

FaithSearch International exists to extend the Gospel with evidence to all peoples everywhere. *FaithSearch* International is not denominationally affiliated.

Becoming All Things, Part 3

By Adrian VanVactor,
FaithSearch Evangelist

Jesus: Magician or Messiah?

I often heard the following from my mentor, illusionist **André Kole**.

Imagine Jesus and His disciples walking through the dusty streets of Galilee with five tractor trailers following behind them. That is what it would have taken for Jesus to have done the sort of things He did, if he were mere first century magician.



I had the privilege of touring as part of André Kole's eight-member evangelism team. I performed as a guest-star, tech director, stage manager, and solo missionary during my years on staff. Every night we shuffled **five tons of equipment** in and out of auditoriums to accomplish the many magical inventions from the mind of André Kole.

André was also a top consultant for some of the world's greatest illusionists. For decades, André collaborated with David Copperfield on his television specials. Nearly half of the grand illusions in Copperfield's live touring show were André Kole inventions. André was also the mind behind the famed illusion of making the **Statue of Liberty disappear**.

Each night, I was behind the scenes as we made a fourteen-foot replica of the Statue of Liberty disappear... in slow motion... from the bottom up! When I joined the team, I was challenged to review Jesus' miracles, to imagine how I might re-create the miracles, limiting myself to first century technology. With each theory, André would put it to the test. Each time I

continued on page 2

Volume 4, Issue 2

April 2021

FAITH – Threatening Extinction, Part 2

By Dr. Don Bierle, *FaithSearch* President

Was Jesus serious when He asked the question, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b). In what way can we imagine the possible extinction of faith?

In part one, I wrote that the primary distinction of Christianity from other religions is its faith **object**. The danger is that people tend to focus on their faith, *per se*, rather than the object of their faith, Jesus Christ. When they do that, faith equals "feelings," something other religions have as well. That kind of "faith" may just as well become extinct because it is worthless (1 Corinthians 15:14,17).

conviction is that for someone to have "faith" requires someone to tell them about an object in which to believe. You cannot have Jesus as the object of your faith if you have never heard of Him!

On one occasion Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes... shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes... shall never die. Do you believe...?*" (John 11:25-26). By my **adding** the three ellipses, I hid something essential which Jesus was teaching about faith. The actual passage has "**in Me**" instead of

continued on page 2

FOR REFLECTION

Pray for our Nation's Leaders

God's Truth: "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7).

"Whenever a nation's laws no longer reflect the standards of God, that nation is in rebellion against Him and will inevitably bear the consequences," said Rep. Greg Steube, R-Fla., quoting from *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* on February 25, while speaking on the House floor in opposition to the Equality Act, which would make it illegal to discriminate against homosexual and transgender individuals.

Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., replied: "What any religious tradition ascribes as God's will is no concern of this Congress."

The House voted 224-206 in favor of the bill.

Source: *World Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 6, 03.27.21, Quotables, p. 17.



Headed for a fall? No amount of faith, no matter how sincerely held or strongly defended, can stand if its object is either not there or is unworthy of that faith, such as this rickety old, or perhaps not even there, park bench.

The Case for an "Object" to Faith

We believe in "**something**." When we fail to identify what that "something" is, we are guilty of faith in "**nothing**;" that is, "faith in faith itself." That is when faith threatens to become extinct because it has no efficacy. The apostle Paul asked the question, "...how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher" (Romans 10:14). Paul's

FAITH – Threatening Extinction

continued from page 1

the ellipses; that is, “believes **in Me**”; “believe **in Me**”; and “believe **this**” – adding the **essential object** in each case. You are not saved **by** “faith,” (i.e. by merely having faith); you are rather saved **by the object of your faith** – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Saving faith is a trusting commitment of one’s mind, actions, and destiny to the **efficacy of Jesus Christ alone** [not sincerity, feelings of assurance, works, or personal sacrifice]. Only Jesus has the power to produce the effect promised, not “faith” itself (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Is this splitting hairs? Yes, and it is necessary for understanding the next section.

Faith Is Only as Valid as Its Object

Are these faiths all equally valid?

- *Allah is god because I have faith in him.*
- *Vishnu is god because I have faith in him.*
- *Brahman is god because I have faith in him.*
- *Jesus is god because I have faith in him.*

Compared to Christians, believers in Allah, Vishnu, and Brahman may be just as sincere, do just as many good works, and personally sacrifice as much. But remember: “faith” does not save; good works do not save; sincerity does not save. Only the object can save!

The essential difference between the four “faiths” above is their object. How is Jesus distinguished from the others? In several ways but very important for faith is that only Jesus has been validated by eyewitness historical evidence. As the apostle John wrote, “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory...*” (John 1:14). The other objects are invisible, intangible, and eternally elusive. How do they differ from an imaginary god or even from no god at all?

Furthermore, “*all have sinned*” (Romans 3:23) and “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). To save, every religion must provide their answer to the universal sin and death problem of humanity. All but Christianity say each person must **achieve holiness** by their own efforts. The Psalmist says this is impossible: “*No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever and not see decay*” (49:7-9, NIV).

Jesus, without sin Himself (1 Peter 2:22) in actual history about 2,000 years ago and before many eye-witnesses, died a substitutionary death on the cross in Jerusalem for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and redeemed us from death (John 5:24; Romans 8:1-2) by the power of His resurrection (John 11:25-26). Instead of attempting to rid ourselves of sin and death by achievements of good works (a lost cause!), Christians are forgiven and gifted eternal life as an act of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 26:18).

Christian faith can be shown to be valid because its object, Jesus Christ, can be demonstrated by evidence of every kind to be authentic and certain. Therefore, we do as the Scriptures encourage, “*...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...*” (Hebrews 12:2). This is the faith which will survive without extinction.

What Can I Anticipate from Christian Faith?

In the third and final part of this series on faith, I will explore its life changing dimensions. As the adage states, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” Watch for your next issue of the *Paraclete*. 

Becoming All Things

continued from page 1

failed. **This two-year study affirmed my faith in Jesus as the Messiah.**

In the last *Paraclete* I wrote how I, as an illusionist, could debunk most if not all modern-day claims of the “supernatural.” When I put Jesus to those same tests, I found that He could *not* have been a magician and perform the miracles He did. **No mere magician could.** André Kole and I were not alone in this conclusion. In my section of the book *Unmasking the Masquerade*, I quote David Copperfield, who said during a television broadcast:

The miracles of the Bible go beyond anything that any magician or illusionist would ever perform... but greater than any physical miracle was the ability of a man named Jesus to bring purpose and meaning to the lives of millions of people throughout the centuries. 



IN THE NEWS

What God Does Not Want You to Do at Home (or anywhere)!

God’s Truth: “*For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made... your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*” (Psalm 139:13-16).



“The genie’s out of the bottle,” says Elisa Wells, co-founder of pro-abortion Website Plan C. She was referring to mifepristone, an abortifacient that began being distributed by mail in December, 2020, for at-home abortions. Fifteen states are already participating in a Gynuity Health Projects clinical study which allows women legally to sidestep FDA restrictions and obtain the abortion pill by telemedicine. Digital abortion facilities have opened in New York, California, and Minnesota, with many more to follow if the Biden administration scraps the current in-person distribution requirements. This is yet another harmful consequence of the pandemic. For now, the states are still allowed to regulate the digital distribution of mifepristone. We pray that God’s truth will inspire some state legislators to “stand in the gap” with a **sanctity of life conviction**. 

Source: *World Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 02.27.21, “Unbottling the Pill,” Leah Hickman, pp. 11-12.

The **FaithSearch** Paraclete is published by **FaithSearch** International, an interdenominational, donor-supported, 501(c)(3) organization, based in Edina, MN, USA.

FaithSearch is a member in good standing of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

