Christ: “Some steps towards acknowledging the sacred character of the earth have already been taken. We no longer restrict the concept of ‘sanctuary’ to the church building or temple but are giving it back to the earth, in bird sanctuaries, fish sanctuaries and so on. The eco-sphere itself is gradually being resanctified. **The loving care of Mother Earth is in many quarters replacing the former sense of obedience to the Heavenly Father.** In her book *The Body of God*, theologian Sallie McFague goes further, suggesting that the combined influence of post-modern science and Christian faith requires the construction of **a new model in which we see the universe as the body of God** [not “new” at all, but the ancient philosophy of pantheism]....we will recreate the appropriate festivals to celebrate the earth’s role in our lives. The new religious rituals will be based not only on our relationship to the natural world, they will also celebrate everything we have come to value in human existence...” (Ibid., p. 158, emphasis added).

The value in human existence lies in the fact that each one of us has been made in the image of God, for the ultimate purpose of sharing His glory and immortality. To deny the personal existence of the eternal, all-powerful Being Who created mankind, does not celebrate the value of human life but suppresses the knowledge of man’s awesome, God-given potential, and reduces human life to the level of animal life. In his summary of religion in the global era, Geering makes no mention of man’s relationship to His Creator, but focuses entirely on man’s relationship to the natural world and to the society of his own making: “What then will this new faith, the religion of the future, look like? It is far too early to tell, but some broad outlines can be seen. I suggest that being religious in the global era will be:

- to be devoted to maximizing the future for all living creatures whose destiny is increasingly in our hands;
- to place the needs of the coming global society before those of our own immediate family, tribe or nation;
- to develop a lifestyle consistent with preserving the balance of the planetary eco-system on which all living creatures depend;
- to refrain from all activities which endanger the future of all species;

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- to set a high value on the total cultural legacy we have received from the past and which enables us to develop our potential to become human;
- to value the importance of the human relationships which bind us together into social groups and which enable us to become fully human;
- to promote the virtues of love, goodwill and peacefulness” (Ibid., p. 159).

Geering’s description of the new religion of the global era is filled with idealistic thoughts, but the peace and goodwill that he envisions are not possible in a society that exalts the creation above the Creator, and rejects the knowledge that is revealed in His Word. The apostle Paul condemns this misguided worship of the natural world: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested *it* to them; for the invisible things of Him are perceived from *the* creation of *the* world, being understood by the things that were made—both His eternal power and Godhead—so that **they are without excuse; because when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but they became vain in their own reasonings, and their foolish hearts were darkened. While professing themselves to be *the* wise ones, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into *the* likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed creatures, and creeping things.** For this cause, God also abandoned them to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to disgrace their own bodies between themselves, **who exchanged the truth of God for the lie; and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the one Who is Creator, Who is blessed into the ages. Amen”** (Rom. 1:19-25).

Rejecting the worship of Jesus Christ and God the Father will not lead to utopia. Instead it will lead to the greatest deception ever to befall mankind. The focus of religion is being shifted from the spiritual realm to the natural world, from the divine to the physical, to prepare the world for the coming of a human messiah who will arise from among the nations. The New Testament reveals that this messiah will be heralded by a great false prophet, who will perform supernatural signs through the power of Satan the devil. These signs and wonders will deceive all nations into accepting the false messiah and worshipping him as God.

Warnings in the New Testament of the Coming Apostate World Religion

The foundation of this worldwide deception was already being laid in the days of the apostles. In writing to the believers at Thessalonica, the apostle Paul warned of the “**mystery of lawlessness,**” which was beginning to infiltrate the churches of God and draw believers away from the true faith. Paul’s words to the Thessalonians show that Satan was the unseen power behind this insidious movement to corrupt the churches of God. Paul made it clear that this system would continue until the end times, when it would rise to great power. Here is Paul’s warning: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present. **Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day will not come unless the apostasy* [led by the false prophet (Rev. 13:11-18, 16:13 and 19:20)] **shall come first, and the man of sin** [the antichrist Beast—the coming world dictator (Rev. 13:1-10, 16:13, 19:20)] **shall be revealed—the son of perdition, the one who****

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opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God.

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you understand what is holding *him* back **in order for him to be revealed in his own set time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only *there* is one [Jesus Christ] Who is restraining at the present *time* until it arises out of *the* midst. And then the lawless one will be revealed (whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy with the brightness of His coming); *even* the one whose coming is according to *the* inner workings of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe *the* lie; so that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but who took pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thes. 2:1-12).**

The developing global religious/political system will be used by Satan to deceive the entire world (Rev. 12:9). The underlying philosophy of this religious system is clearly outlined in the *World Scriptures*, which holds the beliefs and writings of all religions of the world to be equal with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus Christ stand in stark contrast to the proclamations of men who claim that there are “various paths to lead to one Supreme God.” Jesus Christ declared to His disciples that He is the ONLY WAY to God the Father, the Supreme Sovereign of the universe: “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me**” (John 14:6).

The Only Way to Eternal Life Is Through Jesus Christ

The scriptures of the New Testament make it clear that there is only one way that leads to eternal life, and that way is through Jesus Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples that false prophets would deceive many into following a false way that leads to death: “**Enter in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many [the majority] are those who enter through it; for narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it. But beware of false prophets [whether religious or secular] who come to you in sheep’s clothing; for within they are ravening wolves.** You shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:13-16).

No religious leader, no prophet, no teacher, no philosopher, can substitute for Jesus Christ, and no so-called “sacred writing” or “religious myths” can replace the God-breathed Word of God. The Old Testament and the New Testament testify, to all who will hear, that salvation through Jesus Christ was planned before the creation of the world. HE ALONE IS “THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.” Jesus came to earth as the only begotten Son of God. Before He came in the flesh, He was the Lord God of the Old Testament. The apostle John makes this truth absolutely clear: “**In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him.

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In Him was life, and the life was the light of men....**And the Word became flesh,** and tabernacled among us (and we ourselves beheld His glory, *the* glory as of *the only begotten with the Father*), full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-4, 14).

None of the other religions have a Savior comparable to Jesus Christ. They have all been founded by prophets and teachers whose writings are believed to enlighten, but they do not have a Savior Who is the Creator God. Jesus Christ was the only spiritual leader Who was God manifested in the flesh. The apostle Paul fully understood this: “And undeniably, great is the mystery of godliness: **‘God was manifested in the flesh,** was justified in *the* Spirit, was seen by angels, was proclaimed among *the* Gentiles, was believed on in *the* world, **was received up in glory’** ” (I Tim. 3:16). As God in the flesh, Jesus Christ laid down His life to become the Savior of the world. At His resurrection, He was restored to His former glory and ascended to the throne of God the Father. Since that time, He has been fulfilling His work of redemption by purifying each true believer from sin, preparing a people to live forever with Him when He returns in glory. The words of the apostle Paul to Titus describe the work of Jesus Christ as God and Savior: “Looking for the blessed hope, and ***the appearing of the glory of our Savior and great God, Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, so that He might redeem us from all lawlessness,*** and might purify for Himself a unique people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13-14).

All prophets or teachers who claim that there is another savior, or another way to eternal life, are frauds. God never sent them. Jesus Christ made it clear that all others who present themselves as “saviors” are thieves and robbers. He alone laid down His life as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. There is no forgiveness or salvation through any other man or by any other way: “Therefore, Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life, and may have *it* more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep....I am the good Shepherd, and I know those who *are* Mine, and am known of those who *are* Mine. Just as the Father knows Me, I also know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring those also, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock *and* one Shepherd. On account of this, the Father loves Me: because **I lay down My life, that I may receive it back again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down and authority to receive it back again.** This commandment I received from My Father’ ” (John 10:7-11, 14-18).

In his epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul makes it clear that, as the Son of God, Jesus Christ is not only greater than any man, but He is also greater than any of the angels. Before He became flesh, He shared the same glory and power as God the Father, but left His glory in order to bring redemption and salvation to mankind. Now He again shares the power and glory of the Father: “God, Who spoke to the fathers at different times in the past and in many ways by the prophets, has spoken to us in these last days by *His* Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; **Who, being *the* brightness of *His* glory and *the* exact image of *His* person, and upholding all things by the word of *His* own power, when**

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He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at *the* right hand of the Majesty on high; having been made so much greater than *any of the angels*, inasmuch as He has inherited a name exceedingly superior to them. For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son; this day I have begotten You’? And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him, and He will be a Son to Me’? And again, when He brought the Firstborn into the world, He said, ‘Let all *the* angels of God worship Him’ ” (Heb. 1:1-6).

Forgiveness of Sin Comes Only Through Jesus Christ

The words of the apostle Peter to the religious leaders of the Jews make it absolutely clear that salvation from sin and the gift of eternal life come only through the name of Jesus Christ. After Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth, they were arrested and brought before the chief priests and Pharisees, who demanded to know by what name or what means the lame man had been healed. “Then Peter, filled with *the* Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we are examined this day as to a good work *done to the* infirm man, by what *power* he has been cured, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, Whom you crucified, *but* Whom God has raised from *the* dead, by Him this *man* stands before you whole. This is the Stone that was set at naught by you, the builders, which has become the Head of *the* corner. **And there is no salvation in any other, for neither is there another name under heaven which has been given among men, by which we must be saved’ ”** (Acts 4:8-12).

The only way to receive forgiveness of sin and salvation is through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Jesus Christ came for the purpose of bringing repentance and remission of sins to light. The apostles answered the religious authorities after they were arrested a second time the following: “And they brought them in *and* set *them* before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not order you by a *direct* command not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, with *the* purpose of bringing this man’s blood upon us.’ But Peter and the apostles answered *and* said, ‘**We are obligated to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you killed by hanging *Him* on a tree. Him has God exalted by His right hand *to be* a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel’ ”** (Acts 5:27-31).

No other religion has a Savior Who gave up His immortal existence as God and took on human flesh in order to die for the sins of mankind. As the Creator God, He emptied Himself of His power and glory and submitted to the shame and brutality of death by crucifixion: “...Christ Jesus, **Who, although He existed in *the* form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, *and* was made in *the* likeness of men, *and* took the form of a servant; and being found in *the* manner of man, He humbled Himself, *and* became obedient unto death, even *the* death of *the* cross.** Therefore, God has also highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name which *is* above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord to *the* glory of God *the* Father” (Phil. 2:5-11).

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The Lordship of Jesus Christ and the salvation of God through His name, has no equal in heaven or on earth. The apostle Paul makes this absolutely clear: “In Whom we have redemption through His own blood, *even* the remission of sins; Who is *the* image of the invisible God, *the* firstborn of all creation; because by Him were all things created, the things in heaven and the things on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. **And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is *the* beginning, *the* firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things He Himself might hold the preeminence.** For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, **and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things to Himself; by Him, whether the things on the earth, or the things in heaven**” (Col. 1:14-20).

Forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God the Father cannot be granted by any religious leader on earth. That is the work of Jesus Christ Himself, Who alone became the sin offering for the world: “For He [God the Father] made Him Who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, so that we might become *the* righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21).

The forgiveness of sins is granted through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to all who truly repent and confess their sins to God the Father. The apostle John shows the way: “If we confess our own sins [to God the Father through Jesus Christ], He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **And yet, if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ *the* Righteous; and He is *the* propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of the whole world***” (I John 1:9-10, 2:1-2).

Forgiveness of sin is imparted, by the grace of God, through the blood of Jesus Christ which is able to cover all sins. No good work, acts of penitence, or prayers to so-called saints, can substitute for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which alone brings remission of sins. All the religious practices and traditions of men are worthless. These works cannot obtain forgiveness or salvation: “Now you were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you walked in times past according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working within the children of disobedience; among whom also we all once had our conduct in the lusts of our flesh, doing the things willed by the flesh and by the mind, and were by nature *the* children of wrath, even as the rest *of the world*. **But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in *our* trespasses, has made *us* alive together with Christ....For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *the* good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them” (Eph. 2:1-10).

The whole purpose of Jesus Christ’s coming in the flesh was to sacrifice His life for the sins of the world, in order that all who believe in Him may receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. The apostle John was inspired to write, “For God so

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loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This third edition has been published to bring the life of the true Jesus Christ of the Gospels into clear focus, and to provide you with a fuller understanding of what God has done for the world and for you personally. The most profound event in the history of the universe and the world was the coming of Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things, to this earth as a human being. God actually came to the earth and became flesh and blood. Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection have had a massive impact on humanity, even altering the course of history. Whether people have understood or believed this does not take away from the meaning and magnitude of the life of Jesus Christ.

Millions of people in the Western world profess to believe in Jesus Christ, but only a very few truly know Him. This perplexing dilemma has occurred because the real meaning and purpose of Jesus’ life has been misunderstood, obscured and darkened by the very ones who teach Christianity. The simple truths of Scripture have been glossed over and misinterpreted, and doctrinal facts have been presented as fallacies. In addition, religious traditions of men have been superimposed upon the Scriptural record of Jesus’ life. These traditions have taken away from the actual eyewitness accounts that are preserved in the four Gospels.

Many theologians and scholars have no understanding of the historical facts that were recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and have interpreted the Gospel accounts to fit their own traditional beliefs or to reject the true Gospel accounts. As a result, the Gospels as historical documents have been discounted and rejected as unreliable and contradictory. Some erroneously teach that the Gospels were not put into written form for nearly three hundred years after Christ, and therefore have little or no historical value and must be rejected as myth. However, when we examine secular histories of the time of Christ, we find that the opposite is true. Other contemporary histories verify that the Gospels contain accurate historical records (see Appendix A). Moreover, the writings of the apostle Paul show that the teachings of Jesus Christ were written down from the very beginning (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 6:1-4, II Tim. 3:15, Gal. 3:1).

The Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel to be written and published. There is evidence that Matthew’s words were being circulated among the believers in the early months of the New Testament church, with the complete book already available only five years after Jesus Christ’s resurrection. Later, but during the lifetimes of the apostles, the other Gospels were compiled and published. Mark’s Gospel was written between 38 and 44 AD. Luke wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts before Paul died. In beginning his Gospel account, Luke states that many accounts of the teachings of Jesus Christ had already been written: “Since many have taken in hand to compile a *written* narration of the matters which have been fully believed among us, as they delivered *them* to us, those who from *the* beginning had been eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having accurately understood everything from the very first, to write *these things* in an orderly sequence to you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the *absolute* certainty of *the* things in which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

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In his account of Jesus Christ's birth and the beginning of His ministry, Luke includes some specific historical events. These records, when compared with secular history and the calculations of the Hebrew Calendar, confirm that the Gospels are historically accurate. Three of the Gospel writers were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ's ministry, and the fourth one, Luke, had read their firsthand accounts, which he used to write his Gospel, under the tutelage of the apostle Paul.

The three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke vary in the details that are included in their respective accounts, but these variations do not indicate a lack of accuracy or consistency. However, when they are properly understood, these additional details help to clarify the facts. The Gospel of John, which was the last to be written, does not contain the same details that are found in the synoptic Gospels. John was well acquainted with the other three Gospel accounts, but God did not inspire him to follow the same pattern in writing his Gospel. Instead, John based his Gospel on the framework of the Hebrew Calendar. The details that John recorded are not included in the other Gospels. As a result, the Gospel of John adds significantly to our understanding of the events at Jesus' last Passover, and enables us to place His burial and resurrection in their actual historical context.

While the world is searching for the historical Jesus outside the writings of the Bible, the most accurate historical record of the life of Jesus Christ has been preserved in the Gospels. This is the source that God has inspired to be written and preserved for us. The Word of God has withstood the test of time and the determined attacks of disbelievers.

In our time, as never before, the forces of evil are working together in a final attempt to destroy all knowledge of the true Jesus Christ. As the world moves headlong toward globalization in business and commerce, a New World Order in government, and a polytheistic world religion, a full understanding of the life of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential. Our personal salvation depends on understanding and living by the true Jesus Christ, Who is the only Redeemer and Savior of mankind. Without this precious knowledge from the Word of God, we may be deceived into believing the lie that will soon engulf the whole world.

The third edition of *A Harmony of the Gospels in Modern English—The Life of Jesus Christ* has been published to make the Scriptural truth of Jesus' life known. The simple facts contained in the four Gospels, when understood in their Scriptural and historical time setting, reveal the dynamic and awesome meaning and purpose of Jesus' life. As you read and study this book, it is the author's hope that you will find truth more gratifying and rewarding than tradition or myth. Remember that the Gospel accounts were written that you may believe and have eternal life: "But these have been written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life through His name" (John 20:31).

Fred R. Coulter