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Branhamism : Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult

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Branhamism : Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult Zondervan 1993 Pages 42-45 George A. Mather Larry A. Nichols



BRANHAM, WILLIAM MARION (1909-65). Branham received his first vision in 1916 at the age of seven. His most important revelation came on May 7, 1946, when an angel appeared to him, related to him his past, and gave him a vision for the future. The angel told him that he would become a healing evangelist. He declared himself the angel of Revelation 3:14 and 10:7. He was the founder of BRANHAMISM.

The Prophet WM. BRANHAM

ONE DAY I HEARD OF A PROPHET, WHOSE MESSAGE WENT STRAIGHT TO THE WORD BACK TO THE BIBLE HE TOOK US: WITH HIS, "THUS SAITH THE LORD!"

I THOUGHT THAT THOSE DAYS WERE OVER, AND ALL OF GOD'S PROPHETS WERE DEAD; BUT GOD GAVE HIS VINDICATION, A PILLAR OF FIRE OVER HIS HEAD!

HE PREACHED PREDESTINATION, AND BAPTISM IN JESUS' NAME; DIVINE HEALING, THE SEED OF THE SERPENT, AND THAT GOD IS FOREVER THE SAME!
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THE SICK, THE BLIND, AND THE CRIPPLED, THE POSSESSED, THE DEAF, AND THE LOST, CAME BY THE THOUSANDS TO SEE HIM, WHILE HE PREACHED THE WORD AT ANY COST'

MALACHI 4 TOLD US HE WAS COMING, AND GOD'S WORD WILL NEVER FAIL; AS HE LEFT US HE GAVE US A PROMISE, ONCE MORE I WILL RIDE THIS TRAIL!

WE DONT KNOW WHAT'S FIXING TO HAPPEN, FOR GOD'S WAYS WE CANT UNDERSTAND; BUT WE'LL STAND ON HIS WORD TIL HE CALLS US, WITH THE BRIDE TO THAT HEAVENLY LAND!

A TENT AND COMPLETE TRANSFORMATION, IN A VISION OUR PROPHET DID SEE; THOUGH HE'S GONE, IT WILL BE COMPLETED, ITS A PROMISE AND SO SHALL IT BE!

It's thus saith the Lord!!!

These lyrics are inscribed on the pyramid-shaped tombstone of the Rev. WILLIAM MARRION BRANHAM (1909-65) in Jeffersonville, Indiana, who was killed by a drunk driver at the age of fifty-six. Although he has been dead for several decades, his memory lives on in his followers, who are convinced that he was a prophet invested with the power and spirit of Elijah, raised up by God to minister to the church in modern times. Branhamites refer to such times as the "Laodicean Age," based on a dispensational interpretation of the seven churches in the book of Revelation (chaps. 2-3).

History. William Branham was born in Kentucky on April 6, 1909. His father was a bootlegger, and neither of his parents attended any (Christian churches. However, when William was born, his parents and the midwife reported that they saw a halo resting above the baby's head. They were frightened and did not know how to interpret this phenomenon. Followers believe that this was a sign that God had his hand on young William's life right from his birth. The halo

allegedly appeared again in Houston, Texas, in 1950 when Branham was on a preaching tour. A photo of the phenomenon was taken to George Lacy, examiner of questioned documents, who on examining it, issued the following statement to Branham, his followers, and the press: "Rev. Branham, you will die like all other mortals but as long as tfrce is a Christian civilization, your picture will live on." The now-famous photo has been copyrighted and can be seen in many publications, such as the Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements published in 1988 by Zondervan (p. 96).

Branham reports that the first time God spoke to him was when he was seven years old. While carrying water for his father's moonshine, he paused to rest under a tree. In the wind rustling through the leaves, a voice spoke, saying, "Never drink, smoke, or defile your body in any way, for I have a work for you to do when you get older."^ Branham's father would often call his son a sissy because he refused to drink. In a weak moment, young William decided to prove to his father that he could consume alcohol like all the other Branhams (his four brothers all drank with their father). Raising the bottle to his lips, he suddenly heard the voice in the wind and began to cry, to which his father promptly responded, "See, I told you he was a sissy.' The voice repeated this message on several occasions in Branham's life prior to his conversion.

Branham's conversion to CHRISTIANITY came through the preaching of a Baptist minister. Shortly thereafter, he felt called to preach, and plans were made to conduct his first church service. In 1933, under a tent in Jeffersonville, Indiana, Branham preached to approximately three-thousand people.

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The death of his wife, Hope Brumback, and his baby daughter, both in 1937, was interpreted by Branham to be God's judgment for not needing a call to minister to ONENESS PENTECOSTALS, with whom he had become acquainted during a revival near the Mishawaka River in Indiana.

In 1946 Branham claimed to have been visited by an angel in a secret cave, where he purportedly was granted the power to discern people's illnesses. Subsequently, the healing services and revivals conducted by the mystic preacher from Indiana were attended by thousands in auditoriums and stadiums throughout the world. From October-December 1951, Branham traveled to South Africa and conducted what has been dubbed the "greatest religious meetings ever." All manner of miracles and healings were reported to have taken place at these meetings, which were attended by Hundreds of thousands. Services were held in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. Julius Stadskev documents the various healings in his book, *William Branham—A Prophet Visits South Africa* (1952). Walter Hollenwegger, who interpreted for Branham in Zurich, Switzerland, on one occasion, writes that he "is not aware of any case in which he [Branham] was mistaken in the often detailed statements he made."*

BRANHAMISM

Reasons for Branham's immense popularity and success are summarized by D. J. Wilson.

In contrast to the caricature of the image-minded evangelist, he lived modestly, dressed moderately, and boasted of his youthful poverty. This endeared him to the throngs who idealized him. He was self-conscious about his lack of education, but the simplicity of his messages had worldwide appeal.

By emphasizing healing and prosperity and neglecting his Oneness theology Branham was able to minister in Trinitarian Pentecostal circles as well. '

Branham was killed in 1965. Some of his followers awaited his resurrection, while others memorialized him by building a shrine in his honor at his grave in Jeffersonville. In addition to the hagiographic poem inscribed in the monument (see Beginning of this essay), a second side of the shrine has inscribed the names of six great Christian leaders throughout the history of the church, of which Branham is the final, or seventh, name. They are Paul, Irenaeus, Martin, Columba, LUTHER., Wesley, and Branham. Each one is seen as being the prophet that God raised up in each of the seven church ages in the book of Revelation. A third side of the monument lists the seven churches—Ephesian, Smyrnacan, Pergamean, Thyatirean, Sardisean, Philadelphian, and Laodicean, the latter to which Branham was assigned.

Teachings. Essentially, Branham's theology is oneness in character, denying the TRINITY of traditional Christian theology. He states, "At the Nicean Council, the apostles' teachings were traded for a much newer and more accepted doctrine called the Trinity." His general theology may be summarized as follows:

God—Oneness theology teaches that God is one person or one essence. The ancient church encountered this idea in MODALISTIC MONARCHIANISM, or SABELLIANISM, named for one of its prominent advocates, Sabellius. Sabellius taught that God manifested himself in different "modes" at different times. At Creation, God was the eternal Father. When Jesus was born, it was God himself (formerly the Father) who took on human form as the redeeming Son. After Jesus' ascension, God then manifested himself as Holy Spirit, wherein he now moves in and through the church. Modalism was originally the well-meant attempt to preserve the unity of the Godhead. But in so doing,

the independent subsistence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of which the Bible refers to on ample occasions was lost. Modalism was challenged by leading theologians in the early church, such as Dionysius of Alexandria. The Trinitarian theology that emerged out of the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) was a testimony to the fact that the church recognized the distinctive subsistence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as being clearly attested to in the apostolic writings of the New Testament.'

Baptism—Branham reasoned that because God is one, the doctrine of the Trinity "is of the

BRANHAMISM

Devil." Therefore, anyone who has been baptized in the name of the triune God must be rebaptized "in the name of Jesus only." Branham understood the baptismal formula given by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 as being a summary of the Modalistic idea discussed above.

Why don't you examine your baptism of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and that false "trinity" it's so-called, which is nothing in the world but three offices of one God, titles. No name of Father. There's no such thing as name, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. . . .*

Humanity—Branham taught a doctrine that he called "serpent's seed" in which he believed that Eve had sexual relations with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Some human beings therefore are predestined to HELL. Hell, however, is not a place of eternal torment, as traditional Christianity maintains. Hell will be done away with by God. On the other hand, there are those born of the "seed of God," not corrupted by Eve's faithless union, who will be heirs of eternal life. Branham believed that those who follow his teachings are of the righteous seed.

At least one branch of Christian theology, CALVINISM, teaches a doctrine of double predestination. But nowhere did Calvin ever maintain, nor did any other movement within orthodox Christendom, that Eve had sexual relations with the DEVIL and that the resultant offspring were the souls predestined for damnation. This is an idea embraced by some OCCULT and SATANIST groups. Augustine believed that "original sin" is inherited by the human race through sexual lust or "concupiscence," but again, it was Adam who sinned, who had intercourse with sinful Eve. Together they produced an offspring that inherited corruption. Branham's serpent's seed doctrine is clearly outside the boundaries of ORTHODOXY.

Church—According to Branham, all denominations within Christendom are apostate and of the Devil. People from different denominational churches may be saved, but they must undergo suffering in a future period of time known as the Great Tribulation. True Christians are rebaptized "in the name of Jesus only" and follow the doctrines taught by God's apostle to the seventh and final age of church history—William Branham. To be part of a denominational church is to have the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:6-18).

For traditional orthodoxy, denominations are an unfortunate testimony to the fact that sinful human beings who are Christians simply cannot agree on all doctrines. There were divisions in the church almost from the beginning. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp division between them over the decision to take or leave behind John Mark on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Paul encountered problems with division in the church at Corinth (I Cor. 1:10-12 and elsewhere), yet the plurality and diversity within Christendom is compensated for in the unity that all Christians experience in the love and forgiveness extended through Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

All who believe in Christ comprise the "holy catholic and apostolic Church" (Nicene Creed, Appendix 1). The Apostles' Creed speaks of all true believers who have received the forgiveness of sins" as being members of the "communion of saints." Narrow sectarianism has always been denounced within the church and will continue to be denounced (Man. 10:40; Luke 9:49-50).

Some of Branham's followers believed that he (Branham) was virgin-born. Christianity regards this notion as being rank heresy. None other than the Founder of Christendom may claim such a unique entrance into the world.

End times-Branham believed himself to be the promised Elijah of Malachi 4:5, sent as a herald to usher in the end. Traditional Christian exegesis of Malachi 4:5 has rendered John the Baptist as being the herald spoken of (John 1:6-9). Even though John denied it (1:21), he perfectly fulfilled the role of the herald of Isaiah 40:3. Interestingly enough, it is Orthodox JUDAISM that maintains that the coming of Elijah is yet future. For this reason, it is customary at a Jewish PASS OVER seder to leave one seat empty at the table, symbolic of the anticipation of Elijah's appearance. No Orthodox Jew ever urged Branham to come and sit in the empty chair, however.

Conclusion. There are many other aspects to Branham's theology that could be discussed. They are omitted because they are quite characteristic of many traditional groups within the bounds of traditional Christendom.

Although Branham died in 1965, he continues to have followers who are avid believers in the truth of his cause. Extremists believe he will be resurrected by God to vindicate his mission. Still others believe he was God himself in human form. Most of his admirers, however, simply believed and followed one whom they considered to be a prophet for the modern world. Branham joins the ranks with many who preceded him and many who will follow-who believed themselves the chosen of God, singled out by a perceived voice

Notes

¹Julius Stadskev, *William Branham-A Prophet Visits South Africa* (Minneapolis: Julius Stadskev, 1952), 35. *Ibid.*, 3. *Ibid.*, 6.

²Walter J. Hollenwegger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 354.

³D. J. Wilson, "William Marrion Branham," in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 95.

⁴William Branham, *Thus Saith the Lord* 2 no. 5, 4-7 as quoted in "William Branham," *Christian Research Institute Fact Sheet*, ed. Cal Beisner (San Juan Capistrano, Calif.: Christian Research Institute, 1979), 2.

⁵See *CHRJSTADELPHIANISM and THE WAY INTERNATIONAL* for a further discussion of the Trinity.

•William Branham, *The Lord God Hath Spoken*, a compendium of tape recorded messages containing utterances of Branham on various subjects.

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