
MAKING PHANEROO

Manifest

A Research Report on the Phaneroo Movement
and its Doctrine

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Making Phaneroo Manifest
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*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and
there is nothing new under the sun.*

Eccl. 1:9

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PREAMBLE

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

ACFAR and Veracity Fount believe that the Ugandan Church should listen to the Word and the world. The first is an ecclesial call, while the latter is a cultural one. Listening to the Word means developing internal tools for discernment necessary to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Listening to the world implies studying the often-collapsing culture to be the world's salt and light (Mt. 5:13-14). This Research caters to the central Christian discipleship responsibility to heed apostolic teaching (1 Tim 4:16). But it also serves a missional cause in a country like Uganda, where many people hold to a nominal Christian Faith severed from its historical Christian creeds and roots. Such nominalism often hinders the effectiveness of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20) and the Great Commandment (Mt. 22:34-39).

CONTEXTUAL CONCERNS

On September 16th, 2014, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau incorporated Phaneroo as a private company limited by shares. Its leadership involves Grace Lubega, Zac Mutyaba, Modestar Sweeney, Brian Mwesige, and Emma Muwanguzi. The movement's impact stretches to prisons, and through its *Manifest Fellowships* (cells), Phaneroo presently has a presence in over fifty institutions of learning in almost every area in the country. Additionally, Phaneroo has spread its wings through its diaspora arm to several countries like Rwanda, the USA, the UK, Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Malaysia, and Congo. They are on TBN Africa, with seventy-eight live streaming centers such as Spirit TV, Lighthouse Television (LTV), Urban TV, Faith World Europe, Calvary TV, and about ten Radio stations, with their recent emphasis being on media ministry (Manifest TV) in a bid to 'take over the world.' Their website and devotionals provide an online presence while their Sunday services occur at the UMA Multipurpose Hall. At the time of this Report, their Thursday fellowships are at the Hockey grounds, gathering close to 15,000 people weekly.

On September 30th, 2019, the *Africa Center for Apologetics Research* (ACFAR) tasked Veracity Fount to research Phaneroo. The letter read in part:

(Phaneroo) has become a challenge to the understanding and appreciation of Christianity in Uganda. Young people are moving away from their traditional churches in droves. Parents are concerned about the change in belief and behavior of their children who have been involved with Phaneroo. Christian leaders ask questions: what is this "Phaneroo?" what does it teach? How can we help our children understand its teachings? If our children are involved in the movement, how can we help them see the potential dangers of being associated with such a group? As you can imagine, these are important questions that demand/deserve answers. Many people have approached us in our capacity as a Research Organization on New Religious Movements seeking help in understanding and responding to Phaneroo. In response to the many calls for help, we are asking for your help to inoculate and equip believers in Uganda on how to respond to this group.

METHODOLOGY

This Research sought to address two questions: what is Phaneroo, and what does it teach? We geared the first effort to determine the movement's origins and ethics and the latter, assessing and discerning their teaching considering historical theology. The *Veracity Fount* Research Team, commissioned by the *Africa Centre for Apologetics Research* (ACFAR), purchased video and audio records spanning the time Phaneroo has been recording its content. We have scoured devotionals and listened to online teachings, and tried to detect differences in Phaneroo's doctrinal persuasions over time. We desired to carefully curate Phaneroo's teaching and weigh it against Scripture, good interpretive practice, and historical Christian orthodoxy. Central themes from the group's teaching on Christ, man, sin, and salvation informed our evaluation during this Research. Phaneroo's doctrinal health assessment that follows the field findings in this Report focused on an initial media review to address the second research question: what Phaneroo teaches. We explore what the Bible and the early Church say about Phaneroo's teaching.

Since Phaneroo's origins and activities are (mainly) on college campuses, we talked to university chaplains, student leaders, and Phaneroo attendees, both past and present. And since Phaneroo has also affected local churches and institutions, we also talked to pastors of some affected churches. Due to space and similarity in stories, we did not include every detail or interview. We excluded other facts because they are so dark, sensitive, and detailed that they may depress or endanger our sources. What we present in this report is representative rather than exhaustive of Phaneroo's teaching and ethic. The examples we provide are tips of the iceberg, and the reader is at liberty to investigate further. But what is included is representatively sufficient. Reports from Makerere University, Makerere University Business School, Uganda Christian University, and Kyambogo University are akin to issues at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi, and Kampala International University Ishaka. And the problems at St. Luke's Church Ntinda exist at All Saints Church Kampala, Full Gospel Church, Makerere, and University Christian Fellowship Kikoni. Though not exhaustive, this Report is sufficient for its purpose: to make manifest a movement whose reach and influence extends beyond denominational and geographical borders and, in so doing, to inform, warn, correct, and "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12).

Constant conversations with ACFAR and soliciting feedback from other Church leaders, pastors, and clergy, enriched this Research. Our consultative meeting on April 23rd, 2022, with leaders and representatives from the Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Pentecostal denominations, chaplaincies, mission agencies, and theological institutes, confirmed the need for this Report and the facts contained therein. The entire research work took about thirty months.

We also contacted the Phaneroo Leadership via letter and email for their view concerning this Research. However, apart from Phaneroo's automated email response, we received no other reply. Such is so, despite WhatsApp reminders to the Leadership.

UGANDAN PENTECOSTALISM: PHANEROO'S POSSIBLE BACKGROUND

Although the 1906 Azusa Street revival steered by William Seymour is acclaimed to have begotten modern Pentecostalism, the origins of the Pentecostal movement(s) are diverse, ranging from the Americas (both South and North) to Wales¹ and from India to Africa. These movements produced the bedrocks of prevalent Pentecostal persuasions and practices in the global south. Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing Christian denomination in Uganda, if not the world. According to the Pew Research Center, Pentecostalism had nearly 300 million followers in 2014, 'many in Africa.'² The Pentecostal movement's diverse origins undergird its non-monolithic nature, less cohesive doctrine, and denominational structures. Loose denominational structures with low doctrinal standards tend to eschew accountability, making Pentecostalism a potential breeding ground for unchecked false teaching. The oft-apparent disdain for established churches and theological training means such errors can blossom without sufficient or sustainable internal checks.

As a movement, one can trace Pentecostalism in Uganda to before the entrance of Full Gospel churches which celebrated their golden jubilee in May 2010. History shows that Pentecostalism operated in Uganda before the 1960s.³ The Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) entered the country from Kenya in the 1930s, having worked mainly in Eastern Uganda. However, 1960 marked a shift in Uganda's Pentecostalism history due to the 'Kampala factor.' Kampala controls Uganda's theological and cultural currents as Uganda's capital city, and Phaneroo's origins lie in these waters of Ugandan Pentecostalism—in Kampala.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH HISTORY

In this Report, Church History is a friend and guide to understanding Phaneroo. Unfortunately, the average Ugandan Christian does not know the story of God's activity in history. Many Ugandans, for example, do not see that the early Trinitarian and Christological conversations which led to the Nicene and Chalcedonian councils started in Africa. And not many think it matters. But history is an inescapable part of life. Historical theology is vital for the Church in Uganda to guard against wrong teaching because false doctrine often comes as a novel deviation from historic Church teaching. The leaders of the Ugandan Church do well to heed the advice from the 20th-century Swiss theologian Karl Barth who wrote: "we cannot be in the church without taking as much responsibility for the theology of the past as for the theology of the present."⁴

To be a member of the Church of Christ is to walk in the teachings handed down to us from the Apostles (1 Cor 15:3-5; Jude 1:3). The task of discipleship is to know what the Church has always held and pass it on to others. But on the other hand,

¹ Cédric Mayrargue, *The Paradoxes of Pentecostalism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Paris: IFRI, 2008), 3. See also Marius Ne, "The African background of Pentecostal theology: A critical perspective," *In die Skriflig In Luce Verbi* ISSN: (Online) 2305-0853, (Print) 1018-6441.

² The Pew Research Center. (2014, November 14). *Why has Pentecostalism grown so dramatically in Latin America?* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/>

³ Daewon Moon. "Pentecostalism in African Christianity: The formation and scope of a distinctive spirituality." *Lausanne Global Analysis*, January 2021, Volume 10/Issue 1. [lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-01/pentecostalism-in-african-christianity](https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-01/pentecostalism-in-african-christianity)

⁴ Donald Wood, "Barth's Theology of Interpretation." *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. First Published: 04.06.2009, Pages 372-374

Evangelism calls people to the unchanging truth of God. Christians do not invent their doctrine *because* the Christian Faith is historical, not speculative. It is an objective reality, not mere subjectivity or sentimentality.

Historical theology is the anchor on which we steady shifting ship. With Scripture, historical theology is the sun in the sky from which a traveler in unknown lands can tell direction and time. The Ugandan Church must know what Christians have always believed, which comes with historical teaching. Though Phaneroo⁵ was incorporated in 2014, its doctrine (as we will see) is much older, and history has a lot to say about it. Grace Lubega himself, the leader of Phaneroo, confesses to being a student of Church history.⁶ It should not surprise us then that Phaneroo's teaching has its roots in the past. This Research will show how, fifteen centuries ago, the Church wrestled with and rejected what Phaneroo teaches. But ideas hardly die. When they do, they tend to resurrect. And as King Solomon says, there is nothing new under the sun. Part of the reason many Ugandan Christians and leaders could not understand Phaneroo's teaching, and its potential harm, is the failure to turn back to Church history.

But before discussing Phaneroo's doctrine in light of both historical and biblical theology, let us first reflect on the movement's beginnings and growth.

⁵ The name *Phaneroo* here is anachronistic, that is, in hindsight, since as an independent entity it only began to exist in 2014. But the movement to which the name applies existed as early as 2010, under CHM.

⁶ Grace Lubega, (Accessed February 17th, 2022), *Why Submission?* Minute 4:28-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB2psnQLC4M>, notes how he spent much time studying Church history "after God separated him" for ministry at campus. We will note as we discuss Phaneroo's doctrine the significance of this fact.

PHANEROO'S UNIVERSITY BEGINNINGS

THE ORIGIN OF UNIVERSITY FELLOWSHIPS

At the start of the Christian Union (CU) around 1962, students in Makerere University Kampala (MUK) halls of residence were many. As the university grew, hostels and rental units rapidly emerged, thanks to the in-demand student population. The growth in the number of non-resident students created a need for a Christian fellowship. So, the MUK CU commenced a joint fellowship to mobilize the Christian fraternity inside the university. Audrey Karuhanga⁷ narrates that the university agreed with the CU to have Hall and Hostel fellowship meetings to organize these growing numbers of Christian students. St. Francis Chapel also began lunch hour fellowships for non-resident students who could not attend CU's evening and Sunday fellowships. Faculty-based fellowships also began. When fellowships started in student residences, the university assigned patrons for supervision purposes. But with increasing student fellowships, the patron supervision loosened, leaving a gap for the alumni to wield more influence on students than their 'assigned' patrons. These alumni overhauled any semblance of official patron influence at the university CU as many outsiders saw an opportunity to gain significant spiritual impact at Uganda's largest learning institution.

THE BEGINNING AND GROWTH OF PHANEROO

In the above context, Pastor Isaiah Mbuga, an alumnus of Afro-Stone Fellowship, visited a sick member of his Christ's Heart Ministries International (CHM).⁸ Mbuga narrated that he overheard people praying in the Hall's common room while leaving Africa Hall. Upon inquiry, he learned that such was the official Hall fellowship. Surprised by the dismal numbers, he stated his desire to 'rebuild the Afro-Stone Fellowship' to those with him.

GRACE LUBEGA ASSISTS ISAIAH MBUGA

Grace Lubega, then a member of CHM, often escorted Mbuga to minister in their newfound ministry ground. With time, Afro-Stone Fellowship grew as fellow students invited others. According to a witness, around 2011/2012, students from other universities flocked MUK at their friends' invitation to 'witness' the power of God. Under Mbuga's guidance, CHM replicated its ministry across university campuses, even outside Kampala. Thanks to their fast student mobilization, it was a swift growth. But between 2012 and 2013, as the two men launched on almost every campus, Mbuga's ministry schedule was untenable. And so, Mbuga chose to forfeit the Afro-Stone fellowship to Lubega.⁹ In retrospect, such was the start of a ministry trajectory turn. The latter singlehandedly gained prominence on various campuses, propagating the teaching elaborated under the Phaneroo brand in this Research.

⁷ Audrey Karuhanga became the General Secretary of Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS) from January 2015.

⁸ Christ's Heart Ministries. (Accessed 2021, January 29). *Our Mission*. <https://christsheart.org/about-us/>. CHM is in Upper Kawuga, Mukono. Its official website states that it aims to 'raise an apostolic generation' and extend 'leadership teachings in Schools, Universities/Colleges' in addition to 'public worship.'

⁹ Achen, who joined Phaneroo from its campus days and still attends there, mentions that 2014 is when Isaiah Mbuga commissioned Grace Lubega to transition the Fellowship to independence from CHM. Mbuga notes that the separation was for Lubega's good and protection, though the tensions had already simmered by that time.

A TURN OF EVENTS

Part of Mbuga's vision at Christ's Heart had been to establish a fellowship where all campuses would gather weekly to pray and fellowship. According to Mbuga, Lubega requested to lead the Fellowship in Kampala, seeing he was a trusted ministry partner. Mbuga thought the reporting lines would remain clear with himself remaining Lubega's mentor. But the charismatic Lubega had already gained prominence from student fellowships, and he cemented his influence as the ultimate "man of God." From our interview, Mbuga says that he was barred from a radio program paid for by CHM at one point and that under Lubega's influence, Mbuga's program at Lighthouse Television was stopped. As one event led to another, Mbuga's active role diminished in his founded ministry. Yet, it is witnessed that his 'spiritual father' function did not.

WHY THE NAME PHANEROO?

Amidst this turn of events, Lubega claimed to have received a vision, reported in his August 17th, 2015, interview with *The Independent*.¹⁰ In his words,

The church has inclined to a very deceptive definition of God as people became too desperate. So, the Lord spoke to me to answer the many questions that the church previously left unanswered.

Asked why his ministry was so attached to young people, Lubega said that:

The campus stage is the most wasted, where many of them have lost the values of Christianity. So Phaneroo is there to solve the problem.

Concerning the choice of the name, Lubega explained how

The Greek word 'Phaneroo' is translated as bringing to manifestation what existed but is not seen. Consequently, what we want to see in this generation is that Christians start bringing forth things that men never thought existed, yet they did, in fact, exist.¹¹

He would later 'disclose the mystery' every Monday at MUK and oversee the same messaging¹² across universities. Lubega's devotionals, edited and summarized as 'Shofar of Grace,' were dutifully distributed wherever a student was spotted. These devotionals would become Phaneroo's lifeblood and are used much in this Report.

CHAOS IN AFRO-STONE AND THE LARGER CHRISTIAN UNION

Event invites for both Lubega and Mbuga grew in fellowships, overnights, prayer retreats, and other learner meetings. The numbers outgrew the Common Room at Africa Ladies Hall and moved to the Mess (dining hall) of the same Hall. Audrey narrates that the university summoned the Warden of Africa Hall to talk about the noise levels, which were uncondusive for learning in the vicinity. Lecturers could no longer use the space, and neither was the Hall good for accommodation and rest due to "fervent prayer sessions and intense worship."

¹⁰ The Independent. (2015, August 17). *Believing in people*. <https://www.independent.co.ug/believing-in-people/>. Lubega tells a similar story during Phaneroo. (Posted August 7th, 2021, Accessed February 17th, 2022). *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary*. Minute 100:07-103:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWT2z9eOJP4>

¹¹ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, January 30). *Ministry Profile*. <https://phaneroo.org/ministry-profile/>

¹² We discuss Phaneroo's doctrine extensively later in this research.

According to those interviewed, a defiant spirit was characteristic of the Phaneroo faithful then. Rev. Aaron Batte mentions a meeting that St. Francis chaplaincy had with some Phaneroo leaders who verbally abused and wanted to beat up the chaplain. The battle with MUK chaplaincy existed because, as Batte notes, Phaneroo infiltrated the main CU, and its leaders headed university fellowships. The tensions between Phaneroo-led CU and the MUK chaplaincy boiled until a split in the MUK CU. At the same time, there were reports of sexual immorality in the Fellowship. Batte and Isaac Ssenyonjo told us of 'papa' Stephen of the CU Fellowship who wanted to rape the 'mama' (Doreen). Then, Kintu, who, as per Isaac, "was the assistant of Lubega," slept with the CU secretary around 2014. Isaac says that the secretary's boyfriend landed on the messages in which, after texting about their sexual pleasures, Kintu ends the text by saying, "my dear, I am off; I have a preaching engagement; we'll talk later." Isaac says he told Lubega these things, which Lubega did not deny, as though he knew them. Another account is from Ivan Isiko, a former patron of Rescue Mission at MUK, who, in January 2013, went on a mission to Butaleja, Eastern Uganda, with some (of the then-to-be-Phaneroo) students. Isiko narrates a sexual orgy he saw one evening (the students didn't expect him to be around since he had shortly traveled back to Kampala), including the group's 'papa' and 'mama.' When confronted, the students justified their actions by appealing to God's grace.¹³ Isiko noted that a few ladies—eight of whom he knew—got pregnant and that of those, only one gave birth. Isiko says that all these attended the Afro-Stone Fellowship.¹⁴

Batte also reports academic decline among students, as some wrote exams in tongues.¹⁵ With all this, the university administration challenged Wardens and Patrons to act.¹⁶

¹³ Paul (not real name), part of the first core meeting of the MUK CU that began in 2014, tells of a mission in Eastern Uganda to which he went with some Phaneroo members. Paul notes that one evening after mission, some of these Phaneroo followers were "making love not far from where the rest are." Paul states that these people justified their immorality by appealing to God's grace and concludes that the grace message that Phaneroo preached underlies these people's conduct.

¹⁴ Peace (not real name), one of the ladies present from Mbuga's first visit to Afro-Stone that grew into Phaneroo, told us how ladies—one of whom was her best friend— "were used" but cannot report their stories. She, and Bruno (who became part of the transition committee of the MUK Christian Union in 2014), independently spoke of abortion clinics in Africa and Livingstone Halls. When asked how far up the leadership the sexual abuse goes, she said: "you will find out." Paul reports at least three ladies, two of them friends, one belonging to his fellowship, all involved in sexual relations outside marriage with Phaneroo members, without remorse.

¹⁵ Bruno reports one fellowship meeting he attended at MTR, Makerere University, where one Phaneroo preacher told a story of a lady who wrote a paper in tongues. The preacher spoke glowingly of the lady who went into the exam without answers. It is reported that the lady "lifted up her faith and put the pen on the paper." The preacher continued narrating how the pen stood on the paper and started to fill in answers on its own. All the girl did was ask for more answer sheets. Paul (not real name) speaks of a friend in University Hall at MUK who stopped attending classes and only went for exams. The friend challenged Paul and others "to understand this grace," boasting of his academic excellence despite dodging classes. Paul notes how his friend missed graduation and doubts he completed campus. Jason reports that he did not perform well at Senior Four because he kept believing that "I am a success without really putting in the work. The work I was putting in was in prayer: praying in tongues." Jason notes that Phaneroo insisted that if you see a 28% on your exam, 'in the spirit,' it is not a 28 but an 82 because "faith is the evidence of things hoped for." Amos, chairperson of the CU at Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi, speaks of the secretary of Nkozi CU at the time who would get his marks and change them as his act of faith. If he got 20%, he would change the two into an eight. Of course, the university system showed a failed grade, and per Amos, this gentleman, still a Phaneroo member, is yet to graduate to date. His friend and assistant secretary, with whom they were Phaneroo's main mobilizers at Nkozi University, left the university without graduating and disappeared.

¹⁶ The chaos at Makerere University from the CU divisions turned into an administrative issue. Some CU students had told Audrey's predecessor at FOCUS, Beatrice Langariti, that Fellowship leaders belonging to Phaneroo engaged in sexually immoral relations, preached a false gospel, and caused chaos within main CU and Halls of residences. Beatrice tried to engage the concerned parties who also met with Lubega, but because much of what

BREAKING CHRIST'S HEART'S HEART

Amidst the growth, chaos, and suspicions, the relationship with CHM still existed. The two leaders shared pulpits. But Grace Lubega was now more visible and received more invites on every campus they had launched. Still, he was a member of CHM, and Mbuga was his 'spiritual father.' Mbuga says that when Lubega gained fame, he sought more control and became unruly. For Mbuga, Lubega even preferred to play football at MTN Arena with some followers for months than attending church on Sundays—and that such is public knowledge. Mbuga claims that moral issues and arrogance complicated his bond with Lubega. In 2015, the rift between Phaneroo and CHM so sharpened that on June 3rd, 2019, CHM released a letter that read in part:

Whereas Christ's Heart Ministries (now) and Phaneroo Ministries were previously connected, this relationship was severed about four years ago. Their questionable doctrine, conduct, and morals, coupled with a deliberate refusal to heed godly correction, have left us with no option but to distance this ministry from Phaneroo ministries and its leadership for the good of the greater body of Christ and in accordance with Romans 16:17 "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." We wish hereby to categorically state that Christ's Heart Ministries is in no way currently affiliated or associated with Phaneroo Ministries or its leaders. Whoever deals with them does so at their own risk.

The letter's revelation of Phaneroo's "questionable doctrine, conduct, and morals" is consistent with sexual immorality and arrogance reported at different colleges, issues we heard at MUK and will also hear elsewhere. But Mbuga was not surprised. "If you begin to think in terms of: 'I can sin with my body, and I don't need to repent, because there's nothing like repentance,' I have issues," says Mbuga. In a public three-minute audio recording, Mbuga accuses Lubega of sleeping with any lady he wished. In our interview with him, Mbuga says, "the main reason we split was about his conduct around women." Mbuga reports his initial doubts concerning the accusations until he got 'unquestionable proof.' He says he tried to talk to Lubega and asked him to marry for four years, all in vain. When this failed, Mbuga says he confronted Lubega, "and that was when he cut me off."¹⁷ The rift grew until the Mbuga and Lubega painfully parted ways but with drastic consequences. Mbuga tells us of some marriages torn to shreds when husbands and wives chose allegiance to Phaneroo or CHM over their spouses. With this rift, Phaneroo proceeded as an independent ministry.

was said against Phaneroo in some of these meetings lacked substantial evidence, the sessions yielded little to no fruit. The unintended outcome was the split of CU. But these issues persistently outlived Beatrice, so the Dean of Students, Kabagambe, summoned Audrey to explain. Audrey held meetings with student leaders on both sides, and these meetings included Canon Geoffrey Byarugaba, the then chaplain of St. Francis, Batte, who oversaw missions, Amos Turyahembe, and some University Patrons. Bruno reports that other meetings included Pastors whose Churches are near campus, such as Fred Watante of Full Gospel Church and Micah Rwothomui of UCF, and leaders from Africa Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE). There was also a meeting between Audrey, John Ekudu (then Dean at MUK), and Isaiah Mbuga around 2015.

¹⁷ In his recent interview in Nairobi, Mbuga accuses Lubega of engaging in ritual sex for power. One would suspect that Mbuga says these things out of spite. Maybe. But we have heard similar accounts from other sources. Isaac and another witness narrate a story in Boston of Lubega's sexual involvement with a lady, Brenda, and her cousin, whose mum lives in Georgia. Isiko also narrates a story during the 2014 MUK CU handover involving a "Mama" who ruined the handover after finding out that her boyfriend, Lubega "was in bed with her two friends." Isiko tells of another story at a Youth Convocation in Mukono around 2014/15 of two girls who had taken Lubega's name. Isiko says he pulled one of the girls aside (a new convert who knew him) and warned her to be careful not to be sexually involved with Lubega. But the girl looked at him and replied: "he only loves the two of us, (and) we don't mind sharing him." These stories are a few of the many which may lend credence to Mbuga's account.

PHANEROO'S ETHICS

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

As at MUK, Phaneroo didn't start independently at Uganda Christian University (UCU). Mbuga, a lecturer there and founder of CHM, started a fellowship nearby. Though we can hardly trace the beginning of Phaneroo's influence, the chaplain says that their *Manifest Fellowship* began around 2015-16. CHM existed at the campus by 2013/14 when students wished to have 'evening glory.' Dr. Rebecca Nyegenye, the then chaplain at UCU, notes how with permission, the students began to meet at 'Tech-Park.' Not long, security guards expressed concern as others grew suspicious of the movement's teaching. The chaplaincy then invited them to hold their fellowships at the Thorny Croft Chapel for easy supervision. (UCU chaplaincy is responsible for the students' spirituality). Nyegenye notes that for most meetings, prayer was central, with Lubega and Mbuga as the main facilitators, even when the evening glory turned into overnights.

But concerns forced the chaplaincy to explore the movement's 'skewed' doctrine. Nyegenye notes that students busied themselves with overnights and fellowships and that their busyness negatively affected their academics. Some students opted out of school as they were taught that God would give them jobs without qualifications. The students—the majority Anglicans—stopped appearing at the chapel and crossed to Mbuga's fellowship, then at the Mukono prayer mountain. Yet, others remained to 'bind' and 'cast out demons' from those who prayed at the chapel since Phaneroo adherents saw such to be unbelievers.

Nyegenye reports that Fellowship leaders, popularly called 'Papas,' "were so demanding," asking their female counterparts, the 'Mamas,' to wash, cook, and even stay at their place. They could do so since, as Nyegenye notes, the movement taught that Christians do not need to repent since they are not sinners.¹⁸ Also, Phaneroo's followers held that they don't fall sick or die; they are gods. Nyegenye recounted a day when the chapel had a concert, and one of the students fainted. The chaplain called a clinic to take him. But the adherents dragged him to a corner and demanded him to "confess that you don't fall sick, confess that you cannot die." The chaplain forcefully sent the boy to the clinic, to their angry protests. Another story is told of a lady so sick that she vomited blood but rejected visiting a doctor, claiming that doing so shows a lack of faith.

As in MUK, the chaplain, and Reverend Emmanuel Mwesigwa, then assistant chaplain, note how Phaneroo adherents were disrespectful, chaotic, and defiant. They misused lecture (and other) spaces. So, the chaplaincy closed their fellowships. Yet, they persisted until the university dismissed them from all university premises.

¹⁸ Isiko was a High School Patron (at Namirembe) for one of the two ladies at UCU whose pornographic video leaked to the media. When Ivan reached out to her (after the school's director informed him), she told him: "pastor, where I am coming from now, it's different. For us we are under grace. Grace gives me liberty. What I am doing is not exactly the same thing my spirit does." For her, her act was a sin of the flesh that had nothing to do with her spirit.

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

The current chaplain at Makerere University Business School (MUBS), Reverend Aaron Batte (chaplain from 2018), suspects that Phaneroo was at the campus by 2013. Both Batte and Abraham, then a Student Leader, note how Phaneroo penetrated MUBS through the CU and recruited key leaders in the CU so that “even the Chapel members were consumed.” Worship team leaders¹⁹ and the then vestry team leader joined Phaneroo. The chaplain says that their then-titled 'Grace Conferences' garnered a following under disguise. Batte and Abraham separately note that these conferences, fellowships, and street preaching led to a sharp decline in the students' academic performances even as some began writing exams in 'tongues.'

Batte notes that with MUBS CU infiltrated, the relationship between the CU and Chaplaincy got complex due to the former's doctrine and conduct. Rev. Francis Osire, the assistant Chaplain at MUBS, reports how Phaneroo followers claimed that the chaplaincy was under them and only submitted to Grace Lubega. Phaneroo started Manifest Fellowship, which Abraham notes was stopped by Rev. Kenneth—who was chaplain of St. James Chapel before Batte—and Osire.²⁰ Batte reports inviting the General Secretary Christian Union and the former 'Papas' of the MUBS CU, who then met with the then leaders of the MUBS CU, but to no avail.

It is reported that confusion and divisions continued until the Principal and his Deputy convened a meeting that expelled Phaneroo from MUBS, prompting Phaneroo to hire a premise in Kataza outside MUBS. But since the school could not dismiss the students belonging to Phaneroo, the movement kept operating under CU. Meanwhile, both Batte and Abraham report incidences of sexual immorality²¹ where some Papas invited Mamas to sleep at their residences. When confronted for their immoral behavior, these papas and mamas told the chaplain that they were 'mentoring' and 'caring for' one another. Abraham cites a prayer secretary who claimed to “mentor” his successor, a lady, who left Berlin Hostel to cohabit with the secretary. The two still subscribe to Phaneroo, though Abraham is unsure if the lady graduated after dodging classes. Abraham notes the connection between Phaneroo's teaching and the lifestyle of its followers, who, for him, want teachings that allow them to smoke shisha, drink beer, and abort²² without remorse.²³

¹⁹ Osire reports that worship leaders would only show up at St. James Chapel at MUBS to sing but refused to attend any other church activity to demonstrate their superiority over the Chapel.

²⁰ In our interview with him, Osire collaborated the account from both Batte and Abraham. Osire provides even more details of Phaneroo's infiltration of the CU, their insubordinate and violent behavior against the chaplaincy and the university administration, and how Phaneroo's dealings disorganized the university programs and lectures. In addition, he notes that some students couldn't continue their studies, including a daughter of “a very important personality in this country.” Having joined Phaneroo, the lady, almost entering her final year, didn't see the need to continue with studies, apparently “because souls are perishing, she needs to go and preach the gospel.” The mother who knew the Dean of Students asked her to intervene, but the Dean failed to convince the lady to resume school and left.

²¹ Stories of sexual immorality among leaders also surface at Uganda Martyrs University—Nkozi. Amos, the CU chairperson, notes how his predecessor “was in a couple of relationships.” Amos confirmed that his predecessor slept with many girls at Nkozi without remorse.

²² We noted how abortion stories appeared at MUK's Afro-Stone Fellowship. Isaac reports of Ken, Fellowship leader at MUK, who told Isaac that the ladies were told to abort, and to do so “to the glory of God” because “pregnancy does not glorify God while at school.”

²³ Osire mentions one lady, a youth leader at St. Luke Ntinda, who decided to join Phaneroo against the advice of the church leadership. A 'certain guy' from Phaneroo wanted to sleep with her. The lady and some Phaneroo

KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

Reverend Emmanuel Mwesigwa, chaplain of Kakumba Chapel since 2013, notes how Phaneroo started at Kyambogo University about 2012-13 as *Shofar of Grace* and as in other campuses, it was under CHM. Phaneroo infiltrated Kyambogo's Christian Union (KCU), which is interdenominational. The chaplain notes the prominence of Lubega, then representative of CHM, who was almost the sole preacher during CU fellowships. Naturally, the students who did not belong to CHM raised concerns about Lubega's dominance. This concern resulted in tension within the CU as Phaneroo attendees aggressively wanted to control KCU. Mwesigwa notes a time when almost all members of the CU committee were Phaneroo members, contrary to CU guidelines, until FOCUS (the governing body of CUs) intervened and disbanded that committee.

Mwesigwa reports that Phaneroo and the chaplaincy's first conflict was when the former organized the 'Third Heaven Conference.' The chaplain said Phaneroo falsely advertised their meetings using KCU banners pinned across the campus. The university requires any event to have permission from the Dean of Students through the chaplaincy to avoid disrupting lectures or university activities. But Mwesigwa reports that the students refused to listen but defiantly continued their conferences and large weekly Wednesday fellowships. Some of these meetings required loud public address systems—producing a noisy environment akin to Africa Hall's chaos which was uncondusive for lectures or study. Such disruption caused lecturers to raise concerns. Because these meetings were unauthorized, the university alerted security to disband them. But Phaneroo instead shifted to North Hall, another university venue and in defiance, continued their activities. Such remained a running battle until the university entirely expelled their organized fellowships from campus.

Beyond defiance, the chaplain notes cases of sexual immorality and abortions. He notes that such sins were sanitized because those engaged in such activities insisted that their lifestyle had biblical justification. Mwesigwa mentions that their teaching on sinlessness and 'free grace' made students careless and irresponsible. Academically, the chaplain narrates a story of a brilliant young girl, a friend, and a Phaneroo member who missed graduating as she was neither reading nor submitting her coursework on time. But with the chaplain's guidance, she re-sat her exams and graduated a year later. For Mwesigwa, such is not an isolated incidence, as cases of students writing their papers in tongues also surface.

ST. LUKE CHURCH, NTINDA

Rev. Alex Bwambale, a former Youth Pastor at St. Luke Church, states that he has known Lubega since Alex's university days at UCU. He speaks of Lubega as a fiery preacher passionate about missions, a person of whom the then UCU chaplain, Canon (Frederick Jackson) Baalwa, spoke highly.²⁴ When Lubega graduated and started work, his relationship with Alex remained—though distant. But one day in early 2014, one youth at St. Luke attended Phaneroo and asked Alex to invite the preacher, who, unknown to Alex, was Lubega. At this, Alex invited Lubega to preach a series in the

members went to Eastern Uganda for mission one time. There, the same guy tried to rape her. Osire reports that this lady "survived by a whisker," thus leaving Phaneroo and returning to St. Luke.

²⁴ Alex Bwambale reports being the chairperson Christian Union at UCU at that time.

Youth Fellowship. Since Alex knew Lubega from before, he took off Thursday—the fellowship day—to do marriage counseling for an out-of-town couple.

Alex had not bothered to attend and did not know what occurred in the fellowship until the last day when he passed by to 'hear what the man was teaching.' He entered as Lubega was stressing how "*with faith nothing is impossible.*" Lubega said: "*in our fellowship, a young man is getting married soon, but the girlfriend is HIV positive.*" Naturally, the audience gasped. Lubega responded to his audience's gasp by telling them that they lacked faith. Lubega then added: "*this young man believes that the moment he gets married to this girl, she will be healed.*" At this, the pastor pondered what his people fed on in his absentia.

Meanwhile, Alex mentions that strategically, Lubega had 'moved with his gang' from other places (like UCU) who had come to 'recruit' from St. Luke's Church. These youth 'hijacked' the church's Youth Facebook Page and used it for their purposes. It then became apparent to Alex that Phaneroo had penetrated their whole fabric. A youth leader soon left, and more followed. Then parents observed a difference in how their children conducted themselves. Some youths reminded their parents that they are more spiritual, and others outrightly called their parents 'religious' and derided them for not understanding 'the things of the Spirit.'²⁵ As elsewhere, they insisted that they were not sinners and could not fall sick. Some were honest enough to tell their parents that they found a new fellowship that 'meets their needs.' Strong opposition and disobedience ensued for those whose parents tried to stop them.

Beyond forbidding Lubega from returning to St. Luke, the church organized a series to counter and clarify what Lubega had taught, teachings that had taken root, especially among the youth. Cloe, a former Youth Leader, also cites the church's effort to involve more young people in the liturgy.

Let's end this account with a story that Alex narrates about a young person he had pastored, whose close relative (call her Loyce, not real name) returned from Phaneroo after a considerable struggle. The young man was concerned for Loyce's participation in Phaneroo and began a bible study at his home. Despite warnings, Loyce remained with Phaneroo until her close friend was raped "by somebody very close in the leadership circle of the movement." When the matter was reported, Alex says that the top leadership rebuked the victim, saying, "this man of God cannot sin. If anything happened, that was his flesh, but you cannot accuse him."²⁶ It was then that Loyce's ears opened, prompting her to leave Phaneroo.

Having discussed Phaneroo's ethic at campuses and churches, we should return to Mbuga's other claim, in his recent Nairobi interview, that his assistant "got involved with other spiritual entities and started using powers that I don't understand." In the next section, we inquire whether Phaneroo is a cult or an occultic.

²⁵ Jason mentioned how his relationship with his family deteriorated since joining Phaneroo in 2012. Jason saw his parents as lost people who needed conversion. Many of our interviewees identify with Jason's experience.

²⁶ Grace Lubega, (Accessed April 27, 2022), *Love Constrains Us: Regard No Man After The Flesh*, says: "we do not judge men according to what they do in the flesh." See <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/love-constrains-us-regard-no-man-after-the-flesh/>. In another sermon he adds: "don't judge people's love for God by their actions."

IS PHANEROO AN OCCULTIC CULT?

The leader of a cult exercises an almost irresistible power over his followers. Through his charisma, he is able to command unquestioning obedience over every aspect of the member's life and reserves the right to alter the cult's rules and beliefs at will. In some cases, the leader claims to be God. From the time a member joins, the cult is to be his or her real family. Frequently cult members refer to the leader as 'Father.' The natural parents, sisters, and brothers are rejected. Contact with them is sometimes allowed in order to raise money from them, and also with a view to 'saving' them too by bringing them into the cult. Cult members are taught that the end justifies whatever means are required to complete the cult's mission as interpreted by the leader. So, not surprisingly, systematic deception is a typical cult tactic. The follower's fear of being rejected is exploited by the group for the purpose of control. Rejection may simply involve being treated as an outcast. Sometimes it can take the form of threats about, for example, being damned to hell or being destined to reincarnate as a worm or an insect. Members believe that there is no hope of salvation outside the cult, which claims to provide the only answer to humanity's problems. Outsiders are considered lost, evil, even satanic.²⁷

Lubega's rise to fame is marked by his teaching, which, as we will see, can be termed as "cheap grace."²⁸ The prosperity gospel message, his unprecedented media presence, bottom-top mobilization, and eloquent oratory skills have made Phaneroo a sensation in a short time. As a charismatic individual, he naturally draws followers to himself. Charisma, though, tends to come with temptation for a cult-hero status. Such cult heroism commands loyalty and obedience, which Lubega does not shy away from demanding. In the *Submission to Ordinances* message at MUK based on Romans 13:1, Lubega tells a story of a lady who died for not heeding his spiritual authority. Lubega narrates how he met the young lady and began to disciple her but claims that the lady was insubordinate to his authority, despite the moral and financial support Lubega provided her. He says this lady was 'prophetically gifted' so that as she "grew in the gift," she also grew in insubordination to the 'man of God.' In the story, this lady falls sick and ultimately dies. Lubega suggests that:

this young woman did not die of sickness. Not because of disease. Of course, the doctors will say she died of disease, but that's not really what killed her. I knew when she was going to die that she was going to die. Apostle Emma picked it and told me that the girl is going, we had not even known she was in the hospital, and after a couple of weeks after intercepting her, she died... that was a loss; we lost her, you get it? A wonderful minister of the gospel, a wonderful gift to the kingdom of God, she died... it was so sad. And all I could go back was, she had an opportunity to make the right decision, and it was very simple, listen to your spiritual authority" (Minute 29-30).

While many are dying in one sphere for lack of knowledge, there are those who are dying because they don't submit wholly to what is revealed.²⁹

For Lubega, one's failure to submit to his authority as a 'spiritual father' leads to death. In this Research, we have spoken to people afraid that their life is in danger after leaving Phaneroo, and thus, the story Lubega narrates above is not isolated. A former

²⁷ Louis Hughes, "Cults and Cultism," *The Furrow*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (June 1993), 352-358

²⁸ According to the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., INC., 1949), 47 "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

²⁹ Grace Lubega (Accessed April 9, 2022), *Look and Live*, <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/look-and-live/>

Phaneroo attendee spoke of Lubega's ability to 'steal' or 'pick your spirit,' a code word for taking your life. Another narrates how she narrowly escaped death, or what she mentions as ritual sacrifice. For her, the closer you are to Lubega, the more likely you may be sacrificed. In the leaked audio recording, Mbuga notes how (Phaneroo) "tried to get rid of me by killing me, because I was going to tell the story that they didn't want to hear." One interviewee's text read: "I am a bit sick since I talked about him [Lubega]. I am living in fear."

According to Lubega, for those who do not die, not submitting to him may hinder them from certain spiritual realms.

You must ask the ultimate question, "Who is my father?" The answer is not in how he dresses, how he walks, or even in how he preaches. It is in who he is in spirit and the mark of distinction upon him that eternally links you to him. Herein is the power of submission and understanding who your spiritual authority is in the spirit realm... Unless you are truly submitted and have understood his identity in spirit, some realms will never bow to you.³⁰

From the above, submission to Lubega is crucial if his followers are to enjoy salvation. He is the 'link' to their success, eternally here on earth. Biblically, of course, the 'eternal link' that matters is Christ. But from the above quote, Lubega believes he has a lasting relationship with his followers. In a sense, Lubega mediates his followers' relationship with God and determines whether they access God or not³¹ or die or live. During the Q&A session for *Phaneroo's 7th Anniversary* in August 2021, Lubega asserts that submission to his ministry is a covenant by which he shapes the destinies of his spiritual children. For Phaneroo, Lubega is what his followers should be, and thus the ministry emphasizes the need for its disciples to imitate him since "he is the message that he teaches."³² In a sense, then, receiving his message is receiving him.

Lubega assumes the 'spiritual father' role over all the movement's members. They are his spiritual children who are submitted to him and his vision. Achen, a current Phaneroo member, says that to submit is to closely follow Lubega's 'revelation about God,' to tithe and give their 'first fruits' to Lubega himself. Lubega's followers call him 'Papa' with spell-bound reverence,³³ many dreading to mention him without title lest undesired costs follow. Among those who left, there is deep dread that he hears them 'in the spirit' when they speak about him.³⁴ According to a witness, Lubega himself says to his followers: "if you talk about me, I will know because I am a spiritual man."

³⁰ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, September 15). *Phaneroo Devotion: The Glory of the Mantle*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-glory-of-the-mantle/>

³¹ Joseph, a former devil worshipper who claims to know and is known by Lubega from their meetings in Muyenga before and after Lubega begun Phaneroo, mentions that the Phaneroo's emphasis on devotionals and their sermon material is to have Lubega as the sole authority and mediator between the members and God. Many former faithful tell us of the emphasis placed on devotionals and Phaneroo sermons. Joseph claims that Satanists did this to prevent followers from reading the bible for themselves or discover biblical truth apart from the devotionals.

³² Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, July 07). *About Phaneroo*. <https://phaneroo.org/about-apostle-grace-lubega/>

³³ See *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary* Q&A session with Zac Mutyaba and Modestar Sweeney.

³⁴ Lubega, in *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary*, 108:55-109:22 confirms this: "I can literally feel every man watching right now—in the spirit. I can literally feel every family that is seated in that home. I can literally feel the effect of every man listening or watching. Sometimes you have crusade or meetings, [and] I can tell when a crusade a stadium is filled, I can tell it, I can tell it, coz you feel every life coming in." Lubega, (Accessed April 9, 2022), *The Increase of Knowledge*, says: "I have had spiritual experiences. I have been carried by the spirit and attended meetings." <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-60-of-the-increase-of-knowledge/>

Many witnesses say Lubega summons submission in dreams or “in the spirit” for good or ill.³⁵ Lubega ‘imparts his spirit’ to those he chooses.³⁶ Phaneroo’s website notes that Lubega has “laboured to reproduce his spirit in many.”³⁷ Such impartation or ‘reproduction’ begins as an initiation into submission.³⁸ Based on his plans for you, the initiation can be through objects like watches or otherwise.³⁹ Those who experienced this ‘initiation’ report feeling strange power and out of control, as if Lubega had total influence over them.⁴⁰ One former Phaneroo leader says that such people sit in the

³⁵ We should not be surprised when we hear that Lubega visits many of his followers in dreams. Grace Lubega, (Last Accessed February 17th, 2022), *The Renewal of the Mind: Transformational Power*, argues that “when you constantly apply your mind and spirit to the Word, it propels you into celestial (out of body) experiences.” See <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/renewal-mind-transformational-power/>. Also, Lubega, (Last Accessed March 26th, 2022), *The Spirit Man*, argues: “when you dream of a sister and in your dream, you see them die and then you pray about it until you avert death, that is service with your spirit.” <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-spirit-man-1/>.

³⁶ In *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary*, 122: 25-, Lubega asserts that “part of the assignment that the Lord laid on my life was the fathering of men.” For Lubega, stage of one of his fathering is for his spiritual children to imitate him. “Imitation of the spirit is very important coz without imitation, you cannot have an identity. You cannot define identities where there are no imitations. And you cannot define commitments where there are no identities.” As his spiritual children imitate him, they receive impartation from him. “If you receive FROM a minister of God, you receive graces pertaining to your destiny. This is the essence of spiritual impartations” (emphasis his). See Grace Lubega, *How To Receive From Ministers Of God-1*, <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/how-to-receive-from-ministers-of-god-1/>. Lubega, (Accessed May 10, 2022), *Understanding Spiritual Success*, argues that impartation occurs “when we imitate what is spiritual as opposed to what is physical.” <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/understanding-spiritual-success/>

³⁷ Phaneroo, (Last Accessed February 17th, 2022), *About Apostle Grace Lubega*. <https://phaneroo.org/about-apostle-grace-lubega/>. Joseph, the former devil worshipper, says that what often happens is an impersonation of sorts. The attendees are not themselves and do things they would otherwise not do in normal life because they no longer control their lives. One interviewee told us that someone would impersonate her and invite her family to Phaneroo. Peace also noted how her mind would go blank, forgetting other things in ordinary life, which was uncharacteristic before joining Phaneroo. Henry, also a former attendee, speaks of how Phaneroo’s followers’ guards are lowered so that people cannot think for themselves by being there. In the footnote below, we will see Lubega himself calling this confused state of mind “spiritual maturity.” Henry notes that while in Phaneroo, it was easy for him to be deceived. Isaiah Mbuga speaks of Lubega’s followers running mad, getting depressed, and committing suicide in the leaked audio recording. Mbuga’s account seems to be public knowledge among several Phaneroo followers and ex-members.

³⁸ Grace Lubega, (Accessed May 10, 2022), *Laying on of Hands*, tells his followers to “[n]ever be too proud to receive impartation from a man or woman of God. Honour the anointing of God upon His ministers because you can only receive from what you honour.” <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/laying-on-of-hands/>

³⁹ Joseph, a former devil worshipper, tells us that such initiations exist among Satanists, reserved for a few, those whom the leader identifies as gifted enough to be his ‘fellow gatherers of people.’ Dr. Nyegenye told us of a lady at Uganda Christian University who deliberated about this initiation with Phaneroo but later decided otherwise. Peace (not real name), one of the original members of Afro-Stone Fellowship from which Phaneroo emerged, also hinted at initiation into submission in our interview. Yet another, whose name we withhold speaks of being initiated with a watch that Lubega gave her through Zac Mutyaba and knows at least seven more who were initiated this way. Common among those we interview is the word “witchcraft,” with some thinking what happens at Phaneroo is akin to witchcraft while others thought it’s deeper. Rev. Alex recalls a text from a young lady concerned that her long-time friends acted weird. When the lady described her friends’ behavior and the dreams she had of them, Alex “realized that the friends might be into an occultic society, but they are also enticing this person to join.” Alex sent this lady a video of a particular South African ex-devil worshipper who formerly posed as a Pastor. The lady responded that she could recognize what the video described from what she would see when she attended (Phaneroo) Fellowship. Another ex-devil worshipper, Jamil, tells his participation in Phaneroo’s Thursday meetings, not as an antagonist, but as someone at home. You can watch Jamil’s testimony here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ruP4OoC8SE.

⁴⁰ Lubega continues to argue in *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary* (Minute 125:10-125:27) based on John 21:18 that the identity and commitment ‘in the spirit’ means that “when you are old you shall stretch forth your hand and another man shall guide thee and take you places you will not go.” Lubega calls this “a committed life” where “you have no choice, you will serve (and) go wherever the man or woman of God wants you to go. That’s a mature person.” Lubega asserts that submission to ministry is a covenant through which he shapes the destinies of those committed to him. He speaks of a responsibility he has “as a father to pray for all that are submitted to me *a certain way*” and adds that those covenanted to Phaneroo “become part of you.” For Lubega, his spiritual children are connected to him by “the feeling in their heart, and that which connects you to them is the revelation of your heart.” Thus, for

fellowship's front row to 'carry [the apostle's] spirit.' To carry the apostle's spirit is to agree with Lubega, be in complete harmony, and speak in Lubega's absentia.⁴¹ To submit to Lubega as a spiritual father is for him to take over your life and to be and 'shape your destiny.'

Meanwhile, as the substance of Phaneroo's doctrine,⁴² it is reported that no one can contradict his word or offer suggestions on how things run. Pejo (not real name) says that "it's a culture around (Phaneroo) to fear (Lubega). He listens to nobody." Recall that the CHM letter cited "a deliberate refusal to heed godly correction" as one of the reasons for the split. Lubega's word is so final that Phaneroo's devotionals tend to carry more weight than the Bible. Members are encouraged to listen only to Phaneroo messages, whether videos or audio or devotionals. Pejo says that Lubega tells them: "don't mix seed. You don't listen to any other man of God."⁴³ There are unconfirmed reports, at least from two sources, that before Prossie died,⁴⁴ she told her friends that Lubega warned her that "if you ever see God in any other man of God other than me, I will bow to you. Because none is better than me." Lubega supposedly said this after learning that Prossie joined Pastor Ben Ochola's Fellowship. Jason, who joined the fellowship in 2012, says they were discouraged from attending "fellowships of religious people" (those outside Phaneroo's influence) "because you people are Pharisees."

We already noted reports of Phaneroo adherents' arrogance at college campuses. Former members report accusations of ignorance against those who ask for clarity about Phaneroo's teaching. To ask is to not be 'in the spirit' or lack 'mysteries' or 'revelations' or not to be 'deep enough.'⁴⁵ To pursue understanding is to be carnal, for members should not use their minds to think carefully about what is said. They must believe. The things of the spirit, it is said, are grasped, not reasoned. So, those who do not understand pretend to know lest they don't fit. The same goes for those who are sick or financially broke. One cannot disclose their state without being scolded for lack of faith and negative confession. For Phaneroo, those who don't "receive their miracle" choose their condition.⁴⁶ But many people live with their heartache and unfulfilled promises. Phaneroo's yoke crushed many who bleedingly crawled from its claws—suffering dissociation, identity crisis, and feeling used, abused, and manipulated. Or, as Mbuga says, many run mad, get depressed, and commit suicide.

those live streaming Phaneroo, Lubega claims to "pick their feeling" as they pick his heart and imitate him. When such imitate him, they surrender control of their destinies to him as their spiritual father, something he sees as the mark of spiritual maturity and commitment.

⁴¹ Joseph says that Satanists call this: "okwambala akammwa k'akitaawo," meaning "wearing your father's mouth," so that you speak and act as he does. As we noted on Phaneroo's *About Apostle Grace Lubega* section and *Phaneroo's 7th Anniversary*, Lubega's goal is to reproduce himself in his followers who walk, and talk like him.

⁴² Refer to Phaneroo's *About Apostle Grace Lubega* section on their official website.

⁴³ Grace Lubega, (Accessed March 29, 2022), *Of Seed and Bread*, claims that "Christians end up mixing seed because sometimes the wrong bread convinces them that the seed is right." He argues that "Some men have the right bread but the wrong seed." See <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/of-seed-and-bread/>

⁴⁴ Proscovia, or Prossie, headed the team that transcribed Lubega's sermons and crosschecked Phaneroo's social-media content. She had suffered from sickle cell anemia until Lubega 'cured her.' Prossie died mid-June 2021 of what seems to be a blend of sickle cells, malaria, and COVID. She became, as we hear, an example to the 'faithful' of what happens if they left the movement.

⁴⁵ Phaneroo 117 Sermon, (Accessed May 10, 2022), *In His Presence* argues that "All is manifest in us; this is not a present continuous state of learning, you are learned. Just believe it." See <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-117-sermon/>

⁴⁶ Phaneroo, (Accessed May 10, 2022), *Who Hath Believed Our Report?* asserts that "Christians are poor because they want to be poor." Visit <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/who-hath-believed-our-report/>

Rita, a former Phaneroo member, narrates how the idea of 'spiritual father' blends with their legalism to a damning end. "When Lubega preached on first fruit, it seemed like you are not prospering or growing in your life because you ate God's money," she says. "Or there is something you are left to do to grow." Rita wanted to 'do the right thing' to receive her 'prosperity,' so she tried to save for her 'breakthrough' gift to the 'man of God.' But Lubega personally rebuked her, saying it was dishonorable for him to be a spiritual father if she had no 'reasonable' money. Rita recounts that sometimes Lubega spoke of how he had a burden to 'pray for my children.' "But," he would add, "it becomes hard if my children don't honor me." From guilt, Rita took a loan which she gave as a 'first fruit' to Lubega personally. Yet she wrestled with inadequacy and felt she couldn't meet God, except via Lubega.

Tags like '*yagudde*,' '*not deep*,' '*no faith*,' and '*unspiritual*' haunt former Phaneroo members. It is reported that for the Phaneroo faithful, those who have 'fallen off' are not worth following up. 'Why would anyone leave?' Relationships are broken as members see their departing friends as heathens. One witness tells us that Phaneroo teaches that only they have the gospel, and only they are walking in the will of God, for, Lubega has seen what no other Christian ministries ever saw.⁴⁷ The adage is that God is doing something great on the earth with Phaneroo at the center.⁴⁸ Thus, to leave Phaneroo is to leave the will of God, to forsake the gospel. This explains why many fear leaving the Fellowship. Yet, despite the claim that they alone have the true gospel and are exclusively God's instruments for redemption, some confess their confusion about what the gospel is.

As we conclude this section, we note that Lubega still seems to haunt those who left. Many former members declined to speak with us in fear of aftermaths, believing that the *apostle* was present amidst them. They dread incurring his wrath or curse if they 'speak ill' of 'the man of God.' Such ones believe that their 'spiritual father-son/daughter' relationship lurks in the shadows and don't want to endanger their lives — or salvation. But they are wounded, bitter, confused, angry, and afraid. They need help but do not know where to turn. They know that while many Ugandan pastors don't identify with Lubega publicly, they privately express their reverence for him. Thus, to those who left Phaneroo, the whole space is like a room haunted by a ghost or spirit—Lubega's spirit. Some do not attend church anymore—they simply cannot.

⁴⁷ Phaneroo, *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary*, Min 105:47-106:03 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWT2z9eOJP4>

⁴⁸ Phaneroo, *Phaneroo 7th Anniversary*. Minute 96:00-96:16.

PHANEROO'S DOCTRINE DISCUSSED

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR DISCUSSING PHANEROO'S DOCTRINE

If a tree is known by its fruit, it indeed becomes necessary to delve deeper into Phaneroo's doctrine that lies behind its behavior which we just discoursed. Doctrine grounds ethics as right-believing begets right living. This Research section analyzes Phaneroo's teaching. It assesses the movement's teachings considering biblical and historical Christian instruction on Christ (Christology), humanity (anthropology), and salvation (soteriology). We also provide a biblical and historical consideration of Phaneroo's prosperity gospel. The doctrinal discussion below is an uncompromising, courageous, yet brotherly commitment to equip and resource Ugandan Church leaders and parents with lifetime tools to fulfill the Great Commission's call to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded" (Matt: 28:20).

WEAR YOUR CHURCH HISTORY LENS

We earlier discussed the significance of Church History for understanding the ideas we hear or hold. A key to understanding Phaneroo lies in our knowledge of one ancient movement called *Gnosticism*. Gnosticism (from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning knowledge) emphasized deep knowledge or revelation over sanctification. It held a hierarchy between spirit, soul, and body, thinking the spirit was the nobler and the body the baser of the three. As such, it looked down on the body and material reality. Gnosticism conceived salvation primarily as deliverance from ignorance, which they considered the fundamental human problem instead of sin. Gnostics taught that every one of them is Christ, of the same nature and origin as him and that humans are divine stars or aeons who descended from and return to the spiritual realm. They taught that Jesus and Christ are not the same, but Jesus was the earthly man, while Christ was heavenly.

For each section that we explore, we will discuss Gnostics and their beliefs that have metamorphosized into Phaneroo's teachings. If we understand Gnosticism, we will quickly evaluate Phaneroo's ideas, for nothing is new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). As it turns out, Phaneroo's 'deep revelation' is nothing but what the Church already tried, tasted, and trashed. We invite you to wear your Church History lens as we delve into doctrine.

COMMENCING AT CHRISTOLOGY

At the heart of every departure from Christian orthodoxy is a fundamental parting with the central teaching about Christ. We often find that a move from understanding Christ's nature and works consequently pulls all other doctrines out of proportion, for "in him, all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). When the apostle Paul argues for the superiority of Christ as the pattern and object that is central to Christian belief, he means that everything rises and falls on him. It thus made sense for us to begin our discussion of Phaneroo's doctrine with their view of Christ, also known as Christology. We will see how Phaneroo's view of Christ shapes their idea of the human person's nature, salvation, and the Christian teaching on life in this broken world. We assess Phaneroo's doctrine about Jesus Christ, considering what the Church and the infallible Scriptures have always taught about Jesus—the Christ.

PHANEROO'S CHRISTOLOGY

Central to the discipleship journey is Jesus' question to his followers: 'But who do you say that I am?' (Mk. 8:29). To be a disciple is to ask, 'who is Jesus' and 'what does it mean to follow Him?' The reader of the Bible will notice that people had different ideas about Jesus' identity. Some thought of him as 'John the Baptist; others say, Elijah; while others, one of the prophets' (Mk 8:28). But Jesus, turning to the disciples, asked them who they thought he was. To this, Peter responds, "You are the Christ."

In Mark, Jesus' response to Peter is a surprisingly strong warning, charging the disciples to tell no one. Mark uses the same verb in 1:25, 3:12, 4:39, and 9:25 for Jesus' rebuke of demons and waves. We might rightly wonder why Jesus issues such a stern reprimand to Peter—and all the disciples. Hadn't Peter indeed identified Jesus as the Christ? Wasn't he right? He surely was. Yet Jesus reproved Peter because his response was both partial and distorted. Peter's hopes of who Christ ought to be colored his understanding of who he was. The response was distorted—because Peter sought a Christ who must not and cannot suffer. Indeed, Peter rebuked (the same verb) Christ when the latter spoke of his looming crucifixion (8:32). Partial—because he saw Christ as only human, even though Jesus' works revealed him as divine. Peter, and all the disciples, couldn't configure how Christ could be God-Man. But their discipleship, like ours, depended on the proper knowledge of who Jesus is. Is he only like us, or is he both like and unlike us?

A few years later, the Seven Ecumenical Councils sought to clarify the answer to this question, given the prevalent distortions and heresies of their times. Most of these distortions were Gnostic. Gnosticism—and Docetism disdained physical nature and denied Christ's coming in the flesh (1 John 4:1-6). Gnosticism manifested itself in various forms, which we will consider shortly. But against these distorted and partial presentations of who Jesus is, the early Church sat. For the Church, Christ's identity—or who Christ is—determines whether we can be saved or not. As God and Man, Jesus reveals God to us and shows us what it means to be human. A proper view of Christ determines whether we know God or even ourselves. "But who do you say that I am" is thus not merely Jesus' rhetorical question because our salvation depends on its answer. Having said this, we must ask: who does Phaneroo say that Jesus is?

PHANEROO: JESUS AND CHRIST ARE NOT THE SAME

Nestorianism was an early heresy that led to the Councils of Ephesus (431 A.D) and Chalcedon (451 A.D). Nestorius, an Archbishop of Constantinople, separated Jesus Christ into two persons. He taught that Jesus was a man to whom the divine Word (*Logos*) joined himself. Jesus is not God the Son. Nestorius held that the *Logos* and the man — Jesus — were so united as to be considered 'one.' If you asked him who Jesus was, he would answer that he is a man, descended from David, born of a virgin. But to Nestorius, Jesus is not God the Son. Nestorius famously rejected the idea that Mary is the 'Mother of God' scoffing: "Does God have a mother? A Greek without reproach introducing mothers for the gods!"⁴⁹ Nestorius saw Jesus as a 'temple' within whom God the Word dwelt, or was 'incarnate.'⁵⁰ That is, in as much as one would think Jesus Christ is one person, for Nestorius, the one we see is Jesus, the man who is indwelt and exalted by God. Nestorius insisted that:

⁴⁹ Richard A. Norris Jr. *The Christological Controversies*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980. Page 124.

⁵⁰ Norris, *The Christological Controversies*, 125

A creature did not produce the Creator. Rather she gave birth to the human being, the instrument of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit did not create God the Logos. Rather, he formed out of the Virgin a temple for God the Logos, a temple in which he dwelt. Moreover, the incarnate God did not die; he raised up the one in whom he was incarnate. He stooped down to raise up what had collapsed, but he did not fall.⁵¹

Nestorius saw in Jesus Christ two persons, one heavenly—God the Logos, the other earthly—Jesus, the man. To Jesus' question, "who do you say I am" Nestorius might reply, 'who should I say is asking?'

But Nestorius' teaching was Gnostic, for Gnostics separated Jesus from Christ, seeing the one as earthly and the other as heavenly. The 2nd century Church Father Irenaeus of Lyons reports how the Gnostics:

maintain that the baptism of the visible Jesus was unto remission of sins, but the redemption of Christ who descended upon Jesus was unto perfection since they suppose that the former was ensouled but the latter spiritual.⁵²

Now Jesus, inasmuch as he was begotten of the Virgin by God's action, was wiser and purer and holier than all men. On him Christ, united with Wisdom, descended; and thus, was formed, Jesus Christ.⁵³

Many of Jesus' disciples, the [Gnostics] assert, did not realize that Christ had descended on him. Still, when Christ had descended on Jesus, Jesus began to work wonders, to heal, to announce the unknown Father, and publicly to acknowledge that he himself is the Son of First-Man.⁵⁴

We see how the Gnostics taught that Jesus and Christ are two persons, not one from the above. They saw Jesus as human, earthly, and fleshly, but Christ as spiritual and heavenly. Some held that this 'Christ' descended upon Jesus when John baptized him.

Phaneroo teaches what the Gnostics taught. About the difference between Jesus and Christ, this is what Phaneroo preaches:

Christ also went through some things, and at some point, he found himself praying to go against the will of the Father. (But) that was not Christ praying, that was Jesus. Who understands what I am saying? Jesus prayed that way, not the Christ. The Christ knew what was happening, hallelujah. But Jesus wanted to live. Jesus wanted to be like any other man: grow up, have children, and have a good life. But, the Christ could not allow the Jesus. Who understands what I just said?⁵⁵

And again, in *Christ the Ultimate Reality* (P298, minute 37:18), comment on Col 3:4:

[We] appear *with Christ* [emphasis his], with the manifestation, and I love that (Paul) didn't use the word Jesus, but he used Christ, which is the anointed One, the spiritual form of this word.

And again:

⁵¹ Norris, *The Christological Controversies*, 130

⁵² St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 1*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt, John J. Dillon, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans. Dominic J. Unger, 55th ed., vol. I, Ancient Christian Writers (Mahwah, NJ; New York: The Newman Press, 1992), 77–78.

⁵³ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 101.

⁵⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 101.

⁵⁵ Grace Lubega. *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. January 9th, 2020, Minute 25:50. Compact Disc.

All the disciples of Jesus Christ knew Jesus, but they never knew the Christ. The Christ can appear to you, and you will still not know him.⁵⁶

Phaneroo, like the Gnostics and Nestorius, sees Christ as spiritual and Jesus as earthly and fleshly. Jesus is from below, encumbered by earthly desires to marry and have children and a good life. For Phaneroo, Christ is the heavenly 'anointed one.' We must know that there are other areas where Phaneroo uses 'Jesus' and 'Christ' or 'Jesus Christ' interchangeably. Such cases would not be unlike when Nestorius speaks of Christ as being God and Man, or of 'God incarnate' even when he still means by this that Jesus is a man to whom God the Son is joined. When Phaneroo speaks of Jesus or Christ or Jesus Christ, the reader or hearer must discern whether the spiritual or the earthly is in view.

Like Nestorius, Phaneroo sees Jesus as a person indwelt by God. In "*Permission To Tempt* Devotion, we read:

God also "allowed" the temptation of Jesus to prove to the devil that what was in the Christ was above corruption.

Notice that it is not Jesus who is said to be above corruption, but rather *what was in the Christ*. We should wonder whether Phaneroo interchanges Christ with Jesus here. But here, Phaneroo sees Jesus as a man indwelt by the incorruptible. In addition to Jesus not being Christ, he is not so much God, but a person indwelt by God. To the question 'who do you say I am,' Lubega might ask: 'and who do I say is asking?'

But the early Church asserted that Jesus Christ is one Person, God the Son. The Bible insists that Christ was Jesus (Acts 18:5, 28; Jn 20:31). The first ecumenical council of Nicaea affirmed that Jesus is "of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."⁵⁷ It was this 'God of God' who "for us, men, and our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man."⁵⁸ That is, Jesus is not two persons with one indwelling the other. And he is not a man indwelt by God. Instead, Jesus is the eternal God who—in time—became human yet remained God. As the fourth ecumenical council of Chalcedon affirmed,

this same one Lord of ours, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, we acknowledge to subsist of and in two substances unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the difference of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the proprieties of each nature being preserved and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not scattered or divided into two Persons, nor confused into one composite nature; but we confess one and the same only-begotten Son, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, not one in another, nor one added to another, but himself the same in two natures—that is to say in the Godhead and in the manhood even after the hypostatic union: for neither was the Word changed into the nature of flesh, nor was the flesh transformed into the nature of the Word, for each remained what it was by nature.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, October 18). *Phaneroo Devotional: The Revelations of the Christ*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/the-revelations-of-the-christ/>

⁵⁷ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Nicene Creed," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Henry R. Percival, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 3.

⁵⁸ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Nicene Creed."

⁵⁹ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Letter of Agatho and of the Roman Synod of 125 Bishops," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Henry R. Percival, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 340–342.

Cyril of Alexandria, too, wrote a response to Nestorius thus:

It is not the case that, first of all, an ordinary human being was born of the holy Virgin and that the Logos (i.e., the Word) descended upon him subsequently. On the contrary, since the union took place in the very womb, he is said to have undergone a fleshly birth by making his own the birth of the flesh which belonged to him.⁶⁰

That is, Jesus Christ, who eternally is God, did, in time, for us and our salvation, become a man without ceasing to be God or enjoying the privileges of the Godhead. The Church did not distinguish or separate Jesus from Christ as Phaneroo does, as though these are two persons presented as one. Jesus is the Christ without difference or separation. The two names refer to one historical figure, the Son of God and the Son of Mary. There is no 'the Christ' who desires what 'the Jesus' does not want, for there is no Christ but Jesus of Nazareth alone. The Bible and the Church teach that Jesus Christ is God the Son made human for us and our salvation. In Jesus, God and Man are one, without separation or mixture. Without separation, so that we may know that God and flesh are united in Christ without the divine consuming human nature. Without mixture, so that we may know that Christ's human nature is neither divinized nor turned into something other than human. The reader must move slowly here. How God and Man are one in Christ is crucial for understanding Phaneroo's teaching regarding the believer's nature and position before God. To this claim, we now turn.

PHANEROO: CHRIST IS A DIVINE STAR AS US

Gnosticism's chief tenet was its conception of Christ, not so much as the One who saves us from our sin but as an example of how to escape from ignorance. To them, Jesus is like us, a big brother of sorts. As our brother and one of us, he shows us our inherent potential as aeons or divine sparks or gods. This potential, according to Gnosticism, was hidden from our minds. Ignorance, not sin, is our main problem. We became ignorant when we fell away from the spiritual realm into the material and earthly world. Accordingly, we used to live in the spiritual realm, each one of us. But we fell away and pursued worldly things. Then we became ignorant. Yet we did not lose our potential, and Christ thus comes from above to teach us what we are capable of and who we are. Christ is like us, an aeon—a divine star or spark. He comes to lead us from the earthly realm to the spiritual realm, where we rule as sons of God. In so doing, we see that we are Christs, divine sparks, and gods. Again, venerable Irenaeus says this about the Gnostics:

They say that in this manner, the Aeons (divine sparks) were made equal in form and mind since all became Minds and all Words and all Men and all Christs.⁶¹

Wherefore, some of them advanced to such a pitch of pride that they claim to be like Jesus; others even claim that they are more powerful than Jesus; some again assert that they are superior to his disciples, as, for instance, Peter and Paul and the rest of the apostles. They claim that they are in no way inferior to Jesus. Really, their souls, they claim, descend from the same sphere, and because in like manner they hold in contempt the makers of the world, they have been deemed worthy of the same power and return again to the same place.⁶²

The Gnostic conception of Christ and themselves is that they both descended from the same place, sphere, or realm and returned to this place. We will explore this concept further under the doctrine of man (anthropology). But the Gnostics taught that they

⁶⁰ Norris, *The Christological Controversies*, 133.

⁶¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 27.

⁶² St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 88.

previously dwelt in heavenly places before getting earthly. And Christ came to show them the way back as the champion who blazes the trail back to the spiritual realm from where both he and believers came. Phaneroo teaches the same. Consider, for example, the following from *Man from Above*:

The superstar [Jesus] returned above, and the moment he reached heaven, he said, 'Apostle Grace, go down on earth and show them.' I came the day I got born again. The moment I entered the tabernacle, the angels told me, 'Welcome to the world of men.' I am not ordinary. I am from above.

You are from above. When you 'tabernacled' into this earthly body, something about you changed. That is why we move in another realm, why I can know things before they happen. I am from above. I live in a realm that is much faster than the devil.

And again

We were walking at a certain place where we once were not because of the lust of this world but then because of the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, we were separated, and now John writes and says that you are 'of' God, not you are 'for' God.⁶³

We, too, as children of God, are stars (Deuteronomy 1:10) and come in the likeness of that one star, Jesus.⁶⁴

God is not a soul. He is a spirit. The Bible says that he created them in His image and likeness. That means that they were spirits, but they were held in heaven, waiting. The first man, who is Jesus, said, let me give you a sample, and he came into the body, healed the sick, cast out devils, did all these kinds of things, and said, 'it is for your good that I go. Why? Because I have just shown you a sample.'⁶⁵

Phaneroo sees Christ as a divine spark that came from the spiritual realm as an exemplar and brings the knowledge of this mystery to those who receive it.

But the Bible does not teach that Jesus Christ is a divine spark among the many. It insists that from the beginning of all things, Jesus is God the Word (John 1:1-5), who belongs to his class alone. *Monogenēs* (μονογενής, 9x in NT), a word often translated as 'begotten' or 'only' (John 1:14, 18, and 3:16), speaks of someone in their genre alone. The term pertains "to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship" (BDAG).⁶⁶ John uses *μονογενής* five times (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) to refer to Jesus' unique relationship with God. Jesus is in a class of his own regarding his sonship relationship with God. His sonship belongs to its own genre. The Bible never uses *μονογενής* for a believer's sonship. It never does. To say that Jesus is a divine star like us, as Gnostics and Phaneroo teach, is not to know Jesus or ourselves. Unlike us, Jesus is God the Son, and we are all his creatures.

⁶³ Phaneroo. (2016, May 27). *Phaneroo 89 Sermon: Of God*. <https://www.phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-89-sermon/>

⁶⁴ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, October 20). *Glorious Stars*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/glorious-stars/>. In his devotion titled *The Course of Your Star*, Lubega adds that "Every Born-again Christian is a star. Because you are, the day you were born, God allocated men to bless you. You are the star that appears to the wise like the sun gives light to the day. And that light is the Word of God." See Grace Lubega, (Accessed 2021, February 21). *The Course of Your Star*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-course-of-your-star/>

⁶⁵ Phaneroo. (2015, October 29). *The Man from Above*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/the-man-from-above/>

⁶⁶ This word occurs nine times in the NT. Other than the five times it's used of Jesus, it is used in Lk 7:12 for a widow's "only son of his mother," in Lk 8:42 for Jairus' "only one daughter," in Lk 9:38 of a man from the crowd who begged Jesus to cleanse "my only child." Heb. 11:17 refers to Isaac as Abraham's "only son." Though Abraham has Ishmael, Isaac was a unique son in a class of his own, being Abraham's only son of promise.

PHANEROO: CHRIST IS A PRIMARY EXAMPLE OF OUR POWER

Phaneroo's devotional *Permission to Tempt*⁶⁷ presents Jesus as an exemplar of how to overcome. "Jesus did not pray for Simon not to be tempted," Lubega argues, "He allowed the temptation to prove Peter's strength." For Lubega, the temptation of Jesus is an example for us. And the goal of the temptation, he says, is for our inherent strength to manifest. Jesus was tempted so that *what was in the Christ* may be found incorruptible. So, we, too, are tested for the same reason.

The Bible does not say that Jesus' temptation speaks of our inherent strength. Instead, Jesus's temptation identifies him with both Adam and Israel, as One able and worthy to save the sons of Adam and bring about a renewed Israel that is faithful to the promises of God. Recall how Satan tempted Adam and forced his expulsion into the wilderness (Gen. 3). Satan also tempted Israel during the wilderness wanderings. So, Jesus, the last Adam, and faithful Israel appears in the wilderness, tempted by the same Serpent. But while both Adam and Israel fail their temptations, Jesus overcomes them, proving himself as greater than Adam and Israel. Jesus' temptation shows him to be God who binds and robs the strongman (Mk 3:27) and Man who overcomes on behalf of those joined to him by faith. Jesus' temptation is not an example for us to know how strong we are but a reminder that only he is both God and true Adam; therefore, only he can save humanity from the sin that temptation brings.

But Phaneroo does not say this. Instead, it sees Christ's temptation as an example for us to realize our potential. Phaneroo does not see Jesus Christ as God and Savior but as a big brother who comes to show us who we are. The above is not an isolated incidence. Phaneroo also says that Jesus walked on water to show us what we can do.

He (Christ) did not walk on water for them to know that he was a man of God. He walked on water because he wanted to teach what it means for a man to walk by faith and defy the laws of the earth.⁶⁸

But the Gospels say nothing of this sort. In Mark, for instance, Jesus walks on water to show that he is the God of Israel who makes a way in the seas. Isaiah 43:1 opens with YHWH comforting terrified Israel amidst raging waters (43:2). The Lord, the 'I am' (Isa. 43:10), calms his people, promising protection against rough rivers and waters. In Isa. 43:16, YHWH introduces himself as one "who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters." Mk 6:47-48 shows the disciples as terrified Israel amidst the raging sea and Jesus making a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters. Jesus, in his self-disclosure as YHWH, comforts his scared servants and says, 'I am' (Mk. 6:50), claiming for himself the identity of the God of Israel.

What terrifies the disciples is that they had thought of Jesus as one of them. 'Perhaps they thought he may be doing some extraordinary things, but he is like us. Like Nestorius, the disciples thought of Jesus as a man who had a great relationship with God. So too, Phaneroo saw in this example what it would be like to return to the realm of the gods and rediscover our identity. But Jesus essentially says to them, "be comforted, I am YHWH, who creates and commands the sea and waves." Thus, the disciples ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mk 4:41). Neither did Jesus tell them 'see your ability' nor did the disciples see it that way. Jesus

⁶⁷ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, November 14). "*Permission*" to *Tempt*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/permission-to-tempt/> and also "*Permission*" to *Tempt 2* via <https://www.phaneroo.org/devotion/permission-to-tempt-2/>

⁶⁸ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, October 6). *Phaneroo 101 Sermon: The responsibility of Prayer*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-101-sermon/>

didn't walk on water to show us how to do it or our potential. He walked on water as proof that he alone is God.

Phaneroo's claim that Christ's nature is like ours leads them to equate him to the born-again person like the Gnostics.⁶⁹ We see Phaneroo's conception of Christ as a regenerate man in their sermon *The Lord Is Good* based on Mark 11 and Matthew 21. For them, Jesus is God's Son in the same sense that believers are sons of God. Lubega remarks:

It's not in the consciousness of the son of God to walk to the fig tree, and it doesn't have fruit in the name of "It's not its season"... The tree thought it would relate with Jesus as a Son of Man. But He wasn't. That's why He answered it. That means that spiritually the tree refused to respond to a regenerated man, to the divine order... Even in this fallen world, these living things are still conscious of the sons of God. The tree wanted to submit the son of God to the patterns of men of the flesh. (Min. 22-26)

Lubega says in another devotional that

Your spirit was formed not out of the dust of the ground but out of the God substance. What does this mean to your life? What the Word can do, you can do; what the Word overcame, you overcame.⁷⁰

The subtle switch from Christ to the 'regenerated man' suggests that the believer is like Christ. We see the same in the insistence that we are of the same 'spirit stuff' as Christ. To Phaneroo, the difference between Christ and believers concerns his secret knowledge of operating in the higher realm. He knows how to function from another dimension due to his 'oneness' or 'union' with God. From Christ, we learn the secret of transcendence or otherworldliness, of moving from the lower plane 'of the flesh' to the upper spiritual domain. The upward movement is necessary since, as we mentioned, in Gnostic thought, humanity fell from the spiritual plane due to its participation in material or earthly reality, drifting in ignorance. But Christ came to show us dominion over material existence, as one of us. It follows then that as created nature submitted to Christ, so does it to us. "Everything that was created is in submission to the sons and daughters of God" (Min 27).

Now, of course, whoever reads the story of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree must be aware that the fig tree historically and prophetically symbolized Israel's nation (Isa. 28:3-4; Hos. 9:10, 16; Mic. 7:1; Joel 1:7; 12). Read in context (e.g., Mark 11), Jesus' symbolic cursing of the fig tree was a warning to Israel's religious and temple establishment (cf. Hos. 9:16). Mark 11:1-33 is an intentional chiasm—a poetic literary structure. Verses 1-11 narrate Jesus' first and sudden temple visit. Verses 12-14 are the fig tree's cursing, while 15-19 is the second temple visit (cleansing the temple). Then, verses 20-26 narrate the withered fig tree, while 27-33 is the third temple visit. You see how Mark sandwiched the 'fig tree' on either side by Jesus' temple visits and his debate with the temple authorities. By this, Mark means that Jesus is YHWH incarnate, who has suddenly come to his temple and found no fruit to eat.

In Malachi 3:1, the Lord promises to send his messenger ahead of him, and "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." Mark 11 reveals the sudden coming of YHWH to his unprepared people, which incurs their judgment. Just as the

⁶⁹ See also Phaneroo: *When Divinity is Provoked* via <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/when-divinity-is-provoked/>

⁷⁰ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, November 12). *The Phaneroo Devotion: Word Begotten*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/word-begotten/>

fig tree had a veneer of vitality yet without fruit, the Jewish temple institution had the semblance of devotion to God devoid of fruit. And just as the fig tree dried up to the root (Mk 11:20), so will Israel's religious system be soon uprooted when Jesus dies. Jesus's act revealed his nature as the God of Israel, not how nature obeys believers.

But Lubega says nothing about the actual meaning of the text. Rather than speak of who the text reveals Christ to be—the unique God of Israel, what Lubega sees in the text is Phaneroo followers' power over nature, with Christ as an exemplar. He does not see YHWH's sudden coming on earth in human form, in Christ. To him, Jesus is a man who shows us what we are capable of if only we were well-aligned. In this framework, Jesus is not God who has become human as much as a man indwelt by God, who shows us the way to ascend to the higher plane from where we fell. What we need is not for God to come down but an older sibling to lead our way up into spiritual realms where we once dwelt, exercising power over nature.

PHANEROO: CHRIST = ME

The claim that Christ equals me flows from and is inseparably intertwined with what we discussed above. We saw the Gnostic roots of Phaneroo's idea that we are 'stars and come in the likeness of that one star, Jesus.' This idea assumes that we are all aeons, or divine sparks emanating from the divine One. You may recall that the Gnostics taught that "the Aeons (divine sparks) were made equal in form and mind since all became Minds and all Words and all Men and all Christs."⁷¹ It is no wonder that Phaneroo routinely teaches that its followers are all Christs. Consider the following

(God) entered Christ and all the attributes of Christ He gave them to you, power, money. Christ = Me.⁷²

There is a place where a man needs not redemption. If that man is perfectly in love, he becomes as I AM; the Christ does not need redemption.⁷³

The Father wants us to understand that we are one with Him in the same way that Christ is one with Him.⁷⁴

But imagine! Think about it for a moment! You are one with God like Christ is one with Him... no one can tell the difference between you and the Master anymore because He is very much alive inside you. It is with this very confidence that Christ says, "if you have seen me, you have seen the father." So, it is with you. If they have seen you, they have seen the Father. If they have seen you, they have seen Christ! Hallelujah!⁷⁵

As with Gnostics, Phaneroo sees no difference between the believer and Christ save for the fact that Jesus is our 'head' and shows us the way. But as far as nature (and in some instances, personhood) is concerned, Phaneroo sees no distinction. Jesus is as we are, or to cite their famous verse, 'as he is, so are we' (1 John 4:17). After twisting the similarities between Christ, Phaneroo concludes that its followers are Christs without a difference. "No one can tell the difference between you and the Master anymore,"⁷⁶ insists Lubega. Because, for Lubega, you are the Master.

⁷¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 27.

⁷² Phaneroo: *Before you were formed in your mother's womb, I knew thee*. 7th November 2019. Minute. 35:27

⁷³ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, January 29). *The Way of the Lord: A Love that Surpasses Knowledge*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-70-sermon/>

⁷⁴ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, January 10). *One with God*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/one-with-god-2/>

⁷⁵ Phaneroo. *One with God*.

⁷⁶ Phaneroo. *One with God*.

Phaneroo uses 1 Jn. 4:17 and Acts 9:4 as prooftexts. But these two verses could not possibly mean that Jesus and the believer are the same and without distinction, as Phaneroo claims. The reader of 1 John 4:17 must note that the text doesn't speak about our nature. John talks about those perfected in God's love, evidenced by their love for one another (1 Jn 4:16). As far as we love one another, we have no fear on the day of judgment because we abide in God's love. Our love for one another shows that we abide in God's love which is self-giving and aimed at our salvation. To stay in God's love is to be as Christ is. Being the Father's beloved, Christ showed his love by coming and dying for us. John teaches that those who lose themselves in service of others are like Jesus in this regard. John is not saying that you are Christ.

Acts 9:4 (cf. 22:7; 26:14) speaks about Paul's persecution of the Church as that against Christ. Here, the Church, not individual believers, is in view. This distinction is crucial since no single individual is the Church. As an extension of Christ's mission on earth, the Church is figuratively his body and purchased possession (Acts 20:28). Whoever persecutes the Church persecutes Christ. The text is not saying any believer is Christ. Instead, Christ means that whoever attacks what belongs to him attacks him. In life, anyone who harasses my child—even chicken—because of me harasses me. It does not follow that my chicken and I are one (person) or indistinguishable. It merely means that malice directed at my purchased possession is malice against me.

But Phaneroo uses 1 John 4:17 and Acts 9:4 to teach that we are inseparably Christs by nature and personhood. Yet as we saw, the Bible's use of monogenēs concerning sonship with God sets Christ apart from anyone else. Besides, Phaneroo's view distorts the whole biblical witness that Christ is distinctly God, and we are not. Phaneroo erases the Creator-creature distinctions and falls into pantheism (believing everything is God). If what Phaneroo teaches were true, there would be no salvation for us. We would then be absorbed, consumed, and destroyed out of existence. As mentioned earlier, our salvation depends on whether Jesus is God and we are not. If He is not God, and I don't mean in a Nestorius way (in which Jesus is a man united to God as to be regarded as God), then he cannot save us. And if we are him, who is it that he saves, and who is the 'he' who saves?

Phaneroo would hold to Jesus' divinity. 'Of course,' they will say, 'he is God.' But Jesus is as God as you are. As Nestorius taught, Jesus is God by his union with God. As such, he receives our worship because, as Nestorius says,

I revere the one who is borne because of the one who carries him, and I worship the one I see because of the one who is hidden. God is undivided from the one who appears, and therefore I do not divide the honour of that which is not divided. I divide the natures, but I unite the worship.⁷⁷

Phaneroo teaches that as Christ is united to God and is thus considered God, so is the believer God by his union with God through Christ. For Phaneroo, you are God, with his nature, being, as Gnostics say, a divine spark, an emanation from him.

If someone needs to know the glory of God, there you are. The days will come when men say, 'show us Your glory,' and then we appear.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Norris, *The Christological Controversies*, 130

⁷⁸ Phaneroo. *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. Minute 03:11.

When (people) ask where God is, just stand up straight, chin up, chest out and present yourself because this is the mystery that was hidden from the ages past but is now revealed, Christ in you, the hope of glory.⁷⁹

You are the lord from heaven. You come with the spirit of lordship.⁸⁰

The distortion between creature and Creator is evident in Phaneroo's conception of Christ and what it means for us to be united to him. It does seem that Phaneroo confuses our union with Christ with sameness as him. Phaneroo presupposes that our being joined to Christ makes us Christ. It assumes that our union with God makes us God. Such misconception makes Phaneroo teach that

He is in you; you are in Him; His thoughts are your thoughts; His plans are your plans; His convictions are your convictions... you have God's mind pertaining everything.⁸¹

One member of Phaneroo remarked on one of my Facebook posts: "As he is, so am I. If any planet needed someone to die for them, I would volunteer. I qualify." In the mind of at least many Phaneroo followers, there is no difference between them and Jesus. Some might affirm that they are more powerful than he was. (And if you recall, for Grace Lubega, Jesus was himself earthly, encumbered by desires to marry and have children). As to being more powerful than Jesus, Phaneroo subtly rebukes those who claim 'Jesus, we are comfortable with doing what you did.' To these, Lubega thinks, Jesus says, 'no, you do not get it. These things that I have done, you shall do more because I go to the father.'⁸² Recall what Irenaeus said of the Gnostics:

Some of them advanced to such a pitch of pride that they claim to be like Jesus; others even claim that they are more powerful than Jesus; some again assert that they are superior to his disciples, as, for instance, Peter and Paul and the rest of the apostles. They claim that they are in no way inferior to Jesus.⁸³

Irenaeus' tone tells us that such teaching is distorted, dangerous, and unchristian. It is heretical. The early Church convened to wean out such worthless words and proclaim the apostolic truth against arrogant Gnostics. And God calls the modern Ugandan Church to do the same, to stand for the truth against the lie that magnifies mankind and diminishes deity. But we need to note that when Phaneroo claims that "No one can tell the difference between you and the Master anymore," they mean that Christ and believers are no longer human but have shaded off their humanity and become eons, divine stars returning to their spiritual realm. If Christ is an eon that came to show us how to discover ourselves, and if he is an example of how this is done, it logically follows that Christ is no more human. To this claim, we now turn.

PHANEROO: CHRIST IS NO LONGER HUMAN

*Christ in the flesh is no more. Now, we regard the Spirit of Christ, and His Spirit can only be known through revelation because revelation is the eyes of the Spirit.*⁸⁴

Gnosticism disdained the physical world. It looked down on the body and the 'God of the Old Testament' who created it. The Gnostics taught that 'man is a spirit; he has a

⁷⁹ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020, December 10). *The Experiences of the Word*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-72-sermon/>

⁸⁰ Phaneroo. *The Man from Above*

⁸¹ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2020 October 1). *You have the mind of Christ*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/you-have-the-mind-of-christ/>

⁸² Phaneroo. *The Man from Above*

⁸³ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 88.

⁸⁴ Phaneroo. *The Revelation of Christ*.

soul and lives in a body.' They saw the spirit as superior, the body/flesh as inferior, and the soul as in-between the spirit and the body. Irenaeus of Lyon reports that the Gnostics taught that:

There are, therefore, three elements. First, the material, which they also call the left-handed, and which they say must necessarily perish, inasmuch as it is altogether incapable of receiving a breath of incorruptibility. Second, there is the ensouled element, to which they also give the name right-handed. Inasmuch as it is between the spiritual and the material, it will go over to that element to which it has an inclination. Third, the spiritual, which has been sent forth that here below it might take on form, having the ensouled element as a consort and having been disciplined together with it in conduct. And this spiritual element, they say, is the salt... and the light of the world.⁸⁵

Irenaeus continues concerning the Gnostic teaching that:

(Christ) did not take on any material element since the material substance is incapable of receiving salvation. The consummation will take place when every spiritual element has been formed and perfected by knowledge. The spiritual element is the spiritual persons who possess the perfect knowledge about God and have been initiated into the mysteries of Achamoth (God), and they assume that they themselves are these.⁸⁶

The Gnostics are saying that the body or physical reality is beyond salvation. We will explore this concept more under Phaneroo's understanding of salvation. Suffice it to say, for now, that Phaneroo, just like Gnostics, sees no hope for the flesh/body. (In this write-up, the *flesh* is not used as a moral category to mean carnality or sinfulness but to indicate physical substance or existence). Phaneroo's idea of the descent of Christ and believers assumes that we existed in heaven apart from the body. That is, like Gnostics, Phaneroo believes that we are pre-existing spirits. And as we are, so is Christ, who too was a spirit before entering a body.

As a child of God, you existed in eternity, live for a particular time span on the earth, and will return to eternity.⁸⁷

Even that which we would regard in the flesh because he was perfect would have been Christ, but the Bible says that "yet we know him henceforth not" in the flesh because he is no longer in the flesh. He is back in the realm of the Spirit. Paul calls that the spirit of Christ. He is roaming; he is present; he's with us.⁸⁸

Phaneroo reckons that death freed Christ from his body. As such, Jesus is no longer human. For Phaneroo, Christ's coming was not to save human beings but to destroy humanity, freeing the divine sparks to shine and ascend to the spiritual realm. Thus, Phaneroo teaches that:

God came in the inside of you, and everything that made you a human being was quenched, eaten up. Only Him remained in the inside of you. Even your own will was swallowed up (Phil 2:13). You don't have a will but that which is the will of God. You can't will differently. He entered you, and everything that was human was eaten up.⁸⁹

If God's goal was not the salvation of humanity but its consumption, according to Phaneroo, it follows that 'the star' or 'champion,' that is, Christ, has led the way. So,

⁸⁵ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36.

⁸⁶ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36.

⁸⁷ Phaneroo. *Predestination*, July 28, 2017.

⁸⁸ Phaneroo. Phaneroo 7th Anniversary. Minute 134:30-

⁸⁹ Modestar Sweeney. *The Purged Conscience*. March 19, 2019, Minute 21-22. Compact Disc

'Christ in the flesh is no more.' That is, we can no longer consider Christ as God and Man since the human aspect of his life is no more. Only his spirit exists.

But there are many issues with such an understanding of 2 Cor 5:16. The first is that 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches the opposite of what Phaneroo insinuates. Here we read: "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Notice that 'human' or 'man' is an unqualified modifier of Jesus as mediator. That is, unless he is human, he cannot represent us. The lack of a past tense verb in that verse refutes Phaneroo's idea that Jesus is no longer human. Jesus, as a mediator between humans and God, is still *the man*, that is, human. His resurrection was bodily—for his divinity required no raising since divinity does not die.

The second problem with Phaneroo's claim that Jesus is no longer human is that the Christian hope consists of the body's future resurrection. Paul assures us of this. Against Gnostics who denied the goodness of the body, Paul insists that Jesus rose bodily as the basis of our future resurrection. Paul notes in 1 Cor 15:13-14:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain

Romans 8:11 also grounds our future life in the body in Jesus's past resurrection. Jesus, who as 'God of God' was made man 'for our salvation,' was also for our hope raised as human. In the resurrection, God glorifies physical reality without consuming 'everything that was human.' Yet if, as Phaneroo teaches, God quenches everything human in us, then God is not our Saviour but our destroyer. If 'Christ in the flesh is no more,' then God does not love or save humans. For what sort of salvation destroys the object of its redemption? Such would suit the Gnostic god who never made the earth and all its fullness, a god who cares less if the world dissolves to nothingness.

We can still object to Phaneroo's teaching yet another way. Upon his rising from death, Jesus purposefully presented himself to his disciples, not as a 'spirit' but as a human. In Luke 24:39, speaking to unbelieving disciples who thought he was only a spirit, Jesus says to them

See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

In 24:36-37, Luke reveals how Jesus' abrupt physical appearance to the enclosed disciples startled them, causing them to conclude that he was a spirit. Jesus questions their doubt. Based on some Jewish traditions, the disciples cast bodily resurrection to the end of the world. Thus, the disciples concluded that Jesus could not be 'known' as human anymore after his death which they witnessed. Jesus, to remove their unbelief, showed them his hands and feet. He then proceeded to ask for food and broiled fish which he ate in their presence. He insisted that what they see, Christ risen from the dead, as a human, was what the Old Testament foretold. The claim that death ends Israel's Messiah's humanity is pure conjecture and unbelief. The idea that Christ is no longer Man proceeds from a lack of understanding of God's salvation plan and story through Jesus Christ.

As noted, Phaneroo uses 2 Cor 5:16 to teach that Jesus is no longer human. But on scrutiny, that's not what the text is saying. As Mark A. Seifrid clarifies,

To "know according to the flesh" is to know according to the practical judgments of human reasoning. It is to know according to the human wisdom that regards the cross, together

with the apostle who bears it, as foolishness (1 Cor 1:18–25). Human knowledge and judgment, based as they are on outward appearance, cannot see into the "heart" where God works through the Gospel (v. 12). "Knowing according to the flesh" correspondingly entails an estimation of others that furthers personal advantage. These two aspects of "knowing according to the flesh"—the insufficiency of human knowledge and its self-seeking nature—are bound together.⁹⁰

2 Cor 5:16 is not saying Jesus is no more human as he was when he walked this earth. It does not suggest that his humanity ceased and was consumed by his divinity or spiritual existence. Instead, the text says that we, as believers, do not know him according to human wisdom that is selfish, worldly, and finite. We do not rely on our human wisdom to know God, but we grasp Jesus as the Spirit through his Word reveals him. Our mode of knowing Jesus, not his nature as human, is in view.

Another passage Phaneroo uses to teach the doctrine above is 1 Cor 15:45: "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." And 1 Cor 15:50, "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."

In 1 Cor 15:45, we must see that Paul relies on Ezekiel 37:6-14 to reveal Christ not only as human but as divine, granting life to all those joined to him through his resurrected body. We recall that Paul's argument in the chapter is to say that Jesus is not merely 'spiritual' but has a resurrected body. Here, Paul insists that while the first Adam received life from outside himself, the last Adam has life within himself, which he gives to believers. The very name *Adam* means *Man*. In calling Jesus *Adam*, Paul is undoubtedly identifying him as human, but the One who brings the Genesis creation to its God-desired end. Indeed,

Christ is the one who brings about the consummation of the story of creation by bringing humanity from the state in which it has found itself under Adam's leadership to the state that God has had in mind for it since the beginning.⁹¹

Thus, contrary to Phaneroo, 1 Cor 15:45 does not deny Christ's resurrected existence as a human being.

Next, if we do not take 1 Cor 15:50 from its context, we would notice that Paul argues that God's final victory against death is the resurrection of our bodies. If physical beings do not survive the grave, then death has won. But Paul rejects this by insisting that death is defeated because Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Death did not destroy 'everything that was human' in Christ, and it will not do the same with us. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner help us understand what Paul means by 'flesh and blood':

The combination *flesh and blood* is a Jewish idiom for a human being with a "strong emphasis on ephemeral character, shortsightedness, and moral weakness" or "in contrast to gods." The two clauses seem to have a nearly synonymous relationship, suggesting that the ephemeral character of human life is foremost in mind in the reference to *flesh and blood*. Taken together, the two clauses imply that *perishable* humanity (*flesh and blood*) cannot inherit the *imperishable kingdom of God*.⁹²

⁹⁰ Mark A. Seifrid, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2014), 247.

⁹¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 820–821.

⁹² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 828.

Ciampa and Rosner are saying that for Paul, the mortal or short-lived nature of the body or 'perishable' humanity cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, until it is transformed. But it is the body changed, not destroyed or consumed, as Phaneroo teaches. Paul insists that just as seeds germinate with new forms, so do our bodies. They don't cease to exist; they change. Therefore, the claim 'Christ in the flesh is no more' is a distorted understanding of Scripture. Just as with the Gnostics, it stems from Phaneroo's disdain for the body and matter. But Christianity holds that Jesus is God made man for us and our salvation, forever. That is, there shall be no day when Jesus is not human, just like we will eternally be human, resurrected as we shall be.

CONCLUDING PHANEROO'S CHRISTOLOGY

Phaneroo fails on many accounts when it attempts Jesus' question, "But you, who do you say that I am?" Like the disciples before the resurrection, it misconstrues the nature of Jesus, seeing him as no more than believers. Phaneroo fails to distinguish the Savior from the saved. It misses the inescapable natural gulf between the Creator and all creation. By blurring the lines between God and us, it misconstrues who Jesus is. Also, Phaneroo cannot tell the distinction between Christ's humanity and divinity. Rather than see Christ as the eternal Son of God who became man in time, it divides the natures into two persons, claiming Jesus and Christ are not the same. In so doing, Phaneroo teaches what the Gnostics taught.

Phaneroo further misunderstands what the resurrection of Jesus means, claiming that Christ is no longer human. It teaches this based on a misinterpretation of first Corinthians 15:45, 50. But these texts, taken in context, do not teach that Jesus is not human anymore. Instead, they insist that Jesus, the last Adam, is life-giving because his body belongs to none other than the Giver of life. As the risen Lord, he will oust corruption from those united to him, having defeated death.

Yet, Jesus' question, 'who do you say that I am?' is not to Phaneroo alone. It is to us all. We, individually and as local churches, must respond to it. Who do we say that Jesus is? Sadly, most of us have never settled down to think about the identity of Jesus clearly. Such lack of clarity about Jesus' identity fosters heretical views that Phaneroo holds and teaches. If we can't think biblically and be aware of historical theology, we must not be surprised when heretical novelty surrounds us.

Having considered Phaneroo's Christology, we now seek to discuss its view of humankind's nature, also called anthropology.

PHANEROO'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Diminishing Christ to our level displaces him as the center of all things. The result of shifting Christ from the center is that, as Protagoras—that ancient Greek humanistic philosopher—concluded, man becomes the measure of all things.

But we do well to remember that God, not humanity, is the measure of all things. We are encircled by humankind's civilization in which humanity worships itself and its works. Idolatry, biblically speaking, is when we un-God God. Listen to sermons and speeches, see the billboards and the books, and uncover the center of our conversation and convictions. You will know that we have made ourselves the measure of all things. And the worst form of man-centeredness is worshipping ourselves in the name of God. We have focused on the dots in the universe and forgotten the whole medium that grants the dots their existence. We have magnified the marginal and marginalized the magnificent. A distorted understanding of humanity deforms our knowledge of God. Christianity holds that God is the center of his world. God's glory is more desirous than man's glitter.⁹³ Jonathan Edwards notes:

[God] had respect to himself, as his last and highest end, in this work; because he is worthy in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison of him. All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.⁹⁴

God does everything for his glory, and his ultimate commitment is to himself. And therein lies our security. God loves his glory above all:

For my name's sake, I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise, I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off... For my own sake, I do it for my own sake, for how should my name be profaned? My glory, I will not give to another" (Isa. 48: 9, 11).

Because God pursues his glory in everything he does, our presentation of the gospel must, above all else, be God-centered. John Piper asks why it is crucial "to be stunned by the God-centeredness of God." He then answers:

because many people are willing to be God-centered as long as they feel that God is man-centered. It is a subtle danger. We may think we are centering our lives on God when we are really making him a means to self-esteem. Over against this danger, I urge you to ponder the implications, brothers, that God loves his glory more than He loves us and that this is the foundation of his love for us.⁹⁵

We explored Phaneroo's conception of Christ and its response to Jesus' question, "who do you say that I am?" We noted that correct thinking about Christ is vital to our knowledge of God and ourselves. Next, we assess Phaneroo's teachings on what humanity is. What does Phaneroo think humanity is?

⁹³ DeVern F. Fromke, *The Ultimate Intention*. Pickle Partners Publishing: 2016, Page 20

⁹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Create the World*, in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 140, 242.

⁹⁵ John Piper. *Brothers We Are Not Professionals: A Pea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013. Page 6

PHANEROO: MAN WAS A PREEXISTING DIVINE STAR FROM ABOVE

Gnosticism got its philosophy from ancient Greeks, especially Pythagoras,⁹⁶ Socrates, and his student Plato. It stressed ‘deep revelation’ as a path to God and self-discovery. According to the Apostolic Father Justin Martyr,⁹⁷ Gnosticism found its way into the early church through Simon Magus or Simon the Magician (Acts 8). After Stephen's murder, Philip the Evangelist went to Samaria, Simon's hometown. Upon seeing the wonders Philip did, Simon superficially believed, later offering to buy the Holy Spirit's gifts from the Apostles (Acts 8:14-24). Accordingly, Gnosticism grew through various teachers in the early church, and John's letters refer to some Gnostic teachings of his day, to which we will later turn. Notable Gnostic teachers were Carpocrates, Marcion, Valentinus, Ptolemy, and Marcus.

The Gnostic conception of God/Deity was pantheistic. They believed that ‘everything emanated from God and shares in his divine nature. Pantheism holds that *all is God* or, as Gnostics taught, everything has a piece of the divine spark in them, humanity included. As divine sparks or stars moved further away from the center, they lost more of their divine goodness. One of the divine sparks which fell away, Sophia (Wisdom), created this material universe. It follows that these divine sparks can create the world and earth. The Gnostics believed that human beings were these ‘sparks’ or ‘droplets’ of the same spiritual substance (or essence) as God or ‘the One’ as they called him. For these Gnostics, humanity got trapped in physical bodies from which we must escape.⁹⁸ But these sparks made this world, and for Phaneroo, the rest of the divine sparks or stars continue this creative process.

Phaneroo believes human beings are divine stars who come from God carrying the exact nature, and that man (especially the born-again one) is of the same substance as God and can do everything that God does. Apostle Grace Lubega says:

Everything that God carries inside of him is what you carry. That is why when he looks at you, he says, ‘you are of me’ for everything that you are right now, none of it is your own; everything is of God. Your children are of God; your thoughts are of God; everything that is in the inside of you is of God. You do not have a will.⁹⁹

It is possible for a man to be filled with God; I am not talking about a very anointed man but one who is filled with the fullness of God. But who is God? Who is the Father? He is omnipresent. A man full of God can go where God can go and minister where God can minister... These kinds of men preach what you feel; they answer questions. They minister from a certain time matrix that is faster than the earthly because they are full of God; they are omnipresent; they own all that God owns.¹⁰⁰

As to humanity being divine stars or aeons from heaven, Phaneroo insists that:

⁹⁶ Everett Ferguson. *Backgrounds to Early Christianity, Second Edition*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993. Page 361

⁹⁷ See Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 171. Justin lived from 100-161 AD.

⁹⁸ Theopedia. (Accessed 2021, January 31). *Gnosticism*. <https://theopedia.com/gnosticism>

⁹⁹ Phaneroo: *Of God*

¹⁰⁰ Phaneroo. (2017, July 23). *The Mystery of God the Father*.

...when Jesus was born, a star appeared in the sky, representing him in the spiritual realm. We, too, as children of God are stars and come in the likeness of that one star, Jesus.¹⁰¹

In various portions of Scripture, (God) alludes to us as stars... As a star, you are always in motion.¹⁰²

Phaneroo says that man existed in heaven before being born on earth. It bases such sentiments on the false equivalency of Christ and humanity and claims that what is true of Christ is true of believers. Lubega says that:

Salvation is not when you changed on the earth. Salvation is when a new man from above entered you...Before you were born again, you were a natural man. There is nothing spiritual about the second man. You are the lord from heaven. You come with the spirit of lordship. Except a man be born from above, that man cannot experience the realm because the realm is supposed to be an experience. Salvation is supposed to be an experience. You are from above.¹⁰³

In the Church's history, some speculative theologians, including Origen, Scotus Erigena, and Julius Mueller, advocated that men's souls existed in a previous state.¹⁰⁴ But the idea that humans lived in the heavens before being embodied is rooted in Plato's recollection notion. Socrates, Plato's teacher, believed that humans existed in the spiritual realm before coming into the physical world. While in prison, Socrates awaiting his execution by poison hemlock, the same-day discourses with Cebes and Simmias about death and the soul's immortality. In his Socratic style, he corners Simmias into accepting that all learning is a recollection of events one encountered before he was born.

Then Simmias, our souls existed formerly, apart from our bodies, and possessed intelligence before they came into man's shape – Socrates, *Phaedo*

Contrast the above quote with what Phaneroo says:

As a child of God, you existed in eternity, live for a particular time span on the earth, and will return to eternity.¹⁰⁵

Now read the above quote with the one below, which we already cited before:

The superstar (Jesus) returned above, and the moment he reached heaven, he said, 'Apostle Grace, go down on earth and show them.' I came the day I got born again. The moment I entered the tabernacle, the angels told me, 'Welcome to the world of men.' I am not ordinary. I am from above.¹⁰⁶

Lubega further teaches such a view based on Gen 1:26-28, considering Gen 2:7.

¹⁰¹ Phaneroo: *Glorious Stars*

¹⁰² See Grace Lubega's Devotion. (2021, Feb 21). *The Stars are Moving-1: You are not Stuck*. See also the November 15, 2020 Sermon by the same title, *P.284 Elevated Daily - The Stars Are Moving*. Minute 5, where he fallaciously argues that Genesis 22:17 refers to us as stars by omitting the preposition 'as' which English inserts after 'I will multiply your offspring' and before 'the stars of heaven.' You may find the sermon here: <https://soundcloud.com/phaneroo-manifest/p284-elevated-daily-the-stars-are-moving>.

¹⁰³ Phaneroo: *The Man from Above*.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology*. Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996. Page 213

¹⁰⁵ Grace Lubega. (2017, July 28). *Predestination*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/pre-destination/>

¹⁰⁶ Phaneroo: *The Man from Above*

The Bible says that man (of Gen 2:7) became a living soul. He was not a spirit. God did not carry the Genesis 1:26 spirit and put him into the Genesis 2:7 man. For the man in Genesis 2:7, he simply breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul.

For Lubega, God created our spirits that lived with him in the spiritual realm before making bodies to inhabit. Like Plato, Phaneroo teaches a pre-earthly existence and a descent of these spirits/souls into bodies, out of which they will escape back into the spiritual realm. Like Gnostics, Phaneroo sees these pre-existing spirits as eons or sparks or divine stars that descend into the body when one is born again. These spirits, as Lubega notes, come as Lords from heaven, just as Christ came as Lord from above. As Jesus, the star, is always in motion (we saw this under Christology), so are we, like stars, always in motion, according to Lubega.

But to say that Gen. 1:26 and 2:7 concern two creations is erroneous, misleading, and without a biblical basis. Lubega's teaching is in step with the Greek mythologies rather than Scripture. The two Genesis accounts detail the same creation, with Genesis 1:26-31 giving us a snapshot of *what* God created (humanity) and *why* (as God's co-regents), while Gen. 2:7 zooms in on 1:26 and explains *how* God created man (out of dust). In other words, the second account tells us the details concerning the first account, about the process through which God brought man into existence. Gen 1:26-31 tells us *why* God created man, while Gen 2:7 tells us *how* God created him. These are not two creations but two accounts of one creation.

It is also erroneous to claim that Gen. 1:26 speaks of the spirit of man existing from eternity when Genesis 1:26 speaks of man's creation in the beginning, in time, and on day six. But if Gen 1:26 speaks of God creating the spirit of man and not his body and soul, and the Bible says that this creation (of Gen 1:26) occurred on the sixth day, on what day was his body and soul created? If God rested on the seventh day from all his works, as Gen. 2:2 insists, on what day did God make man's soul and body, in Phaneroo's view? Day eight? Also, Gen. 1:24-25 and 2:19-20 give us two accounts of land animals' creation. Suppose we use the same interpretive lens that Lubega employs, conceiving Genesis one as creation in eternity and Genesis two as creation in time. Does this mean that animals also existed in eternity as spirits before they came on earth? Does Mr. Lubega believe that animals have spirits that enter their bodies in time, perhaps after getting born again? Do animals get born again?

The truth is that Genesis insists that humanity, like all creation, has a beginning in time. There was when humankind was not. Nowhere does the Bible teach that our spirits preexisted before their bodies. Human beings did not come from above. God created them from below. But Phaneroo, like the Gnostics, while seeking to give significance to the human spirit, teaches what the Bible does not. Phaneroo's stress on humanity's eternal spiritual existence comes from their disdain for the body while predicating permanence, immortality, and creative power to human spirits, things due only to God. Phaneroo's view of the importance of man's spirit as one made like God in eternity influences how it views man's constitution and how much value it attaches to the body. Below we discuss Phaneroo's tripartite (three-part) view of a human person, its problematic interpretive lenses, and disastrous ethical effects.

PHANEROO: MAN IS SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

Most of us raised within the Pentecostal heritage take our belief in the three-part constitution of a human person for granted. That is, we hold that man comprises of a spirit, soul, and body. Some might say we are spirits, have a soul, and live in a body. And we hold such a position without questioning. But Louis Berkhof helps us know how the tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy. We may know that the Greeks held that the gods relate with the material universe through an intermediary entity. The Greeks regarded the soul as, on the one hand, immaterial and, on the other, adapted to the body. In so far as it appropriated the ‘nous’ (mind) or ‘pneuma’ (spirit), the soul was immortal. But when it was related to the body, the Greeks considered the soul carnal and mortal. Berkhof states that

The most familiar but also the crudest form of trichotomy is that which takes the body for the material part of man’s nature, the soul as the principle of animal life, and the spirit as the God-related rational and immortal element in man.¹⁰⁷

We recall that St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes this description concerning the Gnostics’ belief in the tripartite theory of man:

There are, therefore, three elements. First, the material, which they also call the left-handed, and which they say must necessarily perish, inasmuch as it is altogether incapable of receiving a breath of incorruptibility. Second, there is the ensouled element, to which they also give the name right-handed. Inasmuch as it is between the spiritual and the material, it will go over to that element to which it has an inclination. Third, the spiritual, which has been sent forth that here below it might take on form, having the ensouled element as a consort and having been disciplined together with it in conduct. And this spiritual element, they say, is the salt ... and the light of the world.¹⁰⁸

Berkhof reminds us of how man's three-part constitution, or the tripartite theory of man’s make-up, was popular, especially among the “Greek or Alexandrian Church Fathers of the early Christian centuries.”¹⁰⁹ But after Apollinaris used it to discredit the perfect humanity of Christ, the early Church condemned tripartitism at the A.D 381 Council of Constantinople. Among those who explicitly opposed the idea that “man is spirit, soul, and body” is the great defender of biblical truth, St. Athanasius. Berkhof mentions that Athanasius stood with the Latin Church’s leading theologians to distinctly favor the twofold division of human nature, also known as dichotomism. Dichotomism insists that the human person consists of the material and immaterial aspects. The material element is the body, and the intangible is the soul or spirit. Historically, Michael F. Bird says that “Dichotomism has been the main position in Christian thought over the centuries,” adding that “it is the most biblical position.”¹¹⁰

Phaneroo teaches the discredited threefold view of man as spirit, soul, and body. As noted above, trichotomism has its root in Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. In Lubega’s sermon titled *Spirit, Soul and Body* preached on 25th January 2018, he says:

¹⁰⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 203

¹⁰⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 207

¹¹⁰ Michael F. Bird. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2013. Chapter 7.3.

...it began from the Spirit into the soul and then the body. God works with you that way; he speaks to your spirit and then relates it with your soul into your body. The body is third in the order of things of God... You are a spirit, with a soul, in a body.¹¹¹

Though what Lubega says has some surface merit, it carries several problems. For instance, one might say that Mark 12:30 divides man's nature into four parts (heart, soul, mind, and strength). One wonders whether we can conclude, as Lubega did for 1 Thess. 5:23 that God speaks to our hearts, then our souls, then our minds, and the last our strength. It is better to say, as Bird notes,¹¹² that in 1 Thess. 5:23 (a text Lubega based his sermon on), Paul uses synonyms for stress, just as Jesus uses 'soul' and 'heart' and 'mind' for focus. Besides, 1 Cor. 7:34 divides man's nature into body and spirit, while Matt. 10:28 divides man into body and soul. We see that soul and spirit often refer to the same thing. Texts, such as Jn 12:27 cf. Jn 13:21; Luke 1:46–47; Job 7:11 synonymously uses *soul* and *spirit*. As Wayne Grudem gracefully lays it out, everything the soul is said to do, the spirit does, and everything the spirit is said to do, the soul does.¹¹³ Consider how the word 'soul' and 'spirit' substitute for one another in these parallelisms:

My *soul* yearns for you in the night; in the morning, my *spirit* longs for you (Isa 26:9).

My *soul* magnifies the Lord, and my *spirit* rejoices in God my Savior (Lk. 1:46-47)

The above references show how 'spirit' substitutes for 'soul' in biblical teaching. The first part of the sentence has the same meaning as the second, even if the *soul* is the subject in the first clause and the *spirit* in the second. Indeed, biblical usage concludes that soul and spirit are essentially and interchangeably the same. The point seems that the human person has one immaterial nature with two names, and so, no justification exists for seeing the soul and spirit as different.

The Scriptural formula for man is in some passages "body and soul," Matt. 6:25 (Grk); 10:28; and in others, "body and spirit," Eccl. 12:7; I Cor. 5:3,5. Death is sometimes described as the giving up of the soul, Gen. 35:18; I Kings 17:21; Acts 15:26 (Grk); and then again as the giving up of the spirit, Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59. Moreover, both "soul" and "spirit" are used to designate the immaterial element of the dead, I Pet. 3:19; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9; 20:4. The main Scriptural distinction is as follows: the word "spirit" designates the spiritual element in man as the principle of life and action which controls the body; while the word "soul" denominates the same element as the subject of action in man, and is therefore often used for the personal pronoun in the Old Testament, Ps 104:1; 146:1; Is. 42:1; cf. also Luke 12:19.¹¹⁴

One wonders why we take all this time and space to speak about the constitution of man. One flawed result of Phaneroo's tripartite theology is that *God cannot relate with a man apart from his spirit*. Lubega holds that God made Adam and Eve as living souls (Gen. 2:7, KJV), but their spirits were not yet fully active. He says that the thing that activates the spirit is the new birth, and hence, for him, the natural man does not receive the things of God.¹¹⁵ Valentinian Gnostics also held that man was a "carnal or

¹¹¹ Grace Lubega, *Spirit, Soul and Body*. January 18, 2018. Minutes 06:19-07:20

¹¹² Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, Chapter 7.3

¹¹³ For a more detailed discussion on the soul/spirit of man, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: And Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000. Chapter 23.

¹¹⁴ Berkhof, 194.

¹¹⁵ Grace Lubega, *The Spirit of a Man—Phaneroo* 299. July 30, 2020. Minute 23:10

irrational soul.” The craftsman or demiurge (the god of the Old Testament) then breathed an “animating rational soul” from his substance (which is the breath of life in Gen 2:7). Wisdom (Sophia) secretly sowed her spiritual seed into the man at a later point. Lubega holds to this Gnostic three-stage creation of a human person, emphasizing the spiritual aspect. For him, God only relates only to our spirits. He says:

Now God says in order to connect with you, to use you and work through you, He made you a spirit.¹¹⁶

You can never have an experience of Almighty God until you are absented from the body.¹¹⁷

But the above teaching raises several problems. First, God, in the Old Testament, related to his people. How else would Adam and Eve hear God’s voice in the garden right after they had sinned (Genesis 3:8) if, as Phaneroo holds, his spirit was not yet activated, and God relates only with spirits? How did God relate with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets? Indeed, the OT provides enough examples of people who ‘walked,’ ‘heard,’ and ‘saw’ God. Enoch walked with God and was no more ‘for God took him’ (Gen. 5:24). Jacob had the divine presence (Gen. 28:10-22). God revealed himself to Israel at Sinai and made them his people (Ex. 19). Noah found favor in God’s sight (Gen 6:8), and God was with Joseph (Gen. 39:23). How could this be so if the spirits of all these patriarchs were inactive, and God does not relate with man apart from their spirit? Indeed, all these examples suggest that God communicates to us as humans with material and immaterial dimensions, not merely through ‘the spirit.’

Human beings' immaterial and material aspects are so united that God speaks to us as composite and complete beings without division. The God who created bodily senses speaks to us through them. He gave Israel his written Law, read with the eyes, heard with the ears, and held with the hands. So, God connects to and through the whole person, contrary to Phaneroo. But even Phaneroo ministry exists through print and motion media that appeal to eyes, ears, and emotions. So why else do they have a communications and graphics department?

Lubega also uses Pro. 20:27 to say that we serve God with our spirits (understood by Phaneroo as the actual heavenly person) when we allow God to “use us beyond the limits of our flesh and our minds.”¹¹⁸ But the Hebrew word translated as ‘spirit’ there occurs 25x in the whole Old Testament, and it always refers to the air we breathe (cf. Gen. 2:7; 7:22; Deut. 20:16; Jos 10:40; Isa 2:22). It does not mean our personhood as understood from a heavenly vantage point, as Lubega thinks of the text. Instead, the ‘lamp’ metaphor referred to illumination (Pro. 6:23). It was an Egyptian expression to denote the human heart as the hidden place where the truth about a person is found in the deepest layer of human existence. A person’s speech associated with his breath (without air, no creaturely speech can be made) serves as the Lord’s flashlight to expose human thought and inclination in the darkest recesses of a person’s life. This way, the Lord is found just when he judges and rewards. The text does not say serving God negates our material existence or excludes the mind.

¹¹⁶ Lubega, *The Spirit of a Man*. Minute 23:18

¹¹⁷ Grace Lubega. (2016). *His Depths and Heights*. <https://www.phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-82-sermon/>

¹¹⁸ Grace Lubega, (Last Accessed March 26, 2022) *The Phaneroo Devotion: The Spirit Man – 1*.

The other flawed teaching from Phaneroo's tripartite theology is that *the human spirit can be present elsewhere apart from the physical body*. We noted Lubega's reported out-of-body experiences. Like Socrates, Lubega sees the body as an obstacle to communion with the divine, a prison from which one must escape. Of course, this teaching stems from Phaneroo's denial of the distinctions between God and believers. Phaneroo teaches that its members can be wherever God is. This teaching's proof-text is Paul's instructions to the Corinthian Church to judge the sexually immoral brother in their congregation. Paul writes:

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1Cor. 5:3-5, ESV).

From this, Grace Lubega says:

Paul is actually awakening the church to the reality, that it is possible for the human spirit with the Holy Spirit to be awakened to realities of transcending even the physical presence of that man to spaces where that man is not physically and can fully attend and recognize, appreciate and connect to everything that is happening in the absentia of that man or woman physically.¹¹⁹

We recall Lubega reiterating that we "can never have an experience of Almighty God until you are absented from the body."¹²⁰ Lubega repeats the same here. For Lubega, such teaching is only for the spiritually mature.

But there are serious doctrinal problems with this idea. Firstly, 1 Cor. 5:3-5 doesn't teach that Paul was a present spirit in Corinth. When Paul mentions his 'spirit being present,' he isn't speaking of astral projection.¹²¹ Neither does he mean this as a sign of his spiritual maturity. Instead, Paul is truly represented in their midst by his letter, a valid spiritual extension of his apostolic authority. In other words, Paul didn't have to be physically present in Corinth to exercise his authority. Space didn't make him any less an apostle.¹²² Letter writers sometimes expressed their concern for the readers by saying that, although they were 'absent in body,' they were with them 'in spirit' or in mind. In some cases, the letter itself communicated the effect of the writer's presence, carrying Paul's intimacy and care, not his metaphysical presence.¹²³

Phaneroo's teaching here is consistent with its belief that we are divine sparks from above that have been liberated from the body. Socrates and Plato, we remember, considered the body to be the soul's prison. For Socrates, the philosopher's goal is to escape this prison and join the gods' realm, becoming like them.

Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over, his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars and wallowing in utter ignorance. And

¹¹⁹ Lubega, *The Spirit of a Man*.

¹²⁰ Lubega, *His Depths and Heights*.

¹²¹ According to Wiktionary, to astral project is to cause the soul/spirit to travel to a location other than the physical location of the person.

¹²² David Guzik, 'David Guzik's Enduring Word Commentary.' Enduring Word Media: 2014, (e-sword version).

¹²³ Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993 (e-sword version).

philosophy can see the ingenuity of the imprisonment, which is brought about by the prisoner's own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement.¹²⁴

Like Plato and the Gnostics, Lubega's low view of the body—which makes him conclude that 'Christ in the flesh is no more'—also leads him to teach out-of-body experiences as markers of spiritual maturity. Like Plato, Lubega sees the flesh as an obstacle to union with God. Yet, we are beautifully and sovereignly bound by space and time as beings made from dust. God purposefully created us differently from angels, as embodied souls or ensouled bodies. Humans are incomplete without both their immaterial and material realities. Phaneroo's disdain for the body and Gnostic concept of the origin of humanity makes it believe that a person can be everywhere, something the Bible reserves for God alone.

Phaneroo's idea that humans are divine sparks descended from above and of the same substance as God inevitably puts man at the center of the universe, something to which we now turn.

MAN AT THE CENTER OF PHANEROO'S UNIVERSE

Christianity is not fundamentally a religious therapy session where we try to help each other feel good about ourselves. A biblical gospel presentation rightly recognizes that none of us lives to ourselves but God (Rom. 14:7-9). But a man-centered message centers on what we need or what we want most. It considers our needs and desires as our most fundamental problems. The true gospel puts God at the center of our lives and the entire universe, having diagnosed our problem as idolatry—the pursuit of that which is not God. "For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). God is God-centered, and we live and die in God's world.¹²⁵

On the surface, the unsuspecting will take Phaneroo's teaching about who we are as biblical since it is littered with several biblical proof texts. But a closer examination shows Phaneroo's man-centeredness. In Phaneroo's estimation, man is his maker and the creator of his universe. God is an errand boy, assisting our quest for self-definition. Consider the following:

God is busy giving you a certain pattern of the imaginative process that creates. When you read that Scripture once, twice, three times, you will notice that everything that must be or will be exists and will come to be by you.¹²⁶

Elsewhere, in the *Distinctive believer*, Grace Lubega restates the same idea thus:

I have the liberty to choose whatever I want from God—[and] that astonished men. It is passive abandonment of God to say there are certain things God will choose not to give because that is his will. His doctrine was with the power to make a choice and the liberty for a man to walk and choose as he pleases—that is called freedom.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Plato. *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant. Introduction and Notes by Harold Tarrant. London: Penguin Books, 1993. Page 142.

¹²⁵ 9Marks. (Accessed 2021, January 30). *What is the difference between a man-centered gospel and the true gospel?* <https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-difference-between-man-centered-gospel-and-true-gospel/>

¹²⁶ Modester Sweeney. *Authority in Life*. July 25, 2017. Min 58

¹²⁷ Grace Lubega. *The Distinctive Believer—Phaneroo 124*. February 02, 2017. Minutes 08:39-09:28.

And again

The God (who) sometimes can say ‘no’ is not the God of Phaneroo (II Cor. 1:20). He continues to say that things might not have changed fully, but he knows, it is a matter of time. He cannot deny me if he did not withhold his dear son (Romans 8:32). My Jesus, in him, is yea, there is no nay—tell your neighbor.¹²⁸

Looking at the quotes above, one cannot fail to notice the theme and focus; man is the center of his world, and God facilitates this arrangement. In the first quote, we see Modester Sweeney teaching that everything must be or will exist because of you. In Gnostic theology, we noticed that the world we see is a product of divine sparks that moved away from *The One*. Gnostics held that the world was made by one spark, *Sophia*—or *Wisdom*. Modestar’s claims, therefore, line well with Gnosticism. But she directly contradicts what Scripture. The Bible places Christ—not us—at the center of the universe. Paul writes this in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-16 (NIV):

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

All things are created by, for, and through Christ. Nothing comes from or for us. We made nothing. Creation¹²⁹ is God’s work alone (Gen. 1:1). In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, a merism for ‘everything.’ The Bible elsewhere insists that God alone is the creator of all things, for, “I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself” (Isa. 44:24). The adjective ‘all’ before ‘things’ denies that anything was made by anyone apart from God. Isaiah here ridicules the nations’ gods and those who claim that there is another creator apart from YHWH. As John M. Frame frames his article,

Creation is an act of God alone, by which, for his own glory, he brings into existence everything in the universe, things that had no existence prior to his creative word.¹³⁰

We live in God’s world, not the other way around. The heavens declare the glory of God, not yours or mine (cf. Ps 19:1-2). Speaking of Christ, John insists that “All things were made through him, and without him was nothing made that was made” (Jn 1:3). Phaneroo contradicts such a plain and essential Christian truth.

In the second quote, Lubega teaches that believers can choose whatever they want from God and have the liberty to walk as they please. The sentiment stems from the prior claim to creation. But, as Frame mentions in the same cited article, to create brings with it the power to command, the power which Phaneroo does not shy away from asking. We recall that Phaneroo claimed that believers are lords from heaven and have the spirit of lordship. As creators, they deserve obedience and, come to think of it,

¹²⁸ Grace Lubega. *The Double-Edged Sword*—Phaneroo 230. March 21, 2019. Minutes 16:00-17:40. Jason, a former Phaneroo attendee tells us that Phaneroo would teach them that they can change God’s will to whatever they wanted.

¹²⁹ By ‘creation,’ we refer to *ex-nihilo* or *from nothing*.

¹³⁰ John M. Frame. (Accessed 2021, January 30). *God the Creator*. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/god-the-creator/>

worship. Thus, Lubega demands submission, threatening death to those reluctant to bend the knee. If he shapes you as your father, you must heed. Creation obeys its maker.

When Lubega shapes the destiny of his followers and ‘imparts’ his spirit, he becomes their ‘god, and he loves to be worshipped,’ as one interviewee puts it. Lubega calls this “liberty.” But what Lubega defines as freedom is the worship only God deserves. So that Lubega expects the worship only God deserves is not a surprise since, as we saw, Phaneroo insists that no one can tell the difference between you and God anymore. When the Creator-creature distinctions are erased, it logically follows that obedience from creatures, which is due to God alone, belongs to Lubega.

But Phaneroo’s understanding of liberty undermines the clear biblical teaching that God—not man, is sovereign. Psalm 115:3 posits that “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” Psalm 135:6 states, “The LORD does whatever pleases him in the heavens and earth, in the seas and all their depths.” All these references are said of God and not man, as Lubega would assert. Because God is Creator, creation obeys him alone. He alone does as he pleases with his creation. The perception we derive from listening to Phaneroo teachings is more therapeutic than gospel-centered. For Phaneroo, everything, including God, exists for us. As taught by Phaneroo, humanity orders, and God cannot say ‘no.’ Phaneroo’s god is utterly subject to sinful humanity’s whims. He is man’s errand boy, going wherever man says.

CONCLUDING ANTHROPOLOGY

Like the Gnostics, Man, for Phaneroo, is a divine star descended from above, having eternally pre-existed his bodily life. But the Bible posits man’s creation and existence in time, not eternity. Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:4-7 do not speak of two creation accounts, as Phaneroo intimates, but one creative act. Gen. 1:26-28 regards *what* was created and *why* while Gen. 2:4-7 concerns *how* man was created. We noted that Phaneroo’s conception of humanity’s origin determines its doctrine about the inherent divinity of human persons. It also grounds their Gnostic tripartite idea of the constitution of humans. We noted that Phaneroo’s tripartite theology—the view that we are spirits having souls and living in bodies—brings the wrong idea that we can be omnipresent. That is, we can be everywhere. But we noted that God made us as beings incomplete without bodies. We will see later how such defines their view of salvation. But we also saw that Phaneroo’s god is an errand boy who can by no means say no to whatever we demand of him. We insisted that such an understanding of God is contrary to what Scripture teaches, that God is at the center of all things, and he does as he pleases. Yet Phaneroo’s man-centeredness makes too little of God and too much of themselves.

Such claims as the above mean that Phaneroo’s understanding of salvation is far removed from what the Bible and the Church have always taught. Therefore, we now turn to Phaneroo’s teaching about salvation, also known as soteriology.

PHANEROO'S SOTERIOLOGY

Phaneroo's theology of salvation aligns with Gnosticism. For Marvin Meyer, Gnosticism comprised of

a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarized in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth, and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated.¹³¹

As noted, the Gnostics conceived of a falling of the divine ones, sparks, or stars, whose destiny is to be re-integrated into the divine 'One' above. Valentinian Gnostics interpreted salvation, as with their anthropology, in terms of a triple division of the human being. We treated this already under Phaneroo's anthropology—their view of a human person. Valentinian Gnostics held that the demiurge (whom they considered the god of the Old Testament) made man a “carnal or irrational soul” and then breathed an “animating rational soul” from his substance (which is the breath of life in Gen 2:7). Afterward, Wisdom (Sophia) secretly sowed her spiritual seed into the man. Thus, man has three essences: an irrational carnal soul, an animating rational soul, and a spiritual seed.¹³² The irrational carnal soul is ignorance that every person has before knowledge (gnosis) comes. Once knowledge comes, it destroys ignorance. Gnostics identified the carnal nature or flesh with ignorance of the rational soul. Thus, by its very nature, this carnal nature—this irrational carnal soul—is not open to salvation in any form. On the contrary, they held that the spiritual nature is man's true inner self, and it exists within all who hear the word of God as a seed. This seed comes and joins itself with the animate soul to elevate it to its level.¹³³ If the seed bears fruit and the person attains some level of knowledge, the spiritual nature is actualized, and thus the person attains the highest level of salvation.¹³⁴

Likewise, for the Gnostics, human beings are divided into three types, depending on which natures are dominant within them. Therefore, Adam and Eve had three children: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Cain typifies the carnal ones, Abel the animate ones, and Seth the spiritual.¹³⁵ These categories are also sometimes presented as three stages of spiritual development. Thus, one can move from one class to another. In carnal people, the irrational soul is like a drug that makes them forget their true origin hence becoming creatures of the world. Cain is the carnal person's prototype, and just like all carnal people, he was by nature a “child of the devil.” In the sower's parable, the seeds that fell upon the path (Matt. 13:4) typify those who die in the carnal state. When they die, they are scattered in the outer darkness and pass into nonexistence.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Willis Barnstone & Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Bible*, (Shambalah, 2003), as quoted from <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/meyer-intro.html>.

¹³² St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 859-860

¹³³ Ibid, 862. We have already noted Lubega instructions to his followers to 'not mix seed,' that is, to not listen to any other preaching except his.

¹³⁴ Grace Lubega, (Accessed March 29, 2022), *The Life of the Seed*, argues that “When a seed is buried in the ground, the body starts to give way. In giving way, the life of the seed itself starts to manifest.” See <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-life-of-the-seed/>

¹³⁵ St. Irenaeus, Book 1. Page 867

¹³⁶ Ibid, 862. Grace Lubega, (Accessed March 29, 2022), *The Power of the Seed*, argues that Men are destroyed because they lack seed. See <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-power-of-the-seed/>

Gnostics believed that the animate people have undergone a conversion and have become identified with their animate rational nature. They ascend to the Creator's level (Craftsman), although they remain ignorant of the true God and their spiritual nature. They require rules and instructions to know what is correct and are subject to the law. Those who remain in this state are like the seeds that fell among thorns. They receive incomplete spiritual knowledge and remain slaves of the law and the spirits of this world. To become identified with the spiritual element, one must attain a state of mystical knowledge (gnosis) of God. To be born again is to achieve this knowledge. And the real resurrection from the dead concerns rising from ignorance.¹³⁷ Gnostics held that they had been resurrected and taught that they now have a new spiritual body and “shall never die.”¹³⁸ Valentinian Gnostics made no distinction between present and future salvation, and thus for them, the resurrection was instant. Therefore, they believed that they have entered “the heavenly realm” or “Fullness,”¹³⁹ and all

attain to the vision of the Father and become intellectual Aeons,¹⁴⁰ entering into the intelligible and eternal union in marriage.”¹⁴¹

Hence, as the Gnostic Gospel of Truth states,

The Father is within them, and they are within the Father, being perfected, being undivided in the truly good one, being in no way deficient in anything, but they are refreshed in the Spirit.¹⁴²

From this, Gnostics concluded that spiritual people do not sin. Knowledge or gnosis is a restoration to the person's original condition and transforms everything. Spiritual people, by definition, do not sin. Through knowledge, they die regarding sin and are raised up again with Christ (Gal 2:19-20; Col 3:5). Knowledge enables them to annihilate the carnal nature (the burden of deficiency) that causes sin.¹⁴³ The Gnostic teacher Valentinus describes this process in *The Gospel of Truth*:

It is within Unity that each one will attain himself, within knowledge, he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter (that is, the carnal element) within himself like fire and darkness by light, death by fire.¹⁴⁴

When this process of ascending to the spiritual realm through secret knowledge continues, the spiritual person ultimately is deified, becoming a god:

Each person who receives knowledge destroys a portion of the deficiency and brings the Godhead one step closer to reintegration. The final end of the world will occur when ‘all

¹³⁷ http://gnosis.org/library/valentinus/Psychology_Salvation.htm

¹³⁸ See Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 171.

¹³⁹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 865.

¹⁴⁰ Aeons were understood to be intermediate deific beings who exist between the ultimate, true God and ourselves.

¹⁴¹ The Gnostic Society Library. (Accessed 2021, February 3). *Psychology and Salvation*. http://gnosis.org/library/valentinus/Psychology_Salvation.htm

¹⁴² The Gnostic Society Library.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁴ Bart D. Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make it into the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Page 48

that is spiritual has been shaped by knowledge' (Irenaeus 1:6:1). The triple division of the human psyche is overcome through gnosis and the person is reintegrated into the divine.¹⁴⁵

The Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* recommends that rather than be called a Christian, a person with knowledge might be understood to be one with and be called Christ (saying 67). Moreover, in saying 108 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus supposedly says:

He who will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.¹⁴⁶

PHANEROO: SALVATION IS AN UPWARD TRAJECTORY

Like the Gnostics, Phaneroo conceives human beings as made up of three parts: body, spirit, and soul. We encountered this under Phaneroo's anthropology. For now, we note how this understanding of a human person views the body as the inferior constituent. The soul is a middle constituent that will either be swayed by the body or the spirit, while the spirit is the pure constituent through which God communicates. Consequently, those born again are "spiritual beings" because, as Phaneroo asserts, their spirit is in control of the person. Those who are not born again, the unregenerate, are "carnal" since it is their body in possession of the soul. Hence for Phaneroo:

You cannot seek manifestation of the life of God within the boundaries of the flesh because the flesh represents carnality, and carnality is a boundary.¹⁴⁷

Phaneroo uses 'flesh' synonymously with the physical body because, for Lubega, "the body you have is not your life." Therefore, the body must be buried so that "the life of the seed itself starts to manifest."

The idea that man primarily is a spirit who only lives in a body has soteriological (salvation-related) consequences. In Phaneroo's estimation, the 'spiritual person,' the one who has been saved, has been elevated to such a plane that he is no longer 'of this world.' Consequently, he not only is above suffering, but he can exercise divine powers by working miracles. The more he achieves this unique knowledge, the higher he rises until he conceives of himself and lives as a god who creates and commands reality. Such a person experiences God by being absent from the body.¹⁴⁸ Phaneroo conceives salvation as an upward movement from the flesh's realm, which is 'carnal,' to the spiritual realm. As one moves higher, or, as Phaneroo will say, 'deeper,' he sheds off the body's restraints until he is a pure spirit. To be a pure spirit is to be as omnipresent, omniscient, and eternal as God is. The goal of salvation, as such, is a return to the spiritual realm, having cast off the spirit's prison, which is the body, and entered the divine realm. Lubega sees the Christian's union with God as mystical, razing the creature-Creator distinction and eradicating human nature. Phaneroo sees salvation as the destruction of the believer's human identity that enables their return to the purely spiritual state as descended divine sparks or stars. In his devotion, titled "*Of God*," while explaining 1 John 4:4, Grace Lubega states:

¹⁴⁵ *Psychology and Salvation*.

¹⁴⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 28

¹⁴⁷ Grace Lubega, (Accessed March 29, 2022), *The Life of the Seed*, <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/the-life-of-the-seed/>.

¹⁴⁸ Phaneroo, (Accessed March 29, 2022), *His Depths and Heights*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-82-sermon/>

Everything that God carries inside of him is what you carry. That is why when he looks at you, he says, ‘you are of me.’

And as we saw Modestar teach before,

God came in the inside of you, and everything that made you a human being was quenched, eaten up. Only Him remained in the inside of you. Even your own will was swallowed up (Phil 2:13). You don't have a will but that which is the will of God. You can't will differently. He entered you, and everything that was human was eaten up.¹⁴⁹

Still to requote Lubega,

When they ask where God is, just stand up straight, chin up, chest out and present yourself because this is the mystery that was hidden from the ages past but is now revealed, Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:26-27).¹⁵⁰

In one of Lubega's sermons, he relates that he switched off the television when confronted with the idea that he is a human being. He said, ‘We have a body, but we are not human beings.’¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, he says, ‘We are 100 percent God beings.’¹⁵² Put another way, Modestar Sweeney teaches that ‘you carry the genes of God in you.’¹⁵³ In other words, Phaneroo sees salvation as the shedding of humanity to return to the godhood we possessed but was enshrined in bodily prisons.

The Bible nowhere presents the view that the believer, united with Christ, has lost their human identity. Our union with Christ does not remove the Creator-creature distinction. The birth of Christ demonstrates that, as Chalcedon and Nicaea insisted, God is united with man without mixture, confusion, or separation. Like the Gnostics, Phaneroo grossly misunderstands the incarnation's effect on humanity.

Christianity insists that God unites himself to humanity in Christ, with neither his divinity consuming humanity nor his humanity being deified. Salvation is not humanity's movement to godhood through the dissolution of human nature, but God's becoming human without abolishing divine nature. If God consumed everything that makes us humans, he would be our destroyer, not our Savior. The gospel is not man's ascendance to the spiritual realm where God is, but God's descending to the earth and becoming like us. Believers don't ascend to God as Gnosticism taught. Instead, Christian orthodoxy insists that God descends to us. The good news is not that men lost their humanity and became gods, but that God became a man for us and our salvation while remaining divine.

But Phaneroo is committed to its Gnostic roots. It presumes that to be born again is to become gods, divine sparks, and ‘stars.’ It still envisions salvation as a return to the heavenly realm from where human beings apparently descended, as we saw under anthropology. The Gnostic thinks of an initial descent of divine sparks that became entrapped in mortal bodies, just as Plato and Socrates taught. Phaneroo thus conceives of being human as evil and inferior and salvation as retracing the upward trajectory, leaving behind what we acquired through our fall from God until we realize our

¹⁴⁹ Minute 19 of *The Purged Conscience*

¹⁵⁰ Phaneroo, *The Experiences of the Word*

¹⁵¹ Grace Lubega. (2017, August 10). *The Words of this Life*. Minute 3:41. Compact Disc

¹⁵² Lubega, *The Words of this Life*. Minute 4:00.

¹⁵³ Modestar Sweeney. (2017, May 25). *Authority in Life*. Minute 18:00. Compact Disc.

godhood. Yet, Scripture does not define human nature as intrinsically sinful. Genesis 1:31 states God's pronouncement that all the material things God made are very good. Human beings with their bodies were part of what God marked as 'very good,' so the claim that salvation is the destruction of humanity is not good news. It is inconsistent with God's Word, and it is Gnostic.

We should discuss the Scriptures that Lubega based on to teach this doctrine, such as 2 Peter 1:3-4 and John 10:34-36. We do well to avoid the temptation for us all to follow Plato in how we may conceive of what it means that believers partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Peter H. Davids discloses that

The first references to the "divine nature" go back to Plato, for example, *Phaedrus* 230A, and they can be documented right down to the period of the NT (e.g., Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.19.26–27). What is important to note is that sometimes this participation in the divine nature was viewed as innate, a divine spark within the human being that simply needed to be recognized or freed, and sometimes it is something to be obtained by effort. Since, in Plato, the immortal soul is imprisoned in the mortal body, for him, all human beings partake of the divine (i.e., immortality) although they may not realise it.¹⁵⁴

That is, it would be platonic to think that 2 Pet. 1:3-4 speaks of believers as divine by being born again. Indeed, Davids divulges more that such a conclusion stems from a negative view of the body:

...at the end of 2 Peter (i.e., in the eschatology of ch. 3), one does not find immortal existence free from a body but a new (or renewed) heaven and a new (or renewed) earth. The picture 2 Peter presents here uses Greek language, but it is far more Jewish than Greek.¹⁵⁵

But what is this 'Jewish' idea that Peter communicates through the text?

...in 2 Peter, the conflict is with teachers whose advocating of practices that our author considers immoral is supported by their rejection of final judgment. The immortal permanence of the divine (as opposed to the earth, which will change) is connected to holiness, purity, and goodness. And these are the virtues that make sense in the context of 2 Peter. And so, it is likely that what 2 Peter has in mind when he claims participation in the divine nature is the reception of an ethical nature like God's, which then leads to immortality.¹⁵⁶

Thomas Schreiner agrees. He insists that

Peter was saying that believers inherit God's promises as they come to know Christ, as they experience his moral excellence and glorious radiance in conversion.¹⁵⁷

Schreiner adds that

¹⁵⁴ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006. Page 173.

¹⁵⁵ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 175.

¹⁵⁶ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 176.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003. Page 293.

Believers will “participate” (*koinōnoi*) in the divine nature, but they will not become gods. This conclusion is borne out by Starr's careful study, where he investigates the terminology used by Peter with reference to his social world. He analyzes the language Peter used here and compares it with similar notions in the Old Testament, Josephus, Philo, Plutarch, Stoicism, Pauline Christianity, and non-Pauline Christianity. He concludes from his comparative study that sharing in the divine nature does not mean “deified.” Instead, Peter maintained that believers will share in the moral qualities of Christ¹⁵⁸

To share in the divine nature concerns living a life of virtue and holiness. It concerns sanctification, not deification. But Phaneroo's disdain for the body and material reality leads it, like Plato, to think about escaping from the prison of the body into the realm of the gods. But it is essential to understand that though our union with Christ makes us morally more like God, it does not make us gods. While Christ, through the incarnation, has bridged the relational gap between God and man, there is still an ontological (or natural) gap between us. God is a transcendent and infinite being, and we are gloriously space-bound and finite.

But then also, John 10:34-36, a quotation of Psalm 82, does not concern believers but Israel's judges. The text is not calling followers of Jesus ‘gods’ but the judges of Israel so. As such, the Psalm reprimands them for their injustice and corruption.¹⁵⁹ To use the Psalm or John 10:34-36 as a basis for teaching believers as gods is to engage in flawed biblical interpretation. That verse says nothing about salvation or Jesus' disciples. And no disciple applied it to himself or believers. Neither should we.

PHANEROO: CHRISTIANS CANNOT SIN

Following the tripartite (three-fold) conception of man is Phaneroo's teaching that *man's spirit cannot sin*. The idea is that since no one can tell the difference between the believer and God, and God cannot sin, it is impossible, they say, for those born of God to sin. Phaneroo bases such on an erroneous reading of 1 John 3:9, which says: ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God’ (KJV). Grace Lubega says:

The question is, who is born of God? What in you is born of God? Your spirit is born of God. If your spirit is born of God, how can your spirit sin? When people question this, that is when you realize the spirit of error.¹⁶⁰

Beloved saint, sin is not your problem; it speaks a dead language to you. When it presents itself in any form, you cannot understand it because it is foreign.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 294–295.

¹⁵⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus comments thus: “He called the rulers of the Jews gods, entrusted as they were with judging. This is the name the Law also gives them: “You shall not revile gods, nor speak evil of your people's leader.” In other words, since God is truly a judge, whereas human beings are entrusted with the task of judging, those commissioned with this task were believed [to be] gods for the reason that they imitate God in this. But at this point the just Judge takes issue with those not judging justly nor adhering unswervingly to the balance of justice, and he prophesies the just judgment to be made by them in the future.” For the commentary on the whole Psalm, see Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms: Psalms 73–150*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Robert C. Hill, vol. 102, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 56.

¹⁶⁰ Phaneroo, *Experiences of the Word*.

¹⁶¹ Grace Lubega. (Accessed September 2021). *Why We Preach The Grace: The Sin Question–1* <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/why-we-preach-the-grace-the-sin-question-1/>

This is the kingdom; this is true repentance. It is when a man walks out of the flesh and gets into the spirit. A spirit cannot steal because it does not need a necklace. Can you lust in the spirit? Have perversion in the spirit? That seed of the spirit, the Bible says, is incorruptible. The biggest limitation for every man is in the flesh. Everything that leads men to sin is the lust of the flesh. When you became born again, that was the thing that God dealt with.¹⁶²

Some people think that being incorruptible entails only not sinning. That is just part of it. However, incorruptible means that you cannot be corrupted.¹⁶³

This teaching is very similar to what the Gnostics taught. Remember that the Gnostics taught it is within Unity “that each one will attain himself” and “purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire and darkness by light, death by fire.”

...for just as the earthly element cannot partake of salvation—it is incapable of receiving salvation—so, on the other hand, the spiritual, which they maintain they constitute, cannot take on corruption, regardless of what practices they may have engaged in. By way of illustration, gold, when deposited in mud, does not lose its beauty but preserves its own nature since mud can in no way injure gold. In the same way, they themselves, so they indeed claim, neither suffer harm nor lose their spiritual substance regardless of what material practices they may be engaged in.¹⁶⁴

Phaneroo and the Gnostics thus think that they have killed the flesh, that is, the body, and are reintegrated into divine unity to become God himself. And since God does not sin and is incorruptible, they too are pure of sin and “cannot be corrupted,” as Phaneroo says, or, as the Gnostics said, they “cannot take on corruption.”

But such is not what John taught. Such teaching came from the false teachers of John’s Day, whom the Apostle refutes in 1 John 1:8-10:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John writes that anyone who claims to be without sin or beyond sinning is deceiving himself and a liar (see also 5:16). The ‘we’ language John uses refutes the suggestion that John spoke of unbelievers—unless John saw himself as an unbeliever. Whatever John means by his language in 3:6 and 9, he does not mean that Christians are without sin in this life. John knows very well that believers continue to sin. The Greek present tense, which John uses in these verses, is different from the present tense in English. It often suggests that the action is in the current time rather than the past or the future and that the action is continuous or chronic. The NIV translation brings this out when it mentions that ‘No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.’ (1 John 3:6. See also v. 9). The present tense conveys a continuous, habitual action in John’s Greek, which would be the language in

¹⁶² Grace Lubega. (2016, March 14). *Condemning the Guiltless*. <https://phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-79-sermon/>. Also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKVr9hrH9vk>

¹⁶³ Grace Lubega. (2015, October 20). *The Increase of Knowledge*. <https://www.phaneroo.org/phaneroo-sermon/phaneroo-60-of-the-increase-of-knowledge/>

¹⁶⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 37.

which John wrote.¹⁶⁵ Thus, John is not saying that believers do not sin or are not corruptible but that Christians cannot live a life dominated and characterized by sin.

Moreover, 2 Cor 7:1 refutes the claim that our spirit is sinless. Believers, Paul inclusive, those with “these promises,” Paul’s “dear friends,” must “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and *spirit*, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” Note that Contrary to Phaneroo, Paul demands that believers must purify their spirits also from filthiness. The Bible does not see Christians as sinless in any part of them! Saints are sinners saved by grace. By position and identity, we are saints. But this righteousness is not infused in us. God doesn’t declare us righteous based on our sinless nature, but Christ’s (1 Cor 5:21). It is Christ’s righteousness that God credits to us.

As saints, we still sin since we still have a sinful nature. The Spirit of God in us changes us through our obedience to his Word. We call this transformation or progressive sanctification. The need for everyday obedience and sanctification is evident in the believer’s life. We are being saved from the influence of sin as God daily deals with our sinful nature, transforming us by renewing our minds (Rom 12:1-2). The Bible demands that we ‘put off’ *our* former conduct or ‘the old man,’ which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. It also instructs us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, to put on the new man created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:21-24). The Bible tells us to put to death *our* members on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col 3:5). Those sinful members are *ours*. Moreover, the Apostle Paul says this even after telling us that we died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God (v3). In other words, there is a sense in which our sinful nature is crucified with Christ (Col 2:11, 3:3, Gal 2:20) and a sense in which our corrupt members remain and must be put away (Col 3:5, Eph 4:21-24). The first was done (past tense) through the death of Christ. But the second is being done (present continuous) by the Holy Spirit through our daily obedience.¹⁶⁶

PHANEROO: CHRISTIANS CANNOT DIE

Fast from the heels of Phaneroo’s teaching that one cannot sin is the idea that Christians, *who know who they are*, cannot die. We met such sentiments under Phaneroo’s Ethics and must note that these ideas are ubiquitous among Phaneroo followers. One would wonder, though, if Lubega teaches such or is misunderstood. Do Phaneroo followers mistake what their Apostle teaches about death? Not so. For Lubega, believers cannot die if their emotions sync with their confessions. In his sermon *Spirit, Soul, and Body*, Lubega says:

Does a man with cancer go to bed? Yes. But a man without cancer, do you stay in bed? You wake up in the morning, you button your shirt up. When they say you have stage four cancer, you put on your shoes and go to work. And then they ask you, ‘what did the doctor say?’ ‘They say I am perfect!’ That’s called a man of heaven. Do you understand what I am trying to tell you? The doctor tells you (that) you have

¹⁶⁵ Robert Rayburn via Third Millennium. (2013, April 14 to April 20). *Christians Cannot Sin?* https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Erob_rayburn%5Erob_rayburn.Christianscannotsin.html/at/Christians%20cannot%20sin?

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Byamukama. (2017, August 3). *Concerning Phaneroo (Part 2)*. <https://byamukama.com/concerning-phaneroo-part-2/>

this disease which is going to kill you. You tell the doctor, ‘Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world. You laugh at the situation, the doctor, his stories, their papers, their machines. Then you walk out of that hospital smiling like nothing has happened. Then they ask you what happened, and you tell them ‘Nothing.’ And here is the mistake: after confessing all those things, you sit in a corner and start thinking, ‘naye if I die from here’ you haven’t gotten it. You can’t die! That’s the secret; you can’t die. That is the thing the devil has lied [about]—those are deceptions that you have put in your spirit. You cannot die if you stick to the Word. Let God be true, and every man a liar!’¹⁶⁷

On March 19th, 2017, Phaneroo’s administrator, Mr. Johnson Agababyona, died of Cancer. Then their celebrated singer, known as *New Testament*, also died. Reports are that many among the administrators and faithful died in that season. These deaths caused several followers to discard Phaneroo’s denial and belief that their disciples could not die. But Lubega argued that those who die simply confess with their lips what they don’t believe with their hearts. To him, there is a class of Christians with a certain understanding whose ‘emotions’ are synced with their confession. These people, for Lubega, cannot die.

Phaneroo’s idea that those with the knowledge of God’s Word cannot die is consistent with their three-class category of humans: the carnal, the born again but under the law, and the fully initiated or the ‘heavenly man.’ We saw Phaneroo’s Gnostic view of salvation as an upward trajectory, an upward motion of believers from carnality to new life but still in ignorance and then to deification, where, like God, they are immortal and incapable of dying. Indeed, Phaneroo insists that ‘God is immortal and so are you!’¹⁶⁸

Justin Martyr (A.D 100-165), born just after the death of Apostle John, notes how by his time, Gnostics held that believers who have secret knowledge of who they are could not die.

A man, Meander, also a Samaritan, of the town Capparetæa, a disciple of Simon, and inspired by devils, we know to have deceived many while he was in Antioch by his magical art. He persuaded those who adhered to him that they should never die, and even now, there are some living who hold this opinion of his.¹⁶⁹

TDNT notes again that:

γνῶσις (gnosis) invests the Gnostic with the divine nature and, therefore in the first instance, with immortality. By his vision, he is transformed from a man into God. Indeed, the very γνῶσις which leads to this is regarded as a divine δύναμις (power) which flows into man and, along with other powers, drives death out of him.¹⁷⁰

Thus, Phaneroo’s idea that we cannot die squares well with Gnostic thought. But when we read Scripture, we note how God willed for Christ to die. Our very

¹⁶⁷ Grace Lubega. (2018, January 25). *Spirit, Soul, and Body, Phaneroo 173*. Minute 55:07-56:20. Compact Disc.

¹⁶⁸ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2017, February 03). *You are Immortal*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/you-are-immortal/>

¹⁶⁹ Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” 171.

¹⁷⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, “Γνώσκω, Γνῶσις, Ἐπιγνώσκω, Ἐπίγνωσις, Καταγνώσκω, Ἀκατάγνωστος, Προγνώσκω, Πρόγνωσις, Συγγνώμη, Γνώμη, Γνωρίζω, Γνωστός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 696.

hope lies in the death of the Son of God. Christ calls Christians to follow him on the road to suffering, crucifixion, and death (Lk 9:23). Stephen's death (Acts 7:58-60) did not prove that his emotions were not synced with his confession. In the account, we don't find him confessing, 'I shall not die.' Indeed, he knew that the One in him was greater than the one in the world. He saw Christ standing at the right hand of God! James, the son of Zebedee (Acts 12:1-5), died, and Paul prepared to die for the gospel (Acts 21:13) wasn't immature. The list is long of many faithful believers, heavenly-minded and heaven-bound, who died. None is reported to have escaped physical death, and none—but the Gnostics made physical death a test of spiritual maturity. Physical death is not final to the Christian, for Christ conquered the grave. Our spiritual maturity is not shown by our not dying but in our love for our neighbors. Rather than the absence of physical death, love proves our spiritual maturity (1 Cor 13:2).

Phaneroo emphasizes the right kind of knowledge as necessary for salvation and escapes from death. Thus, to Phaneroo's emphasis on knowledge, we now turn.

PHANEROO: SALVATION PRIMARILY A DELIVERANCE FROM IGNORANCE

*Sin is not a problem for the new creation. The problem in the church is not sin; the problem in the church is knowledge.*¹⁷¹

One of the fundamental doctrines that the 16th Century Church Reformers insisted on in their struggle with Roman Catholicism is Scripture's clarity. The Reformers insisted that Scripture is itself apparent, able to be understood by all who approach it prayerfully, by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. But, of course, this doctrine was not a new 16th Century development. St. Irenaeus of Lyons says that:

[T]he entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them."¹⁷²

Likewise, Pope Gregory the Great, in his *Letter to Leander*, refers to Scripture as "a river broad and deep, shallow enough for a lamb to go wading, but deep enough for an elephant to swim."¹⁷³ Also, the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1.7 states that

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

The Confession's distinction is crucial, for we must admit that not everything in the Bible is easy to understand. There are indeed difficult passages and portions, some of which will continue to elicit diverse views from well-meaning Bible students. But the things that we need to know to be saved are clear in Scripture. This doctrine needs to be stated clearly right at the onset because, as we shall see next, many of the false

¹⁷¹ Grace Lubega, (2018, November). *Submitted to His Grace*. Minute 04:17-04:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vG_rG2n1Z-Q

¹⁷² St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1024

¹⁷³ Gregory the Great. *Morals in Job: Letter to Leander*, Point Four.

teachings that the Church confronted in its history hide behind the curtain of “secret knowledge” that can only be accessed by a particular group of “elite” Christians.

For the Gnostics, salvation was not deliverance from sin’s penalty. Instead, Christ brought escape from ignorance by unique knowledge and self-awareness. Marvin Meyer puts it thus:

The role of the gnostic Savior is to awaken people who are under the spell of the demiurge [the false deity that created the world] - not, as in the case of the Christ of the emerging orthodox church, to die for the salvation of people, to be a sacrifice for sins, or to rise from the dead on Easter. The gnostic revealer discloses knowledge that frees and awakens people and helps them recall who they are. When enlightened, Gnostics can live a life appropriate for those who know themselves and God. They can return back to the beginning when they were one with God. Such a life transcends what is mundane and mortal in this world and experiences the bliss of oneness with the divine.¹⁷⁴

As we noted before, this unique, mystical knowledge is only available to those who have tapped into their spiritual element. Thus, it is these that are truly born again. And they are born again because they have attained this knowledge. One Gnostic Bishop put it this way:

Gnostics do not look to salvation from sin (original sin or other) but from the ignorance of which sin is a consequence. Ignorance- whereby is meant ignorance of spiritual realities- is dispelled only by gnosis, and the decisive revelation of gnosis is brought by the Messengers of Light, especially by Christ, the Logos of the true God [other messengers include Seth, the third son of Adam, and the prophet Mani]. It is not by His suffering and death but by His life of teaching and His establishment of mysteries that Christ has performed His work of salvation.¹⁷⁵

Lubega, as quoted at the start of this section, insists that sin is not the problem with the Church, but ignorance and lack of knowledge are. In so saying, Lubega again affirms Phaneroo’s Gnostic links. Indeed, the name ‘Phaneroo,’ as Lubega explains it says the same. In his interview with *The Independent*, Lubega insisted that Phaneroo stands for “bringing to manifestation that which existed but is not seen.” What Lubega wanted “to see in this generation is that Christians start bringing forth things that men never thought existed, yet they did, in fact, exist.” Lubega says that the Lord spoke to him “to answer the many questions that the church previously left unanswered.” Thus, in picking his ministry’s name, Lubega saw knowledge as Phaneroo’s decisive distinctive, thus affirming that ignorance, not sin, is humanity’s primary problem.

One can understand the verb Phaneroo (φανερῶ) as a Gnostic or as a Christian. The New Testament mainly uses φανερώω to speak of the revelation of the gospel through the appearance of Christ (cf. Rom. 3:21, Jn 1:31; 2:11; 17:6), not some hidden propositions or abstract subjectivity. The verb, used biblically, does not mean individual revelations and manifestations of what was previously hidden. Instead, it speaks of the knowledge of God that comes from the public preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Paul also uses φανερώω in 2 Cor. 5:10 to speak of our appearance before the judgment seat of Christ on the last day. Paul is not saying that we were

¹⁷⁴ Willis Barnstone & Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Bible*, (Shambalah, 2003), as quoted from <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/meyer-intro.html>

¹⁷⁵ Stephan A. Hoeller, (Accessed April 20th, 2022), *The Gnostic Worldview: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism*. <http://gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>

previously hidden from the Lord and now manifest ourselves before him. It is not as though God did not know we existed, and now learns this when we show up. Indeed, Paul continues in 2 Cor 5:11 that “what we are is known (πεφανερώμεθα) to God, and I hope it is known (πεφανερῶσθαι) to your conscience.” Phaneroo as a verb is not always about what was previously unknown and is now made manifest.

Paul also uses *phaneroo* to speak of every person's knowledge about God through ‘natural’ or ‘general’ revelation. Indeed, “what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them (Ro 1:19). The verb rendered ‘he has shown’ is *phaneroo* (ἐφανερώσεν). Here, the knowledge of God is plain (φανερὸν) to all people so that humanity's problem is not lack of information or knowledge, as Lubega states, but sin, a deep-rooted rebellion against the God who is evident. If they had not known God (in some way), they would not be guilty of rejecting him. Instead, Paul tells believers to ‘put off’ the sinful members and be ‘renewed’ or ‘sanctified’ (Eph. 4:22; Col 2:11, 3:5). For Paul, yes, ignorance is an issue that God addresses in the Church through the public preaching and teaching of the Bible. Yet, sin and its eradication in the believer is the chief work of the Spirit in everyone joined to Christ.

But the Phaneroo movement conceives the *phaneroo* verb in a gnostic esoteric¹⁷⁶ way to denote ‘deep’ knowledge. As such, for Lubega, the initiated are saved from the ignorance of who they are. In his devotional, *The World of Eternity*, Lubega remarks:

The[re] are those that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:18, who are like Gentiles, alienated from the life of God. This alienation is not because they don't have the life but because they don't know the world in which that life works. They confess that they have eternal life, they sing praises about this life they carry; however, they are both ignorant and indifferent to the world of eternity. It is eternal life to know God. This means that the world of eternity starts to open up to you, depending on your knowledge of God.

In *Of Walking in The Spirit*, Lubega declares that:

When a man who is not born again accesses the spirit world and sees certain things therein, his interpretation depends on the master he serves. He cannot understand what he sees the way the Christian sees it. We carry advanced knowledge, and that grace comes with the ability to control the things that we receive, stumble on and see spiritually.

Likewise, his sermon, *The Hidden Gospel*, is a subtle reiteration of the same

There is a gospel that seems open and known generally, and there is a gospel that is hidden. We are all believers, but there's a message that is hid from some. Some assume that because they are preaching what sounds reasonable, then that makes it the gospel, but this is not so.

From the above, you may notice that Lubega believes there are two stages of salvation among Christians, dependent on one's knowledge.¹⁷⁷ Recall that the Gnostics saw stages of advancement in knowledge. Gnostics spoke of the animate level for the

¹⁷⁶ Esoteric: intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest.

¹⁷⁷ For example, in another devotional, Lubega says that “even though we are all chosen, one in a relationship is set apart among the chosen; we are all a royal priesthood but another burns incense in the holiest place; we are all peculiar but he is peculiar even in this peculiarity. That is called distinction!” See Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, January 29). *To Walk with God*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/to-walk-with-god/>

unregenerate or non-born-again people. After conversion, believers or Christians attain a step equal to the creator's. Recall that for the Gnostics, the creator is one of the divine sparks. The last level for the Gnostics is the spiritual element when one has mystical knowledge (gnosis) about God. The more knowledge one has, the more they ascend from the carnal stage to the creator stage and then to the spiritual stage where they live like the gods, shedding off bodily ignorance, also called 'carnality.'

In Phaneroo's quotes above, one sees the three stages also. First, there are the carnal ones, who though having access to the Spirit, do not understand. These are not born again. But even among those born again, two classes exist. As Lubega says, "There is a gospel that seems open and known generally, and there is a gospel that is hidden." "We are all believers, but there's a message that is hidden from some." Some believers are on the creator level. They have regained their state as divine sparks, but, as in Gnosticism, "they remain in ignorance of the true God and their spiritual nature. They require rules and instructions to know what is correct." The last class to which Phaneroo calls its faithful, such ones have 'deep knowledge' or 'epignosis.'

Phaneroo tends to separate those who have the *gnosis* from those with *epignosis* and considers people who have 'epignosis' as more profound than those who have 'gnosis.' It is these that are truly born again. In Part Two of *The Experience of Epignosis*, Lubega remarks:

The scriptures reveal two kinds of knowledge, EPIGNOSIS and GNOSKO. Gnosko is progressive knowledge, that which one acquires gradually with their study of the Word while epignosis is the advanced, complete, and perfect knowledge in and of God. Epignosis does not come by gnosko. This means that you can never study the Word of God enough to have the complete knowledge of God.

Notice that Phaneroo's definition of Christians who only have gnōsis is the Gnostic definition of Christians at the creator level, not the spiritual element level. The class of 'gnōsis' or 'creator level' is for those who, according to Gnosticism, "require rules and instructions to know what is correct." For Phaneroo, those with 'gnosko' gradually acquire such "with the study of the Word," which, Lubega insists, cannot bring you to a higher level. In this same devotional, Lubega speaks of those satisfied with the 'gnōsis' who rely on a gradual study of Scripture for their walk. Accordingly, some sermons aim at gnōsis. But Lubega insists that "the Word of God is deeper than that." He says that the gradual study of Scripture cannot bring epignosis. Something other than Scripture (prayerfully) studied is needed to propel the reader to the 'epignosis' level. Many, says Lubega, read the Scriptures believing that they "are opening them to the experience of epignosis." Lubega calls the Church to "embrace epignosis" and move away from the elementary gnōsis level. Both Lubega and Gnostics conceive of three-stage salvation comprised of shading ignorance about our true origins and destiny as divine stars. The three stages (from carnality to creation or gnosis stage, and then the spiritual or epignosis stage) mark how individuals climb upwards from the earthly realm to the spiritual realm. Like Plato and Socrates, Phaneroo sees the goal of knowledge (or philosophy¹⁷⁸) as breaking free from the chains the body imposes on the soul/spirit.

¹⁷⁸ See Plato, *Phaedo*, 142.

In response to the above claims, one needs to know that in comparing ginōskō with epignōsis, Phaneroo compares a verb (ginōskō) with a noun (epignōsis). As a verb, ginōskō (γινώσκω) has various meanings in the New Testament. According to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), it may mean “to detect” (Mk. 5:29; Lk. 8:46). It can also mean “to note” (Mk. 8:17; 12:12; Mt. 26:10; 2 C. 2:4; Jn. 5:42; 8:27), or “to recognize” (Lk. 7:39; Mt. 12:15; 22:18; Gl. 3:7; Jm. 2:20; Jn. 4:1; 5:6; 6:15), with no clear-cut lines of differentiation. TDNT insists that naturally, the verb can also mean “to learn” (Mk. 5:43; 15:45; Lk. 9:11; Ac. 17:13, 19; Phil. 1:12; 2:19; Jn. 11:57; 12:9; Mt. 10:26 and par.; Ac. 9:24; Phil. 4:5). It may mean “to confirm” (Mk. 6:38; 13:28 f.; Lk. 1:18; 1 C. 4:19; 2 C. 13:6). Ginōskō (γινώσκω) can also mean “to know” in the sense of awareness (Mt. 24:50; Lk. 2:43; 16:4; Hb. 10:34; Rev. 3:3; Jn. 2:24 f.; 7:27; 1 Jn. 3:20; Ign. R., 5, 3) or acquaintance (Mt. 25:24; Lk. 12:47 f.; 16:15; Ac. 1:7; R. 2:18; 7:1; 2 C. 5:16; Jn. 1:48; 7:49; 1 Cl., 31, 3; 35, 3) or even understanding (Lk. 18:34; Ac. 8:30; 1 C. 14:7, 9; Jn. 3:10). The verb may even refer to mastery over something (as in Mt. 16:3)¹⁷⁹

It is not valid, as Phaneroo teaches, that ginōskō is basic knowledge from which believers should graduate. As a verb, ginōskō refers to a proper understanding of God (as in Rev. 2:23; Jn 17:3). Indeed, as in John 17:3, eternal life is to know (ginōskō), the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. On the other hand, TDNT states that the verb epiginōskō is often used instead of ginōskō with no different meaning;¹⁸⁰ the two verbs are synonyms, not different as Phaneroo claims.

The general meaning of ἐπιγινώσκειν (epignōskein, an infinitive of epiginōskō) is “to perceive,” and only infrequently is it intentionally selected instead of the simple form (e.g., Lk. 1:22; 24:16, 31, though cf. v. 35; Ac. 3:10; 4:13; 12:14; Herm. v., 5, 3 f.). It can also mean “to learn” (Lk. 7:37; 23:7; Ac. 9:30; 22:29), “to understand” (2 C. 1:13), and “to know” (Ac. 25:10; 2 C. 13:5). If it has the primary sense of “known,” it can also mean “understood” in the sense of 1 C. 1:13f... The compound is perhaps chosen intentionally sometimes for “to confirm” (Lk. 1:4; Ac. 22:24; 23:28; 24:8).¹⁸¹

The noun gnōsis (γνώσις) in the OT is of the same essence as the corresponding verb ginōskō (γινώσκω). Used with ‘God’ as its objective genitive (knowledge *of God*), it refers to “obedient acknowledgment of the will of God.”¹⁸² In Lk 1:77, John the Baptist goes before God to “give knowledge (gnōsis) of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.” Christ reproves the lawyers of his day for taking away the key to saving knowledge (gnosis, Lk. 11:52). Meanwhile, the noun epignōsis (ἐπίγνωσις) can refer to knowledge, not of God, but sin (Rom. 3:20). The Law brings such knowledge (epignōsis). This is crucial because, contrary to Phaneroo, epignōsis is not special knowledge that comes with esoteric depth. It is the knowledge that even the Law gives. Also, Paul rejects Phaneroo’s claim that ginōskō refers to progressive knowledge while epignōsis doesn’t. In Col 1:10, epignōsis is a progressive knowledge of God in which we must grow. The simple point is that the Bible uses the two verbs, ginōskō, and epiginōskō, and the two nouns, gnōsis, and epignōsis, synonymously, contrary to Phaneroo’s claims.

¹⁷⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–. Page 703.

¹⁸⁰ TDNT, 703.

¹⁸¹ TDNT, 704.

¹⁸² TDNT, 706.

It is also crucial to note that over and against Phaneroo's emphasis on salvation as deliverance from ignorance, the Bible is replete with passages that point to Christ's saving work on the cross dealing with sin. Through his perfect life of obedience and vicarious death on the cross, Christ has dealt with the penalty of sin for his own. Christ did this by justifying us. Justification is a legal statement of "not guilty" to those who otherwise are guilty (Rom 3:28; 5:1; 8:1; Gal 2:16, etc.). Justification is God's declaration of who belongs among his people without categories or stages. And yet, through the process of sanctification, God gradually deals with the power of sin in our lives. Sanctification is the progressive process whereby God, by his Spirit, works in believers' lives, causing them to walk in holiness and obedience to his commands as they put off the flesh's works and put on the fruit of the Spirit. It is the progressive conformity of believers into the very image of their Savior (Rom 6:19; Phil 2:12,13; 1 Thes 4:3, etc.). Then, at glorification, God will forever deal with the presence of sin in our lives. Glorification is that instantaneous transformation of the believers by God's power into a perfectly moral and physical being eternally living in God's presence (Rom 8:16,17; Phil 1:6; 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

Our knowledge of God does not separate us into classes as Christians. We are not more spiritual than others on account of anything we may know that they don't. Love of God and neighbor and obedience to God's commands is the only test of our spiritual maturity. Indeed, those who think they stand must heed lest they fall (1 Cor. 10:12). We are not 'deep' when we claim to have complete knowledge of God. Indeed, J. I Packer posits that:

Scripture speaks of "knowing" God as the spiritual person's ideal: namely, the fullness of a faith-relationship that brings salvation and eternal life and generates love, hope, obedience, and joy (see, for example, Exod. 33:13; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:8-12; Dan. 11:32; John 17:3; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 1:17-19; 3:19; Phil. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:12.) The dimensions of this knowledge are intellectual (knowing the truth about God: Deut. 7:9; Ps. 100:3); volitional (trusting, obeying, and worshipping God in terms of that truth); and moral (practicing justice and love: Jer. 22:16; 1 John 4:7-8). Faith-knowledge focuses on God incarnate, the man Christ Jesus, the mediator between God and us sinners, through whom we come to know His Father as our Father (John 14:6). Faith seeks to know Christ and his power specifically (Phil. 3:8-14). Faith's knowledge is the fruit of regeneration, the bestowal of a new heart (Jer. 24:7; 1 John 5:20), and of illumination by the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:17). The knowledge-relationship is reciprocal, implying covenantal affection on both sides: we know God as ours because he knows us as His (John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19).¹⁸³

¹⁸³ J.I Packer, as quoted from <https://www.monergism.com/true-knowledge-god-comes-through-faith>

PHANEROO'S PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The Prosperity gospel in Uganda has been pronounced for a while. Prosperity preachers dominate the country's mainstream 'Christian' landscape. Many rising fellowships and gatherings lean on a soft prosperity gospel that appeals to our youth. Such appeals sync with postmodern urges toward self-improvement, autonomy, self-enrichment, and 'expressive individualism.' The prosperity gospel teaches that a Christian, by faith, ought to live on earth a pain and poverty-free life. It "promises material, physical, and visible blessings for all who would embrace it; it insists that God's will is for all his children to prosper here and now."¹⁸⁴ Christ's coming that they may 'have life and have it more abundantly' (John 10:10) manifests in a lavish life of wealth and health. It is an appealing theology that asserts that God's will for humanity in no way includes suffering or lack.

Conrad Mbewe calls this a false gospel and an adulterated theology.¹⁸⁵ But Chris Oyakhilome hotly holds that God plans to make every person prosper in wealth and health.¹⁸⁶ Though both sides appeal to Scripture, the real crux concerns not the lip-confession of Scripture's authority but contextual interpretation. The discussion below seeks to respond biblically and historically to the following questions (1) Does God desire his creatures to prosper? (2) What is biblical prosperity? (3) What did the early Church teach about biblical prosperity? We respond to these questions considering what Phaneroo teaches and to which teaching we now turn.

LUBEGA'S MAVERICK DEMO

A maverick demo of 'faith healing'—his February 2017 message entitled *The Distinctive Believer*—captures Lubega's exchange with a supposedly sick girl. "You say something in your spirit without saying a word," he says. "Do you want me to demonstrate? Someone with pain." Then a girl comes up who claims to have had pain in her leg for eight years. There is silence in the auditorium as he asks the flock to watch. The girl starts to shake her body, then eventually walks. She holds her face. Murmurs. She starts to scream, then falls to the ground. People clap. Lubega then states that an operation has taken place on her leg. "Help her stand up." "Check your leg. See what power is doing without saying anything." The girl eventually is up, as though still with pain in the other leg. The apostle says, "let me fix that one also."¹⁸⁷ No prior medical exhibit is announced to show that the unknown girl had an infirmity; neither can we ascertain that a miracle just happened. And such exhibitionism places Phaneroo in the long line of Uganda's faith healing ministries.

We do not deny that God can or still heals in numerous ways. We believe that he does. But the necessity of instantly broadcasting miracles remains conspicuous, especially as a handmaid to the health and wealth preaching antics. For Lubega, being a Christian is about demonstrating power or doing whatever we suppose and choose.

¹⁸⁴ K. Mbugua, O. M. Maura, C. Mbewe, W. Grudem, J. Piper. *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel*. African Christian Textbooks Registered Trustees, The Gospel Coalition, 2015. Page 3.

¹⁸⁵ Conrad Mbewe. (2012, October 11). *Our Criminal Evangelical Silence*.

<http://www.conradmbewe.com/2012/10/our-criminal-evangelical-silence.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Poddtoppen. (Accessed 2021, February 3). *Peace of Prosperity As a Christian By Pastor Chris Oyakhilome*.

<https://poddtoppen.se/podcast/1493355948/christian-devotional/peace-of-prosperity-as-a-christian-by-pastor-chris-oyakhilome>

¹⁸⁷ Lubega, *The Distinctive Believer*. Minutes 43:20-44:42.

The predicament, says Lubega, is that “there are things that should not be happening to Christians.” Indeed, “we have not been taught how to live a glorious life. We have been taught to anticipate evil. But, he says, with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).”¹⁸⁸ For Lubega, much depends on how we think. The problem is the lack of knowledge about our identity as divine sparks and stars. If only we knew who we are—if our emotions sync with our confessions—we would not be sick or financially broke. So we would rise beyond material constraints. Esoteric knowledge remains central to Phaneroo’s soft prosperity preaching. Thus, we will handle it first.

PHANEROO: MINDSET AS A CREATIVE KEY

Emphasis on ‘mindset’ is characteristic of Grace Lubega’s teaching. If we were to quote Phaneroo’s landmark ministry scripture, it would be, “as a man thinks, so he is” (Prov. 23:7, KJV). Lubega says, “Believe in yourself.”¹⁸⁹ “It is your choice to fix things.”¹⁹⁰ The man-centered view of all things we saw under anthropology forms the foundation of Phaneroo’s prosperity teaching. Of course, this teaching is not new. Consider Quimby Phineas (1802-1866), the American Philosopher, hypnotist, spiritualist, and arguably the most influential father of New Thought:

If disease was a state of mind, the cause of which existed in a particular form of belief, the patient’s confidence in the healer’s suggestion would be sufficient to bring about the cure. Disease could be cured with or without a particular medicine.”¹⁹¹

Instead of mesmerizing the patient, he sat in silence by the patient’s side and, after using clairvoyance to understand the malady, explained to the patient the cure that lay within his or her own being.¹⁹²

Quimby believed that sickness resulted from the state of mind. He was convinced that ‘right-thinking’ brings healing. In *Christ Science*, Quimby taught that “Jesus showed humankind how to draw upon the divine wisdom within to overcome false beliefs.”¹⁹³ But if diseases and poverty are due to how we think, it remains to be that we are to blame for our suffering and problems. As we noted in exploring Phaneroo’s ethics, many followers were frustrated when they did not get well after healing promises. Indeed, one of theirs died of cancer which Phaneroo insists cannot kill the *heavenly man*. The answer, we saw, was that those unhealed don’t line their emotions with their confessions. For Phaneroo, the unhealed are so due to their lack of faith. Either you are healed, or you lack faith. Everything begins and ends with you—at least your psychological state. Lubega

[Mentions scenario where a relative died yet one believed God for healing and says] You are lying. You didn’t believe. You did what you thought is believing. But you didn’t

¹⁸⁸ Lubega, *The Double-Edged Sword*. Minute 26:39.

¹⁸⁹ Lubega. (2019, May 23). *Created in Christ*. Minute 33:58. Compact Disc

¹⁹⁰ Lubega, *The Distinctive Believer*. Minute 14:50.

¹⁹¹ Horatio W. Dresser. *The Quimby Manuscripts*. New York: Cosmo Classics, 2007. Page 33.

¹⁹² John S. Haller Jr. *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel*. Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2012. Page 49.

¹⁹³ Horatio W. Dresser. *A History of the New Thought Movement. Independently published (June 18, 2020)*. Pages 47, 49. Also, Ervin Seale. *The Complete Writings*. California: DeVorss & Company, 1988. Pages 103–113; 163–65.

believe. If it was the Godkind of faith, it would have worked. Stop blaming God for your inefficiencies.¹⁹⁴

It's important to know how to respond to the word. Many of you are too passive for God to operate on you. You must learn how to participate in the word. No wonder it is not working for you.¹⁹⁵

The two quotes stress a person's ability to achieve things. Man-centeredness, the upward movement of humans from the realm of carnality to the spiritual plane, and the stress on knowledge all merge. We cited before Phaneroo's emphasis on man's ability to create his reality, whether good or bad. Lubega, like all prosperity preachers, places creative power in human thoughts and speech rather than God's sovereignty over all situations. Humanity is at the center of Phaneroo's universe. Thus, Phaneroo could as well quote the proverb: "Physician, heal yourself!" (Lk. 4:23). If he is not healed, he is the problem—or at least his thinking is.

The apostle Paul disagrees with Phaneroo's assessment. Writing to Timothy, he concludes his letter by saying: "I left Trophimus sick in Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20, NIV). Notice how Paul does not blame Trophimus for lack of faith or that Trophimus did not exercise his free will unto healing. Paul left Trophimus sick, suggesting that he did not see the power to heal the sick as a divine right of the new creation as Phaneroo would have us believe. Physical healing is a sovereign act of God's mercy upon whom he wills. Trophimus' sickness was not a measure of his spiritual immaturity. Paul also writes to Timothy, reminding him to 'Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomach and frequent illnesses.' (1 Tim. 5:23, NIV). In Paul's writings, there is no supposition that Timothy's frequent illnesses were due to his failure to exercise his will, faith, or mindset unto healing. Paul does not blame Timothy for having his emotions out of sync with his confessions.

Without diverting, we must note that according to Genesis 3, suffering entered the world when man disobeyed God and allowed sin to corrupt him. Kenneth Mbugua insists that "Suffering came into the world when man sought pleasure and purpose outside God."¹⁹⁶ Suffering finds its origin in sin, and Jesus died a shameful, painful death on the cross to rid us of that sin and reconcile us with God. Changing one's mindset is not the remedy to the sickness; the suffering Christ is. It is also crucial to note that salvation from sin and its effects which Jesus brings, is not instantaneous. Nor did Jesus leave tools to overcome sin's effects in our hands to exercise them as we please, as Phaneroo insists. To think that Jesus died to give us tools to realize our healing and wealth depending on our mindset is Gnostic. It still sees Jesus as our example, as one who shows us the way back to the spiritual realm from where we supposedly came. So it is to say, 'Physician, heal yourself.'

¹⁹⁴ Grace Lubega. (2019, September 5). *Let God Be True*. Minute 17. Rita, for instance, reports her experience when she took her sick mother to Lubega for prayer. Lubega had preached about how God "wants you healed," and so Rita took her mother to Lubega who prayed for her, promising that in two days she will be healed, proof of which will come when she takes medical texts after a week. But Rita's mother wasn't healed. When she asked Lubega why, he told her how she needs to listen to his sermon of why some people can't get healed. Rita was angry at God for not healing her mother, until she watched *The American Gospel* documentary. Isaiah Mbuga speaks of many people with terminal illness who Lubega forbade from going to hospital "and have died."

¹⁹⁵ *Let God Be True*, Minute 40

¹⁹⁶ K. Mbugua et al, Page 68.

Meanwhile, Pro. 23:7 does not imply that we are products of our thoughts. Indeed, when we read verse six with verse seven, the text says this:

Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

The stingy gives you bread with a smiling face even when his heart is sad. Thus, let not his face deceive you. The only way you can know his true nature is by the state of his heart. As he thinks in his heart, so is he. This text does not say we are products of our thoughts. Instead, it says that a smiling face betrays an evil heart. The text talks about hypocrisy, not how we create a reality with our thoughts and words. It is, of course, correct to say that the Bible commands the Christian to not conform to this world's patterns but to be renewed in their mind (Rom. 12:1-2). While the text commands us against conforming to this world, Phaneroo's idea of mental exercise is defined by worldly things. Though the Bible demands that we focus on Christ, Phaneroo tells its faithful to judge their maturity by their material goods and physical health. We now turn to Phaneroo's teaching on physical health below.

PHANEROO ON HEALTH AND HEALING

In his message titled *The Ministry of Reconciliation* Minute 41:00, Lubega says that “we talk to the conscience about who we are. And as your conscience continues to believe this, you will see that your body has no choice.” Like the Gnostics and Quimby, the state of one's mind is the key to unlocking divine power. Following the tripartite idea of man's constitution that we saw under anthropology, Phaneroo holds that healing occurs when your spirit agrees with your soul against the body. For Grace Lubega, the soul is mid-way between the spirit and the body and can agree with either. If your soul agrees with your spirit, for instance, you are healed because ‘at the testimony of two or three witnesses, a matter shall be established (Deut. 19:15, NIV).’ Your healing comes when the body follows through with what your soul and spirit decide. However, if you feel sick and your soul agrees with your body that you are sick, you will be ill since the two (body and soul) have agreed with the sickness against your spirit.¹⁹⁷ We noted under anthropology that the Gnostics held that the soul is between “the spiritual and the material” and “will go over to that element to which it has an inclination.”¹⁹⁸ Phaneroo merely mimics Gnosticism.

Without the idea that the human person is a spirit with a soul living in a body—a concept we rejected under anthropology—the notion that healing depends on what side the soul falls cannot stand. But even without dismissing trichotomism, one can see the error in this teaching. Deuteronomy 19:15-20, when read properly, deals with how eyewitness testimony was treated in courts of law. The text says this:

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offence they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in the office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation. If the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do

¹⁹⁷ Lubega, *Spirit, Soul and Body*. Minutes 22-27.

¹⁹⁸ St. Irenaeus, Book 1, Page 36.

to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you.

From the above reading, one can already tell that it says nothing about the interior interaction between the spirit, soul, and body. Lubega imposes his ideas onto the text rather than let the text speak for itself. Beyond the proof-texting problem, Phaneroo's 'agreement' idea (between the supposed three parts of man)¹⁹⁹ is self-contradictory. On the one hand, the 'soulish man,' according to Grace Lubega, is carnal because he responds to life from his soul and not his spirit. On the other hand, the soul can agree with the body or the spirit to establish something (healing, success, prosperity, etc.). Such begs the question: does not the soul have more determinant authority over a man, given it ultimately makes the difference? Notice that in Phaneroo's view above, the final and decisive vote belongs not to the spirit but the soul. It does seem then that the person becomes whatever the soul decides—assuming the soul and spirit are different. And if this so, then whatever side the soul chooses, the person remains 'soulish,' for as the soul desires and chooses, so becomes the person.

But Phaneroo's prosperity gospel is rooted in the belief that the believer is not an ordinary person. They are divine sparks of the same essence and nature as God. Inasmuch Lubega and Phaneroo pray in the name of Jesus Christ, they believe that they are coequal with him, and thus, they have the power to command life and cease death. As we saw under Phaneroo's doctrine of salvation (soteriology), Phaneroo teaches its followers that those heavenly enough among them will not die. With man divinized, disease and death are not part of his nature. They argue that if Christ (the divine spark) did not fall sick, why would man (who also is a divine spark as Christ) be with the disease? So, in *Created in Christ*, Lubega says that 'dreamers (followers of Phaneroo) do not die of the disease.'²⁰⁰ Elsewhere he writes that "Disease in the New Testament is a lie."²⁰¹ As noted, Lubega claims that sickness and suffering are results of the choices we make because (commenting on Luke 7:2-9):

Faith is the liberty to do as you please, to look at the dead body of your son and refuse to kill them when everybody wants to bury them.²⁰²

But, indeed, Luke 7:2-9 says nothing about *faith* being the *liberty to do as you please*.²⁰³ This portion of the text constitutes a discreet section of the Gospel, bordered on each side by reports of Jesus' teaching (6:12-49; 8:1-18).²⁰⁴ Luke 7 displays Christ's sovereignty in salvation and the centurions' piety. The centurion had a sick slave to the point of death and had heard of Jesus. Luke does not detail what the centurion had heard of Jesus but, most likely, the cures he had performed.²⁰⁵ Though he was a man of faith

¹⁹⁹ For a discussion on whether man is composed of essentially two parts, material (body) and immaterial (soul/spirit), or three parts (body, soul, and spirit), see our discussion under anthropology/doctrine of man.

²⁰⁰ Lubega, *Created in Christ*. Minute 49:46.

²⁰¹ Phaneroo (2020, September 4). *A Dispensation of Truth*. <https://phaneroo.org/devotion/a-dispensation-of-truth/>

²⁰² Lubega, *The Distinctive Believer*. Minute 18:00

²⁰³ For Jason, "Faith is like a currency for getting things done." Jason narrates a story of when his friend lost his laptop. He 'had faith' that he will find his laptop in a certain place but was frustrated when he didn't. The response to him was that he lacked faith to find his laptop.

²⁰⁴ Joel B. Green. *The gospel of Luke: The new international commentary on the New testament*. Grand rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. Page 281

²⁰⁵ Leon Morris. *The Gospel according to St. Luke: An Introductory and Commentary, 1st Ed.* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. London: Inter-Varsity press, 1974. Page 136.

(7:9), he knew that healing could only be by Christ (7:7).²⁰⁶ Luke states nowhere that the centurion *did as he pleased*. Faith, a gift from God, did not lead him to do as he pleased. Instead, faith led him to Christ, who did as he pleased. Faith is not man's magic wand waved to do his will, but God's instrument to unite sinful humanity to himself through Christ.

We notice that in Phaneroo, there is a tendency to elevate faith above its object. Phaneroo has faith in faith. But faith neither saves nor heals. Christ—the object of faith—does. Yet Lubega says that “when you say ‘Father’ [in prayer], all of the heaven responds, ready to serve you.”²⁰⁷ By ‘faith,’ the God of Phaneroo acts as they please, not as a Sovereign but as an errand-boy. So, “A God that sometimes can say ‘no’ is not the God of Phaneroo (II Cor. 1:20).”²⁰⁸ This statement implies that whatever you want is yours—regardless. Thus, “I am of God, meaning failure can't come my way.”²⁰⁹ Put another way, those that fail are not of God. Man is at the center of Phaneroo's world, creatively reimagining and designing his world. The mindset and secret knowledge of the *heavenly man* cause him to declare health as they please.

But throughout Scripture, God is the final arbiter concerning our lives like a mold that gives shape to a brick (Rom. 9:17-21). The Bible never tolerates the claim that God exists as a yes-man to us. Although suffering entered the world through Adam's sin, we must know that God sovereignly uses pain to our advantage and his glory. God never spared Paul from pain (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Paul pleaded with God three times for the *thorn in his flesh* to leave him. Whatever this thorn was, it was a source of much discomfort (cf. Gal 4:13-15; Num. 33:55; Hos. 6:2). R. V. G. Tasker writes that “it may well have been a rather exceptional illness which had caused him to journey into Galatia at that particular time.”²¹⁰ But if faith were the liberty to do as one pleases, the thorn in Paul's flesh would have left him. Yet “his prayer was not answered in the way he had first wished; nevertheless, the answer he received remained with him as the most powerful inspiration in his life.”²¹¹ From this example, we see that God does not always withdraw suffering from us until his work is done. Paul suffered that Christ may reign. God can and does permit our pain and discomfort for his glory. God's ultimate design for our life on earth is not our happiness but our holiness—not our comfort but conformity to Christ. That God is sovereign, and we are not, displeases Phaneroo. Arthur Pink noted that

the sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth which brought comfort to many hearts and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue.²¹²

R. C. Sproul wrote that “if God is not sovereign over the entire created order, he is not sovereign.”²¹³ A person remains responsible and accountable for his choices despite

²⁰⁶ Green, Page 284.

²⁰⁷ Sweeney, *The Purged Conscience*. Minute 07:00.

²⁰⁸ Lubega, *The Double-Edged Sword*. Minutes 16:00-17:40.

²⁰⁹ Lubega, *The Double-Edged Sword*. Minute, 20:23.

²¹⁰ R. V. G. Tasker. *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians An Introductory and Commentary, 1st Ed.*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. London: Inter-Varsity press, 1958. Page 175.

²¹¹ Tasker, 178.

²¹² Arthur Pink. *The sovereignty of God*. Dublin: First Love Publications, 2017. Page 29.

²¹³ R. C. Sproul. *What is Reformed Theology?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997. Pages 28-9.

God's sovereignty since man's choices as voluntary. Still, we must humbly find hope in God's ultimate control. So, far from *faith being the liberty to do as you please*, it (faith) is a gift from God through which man submits to God's will. Our faith in God proves our dependence on him. The Christian Faith is a self-denying one, not a self-gratifying one. Faith leads to an understanding that Christ is sovereign, and we are not—humility and not pride. Faith surrenders and serves; it does not grab.

More—and this is crucial—the Christian faith is founded on a suffering God. At the heart of Christianity is a God who suffers in his humanity. Christianity insists that God is glorified most, not through the world's pomp and power or the wisdom of the Greeks and Gnostic knowledge, but the cross of Christ, a tool of torture and taunt. What this means is that whoever avoids suffering evades God. To be Christian is to suffer as Christ did. It does not mean we should not seek healing and health. Not at all. As mentioned before, we believe that God heals, whether through prayer or medicine. But God is not mandated to heal anyone or everyone now. We remind ourselves that we live in a world where Christ lived and suffered. And if we have not left it, we will meet with tears and toils, pain and passion, sorrow and suffering. As Christ's passion was God's powerful self-revelation, our troubles, if not self-inflicted, show God's glory because God perfects his power in our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9). As such, whoever shuns suffering shuns God's perfection.

Besides, Scripture is clear that this glorious completion of the work of redemption will not occur until Christ returns and brings the present age to an end.²¹⁴ Like Gnostics, Phaneroo conflates the now and the not-yet. The book of Revelation shows us a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no tears or sorrow or pain (Rev. 21:4). But ours is neither the new heaven nor the new earth. That day is coming, and we do well not to claim it already has. This is a world where pain exists, and no one who lives in it, not even Christ, is exempted from pain. Creation presently groans as it longs for the revealing of God's children (Rom. 8:18-25). All creation shall be free from present corruption (1 Cor. 15:20-28). But now is not that time. And as Mbugua writes, "The benefits of Christ's work are not all enjoyed on this earth."²¹⁵

Costi Hinn—Benny Hinn's nephew hints that "If being Christian guarantees that you will have health, then either there is something wrong with tens of millions of Christians around the world or there is something wrong with that kind of thinking."²¹⁶ If the unhealed are to blame, the problem is with Paul, who could not get rid of his thorn (2 Cor 12:7-10), and Timothy, whose stomach illness cannot go away without wine medication (1 Tim. 5:23). The issue would be with Epaphroditus, who was ill to the point of death (Phil. 2:25-30), and Trophimus, who missed missional work due to illness (2 Tim 4:20). If the sick's blame is on the sick, then the above heroes of faith are pitied. And if we can command power over death, we have such a poor example from all heroes of faith who, we must note—all died. But we stand with a crowd of witnesses, with those who insist that 'to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21). We cannot share in the world's redemption while ignoring its brokenness and pain.

²¹⁴ K. Mbugua et al. Page 20.

²¹⁵ K. Mbugua et al. Page 20.

²¹⁶ Costi W. Hinn. *God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel: How Truth Overwhelms a Life Built on Lies*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. Page 119.

PHANEROO ON WEALTH AND WELLBEING

The idea that man is a spirit makes Lubega teach, in *Condemning the Guiltless* preached on March 14, 2016, that when humanity was under the Law,

he was in the flesh. This is the kingdom; this is true repentance. It is when a man walks out of the flesh and walks into the spirit. A spirit cannot steal because it does not need a necklace.²¹⁷

If the ‘spirit’ cannot sin or steal, as Phaneroo says, it seems plain that neither do spirits need material things. How does one reconcile disdain for the body with materialism? But while (physical) matter does not matter to Lubega’s view of the nature of man, materialism permeates Phaneroo’s teaching. Thus, notwithstanding this contradiction, Lubega says that:

God is not interested in giving you how big; he is interested in giving you how big you want.²¹⁸

It's your right not to lack anything beneficial²¹⁹

And

God has never had a mentality to create man with lack. Even in man's fallen nature, God did not create consciousness for man to lack. But man, in his fallen nature, grew the consciousness to lack.²²⁰

To the Phaneroo movement, “Poverty is a spirit”²²¹ and a lie.²²² Phaneroo considers poverty the devil’s oppression and, more commonly, unbelief. Lubega summarily says, “When you talk about poverty, talk about yours, Phaneroo members are not poor.”²²³ Therefore, it may not be accidental that Phaneroo is registered as a profit-based private company in Uganda. We saw the centrality of positive thinking and speaking for Phaneroo—a proper frame of mind prerequisite for the kind of faith that yields wealth. Hence, “You believe you're not poor.”²²⁴

But all people that we spoke to say one thing: Phaneroo members are poor, except Lubega. Witnesses insist that even those who come with their money and businesses lose them when they join. One person narrated that all the 33 Phaneroo employees registered with URA were paid peanuts (at least by 2021). A story is also told of one Phaneroo leader who tried conning his girlfriend of money to enable him to pay rent. Another narrates the financial troubles they have as a family even when they serve with Phaneroo. There are rumors that Phaneroo’s ushers steal offertory money to survive and that many who work at Phaneroo offices beg. Those who do university ministry know the beggarly life of Phaneroo’s followers at college campuses.

²¹⁷ Phaneroo. *Condemning the Guiltless*.

²¹⁸ Lubega, *The Distinctive Believer*. Minute 21:54.

²¹⁹ Grace Lubega. (2019, June 27). *The Lord is Good*. Minute 7:00. Compact Disc

²²⁰ *The Lord is Good*, Minute 11:00.

²²¹ *The Lord is Good*, Minute 08:00.

²²² Phaneroo, *A Dispensation of Truth*.

²²³ Lubega, *The Distinctive Believer*. Minute 13:19.

²²⁴ Sweeney, *Authority in Life*. Minute 51:00.

Yet, for Phaneroo, one's financial breakthrough is only as big as one's faith. As observed earlier, Lubega's understanding of faith (the liberty to do as you please) is anthropocentric and deifies man. Phaneroo teaches that you are never meant to lack financially and materially if you are a Christian. If you are not wealthy, you are not a Christian, or you are still on the creator/gnosis level and are yet to possess *epignosis*. So, while seeing salvation as an escape from the body's prison cell, Phaneroo defines Christian maturity materially. But such is the paradox called Phaneroo: its financial claims never materialize financially—at least not for most followers. Perhaps, Phaneroo wants to tell us that their members, submitted to Lubega, are not Christians, have no liberty to do as they please, or are oppressed by the devil.

As Kate Browler notes:

The most controversial aspect of the [prosperity] movement is its radical claim to transform invisible faith into financial rewards”²²⁵

Now, the God of the Bible is not against money since he owns everything. As he says, “the silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of the host” (Hag. 2:8). He gives wealth to whomever he chooses for his pleasure and his sake. We may also affirm with Mbugua that “money is fundamentally good and provides many opportunities for glorifying God.”²²⁶ Yet, the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). The notion that one's heavy financial pocket is characteristic of Christ's outworking grace is fallacious. Salvation neither depends on nor is it revealed by one's pocket. If anything, the Bible's warnings go out to the rich in material things. Think of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), the rich young ruler (Mt. 19:16-22), James 1:9-10; 2:1-7, 1 Tim. 6:3-10, or the pompous rich Babylon of Rev. 17-18. If we are not careful, money may morph into Mammon. We can easily find our identity in our wallets' size and fall face down in worship before our bank statements. We may disdain contentment and stir greed in the bosom of fallen humanity's sinful members. Phaneroo makes promises that the Bible never makes, or, as Costi Hinn casts it, the prosperity preachers “write checks with their mouths that the Bible does not cash.”²²⁷

Lubega heavily relies on 2 Co 8:9 for his message. “The Lord Jesus Christ though rich, became poor for your sake so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Lubega says that if believers know who they are, they would be financially and materially well.²²⁸ But 2 Co 8:9, taken in context, promises no wealth to Christians. The syntactical similarities between 2 Co 8:9 and 5:21 show that Christ became poor when he became sin, and we are rich by becoming the righteousness of God in Christ.²²⁹ By poverty, Paul speaks of sin, and by riches, he means righteousness. In 2 Co. 8:9, Paul taught the Corinthian church to exemplify sacrifice and godliness through generosity by giving to the poor and needy. Indeed, the heroes in that chapter are not the materially rich Corinthians but the poor Macedonians. Paul commends Macedonians who overflowed in wealth from extreme poverty (2 Cor. 8:2). Paul Barnett writes:

²²⁵ Kate Browler. *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Page 97.

²²⁶ K. Mbugua et al. Page 123.

²²⁷ Hinn, Page 113.

²²⁸ Phaneroo, *A Dispensation of Truth*.

²²⁹ For more, see Joseph Byamukama, *Does 2 Cor 8:9 Promise Material Wealth?* <https://byamukama.com/does-2-cor-89-promise-material-wealth/>

Paul has appealed to the Corinthians, on the basis of the “overflow” of generosity on the part of the Macedonian churches, to “overflow” in this grace of generous giving, that is, to renew their participation in the collection (vv. 1–7). In the verses following, he reminds them of the desire they had demonstrated “last year” when the collection was initiated (v. 10), exhorting them to complete “now” what they had begun (v. 11). But at the same time, he offers them theological (Christological) and biblical reasons for it (v. 9, 13–15).²³⁰

The word ‘rich’ in 2 Cor 8:9 is not about material wealth. Paul employs the term to point the Corinthians to a significant and *rich* reward—Christ—who sacrificially and generously emptied himself, not counting equality with God as something he must cling to. Christ took a servant’s form and became a man (Phil 2:4-7). He became poor by becoming sin for us, as Paul says just in 2 Cor. 5:21. Paul uses Jesus’ becoming human—his incarnation—as his basis to argue for Corinthian generosity. Christ gave up heaven’s rich glories²³¹ for our redemption. As such, “the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the greatest example of self-sacrificing generosity.”²³²

Thus, Christ’s poverty is to be understood as including the whole of human life under sin, death, and condemnation that he has taken on himself. Not merely the cross but also the incarnation lies within Paul’s metaphor. Correspondingly, the riches that Christ communicates consist of righteousness, life, glory, and comfort—in other words, the gift of salvation itself.²³³

Christ became poor by becoming human and enriched us through his gift of salvation and righteousness. “Scripture is clear that the goal of our salvation is God, not gold.”²³⁴ Thus, since the Corinthian Church is rich with the gift of God through Christ, they surely should part with their gold and not be stingy. The Macedonian Church has shown them the way. Paul mentions how he was routinely *sorrowful yet always rejoicing* (2 Co 6:10) and often went *hungry, cold, and naked* at sea for Christ’s sake (2 Co 11:27). Paul did not command wealth for his life but faced everyday realities of abundance and lack, as we all do. Paul learned the secret of contentment in all situations, including lacking. In Philippians 4:11-13, Paul state that:

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance, and need in any and every circumstance. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

It is pretty intriguing how many people use Phil. 1:13 to claim they cannot lack because they can do all things through Christ. And yet, Paul is saying the opposite; he suffered lack through Christ who strengthens him!

Of course, Christianity does not give material poverty a pedestal. Often Phaneroo will accuse those who disagree with its prosperity gospel of peddling the poverty gospel. But that’s to misconstrue what is being said. No one is saying, ‘go in peace and be poor.’ Historically, believers have been marked by care for the poor with an eternal perspective (Proverbs 14:31; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27; 29:7). When we reject the prosperity

²³⁰ Paul Barnett. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. Pages 958-9.

²³¹ Thomas Constable, *Notes on II Corinthians*: 2015 Edition. Page 82.

²³² Thomas Constable, *Notes on II Corinthians*: 2015 Edition. Page 82.

²³³ Mark A. Seifrid. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, ed. D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014. Page 330.

²³⁴ K. Mbugua et al. Page 4.

gospel, we mean that material wealth is not the measure of gospel faithfulness or knowledge of God. We are not justified by wealth or poverty. Christians must not measure their value by their material wealth as the world does. But attaining material wealth is not evil. Only those who use it as a marker of spirituality make it a god—Mammon. The early Church laid all their wealth at the apostle’s feet because they knew contentment. Indeed, 1 Tim. 6:3-10 insists that prosperity preachers are puffed up, being greedy pursuers of vainglory:

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these, we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

The love for money leads Lubega to teach that “the seed will fight for you; if you are a tither and a giver, nobody can take your job, you are safe,”²³⁵ nurturing a focus on the material and temporary as incentives to give, rather than a love for the Savior. The problem with Phaneroo’s prosperity theology is not that they expect reaping from their ‘sowing’ but that their expected reward is far too small. They think of temporary gain when they are offered permanent and transcendent benefits. Phaneroo focuses on rambling rewards and misses a deeply satisfying blessing. They preach monetary treasures but miss a priceless gift before them.²³⁶ The prosperity gospel promotes a love for money, while the Bible clarifies this approach's dangers.²³⁷ Christ says, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24). M’Neile observes that men can work for two employers, but no slave can be the property of two owners.²³⁸ F. F. Bruce adds:

Mammon, a word of uncertain etymology, was used in the language of the time to mean property generally. It is not the name of a heathen god, but the Aramaic word is probably kept to suggest that property can become a master and even god.²³⁹

St. Athanasius pointed out that the very core of the problem of evil is *man’s worship of creation rather than his creator*. He writes: “much worse; they even transferred the honor due to God to wood and stones and every material object, and even to human beings.”²⁴⁰ Instead of worshipping the God of man, prosperity gospel theology looks to mammon. Thus, “Prosperity preachers regularly make God’s word

²³⁵ Phaneroo. (Accessed 2021, February 3). *Lessons from King Asa: Seeking God, Pride, and Humility*. Minute 41. Compact Disc.

²³⁶ K. Mbugua et al. Page 25.

²³⁷ K. Mbugua et al. Page 26.

²³⁸ F. F. Bruce. *Zondervan Bible Commentary: One-Volume Illustrated Edition*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018. Page 1070.

²³⁹ Bruce, 1070.

²⁴⁰ Saint Athanasius. *On the incarnation*. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011. Page 61.

mean whatever they decide to infer from it.”²⁴¹ But the gospel is centered on the message of Christ and him crucified. The gospel insists that Christ is enough. He is our only hope, the solid rock, and all other ground is sinking sand.

Biblical prosperity is this: Christ—not health and wealth—is the ultimate and ideal reward. Whoever has Christ has all they need. Whether one lives in a hut or mansion, walks or drives, famous or unknown, Christ must be enough. If our identity is in Christ plus (wealth, health, fame), we will lose our souls. Consistent with biblical teaching, the Church has always taught that humanity is lost without God and that profound satisfaction is only through the reconciliatory death of Jesus. In him, we obtain eternal salvation, far more priceless than what the prosperity gospel offers. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that *Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever*. God is glorified when our satisfaction in him quenches our cravings for money and manna. We glorify God most when we are satisfied in Christ as our only longing and when Christ—not material wealth—is all we seek. The prosperity gospel is devoid of Christ. And as Bishop Mwita Akiri, Founding Bishop of the Missionary Anglican Diocese of Tarime, Tanzania, notes:

The prosperity gospel is often devoid of meaningful theology. If it has one, it is often a distortion of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, just as contemporary liberal theology, prosperity theology is so attractive, especially to the undisciplined ordinary Christians in many corners of the globe. More often than not, the task and the quality of discipleship will depend on the quality of training and personal relationship of the preacher/minister with the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴²

CONCLUSION

We mentioned that those who promote and those who reject the prosperity gospel do so while holding to Scripture's sufficiency. But it remains that “the real chasm is between those who have bowed to the living God and thus also to the verbal, propositional communication of God’s word, and those who have not.”²⁴³ It is not enough to cite the Bible. It is necessary to do so in its context. The prosperity gospel thrives on the neglect of Scripture and adopting secular motivational messages that are therapeutic rather than sanctifying. Phaneroo’s insistence on material wealth, health, and mindset as a key to unlocking our creative powers is unbiblical. Its teaching places the believer in the center of their world. But biblical Christianity has God enthroned above our appetites and urges for earthly comfort. Ultimately, like Solomon said in Eccl. 1:9, there is nothing new under the sun. Phaneroo’s teachings are nothing new. Phaneroo teaches what was taught before by the Gnostics and the prosperity preachers. But the Church has always stood firm against idolatry—especially idolatry clothed in Christian terms. Yet, everyone has a daily choice: either bow the knee to Scripture or build a destiny on what mortal and fallen people say. We do hope you choose the former because:

All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field... surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Is 40:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25).

²⁴¹ K. Mbugua et al. Page 16.

²⁴² in his GAFCON essay *Prosperity gospel: Its Concise Theology Challenges and Opportunities*.

²⁴³ Francis A. Schaefer. *The church before the watching world*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972. Page 70.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Solomon insisted that nothing is new under the sun (Eccl 1:9-10). We also noted that a key to understanding Phaneroo is in our knowledge of *Gnosticism*, an ancient movement that emphasized deep knowledge or revelation over sanctification and held a hierarchy between spirit, soul, and body, thinking the spirit nobler and the body the baser. Gnosticism conceived salvation primarily as deliverance from ignorance, for ignorance, not sin, is the critical human problem. It taught that every Christian is Christ, of the same nature and origin as him and that Christ and all humans are divine stars or *eons* who descended from and returned to the spiritual realm. Gnosticism taught that Jesus and Christ are not the same—that Jesus was the earthly man, while Christ was heavenly. Phaneroo teaches that Jesus and Christ are not the same and that Jesus is earthly, while Christ is heavenly. Phaneroo holds that Jesus is a divine star like us, descended from the spiritual realm from which we all came. Like Gnosticism, Phaneroo teaches that "Christ equals me," and there is no difference between him and Phaneroo members. They are the same in nature, origin, and status. That is why Phaneroo insists that you should stand, chin up, and present yourself when they ask where God is. Phaneroo also holds that Jesus is no longer human, that his death and resurrection dissolved his humanity to nothingness, releasing him to roam as a spirit.

Meanwhile, concerning humanity, Phaneroo insists that its followers are creators of reality since they are "100% God-beings." As we noted, Lubega teaches that he and his followers were preexistent stars who existed as spirits in the spiritual realm but entered bodies when they got born again. Salvation is when their preexisting spirits enter them, destroying their humanity as they ascend to the realm of the gods. For Phaneroo, salvation is not God becoming human to reconcile us to himself, but rather, God consuming everything human to make you God. You can neither sin nor die if you are not human since you are 100% God-beings. But since this knowledge is secret and needs to be revealed (hence Phaneroo's emphasis on deep revelation and their name "Make Manifest"), salvation is primarily deliverance from ignorance, not sin. The deliverance, like the Gnostics, has three steps: the carnal or unsaved, those on the 'gnosis' level (who need to follow the rules and study the Bible), and those at the 'epignosis' level (those who have complete and perfect knowledge of God). Phaneroo claims to be at the third level, which, for the Gnostics, is the spiritual level. To those at the epignosis level, God cannot say no to their demands for health or wealth, for "A God that sometimes can say 'no' is not the God of Phaneroo."

To the above, we observed how the Bible insists that Christ is Jesus (Acts 18:5, 28; Jn 20:31). The early Church emphasized that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures so that there is no Jesus apart from Christ. We also noted that the Bible insists on the utter uniqueness of Jesus, the son of God. We saw John's use of monogenēs of Jesus and never of Christians to state Christ's unbreachable inimitability (see Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). We argued that Jesus is not a star like us, but God the Son—unlike us. This ontological gulf between God the Son and us exists between God and all creation so that the claim that we are "100% God-beings" is blasphemous and heretical. Whoever believes that they have God's exact nature neither knows God nor themselves. The Bible insists on one God and that everything comes to be by, through, and for him. Only God does as He pleases. The God of Israel, not humanity, is at the center of existence (Ps. 115:3, 135:6; Isa. 44:24; Col. 1:15–16), and there is no "God-being" except the one God of Israel.

We also noted how biblically, salvation concerns God's uniting himself to us without destroying our humanity. For what salvation is it where the savior destroys the object of his saving act? Scripture places the redemption of our bodies at the center of the good news (Rom. 8:18–24; 1 Cor. 15:12–58). God saves us as ensouled bodies and embodied souls. Thus, the Bible calls us to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1). We also saw that, over and against Phaneroo's Gnostic denial of our sinfulness, the apostle John writes that anyone who claims to be without sin or beyond sinning is deceiving himself and a liar (1 Jn. 1:7–10). The "we" language John uses refutes the idea that John was addressing unbelievers. Second Corinthians 7:1, too, disproves the idea that the believer's spirit is sinless. Besides, salvation is not the upward movement of our spirits as eons to the spiritual realm. Salvation is God dealing with our sin through his union with us in Christ and his indwelling Spirit.

We also rejected the idea that believers cannot die or fall sick, for the Bible says no such thing. Christ died and called us on the road to death (Lk. 9:23). Steven's death (Acts 7:58–30) did not prove that he did not know who he was. James died (Acts 12:1–5), and Paul—prepared to die for the gospel (Acts 21:13)—wasn't immature. For the Christian, death is not the test of maturity but a way to be fully human when we see God. If the unhealed are to blame, the problem is with Paul, who could not get rid of his thorn (2 Cor 12:7–10), and Timothy, whose stomach illness cannot go away without wine medication (1 Tim. 5:23). The issue would be with Epaphroditus, who was ill to the point of death (Phil. 2:25–30), and Trophimus, who missed missional work due to illness (2 Tim 4:20). So if the sick's blame is on the sick, then the above heroes of faith are pitied. And if we can command power over death, we have such a poor example from all heroes of faith who, we must note—all died. But we stand with a crowd of witnesses, with those who insist that 'to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21). We cannot share in the world's redemption while ignoring its brokenness and pain.

Yet, what Phaneroo teaches affects how its followers live. The reports about Phaneroo's ethics at various college campuses and churches fit with what they believe. The idea that they cannot sin connects well with accounts of the movement's prevalent sexual immorality, from the least to the highest. Their supposed ability to claim riches and health ironically stands contrary to reports of poverty, illness, death, and mental health issues in their midst. Their beliefs in being gods and God-beings explain their arrogance reported on every college campus. Preference for 'deep revelation' explains their apparent disdain for contextual biblical interpretation and application. Their belief in out-of-body experiences explains Lubega's haunting dream appearances, while his submission doctrine ties to the movement's cultic and, perhaps, occultic tendencies. Finally, Phaneroo's teaching and reported practice align well with Gnosticism described by the Church Fathers, especially Irenaeus of Lyons and Justin Martyr. Thus, knowing Scripture and Church History helps us guard against ancient heresies disguised as deep revelations. May the Lord grant us discernment and wisdom in service of his kingdom, for the glory of his name.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 2 Peter 2:1–3

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Considering this Report, we hope to conclude with some recommendations to the reader. First, we recognize the complexity of everyone's context, and thus some of the application points might come handier for you than others. We also recognize that though some workers plant and others water, only God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). We pray for God to use this Research to enrich and enlighten you. That said, here are a few thoughts on the way forward.

#1. Christian ministry at universities should be exercised under experienced institutional leadership for accountability and spiritual health purposes. It makes sense for University Christian leadership in Makerere, Kyambogo, UCU, and others to cultivate relationships with local churches that send through students in the first place to commence a long-term robust network of Christian ministry.

#2. Theological training is at the heart of all responses to aberrant Christian teaching. There is no overstating the importance of sound doctrine and the growing need for Ugandan Christians who "rightly handle the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) for the long-term good of any Christian congregation. All encouragement in this direction towards ministry preparation should repeatedly happen both informally and formally. There should be informal training for lay Church leaders to lead bible studies, teach, counsel, pray and preach in local contexts. Formally, Pastors should receive training from Seminaries and bible colleges to prepare themselves for long-term biblical faithfulness in their call to shepherd.

#3. In Uganda, local churches should disseminate Christian research spearheaded by Parachurch organizations like ACFAR and Veracity Fount for greater awareness and visibility. Nevertheless, pulpit ministry across local churches should always be undergirded by apologetics. Doing so will cultivate necessary discernment among Christians. If false teachings are to be dealt with from the root, Ugandan Christians in every congregation should be empowered and equipped by their Pastor to "give a reason for the Christian hope they have" (1 Pet 3:15).

#4. Biblically resourced CUs should ensure healthy post-school discipleship paths. Under local church accountability and perhaps regular Parachurch support, professional Christian groups in Uganda should be resourced with exegetical and apologetics tools necessary to work alongside local churches in discipling those out of school to grow and mentor others in the Faith.

#5. Ugandan evangelical associations' staff (BUU, ACEMU, BAFFE, PAG, VF, Living Word, and SUU) should establish and cultivate leadership and doctrinal oversight over their respective student ministry communities across educational institutions in Uganda. The ACFAR and Veracity Fount Leadership teams can mobilize action points toward this.

#6. Refresher training for Anglican chaplains is urgent, especially when many Anglican fellowships in Kampala and beyond have been most besieged by aberrant Christian teachings like Phaneroo, and Zoe, among others. Institutions like Bishop Tucker at Ugandan Christian University are best placed to spearhead this conversation and implement action steps towards its fulfillment. Collaboration with local Anglican fellowship structures on this front will increase response effectiveness.

#7. Ugandan high school ministry needs more than Scripture Union oversight, and more local churches should come alongside SU in mobilization. However, collaboration like this calls for joint leadership to ensure discipleship and outreach planning, evangelization, and spiritual health among many young Christian faithful coming out of lower educational institutions.

#8. Parachurch's efforts to help churches equip parents for their unique and partial role in discipleship should be resourced through apologetics research and publication, Reasons to Believe seminars, and exegetical forums. Doing so supplements teenager discipleship efforts which are often not exhausted on Sunday forums and pulpits.

#9. Expository summits to resource urban pastors are essential in creating an interpretive and biblically faithful culture towards empowering Ugandan preaching ministry. Consequently, more collaboration among Kampala urban churches is necessary for periodically assessing recommendations like these.

#10. After this Report's publication, a meeting with select Christian leaders respected by Grace Lubega should be mobilized to engage him and hold him accountable for his teaching personally. This endeavor aims at two things. The first is Lubega's restoration to accountable Christian fellowship—even if that means losing his founding position at Phaneroo. The other is the Church's good and the long-term spiritual health of many youths misled by his teaching.

#11. Continental network building with other regional evangelical players like Ekklesia Afrika and The Gospel Coalition Africa (TGC-Africa) is essential for resource mobilization and broad reach to other African countries bedeviled by the prosperity and gnostic teachings, among others.

#12. Above all, periodical prayer mobilization events across Kampala Urban church networks seeking spiritual revitalization and renewal among Kampala churches are critical in this evangelism and discipleship task. Action points derived from this could be deliberated in meetings across ACEMU, ACFAR, Veracity Fount, PAG, Living Word, and BUU, among other interested evangelical parties in this mission.

A Note to those who have since left Phaneroo: Finding a healthy bible preaching church or community is a good start. You may reach out to ACFAR or Veracity Fount for starters. A healthy local church is essential for your spiritual recovery and active corporate discipleship. Also, remember that many are praying for you.

A Note to Parents who have watched their own stray: Sound local church help is indispensable. As an ordinary long-term solution, family discipleship starting with routine prayer times and bible devotions at home are good preventive starts. Such devotional times are also “means of grace” towards shaping (or reshaping) the youths' minds to follow Christ in our homes. Churches and para-church organizations will do well to consistently resource parents in their congregation with the tools necessary to carry out this responsibility starting at home effectively.

I write to appreciate ACFAR and Veracity Fount for this research initiative to unmask the "deep revelation camouflage" that thrives on the prevalent nominalism among evangelicals in Uganda. We have heard wrong for so long that truth sounds odd, antagonistic, and even repulsive to many! We must acknowledge that the challenge of thinking biblically about what we believe is heavy on Christians who haven't thought rightly. Christian research is urgently needed to grow local content to inform an appropriate response to the salient gaps and take advantage of gospel opportunities that originate therein. The findings of this research have laid bare Phaneroo's structure, doctrine, and ethics for us to think objectively about the issues. The results also articulate strategic gaps in student ministry at universities, colleges, and schools that call for urgent, considered, and concerted action. I especially appreciate the recommendations outlined for action.

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ACFAR's mission is to equip believers in Africa for the defense of the faith, biblical discernment, and cult evangelism. We believe that Christ's call to discipleship can't be fully realized without equipping believers for discernment and defending the faith.

Therefore, we will continue to warn, inform, train, research, and partner with like-minded local churches and para-church organizations.

We envision a generation of disciples who are confident in their faith, defend it with conviction and courage, and are passionate about cult evangelism. For details on how we achieve our vision, please visit our website www.acfar.org.



Veracity Fount envisions a Ugandan Church equipped and equipping for mission. We seek to research and resource the Ugandan Church towards its renewal.

The ministry offers contextual theological research that enables pastors and Christian leaders disciple their congregations well. We also provide sound theological resources through an open library for private study and personal research, biblically faithful and culturally relevant podcasts, and weekly small group fellowships.

We desire to be faithful to Scripture, orthodox and historical, unwaveringly contextual, networked and networking, and teachable teachers. For more details on who we are and what we do, please visit www.veracityfount.org.