

The Problem of “Kingdom Now” Theology Challenge

Part 1

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Abstract

The article analyzes basic teachings of Kingdom Now theology, which is one variation of Dominion theology. In the first part the article offers a brief history of the emergence and development of Kingdom Now theology. After that the article offers a survey of basic teachings of Kingdom Now theology in the area of soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology and anthropology. The conclusion is that Kingdom Now theology contains some positive and important teachings and emphases for contemporary Evangelical Christianity, but also a number of problematic teachings that need to be rejected.

Key terms: Kingdom Now theology, Dominion theology, Faith movement, Latter Rain, apostles, transformation.

Introduction

Today’s “Kingdom Now theology” (further in the text: KN), which represents one of the versions of “Dominion theology” (further in the text: DT) that is prevalent in a part of Evangelical Christianity (especially in the Pentecostal-Charismatic part), emerged as a result of various influences and theologies which are present in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, and is currently its pinnacle. Furthermore, we can speak of a kind of eclecticism of KN, which took over some theological postulates and emphases from certain spiritual movements, and united them in one place as a sort of theological system. The intent of this article is to

explore the basic postulates of KN theology, to point out some positive challenges which it sets before the church, but also to point out the issues which accompany the challenges. While KN theology incorporates some good teachings, but also a lot of theologically and practically unorthodox teachings, this mixture of good and bad poses a potential threat for Evangelical Christianity.

For this purpose, in part one we will provide a brief historical overview of factors which led to the emergence and development of KN theology, and in part two we will examine the basic teachings in the areas of soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology, and anthropology. Due to the broadness of the subject, the presentation and analysis of KN theology requires two articles. That is why in the first article we will only emphasize the main outline of KN theology, while in the second article we will take a closer look at KN theology and point out some corrections and solutions which are necessary if we wish to benefit from the good points of KN theology, and subsequently, the Charismatic movement.

A Brief Historical Review of the Emergence of KN Theology

Although the article does not provide sufficient room for a good historical overview of all the factors which led to the emergence and development of current KN theology, a brief historical overview is necessary for the purpose of better understanding the emergence and influence that KN theology has had on Evangelical Christianity. It needs to be said that the proponents of KN theology are various movements which have many similarities in some theological issues, but they do differ in some of them; in other words, they do not all have the same teaching. What they have in common, though, is that they were built on the foundations of Neo-Pentecostalism, which emerged in the middle of the 20th century. Some of the foundations for this theology are the following movements and ideas: Latter Rain, Identity, Manifest Sons of God, Restoration, Reconstruction, Charismatic Renewal, Shepherding/Discipleship movement, Kingdom Message, Positive Confession. Also, this theology uses a certain terminology, which can point to the presence of this idea. Some of these phrases are: Dominion, Overcomer(s), Word-Faith, Spoken Word, Five-fold ministry, Latter Rain, Tabernacle of David, Feast of Tabernacles, Many-membered man child, Manifestation of the Kingdom, Manifestation of the Sons of God, Ongoing Incarnation, Birthing in the Spirit, Get this into your spirit, Unity (of the Body), Serpent's Seed or Seed of the Serpent, Faith in faith, God's faith, God-like faith, Kingdom language, Kingdom principles, Christ principles, Elijah Company, Bride Company, Ecclesias.

Noticing that more and more Pentecostals, whose battle cry over the years was that of the imminent coming of Jesus Christ, accepted Dominion theology,

Harvey Cox came to the conclusion that the Latter Rain movement is responsible for this change. Although the movement is no longer active today, its teachings were included in and remained part of Charismatic practice and teaching. The leaders of this movement were convinced that the Spirit is working powerfully today through healing and prophecies, and that a revival of global proportions is near. The movement rejected the belief in Christ's close coming (premillennialism) as something that had been useful up to that point but is, in reality, false hope. This change in eschatology was a result of a different understanding of God's kingdom. "We are entering into the Kingdom Age in a sense now, for the Kingdom is being formed in us and when it is completed ... all judicial as well as religious authority will be vested in the church of Christ" (Newport, 1998, 401–402). In other words, premillennialism was rejected and postmillennialism was accepted as the dominant eschatological framework. In the same way, the participants of the Latter Rain movement, such as George Warnock and Franklin Hall, have in their books (Warnock, *Feast of Tabernacles* from 1951, and Hall, *Subdue the Earth, Rule the Nations* from 1966) pretty much paved the way for the emergence of the New Apostolic Reformation and KN theology. This is further enriched by the notion that the church was obligated to establish the kingdom of God on earth, but the cause of failure was the fact that it had lost its apostolic and prophetic ministry early on. In the last days God will restore the positions of the apostles and prophets, who will lead the church in a holy war, in which evil shall be defeated. There will be a great awakening and most people in the world will be won over for Christ. Blessings, signs and wonders shall rest upon those whom the apostles and the prophets bless, and there will be curses on those whom they curse. Through intensive worship, prayer, fasting, and spiritual warfare, the church will destroy the demonic fortresses and territorial spirits on the earth and in the heavens. In all this, some of the proponents of Latter Rain proposed the idea that the second coming of Christ will occur as a spiritual experience, in which believers will become incorporated into the Body of Christ on the earth, while others believed that the Body of Christ will attain dominance in the whole world, which is one of the prerequisites of Christ's return to earth.

However, the key alteration, which allowed for the emergence of KN theology, was the eschatological one. When he speaks about the importance of eschatology, Peter C. Wagner (2006, 39) emphasizes that in the 20th century premillennialism was prevalent among Evangelical Christians, teaching that the kingdom will come with the second coming of Christ. Wagner claims that the reason why entire denominations rejected DT and KN theology was their teaching, which was oriented towards social transformation, which then forces such churches to step out of their eschatological comfort zone.

Definition and Basic Postulates of Kingdom Now Theology

As we have already said, KN theology presents a product of various theological influences which emerged inside Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Continuing where things were left off, it overtakes some theological postulates and summarizes them into a new whole. It is justified to say that without these previous theological movements KN theology as we now know it could not exist. Looking at church history, Bill Hamon (1997, 19) explains how previous movements of God's agencies have opened the way for what we have today. His vision of history goes something like this: the Protestant Reformation opened the way for the Holiness movement, as well as other movements. The Pentecostal movement paved the way for the Latter Rain movement and the Charismatic renewal, while the Faith movement opened the way for the present-day Prophetic movement, which is in turn preparing the way for the Apostolic movement, which will prepare the way for the Saints' movement in the future. The Saint's movement pertains to ordinary believers who were, according to the example in Acts 8:1-4, going everywhere and preaching the Gospel, accompanied with miracles and wonders, while the apostles remained in Jerusalem. Using this example, Hamon (1997, 243-247) claims that the purpose of the five-fold ministry is to prepare the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-16), because the great harvest will not be a result of the work of just a handful of apostles, prophets, and evangelists, but of all the saints who have been prepared by God and anointed by the Spirit.

In this brief overview we see that KN theology proponents view themselves as the pinnacle, i.e. the final wave, of God's activity, as well as heirs and inheritors of all that has been good and faithful in church history. With such a mindset, it is not seldom that the proponents of KN theology view any criticism of their teachings and practices as "attacking the work of God," and the critics as the opponents of God's work. However, as we shall see, there are a lot of things which deserve to be criticized in KN theology. What follows is an outline of the definition of KN theology, as well as its basic theological postulates.

The definition of KN theology – its purpose

As a basic definition of KN theology, which is a variant of Dominion theology,¹

1 Another version of DT, which comes from a Calvinist background, is called Christian Reconstruction. This theology, although it comes from a different background than KN theology and has its own distinctions and emphases, is another modern version of post-millennialism. Although these theologies are essentially identical post-millennial eschatologies, they do go about establishing God's kingdom in different ways; KN theology does it through using the Law as a basis for religious, moral, ethical, and social life.

we can quote the teaching that Christ commanded His church to establish *the Millennium* (a thousand-year kingdom), i.e. the visible dominance of God's kingdom on earth, and to conquer every area of human existence, leading people into submission to Christ before His second coming. The definition of this theology can be seen in its purpose. In its eschatology, this theology is led by the assumption that God's kingdom can come to earth through human help, i.e. Christ shall not return until the church takes the power from Satan and his followers, thus establishing dominion on earth. Thus Pat Robertson states,

Now what do you do? What do I do? What do all of us do? We get ready to take dominion! We get ready to take dominion! It is all going to be ours - I'm talking about all of it. Everything that you would say is a good part of the secular world. Every means of communication, the news, the television, the radio, the cinema, the arts, the government, the finance - it's going to be ours! God's going to give it to His people. We should prepare to reign and rule with Jesus Christ (Dager, 1990, 95).

In explaining the goals of KN theology, Peter C. Wagner (2006, 38) clearly emphasizes that the purpose of the church is to attain social transformation: "Now that we have social transformation on our evangelical agendas, it is time for action. I regard 'social transformation' as the concept term. However, the action term that will best set us on the road toward that goal is 'taking dominion.'"² Under "social transformation," proponents of KN theology cite as their goal the "seven mountains" which are to be overcome and brought under God's power, and these include religion, family, education, media, government, art, entertainment and business. The reason why this theology is called "Kingdom Now" is perhaps best explained by the following quote by Wagner (2006, 35-36), in which he explains the meaning of Jesus' prayer "thy kingdom come."

God's ideal for human society is obviously the society that He directly oversees in heaven. It would follow, therefore, that this should also be the way that we live here on Earth, and that is what we should be praying for. Heaven is a place of peace and prosperity and health and happiness and morality and selflessness and well-being and harmony and understanding and kindness and high worship. To the extent that the society in which we live is not characterized by such qualities of life, it falls short of what God wants it to be. Since we are God's people, we are responsible to do whatever we can to help our communities meet God's expectations.

2 Some other phrases used for the same purpose include: "taking cities," "reaching cities," "prayer evangelism," "reaching a nation," "reformation," "community transformation," "revival" and "reconstruction."

Basic framework: eschatology and the mandate to govern, Genesis 1:26-28

Since we have now defined KS theology, it is time to emphasize the new framework inside which the proponents of this theology think and strive to attain their goal. On one hand, KN theology's claim that it is the task of the church to establish dominion of God's kingdom before the coming of Christ depends primarily on the post-millennialist view of eschatology, which proposes the notion that the kingdom of God, as an expression of God's *reign*, must always be manifested as a visible (outward and physical) *area* of God's authority. On the other hand, this understanding of God's reign as the visible area of God's authority is based on an interpretation of Genesis 1:26–28, where the commandment given to Adam in regard to his power over plant life and animal life is interpreted to include the dominion of born-again believers over Satan and demons, as well as the rest of mankind. These two ideas taken together form the basic framework of KN theology, which consequently influences changes within orthodox soteriology and ecclesiology.

Genesis 1:26–28 in KN theology

The understanding of Genesis 1:26–28 in KN theology, whereby God created Adam and mankind in order to establish His dominion on earth looks something like this. As he interprets the commandment to Adam of governing in Genesis 1:26–28, where God commands Adam to fill the earth and subdue it and to reign over plant and animal life, Scott Bessenecker goes on to say: “To have dominion [first command of Gen 1:28] is to ‘govern’, to subdue is to ‘invade and conquer’... An occupying force in the world was allowed to exist, a rebel bent on stirring up insurgency against God – thereby creating the need for someone to wield the power to subjugate him and his works” (Fanning, 2009, 6). Bill Johnson (Johnson, 2003, 29) has a similar understanding of Genesis 1:26–28, which also reveals the purpose of the creation of man:

Man was created in the image of God and placed into...the Garden of Eden. Outside of that garden it was a different story. It was without the order and blessing contained within and was in great need of the touch of God's delegated one —Adam. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden with a mission...It was God's intention that as...they would be extending the boundaries of His garden (His government) through the simplicity of their devotion to Him. The greater the number of people in right relationship to God, the greater the impact of their leadership. This process was to continue until the entire earth was covered with the glorious rule of God through man. But in Genesis chapter 1 we discover it's not a perfect universe. Satan had rebelled and had been cast out of heaven, and with him a portion of the fallen angels took dominion of the earth. It's obvious why the rest of the planet needed to be subdued—it was under the influence of darkness. God could have destroyed the devil and

his host with a word, but instead He chose to defeat darkness through His delegated authority—those made in His image who were lovers of God by choice.

Unlike Bessenecker and Johnson, who believe that Satan already had power on earth when God created man as a sort of warrior species with the purpose of taking the power back, Peter C. Wagner (2013, 176-78) has a slightly different understanding of Genesis, but the main idea remains the same. He holds that man had authority over the entire earth, and Satan had lost his authority in heaven. That is why Satan came to the Garden of Eden, in order to reclaim some of his lost authority, aware that God gave Adam the authority over earth, but also that He could have given it to someone else just as well. By tricking man, Satan became the master of all the earth.

It is particularly worth mentioning that in KN theology the mandate to govern, which God gave to all people in the beginning, seems to only apply to some. Since the commandment regarding the implementation of authority over all of creation still stands (cf. Wagner, 2010, 86), some proponents of KN theology believe that this commandment and the possession of such authority today applies only to those who have given themselves over to the all-encompassing rule of God. It is only the believers who have the authority in Christ to establish the original creational order which God intended for man (cf. Hayford). D. J. Kennedy says something similar: "Would God be saying to unregenerate people today that they are to rule the earth? I don't think so. He is speaking to those of us who have been recreated into the image of God and who are being refashioned by him" (Goldberg, 2006, 42). This means that no longer are we talking about the authority of man over creation, but about one kind of people having the mandate to govern over another kind of people.

The meaning of Genesis 1:26–28 in terms of soteriology

If the main problem in the events of the Garden of Eden was the loss of government, then the redeeming work of Christ is viewed in a similar way. Through His death and resurrection Christ reclaimed that which Adam had given over to Satan, i.e. the power to rule the earth. Kris Vallotton and Bill Johnson (2006, 174-75) thus claim:

We can only imagine what our world would be like if Adam and Eve had fulfilled their commission to rule. At some point, the devil came to them in the form of a serpent and convinced them to listen to him rather than God. When they obeyed the devil they became his slaves and were forced to surrender their place of authority to him. Since the fall, Satan, "the god of this world," has ruled the earth. His words to Jesus in the wilderness show us that he possessed the realms of dominion that were formerly man's: "The devil said to Him [Jesus], 'I will give you all this domain and its glory; *for it has been handed over to me*, and I give it to whomever I wish'" (Luke 4:6)... When Jesus died on the cross, He stripped

the keys of authority away from the devil (see Col. 2:15; Rev. 1:18). He restored His rulership back to mankind and delegated His authority to the Church.

Jesus came to take the punishment for sin, but also to reclaim that which had been lost (Lk 19:11). Not only was mankind lost, but so was its authority over the planet. This is why Jesus came to reclaim and save both (cf. Johnson, 2006, 31). By redeeming man, Jesus reclaimed that which Adam gave over to Satan. According to Johnson, when Jesus exclaims from the triumphant throne, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18–19), this means that Christ is saying, "I have reclaimed everything. Now go and save humanity." The original intent, as stated in Genesis 1:26–28, has now been restored in Christ's resurrection and ascension, and the born-again believers now have to establish rule over the darkness, snatching people from hell and establishing Jesus' reign wherever they go by preaching the good news of the kingdom (cf. Johnson, 2006, 31). Salvation, therefore, not only includes salvation from sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, new life in Christ, redemption, etc., but also the regaining of lost authority with the purpose of establishing God's dominion on earth.

The meaning of Genesis 1:26–28 for church mission and evangelism

Through His death and resurrection Christ reclaimed from Satan the dominion which Adam had given over to him, and the church, as the heir to Jesus' power and authority, an extension of Christ's authority, and the bearer of His blessings, possesses this dominion authority. "From the beginning the Great Commission has been for humans to invade those forces opposed to God and subjugate them to Him, whether forces within us or outside us" (cf. Hayford). This is why Vallotton and Johnson (2006, 173) regretfully state that Christ's commandment in Matthew 28:18–20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," has been reduced by the church to the following, "make my disciples in all the nations." Therefore, reducing this commandment to merely making disciples out of individuals is a complete misunderstanding of God's Word. Jesus sends His disciples in the context of His universal authority on heaven and earth, which He has taken away from Satan. This means that the church is supposed to make Christ's disciples out of *entire nations*.

Based on the mandate given in Genesis 1:26–28 and Matthew 28, the church, being the new Adam, is obligated to establish Christ's dominion over the earth, which includes the destruction of demonic authority on the earth and, in some cases, the destruction of those who oppose God's authority.³ Talk of evangelism

3 "There are differences of opinion among dominion teachers as to how those dissenters will be removed, but there are essentially five ways in which that may occur: 1) God will supernaturally strike dead those who oppose His apostles and prophets; 2) God will send, or allow satanic forces to send, plagues upon those opposers; 3) The Church (or certain 'overcomers')

and working one-on-one is abandoned, and the emphasis on the repentance and conversion of the individual is replaced with the talk about building the kingdom and massive mutual ventures of conquering cities, regions, and nations (cf. Leslie). Efforts are made not only to bring individuals to Christ, but also to change the legal system, government, education, churches, synagogues, families, and other aspects of human society in accordance with Christian beliefs and moral norms (cf. Crowley, 2006, 151).

The next thing we see in KN theology is a new view of evangelism. Evangelism is seen more as spiritual warfare, and less as proclaiming the gospel message. The enormous interest for the topic of spiritual warfare stems from a reasoning that says: in order for the Gospel to be successful, satanic power in a certain aspect must be crushed. In other words, we first need to defeat the enemy in the heavenly realms, and then go and evangelize. Don Clasen (1996c) sees it this way:

Time was when revival in the Church was a relatively simple thing. Christian preachers ... understood that God's problem with man was not the Devil but man's own sin. They understood that God will sometimes get so excited when men keep their motives right like young Solomon did (I K 3:9-13) that He will give things people aren't even demanding and believing for. Therefore, revival was simply a matter of humbling ourselves before Him, confessing our sins, and beseeching His mercy to send a supernatural visitation of the Spirit.

This is no longer the case today. Now we talk of spiritual warfare, wrestling with demons, destroying demonic hierarchies and powers over places, spiritual marking, etc. In the words of Ed Silvano, "this reconstituted church must engage and defeat the enemy and retake the heavenlies in the name of her Lord, so that the eyes of those still being held captive by Satan will be opened" (Steinkamp). John Dawson thus says, "We must overcome the enemy before employing other methods of ministry" (Fanning, 2009, 1). Hence some new techniques of spiritual warfare, such as going to special places (e.g., mountains), which represent demonic thrones, and destroying them (e.g., axing down the stalagmites in which demons dwell); finding the right location for prayer; anointing objects; spiritual marking with the purpose of discovering the names of spirits and the methods they use in order to enslave people and bind them; warfare through festivities that include waving flags and other tools which send demons shivering when Christians wave them; carrying a prayer scarf; blowing into a horn; burying objects which prevent demons from entering a space, etc. (cf. Ravenhill, 2006, 164-73).

will pronounce God's judgment upon their enemies, thus moving God to destroy them; 4) The Church will, out of 'necessity,' use physical force by which it will judge, sentence, and execute penalties (including death) upon the opposers; 5) All or any combination of the above may take place." (Dager, Part III -Section B)

Worship becomes part of spiritual warfare. Ron Philastre says,

Praise is our weapon which will be used to defeat, destroy and overcome the last enemy, which is death. Through our praise we will bring about resurrection life (which is also called the manifestation of the sons of God). This bodily and sinless perfection will only then make it possible for Jesus to return to earth, but this restoration of perfect praise and a perfect church must take place before Jesus can return (Clasen, 1996c).

In conclusion, the church has - through the victory of Christ - reclaimed the lost authority which God intended for mankind, and mankind is responsible for establishing God's reign in the world, while the main obstacles in achieving this are demonic forces. First, we need to break their power through spiritual warfare, and only then can the Gospel be successfully proclaimed to the nations. KN theology not only expects that individuals from various nations would convert, but that entire nations would be won for Christ.

Ecclesiology in Kingdom Now theology

Along with the previously mentioned understanding of KN theology in regard to the church's mission and evangelism, there is a notion present in ecclesiology that the church is no longer the body of Christ, but that she in fact becomes the second Christ here on earth. Based on Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11, the mission of present-day apostles provides a foundation to the church which, as it accepts their ministry, becomes enabled for ministry, spiritual warfare, and establishing domain; and through the idea of the city church efforts are made to try and make all churches in one city or place to submit themselves to the authority and rule of the apostles and prophets, which places their authority above the authority and autonomy of the local congregation. Following is an overview of the mentioned concepts.

The Church as the second Christ

The church which is called the "body of Christ" in Scripture (Eph 1:23) becomes the "second Christ" in KN theology, and its purpose is to rule the world. We reach this conclusion by interpreting phrases such as *government on His shoulders* (Isa 9:5-6), submitting everything *under Christ's feet* (1 Cor 15:25), *Joel's army* (Joel 2:11), *revealing of the sons of God* (Rom 8), and the *male child* from Revelation 12:5.

Since Isaiah 9:5-6 clearly states that the "government rests on his shoulders," and shoulders are a part of the body, the church on earth becomes the ruler as the body of Christ. Therefore John Noble writes, "When the government is clearly seen to be upon His shoulders [i.e. the church], we shall become a light and a testimony to a *totally new order*, which finds its source and strength coming from

the throne of God” (Clasen, 1996b). Pointing out the same verses, Jonas Clark (2007, 169) emphasizes: “Notice from this Scripture that the government of our Lord is located ‘upon his shoulders.’ This is a description of the Body of Christ, the royal priesthood. There can never be an ‘increase of His government’ without the increase of governing authority, dominion activity, and demonstrated kingship through Christ’s priests and kings.”

Another part of the body which the Bible refers to is feet, in 1 Cor 15:25, where it says, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” Christ rules indeed, but He does so through His priests and kings (i.e. Christians), and putting everything under Christ’s feet occurs through the preaching and manifesting the Gospel of the kingdom (cf. Clark, 2007, 170). This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that the church (i.e. the second Christ) is the one to whom all enemies must be submit, whether people, demons, or enemies inside the church or outside of it.⁴

What is common to both of these interpretations is the shifting of the church as the *body of Christ* to the Church as the *second Christ*. The attributes and prophecies of Christ (the coming Messiah in Isaiah, and the putting under his feet in 1 Corinthians 15) are now, in the name of the *tight connection* between Christ and the church, being applied to the church.

We see further identification of the church with Christ in terms of Christ’s warfare against Satan, His victory, and restoration. According to this, Joel 2, Revelation 12, and Romans 8 speak about the strength, success, and the greatness of the church, and not Christ. Joel 2:3–11, among other things, mentions the army of the Lord, which stomps the ground powerfully and awesomely, as “before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.” The context tells us that the Lord is sending this army in order to punish His people, but if His people repent and turn from sin, the Lord shall have mercy on the land. In 2:20 the Lord promises that He will banish this army far away from His own people. But how does *Kingdom Now* apply this passage to the present-day church?

According to this theology, this army becomes an army of zealous Christians (Joel’s army) which will defeat all of God’s enemies, including Satan (cf. Clasen, 1996a). In his book John Crowder (2006, 253) speaks this way about Joel’s army: “Out of the dry, desert sand the Lord is raising up an exceedingly great army.... What is coming has no precedent in human history. It will be a cataclysmic release from Heaven to earth.” Quoting Peter’s sermon from Acts 2:17-18 and Joel 2:28–9, Crowder concludes: “This is Joel’s army, reserved for the end-time

4 Interpreting Psalm 110, Francis Frangipane states: “The Church is the feet of Jesus. And God has promised Jesus that He will train your feet and use them to tread down and crush your enemies” (cf. Clasen 1996b).

harvest.” Furthermore, Crowder (2006, 253-54) describes this army as an army which will perform miracles that influence the natural order of things, miracles which restore the lives of individuals and influence the entire world. These will be common individuals, who are going to possess powerful God’s anointing and power (cf. Crowder, 2006, 255-56). This will be a generation that will literally be able to call down fire from the sky, but their hearts will be rooted in closeness to and compassion from God before He breathes this ability into them, making them able to proclaim His judgments in His name. Their main task will be the destruction of devil’s works (cf. Crowder, 2006, 256).

For Kelley Varner (2005, 141) the army which is mentioned in 2:2–11 refers to, as interpreted quite literally, locusts which the Lord has sent as punishment for the sins of the people of Judah, but this detailed description also points prophetically to the “corporate Overcomer, those men and women apprehended for Zion.” For him, the “day of the Lord” is not “night,” but “day,” and the army symbolizes Christian prayer warriors who have been sent among the nations (Joel 2:2) (cf. Varner, 2005, 142). The reference to “Eden” in Joel 2:3 is a picture of God’s kingdom on earth (cf. Varner, 2005, 144), while the “desolate wilderness” which is left after this army is a picture of destruction, i.e. ravaging/cleansing the land from all man-made traditions, ideas, and teachings (cf. Varner, 2005, 145). Varner (2005, 170) deals with the problem which arises in 2:20, when God promises to remove this very army from His people and when He mentions its “stench” and “foul smell,” by saying that the “stench” symbolizes religion and tradition (i.e. locusts) which, just like the broken cistern, are unable to hold the “water of God’s Word.”

Revelation 12:1–6 is another passage in which the church is identified with Christ. The passage speaks of the pregnant “woman” who gives birth to a “male child” (Rev 12:5) who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. The child is “caught up to God and to His throne,” while the “woman fled into the wilderness,” where God prepared a shelter for her where “she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.” The questions arise: who is the woman, and who is the male child? The traditional interpretations say that the male child is a reference to Christ who rules with a rod of iron, and the phrase “caught up to God and to His throne” is a reference to the ascension of Christ. However, there are the following interpretations of the woman’s identity: a) according to dispensationalists, she is Israel, who needs to find shelter in the ancient city of Petra when the Antichrist tries to invade it (cf. Clasen, 1996a); b) the Roman Catholic Church believes it is possible that the passage is a reference to Mary, who has been considered the new Eve, i.e. mother of the new mankind, ever since the days of Irinaeus and Justus (cf. Kaštelan and Duda, 1995, 1270); c) the woman is the church, i.e. spiritual Israel, because in the OT Israel from Messianic times

was often portrayed as a woman who gives birth to the new Messianic people.⁵ However, according to KN theology the “male child” is not a reference to Christ but “the last days ‘Company of Overcomers,’ an elite corps that are ‘birthed’ out of the larger Church through intercessory travail, and who do ‘spiritual warfare’ until they are ‘caught up’ to replace Satan at the throne of God” (Clasen 1996a). Franklin Hall (1966, 11) identifies the “male child” with the group called “overcomers”: “*The man-child company* will have dominion of this planet first. Those who possess a house may decide who shall occupy it. In the same manner, as a group from the church take up their authority and rulership of the planet that God gave them, they will likewise be able to choose whom they will, to occupy it.”

Another phrase which has been undergoing a significant change under the influence of KN theology is the phrase “manifesting the sons of God” from Romans 8:19 which, just like the previous two phrases, changes the understanding of soteriology, eschatology, and ultimately changes the church into a martial institution. “Manifested Sons of God”⁶ represent a generation of latter-day believers who will be able to achieve this state and bring newness and renewal to the whole land. They will attain the deliverance of the entire creation from the curse which befell the earth because of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3. Althouse emphasizes that this belief was initially present in the Latter Rain movement, which claimed that certain saints could become immortal if they managed to achieve a certain level of perfection through the renewal of the apostolic and prophetic ministry. They would receive redeemed bodies and eternal life while in the body, so they would not experience death. This concept was initially referring to the belief that God would raise up an army of people who will abolish sickness before the return of Christ. Later on it assumed the idea of attaining immortality, and in the 60’s and the 70’s the idea emerged from the “Manifested Sons of God” that a person can become a god, that one may become perfect, or that in attaining divinity one may attain perfection, and consequently immortality (cf. Althouse 2003, 58). Dager (Part II - Section B) claims that the key doctrine for this teaching is the attaining of perfection (i.e. succeeding in living a sinless life), which will produce indestructibility and imperishability, while some proponents of this theology even believe that Christ will not return in the flesh. Christ and the church will become one in nature and in essence and the church, as the incarnation of God, will be a manifestation of Christ on the earth.

5 Isa 26:17; 66:7; Jer 50:12; Ezra 9:38–40; Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22; Rev 21:2,10 (cf. Kaštelan and Duda 1995, 1270).

6 There is a difference between the *Manifested Sons of God* movement and the *Manifested Sons of God doctrine*. Although the movement no longer exists as such, its teaching is still present in Charismatic theology.

Apostolic ministry in KN theology

Based on Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11–13, KN theology emphasizes the necessity of restoring the apostolic and prophetic ministry. The term used to describe the five ministries spoken about in Ephesians 4:11 is “five-fold ministry.” Hamon (1997, 279) explains what is meant by this: “These are the fivefold ascension gift ministries as revealed in Ephesians 4,11 - Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher. They are not gifts of the Holy Spirit per se, but an extension of Christ’s headship ministry to the Church. Their primary ministry and function are to teach, train, activate, and mature the saints for the work of their ministries (Eph 4:12-13).” David L. Brown (2003, 13) interprets the five-fold ministry in this way: “They are called ‘five-fold’ because there are literally five components or administrations for one ministry. These five functions all have one goal: the perfecting or maturing of the saints, better known as the Church or the Body of Christ.”

KN believes that the church, as the heir to the power and authority of Jesus, as well as the extension of Christ’s reign and the bearer of His blessings, holds the authority of dominion. However, due to institutionalization and corruption, the church lost its dominance over the earth, so Satan has regained dominion. This is why doctrinal chaos, sin, or immaturity of believers are not cited as the main problems in the church, but the claim that the *church is outside of divine order, doing her own thing* (cf. Clasen, 1996a). The phrase “out of divine order” is a reference to the fact that there is no God-given authority in the church to lead it toward maturity and victory. Of course, this has to do with the importance of the apostles and prophets. Upon losing these ministries the church sank into a dark age, and when they return the church can expect great things. This is why KN theology sees the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic ministries, as well as the necessity of submitting the church to their leadership and government, as crucial (cf. Wagner, 2010, 27-31). Therefore Hamon (1987, 53) says that “the company of prophets will help restore the apostles back into their rightful place in the church. The full restoration of apostles and prophets back into the church will bring divine order, unity, purity, and maturity to the corporate Body of Christ.”

The ministry of present-day and future apostles and prophets is a foundation of the church, because it is incomplete without them and unable to accomplish its divine task: to expand God’s dominion on earth. The ministry of apostles and prophets is as follows:

The Apostle is a foundation-laying ministry (Eph 2:20) that we see in the New Testament establishing new churches (Paul’s missionary journeys), correcting error by establishing proper order and structure (First Epistle to the Corinthians), and acting as an oversight ministry that fathers other ministries (1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 11:28). The New Testament Apostle has a revelatory anointing (Eph 3:5). Some major characteristics are great patience and manifestations

of signs, wonders and miracles (Hamon, 1997, 279).

On the other hand, a prophet is,

A man of God whom Christ has given the ascension gift of a 'prophet' (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28; 14:29; Acts 11:27; 13:1). A prophet is one of the fivefold ascension gift ministries who are an extension of Christ's ministry to the Church. He is an anointed minister who has the gifted ability to perceive and speak the specific mind of Christ to individuals, churches, businesses and nations (Hamon, 1997, 279-80).

Wagner (2010, 27-31) admits that the Reformation brought in mainly theological changes, but failed to bring in the necessary structural changes. In this way denominations were "new wineskins" for a while, but in our day they have become "old wineskins" which are no longer capable of receiving the new wine of God's blessing. Thus, there is a necessity for a change in the structure of the church, a change which implies the acceptance of apostolic and prophetic ministry. All those who disagree with this idea are openly called out as being under the power of the "collective spirit of religiousness."

Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11-13 are crucial for understanding apostolic ministry in KN theology, because these passages are used as the basis for three claims. The first claim is that 4:11-13 is the foundation for continuing the apostolic ministry even today. In pointing out verse 13, Brown (2003, 19) says,

This five-fold ministry was given after Jesus' ascension. I don't believe that we, as a body, have a 'unity of faith' and knowledge of the Son of God, and surely, we have not come close enough to even begin to measure of the stature of the FULLNESS of Christ.... So the offices of all the ascension gifts to help this body are still in force today and still very much needed.

Steven Lambert (2003, 196) also sees the need for these ministries in the fact that the church has not yet attained the fullness of Christ, but he also emphasizes that, since those were Christ's ascension gifts, this act of giving clearly shows that Christ instituted these positions and ministries in His body until the day He comes back to earth. Until then, these ministries have to be active and serve a purpose. Joel Garcia (2007, 41-42) sees the necessity of the apostolic ministry, not just with the purpose of church growth and nourishment, but also as the necessary form of government and leadership structure. The five-fold ministry (part of which is the apostles) represents God's stewards, and their purpose is to "birth an authentic government that reflects heaven's strategy...overthrow illegitimate forms of government and assert kingdom dominion and influence...work with other apostolic networks to strategize more effectively to reach their cities for Christ."

The second claim that KN theology bases on Ephesians is that, since the apostolic ministry is continued based on Ephesians 4:11-13, the apostles of today are

no different in authority from the apostles referred to in Ephesians 2:20, which are described as the foundation of the church. So even today the apostles are necessary to provide the foundation to the church. Francisco I. Victa III (2006, 32-33) claims that, "As the early church was founded upon the leadership of Apostles and Prophets, so should be the structure in today's emerging church." From this follows that, "Whenever the Kingdom tries to establish itself without current-day Apostles and Prophets at the foundation, there will be a flaw in the structure" (cf. Victa III, 2006, 33). In his comments on Ephesians 2:20, which say that the household of God was built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, John Kingsley Alley (2002, 54) claims that "In the house of God, these are spiritual foundations that have to be laid in both churches and the hearts of the believers. This is the regular ongoing work of apostles and prophets". Lawrence Sobilo (2006, 46) also uses Ephesians 4:11 and 2:20 to confirm the permanence and necessity of the five-fold ministry for as long as the church has not attained unity in faith, and the duty of the apostles is to plant and strengthen local churches, as well as laying the foundations for spiritual growth. In accordance with this Sobilo (2006, 47) says, "In our present day, apostles perform the same functions as they did in the first century church." Sobilo, then, makes no distinction between the New Testament apostles and present-day apostles.

The third claim KN theology makes based on Ephesians 4:11-13 and 2:20 is that the five-fold ministry, and especially the apostles, are a God-given power structure in the church. Such a structure requires the abolition of denominations and the establishment of *city churches*, which would be under the authority of apostles and, consequently, would become part of the *apostolic network*. In commenting on lines in Ephesians 4:8-10, Victa III (2006, 31) claims that Jesus won a victory over powers and principalities in the heavens. However, what matters is the following: "This victory will never be fully applicable to the church that refuses to walk in the Kingdom government that this battle was fought for. To operate as a church in dominion over all evil forces, we must govern ourselves by the government of Ephesians 4." In other words, the five-fold ministry represents not only the ministries, but a structure of government as well. However, the apostles have the authority within the apostolic ministry over the remaining four services.

Success in ministry comes from being under the blessing of the apostle's anointing, and this is still a powerful principle today. As prophets, teachers, and other elders were developed and appointed, they took their place alongside the apostles in leadership of the church, but they remained subject to the apostles. Apostles are, rightly and properly, the final authority in the church (Alley, 2002, 54-55).

If there is no apostolic authority in the church, then the church communities, movements, and denominations have to find another form of authority and a way

of governance. The result of this has been the emergence of denominations, which have contributed to the disunity of the church and enabled the world today to look at the church mockingly (cf. Alley, 2002, 85). Since, based on Matthew 28:18-20, all of Christ's authority was conveyed to the apostles, and was ultimately given to the church through the apostles, this is the authority with which the apostles are to go into all the nations and bring people to Christ. This is why there must be apostles, or the fullness of Christ's authority does not come upon the church. Only through submission to apostles under Christ will the church have apostolic authority (cf. Alley, 2002, 86). According to this, other ministries and leaders in the church must submit to apostolic authority, because it is the only way for apostolic authority to become available to the ministry of the church and to each believer (cf. Alley, 2002, 87-88).

City church

The renewal of apostolic and prophetic ministries requires that local churches which are in cities, towns, and villages submit to the authority of the apostles and the prophets. In respect to this, attempts are made to abolish all denominational differences, and the term "city churches" is introduced. This term implies that churches in a certain city or town are encouraged to understand that they are part of one single city church. Apart from this, they are required to submit to the authority and leadership of the apostles and prophets, in order to become churches with a true foundation (cf. Wagner, 2010, 38-39), which ultimately leads to the creation of an apostolic network.

Speaking about the activities of the apostolic ministry, Rich Marshall (2005, 124) points out that the church needs to "operate under the guidelines outlined in Ephesians chapter 4, not only in the Church, but also in the broader context of entire cities. It is important that we begin to see and identify the citywide leaders who can lead the entire Church within a city in strategic plans to reach the city." Alley (2002, 170) thinks that the idea of a "city church" is found in the New Testament because, "... in any given city or locality there was only one church. Paul's epistles were written to churches in Corinth or Ephesus, for example, which were cities; or to Galatia, which was a region. The point is that wherever there were Christians, there was but one church - and these churches all accepted each other as *the* church." Furthermore, Alley (2002, 171-73) explains that after the apostles would plant a church they would also appoint elders, who were spiritual leaders for the entire city or area. However, these elders would come from among the apostles, prophets, and teachers, i.e. out of the five-fold ministry, and the best example of this is the Antioch church, where it was explicitly said that the eldership was comprised of prophets and teachers.

Scott Wallis (2003, 12) argues that the term "local church" is not biblical, because in the New Testament churches were never categorized according to their denomination or doctrine, but according to their location. Also, the five-fold ministry held a prominent place in the life of a city church:

The Church in the New Testament consisted of citywide churches that were made up of local men with five-fold ministry callings who were called elders.... Every Church in the New Testament was connected in some way to an apostle. Apostles were accessible and available to city churches for the purpose of establishing Christ's kingdom" (Wallis, 2003, 12-13).

According to Wagner (2010, 38-39), in reality the relationships that the local congregations have with the apostles look like this:

Apostolic leadership encompasses a larger territory and operates in a different way. It stands or falls, not based on the position of the church, but on its own relationships. The apostolic network replaces denomination. Local churches are independent and, as I've said, pastors are leaders of congregations (assemblies). They are the ones who decide whether or not will they submit to the "spiritual responsibility" of the apostles on a wider territory. This means that they are entering a mutual agreement according to which the apostles accept spiritual authority over pastors, they support (*sic*) the pastor's work, they participate in the ministry if there's a need for help from the outside, they encourage pastors, and they serve as spiritual fathers. In turn, the pastors participate financially in supporting the apostles in terms of their wages and expenses. This kind of agreement stands for as long as there's a positive relationship at a personal level.

According to this idea of the activities and work of the church, cooperation between churches is not accomplished on the basis of denominational affiliation, but on the basis of the apostolic network, because the city churches are governed by apostles. Inclusion in the apostolic network takes place when the pastor of a church asks for a relationship which includes "apostolic covering" (cf. Polis, 2002, 42), i.e. submission to the apostle, who possesses authority over a certain area (i.e. sphere) (cf. Garcia 2007, 90). Consequently, this kind of arrangement also affects the autonomy of the local church, because the apostle(s) become leaders and stewards who have authority over a certain number of local church congregations. However, the apostles are not responsible for their work to the local churches, but to other apostles who are their equals, or their superiors in the apostolic network.

All apostles I know recognize the need for functional accountability. Most of them have nominal accountability to certain boards, but most of them name their own boards. It makes it hard to consider a person functionally accountable to a board that they name. But they all realize this, so they are on a list of nine organizations across different parts of the world where apostles are coming together on a voluntary basis and holding themselves accountable to each (Wagner).⁷

7 What the Doctor Recommends Article, <http://ministrytodaymag.com/index.php/ministry-leadership40/vision9/418-what-the-doctor-recommends>. *Ministry Today*

Christology and anthropology in KN theology

We have already seen in the example of ecclesiology, where the church is identified with Christ, that KN theology suffers from a problematic Christology and anthropology. The core of the problem lies in the fact that God is being humanized, and man is being deified. Christ is becoming humanized through the kenosis theory and through claiming that Christ was born again, while on the other hand the believers are being implicitly elevated to the same level as God through the teaching that believers are kings, that they were delivered from a sinful nature, and are ascribed with the ability to forgive sins and to create *ex nihilo*. Let us look at both sides of this identification, with remarks in which I will be focusing exclusively on Bethel Church and the teachings of Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton. The fact that they teach this does not mean that all who adhere to KN theology teach it, but it could be symptomatic.

Humanizing Christ

As evidence that proponents of KN theology teach the kenosis theory, I quote Bill Johnson and his view of Jesus' incarnation.

Jesus reflected perfect theology both in what He showed us of the Father and what He showed us about carrying out the Father's will. Jesus emptied Himself of divinity and became man (see Philippians 2:7). While He is eternally God, He chose to live within the restrictions of a man who had no sin and was empowered by the Holy Spirit. In doing this, He provided a compelling model for us to follow (Johnson and Clark, 2011, 125).

Jesus only did what the Father was doing and only said what the Father was saying (see John 5:17–18; 8:26). This sets a pretty high standard for how to live. While Jesus is eternally God, He emptied Himself of His divinity and became a man (see Philippians 2:7). It is vital to note that He did all His miracles as a man, not as God. If He did them as God, I would still be impressed. But because He did them as a man yielded to God, I am now unsatisfied with my life, being compelled to follow the example He has given us. Jesus is the only model for us to follow (Johnson and Clark, 2011, 132).

Jesus so emptied Himself that He was incapable of doing what was required of Him by the Father—without the Father's help. That is the nature of our call—it requires more than we are capable of. When we stick to doing only the stuff we can do, we are not involved in the call (Johnson, 2005, 42).

Why is it important for Johnson to say that Jesus emptied Himself of divinity one way or another? Because in this way Jesus becomes a man just like us, and His lifestyle of acting in the realm of the supernatural (signs and wonders, controlling nature through calming storms) becomes our obligation. He is our perfect example of what a normal Christian life should look like. "The baptism in the Holy

Spirit makes a lifestyle available to us to which not even John had access. Jesus whetted our appetite for this lifestyle through His example, then He gave us the promise of its availability” (Johnson, 2003, 65).

However, Johnson adds another dimension to Jesus’ humanization by teaching that Jesus was born again when He was resurrected. So, not only was Jesus deprived of His own divinity and not only did He do everything in dependence on the Holy Spirit - just like we should be living - but He was also born again. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, but the act of His resurrection was also the moment of His new birth. I have not been able to find this exact statement in his books, but it can be found in his sermons (and his books are mostly transcripts of his sermons and teachings)⁸. It is interesting, however, how Johnson’s theology is developing in this direction, because this concept was already well developed in the *Faith movement* (Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, etc.). What is the significance of this claim? This claim implies that Jesus died twice. First, He experienced spiritual death, just like all humans, when His spirit became separated from His fellowship with God, and the passage in Mark 15:34, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is used to support this. After this, Jesus died and physically went to hell for three days. But what is the purpose of this teaching? D. R. McConnell (1988, 120-21) summarizes the Christology of the *Faith movement* in this way:

On the cross, when man’s sin and spiritual death were imputed to him, Jesus became a ‘new satanic creation.’ As a result, ‘Jesus became sin. His spirit was separated from God.’ This separation from God was more than alienation because of man’s sin. Spiritual death transformed Christ from a God-man into a mortal (and satanic) man, thereby ‘severing’ him from God. In the Faith theology, Jesus was not a substitute for sin in any vicarious sense: he was transformed into a demoniac. After Jesus suffered the penalty of man’s sin and fulfilled all of man’s legal obligation towards Satan, God declared that justice had been done. Because he had taken on spiritual death and become a satanic creation, ‘Jesus was born again before He was raised from the dead.’ He went to hell a demon-possessed mortal man, and emerged from hell a born-again, resurrected man. This ‘born-again Jesus’ then defeated Satan and his forces of darkness in hell. ‘It is important for us to realize,’ writes Kenneth Copeland, ‘that a born-again man defeated Satan.’

Deification of man

The purpose of kenosis and Jesus’ spiritual death, which began in the *Faith movement* and was carried into KN theology, is not just humanizing God, but also deifying believers, i.e. making them equal with God. Since Jesus has identifi-

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GYQwZnTROw>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG7vz1TokQo>

ed Himself with us in every way and has become like us, the identification works the other way around as well. That is why Kenneth Hagin (1977, 8) will go on to say that every born-again believer is an incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, and in another place he states that, "Even many in the great body of Full Gospel people do not know that the new birth is a real incarnation. They do not know they are as much sons and daughters of God as Jesus" (cf. Hagin, 1989, 40). Also, when interpreting 2 Corinthians 6:15, he says, "Finally, the believer is called 'Christ' and the unbeliever is called 'Belial.' That's who we are; we're Christ! Jesus is the Head and we are the Body of Christ" (Hagin, 1989, 41).

I have not found that Bill Johnson refers to believers as "Christ," like Hagin does, as he usually avoids talking about believers being an incarnation of Christ as well as using this term, but he does use other titles with the purpose of deifying believers. For example, he refers to believers as "kings." And while on the one hand Johnson and Vallotton emphasize that we are a part of the royal family (cf. Vallotton, 2012, 164; Vallotton and Johnson, 2006, 141) and that Jesus is King (cf. Vallotton and Johnson, 2006, 83), as he quotes Proverbs 25:2 in his sermon⁹ he implicitly refers to Christians as kings. Also, in his book *Dreaming with God* Johnson (2006a, 47) states,

We are kings and priests to our God (see Rev. 1:6). Our royal identity never shines brighter than when we pursue hidden things with the confidence that we have legal access to such things. Mysteries are our inheritance. Our kingship, our role in ruling and reigning with Christ, comes to the forefront when we seek Him for answers to the dilemmas of the world around us.

Seeing that believers are identified with Christ in this way, it is not fitting for them to maintain their sinful nature. Since God does not have a sinful nature, neither do the believers who have fellowship with Him. Johnson (2007, 204) therefore says,

But the power of sin is old news! The news needed in this day is that the power of the authentic love of God transforms everything it touches. Those changed by His love are true lovers, and those who don't love others have no evidence of ever having experienced God's love. As we face Him, our nature is changed into the nature of the One who touched us, and we release the power of His love to those around us.

In another place Johnson states even more plainly,

Many believe His power exists only to help us overcome sin. This understanding stops very short of the Father's intent for us to become witnesses of another world. Doesn't it seem strange that our whole Christian life should be focused on overcoming something that has already been defeated? Sin and its nature

9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54Qhdu7EMh8>

have been yanked out by the roots. Many constantly call out to God for more power to live in victory. What more can He do for us? If His death wasn't enough, what else is there? That battle has already been fought and won!...The apostle Paul spoke to this issue when he said, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." The word reckon points to our need to change our minds. I don't need power to overcome something if I'm dead to it (Heaven invades Earth, 2003, 130-131).

Speaking about the sinful nature, Kris Vallotton (2012, 39) emphasizes that our entire being - body, soul, and spirit - underwent a radical transformation. As far as the body is concerned, Vallotton argues that our sinful flesh participated in Christ's death. "Our bodies have gone from evil castles, housing a sinful nature that "cannot please God," to holy temples in which the Holy Spirit "dwells." God left no part of us unchanged when He married us to His Son...Our very nature has been completely transformed." Vallotton (2012, 40) also emphasizes that the term "sarx" in the New Testament can refer to both our old and new nature. Therefore, our physical body is neither a source of good nor evil, since our body is governed by our spirit and soul. However, believers are no longer in a position in which their soul is separated from the Spirit. Vallotton draws another argument in favor of the claim that we no longer have a sinful nature, based on the following OT analogy: that of our bodies being instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13), and we know that in the OT only those instruments or sacrifices could be used in worship which were cleansed (cf. Vallotton, 2012, 41). In replying to the question of why we still sin if Christians do not have a sinful nature they are struggling with, Vallotton says that Adam and Eve sinned even before they had a sinful nature. It is the same with us today. "This proves that all you need to sin is a free will and the capacity to believe a lie. In the core of our beings, we are now wonderful people who inherently love and long for our heavenly Father, just as Christ did. There is no intrinsic evil present in us. We have heaven's heart" (Vallotton, 2012, 42).

The identification further continues with the claim that Christians have the power to forgive the sins of the unsaved, a claim based on the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-21), which was bestowed upon us. In this case, Kris Vallotton has the main word. In his book, *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle*, Vallotton (2007, 109-10) states,

God was in Christ so that He could reconcile the world to Himself. How did He reconcile the world to Himself? By "not counting their sins against them"! Did you get that? But as powerful as this is He also went on to say He has given us the same ministry. He wants us not to count sin against sinners so we can beg them to be reconciled to God. If God is not counting sin against sinners, what gives us the right to do it? And whatever gave us the idea that pointing out people's sin leads to reconciliation? God said not counting sins leads to re-

conciliation. We need to rethink the way in which we minister from the King's palace so we don't defile His throne and undermine His ministry.

Vallotton will repeat in two more books that our ministry is that of reconciliation, which means that it is not our task to convict people of their sins, but to help them to become reconciled to God by not taking their sins into account.

All of us who are new creatures in Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation, not the ministry of judgment that the prophets of the Old Testament were given. What is the ministry of reconciliation? Not counting people's trespasses against them. That passage all by itself will destroy the ministry of a few prophets whom I know (2015, 66).

Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we are new creations in Christ. He goes on to explain to us that God reconciled us to Himself by not counting our sins against us (see v. 19). Then he reminds us that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation (see v. 19). When you break this passage down, you begin to realize that our ministry as believers in Christ is not to convince the world of their sin. Rather, we are to help reconcile the world back to Christ by not holding people's sins against them (Vallotton and Vallotton, 2011, 73-74).

And while it is not very clear what it means that we do not hold people's sins against them based on these passages, in one of his talks Vallotton openly states that for us the reconciliation ministry means we have power and authority to forgive people's sins. In this way, as he interprets John 20:22-23, Vallotton will openly say, "How many do you understand that now, we are an agent of forgiveness, and we have the right to forgive people of sins, when they do not deserve it?" And since we are now part of the kingdom, Vallotton goes further and states, "And then once we got in [in the kingdom of God], we got commission to let anyone else in that we want to, by reconciling them to Christ by not counting their trespasses against them."¹⁰

Finally, the identification takes place through a claim, which also originated from the *Faith movement*, that believers have the power to create *ex nihilo*, i.e. to create something out of nothing. The following statements testify to this:

Internal realities affect our external realities. In fact, in some ways they create an external reality. Jesus released peace in a storm, and the storm ceased. The peace was in Him before it was around Him. We see that phenomenon when He slept during that life-threatening storm. The peace He lived in positioned Him as the answer to the disciples' cry. He slept in the storm before the disciples were able to sleep in the boat. Because of what was in Him, whenever Jesus talked, a shift took place in the atmosphere around Him. The people around Him did not know

10 See the clip from the talk on the following links, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=839853439385014&id=148396958530669; <https://www.facebook.com/ibethelvtv/videos/10153274191145930/>

what was happening; all they knew was that He spoke “as one having authority” (Matthew 7:29). Yet Jesus informed them that spirit and life were released through His words (see John 6:63). Peter demonstrated this phenomenon later. Because of the Spirit in him, when he walked to the Temple to pray, those in his shadow were healed. We, too, are carriers of the divine (Johnson and Clark, 2011, 179-180).

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” (Prov 18:21 NASB). With our speech we design and alter our environment. Realities are created that didn’t exist a moment earlier through simple proclamations. With this tool we can build up or tear down, edify or discourage, give life or destroy it. The declared word has the capacity to resource earth with Heaven’s resources. As reformers we must first pay attention to what we say, realizing that we are actually building the world we have to live in. We have the ability to speak from God, revealing His world and His ways. As Bishop Joseph Garlington says, ‘nothing happens in the Kingdom until something is said’... Every time God speaks to us, there is a transfer of heavenly resource from His account into ours (Johnson, 2006a, 174-75).

What is seen was not made out of things which are visible (Hebrews 11:3). This verse speaks of how God creates. He was the original Imagineer, and what He *envisioned* we became. Like God, we create visible realities from the invisible dimension of our imaginations. In fact, there has never been anything perceived in the visible world that wasn’t first assembled in the invisible realm of imagination (Vallotton, 2010, 187).

Also, on his Facebook profile dated November 12, 2014 Vallotton asks the question, “If words became worlds, what would you be calling into existence?”¹¹ This clearly implies that our words have the power to create, just as God does.

Conclusion of Part One

The purpose of this article was to clarify the basic theological postulates of KN theology. As we have seen, this theology brings certain innovations into Evangelical Christianity in terms of: a) Soteriology—claiming that the purpose and the result of Christ’s sacrifice was not just redemption of sins, but also taking away the right of ruling the earth from Satan, and giving this same dominion to mankind, which had handed this right to Satan as part of the fall in the Garden of Eden. b) Eschatology—teaching the necessity of salvation not only for individuals, but for all structures as well, claiming that it is the responsibility of the church to facilitate Christ’s return by “correcting the problems in the world before Christ returns” (Wilson, 2005, 164). Due to this, the representatives of this theology are optimistic, they are postmillennialistic in their theology, they are society-orien-

11 <https://www.facebook.com/kvministries/posts/10152544573293741>

ted, and they strive to get into all the pores of society by changing it from inside. They are activists, but at least they are not revolutionaries for now (cf. Land, 1993, 194-95). c) Ecclesiology—the church becomes an institution whose main task is spiritual warfare; the church is no longer the body of Christ, but becomes the second Christ here on earth, and the ministry of present-day apostles gives the church a foundation, enabling it for ministry, spiritual warfare, and attaining dominance by accepting their authority. Using the idea of a *city church*, attempts are made to have all churches in a city or town submit themselves to the authority and government of the apostles and prophets, thus placing their authority above the authority and autonomy of the local congregation. d) Christology and anthropology—by identifying and equalizing between believers and Christ in a way that teaches the theory of kenosis and Jesus' spiritual death, and the believers are called "kings," it is emphasized that they no longer have a sinful nature and are ascribed the ability to forgive sins and to create *ex nihilo*.

It is clear from this summary that KN theology has some drawbacks when it comes to some key theological branches, such as Christology, soteriology, and anthropology. And these issues need to be laid out publicly and given a critical review. On the other hand KN theology contains some positive aspects as well, which are lacking and are necessary in present-day Evangelical Christianity. That is why in the second article we will first outline some positive challenges that KN theology puts before us, but we will also provide a critical look at them in order to argue for the acceptance of those positive challenges that KN theology is putting before us, while at the same time rejecting the problematic parts (i.e. unorthodox) that are connected with these challenges.

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Ervin Budiselić

Problematika izazova teologije „kraljevstvo sada“ – I. dio

Sažetak

Članak analizira osnovne teološke postavke teologije „kraljevstvo sada“, kao jedne inačice teologije prevlasti. U prvome dijelu nudi se kratka povijest nastanka i razvoja teologije „kraljevstvo sada“, a nakon toga pregled osnovnih učenja teologije „kraljevstvo sada“ u području soteriologije, eshatologije, ekleziologije, kristologije i antropologije. Zaključuje se kako teologija „kraljevstvo sada“ sadrži neka pozitivna i potrebna učenja i naglaske za današnje evanđeosko kršćanstvo, ali jednako tako u sebi sadrži dosta problematičnih učenja koja je potrebno odbaciti.