Book Review: Exploring Kenotic Christology by C. Stephen Evans (Ed.)

C. Stephen Evans' compilation of modern essays on kenotic Christology brings together a number of current proponents of the kenosis theory with a few adherents of the historically orthodox view. The essays are written by philosophers, theologians and Biblical scholars all professing Christian faith. Certainly, some strides have been made in attempting to articulate a more coherent (and varied) kenosis doctrine since Gottfried Thomasius first proposed his theory in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, there are still problems inherent in any literal 'self-emptying' and/or 'self-limiting' doctrine with respect to the Word (Logos) when compared to Chalcedon and, by extension, Scripture.

Confusingly, some use the term kenosis as a way to define the Word's (Logos') necessary limitations qua human while neither divesting divine attributes nor limiting the usage thereof during the Incarnation, which is in actuality merely defining Chalcedonian orthodoxy. For example, to claim that Jesus is limited in power yet God the Son is omnipotent is consistent with historical, orthodox Christianity. Yet others in modern times use the term in ways far removed from the starting point of orthodoxy, even going so far as denying pre-existence. Thomas R. Thompson explains: “Kenoticism is now applied to various Christological projects that differ significantly from the intent and strictures of nineteenth-century advocates” [p 102]. Thankfully, the essayists in this volume all affirm the Logos’ pre-existence, though some depart from orthodoxy in other areas. On the more orthodox end, we have scholar Gordon Fee in his working definition as “some form of self-limitation of divine prerogatives on the part of the earthly Jesus” [p 29]. However, others use the term in the sense of either ontological kenosis (the Word no longer retains certain, or perhaps any, divine attributes) or functionalist kenosis (the Word retains all divine attributes yet restricts the usage of some or all). For the benefit of the reader, the type of kenosis will be listed with the explanation of the essayist(s)’s stance in this review – ontological or functionalist (which will also be collectively identified as “unorthodox”), as opposed to orthodox (fully Chalcedonian/Biblical).

Not surprisingly, Fee, a renowned exegete, offers the most Scriptural examination of Jesus Christ's earthly life. He cautions against overly humanizing the divine or improperly divinizing the humanity of the Incarnate Christ, for to do the latter is a sort of “naive docetism.” Fee does an excellent job of debunking James D.G. Dunn's exposition of Philippians 2:6-11 as an 'Adam Christology' [30-32]. While not technically kenotic (excepting perhaps a modern understanding of the term), Dunn asserts that the Apostle Paul understood Christ as a man (Adam) rather than the pre-existent Logos who was subsequently made flesh [Dunn, Christology in the Making 1980,Westminster; pp 113-128]. Fee provides a fairly thorough exeesis of the Philippians passage illustrating that the best way to understand the ‘self-emptying’ is metaphorically rather than literally. At times he seems to be propounding a functionalist kenosis [34], yet it appears Fee is merely explaining the Biblical grounds with which to approach the study of the humiliation of Jesus Christ [the Incarnation from conception to Cross and subsequent burial] to stay within the bounds of Chalcedonian orthodoxy [29]. Fee neither attempts to explicitly debunk any of the historically unorthodox kenosis theories (save Dunn’s) nor fully define his own stance.

Bruce Fisk agrees with the logic of kenosis, yet his essay focuses primarily on comparing the Philippians hymn (2:6-11) with contemporaneous Graeco-Roman fiction and how the Christ-hymn might have been understood by first century readers. While interesting in its own right, it sheds only a small to moderate amount of light on the discussion of kenosis in this volume as Fisk, frustratingly, neglects to specifically state his own position. To be fair, he does explain portions of the text by providing some commentary of orthodox scholars with whom he agrees (or seems to agree), with opposing viewpoints as well. Furthermore, to his credit, Fisk touches on the problems in defining the
Ruth Groenhout compares kenosis (self-emptying) in general to feminist thought, arguing that self-sacrifice is not antithetical to feminism: “When placed in the context of a robust notion of self-worth, and when oriented toward service to the Kingdom rather than purposeless self-abnegation, self-sacrifice is an appropriate call for all who call themselves followers of Christ” [311]. She makes a somewhat useful analogy of Christ’s state of humiliation in comparing fairy tale kings who temporarily dress as peasants, setting aside the prerogatives of royalty, who subsequently return to the throne receiving again their full due [297]. Noting that some feminists dismiss Christ’s sacrifice out of hand merely because He was male, Groenhout opines: “His life, death, and resurrection, however, are not intrinsically tied to his masculinity, but to this humanity” [312]. While this is a very profitable essay in its own right, it does little to advance the discussion of the kenosis theory.

Thomas R. Thompson provides a useful history of nineteenth century kenosis, discussing various models and their resultant criticisms from the right and the left. In summation, Thompson asserts that any non-kenetic theory devolves into paradox with contradiction (in distinction from merely paradox) which makes ‘classical’ (19th century), or modern, kenosis theories more palatable in comparison. Better, according to Thompson, to accept some paradox “pushing beyond contradiction, if possible” [110] in explicating a kenosis theory. With this in mind, he claims that the W. F. Gess model (the Logos truly BECAME flesh as a human soul and gradually regained deity throughout the Incarnation – a true metamorphosis of the divine Logos) is “the most consistent and coherent” [111], while conceding it failed in the claim of deity. Yet incredibly (especially in light of the fact that he’s at least cognizant that the Word was to sustain the cosmos [94], cf. Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17), Thompson believes this kenotic motif provides the most promise, asserting that a Gessian model can somehow “make the deity claim”, concluding with, “But, that is the argument for another work” [111]. This most extreme of the ontologically kenotic theories has been described by La Touche as “incarnation by divine suicide” [“The Person of Christ in Modern Thought” in L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Eerdmans; p 327].

Edward T. Oakes expresses an understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation: “To explain that paradox by saying ‘the infinite has emptied itself to become finite’ certainly resolves that paradox. But if one interprets self-emptying too univocally or too radically, the paradox is not just resolved but abolished” [218-219]. Oakes then proceeds to expound on an essay by Hans Urs von Balthasar putting forth a view that Jesus “descended into hell”, i.e. Sheol, to die there, between the Cross and the Resurrection (which, perhaps to some, could well be a logical conclusion to ontological kenosis, given that Christ took on the sins of the world [cf. 2 Cor. 5:21]). He even seems to suggest that Jesus went to Gehenna, the lake of fire: “Sin is burnt up, as it were, in the fire of this love, for God, as Scripture says, is a consuming fire that will not tolerate anything impure but must burn it away” [240]. To support the view, Oakes/Balthasar use the Apostles’ Creed and much-disputed Biblical texts, primarily 1 Peter 3:18-20, the disparate views of which are aptly described by R.C. Sproul who admits his own view is in the minority: “I would hasten to add that most views of this passage are in the minority, since there is no majority view on the meaning of this text…” [St. Andrew’s Expositional Commentary: 1-2 Peter, Crossway; p 125]. Wayne Grudem explains the various theories related to this passage in the appendix of the TNTC of 1 Peter, taking 37 pages to do so. Neither Sproul nor Grudem construe this passage as remotely kenotic, and Grudem contends the phrase in the Apostles’ Creed (descended into Sheol) is not in the earliest versions of the Creed [Systematic Theology, Zondervan; pp 583-588, cited from Schaaf, Creeds of Christendom] and, on that basis, omits it from his systematic [p 1169]. Orthodoxy vehemently denies Jesus literally died in Sheol, much less Gehenna.

Not wishing to “ablish the paradox”, Oakes asserts that Jesus Christ was literally the Word ‘become flesh’ [218, 236] (a la Gess, as Thompson proposes above); subsequently, the second person of the Triune Godhead actually becomes wholly separated from the rest of the Trinity post-Cross [similar to the ‘Jesus Died Spiritually’ heresy of some Word of Faith teachers], at which point the kenosis is “subsumed” into the Trinity and the Trinity is “transformed” [241]. Oakes ends his essay with his admonition to “leave the paradox as stark as possible” [245].

In the Thompson/Connelius Plantinga Jr chapter the authors assert that kenosis theories are dependent upon the adoption of a ‘social view of the Trinity’, but one that does not go so far as implicit or explicit tritheism as [Oakes’ essay does so implicitly]. While I’m not so sure that the authors make their case, there are other problematic issues put forth. Again, the Gessian kenotic theory is the preferred model [170, 176]. In speaking of Gess’ view, Chater aptly describes it thus, “This theory is so untrue…that it needs no minute refutation” [Systematic Theology, Kregel; I.380].

In asking the question ‘Is kenosis orthodox?’, Stephen T. Davis sets out to ‘prove’ that kenosis can be congruent with the Chalcedonian view that the Incarnate Christ was fully human and fully divine, “I am suggesting a kenotic theory as ‘heresy of some Word of Wisdom’ [115]. Davis does not propose a fully formed theory; he merely attempts to show that kenosis (vaguely defined) is orthodox. To counter the charge that a kenosis entailing a ‘laying aside’ or restricting of the ‘omni’ attributes denies divine immutability Davis claims “soft immutability” such that “God is not fickly, capricious, mercurial, or moody; God’s holy and benevolent nature remains ever and eternally the same; God is faithful in keeping God’s promises; God’s aims and intentions for human beings do not change” [135-36]. But how does that square with Hebrews 13:8, as well as Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:3 (and others noted below)?

In the introductory chapter it is stated that the Evans/Davis jointly authored closing essay “attempts to draw together some of the main strands made by the proponents of kenotic Christology today” as a challenge to “traditional theories” [24], with the concluding essay itself asserting that only a “full-fledged” kenosis provides “the best hope of an account...” [63-4].
of the Incarnation that is genuinely orthodox and yet does complete justice to the biblical portraits of Jesus” [321].

While no specific theory is proffered in the final essay, the authors do claim that Jesus Christ “lived his life in complete and continuous dependence on the Holy Spirit” which, while one could potentially argue that this view is not out of the bounds of Chalcedon, runs contrary to the Biblical witness [cf. John 5:21-25 (Christ acting divinely of and by Himself while incarnate by giving eternal life to whom He chose); John 2:19/10:17-18]. This dependence on the Holy Spirit implies at minimum a functionalist kenosis, but an ontological kenosis can be derived from this as well.

In his own essay, Evans promotes an ontological kenosis such that the claim is that God is omnipotent then to be so necessarily means He should be able to forego His omnipotence. Thinking this through, Evans rightly notes, “If he has given up omnipotence, he cannot use omnipotence to get it back” [213]. Excellent point. Evans, however, explains, “That is why the glorification of the Son is described by Scripture as accomplished by the power of the Father” [213]. While I don’t believe this can be backed up Biblically, there are other problems with this view. Both John 2:19 and 10:17-18 indicate that Jesus was in fact omnipotent as He raised Himself on the Third Day [In fact, the entire Trinity was involved in the Resurrection as other Scripture attests: Holy Spirit – Romans 1:4/8:11; Father – Acts 5:29-31/Galatians 1:1/Ephesians 1:17-20; God – Acts 2:24/Romans 4:24]. Moreover, John 2:11 makes the explicit claim that Jesus performed the miracle at Cana by His own inherent powers which “thus revealed his glory”.

Asserting that a kenotic theory should adhere to Chalcedon, Ronald J. Feenstra begins his essay with a brief Christological history starting with the events leading up to and the making of the Chalcedonian Creed. He then proceeds to propound an ontological kenosis by distinguishing between ‘essential’ and ‘accidental’ attributes of divinity, similar to Thomasius’ “immanent” and “relative” attributes. However, as in Davis’ view [Logic and Nature of God, London: Macmillan and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983; p 124] God is, for example, “omnipotent-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise”, borrowing this idea from Thomas V. Morris[152].

In favor of the orthodox view and specifically critical of the unorthodox theories, Edwin Chr. van Driel’s essay notes the “polemic twist” of the unorthodox kenosis proponents. While classical theologians see the Incarnation as an addition (of a human nature/body), the ontological or functionalist kenotic sees it as a divestment or necessary self-limitation of certain divine attributes instead. Adopting a metaphor borrowed from Marilyn McCord Adams, van Driel calls the divine nature of the Word a “power pack” with the human nature acquired at the Incarnation an additional “power pack”. Thus, the incarnate Christ had two complete “power packs” in one person. Van Driel believes a satisfying kenotically orthodox account can be found in Chalcedon, keeping in mind ConstantinePope III (AD681) which further specifies a two-alled (and, van Driel construes, a two-minded) Incarnation.

Similarly, Sarah Coakley asks if modern kenosis “rests on a mistake”, and looks at patristic exegesis (Cyril, Nestorius, Gregory of Nyssa) of the Philippians hymn/poem as a way to show possibilities existing in the communicatio idiomatum to arrive at a coherent Chalcedonian, Biblical orthodox Incarnation, as opposed to an ontological or functionalist interpretation. Disappointingly, Coakley stops short of fully codifying a theory concluding her essay with an admonition to “re-embrace alternative readings of kenosis that take the communicatio tradition seriously, along with its understanding of the radical difference of status of the ‘divine’ and the ‘human’” [264]. (Oliver Crisp, in his book Divinity and Humanity [Cambridge, 2007; see my review]), uses a similar methodology promoting a fully formed theory which he terms “divine krypsis”. He defines it as not being kenotic (though one could argue, ‘quasi-kenotic’) in the manner of Evans, Davis, et al since the Logos is not limited in any way. This works in virtue of the perichoretic relationship of the divine nature to the human in hypostatic union, while restricting any transference of essences or properties to either nature.)

While I will agree with the following statement in the Davis/Evans jointly-authored final essay that “Christology is THE Christian doctrine” [313], I do not agree with their kenotic conclusions on this all-important subject. In fairness, however, the authors state just before their concluding remarks: “We believe that the challenge of kenotic theory will be helpful even to those who eventually reject a full kenotic theory. For a kenotic account will stimulate those who reject it to think more deeply about the meaning of the Incarnation and do more justice to the full humanity of Jesus” [321]. I don’t disagree, as there are those who lean more towards divinizing Jesus’ humanity. One must keep both the human and the divine natures in proper balance/tension.

This book mostly fails to fulfill its billing as from the back cover: “It is an attempt to make sense of the traditional [i.e., Chalcedonian; pp 1-2] Christian claim that Jesus of Nazareth was both human and divine by developing the idea that to become human God the Son temporarily emptied himself of some of his divine attributes.” The reason it falls short is two-fold: 1) the essayists promoting a literal self-emptying fail to take into account the whole of Scripture [primarily Colossians 1:17/Hebrews 1:3; John 2:19/10:17-18 & John 5:21-25] from which Chalcedon is drawn; and, 2) those who promote (or seem to promote) an historically orthodox view (that Jesus did not literally empty Himself of some of His divine attributes) are in opposition to the back cover’s claim. And, frustratingly, neither camp fully explicates a viable theory, though some (Coakley, van Driel) come closer than others. But this in no way renders the work fatally flawed; rather, this illustrates that whoever wrote the back cover commentary was either ill-informed of its contents or did not think through a proper synopsis.

A minor criticism: the book does not segregate those preferring (or seeming to prefer) a historically orthodox position from those who favor modern kenosis which can be confusing as one reads along.

All in all, the book is thought provoking both for those of orthodox persuasion and those favoring the more unorthodox kenotic views and is therefore well worth the read for either camp in investigating opposing views. Be forewarned, unless one is well-versed in Christological issues and somewhat aware of the various kenotic theories, this book will be a challenging read (as it was for me) and likely a difficult read in spots. Yet, it is this reader/reviewer’s contention that.
The Kingdom of God is at Hand, part II

In part I, the intertestamental era (the time between the Old and New Testaments) was discussed including the literary works, social developments, and beliefs of the different Jewish sects of this period. Since God had sent no prophets since the time of Malachi, the oppressed Jews turned to writing various works which are known as Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Much of this literature was fictional; some of dubious origin, while others contained factual historical accounts interspersed with inaccuracies; however, there was a fair amount on the spirit world including the angelic realm, eschatology, and the afterlife.

The Church of today is in waiting in a not too dissimilar way. There have been no prophets since the writings of the Apostles in the first century; and, we are in between the two advents – Jesus’ First and Second Comings.

However, in recent years there has been the claim that God has brought back prophecy through the so-called “restoration of the five-fold ministry” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers based on an interpretation of Ephesians 4:11-13. Interestingly, the focus is primarily on the first two in this list to the virtual exclusion of the others with some of the self-proclaimed using these titles to define their own personhood as in Apostle _________ or Prophet _________ (with the first letter of their designation capitalized).

It is beyond the scope of this article to do an in-depth exposition on the Latter Rain movement[1] from which the “five-fold” teaching in the previous paragraph and much of the remaining article emanate. Others have already done a fine job such as Tricia Booth (formerly Tillin of Banner Ministries) at The Birthpangs of a New Age[2], Herescope[3], and others.

It would be journalistically improper, unfair and inaccurate to make direct correlations between the Jewish sects of the intertestamental era with Christians of the present; however, general comparisons may prove interesting. The Qumranians as identified in the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) lived a monastic type of lifestyle perhaps not too dissimilar to the monks and nuns of the Roman Catholic Church of today. Also, the Qumran group had their “teacher of righteousness” whom they looked to for interpretation of the Scriptures not unlike the Roman Catholic Church looks to the Papacy. Interestingly, the focus is primarily on the first two in this list to the virtual exclusion of the others with some of the self-proclaimed using these titles to define their own personhood as in Apostle _________ or Prophet _________ (with the first letter of their designation capitalized).

More comparisons could be made; but, that would detract from the primary focus of this article. However, in general, it
Kingdom Now/Dominionism and the Redefined Great Commission

The first paragraph of part I ended with this question: “So, is the kingdom of God NOW?” Bill Johnson answers in the affirmative:

“Jesus taught us how to live by announcing, ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand!’ It is a present reality affecting the now.

“…Many say that we must be careful over how much emphasis we put on what we are to become in the now. Why…? [6] [bolding from italicized original]

While the Kingdom of God is most certainly now, its consummation will come only when Jesus returns bodily (Acts 1:5-11). Johnson, however, believes Jesus gave the authority to us to “take dominion” over the earth; i.e., to “Christianize” by ‘miracles, signs and wonders’ thus distorting Matthew 28:19-20 and redefining the Great Commission as orthodox Christians know it:

“In redeeming man, Jesus retrieved what man [Adam] had given away. From the throne of triumph He declared, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore…’ In other words I got it all back. Now go use it and reclaim mankind… [7] [emphasis and ellipse as in original]

Johnson states that the “authentic gospel” is actually “the gospel of the kingdom” [8] – meaning what is known as Dominionism or Kingdom Now. Interestingly, the part about repentance and sin as in Luke 24:47 – “and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem.” [NIV] – is conspicuously absent or deemphasized amongst those who have redefined the Great Commission. Without the knowledge that we are sinners – the bad news – what good is the Good News of the Gospel? Todd Bentley even goes so far as to say:

“…We can preach the Gospel all day long, but that won’t save souls… [9]

That’s because it’s all about the ‘miracles, signs and wonders’ according to the Bentley and Johnson viewpoint. In the October, 2009 issue of Charisma, C. Peter Wagner states the same basic thing as Johnson:

“Formerly I thought my task was to go to as many nations of the world as possible and plant as many churches as possible. Now I take the Great Commission more literally when it tells us not to make as many individual disciples as we can but to disciple whole social groups – such as entire nations. This is kingdom theology.

“When God created Adam and Eve, He told them to take dominion over all His creation (see Gen. 1:28). This was God’s plan until Satan succeeded in persuading Adam to obey him rather than God. The result was that Satan usurped Adam’s authority and took dominion himself. [10] [emphasis mine]

This whole premise of ‘reclaiming lost dominion’ is faulty. The main problem with this logic is that the dominion referred to in Genesis 1:28 refers to ruling over the fish, birds, animals, and “every living thing” on the earth. The next two verses in Genesis explain God’s intent:

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food. And it was so. [NIV]

In effect, the Lord is saying we are to have stewardship rather than ownership over the earth. Who really owns the earth? Psalm 24:1 states, “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” [NIV] In the book of Job, Satan himself must receive God’s permission to test Job (Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6). And, in Job 38:33 God states the following as a rhetorical question:

33 Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God’s dominion over the earth [NIV]

Obviously, Satan does not have dominion over the earth – he may be “lord of this world” in a sense; but, he doesn’t own it or control it. God is still sovereign. So, regarding Wagner’s and Johnson’s (and others’) claim that the dominion of the earth was lost to Satan at The Fall, Scripture just does not attest to that. From the Adam Clarke commentary regarding Genesis 1:28:

“…God created man capable of governing the world, and when fitted for the office, he fixed him in it. We see God’s tender care and parental solicitude for the comfort and well-being of this masterpiece of
The more traditional view of postmillennialism (that Jesus will return after the Millennium spoken of in Revelation chapter 20) does not believe that man has any control as to when the coming of the new heavens and the new earth will take place. Yet, this is the basic premise of the late Earl Paulk in his 1985 book Held in the Heavens Until... In it, he asserts the classic Latter Rain notion that Jesus cannot return until certain things are accomplished by Christians.

The back cover of the book explains:

Why must Christ "remain in heaven until the time of restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21)? When will the time come? As Christians, are we responsible for helping Christ?

"...The Church must accept its responsibility in the Second Coming of Christ. Only when the church is in the spirit of unity as the mature Bride of Christ will He return."[12][emphasis mine]

So, with this view, Christians are either hindering or hastening the Second Coming by our actions or inactions. The book goes into all the Latter Rain doctrines, including Dominionism, in the same way Johnson and Wagner believe. Paulk begins by saying Adam and Eve were not only created in God's image, but were created as His offspring with the implication, of course, that they were little gods:

"When God created His offspring in His own image, He determined that they would bring order and dominion to the earth. God declared the dominion of His Kingdom over everything throughout the entire universe (Genesis 1:26)...."[13][emphasis mine]

Just like Johnson and Wagner above, Paulk goes back to the Garden of Eden.

Error Incarnates Error

Some of the implications and ramifications of the "errors" regarding one’s view of the kingdom of God are delineated by D. A. Carson in his Common errors in understanding the Kingdom[14]. As indicated here throughout this article, these doctrinal "errors" compound themselves in and with their associated teachings.

[Side note: there are various movements with this same flair such as Reconstructionism[15]; however it is beyond the scope of this article for a full discussion. Herescope[16] has been doing a very fine series on the various flavors of Kingdom Now theology.]

Kenneth E. Hagin says basically the same thing as Johnson, Wagner and Paulk with respect to the Great Commission in his book The Name of Jesus in which he quotes heavily from E. W. Kenyon's similarly titled book The Wonderful Name of Jesus. The belief is that Christians can domost anything in Jesus' name because Jesus specifically gave His authority to the "Church" including, of course, taking dominion[17]. Hagin picks up where Paulk left off in the previous section:

"...When someone is born again, he is baptized into, put into, immersed into the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head. We are the Body. The Head and the Body are one."[18] [all as per original]

Note how "Body" is capitalized. Hagin also references II Corinthians 6:14-16; and, because of the words of verse 15, "...And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" [KJV] he equates this to mean the Church is called Christ. ...'[19]

"...In fact, in the Epistles, the Church is called Christ! The Church has not yet realized that we are Christ."[20]

Curiously though, in the following he does not capitalize "head" or "body" which is assumed to be a typographical error especially as he explains further that we are Christ individually not just collectively:

"...Christ is the head; we are the body. We are Christ.

"...We are here as His representatives – not only collectively, but individually."[21][emphasis mine]

Then he quotes Kenyon directly (attributing this to Kenyon):

"When we pray in Jesus' Name, we are taking the place of the absent Christ; we are using His authority to carry out His will on the earth."[22]

So, we go from a redefined Great Commission to self as God. It gets worse. Here are well known words of Kenyon which Hagin parroted on more than one occasion:
"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." [23] [emphasis mine]

This is tantamount to Manifest Sons of God doctrine[24]. By strict definition, the word Incarnation infers a preexistence; and, by extension, this also infers the doctrine of reincarnation. Here’s Paulk stating basically the same thing as Hagin/Kenyon:

"...It was the quickening and bringing alive of the Word which was incarnate in Jesus Christ. That Word became incarnate in the Church.

"...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.'” [25] [emphasis mine]

"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.” [26][emphasis mine]

Then Paulk goes on to reference Matthew 18:19-20[27] just as Hagin does in his book[28] in justifying the same doctrine AND; similarly Paulk references Mark 16:17-18[29] in the same manner as Hagin[30]. There is certainly a lot of cross-pollination between Hagin’s teachings and Paulk’s even though Hagin is considered Word of Faith while Paulk is considered Latter Rain. In reality, both Word of Faith and Latter Rain have much in common.

"...The next move of God awaits Christ in us taking dominion being the standard by which God can judge the world. The next move of God awaits the total oneness of the family of God in heaven and earth…” [31][emphasis mine]

The Changing Face of Christianity

At the time of publication of Paulk’s Held in the Heavens Until…, the International Coalition of Apostles (ICA)[32] was not yet formed; however, one of the major goals of Latter Rain was to establish a hierarchy of leadership which others must be subordinate to. In 1985 when this book was first published the “modern prophetic” was gaining momentum.

"Jesus cannot come until the apostolic ministry is re-established. We are now in the period of the prophets. Today God is raising up prophets who are under the anointing of God, but the period of the apostolic ministry will soon return also. Only then can Jesus Christ return.” [33][emphasis mine]

The ICA’s “Presiding Apostle” is C. Peter Wagner of Global Harvest Ministries[34]. Membership as of November 10, 2009 can be found at this link.[35] The newest version of their website now requires a member login; whereas, previously anyone could access their site. Of course Internet Archive a/k/a The Wayback Machine the following info from their former site is recovered:

"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. Churches of the Apostolic Movement embrace the only Christian megablock growing faster than Islam.” [36][emphasis mine]

Further, on the Prospectus tab the redefined “Great Commission” is identified and its importance explained:

"The fundamental vision of ICA is to speed the completion of Jesus’ great commission to preach the gospel to every creature and to make disciples of all nations. World evangelism is the pulse beat of apostles wherever they might be found. Nothing that we do in ICA should eclipse or even dull this essential vision. The accelerated advance of the Kingdom of God is our highest priority...” [37] [emphasis mine]

Bill Johnson, in his own push for both apostolic authority and unity (at the expense of doctrine) in this “post-denominational era,” compares and contrasts what he terms “fathers” (modern day “apostles”) and “teachers” (those who adhere to sound doctrine). He claims these “fathers/apostles” are humble, they imitate other “fathers,” and they have a ministry of power with a focus on “The Kingdom.” On the other hand, “teachers” are prideful, they “gather around ideas” to the point of being divisive (in sticking to orthodoxy Christian doctrines) while focusing on the “many words” of said teachings. To him, signs and wonders take precedence over sound doctrine.[38]

Mike Bickle states that Jesus cannot return until the Bride of Christ (the Church) is mature, perfect. Bob Dewaay wrote an excellent piece on Bickle’s Bridal Paradigm[39] which shows the International House of Prayer view. This belief of Bickle is shared by Paulk:
“The purpose of every move of God is to produce the mature Bride: Christ in us, the power of God’s authority displayed through us, taking dominion of the planet. God waits for us to complete His plan. God cannot move again until we fulfill our mission on earth.”

Mike Bickle is also (in)famous for the following quote:

“The Lord said simply, ‘I will change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the earth in one generation.”

Rick Joyner, of MorningStar Ministries on the back cover of his book The Harvest, states a similar thing:

“What is about to come upon the earth is not just a revival or another awakening; it is a veritable revolution. This vision was given in order to begin awakening those who are destined to radically change the course and even the very definition of Christianity.”

And, Bill Johnson, at Todd Bentley’s “commissioning” service at the ‘Lakeland Revival’ on June 23, 2008 said:

“…We shape the course of history by partnering with you giving honor where it’s due. You welcome the glory as well as anybody I’ve ever seen in my life – I long to learn from you in that and I bless you. And, I pray with the rest of these that the measure of glory would increase, that Moses would no longer be the high water mark with the glory shown from his face but instead the revelation of the goodness of God would change the face of the church. And that he would use your voice, your grace, your anointing, to alter the face of the Church before the world…”

It seems, unfortunately, the “face of the Church” has changed, and for the worse, in some quarters; but, did God do this or did man? “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” [Hebrews 13:8] “But you remain the same and your years will never end.” [Psalm 102:27] “God is not a man that He should lie or a son of man that He should change his mind” [Numbers 23:19] The Bible provides the answer. [all Scripture from NIV]

The New Age Kingdom

“The Kingdom of God will be presented to Christ by the Kingdom prototype, a true demonstration of Him in the world. When His Kingdom on earth has been demonstrated in prototype, Christ will return…”

The words above are those of Earl Paulk. Compare these and the other quotes in this article to Alice Bailey, acting as a medium for “Tibetan Master DK (Djwhal Khul),” in her 1937 esoteric/occult book From Bethlehem to Calvary, explaining the New Age view of the kingdom of God in the chapter titled “Our Immediate Goal: The Founding of the Kingdom:

“…The question, however, arises whether we may hasten the process: whether, by a right understanding of Christ and His teaching, we could so expedite matters that the kingdom and its laws may hold sway earlier than would otherwise be the case…”

“…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.”

Bear in mind that “Christ” here does not refer to the Jesus Christ of orthodox Christianity but rather the occult/esoteric/New Age version. The soon-to-emerge “Christ” above refers to the “Christ consciousness” and; once enough individuals achieve this state – a “critical mass” – the physical embodiment of the antichrist will arise on the scene.

Put another way, the New Age view is that “Christ” is not a person but an “office” or “anointing” which Jesus received; so, in the following quotes, “Christ” refers to this “Jesus” rather than the actual divine Jesus Christ of true Christianity. In the occult/esoteric view Jesus had both a human nature and a divine nature (as do all humans according to this view); and, through effort He attained godhood leaving His humanity behind. This, of course, changes the definition of “church” and the “kingdom of God” as well.

“…the motive must be the one that incited Christ to all His divine activity – the founding of the new kingdom and the attainment of that state of consciousness on a universal and human scale which will make out of the human being a citizen of the kingdom, consciously functioning therein, voluntarily subject to its laws and striving steadfastly for its extension on earth…”

“The true Church is the kingdom of God on earth, divorced from all clerical government and composed of all, regardless of race or creed who live by the light within, who have discovered
The fact of the mystical Christ in their hearts, and are preparing to tread the Way of Initiation. The kingdom is not composed of orthodox theologically minded people. Its citizenship is wider than that, and includes every human being who is thinking in larger terms than the individual, the orthodox, the national and the racial. The members of the coming kingdom will think in terms of humanity as a whole; and as being as they are separate or nationalistic, or religiously bigoted, or commercially selfish, they have no place in the kingdom. The word spiritual will be given a far wider connotation than that which has been given in the old age which is fortunately now passing. 

"How will this condition of God's kingdom materialize on earth? . . . by men and women everywhere cultivating the wider consciousness, and becoming more and more inclusive. . . ."[53][emphasis mine]

The exclusivity of the "old age" of Biblical Christianity with its insistence on only one way to salvation is seen as "sin" and "divisive" by the New Ager. Their goal is inclusiveness as the above quote demonstrates. The reasoning is that worldwide unity is critical to the attainment of the next leap in humankind from the homo sapiens of the current Piscean Age to homo universalis in the upcoming Age of Aquarius.[52] Ed Tarkowski, in his work Lord Maitreya: Lord of the Apostasy, ("Maitreya" is the name given for the antichrist) explains:

"New Agers believe that every age has had a teacher who manifested 'the Christ.' During the past 2,150 years, they say, we have been in the age of Pisces, the energies of which brought divisions into the world. It is believed that now we are in a transition period, and that the new age of Aquarius will be one of synthesis, an age of unity and oneness. This unity of all things will bring fulfillment to humanity through the realization that man is god. Many believe that this realization will be brought forth under the Aquarian leadership of and through the personal appearance of the Lord Maitreya."

[53] [emphasis mine]

A central tenet of New Age teachings is evolution and the accompanying doctrine of reincarnation. In her 1948 book The Reappearance of the Christ—which refers, once again, to the "Christ consciousness" and/or antichrist—Alice Bailey speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The "Hierarchy" mentioned below is the New Age "spiritual Hierarchy" or "Masters of Wisdom" who are, in reality, demonic spirits. "Christ" in the last sentence is actually the antichrist or Lord Maitreya:

"...It will then be possible for the Hierarchy [Masters of Wisdom], the Church of Christ hitherto invisible, to externalise [sic] itself and to function openly upon the physical plane. This will indicate a return to the situation which existed in Atlantean days when (to use Biblical symbology, Genesis Chaps. 2 and 3) God Himself walked among men; He talked with them and there was no barrier between the Kingdom of men and Kingdom of God. Divinity was then present in physical forms and the Members of the spiritual Hierarchy were openly guiding and directing the affairs of humanity, as far as man's innate freedom permitted. Now, in the immediate future, and on a higher turn of the spiral of life, this will again happen. The Masters will walk openly among men; the Christ [antichrist] will reappear in physical Presence. . . ."[54][brackets mine for explanation, emphasis mine]

In stating “The Christ will reappear” the actual meaning is the antichrist will appear. This will NOT be Jesus Christ’s second coming as the text may seem to say.

Building the Kingdom on the Firm Foundation

Ethics and religion cannot be legislated as this will not, by itself, change the heart. Only God through Jesus Christ can do that. For a good read on the correct way to ‘build the Kingdom’ see Relevant Bible Teaching[55].

The Kingdom of God is within the true believer (Luke 17:21) by the indwelling Holy Spirit—the one who trusts in the Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible. The Kingdom is constructed by God through Holy Spirit conviction, not man. It is built through preaching the True Gospel and a receptive heart accepting this Gospel—the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one and only begotten/incarnated Son of God, who took the sins of the world upon Himself and nailed them to the Cross thus providing the means of salvation for all who believe on Him. Raised on the third day, He ascended bodily and is now at the Father’s right hand providing intercession for us. If you confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior you will have eternal life provided you stand firm to the end.

Please dear reader, be sure you are helping to build the right Kingdom. Your eternity could be at stake.

Endnotes:


<http://www.birthpangs.org/articles/latterrain/gloryappx.html>


  <http://gospelmasquerade.wordpress.com/2009/02/18/why-i-believe-ihop-is-a-cult/>


[8] ibid. p 27


[12] Paulk, Earl. Held in the Heavens Until... 1985; K Dimension, Atlanta, GA; back cover


[17] Hagin, Kenneth E. The Name of Jesus. 1979; RHEMA Bible Church / Faith Library, Tulsa, OK; pp 18-19, 42, 47

[18] ibid. p 66

[19] ibid. p 105


[21] ibid. p 106

[22] ibid.


[26] ibid. p 197

[27] ibid p 198


[34] Global Harvest Ministries home page <http://www.globalharvest.org/>


[37] ibid. par 5
and moves on to discuss religious experience, revelations, and miracles. He explores what religious experiences are and how they are experienced. Are they direct? Are they mediated?

The book begins by exploring various approaches to philosophy of religion. These include the opposite approaches of fideism (the claim that faith is the precondition for any correct thinking about religion) and neutralism (the insistence that thinking about religion must be presuppositionless). The author settles on an approach to philosophy of religion viewed as a...