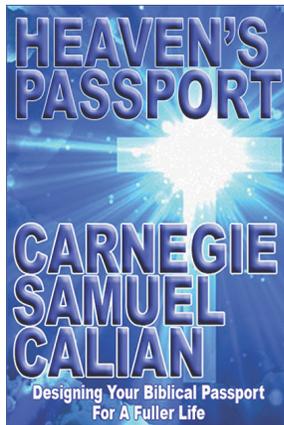


HEAVEN'S PASSPORT For a Fuller Life on Earth by Rev. Dr. Carnegie Samuel Calian

By **Rev. Vartkes M. Kassouni, D.Min.**



Rev. Dr. Carnegie Samuel Calian is a pastor/theologian/educator who has written 13 books on subjects ranging from theology, pastoral training, personal life and critical issues facing us and our churches today. He is President Emeritus of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PCUSA). With a keen mind and passionate heart fired by deep faith in Jesus Christ, this prolific author has much to offer his readers by way of his latest book.

The title of the book is intriguing in that the word PASSPORT, in relation to HEAVEN, has been used by other authors referring to how one gets to Heaven from Earth. Rev. Dr. Calian's book takes us in the opposite direction, from Heaven to Earth. (Designing Your Biblical Passport For A Fuller Life, as he says it in the subtitle). In other words, how faith can equip us to tackle life's challenges and issues. "I have tried to model the central elements for a faith-centered way of engaging with friends, neighbors, strangers and even adversaries" (page 12). Drawing from his vast experiences as a minister and educator and deep knowledge of the Bible, the author seeks to draw believer and unbeliever into mutual study, dialog and action. It is an ambitious endeavor taking the readers, not only into private discussions and study, but calling on world powers and religions in his quest for interfaith and international engagement in the interest of peace and cooperation.

In a series of broad exhortations arranged in seven Parts, and 24 Chapters, the author motivates the readers to: 1. START YOUR DAY RIGHT; 2. TREAT INDIVIDUALS AS SACRED; 3. BE GENEROUS; 4. PRACTICE MODERATION; 5. DISCLOSE MISTAKES; 6. SPEAK BRIEFLY, ACT WISELY; 7. DON'T QUIT ON GOD, OTHERS, OR YOURSELF. The Afterword contains a reprint of an article from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette newspaper which is a sampler of this book. Three Appendices include a Bible Quiz; Addressing Biblical Illiteracy today; Calling for an Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialog as sorely needed; and Rethinking Seminary Education.

The author's thoughts are wide-ranging and cover tremendous territory all the way from personal life and inter-personal relations, to world religions, national and international issues, centering in the quest for inner peace and international harmony. His style of writing is essentially Socratic— asking questions consistently, and often rhetorically. His objective is for groups of people, in churches, neighborhoods, or wherever possible, to use this book as a study guide, with the intent of drawing people together and discovering their commonalities in the process. Hence, his desire is for readers to answer these questions and in the process create

their own solutions, rather than being told what the author thinks. To enable this process to succeed, he has several questions attached to the chapters, and a bibliography including an abundance of books on all related subjects.

The organizing principle or thesis of this book is his focus on the biblical affirmation of "the image of God," or the "imago Dei," which all humanity bears because we are God's creation. Consequently, all people are to be considered sacred. "Unfortunately, too many humans around the world are feeling less human today" the author acknowledges. Hence, the dilemma faced by us all who agree with him and support the promotion of efforts toward inner peace, and inter-communal and international dialog in this regard. "Otherwise, what hope have we for lasting peace or justice as a global community?" Biblical theology, from a classical viewpoint, stresses the disfigurement or marring of the imago Dei by human sin, called "original sin" going back to the fall of Adam. The author stresses the message of Jesus, and the teachings of the Apostles, with ample references to the Gospels and the Epistles, to "renew this relationship that has been tarnished for so long in our underlying histories and conflicted assumptions of human nature. The outreach of Jesus as God's son promotes an inclusive and harmonious spirit that affirms the imago Dei (God's image) manifested in our diverse cultures and contrasting lifestyles, but we have been unwilling to overcome these walls separating us."

The author then lays out for the readers a comprehensive process of individual and group Bible Study, readings in an amazing list of relevant books and audio-visuals by classical as well as contemporary authors. This "essential distrust leads humankind in deadly pathways that defy the divine grace and mercy of our Creator-God." In so many words, Calian says, "Enough is enough, let's all get to work on this dilemma before it gets to be too late for humanity!" Amen to that!

Several times, acknowledging that action is required, he suggests rhetorically, for his readers to pursue two strategies.

First, a national effort, led by Congress, to bring together American citizens of various political, racial and social persuasions "by forming a politically balanced Commission of Citizens to examine our nation's pledge and motto (In God We Trust) wherever our flag is on display, calling for affirmation." This would test our seriousness "about wanting America to be great without expecting similar ethical standards of quality-greatness throughout our global society, if peace and justice are to have meaning in our inter-connected and interdependent post-pandemic world." One is consequently led to ask how such an effort on a national scale can develop beyond individuals and groups reading this book.

Second, a Global Center for Religious Understanding and Cooperation is proposed. Acknowledging that there have been past efforts in this regard that have been insufficient, and in the light of new and pressing global challenges, he mentions noteworthy efforts already going on in this regard that need to be emulated and increased in number and effort. He envisions this Center to include courses and research projects drawing colleges, universities, divinity schools and seminaries into creative partnerships with common interests in a changing world. That is quite an undertaking indeed! One wonders how the noble efforts that have gone into the formation of the United Nations, World Council of Churches and other similar enterprises factor into our studies in this regard.

Throughout this book Rev. Dr. Calian illustrates his points with experiences he and his wife Doris have had in their travels worldwide. These are fascinating episodes containing much by way of encouragement and enlightenment for his readers. All in all, HEAVEN'S PASSPORT succeeds in stirring our faith and imagination in the interest of what Jesus called "The abundant life." It also stretches us to look far beyond ourselves to the realization of global peace and harmony among people of different religious and national identity. Here we have a vast expansion of our understanding of what our life and mission, as disciples of Christ, could mean today.