The Image Makers

Is the modern prophetic movement guilty of prophesying by Baal & fashioning God in its own image?

By Peter C Glover

God is in the image-making business and man, the glory of his creation, strikingly bears, in his nature, the image of his Maker. Marred since the Fall by personal sin, that image can only be restored through faith in Christ alone. The Genesis creation story (Gen. 1 - 3) makes it clear that man's likeness to, or image of, the Father is not physical. After all, was man not made from the elements taken from the created earth (Gen.2:7)? Instead, it is the inner nature of man that reflects something about the nature of God. As one Christian writer puts it, 'the likeness is rooted in all that is required to make a human being a person: in our intellectual, emotional, and moral likeness to God...'

As the same writer says, 'The NT teaches that Jesus perfectly expressed the image of God'. He continues by helpfully explaining the meaning of the NT Greek word used (i.e. eikon): 'The word expresses the relationship of a coin to its die; that is, there is no comparison here but rather an exact expression of the thing from which the coin is molded'. The apostle Paul calls Jesus 'the image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus himself could not have stated it more clearly to a still uncertain group of disciples: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

God then has created man in his own image, as the Scriptures reveal. Should we look anywhere else for our understanding of the Creator God, we should only become confused and even deluded in our understanding. Should we go further and attempt to ascribe to God attributes, actions and words that blur the scriptural image, he would quickly become another god altogether. Should we ascribe visions he did not give, words he did not speak, manifestations he did not create, we should be in real peril of creating and worshipping another god altogether, another who, like Baal, does not really exist.

1. God: in whose image?
God is not the only one in the image-making business. The devil and man have long been partners in the counterfeiting of his works. The Bible calls this counterfeiting enterprise idolatry. In practice, idolatry is achieved when any belief or system of belief usurps that revealed in the divinely-inspired Scriptures. The Bible itself often depicts image-making
and false belief systems straightforwardly in terms of graven images. But what is a graven image, if not the external representation of the internal and vain imaginings of men?

What, after all, were the golden calf, the Asherah poles, the gods of Canaan, effigies of Baal and other gods, but the visual god-image, the material evidence for the supplanting of the true God with a fake in men's hearts; the end product of human beliefs meticulously 'carved' and 'turned' on the lathe of sinful and rebellious human minds? In reality, it matters little whether we are able to point to visible manifestations, such as totem poles, as evidence for such belief. Images of God the Father and of Christ are no less graven when formed only in the imagination of the mind. Neither does it matter by what name we may call ourselves if we do not believe aright concerning the nature of God. The apostle Paul's understanding of God had, with his Damascus-Road experience, been transformed and refined as gold in the fires of the divine Word, but his former colleagues in the Jewish leadership still stood condemned by their alchemist-like forging of a god in their own imagination. If, then, Jesus could accuse the leadership of the believing community in his day of being 'blind guides', what should our reaction be to those who claim to be Christian teachers, yet who teach such New Age ramblings as these:

1. 'Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force'... 'It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function.'

**Kenneth Copeland** (US TV evangelist and founder of the magazine *Believers' Voice of Victory*)

2. 'You create the presence of Jesus with your mouth...He is bound by your lips and by your words...Remember that Christ is depending on you and your spoken word to release His presence.'

**David Yonggi-Cho** (South Korean pastor of the world's largest church and an international evangelist)

3. 'As I prayed that day, I told the Lord, "Either you come down here and touch me or I am going to come up there and touch you". '

**Rodney Howard-Browne** (credited with originating the Toronto Blessing experience, TV and international evangelist)

Consider for a moment the implications of the above. 1) Faith is a force which makes the spirit world function - no mention here of faith in Christ. 2) You can create your reality by your words and Christ is restricted by them! 3) 'I told the Lord' really? The Lord of Job, the Lord who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord who created the entire universe - Rodney Howard-Browne *told* him what he should do. What is more, if he refused, R H-B proposed (somehow, not explained) to 'reach up and touch him'.

Have I misread my Scriptures? Where in the Bible is faith described as a 'force' which we can tap into, or a system of irrefutable laws which we can invoke, that cannot fail and to which the Almighty himself is subject? And where does the Bible teach that I may have anything I want and that God should jump when I tell him? Is this really Christianity at all?
Are these just isolated examples of unbiblical belief, or are they serious deviations from truth that reveal a new age of image-makers bearing the label 'Christian'? Not all of these men believe exactly the same things, but we must ask: Is it possible to discern a common root, an allying foundational belief by which all of these teachers stand or fall in the chief thrust of their ministries? The 'tie that binds' these men, and a vast array of other Christian leaders making similar statements today, is their common desire for a God who esteems and talks to them and who constantly excites with new things - a god in their own image. It is essential then to create their own God, one who is still today speaking new revelation. That many in the evangelical church, perhaps overawed by the belligerent nature of these confident crowd-pleasers, have failed to identify the prophetic movement *in its entirety*, as in error, is a reflection of increasingly poor theological understanding of the issue, coupled with a fear of man, over a fear of God. The resulting fruit of spiritual chaos has been the burgeoning array of spurious 'evangelical' movements which proliferate in the modern church. If we desire a cure for the malaise we will now have to resort to radical surgery and sever the common root from which most have grown, the *erroneous belief in continuing prophecy*. Through this teaching an image of God manifesting himself through signs and wonders, speaking vague and contradictory prophecies, has been built up. As this image is discernibly not the Christian God of the Bible, it is for Bible-believing Christians to tear down that image, by bringing the eternal Word of God to bear. If they ask us, 'Do we believe that God is speaking today?', we will answer, 'Of course! He has never stopped speaking - *through the prophetic Scriptures*'. 'But', we must add, 'he is not speaking any new prophetic revelation'.

The contemporary prophets are, they claim, a 'new breed' of Christians replete with experience of direct encounters with God, chosen by him to be bearers of new prophetic revelation. That large and increasing numbers of modern Christians are influenced by them and their teachings is indisputable. But, as Alan Howe's companion article in this issue makes clear, and as I have written elsewhere, their claims wholly fail the biblical tests. We know that two millennia of Christian Bible teaching, the beliefs of *all* the great saints of the church, and Christian practice and experience, all concur in the view that prophetic revelation ended with the establishment of the church and the completion of the written revelation of God in Christ. This being the case, why has modern Christianity lost its confidence in the written Word and failed to refute such false modern 'prophetic' images?

Elijah asked the people on Mount Carmel, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him' (1 Kings 18:21). Elijah knew that Baal did not exist, that he was merely a figment of the people's and false prophets' imagination. Elijah knew that Baal bore no relation to the God of the *written* revelation. Baal represents for us all false images of the living God. For the only original
image of God is contained in Scripture - the whole of Scripture, and nothing else. Adding anything to, or detracting from, God's revelatory image in the Word, will succeed only in marring that image.

Substantial numbers of non-canonical OT and NT books and epistles exist. They are known as the Apocrypha. Though these books often appear full of Bible-like wisdom, they were sufficiently different that the believing community were suspicious of them and ultimately rejected them. The Jews and the early church knew that the inclusion of any such writings not wholly inspired by the Holy Spirit would taint and poison the entire biblical brew.

It is our contention here, that the new prophetic movement, this new breed in today's church, and all who are prepared to stand with them, are teaching revelations, visions and words that are wholly of their own minds. We assert that they are producing apocryphal works on a scale unprecedented in the church and which fail all of the biblical tests. We contend that this movement has successfully created, thereby, a god in the image of their own minds, and are the spiritual heirs of the self-appointed prophets who opposed Elijah on Mount Carmel and who were prophesying by Baal, not by the Lord.

2. Fashioning the image
What was the nature of the sin that led to man's fall from grace in the Garden? Eve was deceived by the serpent (Satan) and she had eaten the forbidden fruit of the tree in the centre of the garden. She had given some of the fruit to her husband and he also ate of it. This disobedience had 'opened their eyes' to the knowledge of good and evil. But what exactly was their sin? In fact, it was two-fold. Firstly, they disobeyed the word of God by doing that which he had specially told them not to do by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16). Secondly, the reason they did so was to be like God' (Gen. 3:5) and know what he knew. Eve was deceived into believing that God was keeping greater mysteries from them, and that through their own actions they could claim more revelation-knowledge than God had seen fit to impart. This, in essence, is the same sin at the heart of the modern prophetic movement. This movement, not content with the sufficiency of the revelation of Scripture, insists on knowing more than the prophetic Scriptures reveal.

False prophets and teachers have rarely assaulted Christian doctrine head-on. Instead, like most peddlers of unorthodox belief, such as the Judaisers who attempted to disrupt the apostle Paul's teaching in Galatia, they ingratiate themselves via the immaturity of the existing believing community. They do so by aggressively extolling their own authoritarian views, adopting language from the Garden: 'Did God really mean that...say that...?' For all of the eloquence and learned teaching of the Judaisers who turned up in the Galatian church, Paul nevertheless realised what was at stake, and wasted no time in venting his righteous anger against those he perceived as peddlers of a 'different gospel'. Paul effectively treated them as unbelievers, even suggesting that those who were causing trouble should emasculate themselves! (Gal. 5:10, 12). How, then, has our generation become so gullible and tolerant, revealing such a lack of spiritual understanding, and seemingly disabled by the tyranny of what Calvin called 'perfidious tolerance'?

All Christians are adjured to search the Scriptures for themselves concerning the teaching they may be receiving (Acts 17:11) and to test it against the pattern handed
down by Jesus and the apostles (Acts 16:4; Gal. 1:8; Tit. 1:9). Here are two highly relevant reasons why.

a. **Isaiah 44: 9 - 22.** As we read through this section, Isaiah shows us how the false teacher succeeds in fashioning his own image of God by the graphic example of a woodworker at his lathe. Isaiah notes how with care and great skill the woodworker measures, shaves and shapes the wood into a thing of aesthetic beauty. But, ultimately, he is not producing an original as he claims. The passage ought to alert us to just how clever we are in shaving off a truth here, fashioning and adding another truth there, and ending up with something which looks impressive, but is, in fact, a grossly distorted version - a cheap imitation.

b. **Jeremiah 24:34.** The main controversy concerning prophecy often revolves around the credibility and calling of the speaker of prophecy. But as this Scripture reveals, it is not only the prophet, but also his hearers, who are in danger of judgement for continuing to be associated with false prophecy, and for accepting such words as from God. This much overlooked Scripture should animate all who love God's Word to warn those locked into modern prophecy that neither prophet nor hearer will escape punishment. Our loving duty is surely to warn them.

The modern prophetic movement has forged an image of God born of its own imaginings. Yet, as Matthew Henry, in his commentary on the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, points out:

> It [the Second Commandment] also forbids us to make images of God in our fancies, as if he were a man as we are. Our religious worship must be governed by the power of faith, not by power of the imagination.¹⁰

John Calvin puts it this way:

> ...where [Scripture]...would distinguish the true God from the false it would particularly contrast him with idols. It does this, not to approve what is more subtly and elegantly taught by the philosophers, but the better to expose the world's follies, nay, madness, in searching for God when all the while each one clings to his own speculations. There, that exclusive definition, encountered everywhere, annihiſates all the divinity that men fashion for themselves out of their own opinion: for God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself.¹¹ (italics mine)

3. **Marketing the Image**

Having fashioned the image of a fanciful belief-system, the next step is to market and sell it. And we emphasise 'sell it'. And what church today is not dazzled by the apparent success of a movement which so easily draws followers to it? Churches and Christians, in search of a spiritual 'quick-fix', will be all too ready to seek to share with this 'prospering' movement and reap similar blessings. What a tragedy has unfolded in our midst. The leaders become rich through selling home-made images. The image, though, fails to benefit the purchasers, who pursue more and different images. This, in turn, spurs rich leaders to develop more images as it self-evidently is a successful marketing product. The
sellers believe themselves to be prospering and, in turn, the buyers grow ever more desperate to achieve the same material proofs.

The world would investigate and expose such a fraud in a minute. The church, to its shame, chooses to live with it. We can do little better than review the market-stall rhetoric and ' patter' of the new prophets, exposing them to the light of Scripture as we go.

_The new breed of prophets_

That the prophecies of many new prophets stand in direct opposition to the revelational messages of the Scriptures, should strike us as alarming. Here are some examples of the new prophets:

- Feel, don't think. Just experience it.
  - If it makes sense it's not from God - if it's from God it doesn't make sense.\(^{12}\)
  - The mind is never going to understand what God is doing.\(^{13}\) _Rodney Howard-Browne_

And the Bible's emphasis...

- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...
  - (Rom. 12:2)
- ...be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (Eph. 4:23)
- ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. (Eph. 1:17-18)

How about TV evangelist and long-time friend of Billy Graham, US pastor at the Crystal Cathedral, Robert Schuller, speaking on sin?

- I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.\(^{14}\) _Robert Schuller_

And the Scriptures...

- For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)
- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

Many of today's new prophets have met with and can describe God:
The Form that I saw was about the height of a man six feet tall, maybe a little taller, and twice as broad as a human body with no distinguishing features such as eyes, nose, or mouth.  

...He's [God] got hands, you know, as big as basketballs...He's very much like you and me. A being that stands somewhere around 6'2", 6'3", that weighs somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred pounds, little better, ... and has a hand span of nine inches across.  

I found that God is a real person - He has a body, a soul and a spirit. It's true of Jesus. And it is also true of the Holy Ghost. Three separate persons, each with a body, soul, and spirit.  

The Scriptures however are quite blunt:

You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me, and live. (Exod. 33:20)

No one has seen God at any time. (John 1:18)

God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

What about money? John Avanzini is known as the end-time prophet of finances, and with good reason, as it was he who came up with the oft-used hundredfold method of giving used by many prophets today.

Jesus was handling big money because that treasurer he had was a thief. Now you can't tell me that a ministry with a treasurer that's a thief can operate on a few pennies. It took big money to operate that ministry because Judas was stealing out of that bag.

Jesus had a nice house, a big house - big enough to have company stay the night with him...

Another new prophet goes even further:

Not only is worrying a sin, but being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity!

Christ, however, had a very different perspective:

Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mark 10:23)
It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:25)

In all of this, of course, our only protection against error and heresy are the prophetic Scriptures beyond which we are instructed not even to think (1 Cor. 4:6). As scriptural injunctions such as this are so clear, it becomes essential that the written logos (Word of God) must be undermined in favour of the rhema, more immediate, prophetic word. And what do we find the new prophets teaching?

I believe the test of a prophet is not whether his word comes to pass, it's his lifestyle. It's the character of the individual. That is how you test a prophet...It's not a matter of whether the word comes to pass or not, it's the nature of that person's life.  

David Ravenhill, a US Vineyard pastor/prophet

And the Scriptures say:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak...that prophet shall die...when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if that thing does not come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:20-22)

Behold, I am against the prophets who steal my words every one from his neighbour...against the prophets...who use their tongues and say 'He says'...against those who prophesy false dreams...and tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and recklessness. (Jer. 23:30-32)

Some are more direct in their downgrading of Scripture and agree with the view of liberal modernism:

While we should thank God for Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, I say with reverence that they are insufficient and inadequate to give us the help we need.  

(In response to the question 'Do you believe the Scriptures are infallible?’ he answers) I thought for a while, shrugged my shoulders, shook my head and said I couldn't come to terms with it.  

...it is no more the primary purpose of the church to teach the scriptures than it is for British Rail to promote timetables.  

Gerald Coates - a self-proclaimed UK prophet and leader of the Pioneer network of churches.

But what do the Scriptures say about themselves?
For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)

...according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...has been made manifest...by the prophetic Scriptures... (Rom. 16:26)

...that you may learn from us not to think beyond what is written that none of you may be puffed up...
(1 Cor. 4:6)

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

What is wholly apparent is that the messages of the new breed are largely opposed to the messages of the Bible. What is also clear is that the spirit behind the more immediate (rhema) word of the new prophets is of a very different order from that of the one who gave us the written (logos) eternal Word of God. This becomes highly relevant when we consider, in the light of all this, how we are to relate to such men, in public and in private.

The Bible has long recognised the link between false teachers and prophets giving the multitude 'what they want to hear' (2 Tim. 4:3-4), and their making of personal gain by doing so (1 Tim. 6:5). By selling prophetic insight as a commodity through books, tapes and a constant round of conferences, many modern prophets have succeeded in becoming the richest Christian teachers in history. They have achieved this by using some of their newly found wealth to advertise brashly and widely and by buying into the largest market stall of all - television. This is how the prophetic movement of today has risen to such prominence and gained such control of the airwaves. The biblical gospel, however, has never been popular, nor has it ever been a means of personal gain. The takeover of 'Christian' TV by false prophets, has provided the prophetic movement with the widest audience in church history. It is transforming the face/image of the church in the world, even enabling many unbelievers to define the church in terms of it. What a significant temptation it is for Christians to live in peace and fellowship with this 'new breed' of dynamic modern Christian, relying instead on the myth of influencing them (see Bob Godfrey's article in this issue).

4. Worshipping the Image
Many prophetic movements are at different stages of development and are selling their images according to their new prophetic understanding. Some have travelled extensively along this path, holding daily chats with the Almighty and being shown all manner of heavenly visions for the main element of their subsequent public performances and books. Yet we are not contrasting the reluctance, even refusal, of the apostle Paul to share any of his visionary experiences to boost his credibility in the eyes of others (2 Cor. 12:2-6). Rick Joyner exemplifies such prophets. Joyner peddles an image of Christ and his gospel wholly unrecognisable in the light of Bible teaching (see 'Rick Joyner: Prophet of The New Christianity' in this issue). Next there are those who are halfway along the path, who only occasionally dip their toes into prophesying themselves, though they often
repeat as true the claimed prophecies of other modern prophets. UK prophet Gerald Coates exemplifies this type, who 'play' at prophetic utterance (see Alan Howe's article) and whose 'image' of Christian belief bears only the vaguest resemblance to that of biblical teaching. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who strongly dislike the first two types. They have noted their gross excess and know enough Scripture to help them recognise the false images being presented. Even so, without a systematic theology, their own position of opposing excess, while still clinging to the foundational belief in continuing prophetic utterance, lacks biblical logic, causes its own spiritual confusion, and is also a reflection of fashioning God in the image of man, albeit a less marred image. This duly separates them from those who hold the view that prophetic revelation - as taught by almost two thousand years of the church - has ceased.

This last sort of advocate of modern prophecy is exemplified by US Pentecostal pastor Bill Randles - the acceptable face, for many, of a Christianity 'open' to new prophecy, although Randles is well able to identify and diagnose the falsehood of the more obvious fakes. Neither does Randles pull any punches, believing that those he questions have simply travelled too far along the new prophetic path. Randles is then different in degree, but not different in kind. This would be less of a problem if it were not for the fact that, in making out his case, he publicly caricatures and thus opposes the historic Christian cessationist teaching on prophetic utterance - a position held by men like Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon and a host of others. (See the accompanying assessment of Randles' new book on the prophetic movement.) While more moderate supporters of new prophetic revelation can diagnose many of the symptoms, they are wholly unable to cure the disease. We cannot, with integrity, dissociate this latter type from the two earlier types. When beliefs are boiled down, they all believe the same basic error.

To leave the solid ground of Scripture for the high hills of private revelation, 'hidden' spiritual truths and 'dynamic Christianity', will always appear enticing. But it will mean turning our back on the complete revelation in the wholly sufficient prophetic Scriptures, denying them their unique place at the heart of the Christian life. The Lord himself tore the curtain of the Holy of Holies in two, providing direct access to him through the sole mediator, Christ. We no longer need the mediating presence of either human 'priest' or 'prophet' as a consequence. Wrong doctrine and belief will lead us into wrong worship of an image fashioned by human hands and wisdom, rather than the true God presented in the Bible.

How shall we answer, I wonder, when our Lord requires of us, why we were not diligent to refute all that assailed his written Word and sought to supplant it in the hearts and minds of believers? How will we defend the allegation that we did not protect young and vulnerable Christians from the gross distortions and delusions that are being taught as prophetic truth in our day? Are there not sufficient warnings in Scripture? Isaiah issued one such warning when he informed us that there will come a Day when God will cut off the 'head and tail of Israel' (Isaiah 9:14). We need not detain ourselves here with identifying the 'head' of Israel. But, if we do not believe that this is a serious issue, we will need reminding that he will also cut off 'the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail' (v.15). For the false prophet is no true Christian.

We must reject the new prophetic movement and all forms of modern prophecy, for without the prophet there is no prophecy. We need once again to accept that God, in his wisdom, has made known all that he intends to make known until Christ returns.
2 ibid
3 ibid
7 Rodney Howard-Browne, *The Touch of God*, p.71
8 see Peter Glover, *What is Cessationism? Reclaiming evangelical teaching concerning the more extraordinary gifts of the Spirit*, CRN Publications, 1999
12 Rodney Howard-Browne, quoted in *The Counterfeit Revival* audio tapes by Hank Hanegraaff, President of the US Christian Research Institute
14 Dr Robert Schuller, *Christianity Today* US magazine, 5 October, 1984
16 Kenneth Copeland, *Spirit, Soul and Body*, Kenneth Copeland Ministries audiotape no.01-0601, side 1
17 Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, original manuscript (later removed) p.101
18 Avanzini teaches that all believers, whatever amount they give, will receive from God one hundred times the value of any gift given. Needless to say, none of the proponents of this system advise giving to other ministries, merely their own.
20 John Avanzini, on Kenneth Copeland's *Believer's Voice of Victory* programme on TBN, January 20,1991
22 David Ravenhill, *Understanding Prophecy and Its Fulfilment* from the Introduction to the Prophetic Tape (90917), 17 September, 1989
23 Gerald Coates, *The Vision*, p.157
24 Gerald Coates, *An Intelligent Fire*, p.172-3