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# The Nature of the Crucified Christ in Word-Faith Teaching

William P. Atkinson

**KEY WORDS:** *Christology, cross, atonement, dualism, JDS, nature, sin, sacrifice, Satan, Kenyon, Hagin, Copeland.*

A movement that has concerned world-wide evangelicalism in recent years is that known as the word-faith movement (WFM), faith movement, prosperity gospel, or health and wealth teaching, influential through its widespread use of television, conferences, training programmes, and written publications. While it is perhaps most infamous for its teaching on faith, health, and prosperity, its view of the atonement has also caused alarm. Though less well known, this has gained the title 'JDS teaching'—while on the cross and in the grave, 'Jesus Died Spiritually'. JDS teaching is not adhered to by all in WFM, but it is characteristic of the two names most famously associated with the movement: Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) and Kenneth Copeland (1937- ). It was also taught by the man who, since Dan McConnell's influential crit-

icism of WFM,<sup>1</sup> has been recognised to have been its 'grandfather', E. W. Kenyon (1867-1948).

JDS doctrine makes a number of claims about what happened to Jesus on the cross. One is that in his spiritual death Jesus was separated from God; another is that Jesus suffered at Satan's hands. While both of these are handled in an unusual manner within JDS teaching, the fundamental ideas might not meet outright disagreement among evangelicals. Jesus' cry of dereliction, and the testimony that Satan entered Judas might be regarded by some as evidence enough. However, a third element to JDS teaching is more unpalatable. It is that while spiritually dead, Jesus partook of a sinful, satanic nature.

This article will consider the third element, and analyse the views of the

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<sup>1</sup> Dan McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988, 1995), published in Great Britain as *The Promise of Health and Wealth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990). References in this article are to the latter.

three JDS proponents mentioned above, Kenyon, Hagin and Copeland. Next, it will consider the response to JDS teaching that has been offered by evangelical critics of WFM, who have produced a number of important works both before and since McConnell.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, it will consider the possible genesis of the teaching. In that section, discussion will first focus on Kenyon's possible contemporary sources, for McConnell convincingly demonstrated that, through Hagin, JDS doctrine reached WFM from Kenyon.<sup>3</sup> He further claimed that what he called Kenyon's 'spiritualization' of the atonement came not from Christian sources, but from ideas flowing from New Thought and Christian Science. Discussion will then move to consider biblical teaching that is claimed by JDS teachers to support their particular view of Christ's death.

### Satan and his sinful nature

These authors' presentations of Christ's death are based upon a highly dualistic cosmology in which God and Satan are powerful participants in

humanity's sin and salvation. For those unused to such writing, Satan is mentioned with surprising frequency, and ascribed surprising authority. They regard Satan as a fallen angel,<sup>4</sup> so evil that for Kenyon at least, Satan personifies sin.<sup>5</sup> Turning now to Satan's 'nature', Kenyon used the word in the context under consideration in synonymy with 'substance', 'being', and 'character'.<sup>6</sup> Thus he seemed to mean 'all that an entity inwardly and innately is'. In assuming this sense, he leant on Ephesians 2:3 ('we were by nature children of wrath').<sup>7</sup> However, in the contexts of divine and satanic natures, he also wrote in an almost personifying way, for instance that, 'Spiritual death is in reality a Nature', adding in apparent synonymy that, 'Spiritual Death is as much a substance, a force, a fact, as life'.<sup>8</sup> Here, he envisaged 'nature', if divine or satanic, as a substantial force having an impact on the entity 'partaking' of it.

Kenyon noted that Satan's nature

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2 Most notably, Andrew Brandon, *Health & Wealth* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1987); H. Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Milton Keynes: Nelson Word: UK edn, 1995 [1993]); T. Smail, A. Walker, & N. Wright, "Revelation Knowledge" and Knowledge of Revelation: The Faith Movement and the Question of Heresy', pp. 57-77, *Journal for Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994); R. M. Bowman, Jr, *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001); Andrew Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health & Prosperity* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

3 McConnell, *Promise*, ch. 7.

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4 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 47, 57, 59-60; Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Origin and Operation of Demons* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1978), pp. 7-8; Kenneth Copeland, 'The Gates of hell Shall Not Prevail', *Believer's Voice Of Victory* 25.4 (April 1997), p. 6.

5 E. W. Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* (Lynnwood: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 29th printing, 2000 [1943]), pp. 62-63; compare *Father*, p. 49.

6 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 47, 57, 64.

7 E. W. Kenyon, *The Bible in the Light of Our Redemption* (Lynnwood: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 3rd printing, 1969 [posthumously edited and compiled by Ruth Kenyon Housworth]), p. 33; *Father*, p. 53.

8 Kenyon, *Bible*, pp. 28, 30; compare p. 37; *Father*, p. 50.

changed when he rebelled. Since then, it 'is the very opposite of God's', 'the very fountain of all that is evil, wicked, and corrupt in the human', 'malignant... evil, unjust, and destructive'.<sup>9</sup> The best way to perceive the satanic nature was through Satan's names, as Kenyon understood them from the Bible. These included 'accuser', 'defamer', 'slanderer', 'corrupter', 'tempter', 'seducer', 'murderer', and 'liar'.<sup>10</sup>

Hagin understood Satan's nature similarly. 'Nature' he used in apparent synonymity with 'characteristics', and these characteristics he listed thus: 'The nature of the devil is hatred and lies.'<sup>11</sup> Copeland, in rather circular fashion, simply defined Satan's nature as spiritual death, stating elsewhere that Satan's nature was 'sin'.<sup>12</sup>

### Partaking of a sinful, satanic nature

A key term for Kenyon was 'partaking' of the satanic nature.<sup>13</sup> For Kenyon, Satan's nature, like God's, is communicable to humanity. Humans are so

dependant on a 'higher' spiritual force that they cannot exist without participating in either God's or Satan's nature.<sup>14</sup> This is a mutually exclusive choice, and not a mere claim that an individual could reflect certain aspects of the image of God while exhibiting certain behavioural traits of Satan.<sup>15</sup> Adam, created to participate in God's nature, began instead to participate in Satan's when he fell. Whether participation in the divine nature and participation in the satanic nature were equivalent in their degree and effect is less than clear. Participation in the divine nature was not so great that Adam was divine *rather than* human before the fall: 'He did not have God's nature. He had perfect human nature. He had perfect human life.'

It might thus charitably be assumed that Adam did not become satanic *rather than* human after the fall. Nevertheless, the words quoted immediately above are surrounded by the following:

Satan breathed into Adam his own nature. Adam was actually born again in the Garden... Into his spirit, Satan now poured his own nature. Man instantly became a liar, a cringing, cowardly being. That nature has been reproduced in the human race down through the ages.<sup>16</sup>

The profound and intrinsic character of the participation in Satan's

9 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 47, 57.

10 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 64-68.

11 Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Name of Jesus* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1979), p. 31; compare *The New Birth* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1975), p. 10.

12 Kenneth Copeland, *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1976), pp. 9-10; *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, audio tape 02-0017 (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.), side 2.

13 Kenyon used the phrase frequently with reference to humanity's fall (e.g. *Father*, pp. 37, 41, 47; *Bible*, pp. 30, 33), but also applied it to Christ (e.g. *Father*, p. 137).

14 Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 28.

15 Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 34.

16 E. W. Kenyon, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, (Lynnwood: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 13th printing, 1969 [1945]), p. 60.

nature that these words reveal is confirmed elsewhere: 'Man commits Sin, because his Nature produces that kind of conduct.'<sup>17</sup> Kenyon may simply have meant 'fallen nature' by 'Nature', but given the tenor of his writing, it is also possible that he meant to indicate that fallen humanity was such a full participant in Satan's nature that this satanic nature was now humanity's own.<sup>18</sup>

Turning now from Adam to Jesus, 'We know that as Moses lifted up the Serpent in the wilderness Jesus was also lifted up a serpent; that is, He was a partaker of Satanic Nature, the old Serpent.'<sup>19</sup> Whether Christ's partaking in Satan's nature meant quite the same as Adam's partaking is moot. Kenyon's view of substitution, in which Christ underwent what humanity suffered when it fell in order that humanity might thus be redeemed, might suggest that it was the same. On the other hand, Kenyon's descriptions do not overtly state that Christ, while spiritually dead, was like Adam at enmity with God, a liar or a coward.

In order to consider what Kenyon meant by 'partaking' when specifically applied to Christ, it is helpful to note some of his other language. He wrote, for instance, that Jesus' 'spirit absolutely became impregnated with the sin nature of the world'.<sup>20</sup> This continues to suggest large synonymy between 'Satanic nature' and 'sin

nature', but his use of the word 'impregnated' also suggests that Kenyon's use of 'partake' was not a reference merely to an extrinsic 'fellowship with', but rather suggests an intrinsic alteration in, or at least adulteration of, the nature of Christ.

A similar conclusion is suggested by the words 'one' 'united' and 'all' in: 'He became one with Satan when He became sin'; 'He had been lifted up as a serpent. Serpent is Satan. Jesus knew He was going to be lifted up, united with the Adversary'; 'He not only bore our sins, but the sin-nature itself was laid upon Him, until He became all that spiritual death had made man.'<sup>21</sup> It is thus reasonable to conclude that when Kenyon used the language of identification, he did not only mean that Christ was 'counted' as one of the fallen human race, but that he became what humans had become. However, this is not entirely clear, and so a second uncertainty emerges: not only is it unclear whether Adam partook in Satan's nature to such an extent that this nature was his own, but also whether Jesus partook in Satan's nature to the same extent that Adam did.

No firm answers to these questions are offered. On the one hand, Kenyon insisted that Christ was a full substitute for fallen humanity. On the other hand, Christ's partaking of the satanic nature did not involve the enmity with God that it did for Adam.

While the weight of the evidence

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<sup>17</sup> Kenyon, *Father*, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> This is McConnell's understanding (*Promise*, p. 118).

<sup>19</sup> Kenyon, *Father*, p. 137.

<sup>20</sup> Kenyon, *What Happened*, p. 63.

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<sup>21</sup> E. W. Kenyon, *Identification: A Romance in Redemption* (Los Angeles: E. W. Kenyon, 1941), p. 21; *What Happened*, pp. 44-45; *Bible*, p. 165.

points to an *intrinsic* 'partaking' of the Satanic nature in Christ while he suffered, occasionally Kenyon used more externally orientated language: 'Here we see God taking our sin nature, hideous spiritual death, and making it to strike, as the Prophet says, upon His soul.'<sup>22</sup> So Lie speculates that Kenyon may have meant to indicate no more by writing of a 'partaking' of Satan's nature than a recognition that both Christ and Satan must experience hell.<sup>23</sup> This speculation, however, does not cohere with Kenyon's overall portrayal. Whatever precisely Kenyon meant, he was indicating something more intrinsic than simply an experience common to the two.

When one turns from Kenyon's writing to the output of Hagin and Copeland, it quickly becomes clear that they do not refer to this aspect of spiritual death with anything like the frequency that Kenyon did. Hagin believed precisely the same things as Kenyon regarding Adam's partaking of the satanic nature.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to Kenyon, however, Hagin stopped short of overtly using the language of 'partaking of Satan's nature' of Christ on the cross. This seems to have been a deliberate choice, and initially suggests divergence from Kenyon's ideas. In fact Hagin, when asked his precise view by Hanegraaff, replied, 'I don't believe that Jesus took on Satan's

nature or submitted to his lordship.'<sup>25</sup>

However, both Hanegraaff and Bowman are cautious about accepting Hagin's disavowal. Hanegraaff writes, 'It becomes very confusing indeed when someone denies the very thing he affirms.'<sup>26</sup> This is slightly misleading, for, as noted above, Hagin did not state in so many words that Christ took on Satan's nature. Bowman is more nuanced:

We ought, of course, to take Hagin at his word that he finds such a way of expressing his teaching somehow unacceptable. On the other hand, we should not assume too quickly that Hagin disagrees with the *idea* expressed by saying that Jesus took on Satan's nature.<sup>27</sup>

Bowman's accurate thinking is confirmed by Hagin's explicit statements that Christ's suffering involved his taking 'upon Himself our sin nature, the nature of spiritual death'<sup>28</sup> and 'He took our spiritual death... our outlawed nature.'<sup>29</sup> These show that his concepts did not differ substantially from those of Kenyon, for he had made it clear that 'our' sinful, outlawed nature was that of Satan.<sup>30</sup> Further-

<sup>22</sup> Kenyon, *Father*, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> G. Lie, 'The Theology of E. W. Kenyon: Plain Heresy or Within the Boundaries of Pentecostal-Charismatic "Orthodoxy?"', pp. 85-114, *Pneuma*, 22.1 (Spring 2000), p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> Hagin, *New Birth*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, correspondence with H. Hanegraaff, quoted in Bowman, *Controversy*, p. 161; Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, p. 156.

<sup>26</sup> Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Bowman, *Controversy*, pp. 167-168, italics original.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 2nd edn, 1983 [1966]), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Present-Day Ministry of Jesus Christ* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 2nd edn 1983 [n.d.]), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Hagin, *New Birth*, p. 10.

more, even if Hagin succeeded in distancing his views from a belief that Christ partook of Satan's nature itself, it is clear that he believed that Christ participated in a 'sin nature'.

For Copeland, fallen human participation in Satan's nature, and the identity of this concept with spiritual death, emerges in such statements as:

When Adam committed high treason against God and bowed his knee to Satan, spiritual death—the nature of Satan—was lodged in his heart. Actually, Adam was the first person ever to be born again. He was born from life unto death, from spiritual life unto spiritual death... God said that Adam would die the very day he ate the forbidden fruit, yet he lived several hundred years longer. God was not referring to physical death; He meant that Adam would die spiritually—that he would take on the nature of Satan.<sup>31</sup>

He further describes this 'lodging in the heart' and 'taking on' of Satan's nature as a 'union between Satan and mankind'.<sup>32</sup>

Copeland is less reticent than Hagin in ascribing participation in Satan's nature to the spiritually dead Christ. He writes that 'Man is a partaker of satanic nature due to the fall; Jesus bore that nature' and, expounding John 3:14, states that 'the serpent denote[s] union and harmony with the nature of

the Adversary'.<sup>33</sup> 'When Jesus went to the cross, He not only bore the penalty for our sinful conduct, He bore sin itself. He took on Himself the sin nature and every manifestation of death and destruction it carries with it.'<sup>34</sup> His preaching explicitly links the sin nature to Satan: Christ 'accepted the sin nature of Satan in His own spirit'.<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion to this section, we see that Kenyon's teaching was fullest and most unambiguous, though his exposition created two significant uncertainties: did Adam partake in Satan's nature to the extent that this nature was intrinsically his, and did Jesus partake of this nature to the same extent as Adam? These uncertainties create further ones: how intrinsic to his being was Christ's participation in this alleged satanic nature, and what effect on his being did this have?

Hagin explicitly denied teaching that Christ partook of Satan's nature. He did teach that Christ took an outlawed sin nature, and in practice made no clear distinction between it and the satanic nature that Adam had allegedly inherited at his fall. Copeland represents a return to Kenyon's more outspoken language. He explicitly relates Christ's spiritual death to the nature of the devil. Neither Hagin nor Copeland, in the varied ways that they approach this subject, dispels the uncertainties created by Kenyon.

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33 Kenneth Copeland, *Did Jesus Die Spiritually?* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.), p. 3.

34 Kenneth Copeland, 'Worthy to be Anointed', *Believer's Voice Of Victory* 24.9 (October 1996), p. 5.

35 Copeland, *What Happened*, side 2.

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31 Copeland, *Covenant*, pp. 9-10.

32 Copeland, *Covenant*, p. 11; compare 'The Great Exchange', pp. 4-8, *Believer's Voice Of Victory*, 24.2 (February 1996), p. 5.

## The Responses of the Critics

A number of responses are offered by the critics of WFM introduced earlier. This aspect of JDS teaching is characterised by some as presenting Christ as 'demonic', or 'a demoniac'.<sup>36</sup> This misrepresents Kenyon, Hagin and Copeland, who always use the term 'satanic', not 'demonic'. The Christ of JDS teaching is also characterised as a 'new satanic creation'. McConnell introduces this term, and is followed by Perriman.<sup>37</sup> McConnell cites both Kenyon and Hagin in his relevant endnote. However, the two passages McConnell refers to are about Adam, not Christ. The extent to which Christ's experience exactly mirrors Adam's in JDS teaching is debatable.

Turning now to the criticisms, some are banal and require little comment. Hanegraaff worries about whether Satan must have become the recipient of Christ's prayers when the latter cried 'Father' from the cross.<sup>38</sup> Dal Bello opines that Christ himself would by JDS reckoning have needed a saviour.<sup>39</sup> Others are more thoughtful and require consideration.

Of these, one comments that to state that Christ partook of the satanic nature is to imply that Christ committed sin. Thus, according to McConnell and dal Bello, the Christ of JDS teach-

ing, while on the cross, was 'sinful', for Brandon, he was a 'sinner', for Perriman he was 'inherently sinful', and for McCann, he was 'obedient to Satan'.<sup>40</sup> Bowman is a lone voice. He recognizes that WFM teachers 'mean that Jesus took on a sinful nature, the nature of Satan, so that somehow Jesus himself, *without committing any sin (as we may gratefully acknowledge the Word-Faith teachers to recognize)*, comes to have the character of sin.'<sup>41</sup> That Bowman's greater caution is justified will emerge in the next few paragraphs.

The critics' rejoinder is consistently to point out that Old Testament sacrifices of which Christ's is seen to be an echo involved blemish-free animals, and that the New Testament presents Christ as a 'lamb without blemish or spot'.<sup>42</sup> This argument seems to ignore the state of sacrificial animals—and Christ—during the process of killing. However physically blemish-free they were beforehand, they certainly were marred as the knife, nails or spear entered the body.

The rejoinder also fails to acknowl-

36 Brandon, *Health*, p. 126; McConnell, *Promise*, p. 120; Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, p. 155; Smail, Walker, & Wright, 'Revelation', p. 69.

37 McConnell, *Promise*, pp. 118, 120; Perriman, *Faith*, pp. 24-25.

38 Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, pp. 160-161.

39 Moreno dal Bello, 'Atonement Where? Part 2', (1994), accessed 25.9.03 from <http://www.banner.org.uk/wof/moreno2.html>.

40 McConnell, *Promise*, p. 127; dal Bello, 'Atonement', p. 6; Brandon, *Health*, p. 126; Perriman, *Faith*, p. 110; Vincent McCann, 'An Evaluation of the Key Doctrines in the Health and Wealth Faith Movement' (1998), accessed 25.9.03 from <http://www.spotlightministries.org.uk/faithmov.htm>.

41 Bowman, *Controversy*, p. 169, italics added.

42 Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, p. 158; Brandon, *Health*, p. 126; McConnell, *Promise*, p. 127; Perriman, *Faith*, p. 110; Smail, Walker & Wright, 'Revelation', p. 69. References are made to Lev.4:3, 23, 28, 32; 6:25-29; Deut.15:21; 1 Cor.2:8; Heb.9:14; 1 Pet.1:19; 3:18.



edge the recognition of JDS teaching that Christ was sinless.<sup>43</sup> Dal Bello criticises Copeland for being contradictory when the latter states that Christ was spotless when he went to the cross, but accepted Satan's sin-nature when he hung there.<sup>44</sup> It is not self-evident that this understanding is contradictory. Christ's being could have undergone some sort of change. Nevertheless, Kenyon had taught not only that Christ was sinless during his earthly ministry, but also that he was sinless while separated from God and taken to hell by Satan.<sup>45</sup> It may be that Copeland's teaching here contradicts not his own, but Kenyon's. However, it remains uncertain that Copeland, any more than Kenyon, conceived of Christ as one who committed sin when he partook of the satanic nature.

A second important criticism is that for Christ to have partaken of the satanic nature, he must either have ceased to be divine,<sup>46</sup> or exhibited a blend of divine and satanic natures.<sup>47</sup> The latter criticism presents an idea that Kenyon had in fact rejected,<sup>48</sup> and which seems foreign to Hagin and Copeland's presentations, with their

focus on Jesus' separation from God. The former criticism requires fuller consideration, and it is at this point that a particular weakness in JDS teaching emerges, for Christ's participation with sin and Satan, while separate from God, is presented in such intrinsic terms that the crucified Christ does seem to be presented in ways which do not support his divinity. Questions are thus raised not only about the understanding of the cross presented in JDS teaching, but also about its incarnational Christology.

While it might charitably be assumed that Christ's divine nature, as understood by WFM, was entirely intrinsic to his person, there is a suspicion that Christ partook of the divine nature in somewhat more extrinsic ways, commensurate only with both Adam's pre-fall partaking of the divine nature, and Christ's own accursed partaking of the satanic nature. So the uniqueness of the incarnation, and in turn of Christ's person, is not clearly maintained in this portrayal. The incarnational Christology of WFM thus seems, when applied to JDS teaching, to exhibit adoptionistic tendencies. If this suspicion is true, it explains the ready freedom with which the authors under review regard Christians as 'as much an Incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth'.<sup>49</sup>

It must, however, be noted that these tendencies are not carried through to their logical conclusions. Kenyon denied adoptionism,<sup>50</sup> and

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43 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 123-124; Hagin, *Present-Day Ministry*, ch.1 (implied in his logic); Kenneth Copeland, 'The Power of Resistance', *Believer's Voice Of Victory*, 25.6 (June 1997), p. 5.

44 Dal Bello, 'Atonement', p. 7.

45 Kenyon, *Father*, pp. 119, 130, 136. Compare Lie, 'Theology', p. 100.

46 Perriman, *Faith*, p. 22; Bowman, *Controversy*, p. 161; Hanegraaff, *Crisis*, p. 155; Hanegraaff and de Castro, 'What's Wrong'.

47 Dal Bello, 'Atonement', p. 7.

48 Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 34 (with reference to Adam).

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49 Kenyon, *Father*, p. 100; compare Kenneth E. Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1981).

50 Kenyon, *Father*, p. 98.

when other aspects of Christ's incarnate life are portrayed, Kenyon and others reveal a Christology that is firmly 'from above': 'God was manifest in the flesh. God lived as a man among us and we know His nature.'<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Kenyon did *not* write that Christ 'partook' of the divine nature during his incarnate life.

This terminological distinction might, in the final analysis, reveal an unconscious distinction between the extents to which Christ was divine in his life and satanic in his death. It might thus point to an underlying acknowledgement that Christ continued to be divine *in himself* while nevertheless partaking in some unexplained way in the satanic nature.

A third criticism is the stark one, stated by Bowman and by Smail, Walker and Wright, and implied by others, that JDS teaching at this point is simply without biblical support.<sup>52</sup> This requires considerable further discussion, and the next section will discuss this.

In conclusion to this section, WFM's critics raise three significant objections to the belief that Christ participated in a sinful, satanic nature. The first is the weakest. This is that Christ must thereby have sinned. It represents an inaccurate reading of JDS teaching, and presents a superficial reading of the Bible concerning the

process of sacrifice. The second is more robust. It is that Christ must have ceased to be divine. The uncertainties that emerged earlier concerning precisely how Christ's partaking of a sinful satanic nature is to be construed make it impossible to offer a definitive assessment of Christ's continuing divinity while spiritually dead. The uncertainty that exists is matched by a similar one concerning the participation of the human Christ in the divine nature. Adoptionistic tendencies exist. The third criticism, considered in detail later, is that there is no biblical warrant for this thinking.

### Kenyon's, Hagin's and Copeland's sources

As with all their theology, these authors regard the Bible as teaching their views. It is with few exceptions the only source they explicitly cite. However, in more general terms, Kenneth Copeland Ministries acknowledge Copeland's indebtedness to Hagin.<sup>53</sup> It is also clear, in view of his widespread plagiarism of Kenyon,<sup>54</sup> that Hagin used Kenyon repeatedly as a source. In turn, McConnell claims that Kenyon was dependent on New Thought and Christian Science (NT/CS) for his 'spiritualization' of Christ's death.<sup>55</sup> This section will therefore consider the extent to which Kenyon, and through him Hagin and Copeland, might have been influenced by sources that Chris-

<sup>51</sup> Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 158; compare Hagin, *Zoe*, p. 39; Kenneth Copeland, 'Taking An Offense', *Believer's Voice Of Victory* 23.7 (July 1995), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Bowman, *Controversy*, pp. 168-169; Smail, Walker & Wright, 'Revelation Knowledge', p. 69.

<sup>53</sup> N.a., 'It's Harvest Time!', pp. 16-29, *Believer's Voice Of Victory* 25.7 (July/August 1997), pp. 18-19.

<sup>54</sup> See McConnell, *Promise*, pp. 8-12.

<sup>55</sup> McConnell, *Promise*, p. 120.

tians would regard as heterodox, before discussing those biblical passages which are central to JDS understanding.

A cursory reading of McConnell's work might give the impression that Kenyon gained all his more controversial ideas about Christ's death from NT/CS sources. However, Simmons, Lie and McIntyre have established that Kenyon was as much or more indebted to Higher Life and Faith Cure (HL/FC) authors for his views on the atonement as he was to NT/CS.<sup>56</sup> Concerning this article's focus, it can simply be noted that *neither* relevant HL/FC *nor* possible NT/CS sources referred to Christ's partaking of a sinful, satanic nature. Even the author who wrote most explicitly about Jesus dying spiritually, Henry C. Mabie,<sup>57</sup> did not hint that Christ related to Satan in the process. He wrote of Jesus' 'vicarious union with the guilty human race' and that Jesus 'became as it were sin itself',<sup>58</sup> but he did not correlate Satan with this. Perhaps the greatest terminological similarity is to be found in the writing of A. B. Simpson, who claimed that

the snakes referred to in Numbers 21 represented Satan, and then employed the same logic as does Copeland (see below):

There was also in that brazen serpent the thought of Christ made sin for us, Christ assuming the vile and dishonoured name of sinful man, and counted by God, and treated by men, as if He were indeed a serpent and a criminal. Thus for us has He taken the sting from Satan.<sup>59</sup>

Even here, the thought that Christ was 'counted by God... as if He were... a serpent', while relating Christ tangentially and implicitly to Satan, falls far short of stating that Christ partook of Satan's nature.

In the absence of any reference among these sources to the crucified Christ's partaking with, union with or impregnation by the satanic nature, the only point of note is that NT/CS was essentially monistic.<sup>60</sup> Those NT/CS authors who, as McConnell has shown,<sup>61</sup> might be regarded as likely to have influenced Kenyon (Phineas P. Quimby; Ralph W. Emerson; Mary B. Eddy; Ralph W. Trine) did not give Satan anything like the attention offered by Kenyon. Quimby mentioned the devil very occasionally, regarding it/him as identical with ignorance or

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<sup>56</sup> D. H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Post-bellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1997); G. Lie, 'E. W. Kenyon: Cult Founder or Evangelical Minister?', *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* vol.16 (1996), pp.71-86; J. McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon and His Message of Faith: The True Story* (Orlando: Creation House, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> His relevant works include *How Does the Death of Christ Save Us?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), and see discussion in Lie, 'Theology' and McIntyre, *Kenyon*.

<sup>58</sup> Mabie, *Death*, pp. 39, 42.

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<sup>59</sup> A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (London: Morgan & Scott, new ed. 1915 [1888]), p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), pp. 167-168.

<sup>61</sup> McConnell, *Promise*, ch. 3.

error.<sup>62</sup> Eddy, though she did refer to 'the personification of evil', denied the existence of a personal devil.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, HL/FC was far more dualistic: some of its writers mentioned Satan, the devil, demons, or 'spiritual enemies' with some frequency, though they did so without the attention offered by Kenyon.<sup>64</sup>

A terminological link does emerge between Trine and Kenyon over use of the word 'partaker'. Trine frequently

used this term to refer to humanity's relationship to 'divinity'.<sup>65</sup> It is conceivable that his use influenced Kenyon. However, 2 Peter 1:4 is likely to be the primary influence on Kenyon, and possibly on Trine as well.

## Biblical Sources

Turning now to Kenyon's biblical sources, his thinking began with humanity's fall. Adam's partaking of the satanic nature as a result of his sin was, however, stated with neither biblical material nor logical deduction to support it.<sup>66</sup> Kenyon believed he had biblical undergirding to his views:

It is very clear that when Spiritual Death entered the life of Adam, his spirit underwent a complete change. Man was actually born again when he sinned. He was born of Satan. He became a partaker of satanic nature. He became a child of Satan. Read 1 John 3:12, John 5:24, 1 John 3:14-15, and Ephesians 2:1-5.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the texts he listed, while referring to human sin, the agency of 'the prince of the power of the air' in its genesis, 'spiritual' death, and even 'nature', do not indicate any partaking of Satan's nature. Likewise, Hagin offered no direct scriptural evidence for his assertion that, 'When Adam and Eve listened to the devil, the

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62 Horatio W. Dresser, ed., *The Quimby Manuscripts* (Electronic Edition: Cornerstone Books, 2000 [1921]), accessed 28.1.05-12.5.06 from <http://cornerstone.www.hubs.com/framepage.htm>, ch.14; Phineas P. Quimby, 'Questions and Answers' (n.d.), accessed 12.5.06 from [http://www.ppquimby.com/sub/articles/questions\\_and\\_answers.htm](http://www.ppquimby.com/sub/articles/questions_and_answers.htm).

63 Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, rev. edn 1891 [1875]), pp. 103 (compare p. 357), 469; *No and Yes* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1887), pp. 19, 27-30.

64 E.g. A. J. Gordon, *Behold He Cometh* (London: Thynne & Co., 1934 [1896 as *Ecce Venit!*]), pp. 99-100, 103, 141-142, 174; Mabie, *Death*, pp. 5, 41; Carrie J. Montgomery, *The Prayer of Faith* (London: Victory Press, new ed. 1930 [1880]), pp. 18, 26, 68; A. B. Simpson, *The Holy Spirit or Power from On High Volume II* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1896), pp. 176, 248, 269; *Gospel*, pp. 28, 78, 86, 101; *Standing on Faith* (London & Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.), pp. 49, 67, 97; Hannah W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood: Fleming A. Revell Company, 1952 [n.d.]), pp. 97, 122, 124; R. A. Torrey, *How to Obtain Fulness of Power* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1902), p. 40; G. D. Watson, *Coals of Fire* (n.p.: n.pub., 1886), p. 108; *Our Own God* (Blackburn: M.O.V.E. Press, n.d. [1904]), p. 143.

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65 R. W. Trine, *In Tune With The Infinite* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1952 [1897]), pp. xiv, 4, 29, 75.

66 Kenyon, *Family*, pp. 35-38; *Bible*, pp. 25-29.

67 Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 30.

devil became their spiritual father and they had the devil's nature in their spirits.' He observed that Cain killed Abel,<sup>68</sup> but did not ascertain that this event was evidence not only of moral failure, but of participation in Satan's nature. In the same way, John 8:44 indicated to Kenyon that fallen humanity imbibed Satan's nature, for 'the father... has given man his nature'.<sup>69</sup> It is true that here Jesus is given to say that his interlocutors exhibited some of Satan's characteristics. Insufficient evidence is provided in this brief passage, however, to conclude that the whole of fallen humanity shares in Satan's characteristics to the extent that Kenyon believed.

Turning from any alleged participation in a satanic nature by fallen humanity to that alleged participation by Christ, two passages stand out among the many cited: 2 Corinthians 5:21 and John 3:14. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is often quoted, referred to, or alluded to by Kenyon, Hagin and Copeland,<sup>70</sup> and most especially by Kenyon. For him, it offered direct evidence that Jesus partook of the satanic nature,<sup>71</sup> or of 'the sin-nature itself'.<sup>72</sup> Similarly

for Copeland, 2 Corinthians 5:21 offers evidence that Jesus 'accepted the sin nature of Satan', and 'was so literally made sin in spirit that He had to be made righteous in spirit again'.<sup>73</sup> Hagin was more cautious in his vocabulary. 2 Corinthians 5:21 indicated that Jesus took 'our outlawed nature'.<sup>74</sup>

These authors do not offer any exegesis of the text, but simply accept that it teaches that Christ participated in, became, or took sin, that such sin can be regarded as a 'nature' and that for Kenyon and Copeland at least this nature characterises or emanates from Satan. All three conclusions are controversial. With regard to the first, that Christ became sin, commentators fall into two groups. While some take Paul to have meant that Christ 'became sin' (which in turn is necessarily understood in some metaphorical sense, for a person cannot become a behaviour or moral quality), for others Paul meant that Christ became a sin-offering.

The latter view appeals to the dual meanings of Hebrew words that are each capable of translation as 'sin' and 'sin offering', depending on context,<sup>75</sup> as a possible background to Paul's expression here.<sup>76</sup> The former interpretation is not without difficulty: 'sin'

68 Hagin, *New Birth*, p. 10.

69 Kenyon, *Father*, p. 62; compare *What Happened*, pp. 60-61; Hagin, *New Birth*, p. 10.

70 E.g. Kenyon, *Bible*, pp. 47, 159, 220; *Father*, pp. 137, 222; *Jesus the Healer*, pp. 9, 26, 57, 67; *What Happened*, pp. 14, 43, 130, 158; Hagin, *Name of Jesus*, pp. 31, 56; *Present-Day Ministry*, p. 6; Copeland, *What Happened*, side 2; 'Great Exchange', p. 5; *Did Jesus Die Spiritually?*, p. 1.

71 Kenyon, *What Happened*, p. 20; *Bible*, p. 220.

72 Kenyon, *Bible*, p. 165.

73 Copeland, *What Happened*, side 2; *Did Jesus Die Spiritually?*, p. 1.

74 Hagin, *Present-Day Ministry*, p. 6.

75 R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Volume 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 79, 278.

76 E.g. F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), p. 210; Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 159.

must be understood metaphorically as some sort of personification of a quality or a state, but it is not clear what the personification is. Harris lists three options: 'sinner', 'sin-bearer', and 'sin', preferring the last.<sup>77</sup> Whichever is the case, this interpretation, despite its difficulties, is perhaps preferable, in that it makes fuller use of the internal logic of substitution, representation or exchange that Paul employed.<sup>78</sup> For the sake of present discussion, it will be tentatively accepted, for it is clearly the starting point for the JDS understanding of the verse.

Accepting, then, that Paul might have meant Christ became 'sin', rather than a 'sin-offering', this still does not allow the logical leap of JDS teaching that Christ thereby partook in some 'nature'. An understanding of Paul's metaphorical use of the terse phrase 'was made sin' emerges from the immediate context. 'Sin' is clearly contrasted here with 'righteousness', and more specifically the righteousness of God (5:21b)<sup>79</sup> that 'we' are enabled to become through Christ's being made sin. The cluster of ideas characterising this righteousness can be seen from the preceding sentences. Those who have become the righteousness of God are those who live for Christ (5:15) in

newness of life (5:17) and in reconciled friendship with God (5:18), as their sins are no longer counted against them (5:19). In short, they are treated as if they had not sinned.

The contrast between 'our' becoming righteousness and Christ being made sin suggests, then, that the latter phrase is to be understood as Christ's being treated as if he had sinned. As Paul referred to Christ's death at 5:14-15, and linked this to 5:21 with references to 'for all' (5:14, 15) and 'for us' (5:21), it is a safe conclusion that Paul understood this to have happened in Christ's death.<sup>80</sup> Certainly, his death was portrayed in the gospels as one in which he was treated by people as if he had sinned—it was for alleged crimes that he was arrested, tried and executed.

How familiar Paul was with such accounts when he wrote 2 Corinthians is an open question. In the chapter under investigation, he denied knowing Christ 'according to the flesh' (5:16). However, what he meant by this was not that he chose to ignore Christ's human history,<sup>81</sup> to which he made reference elsewhere in this correspondence (1 Corinthians 2:2; 7:10; 11:23-25; 15:3-7; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:10; 8:9; 13:4). He knew well that Christ suffered in his dying (4:8-10), and that this death was by crucifixion—reserved as an execution of criminals (13:4).

These considerations confirm that it is reasonable to suppose that Paul wished to indicate in 5:21 that Christ

<sup>77</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 453.

<sup>78</sup> See Harris, *Second Corinthians*, pp. 454-455; C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), p. 180; Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians Volume I* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 439-442.

<sup>79</sup> All references in this section are to 2 Corinthians unless otherwise stated.

<sup>80</sup> So Harris, *Second Corinthians*, p. 452; etc.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce, *Corinthians*, p. 208.

was treated in his dying as if he had sinned. Furthermore, he indicated that this was ultimately an act of God (5:21a; cf. 5:19). It may go beyond the evidence here to declare that, for Paul, Christ was treated *by God as well as by humans* as if he had sinned.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, what happened was not beyond God's ultimate directorship.

This conclusion may not be incompatible with the idea that Christ partook in the process of a 'nature', but it by no means requires this. Given that Paul's reasoning elsewhere about Christ's death reveals no participation in some alleged 'nature' of sin, there is no reason to assume this in exegeting 5:21. It is not even clear that an idea of a sin 'nature' is necessary in this discussion or in exegeting Paul.

Similarly, the idea that Christ related in some way to Satan and/or his nature in his crucifixion is not incompatible with Christ being treated as if he had sinned, but neither is it necessitated by it. There are three 'players in the drama' summed up in 5:21: God, Christ, and 'us'. Satan is firmly 'off-stage'. He makes a number of appearances in 2 Corinthians (2:11; 11:14; 12:7; cf. 4:4; 6:15), and is portrayed as an enemy of Christ and his people. That he might have played some causative part in Christ's death is not implausible. The difficulty for the JDS reading of 5:21 is that this verse simply does not state this, still less that Satan in some way transferred all or some of his characteristics to Christ in the process.

Turning now to John 3:14, Kenyon and Copeland make use of its allusion to Numbers 21:8 in their understand-

ings of Christ's partaking of the satanic nature. The thinking is explored most fully by Copeland:

Why do you think Moses, upon the instruction of God, raised a serpent upon that pole instead of a lamb? It used to bug me: I asked, 'Why in the world did You ask to put that snake up there—the sign of Satan? Why didn't You put a lamb on that pole?' The Lord said, 'Because it was the sign of Satan that was hanging on the cross.'<sup>83</sup>

Similar logic is apparent elsewhere: 'The serpent was the likeness of the thing destroying the Israelites. Jesus became sin and died spiritually. The worm and the serpent denote union and harmony with the nature of the Adversary.'<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to 2 Corinthians 5:21, John 3:14 offers a more obvious possible association with Satan, in the form of the serpent. Kenyon and Copeland both implicitly rely upon the broad biblical association between Satan and snakes. Copeland also offers evidence that this link is appropriate in the case of John 3:14. He points out that in Numbers 21 the serpents from whose bites the Israelites needed to be rescued were the 'plague' destroying the Israelites.<sup>85</sup> This obviously brings Satan to Copeland's mind, for Satan is the one plaguing and destroying humans who need to be rescued from his clutches, and from the sin he incites them to commit.

However, the JDS reading exhibits a

<sup>82</sup> So Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, p. 180.

<sup>83</sup> Copeland, *What Happened*, side 2; compare Kenyon, *What Happened*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>84</sup> Copeland, *Did Jesus Die Spiritually?*, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Copeland, *Did Jesus Die Spiritually?*, p. 3.

number of significant weaknesses. In Numbers 21, the snakes are neither at enmity with God, nor associated causatively with Israel's sin. Quite the opposite is true: the snakes are in fact *sent* by God, and serve to bring Israel's sin *to an end*, either by killing the sinners (implied in Numbers 21:6) or by bringing about contrition (Numbers 21:7). Turning now to John 3:14, the parallel that can be drawn between the details in the two passages must not be overestimated. It is possible that John 3:14 contains the words 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert' only for the reason that the crucifixion and the story recorded in Numbers both involve the act of lifting something or someone up.<sup>86</sup>

That said, if any parallel beyond this between the snakes of Numbers and the crucified Christ is to be drawn, it might follow the significance of the snakes that was elucidated earlier in this paragraph. In other words, just as the snakes were *sent* by God (Numbers 21:6) to end a sin, and the lifted snake was provided by God's instruction (Numbers 21:8) to save from this divine judgement those who looked to it, so too Christ was *sent* by God (John 3:17) effectively *to end sin*: those who looked to him would be saved from divine judgement (John 3:15); conversely, those who refused to do so would receive divine judgement through his agency (John 3:18-19).

If it is fair to draw this degree of parallel, then such a reading does not support that offered by JDS teaching. Inso-

far as Jesus was the 'serpent', he was not thus God's enemy, nor participating in the nature of God's enemy. Rather, he was God's provision, to bring about salvation from or judgement for sin, depending on the response of people to him.

In conclusion to this section on sources, Copeland and Hagin clearly drew on Kenyon, though Hagin drew back from his avowals that Christ partook of a satanic nature. In turn, while Kenyon might have been influenced by both HL/FC and NT/CS teaching, the whole dualistic milieu of HL/FC thinking, in which Satan often played a prominent part in presentations of Christian thought and life, seems far closer to Kenyon's own scheme than does the largely monistic worldview of NT/CS. However, no *direct* antecedents to Kenyon's thought have been found among those sources to which he was evidently or allegedly indebted in *either* HL/FC *or* NT/CS. The closest links were, from HL/FC, Simpson, who offered some creative use of Numbers 21 and John 3:14, and from NT/CS, Trine, who wrote of people being 'partakers'. Neither source, however, mirrored Kenyon's ideas entirely. Kenyon seems to have reworked existing ideas to create his own distinct thesis.

Turning now to their use of biblical texts, it has emerged that neither 2 Corinthians 5:21 nor John 3:14 has offered the support to JDS teaching that the authors under review claim. The meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:21's reference to 'sin' is disputed. Even if it is not understood as 'sin-offering', it must be handled metaphorically, and seems to indicate that Christ was treated as if he had sinned, rather than that he partook of a 'sin nature'. John

<sup>86</sup> So C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (2nd edn, London: SPCK, 1978 [1955]), p. 214.



3:14 may not perceive a close typological resemblance between Christ and the lifted serpent. If it does, the parallel drawn does not suggest that Christ related in some way to Satan while being crucified.

It must also be stressed that the exegesis of isolated 'proof-texts' is not a sufficient or satisfactory process in seeking to gain an appreciation of the New Testament's teaching on a theme. The whole tenor of the New Testament must be taken into account. Numerous passages throughout its canon record or interpret Christ's death. References to a sinful or satanic 'nature' in these passages are notable for their absence.

## Conclusions

This article has surveyed the unusual doctrine, inherent to JDS teaching, that Christ in his spiritual death partook of a sinful, satanic nature. It has been shown that this idea was fashioned in the mind of Kenyon. He had seeds provided for his thoughts, but the precise fusion of language and ideas seems to have been his alone. The resultant scheme is reasonably clear, but does create a number of questions about the extent to which Jesus was, as Kenyon claimed, a full substitute for sinful Adam and his race. It has also emerged that both Hagin and Copeland have followed Kenyon in plentiful reference to 'nature' in this context, declaring with Kenyon that Christ took a sin nature in his spiritual death, although Hagin in particular retreated from referring to this nature as satanic.

In the debate that has been conducted so far concerning this doctrine, three main criticisms have been offered. The article has surveyed

these, noting that there is reason to doubt the uniqueness of the person of Christ expressed in the Christology underlying JDS teaching at this point. The article proceeded to consider the biblical material that JDS teachers call to their aid in expounding their teaching. It concluded that neither 2 Corinthians 5:21 nor John 3:14, nor indeed the whole tenor of biblical teaching, offers the support that the teachers under review claim for it.

To close, the greatest weakness in this part of JDS teaching is its inability to offer satisfactory answers to questions that are demanded by tensions between these teachers' superficial allegiance to traditional incarnational Christology and substitutionary atonement theory, and their actual delineation of the events of the cross. There is contradiction in their teaching between, on the one hand, their insistence that Christ was a full substitute for Adam's fallen state, and on the other hand, their recognition, clearest in Kenyon's exposition, that Christ remained sinless while partaking of the satanic nature.

There is also a considerable degree of uncertainty about what view of the incarnation underlies JDS teaching at this point. Did Christ in becoming 'satanic' cease to be divine? If so, had he previously only 'partaken' of the divine nature, in adoptionistic terms, as opposed to subsisting eternally in his divine nature, in traditional incarnational terms? Some of the explicit avowals of incarnational Christology made by JDS teachers are undermined by their exposition of this theme. It is in the claim that Christ in dying participated in a sinful, satanic nature that JDS teaching is at its weakest.