

Dialogue with Deception

A critical review of Lloyd Gardner's book, *Face to Face: A Dialogue with Jesus* (Tollhouse, CA: Eliezer Call Ministries, 2009) 174 pages.

"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by . . . taking his stand on visions he has seen . . ." (Paul the Apostle, Colossians 2:18)

Lloyd Gardner's book, *Face to Face: A Dialogue with Jesus*, contains material that Bible believing Christians can agree with. Scriptural quotations, paraphrases and allusions appear throughout the book. Lloyd's emphasis upon the spiritual life--the need for believers to daily take up their cross and follow Jesus, to love Him as a faithful Bride, to enter into God's rest, and to eschew worldliness and cultivate holiness and forgiveness in Christian living--ought to resonate with all believers.

Having almost died of a heart attack near Budapest, Hungary, in November of 2006, I sympathize with the author's living with cancer. His insights can help others who for reason of illnesses, are coping with the uncertainty of life.

As a pastor, I also identify with the naiveté with which he returned to minister in a former congregation only to be dismissed by the leadership for failure to share their vision for the church (Chapter 9), which in today's market-driven environment of ministry demands the production of tangible "results"—increasing attendance numbers, upping the cash flow and building bigger buildings. These days, "the buck stops" in the pulpit!

In a day of "big box" churches, Gardner's focus upon the simple, as opposed to the institutional, church—*The 2:42 Formula*—finds precedent in Scripture. Luke describes "the four to-s" of the early church; that early Christians devoted themselves "**to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer**" (Emphasis added, Acts 2:42). [1] But these days, contemporary Christians are all about feeling comfortable in church. As one pastor observes:

Comfort has become a central goal of worship. In the face of life's challenges, people come to church seeking therapy or comforting affirmation. They often get their wish because church leaders know that these customers will vanish from the padded seats if they're not satisfied. [2]

So pan-evangelical congregations emphasize man-centered musical excitements and entertainment in worship, programmatic approaches to spirituality, and paid professionals preaching psychology, positivity, possibility and prosperity in order to make the audience "feel good." These developments in America's evangelical churches represent a radical departure, even apostasy, from the devout and simple church described in Acts.

Gardner's book contains truth. But when compared to Scripture, the truth is mixed with error, something that ought to concern Bible believers. About mixing truth and untruth, Harry Ironside (1876-1951) wrote:

Error is like leaven of which we read, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Truth mixed with error is equivalent to all error, except that it is more innocent looking and, therefore, more dangerous. God hates such a mixture! Any error, or any truth-and-error mixture, calls for definite exposure and repudiation. To condone such is to be unfaithful to God and His Word and treacherous to imperiled souls for whom Christ died. [3]

We turn to discern the errors in *Face to Face*.

"Super Spirituality"

As suggested by the title (*Face to Face: A Dialogue with Jesus*), Gardner's book claims to recount multiple in-the-body visitations the author had as a time traveler with Jesus at the future judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10-11); experiences that were personal, physical and private. [4] To discern the authenticity of these supra-spiritual encounters (spirituality above the scriptural norm), Gardner's experiences should be submitted to the scrutiny of Scripture. He himself cautions readers: "Do not accept what people tell you without putting it to the test of God's word. What God shares in His word is of much more importance than all of the experiences people can or will have." (*Face to Face*, 6)

So by his invitation, we will attempt to assay (to test the qualitative substance of) the author's claimed visitations and conversations with Jesus. In this assessment, I ask the reader's patience, for the issues raised in *Face to Face* do not lend themselves to "sound bite" responses. Reported experiences like Gardner's--which are also claimed by individuals who are part of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), a network of organizations and individual ministries like *The Elijah List* and *The Call*--represent much of what is being pawned off among uninformed Christians as true "spirituality." Some claimed experiences are phenomenal--traveling to the third heaven, transporting oneself into other time dimensions, obsessing over angels and archangels, etc.--but blatantly challenge the Bible's teaching on true spirituality. We begin with Gardner's claim to have had conversations with Jesus.

Voices

Listening to and hearing the voice of God is a popular experience claimed by many of today's New Age/New Spiritualists. [5] In 1965, Columbia University Professor of Medical Psychology Helen Schucman (1909-1981) began to hear an inner Voice identified as Jesus'. Over a period of seven years, the Voice dictated material to her that, with transcriptional help provided by her faculty colleague William Thetford, became *A Course in Miracles*. [6] Because of the similarity of the course's dictations to the words of the Gospels, especially John, others also believe that the "inner voice" Schucman heard was Jesus'. [7] New Age spiritualist Barbara Marx Hubbard (1929-) also listens to someone who speaks inside her. [8] New Age guru Neale Donald Walsch also claims God speaks to him (*Conversations with God: an uncommon dialogue*, Books 1, 2, 3). [9]

The author of the bestselling religious allegory *The Shack*, Paul Young, accounts for the book's origin for reason of personal and private conversations he had with God. [10] On his daily work-commute from Gresham to Portland, Oregon, *World* magazine reports that, "Young used 80 minutes each day . . . to fill yellow legal pads with imagined conversations with God focused on suffering, pain, and evil." [11] A friend of Young's testified that the conversations were authentic. [12] In thinking how to explain the story of his ministry to a childhood campmate with whom he had been reunited, Bill Hybels asked: "How could I tell this savvy, cynical business guy that my fifty-year odyssey unfolded as it has because of a series of whispers from God? *Inaudible* whispers, at that." [13] Many, both without and within the pale of evangelical Christendom, claim to have heard God speak in the quiet of contemplation or via direct conversations with Him. [14] Amidst the cacophony of voices, everybody seems to be listening to everybody else, but few to the Word of the Lord.

The fact that contemporary evangelicals seek "fresh" revelations from God indicates that they no longer consider Holy Scripture to be sufficient and authoritative in matters of faith (Contra 2 Timothy 3:16.). Yet if the Bible is no longer considered sufficient, the coming of "fresh revelations" raises the following conundrum. If the new revelations repeat the Word of God—and there is much in Gardner's book that does that—then they are *unnecessary*. If the revelations/conversations are at odds with the Word of God, then they are *heresy*. If they add to the Word of God, then they point to Scripture's *inadequacy* and *insufficiency*. To this point Proverbs warns: "**Add thou not unto his [God's] words, lest he [God] reprove thee, and thou be found a liar**" (Proverbs 30:6, KJV; Compare Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18.).

As such, whispers, conversations, contemplations or dialogs open up the borders of the Christian faith to beliefs alien to the Bible. Such trafficking in spiritual ideas undermines Scripture's authority and sufficiency (See 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). [15] Unlike the Psalmist—who wrote, "**How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way**" Psalm 119:103-104, NASB—New Spiritualists manifest their dissatisfaction with, and in some instances disdain for, the Word of the Lord. They want more than what already stands written, more than the truth God revealed through the Holy Spirit in Scripture (See Luke 24:44-49; Romans 1:17; etc. and etc.; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Fifteen years ago the Van der Merwes observed this trend. They wrote:

By all appearances, Christians are knowingly or unknowingly dabbling in eastern mysticism and the spirit world. . . . Deeper spiritual understanding seems to be the motivation behind it all. The problem is that Christians are no longer satisfied with the literal Word of God. They are looking for experiences "beyond the sacred page". The Bread of Heaven, according to their inner "sacred feelings", has become stale and outmoded. [16]

So the claim to have encountered Jesus and received revelations via conversations casts an aura of suspicion over the Word of God and the God of the Word. For it must be asked, if God didn't mean what He said, why didn't He say what He meant? Lewis Sperry Chafer once remarked that all heresy is either the Bible plus or the Bible minus. *Face to Face* contains

material that not only adds to Scripture, but also is at odds with Scripture.

So the question arises, in his conversations with Jesus did Gardner, like the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith (1805-1844), receive added revelations? Like the prophet Mohammed (though he only did it once), did the author take night journeys into the future where he encountered Jesus at the judgment seat? (See 2 Corinthians 5:9-11.) To authenticate his having done so, Gardner points to the experiences of the apostles Paul (2 Corinthians 12:1-6) and John (Revelation 4:1-2), thus inviting us to compare his experience with those of the apostles to see whether or not their experiences might validate his. We begin by comparing Gardner's experience with Paul's rapture into "the third heaven."

Into Paradise—Caught up!

To the Corinthians Paul wrote:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. (Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, NASB)

Because Paul's trip to Paradise came fourteen years before he wrote 2 Corinthians around A.D. 55-56, the experience can be estimated to have happened before his first missionary journey (A.D. 42-44). In the context of his overall ministry, Paul's transport to Paradise was an obscure event that, were it not for the influence imposter apostles were having upon the Corinthian church, would likely have gone unreported. Yet Paul, in contrast to Gardner who claims to have visited the heavenly judgment seat on numerous occasions, reported that he visited Paradise once. As to Paul's record of being "caught up to the third heaven" (we note that the passive verb "caught up," Greek *harpazo*, is the same word that designates the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17), we should observe the context of his experience.

Imposter Apostles

Imposter apostles had beguiled the Corinthian congregation. In contrast to Paul whose "**personal presence [was] unimpressive, and his speech contemptible**" (2 Corinthians 10:10), the super-apostles projected themselves as strong, self-assured, and successful. These "new lights" were striking in their appearance, self-confident in their demeanor, and smooth in their communication skills (2 Corinthians 10:12). In our culture, they would make for successful media preacher/communicators. Thus, to counteract the super-apostles, Paul boasted in his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 11:12-15, 30).

But to enhance their apostolic credentials, these false teachers also claimed to have had extraordinary religious experiences. So reluctantly, Paul countered their claims by referring to his "**visions and revelations of the Lord**" (2 Corinthians 12:1). Paul's "**visions and revelations**" were "**of the Lord.**" Jesus Christ was both the object and origin of what Paul saw and heard in Paradise. The visions and revelations came from Jesus Christ and were about

Jesus Christ. Unlike Gardner, the apostle was a recipient of and not a participant in the visions and revelations. We note that unlike Gardner who paints a verbal picture of heaven resembling a Thomas Kinkade painting. (*Face to Face*, 14), Paul did not reveal the details of what he saw and heard.

Furthermore, in contrast to Gardner whose experiences with Jesus were in the body, Paul did not understand whether his experience of being taken to, arriving at and being in Paradise was “**in the body**” or “**out of the body**” (2 Corinthians 12:3). Unlike Gardner, who in vivid detail recounts his conversations with Jesus, Paul informed the Corinthians that his experience was ineffable. He “**heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak**” (1 Corinthians 12:4). God forbade Paul to reveal details of what he saw. Of course, the question arises, if the Lord forbade Paul to describe his paranormal experience of being in Paradise, why did He permit Gardner to describe his encounters with Jesus in vivid detail, who supposedly even granted him “creative license” to do so? (*Face to Face*, 6)

It's not that Paul *could not* describe being in Paradise but rather, for reason of a divine gag order, he *would not*. For good reasons he was forbidden to describe his experience in Paradise. *First*, by prohibiting Paul to speak of his experience, “God ensured,” Hafemann writes, “that the basis of apostolic authority did not become ecstatic, mystical experience.” [17] Unlike the imposter apostles, there was nothing to be gained by Paul for promoting himself as one who journeyed to heaven.

Second, as they boasted in the details of their spiritual experiences to trump Paul's authority amongst the Corinthians, the imposter apostles apparently took their stand on visions they had seen (Colossians 2:18). [18] But Paul was under strict orders not to create a competition of experiences, a “can-you-top-this-one-?” contest. Unlike his opponents, the apostle made no claim that his experience enhanced his ministerial résumé. That he waited fourteen years to relate this incident to anyone indicates he considered that his rapture added nothing to his apostolic authority, doctrinal teaching or spiritual credibility. Though his letters are full of directions for practicing the faith, no directions are given for seeking experiences like his being in “the third heaven.” By Paul's example we can deduce that, contrary to the super spirituality manifested by many charismatic and contemplative Christians, the apostle did not consider extra-biblical visions or visitations to be a vital component of the true spirituality he portrays in his letters.

Third, the fact that Gardner reports these conversations with Jesus to have been private—the contents of some of them, in Gardner's words, to be “kept between Christ and me”—raises the question of verifiability. (*Face to Face*, 6) Has God spoken to Gardner in esoteric ways beyond the manner in which He speaks to other believers through Holy Scripture today? By his claim to have had encounters and visitations with Jesus, is Gardner attempting to distinguish himself to be a special prophet, even apostle of Jesus? To this point, Scripture demands that everything be confirmed by two or three witnesses, for as the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians, “**In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established**” (2 Corinthians 13:1; See Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28). This may explain why in his dealings with the imposter apostles, Paul kept the descriptive details of being taken into Paradise to himself. There were no other witnesses! His rapture was unverifiable. Had the great

apostle given detailed reportage of his experience, he would have violated the very standard of verifiability he demanded the Corinthians to observe. In contrast to the resurrection of Christ who **“appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time . . . and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me [Paul] also,”** no other human being was privy to Paul’s Paradise visit.

Unlike the imposter apostles, there was nothing for Paul to gain by promoting himself as one who had seen divine visions or heard divine voices. Therefore, on the basis of verifiability, Paul’s rapture into the third heaven gives no example, provides no precedent, and grants no authorization for other Christians to seek or report similar spiritual enhancements.

To assure his readers that what he wrote to them was the truth, the Apostle John opens his first letter as follows: **“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life . . . we proclaim to you also”** (1John 1:1, 3). Gardner admits to his readers that his conversations with Jesus at the judgment seat were private. On this point it should be noted that what is private is not verifiable; and for lack of witnesses, *what is not verifiable is not believable*. We turn to John’s experience.

In the Spirit in Heaven

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. (John, Revelation 4:1-2, NASB)

Unlike Gardner’s, John’s transport to heaven was spiritual and not physical. John’s experience was not in the body. Indicating that it was so, and unlike Paul, he says, **“I was in the Spirit”** (Revelation 4:2). As a seer, John’s experience was visionary. Mounce observed: “That John does not record a physical relocation from earth to heaven suggests that we are to understand the heavenly ascent in a spiritual sense.” **[19]** Then he adds: “There is no basis for discovering a rapture of the church at this point.” **[20]** And neither, it might be added, does it provide a basis to believe that God will physically translate an individual to a heavenly judgment seat.

The Judgment Seat—No Fear!

Gardner’s equating the Mercy Seat (Leviticus 16:1-19) with the Judgment Seat (2 Corinthians 5:10) strains credulity; the former being the Old Testament place where sin was propitiated (Hebrew, *kaphar*, Greek, *hilasmos*) and the latter referring to a future event where service will be rewarded (Greek, *bema*). (*Face to Face*, 9) The only commonality they share is the English word “seat”! But that is where “creative license” can lead; mercy seat equals judgment seat. This equation is asserted despite the fact that on the Cross Jesus atoned for our sins one time (His blood no longer flows) while Israel observed the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) yearly. By Jesus’ death on the cross, the sins of believers were propitiated **“once for all”** (1 Peter 3:18; Compare 1 John 2:2; 4:10 and Leviticus 16:34.).

Gardner's schmoozing experiences at the judgment seat with Jesus must also be questioned. Does the atmosphere surrounding his experience accord with Scripture? Though the author reveals experiencing introspective moments of regret, overall he describes his visitations with the Lord to have been "comfortable," to have been non-threatening and non-judgmental. (*Face to Face*, 32) Can you imagine that? No judgment at the Judgment Seat! This is asserted despite the motivation Paul experienced at the prospect of it--"**Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God**" (2 Corinthians 5:11, KJV)--and the apostle's admission that he was running the course of his ministry so as not to be disqualified before it (See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:8.). Peter also tells his readers to, "**conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth**" (1 Peter 1:17).

The atmosphere of being in Jesus' presence that Gardner describes also contradicts that of the prophet Isaiah who when he saw the Lord cried out, "**Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**" (Isaiah 6:5, NASB). And who was the King Isaiah saw? John records that Isaiah saw Jesus, the pre-incarnate Son of God. As the beloved apostle wrote: "**These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him**" (John 12:41). In the historical and literary context of John's Gospel, the person designated by the pronouns "**His**" and "**Him**" can only be Jesus! Isaiah saw the King and became discomfited. Gardner saw Him and was comforted. Whose experience do you believe really represents encountering Jesus, Isaiah's or Gardner's? [21]

Creative License

The fact that Jesus supposedly gave Lloyd Gardner creative license is disturbing (Gardner: "Jesus gave me permission to use creative license in presenting these accounts of our conversations," *Face to Face*, 6) Frankly, I find such a method of reporting to contradict the literary standards by which the New Testament documents were compiled. For example, in compiling his account of Jesus' life and the early church (Luke-Acts), Luke begins: "**Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us . . .**" (Emphasis added, Luke 1:1-2, NASB).

The word "**servants**" (*huperetes*), translated "**ministers**" in other translations (KJV, NAB, NKJV, ASV), is a nautical word meaning "under or subordinate rower." [22] As such, it connotes the picture of rowers who dipped and pulled their oars according to orders of the coxswain, the crewman who sits in the boat's stern, steers the boat, and barks out the cadence for the rowers to coordinately dip and pull their oars. In war or in competition, it's important that all the rowers row to the same cadence. There is no room for "creative license," for rowers to follow the beat of their own drum. "Creative license" however, suggests that the word serves the writer, when in authentic reporting, the opposite should be the case--the writer serves the word. Unlike the authors of the Gnostic or Apocryphal writings, the New Testament apostles did not invoke "creative license" when recounting the miracles and message of Jesus. No. They were "under-rowers." They served the Word. They didn't make the Word serve them. So given his claim for having been given creative license, one must wonder how much of Gardner's book is really a monolog, the record of a man's musings within himself, and not a dialog, a record of authentic conversations with Jesus.

Short circuiting fellowship . . . from the bottom up

As the Holy Spirit brought Jesus' words and wonders to their remembrance, the disciple-apostles recounted them exactly as they had witnessed them (See John 14:26.). To his little flock that was being besieged by false teachers, the Apostle John wrote:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life . . . what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3).

The reporting of the apostles (In the opening five verses of John's first letter, the pronoun "we" is apostolic.) was accurate to the extent that, so long as believers in the church accepted the accuracy and authenticity of the apostolic writings, they would have fellowship with the apostles, with the Father, with His Son and with one another. To depart from the writings was to short circuit the entire interaction of the divine fellowship, bottom up.

So if the Lord did not give Luke and His disciple-apostles "creative license," then why would he give it to Gardner? Given creative license, Gardner shows himself to be an over-rower dipping and pulling his oars to the cadence of his own creative consciousness. Should such "once-upon-a-time" reportage be believed? And might it be--and I only pose the question--that for reason of creative license, that for reason of playing footloose and fancy-free with the facts, the author might find himself out of fellowship with the very One he claims to have had conversations with? To march out of step with the apostles is also to be out of fellowship with the Son and the Father (See 1 John 2:23-24.).

Is Gardner an apostle-prophet?

To substantiate his claim as to the authenticity of the truth he conveys in the book, Gardner alludes to Jesus' promise to His disciple-apostles (Jesus "is with us through the Holy Spirit and He has promised that the Spirit will lead us into all truth," *Face to Face*, 165). Jesus promised them:

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide *you* into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to *you* what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to *you*. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to *you*. (Emphasis added, John 16:13-15, NASB).

One can only note the incidence of the pronoun "you" in John 15:26-16:16. In continuity, "you" refers twenty-six (26) times to the original disciple-apostles. John understood that Jesus' promise was not to or for believers today. If it had, then he might also have employed the pronoun "them" (Compare John 17:13-26.). Milne confirms this observation: "This promise is made to the apostles as the assurance of a special future ministry of the Spirit, which will bring

to completion the truth Jesus wants his disciples in every generation to know.” [23] The promise that they would be guided “**into all truth**” was from Jesus to His immediate group of disciple-apostles, a group that did not include Lloyd Gardner, or for that matter, Larry DeBruyn. Believers today enjoy the witness of the Spirit as He witnesses to Jesus Christ, authenticates the Word of God to their hearts, provides inner testimony as to their salvation and actualizes their spiritual union with Christ and with one another (John 15:26; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 6:16, 19). But nowhere does Scripture say that Jesus gives believers new revelations.

By the end of the first century, the apostolic writings were complete. The faith has been “**once delivered**” (Jude 3). Jesus’ revelation to the church therefore, is not now ongoing. On the point of these “face to face” dialogs, one must wonder whether they are a dialog, a record of real conversations with Jesus, or a monolog, a record of one man’s musings within himself, or more ominously, a record of a man communicating with other spiritual entities (1 Timothy 4:1). As in the first century, Christians today ought to be in submission to the writings of the apostles in matters of faith and practice for as John served notice: “**We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error**” (1 John 4:6, KJV). Only by the apostolic word can truth and error be discerned. Therefore, other revelatory voices and writings are neither necessary for nor relevant to the Christian faith (1 John 5:13). As noted by Van der Merwe:

When a Voice, be it conscience, intuition or a subjective impression replaces the authority of the Scriptures and takes precedence over “God’s Word”, then it is cultic. Cults have always sought divine authority in man, while Christians seek divine authority in God’s Word. [24]

On Revival

Throughout the book, Gardner laments the condition of today’s visible church, for being controlled by professional clergy (Gardner writing: “allowing one man to take control of the local church,” *Face to Face*, 74) and for being separated in buildings (Jesus speaking: “Now the people were separated away in buildings for the sake of controlling men,” *Face to Face*, 77). Lamentably, Gardner rightly diagnoses the mega-ism that infects pan-evangelicalism, something that resembles the “collectivity” by which the Supreme Soviet, by its intellectual indoctrination and geographical concentration, sought to control the people of Eastern Europe after World War II. History shows that people can be more easily controlled and corrupted *en masse* rather than in small groups. Presumably, that’s why God judged Babel (Genesis 11:6-8). There is potential for the mega church to spread mega error and corruption. On the other hand, the existence of vital micro-congregations can impede it. So when reading the New Testament, one looks in vain to find big congregations or denominations, or for that matter, how to build them. Instead, one only sees small independent churches. The author’s point that the existence of smaller church fellowships will impede the spread of heresy and apostasy is right and in this concern he is not alone. I have also written:

It is my conviction that the evangelical movement is being leavened not only by Pharisaical hypocrisy (Note the prominent pastors whose immoral and private behavior belied their public profession.), Sadducean false teaching (Note the unorthodox and

unbiblical teachings that are promoted through various media, parachurch ministries, and conferences.), Herodian scheming (Note the pragmatism in which the goal of church growth justifies any means to achieve it.), but also through musical experiences which cater to the fleshly impulses of Christians who confuse their emotional catharsis with worship. [25]

While Gardner's diagnosis of the disease plaguing the church accords with Scripture, his cure, at least on two points, does not.

No Replacement Revival

The author predicts the collapse of America. (*Face to Face*, 48-56, 171) But out of the ashes of America's collapse, he reveals that a new order will emerge—church to the rescue! In that the church is viewed to be the ongoing incarnation of Jesus' presence on earth, dominionists—those who are convinced the church will be the instrument for realizing God's kingdom on earth—believe the church will lead the end time revival that will help usher in God's kingdom. Out of the chaos will emerge a new world order led by the church! After stating that one "common thread" of these neo-agnostics "is that they are expecting a 'New Order'," the Van der Merwes quote Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan as having stated: "In all revolutions there are noisy and dangerous times as the OLD ORDER is replaced by the new . . . after the dust settles, we can proceed to build the beautiful kingdom that the Lord has purposed from the foundations of the world." [26] This scenario is the typical belief amongst members of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) who are departed and separated from historic Pentecostalism.

Coincidental with the coming collapse and necessary to the establishment of God's kingdom, Gardner predicts a massive end time revival will sprout from the seed (i.e., the small churches) that he and other apostles are now planting. This coming revival will first sprout among smaller congregations, then spread into larger ones, and ultimately grow to effect a national revival on a scale unprecedented in American history (Jesus speaking to Gardner: "Son . . . you have a significant part to play in that success," *Face to Face*, 27). But for a number of reasons, this schematic for revival seems too contrived for as John Rea noted, "genuine revivals . . . are the sovereign work of God." [27]

First, believing that revival will come through a multitude of small church plants—and please do not take this to be a critical of small churches for as has been stated, there's spiritual safety in numbers of independent congregations—seems too mechanical, i.e., the more vital small churches that Gardner plants (no pun intended), the more prolific and widespread will be the outbreak of revival when America collapses.

The Word of God states that revival will not come via the mechanism of planting small churches below, but by the sovereign Spirit's blowing from above. It is my conviction that today's church does not stand in need of revival, but "vival"—of life! Jesus told religious Nicodemus: "**You must be born from above**" (John 3:7); and then added: "**The wind [Jesus' metaphor referring to the Holy Spirit] blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit**" (John 3:8). Spiritual life only comes by an act of divine grace from above. Of the first Pentecost, Luke

records: **“And suddenly *there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting*”** (Emphasis added, Acts 1:2, NASB). About revival, F. Carlton Booth stated: “No human being can kindle the interest, quicken the conscience of a people, or generate that intensity of spiritual hunger that signifies revival.” **[28]**

We should also note that in His *Parable of the Soils* (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23), Jesus highlighted that seventy-five percent of soil/souls will not receive the seed. If in the revival metaphor the seed represents a collectively of small churches that Gardner and other modern day apostles are planting, then there will be a seventy-five percent failure rate. Such a malfunction hardly portends a coming revival on the magnitude Gardner envisions. Furthermore, where does one find such a scheme for revival in the Bible? This brings us to a second point.

Gone to Seed!

The Bible does not predict a triumphant church in the last days, but a church that in its apostasy has “gone to seed.” Scripture predicts the reprobation, not revival, of institutional Christianity. *First*, the church will be deceived. In the **“last days”** the visible church will hold **“to a form of godliness”** as **“evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived”** (2 Timothy 3:5, 13, NASB; Read 3:1-13.). *Second*, what began with deception will culminate in delusion. **“God shall send them strong delusion”** (2 Thessalonians 2:11a). For reason of **“counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,”** the church’s deception will be *intensive* (2 Thessalonians 2:9, NIV; Compare Matthew 24:24.). For reason **“that they should believe a lie,”** the church’s delusion will be *extensive* (2 Thessalonians 2:11b). The deception and delusion will be so *pervasive* that Jesus posed the question, **“when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”** (Luke 18:8).

Scripture does not predict in the last days, the time period between Jesus’ first and second comings, that the church will, in any form, bring revival to the world. **[29]** Jesus and the Apostles predicted that as the end of the age arrives, escalating apostasy will have consumed the church. For reason of the radical depravity which resides in the human heart, the scale of the mounting apostasy can only be compared to what happened in human history before the Deluge, when only eight souls, Noah and his family, were delivered (Genesis 6:5; Matthew 24:37; 1 Peter 3:20). In light of the departure from the faith that the Lord and His apostles predicted would plague the church, the prospect for the unfaithful bride of Christ becomes only one of divine judgment. However, all is not lost, because in God’s plan for the end, the church has not replaced the Israelites.

God’s Olive Tree—the Symbol of His Work in the World

Among other metaphors taken from nature, Paul uses **“the rich root of the olive tree”** to represent the source of divine blessing in the world (Romans 11:17). Connected to the tree are branches that serve as conduits through which God, in His sovereign grace, brings His blessing to the world. The branches are of two types: natural and wild, those indigenous to the rich root and those that are not.

Natural Jewish Branches—Cut Off

In the olive tree metaphor, the natural branches represent the Jewish people. As Jeremiah informed Judah before divine judgment was to befall her, **“The Lord called your name, ‘A**

green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form” (Jeremiah 11:16). In accord with God’s promise to bring spiritual blessing to the world through Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 12:1-3), Paul described the role the Israelites were to play in the unfolding drama of redemption, that to the Jews **“belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”** (Romans 9:4-5). But in her appointed priestly role, Israel failed God. So He judged the nation, first by deporting Israelites to Babylon (586 BC), and second by dispersing Jews from the Holy Land in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. However temporary, God cut the natural branches off from being a conduit by which He brings spiritual blessing to the world (Romans 11:1-24). For failing to produce fruit, God cut natural branches off!

Wild Gentile Branches—Connected

But even as He removed natural branches from being the conduit of divine blessing, God was also grafting wild branches onto the olive tree to take the place of separated Israelites. Beginning at Pentecost, God would form a majority of Gentiles (wild branches) and a minority of Jews (natural branches) into one olive tree to continue His work of bringing spiritual blessing to the world. Elected by God and like Israel of old, the church too would become a kingdom of priests (Compare Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.).

Wild Gentile Branches—Cut Off?

But from the beginning of the grafting, the potential existed for the church like Israel to fail in her divine calling to bring God’s blessing to the world. As predicted by Jesus and the apostles, the wild branches would over time become as deceived and deluded by false teachers as the natural branches had been by false prophets (2 Peter 2:1 ff.). That’s why Paul warned wild branches: **“Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you”** (Romans 11:20-21). The apostle also warned the unnatural branches (i.e., the Gentile Christians) that if they were not faithful, **“you also will be cut off”** (Romans 11:22).

Natural Jewish Branches—Connected Again

For reason of their sin, Israel, with the exception of a believing remnant, currently stands cut off from the olive tree of divine blessing. During the age between Christ’s two comings (e.g., “the last days”) and for reason of divine judgment, the Israelites have been cut off from the olive tree. Paul describes **“that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in”** (Romans 11:25). [30] Israel is not currently a conduit for divine blessing. But their hardening and separation from the olive tree are not to remain permanent, for the apostle wrote that after the times of the Gentiles were completed (Luke 21:24),

All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. (Romans 11:26-27, KJV.)

In contrast to the Gentiles who’s engrafting to the olive tree was unnatural, the re-grafting of the Israelites will be natural (Romans 11:23-24).

The Coming Revival

While Scripture predicts there will be a revival during the last days, it portrays that Israel, not the church, will be the center of it. Micah prophesied:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:1-2, KJV; Compare Isaiah 2:2-4; Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:16) [31]

While the New Testament pictures that escalating apostasy will have consumed the church in the last days, that the vast majority within Christendom will have become deceived and deluded, the Scriptures predict that Israel will physically return to the Promised Land and there experience genuine revival (Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:14; Romans 11:25-27). As the Lord told Zechariah, **“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born”** (Zechariah 12:10).

At the end of the age God will re-graft the Israelites onto the olive tree after which their priestly appointment in the world will be realized (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6). Because their Messiah will have returned, God’s revived nation will again become the conduit of divine blessing to the world (Zechariah 2:11). According to Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28), there will dawn “a new era of revelation with the Israelites preaching to each other or, perhaps, even to the entire world.” [32] In the revival of the end of the age, the church, contrary to Gardner’s revelation, is not a factor. This contradicts another New Apostolic Reformation tenet, that the church has in part or the whole replaced Israel in God’s unfolding plan to rescue the world. Jesus told His disciples, **“Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Matthew 19:28, NASB).

Conclusion

Lloyd Gardner claims to have had personal encounters (*Face to Face*) with Jesus. In light of his claim he chides readers, “Don’t simply pass these words through the judgment of your limited doctrinal understanding.” (*Face to Face*, 7) But should his claims be given a pass?

The author’s claim to have seen Jesus is suspicious for Peter wrote that the **“proof”** of faith will occur at **“the revelation of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 1:7). Then John tells us **“every eye will see Him,”** not just Lloyd Gardner (Revelation 1:7). Until His future unveiling, we live by faith. Though we **“have not seen Him, [we] love Him, and though [we] do not see Him now . . . [we] believe in Him”** (1 Peter 1:8). [33]

Though our understanding of the Bible’s teaching is limited, that does not mean that

experience, whether mine or another's, trumps doctrine. If any experience(s) defies a reasonable explanation based on Holy Scripture, it is not doctrine that ought to be questioned, but experience. If the experience does not align with Scripture, then it ought not to be embraced, but first questioned and then jettisoned.

The Puritan Thomas Watson (1620-1686) wrote of the necessity of believers to be settled in the Christian faith. He wrote:

There is a great need to be settled, for so many things unsettle us. Seducers are abroad . . . They possess a pretense of extraordinary piety, so others may admire them and suck in their doctrine. They seem to be men of zeal and sanctity, to be divinely inspired and pretend to new revelations. [34]

As regards the Christian faith, this reviewer finds *Face to Face* to be an unsettled record in which the author claims to have had visitations more extraordinary than the apostles. As for me, I will choose not to take seriously a book based upon visitations someone has made and voices someone has heard. As the prophet pronounced: **"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"** (Isaiah 8:20, KJV).

The Lord told Ezekiel: *"Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, 'Listen to the word of the LORD!' Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing'."* (Ezekiel 13:2-3)

ENDNOTES

[1] Recently, a friend of mine from seminary days has written an excellent book expressing concerns about the institutional church similar to those stated by Gardner. But Bill derived his thoughts about the present state of the church not from personal conversations with Jesus, but from the Bible, which is as it ought to be. See William J. Allen, *Fractured Fellowships: Or, How the Church Lost its First Love* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, A Division of Thomas Nelson, 2010): xx+212 pages and Bibliography. My concern with the Purpose Driven method of doing church has also been stated. See Larry DeBruyn, *Church on the Rise: Why I am not a "Purpose-Driven" Pastor* (Indianapolis, IN: Moeller Printing Company, Inc., 2007): v+168 pages, Appendices, Essays and Bibliography. I note this to show that in his objecting to the current manifestation of "big box church," Gardner is not alone.

[2] G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (New York, NY: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2010): 79.

[3] Harry Ironside, "Exposing Error: Is It Worthwhile?" *Go to the Bible.com*. Online: <http://www.gotobible.com/HTML/exposingerror.html>. Dr. Harry Ironside (1876-1951) was a godly Bible teacher and prolific author who pastored Chicago's Moody Memorial Church from 1930-1948.

[4] Kurt Koch (1913-1987), German theologian, pastor, expert on the occult and counselor to multitudes who suffered from demon affliction, notes that one form of spiritist activity is "astral

traveling” or “astroprojection,” where adept mediums can “send their soul to the moon or the planets to discover things there,” some being so “bold that they claim to have penetrated the sphere of God.” See Kurt E. Koch, *Occult ABC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1986): 222. Though involving physicality, Gardner’s experience resembles astral traveling.

[5] In part, Hillstrom accounted for our culture’s shift toward mysticism for reason of “an astonishing variety” of reported spiritual experiences, one of which involves a time-to-time hearing of a “distinct inner voice” that gives “the listener advice and counsel.” See Elizabeth L. Hillstrom, *Testing the Spirits* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995): 15. Amazingly, what characterized the mysticism of the New Age/New Consciousness movement fifteen years ago has now become main stream amongst evangelicals!

[6] Helen Schucman with William Thetford, *A Course in Miracles*, 3 Volumes (New York, NY: The Foundation for Inner Peace, 1976). According to Schucman, these volumes were dictated by an inner Voice identified as that of Jesus.

[7] See Warren Smith, *Reinventing Jesus Christ: The New Gospel* (Ravenna, OH: Conscience Press, 2002): 9-12. Look for the new edition of this book in early 2011. Warren B. Smith, *False Christ Coming: Does Anybody Care?* (Magalia, CA: Mountain Stream Press, 2011).

[8] Ibid. 14-19.

[9] Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God: an uncommon dialog*, Book 1 (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995, 1996). His two subsequent volumes were published by Hampton Roads Publishing in Charlottesville, Virginia, 1997, 1998.

[10] Immediate to the plot of *The Shack* is a personal note that the main character, Mack, receives from Papa, or God. The note reads: “Mackenzie, It’s been a while. I’ve missed you. I’ll be back at the shack next weekend if you want to get together. –Papa” See Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack* (Los Angeles, CA: Windblown Media, 2007): 16.

[11] Susan Olasky, “Commuter-driven bestseller,” *World*, June 28/July 5, 2008, 49.

[12] “I know the author well—a personal friend. (Our whole house church devoured it last summer, and Paul came to our home to discuss it—WONDERFUL time!) The conversations that “Mack” has with God are real conversations that Paul Young had with God . . . and they revolutionized him, his family, and friends . . . When he was a broken mess, God began to speak to him. He wrote the story (rather than a “sermon”) to give the real conversations context—because Jesus also used simple stories to engage our hearts, even by-passing our objecting brains, in order to have His message take root in our hearts, and grow.” Quoting Dena Brehm, on the interactive blog, *Christian Universalism-The Beautiful Heresy: The Shack*, posted February 14, 2008 at 11:44AM, <http://christian-universalism.blogs.com/thebeautifulheresy/2008/02/the-shack.html>. Though no longer available on the blog, the writer possesses a copy of the letter.

[13] Bill Hybels, *The Power of a Whisper: Hearing God, Having the Guts to Respond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010): 16. If the whispers are not God’s (it cannot be assumed they are), then will any hearer have the guts not to respond? Furthermore, if like Samuel since his childhood Hybels has heard mystical whispers, why finally are we finding out about them now? Why weren’t we told about his experience earlier?

[14] See Pastor Larry DeBruyn, “Who Goes There? Encountering Voices in the Quiet of Contemplative Prayer,” *Guarding His Flock Ministries*. Online: <http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/11/16/who-goes-there-2/>. See also Pastor Larry DeBruyn, “Be Still: Contemplative, or Listening Prayer and Psalm 46:10,” *Guarding His Flock Ministries*. Online: <http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/04/09/be-still/>.

- [15] Peter wrote that “**no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation**” (2 Peter 1:20). The word “**interpretation**” can be understood to mean “origination.” Indeed, that is as the context affirms, for Peter explained that “**no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God**” (2 Peter 1:21).
- [16] Travers and Jewel Van der Merwe, *Strange Fire: the Rise of Gnosticism in the Church* (Lafayette, IN: Discernment Ministries, 1995): 21. Available online: <http://discernment-ministries.org/StrangeFire.pdf>. On this point, Warren Smith drew my attention to the confession of one emergent church leader who confessed: “I don’t know if you’ve read the Bible, but if you haven’t, I think you may be in a better place than those of us who have read it so much that it has become stale.” See Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006): 40.
- [17] Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000): 460.
- [18] It appears that Lloyd Gardner is also taking a stand on voices that he has heard.
- [19] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977): 134.
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] When the realization dawned upon him as to whose presence he was in, Peter cried out to Jesus, “**Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!**” (Luke 5:8).
- [22] Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986): 51.
- [23] Emphasis added, Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here is your King!* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993): 232.
- [24] Van der Merwe, *Strange Fire*, 62.
- [25] Larry DeBruyn, *Church on the Rise: Why I am not a “Purpose-Driven” Pastor* (Indianapolis, IN: Moeller Printing Company, Inc., 2007): 180.
- [26] Van der Merwe, *Strange Fire*, 27.
- [27] John Rea, “Revive, Revival,” *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea, Editors, and Volume 2, K-Z (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975): 1467.
- [28] F. Carlton Booth, “Revival,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-Chief (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960): 460.
- [29] Bruce comments: “The ‘last days’ began with Christ’s first advent and will end with His second advent; they are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age.” See F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954): 68.
- [30] Jesus prophesied that “**Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled**” (Luke 21:24; Compare Romans 11:1-10).
- [31] Phillips comments: “When the Hebrew people finally return to the Lord in repentance and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and Lord, ‘then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people’ (Joel 2:18, italics added, KJV).” See John Phillips, *Exploring the Minor Prophets* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1998): 77.
- [32] Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah: The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary*, Kenneth Barker, General Editor (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990): 72.
- [33] See Pastor Larry DeBruyn, “Strange Encounters: Do People Really See Jesus Today?” *Guarding His Flock Ministries*. Online: <http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/05/27/strange-encounters/#more-1166>.

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[34] Patti M. Hummel, *Glorifying God: Inspirational Messages of Thomas Watson* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009): January 3.