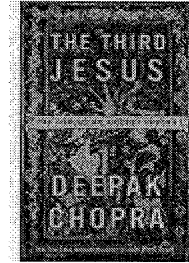


DEEPAK CHOPRA'S THIRD JESUS: THE PERSISTENT NEW AGE JESUS

A Response to Deepak Chopra's The Third Jesus: The Christ We Cannot Ignore

By Marcia Montenegro, written May/June 2008 (page 1 of 2)



"Once you see Jesus as a teacher of enlightenment, faith changes its focus. You don't need to have faith in the Messiah or his mission. Instead, you have faith in the vision of higher consciousness." From *The Third Jesus* (NY: Harmony Books/Random House, 2008, p. 62).

"Absolute truth is blind truth," *The Third Jesus*, p. 229.

While I was exploring and engaged in the New Age for close to 20 years, I became familiar with topics such as Christ Consciousness, enlightenment, the world as an illusion, God within, energy, karma, reincarnation, Eastern meditation methods, Jesus as a spiritual master akin to Buddha, different levels of truth and reality, sin defined as thinking we are separate from God or being unaware of our true divine Self, and many other related beliefs. These concepts undergirded my worldview.

At the same time that the New Age has been blending with the culture exponentially to its growth, many people believe the New Age has faded away when, in reality, it is more deeply entrenched than ever before. One sign of this is the astounding number of bestsellers promoting these beliefs. *The Third Jesus* is yet another such work, although its focus is more strongly on Jesus, and the book uses copious amounts of Scripture from the Gospels in an attempt at credibility.

Surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, quite a few professing Christians endorse Chopra's book. Their words of praise reach out to the reader in the initial pages of the book. Chopra's views are not a mystery; he has written over 40 books, so no one who endorses his books can credibly claim ignorance of his theology.

Who is the Third Jesus?

According to Chopra, the first Jesus is the historical Jesus, "kind, serene, peaceful, loving" and "the keeper of mysteries," but also "less than consistent" (8). The second Jesus is one who never existed, an "abstract theological creation," the "foundation of a religion that has proliferated some twenty thousand sects" (9). The third Jesus, the one championed by Chopra, is the one "who taught his followers how to reach God-consciousness," and this Jesus

"is not *the* savior, not the one and only Son of God" (9).

Chopra believes that he can find in scripture "a map to enlightenment," and that this is not about faith. "Conventional faith," he declares, "is the same as belief in the impossible (such as Jesus walking on water) but there is another faith that gives us the ability to reach into the unknown and achieve transformation" (10). Any words in the Bible from Jesus saying it is necessary to believe in him "as the road to salvation" are not actually the words of Jesus; rather, "those words were put into his mouth by followers writing decades later" (10).

Chopra is, first of all, confusing Jesus with the flaws of religious institutions. He ignores the fact that historic Christianity has been based on Scripture and, despite all the conflicts and disagreements, a core set of beliefs has survived for 2,000 years -- a core which unites those around the world who confess Jesus Christ as the bodily resurrected Savior. Other world religions are also marked with numerous sects, but this is left out.

Secondly, Chopra has decided that Jesus did not say certain words that are in the Bible and he summarily rejects them. On what basis does Chopra decide this? Chopra seems determined to fit his version of Jesus into the Bible, even though it is like putting a square peg into a round hole. Thousands of Christians have pondered and pored over the scriptures, analyzed them, and preached them. They have never found the "third Jesus" that Chopra proclaims because that Jesus is simply not there. Nevertheless, after 2,000 years, Chopra breezily dismisses the historic Christian faith that millions around the world have claimed for centuries.

Would any Christian, or even non-Christian, get away with this in the case of, for example, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism? What if someone were to write a book claiming that Buddha really taught that suffering is good, and that any reports or texts that Buddha said otherwise were words added later by his misguided followers? After all, the texts of Buddha's reported sayings were not written until about 500 years after his death. What if someone claimed that Buddhism is not at all what Buddhists have believed for centuries? that they have it all wrong? If the author of such a book were as well known as Chopra, the response would be pure outrage. Yet this is exactly what Chopra and others are doing today with Christianity.

Jesus denied by page four

In the first pages of this book, there are a number of mostly lengthy endorsements, at least half of which are from professing Christians. Not surprisingly, Bishop Shelby Spong and Matthew Fox are among them -- they both have been very public in their denials of the historic Christian faith. Others include various Roman Catholics, a United Methodist Church minister, a professor and dean of a Methodist school, and a Roman Catholic priest who hosts a Catholic channel. These people are not unintelligent; it would be an insult to them to think they did not know what they were doing. One is left only with two conclusions: to deduce that their glowing words about this book reveal that they themselves agree with New Age ideas and/or that they have denied the essentials of the historic orthodox Christian faith. There is no other assumption possible, because *The Third Jesus* denies, by the first four pages, who Jesus claimed to be and why he came.

Chopra boldly states that Jesus "did not physically descend from God's dwelling place....nor did he return to sit at the right hand of a literal throne" (3). It is unclear what he means by a "literal throne." The throne represents the status and power of Jesus and whatever physical

appearance it may have, we just can't know. I think the use of the word "literal" means that Chopra does not believe a historic person named Jesus literally ascended to heaven the way the Gospels and the book of Acts tell us he did. *"So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God"* (Mark 16.19). And *"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight"* (Acts 1.9).

Jesus did not physically descend in the sense of floating down from the sky as an embodied man, but he did physically incarnate, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born as a babe to Mary. In this way, he did descend "from God's dwelling place." In fact, Jesus announced this many times in the Gospel of John. One of the plainest statements is, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"* (John 6.38). And also, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven"* (John 3.13). "Coming down from heaven," as portrayed clearly in the Gospels, refers to the historic incarnation of Jesus.

Other verses, including declarations that God sent Jesus, are John 5.23, 24, 30, 36-38; 6.29, 41, 51, 57; 7.18, 28, 29, 33; 8.16, 18, 23, 29, 42; 9.4; 11.42; 12.44, 45, 49; 13.20; 14.24; 15.21; 16.5; 17.3, 8, 18, 23; and 20.21.

Continuing, Chopra adds that what makes Jesus the Son of God is that "he had achieved Christ-consciousness." Anyone familiar with this term and what Chopra means by it knows that Chopra is talking about a state of consciousness, a realization of one's own inherent divinity that all humanity may achieve, with Christ as the model.

Chopra believes the material world is an illusion, and that we are trapped in a material existence. The answer for Chopra, and what he inserts into Christianity without the slightest evidence from the Bible, is to be aware of this illusion and realize that our inner "true self" is divine and "is as unbounded as the light" (24). Chopra takes Jesus' statements about light out of context in an effort to support this view.

The subtitle for this book is "The Christ We Cannot Ignore," but essentially, Chopra is ignoring the Christ in the Bible, as well as the history, plain meaning, theology, and prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) as they have been held not only by Christians for over 2,000 years, but also as they have been interpreted and affirmed by Jews. Chopra acknowledges that parts of the Gospels do link Jesus to the Jewish tradition (188), but his Third Jesus reveals that Chopra dismisses or rejects this link, which makes sense given that Chopra does not accept the authority of the Gospels. There is simply no support for believing that Jewish writings and beliefs were advocating a Hindu concept of enlightenment.

"If Jesus rose to the highest level of enlightenment," asks Chopra, "why should he be unique in that regard? Buddha may be his equal....along with Vedic rishis like Vasishta and Vyassa, who didn't happen to have religions named after them" (20). In other words, Jesus is just another enlightened master like Buddha, a great one perhaps, but well known partly because he had "a religion named after" him.

If anyone has doubts that this "Third Jesus" is not the biblical Jesus by page 4, certainly by page 9 and definitely by page 20, it is perfectly apparent that Chopra's Jesus is another Jesus, not the Jesus in the Scriptures.

And yet, astonishingly, professing Christians endorse this book that denies the very foundations of the faith they claim to be following, using phrases of praise such as "profound wisdom and clarity," "an intriguing vision," "a marvelous, modern touch of insight," "the mystical Jesus, at one with our deepest consciousness," "this enlightening journey," and "a book "to incorporate into one's life." Do these professing Christians prefer to believe Chopra over the Bible? Or are they redefining Christianity in order to continue to call themselves Christians? One can only wonder in confused amazement.

Enlightenment, not salvation

The steps outlined by Chopra to live the spiritual life (23-25) involve meditation (being still and going within to "encounter the light and God at the same time,"); contemplation (in order to see that all is light); revelation (God is both hidden and revealed); prayer (which is "simply asking the way the light asks to see itself"); grace (the light as "pure love"); love ("when your inner light is connected to God"); faith, defined as when you "stop believing in the illusion of the material world and see everything for what it really is -- light;" salvation, which is that you "are redeemed when you move into the light. You've escaped your false self and arrived at your true self;" and finally unity, explained as "once you realize you are the light, nothing stands between you and God."

Taking the phrase about the Kingdom of God being "within" from the King James, Chopra states, "the path to God-consciousness is awareness" (44). Naturally, when one looks at the context of this statement about the Kingdom, it is Jesus rebuking the Pharisees. Most translations use the word "among" or "in the midst of," because Jesus was establishing his Kingdom in their midst, but the Pharisees refused to see he was the Messiah prophesied by the Hebrew scriptures and rejected this.

Redemption is moving "into the light," something that one does on his or her own. Sin plays no part in this, nor does the fact that God declared sin to be the reason for man's need for redemption. The need for a sinless sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin is absent because in Chopra's world, consequences are a part of karma and if there is a penalty, we pay for it ourselves through karma.

Chopra mentions the "violent death" of Jesus and states that Christians worship Jesus for this death because it led to the resurrection (27). Chopra writes about this in the context of not resisting evil, not in the context of the atonement as paying the penalty for sin and the need for a blood sacrifice, the theme of the Old Testament.

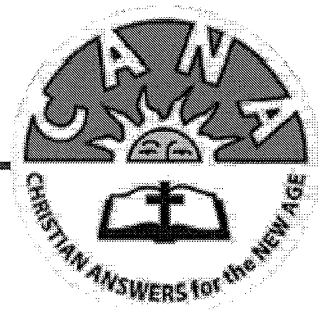
Jesus is compared to Buddha in the time-honored New Age fashion. "The salvation Jesus offered was the same as Buddha's: release from suffering and a path to spiritual freedom, joy, and closeness to God," writes Chopra (139). The gargantuan differences between Buddhist and Christian doctrines are ignored, an oversight that for any reader -- Christian or non-Christian -- should undermine, at the very least, this book's credibility.

The premise of Buddhism begins with an assumption that the world is not real, that ultimate reality is Buddha-nature, all suffering is caused by desire, and one can overcome suffering and reach awareness of true reality through specific teachings, ethics, and forms of meditation, a process that requires many lifetimes and leads to nirvana, a state (not a place) which marks the end of suffering through extinction of the illusion of self. There is no supreme God in

Buddhism, only lesser deities and demi-gods who themselves must reincarnate to reach enlightenment.

In stark contrast, God's word teaches that the material world is real, created by God (not emanated from God); there is a supreme God; man is separated from God by sin (not by illusion); and man is reconciled to God through faith in Christ who made this possible through his atonement on the cross. Release through faith in Christ is not extinction of illusion but rather redemption and eternal existence in God's domain, the Kingdom established by Jesus Christ to be revealed in full glory at the end of time.

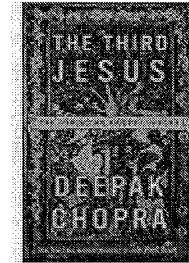
| << Previous Page | 1 2 | [Next Page >>](#) |



DEEPAK CHOPRA'S THIRD JESUS: THE PERSISTENT NEW AGE JESUS

A Response to Deepak Chopra's The Third Jesus: The Christ We Cannot Ignore

By Marcia Montenegro, written May/June 2008 (page 2 of 2)



God is not personal

The Old Testament does not, Chopra writes, depict God as a person, but rather a being beyond "physicality" who is "abstract and unimaginable" (41-42). Chopra argues that Jesus used the term "father" for God but that it was just a term of convenience because the Jews did not want to pronounce God's name (42).

While it is true that God the Father is spirit and does not have a physical body, it is also extraordinarily clear in the Old Testament that God is personal; he is not a mere principle, idea, or abstraction. God speaks personally with people like Adam, Joseph, Abraham, Isaac, Jonah, David, all the prophets, and numerous others. God reveals himself as Judge and Redeemer, and discloses his attributes of righteousness, omniscience, mercy, wrath on sin, love, grace, and others. He tells the Hebrew people that they will be his sons and daughters (Isaiah 43.6, quoted in 2 Corinthians 6.18), he instructs them on how to build the tabernacle and how to build the temple, and he talks of being their shepherd (Isaiah 40.11, Ez. 34.12).

God displays will, intelligence, communication in words, joy, sorrow, anger, mercy, compassion, patience, and other qualities impossible to find in a force or mere concept. Indeed, the examples of God as a personal God are so numerous, that to give these would require quoting almost the entirety of the Old Testament. To reject this and say God is an abstraction is to do the gravest disservice to the text. But since Chopra believes God is a principle of divine intelligence, he seemingly is choosing to read his own meanings into the content, even though such meanings are totally incongruent with the text.

In fact, according to this book, the kind of God you believe in is irrelevant; what matters is that you realize that you are in an illusion: "By praying to whatever deity or higher self you believe in, you are essentially making a connection with reality, asking to be reminded that illusion isn't real" (28). Redemption is finding "an inner state that is free from images of pain" (29).

Higher consciousness, not faith

The twist Chopra applies is to turn the exoteric (outer) into esoteric (inner), rendering Jesus into "a teacher of enlightenment" (62). Objective reality is irrelevant; what counts is the inner

knowledge and experience. After discussing faith and admitting that the Bible states that one must believe in Jesus as the Messiah, Chopra confesses this is in conflict with enlightenment (60-61). He resolves this by deciding that Jesus could have been referring to faith "as experienced in a higher state of consciousness;" that is, one has faith when one is "in God-consciousness, as Jesus was" (62).

Viewing Jesus from this vantage point means, "You don't need to have faith in the Messiah or his mission. Instead, you have faith in the vision of higher consciousness" (62). Chopra's main proof text for this is "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you" (62, 144-45). According to Chopra, this statement from Jesus "points the way to hidden dimensions" in which you find the connection to "inner reality" (144).

Chopra recommends several meditative exercises, such as repeating phrases to yourself, letting them become "softer and deeper" for up to twenty minutes (144-45). Phrases he suggests are "Our Father, who art in Heaven" or "Hail Mary, full of grace" (144-45). After this, you gaze at a "sacred image, such as an icon, a picture of Jesus, a statue of Mary" and ask the figure "to embody itself through you" in order to connect with this essence and "remove the artificial boundary between the isolated ego-self and the higher self" (145).

Fond of "Be still and know that I am God," which Chopra takes out of context from Psalm 46 (as do an increasing number of Christians), he states that "be still" refers to meditation (which it does not -- see CANA article on "Be Still and Meditation" about Psalm 46.10). Continuing, Chopra states, "At the source, you are connected to pure awareness" and the phrase "Know that I am God" "refers to the unfolding of a deeper reality than the ego-mind was ever aware existed" (152). Chopra gives an exercise based on this in order to work toward "union with God" (153).

Man as God

Chopra writes this book from the Eastern-New Age premise that man is part of God and has a divine nature, but we have forgotten this and fallen prey to the illusion of the world and the separatist ego-self. A proponent of the New Age misapplication and misunderstanding of quantum physics, Chopra proclaims that you are "blinking in and out of existence countless times per minute" and always "in flux," not "anchored in physical reality" (168). Indeed, the reader, says Chopra, should remind him and herself that "I am not fixed in time; I am not fixed in space; the person I think I am is actually a lingering memory," among other similar ideas (169).

You are not a separate individual; rather, "you are in everyone else, and everyone else is in you...you see them as essence, or pure Being" (168). "God-consciousness" is the realization of these principles and of one's divinity, and is the goal of the spiritual journey for Chopra. All of the misinterpretations of Scripture and all of the exercises offered in this book are designed to lead the reader to this conclusion, and to thus encourage him or her to start the journey to this state of God-consciousness.

What is the response?

The Third Jesus is a Gnostic, New Age Jesus that exists with no defensible historical or textual evidence. This "third Jesus" does not even tenuously resemble the Jesus proclaimed in the

Gospels, nor is there any evidence that early Christians or the early Church confessed this Jesus.

There is a difference between disagreement with the claims in a text and unsubstantiated misinterpretations of that text -- any text. In essence, Chopra denies every essential of the historic Christian faith and overturns basic principles of hermeneutics in order to misuse the biblical text to prop up his own beliefs. Like the old-fashioned cloth doll that would change into another figure when held upside-down, Chopra puts aside the historical Jesus Christ of Scripture for an ethereal and vague Jesus-figure who seemingly meant things other than what he said. This action imbues the words of Jesus in the Gospels with meanings at odds with his Jewish heritage and contrary to the historical Middle Eastern cultural context, transforming the Bible into a puzzle book that requires people like Chopra to guide us to a hidden meaning. To remain silent in the face of such flagrant misrepresentations would be seen as ludicrous were such things written about a religious text other than the Christian Bible. Therefore, I cannot remain silent.

Chopra commits numerous straw man fallacies, false dichotomies, and uses loaded language. He also makes self-refuting statements such as, "Absolute truth is blind truth" (229). Is this statement true? It can't be, because this statement is an absolute statement or absolute truth claim, and thus it defeats its own assertion. However, Chopra suggests here an analogy between the "jihadis" and a Christian he met who believed in absolute truth. But if truth is not absolute, then everything Chopra asserts is without value, because truth is meaningless if it is relative. The term "relative truth," if true, must also be relative and therefore cannot itself be proclaimed as true. On what standard does Chopra base truth if there is no absolute truth?

If you have tended to agree with Chopra on what he writes about Jesus or the Bible, I plead with you to read the Bible for yourself, and perhaps even read some of the recommended books or links below in order to come to your own conclusion.

Recommended books

These books, although they do not respond specifically to *The Third Jesus*, do address some of the claims made by Chopra in *The Third Jesus*, or explain textual evidence for the Bible. Listed alphabetically by author:

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels, Craig L. Blomberg

Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ, Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace

The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities, Darrell L. Bock

The Canon of Scripture, F. F. Bruce.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? F. F. Bruce

The Origin of the Bible, F. F. Bruce

Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels by Craig A. Evans. Read sections on the Gnostic books.

From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible, Norman Geisler and William E. Nix

Jesus in an Age of Controversy, Douglas Groothuis

Reinventing Jesus, J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace

The Case for the Real Jesus, Lee Strobel

Links on the Gnostic Gospels and the Gnostic Christ

"What Are the Gnostic Gospels?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Gnostic-gospels.html>

"Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus" by Douglas Groothuis

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0040a.html>

"The Gnostic Gospels, Part Two" by Douglas Groothuis

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0088a.html>

"The Gnostic Gospels"

<http://www.knowgodpersonally.org/page.php?page=TheGnosticGospels>

"Is the New Testament Reliable?"

<http://www.knowgodpersonally.org/page.php?page=IsTheNewTestamentReliable>

[Quotes from this article or copies up to 25 copies are permitted, as long as proper credit (author's name and website) is given and no fee is charged for copies beyond copying fees. For any other use, please request permission from author at mmontenegro@fim.org. Thank you.].

| << Previous Page | 1 2 | Next Page >> |