Creating Straw Men from Cognitive Dissonance

This article will address two separate yet sometimes related phenomena witnessed in various online exchanges (and elsewhere), namely the straw man fallacy and cognitive dissonance. I’ll explain them one at a time, and then I shall illustrate how the two are at times combined.

**Straw Man Fallacy**

A straw man fallacy arises out of a presupposition, a misunderstanding, and/or an intentional mischaracterization, leading to a distortion of another person’s actual viewpoint or proposition. There are four parts, though sometimes 2, 3 and/or 4 may be grouped together in the conversational exchange:

1. **Person A holds to or voices position or proposition X**
2. **Person B distorts A’s stance (intentional or not) as Y instead**
3. **Person B argues against distorted position Y**
4. **Therefore, B concludes that A’s position X must be flawed – a fallacy**

Person B’s argument is fallacious because person B is attacking the wrong position (Y instead of X). Person B never really engaged with person A’s actual position. This would be akin to burning a competitor’s mascot in effigy thinking that you actually destroyed the competition in reality.

Here’s an example:

Weather permitting, George golfs with his buddies about two to four times a month. Jane, his wife, suggests George cut his golf outings down to one or two a month as a cost-cutting measure. In response, George says angrily, “You just don’t like me going out with the guys!”

Jane is person A with proposition X, exemplifying part 1 above. George is person B, with his response illustrating position Y, a distorted version of X (Jane’s proposition), and exemplifying parts 2 – 4 in his one-sentence reply (Y is Jane’s supposed ‘real’ position, therefore X=Y). Observe that Jane has said nothing about whether she likes or dislikes George going out with the guys. Jane’s suggestion is merely about reducing George’s golf outings in order to cut expenses. For George to claim that Jane is opposed to him going out with the guys is presumptuous, resulting in his new, distorted position Y.

The words “never”, “none”, “always”, “forever”, “every”, and “all” are many times indicative of a straw man. Here’s one from this site:

Bill and Jill are arguing about cleaning out their closets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bill (A): “We should clean out the closets. They are getting a bit messy.” (X1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill (B): “We just went through those closets last year. Do we have to clean them out every day?” (Y1, also B’s X2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill: “I never said anything about cleaning them out every day. You just want to keep all your junk forever, which is just ridiculous.” (Y2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bill’s response to Jill is an obvious mischaracterization (“every day”) of Jill’s initial suggestion; and Jill’s response to Bill is just as distorted (“You just want to keep your junk forever...”). Bill’s calling Bill’s stuff “junk” is an overt exaggeration. This exchange illustrates how a straw man can degenerate into even more distortions, and is an impediment to effective discourse.

**Cognitive Dissonance**

Cognitive Dissonance, which could be called “thought disharmony”, is that uncomfortable feeling when holding two contradictory thoughts simultaneously. This comes about when something you’ve known to be true is contradicted, or
It could occur in something like the following:

Fred, a man you've known for a long time and had been a friend of the family for the past dozen years or so, is one of the most honest persons you've ever encountered. He has demonstrated both his love for others and his integrity on many occasions. Yet Fred has very recently been arrested for a bank robbery, with seemingly irrefutably strong corroborating evidence – to include eyewitness testimony from Ricky and Lucy, who, though a bit eccentric, you know and trust. It's also discovered that Fred has racked up large gambling debts and the robbery was apparently done in an attempt to pay these off.

You are now encountering cognitive dissonance. You may think to yourself, “I knew there was something about Fred, but I couldn’t put my finger on it,” thus giving yourself an ‘out’ for not feeling totally betrayed and/or for thinking of yourself as a bad judge of character. You ARE a good judge of character, aren’t you? You may ask yourself, “Why did I not see this sooner?” You tentatively conclude, “Fred was just really good about hiding this; he’s sociopathic!”

Alternatively, you could choose to disbelieve the evidence, including the eyewitnesses. “There’s some sort of conspiracy against Fred”, you think. “I’ve never been too sure about Ricky and Lucy, ya know, maybe they’re in on it; that Lucy especially is rather odd at times.” Or, you could seek to minimize Fred’s actions, “He probably gambled to help someone else out of financial trouble and was somehow forced into the robbery by thugs trying to collect his gambling debts.”

The key thing to understand is that we all encounter cognitive dissonance at times in our lives, and that we all will use some sort of measure, or measures, to come to consonance again. We want thought harmony, not disharmony. We will also avoid situations, events, or information that could increase the dissonance.

From this link: There are three key strategies to reduce or minimize cognitive dissonance:

- Focus on more supportive beliefs that outweigh the dissonant belief or behavior
- Reduce the importance of the conflicting belief
- Change the conflicting belief so that it is consistent with other beliefs or behaviors

Here’s another example from the above link:

The person who continues to smoke, knowing that it is bad for his health, may also feel (a) he enjoys smoking so much it is worth it; (b) the chances of his health suffering are not as serious as some would make out; (c) he can’t always avoid every possible dangerous contingency and still live; and (d) perhaps even if he stopped smoking he would put on weight which is equally bad for his health. So, continuing to smoke is, after all, consistent with his ideas about smoking. (Leon Festinger A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1957)

Creating Straw Men Fallacies from Cognitive Dissonance

Now we’ll illustrate how these two phenomena can appear together. If a person encounters cognitive dissonance centering on a statement about a person or subject important to them (X), they may distort, intentionally or not, the statement put forth about this person or subject, thus creating a straw man (Y). Then, the straw man (Y) is attacked, centering on a statement about a person or subject important to them (X), they may distort, intentionally or not, the resulting in the straw man fallacy (X=Y, therefore X is false). Thus, this straw man fallacy is actually the result of an attempt to alleviate initial cognitive dissonance. In such a case, the straw man fallacy is the means by which the individual achieves consonance, or thought harmony, once again.

Using the quote above about the smoker, with X = smoking is bad for your health: The smoker reduces his dissonance by minimizing the effects of smoking (Y) and/or making cigarette smoking the equal of other ‘evils’ he’ll likely encounter (Y), so he might as well just continue smoking (X=Y). Rather than quitting smoking he’s altered his thinking, making the habit of smoking “consistent with his ideas about smoking”. Thus he’s achieved consonance.

Here’s another example:

N. U. Cantu (any resemblance to an individual about whom I’ve previously written on CrossWise is purely intentional) is a very charismatic individual – charismatic in the sense of friendly, likeable. Cantu teaches that the earthly Jesus was a mere man devoid of divinity, performing all his miraculous wonders after receiving the “Christ anointing” immediately following His baptism by John. In addition, this “Christ anointing” is what provided Jesus the “title” of Christ, for without this “Christ anointing” there could be no title. Moreover, Jesus is our model in this regard, according to N. U. Cantu; so, Jesus did it, and you can too! All you need is this same “Christ anointing”. In fact, with this “Christ anointing” you’ll do even greater miracles than Jesus!
An N. U. Cantu admirer, person B, reads position X, experiencing cognitive dissonance. Cantu really seems like a nice, sincere guy, and B is absolutely ‘SURE’ the case (X) is considerably overstated. Yet B never actually investigates the content of X to alleviate his dissonance. Instead, B emotionally attacks person A, stating, “You obviously hate Cantu” (position Y, a distortion of X), thus creating a straw man. B continues, “You obviously have an axe to grind” (position Y, a distortion of X). The implied conclusion of B is that because of presumed prejudice (Y) on the part of A, the entire statement (X) is false (because X=Y), thus illustrating a straw man fallacy. Person B has achieved consonance, by eliminating his dissonance through erecting a straw man fallacy. Person B now has thought harmony once again.

To alleviate any further dissonance, B may stop reading any other material put forth by A. This accounts for those “hit and run” comments on blogs.

While perusing Dr. David Alan Black’s blog a couple weeks ago (specifically, the entry on December 30), I saw that Black had pointed to Dr. Craig Keener’s review of Dr. John MacArthur’s book Strange Fire, a work exposing some of the faulty theology and practices within Pentecostalism/charismaticism. Keener, who puts out multi-volume scholarly works every week (OK, it’s not quite that frequently, though it seems so), reviewed MacArthur’s work at length, providing a fair, even analysis, criticizing the author for unnecessarily condemning one whole segment of Christendom. (I state this without having read the book, though I’ve read other critiques, and have no reason to disbelieve Keener and the others in this regard.) The reader is encouraged to view Keener’s review it in its entirety (at hyperlink above).

I’ve selected portions of the review from which to add comments of my own. The reader here should feel free to cut and paste other parts of Keener’s critique to add to the comments section and provide further commentary.

Assuming Keener’s (and others’) charge that the author has painted with a very broad brush is correct, I’d fully agree with the following statement:

…Reactionary teaching like MacArthur’s, however, is more likely to polarize than to invite.

While I’m certain that hyper-charismaticism is dangerous, I’m just as certain that hyper-dogmatism is the same. A few years ago, the teacher of a study I was attending, using an analogy from bowling, offered the general advice of steering clear of either gutter (though he didn’t use either of my “hyper-” terms) as I was seeking his input on my concerns over doctrines and practices of another student who was attempting to influence me. Without stating so explicitly, it was obviously he agreed with me that the other individual’s ball fell into the hyper-charismatic gutter. I never forgot that analogy. I eventually left the group over the teacher’s own promotion of others with unorthodox and heretical doctrines of the hyper-charismatic variety (after enjoying a few lunches – my treat – in which I expressed concerns).

Since then, I’ve tried to steer clear of the other extreme, the one of hyper-dogmatism. I don’t know that I’ve been entirely successful in that endeavor; I’d say my bowling ball may have a slight tendency toward the hyper-dogmatic side rather than the other gutter – much as I’d like to remain in the middle. I suppose I’m continuationist in theology (I
I wonder who it was teaching MSoG and the "many-membered Christ" doctrine that New Age / New Spirituality for the past 100 years, a teaching that is specifically antichrist article especially transcriptions at 13:49-14:12 and 36:30-37:34 of the podcast, near end of "Thinking from the Throne" here such as Bob Jones, Paul Cain, and Todd Bentley have been much more obvious (see influence – has been teaching in a veiled form for quite some time now, while others what Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, CA – an individual with worldwide (MSoG) doctrine. This "many-membered Christ" (manchild), the culmination of MSoG, is I'm glad that Keener has actually witnessed firsthand the Manifested Sons of God (MSoG) doctrine. This "many-membered Christ" (manchild), the culmination of MSoG, is Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, CA – an individual with worldwide influence – has been teaching in a veiled form for quite some time now, while others such as Bob Jones, Paul Cain, and Todd Bentley have been much more obvious (see here for one example each of Jones and Bentley). Yet Johnson’s recent podcast "Thinking from the Throne" is much more explicit (see here for lengthy CrossWise article, especially transcriptions at 13:49-14:12 and 36:30-37:34 of the podcast, near end of article). This is not just heresy, but a doctrine paralleling the occult teachings of the New Age / New Spirituality for the past 100 years, a teaching that is specifically antichrist in nature as defined by the Apostle John (1 John 2:22, 4:1-3).

I wonder who it was teaching MSoG and the "many-membered Christ" doctrine that Keener mentions here?
Of course, many would agree. But, this begs the question: why aren’t there more Biblical scholars writing about these specific individuals (in a more ironic manner than some of the laity), warning the church at large? Why didn’t Keener reveal the name of the Manifested Sons teacher he mentioned earlier?

Partly, if not mostly, in response to MacArthur, in a recent Charisma article Dr. Michael Brown poses the question Are We Charismatics Doing Enough to Correct Abuses in Our Midst? Certainly. Brown has exposed some of the faulty doctrines and practices within Pentecostalism/charismaticism, even mentioning some names. For that he deserves credit. Yet on Brown’s own Voice of Revolution site he allows others to post articles, sometimes promoting teachers with very questionable theology and praxis. This can cause confusion.

As just one example, Bill Johnson was lauded in a piece titled HEAVEN ON EARTH by Bill Johnson (Everyone Must Hear This!). The author of the piece merely provided one quote — “Jesus is perfect theology” — and two audio clips, yet there were some very troubling things stated in those clips. (Rather than go into detail here, the reader can go to the link, listen to the audio for themselves, and read some of the comments, which include a few of my own, though I came in a bit late.)

Charisma itself is one of the worst offenders, promoting leaders of the so-called “New Apostolic Reformation” (C. Peter Wagner’s own term) to include Bill Johnson, Mike Bickle (of International House of Prayer), etc. Jack Hayford, who is mentioned favorably by Brown in his article referenced above, appears to be a part of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), as well. Hayford had suggested using the Gamaliel approach (cf. Acts 5:38-39) to the so-called “Lakeland Revival” of 2008, refusing to provide a very much needed corrective to the proceedings, illustrating what I’d define as poor leadership at best.

For those unaware, the NAR even has its own “Apostles” (that’s a capital “A”), as evidenced by their own International Coalition of Apostolic Leadership organization (formerly “International Coalition of Apostles” — and there are other similar organizations). While the membership list is now concealed to those of us outside this elite group (though with a recommendation by a current member and by paying the requisite dues you too can become a member!), here is a list of members from November 10, 2009, to include former “Presiding Apostle” C. Peter Wagner. Following is some now-deleted verbiage from the old site (no longer available on Internet Archive):

**BETHEL CHURCH**

**INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF APOSTLES**

**INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PRAYER**

**ICHTHYS**

**ICHA**

**IHOP**

The Second Apostolic Age began roughly in 2001, heralding the most radical change in the way of doing church at least since the Protestant Reformation. This New Apostolic Reformation [NAR] embraces the largest segment of non-Catholic Christianity worldwide and the fastest growing....

These folks (NAR) who are “heralding the most radical change in the way of doing church at least since the Protestant Reformation” are purportedly “the largest segment of non-Catholic Christianity worldwide, and the fastest growing”, and these are all within the charismatic realm. I’d be delighted if Dr. Keener would research this group and write a detailed analysis of his findings, given both their charismatic leanings and purported size. In addition, I think it especially prudent for Keener to name the individual who was teaching MSoG, and to name those who were teaching the “many-membered Christ” doctrine as a warning to the Church at large.

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1. Here are the respective transcriptions: [13:49] ...So what is He looking for? He is looking for a people that will cooperate with the FULLNESS of God’s presence, operating and manifesting THROUGH them so that this world actually gets a FULL and ACCURATE taste of who Jesus is. It’s not us, it’s Him. But He dwells IN us in FULLNESS in bodily form...[14:12]

[36:30]...until we all come to unity of faith and the KNOWLEDGE of the SON of God. Too many people think they know that don’t know. So the knowledge of the Son of God, to A perfect man. Look at the description. Millions and millions of body members come to a singular – perfect man...a full-on revelation of the Person of Jesus, what He is like, how He is. To A perfect man, to the measure and stature – equal measure to the fullness of Christ...[37:34]
Charismatic Ramifications on the “Long Ending” of Mark’s Gospel

DECEMBER 8, 2013 44 COMMENTS

Most modern Bible translations include a note expressing serious doubt about the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. Individuals who do accept these final verses as part of Mark’s Gospel, however, are committed to an extreme view of the signs listed in verses 17 and 18, to include the explicit ability to drink poison with no ill effects. If the Greek text in this “long ending” is taken seriously, understood, and translated in proper context, then all five signs are for all those who believe — excepting those actively preaching the Gospel message — at the point of initial conversion and continuing on thereafter. That is, upon hearing and believing in the Gospel message, newly regenerate believers, without exception, will exhibit all the signs listed in Mark 16:17-18, as accompaniment to the Gospel. Moreover, these five should be evident among all believers, past, present and yet future, upon initial acceptance of the Gospel and thereafter — at the least, whenever the Gospel is being actively preached.

The Long and the Short of It

For quite some time, it has been the scholarly consensus that the “long ending” of the Gospel of Mark, i.e., the last 12 verses (16:9-20), is not original to the Gospel, even though there are many manuscripts that include this text.¹ While there are those who assert that the long ending is indeed original, they are well within the minority among NT scholars and textual critics. The vocabulary and style of the Greek in the long ending is substantially different than the remainder of Mark’s Gospel.² In addition, the associated manuscript evidence points rather decisively to the inauthenticity of these verses.³

There is even a so-called “short ending” in one extant Old Latin manuscript. This short ending consists of a small amount of text following verse 8, about the equivalent of one long Biblical verse or two shorter ones. While this is found as the ending to Mark’s Gospel in only one manuscript, there is yet another variation in which the long ending is appended to the short ending.⁴ All three — the predominant long ending, the lone short ending, and the combination of short ending followed by long ending — are almost universally rejected, and identified as spurious.

Some are of the opinion that the Gospel of Mark simply concludes at verse 8. However, in view of the fact that verse 8 ends rather abruptly with frightened women at the tomb, and, secondarily, that the very last word is a conjunction (the word γάρ, transliterated gar, meaning for, since, or because), others believe the original ending has been lost, or that the Gospel writer just did not finish the work for some unknown reason.⁵ These may well be factors that influenced the writer of the long ending (assumed to be one lone author by the internal consistency of the text).

Excluding the long ending from Scripture necessarily negates any need to discuss cessationism (the belief that the ‘sign gifts’ have ceased with the Apostolic era and the closing of the Biblical canon) or continuationism (the belief that all the spiritual gifts continue to this day) by appealing to these verses. Dr. Rodney J. Decker, Th.D., has recently written a paper on this subject, titled Mark and Miracle (Mark 16:17-18), with an emphasis on what the longer ending means in its own context and how it relates to the rest of the New Testament, and posted it on his blog. This particular work of Decker (see hyperlink at title above, pdf here) will be relied on for portions of the remainder of this article; general references and specific quotes from it will be followed by applicable page number in brackets, e.g.: {p 3}.

Interpreting the Text of the Long Ending

Decker notes that, in academic settings, those who argue for continuationism by and large do not do so by appealing to the Markan long ending. On the other hand, it is used quite frequently as a basis for argumentation “in non-academic discussions and among poorly trained advocates. That is perhaps not surprising since even in cessationist circles the authenticity of the Long Ending is commonly assumed since it is in the KJV without note or comment” {p 2, n 11}. I’ll add that it seems many readers of modern Bible versions pay little mind to the notes, further contributing to ignorance about the legitimacy of the long ending.⁶ Philip Comfort provides a blanket caution against the lay or academic use of these verses:

…Christians need to be warned against using this text for Christian doctrine because it is not on the same par as verifiable New Testament Scripture. Nothing in it should be used to establish Christian
Un fortunately, certain churches have used Mark 16:16 to affirm dogmatically that one must believe and be baptized to be saved, and other churches have used Mark 16:18 to promote the practice of snake-handling. The writer of the longer ending also emphasized what we would call charismatic experiences — speaking in tongues, performing healings, protection from snakes and poison. Although the book of Acts affirms these experiences for certain believers, they are not necessarily the norm for all.7

Bill Johnson, Senior Pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, CA, is just one example (and there are many others within the so-called New Apostolic Reformation, aka NAR) of a hyper-charismatic (my term for those who go well beyond more conservative Pentecostal/charismatic theology and practice) who frequently cites Mark 16:15 and Mark 16:20 as base texts for the Great Commission, while selectively using only portions of verses 17-18 (healing the sick, casting out demons, and speaking in new tongues, yet omitting snake handling and drinking poison) for his continuationist stance.8 As but one example, here’s a selection in which Johnson specifically cites Mark 16:20 in the footnote reference to this passage:

...While healing is seldom the subject we teach on, it is one of the most common results. As we proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God, people get well. The Father seems to say Amen to His own message by confirming the word with power.... 9

In reading Johnson’s quote, observe that the claim is that “people get well” as a result of the proclamation of “the message of the Kingdom of God”. This passive “people get well” stands in stark contrast to the long ending’s explicitly active “they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”. In other words, according to verse 18, those who believe will actively lay on hands, resulting in the sick recovering; the sick don’t just “get well”. We could give Johnson the benefit of the doubt and just assume he was imprecise with his wording, but what of the other signs that should accompany the message according to the context of the long ending of Mark?:

15 And He said to them [the Eleven], “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.
17 And these signs will follow [accompany] those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”
19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them [the Eleven], He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs [by those who believe]. Amen. [Mark 16:15-20, NKJV (emphasis and explanatory notes in brackets added)]

The text is book-ended with the preaching of the Gospel (vv 15, 20) by the Eleven (vv 14, 15, 19), but note that signs (σήμεια, sēmeia) will follow/accompany those who believe (vv 16, 17), to exclude those preaching (the Eleven) (pp 3-5). The context specifies that it is regenerate believers — those receiving the preaching of the Gospel (by the Eleven; v 15) and reaching a saving faith (v 16) — who will cast out demons, speak with new languages, pick up snakes, etc. Following are the five signs that will be exhibited by these believers:

- Performing exorcisms
- Speaking in new languages
- Picking up snakes (presumably without harm)
- Drinking poison without harm
- Healing the sick by the laying on of hands

Note that, by the context, the snakes are not specifically identified as venomous (or not), and it’s not specified if those picking up the snakes will remain unharmed; it merely states “they will take up serpents” (some manuscripts add “with their hands”). Some may appeal to the next point — “if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them” — but these two are not connected grammatically (p 3). Also, since all five, as Decker observes, “are listed in parallel with no indication otherwise, it would be precarious to suggest that one (or more) is to be taken metaphorically if the others are not” (pp 3-4, n 15). By the context, the statement attributed to Jesus (vv 15-18), as well as the narration in verse 20 (“...the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”) is clearly meant in a literal sense; therefore, all five should be taken literally.
The text explicitly states that all five signs above will accompany the collective of those who believe, as a sign of the Gospel, “whenever they believe” (p 4). Moreover, according to Decker, as indicated by the Greek grammar, each believer should perform all five (pp 4, 4 n 19-20). Further, this implies that each time the Eleven preached the Gospel there would always be demon-possessed individuals, snakes, poisonous drink, and persons afflicted with ailments in their midst.

Yet, by the context, this is not limited to the Apostolic era, the time period when the Eleven were still living (p 5). Since the function of these signs is in conjunction with the preaching of the Gospel – and, of course, the Great Commission is an ongoing command to all Christians (cf. Matthew 28:18-20) – these signs must continue as well (pp 4-5). Therefore, those who accept the long ending as part of the canonical Gospel of Mark are committed to the belief that all five signs above are applicable to every single believer, at the point of their conversion and forward. The only limitation is imposed on those believers who are actively preaching the Gospel. In other words, by the context provided by the author of the long ending, those who believe will perform the five signs above, which necessarily include all the regenerate – past, present, and yet future – except when they themselves are in the act of preaching the Gospel message (pp 4-5).

It could be construed that one of the implicit points made by the author of the long ending regarding “confirming the word through the accompanying signs” is that others in the audience who may have been unpersuaded by the Gospel message itself may become convinced by the attendant display of signs. In fact, there are three pieces of extra-Biblical, apocryphal literature depicting the Apostle John drinking poison for the express purpose of converting others. These are: Virtutes Iohannis (Miracles of John, circa 5th or 6th century AD), Passio Iohannis (Passion of John, ca. late 6th c.) (p 10),10 and Acts of John in Rome (ca. 4th to 6th c.11), with the latter finding its writer portraying John as explicitly quoting the words of Mark 16:18b (“and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them”) (p. 10). With this in mind, would Bill Johnson, or any of the other self-appointed “Apostles” of the New Apostolic Reformation (or any follower of the NAR) who affirm Mark 16:9-20, like to drink from the poisoned cup, toward this same goal?

It seems one could understand this passage a bit more narrowly, interpreting “confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (v 20) as a limitation on those who believe. That is, these signs will only accompany those who believe during the proclamation of the Gospel, thereby limiting the ‘shelf-life’ of these signs. In other words, these five signs would be manifested each time the Gospel message is preached until Jesus Christ returns, but only for the duration of the preaching at each particular place and time.12

But note that even this more narrow view would only limit the time at which these signs are made manifest and not their actual expression. With this limitation in mind, we’ll pose the question above a bit differently: With another actively preaching “the message of the Kingdom of God”, would Bill Johnson, or any of the other self-appointed “Apostles” of the New Apostolic Reformation (or any disciple of the NAR) who affirm Mark 16:9-20, like to drink from the poisoned chalice in order to win others to Christ?

Given his interpretation of Jesus’ promise in John 14:12, Johnson may even desire to identify such acts of ‘poison-bibbing’ (p 10) as manifest evidence of “greater works”, since it is not recorded in Scripture that Jesus Himself drank poison without harm:

| Jesus’ prophecy of us doing greater works than He did has stirred the Church to look for some abstract meaning to this very simple statement...And, the works He referred to are signs and wonders. It will not be a disservice to Him to have a generation obey Him, and go beyond His own high-water mark. He showed us what one person could do who has the Spirit without measure. What could millions do? That was His point, and it became His prophecy. This verse is often explained away by saying it refers to quantity of works, not quality...But that waters down the intent of His statement. The word greater is mizon [sic] in the Greek...It is always used to describe “quality,” not quantity.13 |

But, I’m unpersuaded that even such a charismatic display of imbibing venomous drink without harm would be greater than Jesus’ dying on the Cross for the sins of the world and subsequently raising Himself from the dead (John 2:19-22, 10:17-18).

Nonetheless, as per the context provided by the author of the long ending, poison-bibbing is a requirement of all believers – at least those who accept Mark 16:9-20 as part of sacred Scripture.

**Conclusion**
Some facts and thoughts about the author of the above referenced article (see especially last paragraph):

Dr. Rodney J. Decker is on faculty at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. He is the author of Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) and Koine Greek Reader: Selections from the New Testament, Septuagint, and Early Christian Writers (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), as well as other publications, with more material under contract, including his contribution to the Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament series (The Gospel of Mark).

I enjoy reading and being challenged by his works, most of which are a bit beyond my current level, some quite so. However, it’s obvious he cares about his students’ learning, as he has even taken the time to place additional data, list errata, and translate the German and French text from the Peter Lang book mentioned above (this particular book series requires that all non-English language remain untranslated), onto his own website. Here’s a portion of his remarks:

…Since, however, I have some hopes that students may find the work helpful, and even that some may be curious as to the content of those [untranslated] quotations (an idealistic notion, I suspect, but one which I hope to nurture for a bit longer!), I have thought it appropriate to provide a translation of many of those quotations here.

In addition, Decker has taken one of Dr. Stanley Porter’s difficult works and made it more comprehensible, providing a tremendous service to those wishing to become more conversant with Porter’s position on verbal aspect. This is available as an online pdf (the title itself references Porter’s work): ‘The Poor Man’s Porter’: A condensation and summarization of Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood by Stanley E. Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

While he’s very serious about his work, he occasionally injects a bit of lightheartedness in his material and on his blog (and presumably in the classroom). Decker is currently battling stage 4 cancer. He has recently begun chemotherapy. He and his wife could use our prayers.

Endnotes:

1 This merely illustrates that subsequent抄寫者 faithfully reproduced (more or less) this long ending once it was introduced into the Gospel of Mark, though many manuscripts have markings suggesting its inauthenticity.
2 Here I’m referring to what is known as the internal evidence of NT textual criticism: assessing authorial and scribal peculiarities such as style (vocabulary, grammar) and doctrine.
3 This sentence refers primarily to what is termed external evidence in NT textual criticism: assessing all known variants of a given section of Scripture by focusing on such factors as age, similar readings among manuscripts, and geographic distribution, and then comparing with each other to determine which verbiage is likely original.
4 The following English translation of the “short ending” is taken from Roger L. Omanson, A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society), 2006), p 104. Note that the first sentence is a continuation of 16.8, for the obvious purpose of not leaving the verse ending with the women fearful. But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after these things Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen. Manuscripts which append the “long ending” to the “short ending” omit the final “Amen” of the “short ending” (Omanson, p 104).
6 This is based on my own admittedly very limited experience.
7 Comfort, p 161.
8 This is evident throughout his books, sermons and other materials. Of the many works I’ve studied/surveyed, none promote snake handling or the drinking of poison.
9 Bill Johnson, When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2003 (first edition)), p 89; emphasis in original. I’m giving Johnson the benefit of the doubt that he’s speaking of the true Gospel, and not the differentiated “Gospel of the Kingdom” of some New Order of the Latter Rain and/or New
We find Johnson here making the claim that Jesus’ first temptation from Satan was to...
question His identity, who He was. By this he means that “IF you are the Son of God” is the focal point of this temptation, rather than trying to persuade Him to turn the stone to bread. Johnson reaches this conclusion by going back to the Father’s words to Jesus in Luke 3:22. This is why he stresses “WORD of God” in Luke 4:4.

However, quite simply, the word if should be taken as since: “Since you are the Son of God” command this stone to become bread.” The IF in the initial clause is not conditional; it’s descriptive. Satan knows full well Jesus is the Son of God (James 2:19); and, Jesus had been well aware of His identity as evidenced by His words to his mother Mary as a 12 year old, “Didn’t you know I had to be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49, NIV). Therefore, from a Biblically orthodox perspective, this temptation was to persuade Jesus to use His own intrinsic power to satisfy His human need, rather than to fulfill the work He came to do by relying on the Father for His sustenance while in the wilderness.

Jesus explains this later to the disciples in Matthew 13: I’ll just read the one phrase to you that’ll help that concept to make sense. He was talking about people who had no root in themselves; they hear the Word but there’s no depth in their person. They’ve not been prepared for what God is saying and doing. And, then it says “for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the WORD [ED: 3 second pause for emphasis] immediately they stumble. Persecution, difficulty, conflict arises because of the Word. The WORD of the Lord attracts CONFLICT. It’s not punishment. It’s not to humiliate. It’s for two basic reasons: it’s because the Lord wants to give reward and He wants to honor character. Character is not formed in the absence of options. There has to be two trees in the Garden where I am honored for a decision. Do I honor what God has declared over my life or not? Do I consider other options, other possibilities?

According to Christian orthodoxy, the Parable of the Sower/Soils (Matthew 13:1-23) pertains to humankind, not to Jesus. The “Word” (seed) in this parable refers to the Gospel message that Jesus Himself, as the “farmer” (Matthew 13:3), was proclaiming, contrary to Johnson’s explanation. Moreover, this parable has absolutely nothing to do with Jesus’ temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-13).

Given the potentially confusing nature of the above, we’ll recap. In making the claim that Jesus’ first temptation from Satan was to question His identity as the Son of God and then using the Parable of the Sower/Soils to explain his meaning, Johnson has reduced Jesus to one who is dependent upon the so-called ‘present truths’ for His identity and guidance, just like the rest of humankind, per Johnson’s theology. Consequently, as per Johnson, Jesus is potentially subject to stumbling when “persecution, difficulty, conflict arises because of the Word”, because Jesus Himself could have chosen to listen to Satan rather than God if He didn’t have enough ‘depth in His Person’.

Obviously, Johnson is way off base Biblically here, but to what ends? Why has he conflated and reinterpreted Scripture so?

Interestingly, Johnson’s interpretation of the first temptation as Satan questioning His identity, with Jesus’ replying that He/we are to rely on “present truths” is found in New Age / New Spirituality teaching. In the following note how “Satan” is equated with “Ego”, which, in occult terminology, is the so-called “lower self”, the human nature. This is as opposed to the “higher self”, the divine seed/spark, or “Christ” within. This particular author is using the parallel passage in Matthew of Luke 4:3-4:

“Our ego always compromises the truth by masking true reality for the grand illusion; in essence, the ego is the anchor to the physical perspective. But Jesus overcomes this perspective. He tells Satan that man does not live by bread alone (physical existence), but by every word from the mouth of God (spirit). In fact since Jesus denies the bread completely, we understand that ultimate truth lies beyond the veil of the physical realm and instead resides in the spiritual realm, or the realm of consciousness that operates beyond this 3D physical experience [bold and parenthetical remarks in original; other emphasis added].
Bill Johnson has used (as have others in hyper-charismaticism) this very same physical realm vs. spiritual realm false dichotomy more than once. Here’s one example:

The focus of repentance is to change our way of thinking until the presence of His Kingdom fills our consciousness. The enemy’s attempt to anchor our affections to the things that are visible is easily resisted when our hearts are aware of the presence of His world...

If the Kingdom is here and now, then we must acknowledge it’s in the invisible realm. Yet being at hand reminds us that it’s also within reach...That which is unseen can be realized only through repentance [ED: aka, “intimacy with the Father”, “ascended lifestyle”, etc.]. It was as though He said, ‘If you don’t change the way you perceive things, you’ll live your whole life thinking what you see in the natural is the superior reality’... [WHIE p 38. Italics in original; emphasis added. Cf. SPTM p 41]

Keep in mind that in Johnson’s dictionary repentance comes from having “intimacy with the Father” (which leads to the “ascended lifestyle” or “renewed mind”), performing “Biblical meditation” (which, as Johnson describes it, is not Biblical, but just like contemplative prayer, or centering prayer in method), aka “soaking”, etc. [see here for more explanation]. Contrary to Scripture, Johnson teaches that to repent is to perceive the spiritual realm, with increasing “repentance” providing more and more access to the “invisible” realm. As he states, “Repentance is not complete until it envisions His Kingdom” [WHIE p 38; cf. SPTM pp 42-45].

Going back to Johnson’s sermon, it’s the rest of this particular section in Johnson’s monologue that puts all the pieces together in this specific teaching:

The Scripture, this story in Matthew 13, the parable of the seed and the sower, actually gives this picture of soil; and the seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God is released into the seed, through His Word, into the soil. And, then it says, but other things grow and they choke out the life of the seed of God. Think about it: the Word of God, the most powerful thing in the universe is put into an environment that if we give attention to other IDEALS, other VOICES, other WORDS, we actually give them a place in our heart to take root and they choke out the Word of God, the most powerful thing in the universe. For a season, the Lord has allowed our choices to affect the power, the effect of the Word of God, the most powerful thing in the universe. It’s stunning.

Note that there are two seeds – one external and one internal. To differentiate, the internal seed here is in green colored font. The above underscored seed of God is ambiguous in the context; it could refer to the external seed or the internal seed.

This section of Johnson’s message above will be explained in-depth, as it’s very confusingly worded.

The external seed is “the seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God”. This could be construed one of two ways. The first is that God’s Word has a seed which is called “sperma of God”. That is, the “seed” / “sperma” (of God) is a subunit of God’s Word. The second possible understanding is that God’s Word = the “sperma of God”. In other words, this could be rephrased as ‘God’s Word, which is a seed, also known as the sperma of God...’ The first view seems to make the most sense in this context.

More important is the internal seed called “the seed” (and possibly “seed of God”). The internal seed is the one which “the seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God” is released into. To state another way, the external seed, “the seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God”, is released into the internal seed, which is in the individual’s “soil”. To put yet another way, through the Word (of new revelation) the external “seed of God’s Word” (“sperma of God”) is released into the internal “seed” in the soil of the hearer:

… the [external] seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God is released into the [internal] seed, through His Word [new revelation], into the [internal] soil.

So then, “His Word”, the so-called “present truth”, aka “new revelation”, is the vehicle by which the external seed, the “sperma of God” is released into the internal “seed” in the soil of the individual. Bear in mind Johnson’s claim above that Matthew 13 also pertains to Jesus. This means that Jesus Himself had a seed in his soil, and that “through His Word” (present truth, new revelation), the “sperma of God”, aka “the seed of God’s Word” was released into His internal “seed”, which is in His internal “soil”.

Tying it all Together by Going Back to the Roots

Putting all this together, Johnson is teaching that Jesus, like all men, has a seed within Him, which can either grow by paying heed to so-called present truth, aka new revelation
("the most powerful thing in the universe") such as "YOU are My beloved Son", or the seed can be choked out by other "IDEALS", "VOICES", "WORDS". Jesus’ first temptation in the wilderness is an example of these other ideals, voices, words, yet Jesus withstood this temptation, providing an example for the rest of mankind.

A form of this teaching, known as Gnosticism, goes all the way back to the second century (and perhaps the first century). Early church leaders (some term them "fathers"), perhaps most notably in the writings of Irenaeus, battled against the Gnostics, using the pen as their sword. The basic worldview of the Gnostics was dualistic, such that all matter is evil, while spirit is good. Humankind, while inwardly spirit and hence good, was enfolded by evil matter, the outward body. The goal was to escape the flesh, thus attaining self-redemption. This was accomplished through secret knowledge, or gnosis (new revelation) that came by way of mystical experiences from mystical practices.

This doctrine is reprised or repackaged in varying forms in the New Age / New Spirituality teachings of today. In Levi Dowling’s popular book titled The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, originally published in 1907 and still in print today, is an introduction that recounts these teachings. The following two quotes describe the basic doctrine, comparing remarkably well with Johnson’s “sperma of God” concept. First, there is a “Christ” within (internal divine seed, spark of divine light), which was deposited in all of creation at the very beginning:

> …Christ, the universal Love, pervades all spaces of infinity…

> Perfection is the ultimate of life. A seed is perfect in its embryonic form, built is destined to unfold, to grow. Into the soil of every plane these seeds, which were the Thoughts of God, were cast…and they who sowed the seeds, through Christ, ordained that they should grow…and to each be a perfection of its kind. [AGJC, p 6; capitalization from original, emphasis added]

These seeds then are the “Thoughts of God” lying dormant in each and every thing or being. The key is to awaken, or “sow” the seed through Christ, that is, the “Christ” without, the external “Christ”/Word:

> Christ is the Logos [Word] of Infinities and through the Word alone are Thought and Force made manifest. [AGJC, p 6; CAPS from original, emphasis added]

Let’s compare this directly to Johnson’s teaching above:

> … the [external] seed of God’s Word, the sperma of God is released into the [internal] seed, through His Word [new revelation], into the [internal] soil.

In each case, the vehicle is “through the/His Word”. Levi states that “Thought and Force” are “made manifest” only “through the Word”, while Johnson’s doctrine above is such that new revelation/present truths are made manifest “through His Word”. These are striking similarities. The only difference is that Levi is explicit that the seed inside all things is divine; Johnson is ambiguous with his seed.

Levi’s doctrine is explicitly panentheistic, i.e., God is IN all [pan = all; en = in; the, from theos = God]. Bill Johnson’s is not incongruent with panentheism, though, as noted, he’s ambiguous. Is Johnson’s internal seed divine like Levi’s, which would mean he’s teaching panentheism?

While there are a number of different views of panentheism in the varying religious systems in the world, there are some consistencies in the doctrine with respect to how it relates to Jesus Christ and Christianity in esotericism. For perhaps a clearer understanding, here’s Richard Smoley from his book Inner Christianity: A Guide to the Esoteric Tradition: with a general view of “Christian” esotericism and the doctrine of panentheism:

> …The Father is the ineffable, transcendent aspect of God the Son [ED: Christ] is God’s immanent aspect. This divine spark or Logos is the first sounding-forth of existence from the depths of infinity: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4). Christ is the embodiment of this immanent aspect of God.

> So are we. “Without him was not any thing made that was made.” Nothing comes into existence unless this divine spark of consciousness, no matter how faint or dim, lies at its center. This was true of Jesus, it is true of me, and it is true of you…We may not be as exalted as Christ…But at the core we are the same [IC, pp 134-135; all emphasis added]
Note the two separate aspects of God: the transcendent, which is the ineffable (inexpressible) Father, and the immanent (within all of creation) aspect, which is the Son (Christ). This immanence is alternatively called divine seed, divine spark, divine (spark of) light, logos, or Christ. So, the Son/Christ is a divine entity, and this divine entity was diffused throughout creation as a seed / spark / light. This view of panentheism is such that all is in God (the transcendent Father is wholly outside, surrounding all of creation) and God is in all (the Son/Christ is within all of creation).

Yet, observe that Jesus Himself is called Christ (“Christ is the embodiment of this immanent aspect of God”), rather than merely, for example, Jesus of Nazareth. Smoley quotes from A Course in Miracles to describe Him:

The name of Jesus is the name of the one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. So he became identified with Christ, a man no longer, but at one with God [ACIM, Teachers Manual, p 87; emphasis in original].

Smoley then quotes the “Jesus” of the Course as saying all can do what He did, describing Him as an intermediary, making the impossible (the distance is too great between us and the Father) into possibility [IC, p 135]. The author goes on to affirm that all are Christs, at least potentially [IC, pp 135-136].

But what of the Holy Spirit? Smoley describes this false trinity, to include the integral role of the Spirit:

How do these two, the Father and the Son, interact with each other? What enables them to have any connection at all, while still in some way remaining distinct? There is...a principle that makes this interaction possible. It is called the Comforter, or the Holy Spirit.

Here, in essence, is the Christian Trinity...Between them [Father and Son] is the Holy Spirit, the divine principle of relatedness, which accomplishes perhaps the most astonishing of all miracles: uniting two separate entities while still allowing them to be separate [IC, pp 103-104].

Levi Dowling either conflates and/or confuses the Holy Spirit (“Holy Breath”) with the ‘external Christ’, or he’s trying to convey the same thing as Smoley above [AGJC, pp 8-9]. That is, it may be that “Holy Breath” activates the Christ/Word within and/or communicates the Word from the Father to the inner Christ. Either interpretation brings forth the same basic idea as Smoley’s description. What has Bill Johnson said about the relationship between the Father and the Son? Keeping in mind the foregoing, look for the similarities in Johnson’s words below with so-called “Esoteric Christianity”:

The Father, by the Holy Spirit, directed all that Jesus said and did [F2F, p 108].

It was the Holy Spirit upon Jesus that enabled Him to know what the Father was doing and saying [DWG, p 136].

If we were to assume that Johnson’s internal seed is indeed the divine seed (spark, Christ, etc.) concept, his theology would fit right into the above. Even his “eternally God” statements would have no trouble being synthesized, as certainly if everything has a seed/spark of the divine within, then it’s not a stretch to claim all are, in essence, God, to include the human Jesus Johnson portrays. This is precisely why New Agers can call themselves “Christs” or “gods” with a straight face.

This “seed”/“sperma of God” concept is equivalent to “the anointing”, that is, Johnson’s teaching that Christ = “the anointing” or “anointed one” (of many) [see The Christ Anointing section here for in-depth look], with “the anointing” itself coming from the Spirit which brings the Word of new revelation. Johnson’s view more closely aligns with Levi’s; the first quote below comes from Dowling’s book, the others are from Johnson’s Face to Face with God:

The word Christ is derived from the Greek word Kristos [ED: actually Christos] and means anointed...
The word Christ, in itself, does not refer to any particular person: every anointed person is christed [sic]... [AGJC, p 6; italics in original; bold added.]

The outpouring of the Spirit also needed to happen to Jesus for Him to be fully qualified. This was His quest. Receiving this anointing qualified Him to be called the Christ, which means “anointed one.” Without the experience [ED: the anointing] there could be no title [F2F, p 109; italics in original, bold added].
The outpouring of the Spirit comes to anoint the church with the same Christ anointing that rested upon Jesus in His ministry so that we might be imitators of Him... [F2F, p. 77; emphasis added].

Keep in mind that Jesus' "anointing", as per Johnson in the above, is referring to the Spirit descending as a dove upon Him, which is subsequent to His baptism in water by John, and that this is how He received the title of Christ. In the Apocryphal/Gnostic Gospel of Philip from the 2nd century is the same idea. In the following, there is a specific distinguishing between water baptism and 'anointing' [chrisma (not chrism as in the text) is the Greek transliterated word meaning anointing]. The "anointing" here is identified as the mark of a Christian, rather than true Christian conversion upon which one receives the Holy Spirit indwelling – just like Bill Johnson's teachings:

The chrism is superior to baptism. For from the chrism we were called 'Christians', not from baptism. Christ also was (so) called because of the anointing. For the Father anointed the Son. But the Son anointed the apostles. And the apostles anointed us. He who is anointed possesses all things. He has the resurrection, the light, the cross. [GoP, p. 200; emphasis added].

Integral to the Gospel of Philip is the divine seed / spark ideology. Bill Johnson’s overall Christology would fit nicely into this same Gnostic framework, with his seed as the divine seed / spark. Assuming Johnson’s seed is divine, with each subsequent “anointing” by the external “seed” / sperma of God (which is the “word” of new revelation, or “what God is saying and doing” as per Johnson above), the internal “seed” grows towards maturity (perfection).

Again, assuming Johnson’s seed is divine, then the “spiritual DNA” teaching, which is becoming more prevalent, would be yet another way of stating this concept. That is, when the “seed” / sperma of God [anointing] is “released into the seed [inside the individual], through His Word, into the soil [ED: which contains the individual’s ‘seed’]” initially, then this is the point in which the individual’s divine spark/seed is activated, which is equivalent to one’s latent “spiritual DNA” activated. [See Getting Down to the DNA of Spiritual DNA section here.]

It seems that the interpretation of this internal seed as being the divine seed concept (divine spark, Christ within, etc.), as used in “esoteric Christianity”, makes the most sense of Bill Johnson’s usage in the context above when viewed in the light of some his other teachings (“the anointing”, “spiritual DNA”).

Cf. (cf.) = compare, or see also

ACIM = Helen Schucman A Course in Miracles: Combined Volume 1992 (2nd ed), Foundation for Inner Peace, Glen Ellen, CA


DWG = Bill Johnson Dreaming with God: Secrets to Redesigning Your World Through God’s Creative Flow. 2006, Destiny Image, Shippensburg, PA

F2F = Bill Johnson Face to Face with God: The Ultimate Quest to Experience His Presence. 2007, Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL


IC = Richard Smoley Inner Christianity: A Guide to the Esoteric Tradition 2002, Shambhala, Boston, MA. In the Acknowledgements section is “Reverend” Cynthia Bourgeault (author of The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – a New Perspective on Christ and His Message. 2008, Shambhala, Boston, MA, which has been quoted from on CrossWire), Jacob Needleman, among others. Endorsements include Jean Houston and David Spangler.


Five Years On: Todd Bentley and Bob Jones Teaching Manifest Sons of God in 2008 (Birth of the Man-Child)

2008 was a banner year for the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR – what I term hyper-charismaticism) – at least until it was revealed that Todd Bentley was having an affair with his nanny and divorcing his wife, the mother of their two children (he and the nanny married later). From April 2nd until about August 11th of that year the so-called Lakeland Revival was headed by Todd Bentley. Bentley was, shall we say, “christened” by a number of NAR “Apostles” including C. Peter Wagner, Bill Johnson, Rick Joyner, Che Ahn, and others on June 23rd. It’s too bad for these “Apostles” that there wasn’t an NAR “Prophet” who could have foreseen the disaster that was Bentley’s adultery/divorce and subsequent remarriage. Perhaps all the NAR “Prophets” were deep in thought, otherwise busy, traveling, sleeping, etc. at the time (cf. 1 Kings 18:27-28)? But I digress.

The purpose of this article is to revisit some Manifest Sons of God (MSoG) teaching in order to educate those not quite understanding this particular doctrine, its ramifications, and how it fits into the larger scheme of things. Following are two examples from 2008.

On May 28, in a somewhat lengthy monologue, Bentley explicitly spoke of and promoted the MSoG doctrine. Here’s a portion:

Tonight is a crossing over and we have a moment,’ says the Lord, ‘where we can labor and travail until Christ is formed in you…

…I feel if we gave it a big push that we can literally form Christ – Christ in you. I’m talking about a maturing of what God has placed on the inside of your spirit. It’s gonna come out of the birth canal – it’s gonna come out of the womb – because there is a labor and there is a travailing that is going on in the spirit…

…And, we are saying LET THERE BE LIFE. And, there was life—speaking things into existence. I am talking about a creative realm… Under the anointing you make a declaration and it forms tonight…

…We’re going to go back into travail right now until Christ is formed. God promised a day where heaven and earth must retain Him until the restoration of all things. Heaven will hold back the coming of Jesus Christ until sons and daughters come into maturity. It’s called the Manifestation of the sons of God.

Heaven will hold back the Second Coming… A mature church manifests the glory of God. A mature church manifests the Word of God in truth and power. A mature church walks in holiness and character. A mature church walks in miracle, signs, and wonders.

I’m talking about a maturity tonight – and it’s being formed in you. Let Christ be formed in maturity. Let the full man, let the fullness of God come forth and let the womb open tonight… and let there be a great birthing…

The birthing, laboring, and travelling language is all part of the “birth of the man-child” doctrine, an important aspect of MSoG, as it’s the culmination of the teaching. According to this teaching, there will be ‘one new, perfect man’ (a perversion of Ephesians 4:13). This is the climax of Bentley’s monologue: “Let Christ be formed in maturity. Let the full man, let the fullness of God come forth, and let the womb open tonight…and let there be a great birthing…” The New Age / New Spirituality calls this the forthcoming “Corporate Christ”. MSoG doctrine is such that this “birth of the man-child” IS the Second Coming. This is paralleled in New Age / New Spirituality teachings (see below).

With the proceedings of Lakeland in full swing, Bob Jones spoke at a conference held at Heritage International Ministries Retreat Center, featuring Todd Bentley, Bob Jones, and Rick Joyner, on August 08th (DVD of this event sold through Rick Joyner’s MorningStar Ministries Media Store, item # TS50, “Todd Bentley Healing and Impartation Service, 08-08-08”). Here’s an excerpt of his monologue:
The New Breed is just simply the body of Christ is gonna grow up... What He’s [God’s] doing now is bringing you to a level of maturity where you grow up... So, what he’s talking about it; the New Breed is this: it’s Romans 1:4 – the spirit of holiness. So, for years I tried to get understanding of what the spirit of holiness is for it’s different than the Holy Spirit[ED: YIKES!]

So, last Saturday, He spoke to me about a New Breed of people. And, He said, I don’t want to get in front of them, I want you to get behind them. They’ll be close to the ages of 25 and 40... this is who the New Breed is.’

...The New Breed will be those that are partaker of the divine nature As you begin to grow into the likeness of Christ you’re gonna begin to partake of the divine nature. And, once you begin to grow up in that-a-way you’ll continue to mature until you look like Christ all over the world. Jesus was one person. Now get ready for Jesus[sic – plural of ‘Jesus’] all over the world. Then, he began to tell me that those who have [sic] partaker of his divine nature shall be a friend with God – John 15:15...

So, that divine nature is a friend. It’s really Paul’s prayer: I believe God is answering Paul’s prayer in Galatians 4:19 ‘I travail for you, I pray for you until Christ be formed in you’. There are Christians on the earth now that are growing in maturity to where Christ is being formed in you. If Christ is being formed in you then when you speak you’ll speak as Christ did. And, you have also authority in this. Then, in this He was saying ‘this then will be a generation that will do nothing apart from the Father.’ So, I think the main thing you’re getting ready for is a generation for the fathers to come back in. And, I think the first one that’s gonna come back is Papa. For Jesus came back over...2000 years ago, The Holy Spirit came over 100 years ago [ED: apparently a reference to Azuza Street], this last revelation is who your Daddy is. And, I think this is what’s getting ready – is Papa’s getting ready to reveal his family. And, His family, what He lacks in you is what was in His Son. So, there are those who’s gonna begin to shine like the Son. And, that divine nature will have authority over all the works of the enemy...

I’ve been back here 33 years today [ED: Jones is speaking about his own purported death and resuscitation experience]. 33 years ago I stood before the Lord. I looked into His eyes. To be honest with ya, I didn’t want to come back because it had been so hard. But, He asked... He told me,” if you’ll go back you’ll see the greatest wave of all time in evangelism. I’m gonna bring over a billion youth into myself.” Now, these that’s between 25 and 40 are youth leaders. Getting ready for a birthing of youth beyond anything you’ve ever seen before... And, what he’s after now is the 25 to 40’s which are harvesters... So, get ready. Things have changed. The New Breed – let’s get behind them. For they’re gonna bring the youth behind them. It’s a change of times. The torch is being transferred from the old generation to this 25 to 40. This is the New Breed.

We won’t go into all the issues in Jones’ awful use of Scripture (that was done[here]). The main reason in putting both Bentley’s and Jones’ MoSoG teachings on the same page is to show the reader what to look for in the teachings of others. With this in mind, re-read (or read for the first time) the two previous CrossWise articles (here and here) and look for similarities. Let’s discuss.

But, before doing so, ponder on the words of Alice A. Bailey – occultist, New Ager, the willing vehicle of the channeled writings of “Djwhal Khul”:

...We can produce, and as a [human] race, give birth to the next kingdom in nature, which Christ called the kingdom of God; this is the kingdom of souls, the kingdom of spiritual lives, and herein, uniquely, Christ emerges... [From Bethlehem to Calvary: The Initiations of Jesus]© 1937 by Alice A. Bailey, renewed 1957 by Foster Bailey, Lucis Trust, 4th paperback ed., 1989, Fort Orange Press, Albany, NY, p 259. Emphasis added.

More explicitly, here’s Barbara Marx Hubbard in her work The Book of Co-Creation: The Revelation, Our Crisis is a Birth [Foundation for Conscious Evolution, Sonoma, CA, 1993 (first edition)] with even more alarming tie-ins to Bentley’s and Jones’ messages above (and others who’ve taught MoSoG in hyper-charismaticism). In a section titled The Marriage of Christ and Eve, she begins by referencing the Virgin Birth and the fact that Christ raised Himself from the dead – at least she affirms Jesus Christ’s role in His own resurrection, contrary to Bill Johnson and others who claim it was “the Father by the Spirit” – wondering: “Are we moving beyond sexual reproduction and preprogrammed death?” [p 55].

In order for “Eve” to marry Christ, one’s body must be prepared to transform, to regenerate itself...

If we are approaching a new “normalcy,” normalizing in ourselves what Christ could do, as the next stage in our evolution, then do we have the innate ability, as a proto-universal species, to “become mothers to ourselves,” giving birth to ourselves as fully evolved humans!... [p 56. Emphasis added.]
Marx Hubbard ponders this and other questions until she receives a "revelation" about her own previous "birth experience", which she records in a journal:

"The benign presence I sensed in my planetary birth experience was the Christ. The light that surrounded the Earth and awakened us was the Christ-light. The light that arose within us was the Christ-light that dwells in every one of us! [p 56. Bold in original]"

She then explains:

The Christ “act” – to do the work that he did – is a new kind of resurrection and transformation at the dawn of the next stage of evolution.

_The marriage of Christ and Eve happens at the Second Coming. It is in real time, like his birth. It is an event in history_ [p 56. Emphasis added.]

Recall the words of many in hyper-charismaticism, such as this one example by Bill Johnson: **Jesus is returning for a bride whose body is in equal proportion to her head** [as referenced here]. Also, consider Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, MO, with his emphasis on the so-called "Bridal Paradigm", in which Jesus is "love-sick for His Bride".

Later in this same book Marx Hubbard goes through the Book of Revelation [skipping 6:3-8, though this is covered in an unpublished manuscript of this work, as quoted from here], claiming new revelation from "Higher Voices". In the following these "Voices" 'expound' on Revelation 9:15-16, 18-21, bringing "new revelation":

_The alternative to Armageddon is the Planetary Pentecost. When a critical mass are in the upper room of consciousness on a planetary scale, each will hear from within, in their own language, the mighty words of God. All who are attuned will be radically empowered to be and do as Jesus did. If those people who are not self-centered align their thoughts in perfect faith, that they are whole, created in the image of God, the world can be saved._ [p 147. Emphasis in original.]

Obviously, we know that God will not change His Word and save the whole world. But, note the similarities of this to various teachers within hyper-charismaticism. Note the hyper-charismatic call to unity at the expense of sound doctrine. Recall Jones’ (and others) teaching that there will be a “billion souls saved”. Are these actually a billion souls lost to the New Age / New Spirituality “Jesus”?

Reader, I implore you, please read the words of Bentley and Jones then compare to the words of Marx Hubbard and Bailey.

NOTE: The Barbara Marx Hubbard material was reprised in a later book titled _The Revelation: A Message of Hope for the New Millennium_ [Nataraj Publishing, Novato, CA, 1995], with the pagination a bit different from above.

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Kris Vallotton on Becoming an Incarnation through Holy Communion

JULY 21, 2013  81 COMMENTS

Kris Vallotton, Senior Associate Pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, CA (Bill Johnson is Senior Pastor), recently stated the following on his website:

When Jesus said we must eat His flesh and drink his blood, he wasn’t talking about cannibalism, but he was referring to ingestion that leads to incarnation. Christ is the Word that became flesh. It is important that we ingest the Word of God in a way that causes us to digest His life until Christ is literally formed in us. Ingestion without digestion will lead to feeling full but not being transformed. Digestion is more than just a taste test, it is the full meal of His presence that conforms us to His
There is an old saying that is true in this case, *You are what you eat!*

Many people ingest the Bible but they don't digest the living, active Word of God. Religion fills their souls but never satisfies their longing for real life. Digestion requires assimilation, not just consumption. Truth was never meant to just be recounted, it was intended to be experienced. When we exchange the communion meal for a dinner commentary or a cookbook, we deprive ourselves of the privilege of abundant life, and relegate ourselves to a meager existence in the Kingdom. [Tuesday, July 16, 2013; emphasis added]

How do we interpret Kris Vallotton’s message? The key is in the word *incarnation*. Of course, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ occurred when the Word, the second ‘Person’ of the Trinity “became flesh and dwell among us” (John 1:14). This took place at the moment of the Virginal Conception (Luke 1:35). But, do Christians become an incarnation?

While there are a few different meanings for the term *incarnation*, as it applies to Jesus Christ it implies preexistence, as in the preexistent, eternal Word, the second ‘Person’ of the Trinity took on a new mode of existence as the one, unique God in the flesh. The fully God and yet fully man Jesus Christ is *IS the Incarnation*. And since, according to orthodox Christianity, humans are not preexistent, then humans cannot become an incarnation in that sense of the term. (However, those who believe in the preexistence of souls affirm re-incarnation – not a Christian doctrine, specifically deemed anathema at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, or Constantinople II of 553 AD.)

So what does Kris Vallotton mean? Certainly, he’s adhering to the typical Word of Faith (WoF) doctrine of ‘new revelation’ (what Vallotton terms “living, active Word of God” above), or as Kenneth E. Hagin termed it, the “rhema” word. According to WoF, these ‘new revelations’ are superior to Scripture, the written Word (Hagin called this the “logos” word). But what does that have to do with becoming an incarnation?

The other modern day definitions for the term *incarnation* are used in a figurative sense, yet it’s clear Vallotton is speaking literally, as he states, “*until Christ is literally formed in us*”. Taking the context of Vallotton’s message above, this seems similar to an old and oft-repeated quote by Hagin:

> Every man who has been ‘born again’ is an Incarnation and Christianity is a miracle. The believer is as much an Incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth.¹

Hagin equates the Incarnate Word of God to the ‘born again’ believer. Others have stated something similar, and here are two examples from Earl Paulk – one who taught explicit Latter Rain doctrine as well as WoF:

> …It was the quickening and bringing alive of the Word which was incarnate in Jesus Christ. *That Word became incarnate in the Church.* ¹

> …Jesus was the firstfruit of God’s incarnation, a man living out God’s perfect will. Now He says, “…My people will bring forth life as they become the ‘incarnate Word’ on planet Earth” …the Church is the ‘ongoing expression’ of God.”²

> All things have been given to us, even to the point of allowing us to share the divine nature of Jesus. Sharing His nature is a definition of the ongoing incarnation of God on the earth. ‘Christ in us, the hope of glory.’ His inheritance is already ours…³

While Vallotton has not gone so far as to declare the Church body “the ongoing incarnation of God on the earth”, he’s not very far off. More important though is that if one reads the Vallotton quote carefully, one sees that the ‘believer’ becomes the new revelation word made flesh. Does this mean that, in the Vallotton quote, Jesus Christ was also the ‘new revelation’ word made flesh rather than the Word, the second ‘Person’ of the Trinity made flesh at the Virginal Conception as the unique fully God and fully man, as the Hagin and Paulk selections above seem to imply?

To see that this interpretation of ‘believer’ as ‘new revelation’ word made flesh is indeed the correct understanding, we’ll go through the above Vallotton quote sentence by sentence.

> When Jesus said we must eat His flesh and drink his blood, he wasn’t talking about cannibalism, but he was referring to ingestion that leads to incarnation.
This means simply that partaking of Communion leads to “incarnation”.

Christ is the Word that became flesh. It is important that we ingest the Word of God in a way that causes us to digest His life until Christ is literally formed in us.

These two sentences are the most crucial as far as interpretation. Here, we’ll have to make an initial hypothesis which will prove itself as we continue. First, note the two uses of “the Word” above. From a strictly orthodox perspective, the first sentence would be speaking of Jesus Christ as the eternal Word made flesh at the Virginal Conception. But is this what Vallotton means? We’ll return to this later.

Regarding the second, this could refer to either Scripture, or the ‘new revelation’ word. However, in the second paragraph of the complete quote, Vallotton is clear that he’s referring to the ‘new revelation’ word, since he’s made a direct comparison between this Scripture, with the ‘new revelation’ word the one to be ‘experienced’. Therefore, for now we’ll tentatively conclude that this is the intended meaning here, as this Word “causes us to digest His life until Christ is literally formed in us.”

Ingestion without digestion will lead to feeling full but not being transformed. Digestion is more than just a taste test, it is the full meal of His presence that conforms us to His image. There is an old saying that is true in this case, “You are what you eat!”

Here “the Word” is personified as “His presence”. Also, this implies that Holy Communion consists of the real presence, just as it does in the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox, Lutheranism, and only a few others within Protestantism. The majority of Protestant churches deny the real presence in Holy Communion, seeing it as symbolic instead. For Vallotton, “His presence”, that is, the ‘real presence’ in Communion, literally makes the ‘believer’ become that which was ingested: “the Word”.

Many people ingest the Bible but they don’t digest the living, active Word of God. Religion fills their souls but never satisfies their longing for real life.

The message in these two sentences is that reading (“ingesting”) the Bible results in “religion”, the term used pejoratively; whereas, the “living, active Word of God” (“His life” and “His presence” in the first paragraph), i.e., the ‘new revelation’ word brings “real life”. By positing this false dichotomy between the Bible and ‘new revelation’, this confirms the earlier working hypothesis that the ‘new revelation’ word was the intended meaning in the first paragraph.

Digestion requires assimilation, not just consumption. Truth was never meant to just be recounted, it was intended to be experienced.

Studying and memorizing Scripture is not the real goal. The “truth” of these ‘new revelations’ is to be digested, experienced, assimilated. This is the goal.

When we exchange the communion meal for a dinner commentary or a cookbook, we deprive ourselves of the privilege of abundant life, and relegate ourselves to a meager existence in the Kingdom.

If Holy Communion is viewed as symbolic, rather than the ‘real presence’ of “the Word”, i.e. ‘new revelation’, then we become a spiritual ‘have-not’ instead of a spiritual ‘have’. Why? Because it’s “important that we ingest the Word of God in a way that causes us to digest His life until Christ is literally formed in us.” If we don’t “ingest the Word of God” in this way, then “Christ” will not be formed in us, literally.

But, what does all this really mean? The mystery and confusion evaporate when this is viewed from a Gnostic, or, more specifically, a Neo-Gnostic (New Age / New Spirituality) perspective. First, we’ll need to provide a brief sketch of a basic Neo-Gnostic conception, keeping in mind that this is a perversion of Christianity.

In the Neo-Gnostic (New Age / New Spirituality) conception of deity, there is an eternal trinity consisting of the Father, the Holy Breath (sometimes Mother), and Christ (the logos, usually the offspring of the first two). Christ is “the Word of God”, the “word” of Thought, Force and Love. This “word” formed the entire cosmos, leaving a part of himself in all of creation, alternatively known as a seed, spark, Christ. Therefore, the eternal word (third person of this false trinity, as opposed to second in orthodox Christianity) is the ‘Christ without’, while the internal seed/spark in everything is the...
This is the doctrine of panentheism, that is, God is within all, yet simultaneously transcendent.

In the Gnostic understanding, mankind has two natures, one human and one divine spark/seed, or ‘Christ within’. In order for humans to progress spiritually, the goal is to awaken the ‘Christ within’ (Christ in you, the hope of glory – a perversion of Colossians 1:27) via the ‘Christ without’, i.e., the “word” which provides “Thought and Force”, or ‘new revelation’. As one increases in ‘new revelation’ knowledge, one progresses spiritually. This progression occurs over multiple lifetimes, as the spark/seed is then reincarnated into a succession of human forms.

Though “Christ” (divine seed/spark) was yet still latent in humanity, due to ‘selfishness’, most of the human race did not recognize this and, thus, was not progressing as it should. This necessitated that the eternal Christ (of this false trinity), the “Word of God”, be made manifest in human form “by taking his abode in some pure person”. That “pure person” was Jesus of Nazareth. This “Word of God”, ‘new revelation’ of “Thought and Force”, became flesh in the man Jesus at baptism, specifically when the dove (Holy Breath) landed upon him. This is when the incarnation of the “Word of God” began.

Once ‘the Word’ was “made flesh” in Jesus of Nazareth at baptism, Jesus became the model for all towards their own spiritual progression, for their own self-redemption. The goal then for mankind is for each one to become his own ‘word made flesh’, to become his own incarnation, by recognizing the divine seed/spark within, and then begin its path towards actualization. This false Jesus instructs others: “Look to the Christ within who shall be formed in every one of you, as he is formed in me.” What was it that Vallotton wrote above? “It is important that we ingest the Word of God in a way that causes us to digest His life until Christ is literally formed in us.”

Viewing Vallotton’s complete statement from a New-Gnostic perspective works well indeed. Using Neo-Gnosticism as our lens with which to view this statement, we can see how to interpret “Christ is the Word that became flesh”, and this adds clarity to the entire Vallotton quote.

As regards Vallotton’s references to Holy Communion, we’ll compare to material on a Gnostic website. Please note that there are many different flavors of Gnosticism, with each one borrowing from other religions and occult traditions. This particular one incorporates Hinduism, Jewish mysticism to include the Kabbalah, Tantric Yoga, and others into its own mix of Gnosticism. Also, as a side note, the reader may have recognized that Hagin referred to the ‘new revelation’ word as the “rhema”, while above (and below) it was used as the “logos” instead. This is not unusual, as terms are not necessarily consistent, though concepts usually are.

Jesus says that man cannot live upon this bread alone, this bread of Moses. In other words, the teaching that Moses gives is vital, it is important, but it is not enough; there is something else. And that something else is the Word of God, as Jesus says. But here we have to look deeper than the literal meaning. Some interpret this passage as meaning that we need the scripture or the Bible in order to have life, but this is only a literal, superficial meaning of the phrase. The document from which the quote is taken was written in Greek, and in Greek, ‘word’ is ‘logos’...

Just like Vallotton, we have to look beyond the literal meaning of Jesus' words in John 6, we must “look deeper” for the mystical meaning, as per the Gnostic quote above, for if we don’t, then this will result in “not being transformed”, per Vallotton. The Bible is not enough.

As Vallotton concluded his first paragraph, “You are what you eat!” This is what he means by “His life” and “His presence” in the first paragraph. But, whose life and presence is this really? All this reminds me once again of the following Alice Bailey quote, only this time I’ll place other emphasis:
The church movement, like all else, is but a temporary expedient and serves but as a transient resting place for the evolving life. Eventually, there will appear the Church Universal, and its definite outlines will appear towards the close of this 20th century...This Church will be nurtured into activity by the Christ [ED: the false Christ above, actually Satan/antichrst] and His disciples when the outpouring of the Christ principle [ED: spirit of the 'new revelation' word], the true second Coming, has been accomplished...

The Christian church in its many branches can serve as a St. John the Baptist, as a voice crying in the wilderness, and as a nucleus through which world illumination may be accomplished...The church must show a wide tolerance...The church as a teaching factor should take the great basic doctrines and (shattering the old forms in which they are expressed and held) show their true and inner spiritual significance [ED: occult/esoteric meaning]. The prime work of the church is to teach, and teach ceaselessly, preserving the outer appearance in order to reach the many who are accustomed to church usages. Teachers must be trained; Bible knowledge must be spread; the sacraments must be mystically interpreted, and the power of the church to heal must be demonstrated.
It could not have been planned this way. In the previous CrossWise article, the attempt was made to synthesize Bill Johnson’s “eternally God” statements with his other teachings that indicate a temporarily non-divine Jesus, conjecturing that Johnson may have in mind John 3:13, Ephesians 2:6 / Colossians 3:1-3 as a way to account for Jesus living in two realms simultaneously, with the idea that Christians can do the same, as in the manifest sons of God (MSoG) doctrine. Amazingly, the very day the finishing touches were put on the article and it was published (June 9, 2013), Bill Johnson preached a sermon using these very Scriptures towards that very end! With this podcast as evidence, it is apparent that Johnson DOES, in fact, share essentially the same MSoG view as Bill Britton, as illustrated in the quote used in the last article. Throughout this current article this podcast/sermon titled “Thinking from the Throne” will be referenced, but instead of assigning footnotes next to each quote, time markers will be placed just before and after the quotes from the transcript. ALL CAPS indicates Johnson stressing particular words, all other emphasis added:

[0:24]...I want to pick up where we kind of left off here a few weeks ago...the series that I started about the Throne life, the ascended lifestyle... Jesus stood before His disciples, before Nicodemus in John chapter 3, and He made this statement, He said, “No one has ASCENDED into heaven except He that descended” [John 3:13]. Now this is before His death, before His Resurrection; so He was describing here a lifestyle of intimacy with the Father where even though He was standing on earth He had ascended into heavenly realms in His relationship with God. The point being, that is an invitation for every believer...[1:52]

Did you catch that? Johnson is claiming that John 3:13 means that Jesus “ascended” while He was yet still on earth during the Incarnation, before His literal, physical ascension (Acts 1:9-11) – this “lifestyle of intimacy with the Father” providing the means by which He “had ascended into heavenly realms with God”. Moreover, this is also “an invitation for every believer” to do the same – that is, to attain the “ascended lifestyle”, or “Throne life” while yet here on earth. While John 3:13 is a somewhat difficult Scripture to interpret, not one credible exegesis is such that Jesus had mystically “ascended” while still on the earth, before His literal Ascension. But Johnson’s view is not inconsistent with Gnostic redeemer myths of the 2nd century (and perhaps late 1st century), in which Jesus ascends and descends as a pattern for others to follow towards self-salvation (sometimes with Christ distinct from Jesus as the means by which to “ascend”).

However, as I’ve stated elsewhere, my opinion is that the Gospel of John was actually written in part as a polemic against this sort of proto-Gnosticism of the late 1st century (see introduction here), though some 2nd century Gnostics interpreted John’s Gospel as a Gnostic text. Wayne Meeks interacts with the very liberal Rudolf Bultmann’s work in this regard (“Johannine” = writings attributed to the Apostle John):

...To be sure, [Bultmann’s] observation that the closest extant analogies to the Johannine myth [ED: descending/ascending motif] are to be found in the literature of the gnostic movements stand firm and had been reinforced by more recent discoveries. The problem comes in assessing the very important differences between the typical gnostic myths and that of John, and therefore the direction of the relationship between the two patterns. Perhaps the most important difference, which Bultmann did not fail to notice, is the fact that in gnostic myths most comparable with the Johannine pattern the redeemer’s descent and ascent parallel the fate and hope of the human essence (soul, pneuma [ED: spirit, seed, or the like]), while in the Fourth Gospel there is no such analogia entis [ED: analogy of being/imitation] between redeemer and redeemed...

In other words, in these Gnostic writings the Redeemer Himself first needed redeeming, and the pattern He set for self-redemption was a model for all (or a select few). Is this what Bill Johnson means? As per Johnson, it seems that the ultimate goal of ‘experiencing God’s presence’, “intimacy with the Father”, “Biblical meditation”, or ‘soaking in His presence’ is to “ascend”, thereby having a fully “renewed mind”, as in the sense of attaining full manifest sons of God (MSoG) status. MSoG doctrine is not inconsistent with the “Ascended Master” teaching in New Age / New Spirituality. New Agers call this process leading up to ascension “expanding your (Christ) consciousness”, which is done by “experiencing God” through centering prayer, or contemplative prayer – the same term used by many within Christendom. This is not incongruent with the 2nd century Gnostic idea of receiving ‘special knowledge’ (gnosis), or mystical insight as a means of self-salvation; in fact, this is an updating of this Gnostic doctrine. Here’s one New Ager describing such an approach to this “higher consciousness”:

What would it feel like to be embraced by God? What would it feel like to become aware of how deeply you are loved by your Divine Source? It is possible to experience this! You can have a direct...
personal experience to feel the love your Creator has for you and to grow into the body experience of feeling the love you crave. Spirit has the capacity to relate to us in any way we need and want. Relating to God as an energy force or love is certainly one approach to higher consciousness. Love, however, is best experienced in personal relationships—for example you cannot get love from a thing, only another person. We can know God through our hearts simply by wanting a personal relationship. This opens the portal for Spirit to fill us with the love and acceptance we need that we did not get as children or in our adult relationships.\textsuperscript{4}

Once one reaches the full manifestation of a son of God, aka Master, through “higher consciousness” (by a “lifestyle of intimacy with the Father”?), one can, like the title of this podcast, ‘think from the Throne of God’. Or, as New Age / New Spirituality teacher Alice Bailey states, comparing the manifested son (Master) to the yet-to-ascend disciple, the Master will “\textit{function from the above to the below}” and not (as is the case today with all disciples, though naturally not with the Masters) on ‘the below towards the above’\textsuperscript{5} Much like Johnson has stated on Facebook:

\begin{quote}
The most consistent way to display the kingdom of God is through the renewed mind \textit{[ascended lifestyle, aka resurrection life]}. It is much more than thinking right thoughts. It is how we think — from what perspective. Done correctly, we “reason” from heaven toward earth. [Bill Johnson, Facebook, May 12, 2012; emphasis added]
\end{quote}

Or, as Bailey states elsewhere of the goal of the disciple:

\begin{quote}
…We are also preparing for \textit{expansions of consciousness} which will enable us to live in two realms at once – the life which must be lived on earth and the life which we can live in the kingdom of God. \textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Am I jumping to conclusions? Please read on.

**The Resurrected, Ascended, and Glorified Jesus as Model for Earthly ‘Believer’**

Continuing where we left off above in the podcast:

\begin{quote}[1:52]…The Apostle Paul coined a phrase, found language for this later, when he talked about every believer is seated in heavenly places, in Christ [\textit{ED: Ephesians 2:6}]. So, picture this: Jesus was raised from the dead by the Spirit of Resurrection. When He was Resurrected, He Ascended to heaven, and He was seated at the right hand of the Father, and then was glorified. Alright? So, we have resurrected, ascended, and glorified…\textsuperscript{2:22}
\end{quote}

Here Johnson elaborates on his point about the believer’s goal of appropriating the very thing he claims Jesus did in John 3:13 – by faith, “ascending” via a “lifestyle of intimacy with the Father”, with Johnson using Ephesians 2:6 as his proof-text (see previous article for a proper interpretation of this verse). Does he mean that the ‘believer’ can be “resurrected, ascended, and glorified” and yet be here on the earth? In another audio from 2010, Johnson stated the following. Note his claim of Jesus “re-inheriting everything” as a man, not God, yet Johnson also makes the usual “eternally God” assertion with it. One must wonder what it is Jesus “forfeited” in order to “re-inherit” it, in the selection below. But more important for now, notice the stammering in the middle, in which he makes the disclaimer that Jesus “is not an ascended being” as He “didn’t work His way up into divinity”:

\begin{quote}
The Father so honored Him for His perfect obedience that He now \textit{re-inherited everything}; but, now not as God. \textit{Don’t misunderstand me}, Jesus is not an ascended being; He’s not, uh, He didn’t \textit{work His way up into divinity}. He is eternally God, eternally God. But, when He re-inherited everything, He inherited it as a man without sin. Why? Because He became our elder brother. He became the one who inherited everything. Why? So, that you and I could be positioned to inherit everything with Him. \textit{He forfeited all so that He could re-inherit in a way that would include us}\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

Contrary to Johnson’s disclaimer (again, what was included in the “all” that was “forfeited” and subsequently “re-inherited”?\textsuperscript{8},\textsuperscript{9}) it appears he may be readapting Bailey’s Theosophic teaching that Jesus’ five major events – Birth, Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, and Resurrection / Ascension (the latter two grouped as one) – were both actually and symbolically achieved by Jesus in order to provide a symbolic pattern for others. In other words, according to this esoteric doctrine, Jesus provided an \textit{actual} concrete pattern, both literal \textit{and symbolic}, for the ‘believer’ \textit{symbolically} do the same.
As further evidence to support that Johnson may be re-adopting Bailey’s model, he has elsewhere made the explicit claim that “[m]ost all of the experiences of Jesus recorded in Scripture were predictive examples of the realms in God that are made available to the believer”, with the context specifically referring to the Mount of Transfiguration as one example. Bailey’s fivefold pattern is explained in her 1937 book From Bethlehem to Calvary: The Initiations of Jesus, and it would be instructive to quote a somewhat lengthy section to illustrate (note that “myth” is defined earlier here as “a fact which can be proven”):

...Through self-initiated experiment we can prove their validity: through experience we can establish them as governing forces in our lives; and through their expression we can demonstrate their truth to others. This is the theme of this book, dealing as it does with the facts of the Gospel story, that fivefold sequential myth which teaches us the revelation of divinity in the Person of Jesus Christ, and which remains eternally true, in the cosmic sense, in the historical sense, and in its practical application to the individual. This myth divides itself into five great episodes:

1. The Birth at Bethlehem.
2. The Baptism in Jordan.
3. The Transfiguration on Mount Carmel.
4. The Crucifixion on Mount Golgotha.
5. The Resurrection and Ascension.

Their significance for us and their reinterpretation in modern terms is our task.

The “Gospel” here is reinterpreted as self-salvation through self-deification by following the five steps above symbolically rather than actually. Understand that the “revelation of divinity in the Person of Jesus Christ” is referring to a gradual deification, not that the earthly Jesus was divine per se. In occult teachings such as Theosophy, and some of the Gnostic teachings of the 2nd century (and today), the man Jesus of Nazareth had a divine spark/seed of ‘Christ’ within Him, like all of mankind (occultists pervert Colossians 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of Glory” to this end), which was awakened at “the Virgin Birth” and continued to grow until He fully ‘died to his lower, material self’ at the “Crucifixion”, ridding Himself of the outer material body, after which He ascended. It took the “Christ spirit” – which was separate and distinct from the man Jesus – at Baptism for Jesus to actualize the 2nd through 5th initiations (sound familiar?). So, is this what Johnson has in mind with his teachings? Keep reading. In a follow-up sermon to the June 9th podcast, titled “Waiting Patiently in Hope” (June 23, 2013), Bill Johnson expounds a bit on the basic themes in his “Thinking from the Throne”. More importantly, he states the following which fits well into the Alice Bailey model above:

...The death of Christ is also the death of your old nature. The resurrection of Christ is actually your resurrection. His ascension is actually your legal access to heavenly realms. And His glorification is the position of the New Testament believer coming into the glory of the Lord. We LIVE in this atmosphere of presence...[3:15 – 3:39]

As we well know, the sin nature never leaves us in this life [Romans 7:14-25], but we must live by the Spirit rather than the sinful nature [Romans 8:4] by submitting to the Spirit instead of our sin nature [Galatians 5:16-26]. It is not until the resurrection of the saints that the sin nature leaves the saint – a yet future, one-time event for all Christians collectively, including those who’ve perished in centuries past, at the “last trumpet”, at which point we receive our non-flesh-and-blood bodies [1 Corinthians 15:50-54]. However, in the Alice Bailey Theosophic teachings, and other occult/esoteric doctrines, mankind has two natures – one human (lower self, ego) and one inherent divine nature (divine spark/seed or “Christ within”, higher self). According to Bailey’s five steps above, “the Crucifixion” (aka “The Great Renunciation”) is the point at which the “lower self” (“old nature” in Johnson’s quote above) in the disciple has been completely overcome, overtaken by the now fully actualized divine nature, the culmination of the process of “dying to self”. Following this death of the lower self (“old nature”?), which renders the disciple a spirit being, having shed the outer material body (known as the “not self”), is the resurrection/ascension. This is the final stage, and the disciple is now a fully manifested son of God, usually known as “Ascended Master”. These steps do not have to be fulfilled in one lifetime, for at death the spirit re-ascends to the heavens to await reincarnation into another body, in order to continue the process. The spirit continues reincarnating ad infinitum until completion of the five steps, i.e. the attainment of Ascended Master, or fully manifested son of God. The individual is now on par with the occult/Theosophic “Master Jesus” who had provided the pattern for this “Age of Pisces”. Those who know anything about the manifest sons of God (MSoG) teaching know that
As Bill Fawcett, over on the Facebook page Bethel Church and Christianity (on June 21,
2013), so astutely observed of Johnson’s podcast, “the main doctrinal thrust of the message is that we live in a spiritual universe, and the present world is just an illusion.” This particular theme is an important point made in a previous CrossWise article (see Johnson’s Word of Faith Roots Showing section here). According to some occult doctrine, the physical world in which we live is all illusory (a “field trip”, to use Johnson’s words), while the spiritual world is reality. This idea comes originally from the Dualism of second century Gnosticism (derived in part from Platonism), though this is also prevalent in the Eastern religions – a false dichotomy in which all matter is evil, while all spirit is good. New Age / New Spirituality doctrine is largely taken from Theosophy and other metaphysical cults (all of which adopt doctrines from Eastern religions). The following quotes are from Madame H. P. Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy (1875), in which she borrows the term maya from Buddhism, meaning “illusion”, in her description of this same teaching:

…The reader must bear in mind that, according to our teaching which regards this phenomenal Universe as a great illusion, the nearer a body is to the UNKNOWN SUBSTANCE, the more it approaches reality, as being removed the farther from this world of Maya…[13 All capitalization and italics in original; bold added for emphasis.]

…When the spiritual entity breaks loose for ever from every particle of matter, then only it enters upon the eternal and unchangeable Nirvana. He exists in spirit, in nothing: as a form, a shape, a semblance, he is completely annihilated, and thus will die no more, for spirit alone is no Maya, but the only REALITY in an illusionary universe of ever-passing forms.[14 All spelling, capitalization, and italics in original; bold added for emphasis.]

But if the goal for the “spiritual entity” is to rid itself of matter (as a means of self-salvation towards self-deification) and die no more, then how would this apply to what Johnson is teaching above? Bailey provides the answer:

He [Christ] thereby liberated us from the form side of life, of religion and matter, and demonstrated to us the possibility of being in the world and yet not of the world living as souls, released from the trammels and limitations of the flesh, while yet walking on earth.[15]

If he chooses to take a physical vehicle [ED: body]… the Master will ‘function from the above to the below’ and not (as is the case today with all disciples, though naturally not with the Masters) on ‘the below towards the above’. [16] A Master, or manifest son of God, can choose to come back to earth, without or with an ‘earth body’, thereby living in “two realms at once”. This is not inconsistent with Johnson who claims that this “ascended lifestyle” provides the ability to live “at the right hand of the Father”, while simultaneously living on earth:

[32:48]… In the SAME measure that the Father put Jesus at His right hand, in the same measure He has put YOU at His right hand, because YOU are IN Christ… The renewed mind considers reality from what the Lamb has accomplished… This is the normal life for the believer. [33:59]

While we will one day be raised with Christ, it’s blasphemy to claim we’ll actually be on the Throne, thinking and living “FROM the abiding presence of the resurrected Christ”, at the Father’s right hand, the place where Jesus Christ now sits. In Johnson’s message here, and his other works, much is made of the “renewed mind”, but this is effected by “intimacy with the Father”, ‘soaking in God’s presence’, ‘Biblical meditation’, etc. These ‘encounters with God’ allow the ‘believer’ to advance in his/her spiritual walk – just like the gnosis of the 2nd century:

[34:00]… And I feel like the Lord, even right now, is inviting us… is drawing us into encounters that adjust our perspective… the person who has encountered God sees from His perspective, sees through His eyes – the invitation every believer has to come up higher.[34:43]

Bill Johnson claims that each ‘believer’ can come up so high as to obtain the FULLNESS of God. He does this by first quoting Colossians 2:9 noting that “In Him [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of God bodily” [07:28 – 09:13]. Then Johnson makes the illogical leap that in the ‘believer’, as part of the Church body, dwells the fullness of God (since Jesus is the “Head” and we are the “body”):
Johnson asserts that the Lord’s Prayer is an apostolic prayer in the sense that since the ‘believer’ home is in heaven, then earth is “another territory” as compared to heaven. That is, heaven is “home base”. This illustrates that the ‘believer’ needs to understand, if they don’t already, that s/he really IS living in heaven, with the goal to bring him/herself here to “reason” from heaven to earth, or to think “FROM the abiding presence of the resurrected Christ” as a fully manifested son of God “at His right hand”, with the ability to function in both the heavenly (spiritual, eternal) realm and the earthly realm:

Prior to this, Johnson was explaining how the ‘believer’ should work towards living in and from heaven, not being deterred by naysayers:

The message here is that the ‘believer’ must not “criticize”, but instead recognize as special those who’ve already reached their “breakthrough” (a common occult term for spiritual advancement), their “ascension”, so that the ‘believer’ can be positioned to attain his/her own “ascension” (“the one He exalts”, “the one to whom all things have been added”). The subtle implication is that Johnson himself is in this esteemed category as one so exalted, i.e. “ascended”, an “apostle” who is ‘bringing heaven to earth’. This point is made clearer near the very end of this sermon, as he reiterates this point using Ephesians 4:11 until he gets to this climax, using false humility:

Obviously, this means that there will be individuals who are exhibiting all the traits of the glorified Christ on a worldwide scale (such as Bill Johnson currently?). In fact, in his popular book When Heaven Invades Earth Johnson makes the explicit claim that the glorified Jesus Christ of Revelation 1:14-15 IS the model for the earthly ‘believer’! In addition, as Alice Bailey has done (and other occultists), Johnson proof-texts “As He is, so are we in the world” from 1 John 4:17 to back up his assertion.

Let’s be clear, Jesus Christ is not coming to “live on earth again THROUGH yielded people”. Jesus will be returning bodily in the same manner in which He left (Acts 1:9-11). But Johnson goes even further than this, expounding on the above. In typical Latter Rain fashion, he is looking for full unity, by proof-texting Ephesians 4:13:

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Equivalent to Christ Himself, these fully manifested sons of God, as collectively ONE perfect man, in which Christ is “on earth again THROUGH [these] yielded people”. This sounds eerily close to the New Age / New Spirituality doctrine that “the Christ” — in actuality the antichrist (or antichrist spirit) — will manifest himself through many different people at one time:

Eventually, there will appear the **Church Universal**, and its definite outlines will appear towards the close of this [20th] century...This Church will be nurtured into activity by the Christ[ED: Satan/antichrist] and His disciples when the outpouring of the **Christ principle, the true second Coming**, has been accomplished.²⁰

The Christ, when He comes into incarnation, will most likely **project himself into many parts** and be where he wants to be. This is called the Law of Divisibility, a term used in Agni Yoga that means a highly developed spirit—**one who is able to contact, simultaneously, various people in various locations**. For example, a Master can be seen in various groupsat the same time. He can evenbe in different planes serving and teaching on different levels to meet various needs of the people. He can do different jobs in different places at one time.²¹

Hyper-charismatic Bob Jones was recently at a conference hosted by Bill Johnson’s Bethel Church in Redding, CA, and stated something not unlike the above: “Recently, the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘I’m coming IN my people. Christ in you, the hope of glory. I’m comin’ IN my people.’”²² As already noted earlier, occultists pervert the “Christ in you, the hope of glory” of Colossians 1:27, and MSOG adherents pervert it in a very similar manner.

**Conclusion**

Bill Johnson is clearly teaching the manifest sons of God doctrine (MSoG). Individuals attain this MSoG status of “ascended lifestyle” (aka “Throne life”) through “intimacy with the Father”, using methods akin to the centering prayer and contemplative prayer of Eastern religions and the New Age / New Spirituality (as well as 2nd century Gnosticism). This will ultimately result in the ability to both live and think from the Throne of God, while yet remaining on earth (with a “renewed mind”). Such a ‘believer’ can ‘think from the Throne’ as they are literally — in a statement of utmost blasphemy — at the right hand of God, as per Johnson. This version of MSoG has a parallel with occult doctrine, with the fully manifested son / Ascended Master possessing the ability to live in both the heavenly and earthly realms simultaneously. It seems quite possible that the Neo-Gnosticism of Bill Johnson (and others of his ilk) is a slight variation of the five-fold Bailey model illustrated above. In this revised model Jesus is portrayed as God pre-incarnate (instead of a reincarnated man), yet “He emptied Himself of divinity and became man” so that He could gradually re-actualize His divinity and thus become the pattern for others towards their own self-deification — similar to the Gnostic redeemer myths of the 2nd century.

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4. Donna D’Ingillo, “Experiencing God” *Center for Christ Consciousness: Open your Heart, Expand your Mind, Unite with God* website, par 1, 2 <http://www.ctforchristcon.org/experiencinggod.asp>, as accessed 07/08/13
Bill Johnson. Audio clip taken from 2010 Australian “When Heaven Invades Earth” Tour as accessed from Plantagenet Family Church, Mount Barker, Western Australia, 03/21/11 from the following url: <http://pfchurch.org.au/?p=357>, which now is redirected to a different page altogether. Link recovered on Internet Archive / The Wayback Machine; however, audio clip is unavailable: <http://web.archive.org/web/20101106155256/http://pfchurch.org.au/?p=357>. Originally transcribed by CrossWise on 3/21/11 or shortly thereafter; last access date to original web link unknown but likely Fall, 2011. All emphasis added.  A similar quote is available on YouTube by “whizzpopping” Bill Johnson – Bringing Heaven to Earth (Part 2 of 2) Aug 20, 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxVdxzl0vN4> 3:10 – 4:30: “He forfeited everything because He owned everything; literally all that exists was His. And, He gave it all up to become a man; and, then He re-inherited everything as a man so that you and I would have an inheritance – the absolute mercy of God. So, now He stands after His triumphant Resurrection. The defeat of the power of death, hell and the grave – all that stuff was defeated, the power of sin. And, He stands before humanity and He says, ‘I got the keys back. That which was lost in the Garden, I’ve got it back. Now, let’s get back to plan A.’ And, he makes this profound statement; he says, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.’ Jesus did not make that declaration as God. Now, na – He’s eternally God; he’s not a created being, He didn’t ascend, ya know, to some position. He’s eternally God; but, He did not make that statement as God. How do we know? Because He said, ‘All authority’s been GIVEN to me.’ There’s no one higher than God to give God authority. When Jesus made that statement, He made the statement as OUR elder brother.” CAPS from emphasis in original; bold added. As accessed 07/12/13. Once again, note the stammering in his disclaimer.

In his book *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* [1988 (4th pr. 1991), Hendrickson, Peabody, MA] D.R. McConnell notes how E.W. Kenyon, the ‘grandfather’ of the Word of Faith movement, of which Johnson is a part, had made specific disclaimers yet proceeded to teach the very doctrine claimed! McConnell states: *The typical pattern in such instances is to disclaim any similarities with cultic teaching on a particular topic and then proceed to teach exactly that*[p 45]. It appears Bill Johnson may be doing something similar.

8 Bill Johnson *Face to Face with God: The Ultimate Quest to Experience His Presence* 2007, Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL, p 200. Emphasis added. Here’s a bit more of the context: *Most all of the experiences of Jesus recorded in Scripture were prophetic examples of the realms in God that are made available to the believer. The Mount of Transfiguration raised the bar significantly on potential human experience. While Johnson is not clear on just what constitutes the “new birth”, he does have a teaching which appears to promote the divine spark/seed concept, which is subsequently enlivened and grows by an external ‘word’. This is detailed in the following CrossWise post: https://notunlikelee.wordpress.com/2013/02/24/open-challenge-to-fans-and-critics-of-bill-johnsonbethel-church/ >. In addition, his teaching on “the anointing”, aka the “Christ anointing” (see previous article) matches quite closely Bailey’s “Baptism in Jordan”. Taken together, this accounts for steps 1 through 5 of the Bailey model, when we consider the totality of Johnson’s words in “Thinking from the Throne” and the remaining material referenced in this article, which include the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and even glorification.


14 Helena P. Blavatsky *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* Vol 1 – Science, 1988 (unabridged from original 1877 first edition), Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, CA, p 290. Noteworthy is the fact that Reality was the name of a newsletter written by E.W. Kenyon, and a term used in a similar manner as compared to Blavatsky above. From a footnote in D.R. McConnell’s *A Different Gospel* is the following (although the author did not trace the doctrine to Theosophy, he does compare to both New Thought and Christian Science, which were contemporaneous with the roots of Theosophy): “…it should be pointed out that ‘Reality’ as Kenyon uses it is a term used in New Thought and Christian Science to refer to the spiritual realm and truths that were hidden by the sensations of the physical realm, which were not reality at all, but was considered ‘error,’ the opposite of metaphysical reality. Reality was also the name of Kenyon’s first newsletter[p 55, n 53]. As noted above, Bill Johnson is considered a Word of Faith teacher, having inherited some doctrine from Kenyon. Johnson uses reality in a similar way, as indicated in this very article and in the Johnson’s Word of Faith Roots Showing section here: <https://notunlikelee.wordpress.com/2012/02/20/learning-etymology-with-bill-johnson-a-new-age-repentance/> >.


Cognitive dissonance happens when one's beliefs do not match up with his or her behaviors. Learn more about how people strive to reduce this conflict. Consider a situation in which a man who places a value on being environmentally responsible just purchased a new car that he later discovers does not get great gas mileage. The conflict: It is important for the man to take care of the environment. He is driving a car that is not environmentally friendly. In order to reduce this dissonance between belief and behavior, he can sell the car and purchase another one that gets better gas mileage, or he can reduce his emphasis on environmental responsibility.