

RECONSTRUCTING WORD OF FAITH THEOLOGY: A DEFENSE, ANALYSIS AND REFINEMENT OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT

Theology Interest Group

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"O, when it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good work to do..."

Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*¹

The Debate over Word of Faith Theology

The independent charismatic movement has struggled to form an ecclesiastic identity amid its mosaic of churches, ministries, theological systems, and points of biblical emphasis. It surged onto the Pentecostal landscape in the fury of post World War II healing revivalism under the leadership of spiritual enthusiasts who were dissatisfied with established denominational Pentecostalism. They received the loose classification "independent charismatics" to distinguish them from the denominational charismatics or neo-Pentecostals of the late 20th century charismatic renewal. Their self-imposed isolation from traditional denominational structures created an opportunity for theological innovations. This freedom has also allowed an array of voices to rise up and speak to the issue of theology often with less than accurate methodologies and piece meal constructs that in part have hindered the work of the Holy Spirit. No other movement has been more pervasive in the independent charismatic tradition than the word of faith movement² and none other has been as persuasive.

Researchers and Pentecostal historians have difficulty finding any independent charismatic church or ministry that has not been exposed to the word of faith movement to some degree. Tenants of word of faith theology, such as positive confession and prosperity, have become the caricatures of the entire independent charismatic tradition. The spread of the word of faith movement over the last 25 years has not been without opposition. Critics have spoken out from reformed, evangelical, classic Pentecostal backgrounds and from within the independent charismatic tradition itself. Some critics decry the movement as cultic and the theology as heresy.³ Much to the detriment of the word of faith movement, this has been a rather one-sided debate. Many of the predominate word of faith proponents choose not to respond to the critics in an attempt to heed the Pauline warning to not "quarrel about words."⁴ While some substantial books

¹*Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*. John Dillenberger, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 24.

² The "word of faith movement" includes churches and teaching ministries which promote a doctrinal emphasis on physical healing, financial prosperity and positive confession. It is also referred to as "the health and wealth gospel," "word-faith movement," and "the faith movement."

³ Some of the harshest critics have been Hank Hannegraff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1997); David Hunt and T.A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1985); D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988).

⁴ I Timothy 6:4 and II Timothy 2:14

have been published in response to some of the critical extremes⁵, a thorough reconstruction of word of faith theology has not been attempted. A reconstruction of word of faith theology requires redeeming the word of faith movement from the "heresy junk pile" that it has been heaped on by answering the question, "Do the theological weaknesses within word of faith doctrines constitute an *anathema*ic condemnation or is there sufficient orthodoxy in word of faith theology to apply correction?" This will be a partial response to D. R. McConnell and other word of faith critics. The remaining process of reconstruction includes an explanation of four distinctives of word of faith theology - the nature of faith, positive confession, healing and prosperity. The final step to reconstruction will be to refine those tenants by answering the question, "Can each word of faith distinctive be reconstructed on a solid theological foundation and still retain its word of faith identity?"

Condemnation or Correction?

The integrity of the gospel is a primary concern in the Pauline letters. However, Paul's injunctions do not fall into rigid categories, but differ depending upon the context. To the Galatians, he writes,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel -- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!⁶

Paul emphatically states that the response to those who preach a different gospel is *anathema esto*. The verb *esto* is a third person singular, present active imperative form of *emi* implying a command. This command becomes weightier as Paul repeats his instructions in verse 9. *Anathema* refers to a person or thing that is consecrated and devoted to God for destruction in that it is alienated from God spiritually by sin.⁷ If word of faith theology breaks the boundaries of orthodoxy and is indeed preaching a different gospel, then we should apply the Pauline injunction to declare it *anathema*. This has been the direction taken by some word of faith critics. In his summary remarks, McConnell concludes,

This analysis of the Faith movement has characterized the Faith theology as "a different gospel."...Is the charge justified that the Faith theology constitutes a different gospel? I think that it is, for three reasons: (1) its historical origins; (2) its heretical doctrines; and (3) its cultic practices.⁸

Christian Research Institute President Hank Hanegraaff writes, "The Faith movement has systematically subverted the very essence of Christianity so as to present us with a

⁵ See William DeArtega, *Quenching the Spirit*, (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1996); James R. Spencer, *Heresy Hunters: Character Assassination in the Church*, (Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1993); Kenneth E. Hagin, Jr., *Another Look at Faith* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1996).

⁶ Galatians 1:6-9

⁷ J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 78. cf. LXX Deuteronomy 7:26; Joshua 7:1,12

⁸ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 183.

counterfeit Christ and a counterfeit Christianity. Therefore standing against the theology of the Faith movement does not divide; rather, it unites believers."⁹ In 1980, Charles Farah brought the debate to the Society for Pentecostal Studies where he concludes, "The (Faith) movement uses Gnostic hermeneutical principles and displaces contextual scientific exegesis. It shares many of the goals of present day humanism, particularly in regards to the creaturely comforts. It is in fact, a burgeoning heresy."¹⁰ Nearly ten years later, H. Terris Neuman adds to the debate upon the SPS platform. He writes, "...this paper is a call to the wider evangelical community also to engage in an apologetic that will distinguish the gospel of Jesus Christ from those who indeed propagate a "different gospel"¹¹ (i.e. the proponents of word of faith theology). However, *anathema* is not the only option.

In his zeal to protect the purity of the gospel, Paul gave another command in order to deal with those who are not teaching sound doctrine. Paul writes to Timothy,

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.¹²

There is room within word of faith theology to "correct, rebuke and encourage," but it requires "great patience and careful instruction." Word of faith teaching is not a heresy to be obliterated, but a theologically premature movement that needs significant reconstruction. Word of faith theology is within the bounds of orthodoxy because of its historical roots in Holiness/Pentecostalism and its exaltation of the biblical authority. These elements provide a sufficient theological foundation to seek correction and not condemnation.

Historical Roots and the Flaws of the "Kenyon Connection"

The historical argument raised by word of faith critics is the claim that word of faith theology is rooted in the metaphysical cults. They construct a simple syllogism. Premise one, a bad historical root equals bad theological fruit. Premise two, faith theology has a bad root. Conclusion, faith theology is bad theological fruit. McConnell presents the strongest argument for the metaphysical cultic root of faith theology. He first published his work as a master's thesis at Oral Roberts University in 1982 under the heading "The Kenyon Connection: A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Cultic Origins of the Faith Movement." It was then published by Hendrickson in 1988 under the title *A Different Gospel*.¹³ "The Kenyon Connection," according to McConnell, is the link between the metaphysical cults and the modern-day word of faith movement. He argues that the writings and ideas of the 19th century New Thought movement

⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 48.

¹⁰ Charles Farah Jr., "A Critical Analysis: The 'Roots and Fruits' of Faith-Formula Theology" *Pneuma* (Spring 1981), 21.

¹¹ H. Terris Neuman, "Cultic Origins of Word-Faith Theology Within the Charismatic Movement" *Pneuma* (Spring 1990), 54,55.

¹² II Timothy 4:2-5

¹³ Hendrickson published an updated edition in 1995 which includes a response to William DeArtega. See McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 199-213.

significantly impacted the theological mind of E. W. Kenyon. Kenneth Hagin plagiarized Kenyon and incorporated the heretical strands of Kenyon's teachings into his own theology. Finally, Kenyon becomes the true "father" of the word of faith movement through Hagin's books and tapes.¹⁴ This historical analysis has become a scholastic landmark in building a case for the heretical nature of word of faith theology.¹⁵ However, there are serious flaws at each level of McConnell's analysis that call the final conclusion into question. The "Kenyon connection" breaks down under three significant flaws: (1) a misconstrued history of Kenyon's relationship with the New Thought movement, (2) a misunderstanding of Kenyon's theology, and (3) the lack of emphasis on non-Kenyon influences on Hagin.

(1) McConnell builds his case for the heretical nature of Kenyon's teaching first upon the fact that Kenyon attended Emerson College, the seedbed of New Thought thinking. He writes, "...in 1892 Kenyon enrolled in the Emerson College of Oratory, an institution that was absolutely inundated with metaphysical, cultic ideas and practices."¹⁶ McConnell shrinks the historical development of metaphysics at Emerson College and presents a flattened view of history that is misleading and inaccurate. While Emerson College did become a hub of New Thought ideas and doctrines, it had not become so at the time Kenyon attended. Joe McIntyre argues that while Kenyon attended Emerson College in 1892, the College was just beginning to be exposed to New Thought doctrines. For McConnell to claim that Emerson was "absolutely inundated" with metaphysical thinking is nothing more than "speculation based upon presuppositions" as attested to by McIntyre.¹⁷ It would be a few years in the future before Emerson professors would begin to teach New Thought doctrines. Ralph Waldo Trine, who was a professor and student at Emerson College, taught while Kenyon was a student. McConnell claims that Trine's presence at the school exemplifies his claim that the "brand of New Thought there was of a pure and intense variety."¹⁸ This is historically inaccurate. Emerson historians state that Trine did not begin teaching New Thought doctrines until after he left the school in 1894.¹⁹ McConnell even notes that Trine did not publish his New Thought ideas until 1897.²⁰ If New Thought ideas were active on the Emerson campus, they were neither "intense" nor were they systematically communicated by the faculty. McConnell's shallow historical analysis causes him to force a distorted history to be read into the "Kenyon Connection." The lack of historical evidence causes the "Kenyon Connection" to break down at the initial argument.²¹

(2) This false assumption of a historical connection between Kenyon and New Thought ideas causes a critical bias when evaluating Kenyon's theology. If there is an

¹⁴ Ibid., 29-54.

¹⁵ Other critiques of word of faith theology rely on McConnell's historical analysis. See Neuman, "Cultic Origins," 53; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 351,352; Jerry Vines, *Spirit Works: Charismatic Practices and the Bible*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 166; Tom Smail, Andrew Walker, Nigel Wright, *The Love of Power or the Power of Love*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 79.

¹⁶ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 34.

¹⁷ Joe McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon and His Message of Faith*, (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1997), 22.

¹⁸ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 40.

¹⁹ McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon*, 18.

²⁰ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 41.

²¹ McConnell himself admits that a "deeper analysis" is difficult due to the lack of primary source material on the early life of Kenyon. Ibid.,41.

assumption that Kenyon was heavily influenced by the metaphysical cults, then an objective evaluation of Kenyon's theology has been compromised. Instead of evaluating Kenyon on his own merits, observers of Kenyon are looking for metaphysical elements in his theology because their false view of the history dictates that these heretical elements already exist in Kenyon's writings. Even though the alleged historical connection between Kenyon and the metaphysical cults is without solid historical evidence, the claim that Kenyon's own writings contain unsound doctrine that is based in metaphysical thought could still remain.

The writings of E.W. Kenyon lack theological sophistication and, in part, reveal a departure from the most sound of hermeneutical principles. However, the whole of his teachings falls within the bounds of historical orthodox Christianity, on the fringe perhaps, but still within orthodoxy. One teaching of Kenyon that is attacked and deemed heretical is his doctrine of the descent of Christ into Hell, which extended the sufferings of Christ from the cross into Hell itself. Kenyon writes, "For three days and three nights the Lamb of God was our Substitute in Hell. He was there for us."²² While the errors of the doctrine can be identified, this doctrine itself does not fall out of historic Christian theology. John Calvin taught a similar doctrine according to the Apostle's Creed. He writes,

Nothing had been done if Christ had only endured corporeal death. In order to interpose between us and God's anger, and satisfy his righteous judgment, it was necessary that he should feel the weight of divine vengeance. Whence also it was necessary that he should engage, as it were, at close quarters with the powers of hell and the horrors of eternal death.²³

The doctrine, replete with theological pitfalls, is hotly debated. And while Calvin and Kenyon hold the minority opinion, the opinion itself does not relegate Kenyon to heresy.

McConnell claims that Kenyon held several doctrines that were refashioned metaphysics, three of which become predominate in word of faith theology,²⁴ namely deism, dualism and deification. Upon citing three passages from Kenyon's *Hidden Man*, McConnell comments,

In each of these (passages), Kenyon claims that his teaching is not metaphysical and then immediately follows his disclaimer with a central dogma of metaphysics. For example, when he speaks of "the great spiritual laws that govern the unseen forces of life," he is espousing *deism*, the metaphysical world view that the universe is governed by impersonal, spiritual laws rather than a personal, sovereign God. When Kenyon refers to "God breaking into the sense realm," he is espousing *dualism*, which is the metaphysical view of reality that the spiritual realm and the physical realm are mutually exclusive and even opposed to one another. Finally, when Kenyon refers to "God imparting his own nature to the human spirit" and God becoming a part of our very consciousness," he is espousing *deification*, which is the metaphysical view that salvation entails man becoming a god.²⁵

²² E.W. Kenyon, *Identification*, (Seattle: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1968), 23.

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.16.10.

²⁴ McIntyre lists and responds to sixteen points of Kenyon's theology that is attacked by McConnell. See Joe McIntyre, *E.W. Kenyon*, 299-306.

²⁵ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 44.

McConnell's claim that Kenyon taught the "central dogma of metaphysics" is a false interpretation of Kenyon's writings. It reflects a less than accurate reading of Kenyon's work.

To claim that Kenyon espouses deism is simply ludicrous. The God of Kenyon's writings is the personal Yahweh, God of Abraham, the loving Father of the Lord Jesus and the biblical God who rules over the affairs of humankind. Kenyon, writes,

Sin Consciousness has given us a wrong picture of God and a wrong picture of the New Creation. It has made us see God as holy, just, austere and unapproachable Being who is ever on the alert to discover sin in us and condemn us. That conception has made us afraid and caused us to shrink from Him. The conception is wrong: He is a Father God. John 14:23 says that He will make His home with us....When we know Him as a loving, tender Father who longs for our fellowship and longs to live with us, the whole picture is changed.²⁶

This is far from the deity of deism. Kenyon consistently regards the personal attributes of God as primary and emphasized above God's transcendent qualities. Kenyon uses the term "spiritual laws" to refer to biblical principles that appear constant in explaining the essence and activity of God. Bill Bright uses as similar didactic in his "Four Spiritual Laws" in popular evangelical circles. The laws themselves do not of necessity imply an impersonal Creator.

McConnell's second claim the Kenyon taught the dogma of metaphysical thought is that Kenyon taught dualism. In the above quote, McConnell concludes that Kenyon's phrase "God breaking into the sense realm" implies dualism. Kenyon's phrase is much more consistent with Ladd's theology of the kingdom, the inbreaking of God's kingly rule into history than metaphysical dualism.²⁷ McConnell also claims that Kenyon's doctrine of "revelation knowledge" is gnostic spirit-matter dualism.²⁸ The allegation is that Kenyon held that "revelation knowledge," i.e. knowledge convey by spiritual means, creates an epistemology whereby "the physical senses are of no value in understanding it or using it."²⁹ Kenyon does draw a distinction between "revelation knowledge" and "sense knowledge."³⁰ However this does not limit his epistemology to knowledge obtained by spiritual illumination. Kenyon embraces the integrity of biblical revelation as the cornerstone of a faith-relationship with God.³¹ The distinctions between the two types of knowledge are drawn primarily to form a comparison to aid in the appropriation of healing. "Sense knowledge" can only provide the information of the nature of the sickness. For Kenyon, "revelation knowledge" comes from the Word of God to renew the mind and enlighten the spiritual component of a person. This is not the mutually exclusive dualism of the metaphysics, but the acknowledgement of spiritual sphere of

²⁶ E.W. Kenyon, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, (Seattle: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1965), 33.

²⁷ Ladd commends Dodd's "Realized Eschatology" in the interpretation of the kingdom of God. Ladd writes, "The Kingdom of God, which is described in apocalyptic language, is in reality the transcendent order beyond time and space that has *broken into history* in the mission of Jesus (emphasis mine)." George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 56.

²⁸ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁰ See E.W. Kenyon, *Two Kinds of Knowledge*, (Seattle: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1942), 19ff.

³¹ Kenyon writes, "The integrity of the Word is the basis of faith." E. W. Kenyon, *In His Presence*, (Seattle: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1969), 67.

reality that cannot be touched with physical senses – a spiritual reality that is revealed by Scripture and not the power of the mind.

The third claim by McConnell is that Kenyon promoted deification by teaching that God imparts His nature into the human spirit. For example Kenyon writes, "By a new creation, we are partakers of His very nature. We have become heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We are the next of kin to the Son of God."³² The language choice of Kenyon creates difficulty in providing an orthodox explanation to his teaching. Kenyon finds biblical precedent for the phrase "partakers of His nature" in II Peter 1:4, "...that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature..."(KJV). The question of unsound doctrine hinges on Kenyon's interpretation of the word "partakers." The word *koinonoi* translated "partakers" in the King James Version is a nominative, masculine, plural noun from *koinonos* meaning ones who take part in as companions or partners. It does not imply an ontological fusing, but a harmonious relationship between individual parties. A better English translation would be "partners." Kenyon chooses to use the phrase "partakers of His nature" and he uses it often in his writings. It can produce an unsound doctrine if it is followed to its logical ends, i.e. deification – which McConnell claims has occurred. Kenyon, however, does not digress to the point of deification. Nowhere does Kenyon state that this union between the human and Divine nature produces a fused entity whereby a human being enters godhood. Instead, he uses the term "partakers of the divine nature" to describe the spiritual partnership between a person and God, the Holy Spirit. For example, Kenyon writes,

One stands mute in the presence of a fact like this, that we have in us God's nature. The thing that hurts is that we have never given that nature sway. We have held His nature in bondage. God has been a prisoner in us. Paul was no more a prisoner in Rome than the Holy Spirit has been a prisoner in us.³³

This passage illustrates Kenyon's understanding of the nature of God as located within a human person, but not fused to human nature creating divinized humanity. Kenyon draws a contrast between "God" as a specified, individual person and "us" the individual people indwelt by God, the Holy Spirit. The phrase "we have in us God's nature" causes the raising of theological eyebrows and incites unfortunate condemnation by critics such as McConnell. A less pejorative phrase is preferable, but Kenyon's use of it does not imply deification.

(3) The most fatal flaw in McConnell's analysis is his lack of emphasis on the non-Kenyon influences on Hagin. There is no question that Hagin was influenced by Kenyon's writings. Hagin's word-for-word incorporation of passages from Kenyon is a travesty that Hagin has yet to explain.³⁴ However, in building his case for the "Kenyon

³² Ibid., 197.

³³ Kenyon, *In His Presence*, 191.

³⁴ One theory to explain the "plagiarism" of Kenyon by Hagin is that it was an unintentional editorial oversight. Many of Hagin's books are written by ghost writers who have transcribed the material from audio cassettes of Hagin's sermons. During the early days of Rhema Bible Training Center, Hagin would read passages from Kenyon's books. It is possible that those tapes entered the mix of tapes used by the ghost writers, who incorporated the Kenyon passages into Hagin's books assuming that Hagin was preaching. There is not conclusive proof of this theory. This does not explain the plagiarism of Kenyon in Hagin's articles in the *Word of Faith* as cited by McConnell. Furthermore, whether it is intentional or unintentional plagiarism it is still an error that Kenneth Hagin needs to correct.

Connection," McConnell underestimates the Pentecostal and holiness influences on Hagin. Dennis Hollinger writes in his assessment of the historical development of the faith movement,

The contemporary health and wealth movement flows historically from two primary tributaries: Pentecostal healing revivalism and the influences of E. W. Kenyon... McConnell's *A Different Gospel* attempts to undermine the Pentecostal influence, giving primacy to the "Kenyon Connection." My own conclusion, however, is that we cannot minimize the role of the healing revivalist tradition.³⁵

McConnell "attempts to undermine" the influence of Pentecostalism on Hagin to strengthen the argument of the "Kenyon Connection." The Pentecostal root unquestionably grounds faith theology into an orthodox stream, which stands contrary to the essence of the "Kenyon Connection."

Bruce Barron concurs in his historical evaluation and writes, "During these years of relative oblivion (1910-1947), healing revivalists continued to cross the country sacrificially offering their services, developing much of the theology that Hagin, Copeland and many others continue to proclaim today."³⁶ McConnell provides a rebuttal by stating that "Barron's historical analysis fails at several points."³⁷ McConnell claims that "Faith theology does not, as Barron claims, have multiple sources within Pentecostalism. All of the major doctrines of Hagin, Copeland, et al. have been taken directly from the writings of Kenyon."³⁸ While it is true that leaders in the faith movement have doctrines that rely heavily on Kenyon, McConnell again overstates his point. The major doctrines of Faith theology include biblical authority, evangelism, soteriological-based healing, prosperity, Pentecostal pneumatology, spiritual warfare, and positive confession. Kenyon's influence can only be traced in a few of those. Even doctrines such a "sensory denial through positive confession" which often is credited to Kenyon's influence can be seen in the Holiness/Pentecostal tradition. Barron continues,

The beginnings of positive confession with regard to healing can be spotted as far back as the work of A. B. Simpson, who wrote, "We believe that God is healing before any evidence is given. It is to be believed as a present reality, and then ventured on. We are to act as if it were already true." Why would this well-educated man advocate faith contrary to sensory evidence? Because he believed that the Bible, a higher authority than the senses, teaches healing.³⁹

This may be an indirect influence on Hagin because we have no evidence that Hagin read Simpson's writings, although they would have been available to Hagin. However, it does reveal that the 19th century Faith-Cure movement that feed into Pentecostalism did contain elements of contemporary word of faith theology. R. Kelso Carter, author and participant during the Faith-Cure Movement, notes the importance of verbal confession.

³⁵ Dennis Hollinger, "Enjoying God Forever: A Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel," *The Gospel and Contemporary Perspectives*, Douglas Moo, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 19.

³⁶ Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 44.

³⁷ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, 60. Barron's quote from Simpon is from *Four-Fold Gospel*, 62.

He writes,

In order to this [sic] he must feel that othere [sic] are of more importance before God than himself, and also that he is willing publicly to confess his desire, his helplessness, and his faith in God. Ah! Confession is ever necessary. We must honor Jesus before men. Having thus prostrated self and confessed his belief, he is to be "anointed with oil in the name of the Lord."⁴⁰

Carter continues by describing his personal experience of confession. He writes,

As soon as this became clear to my mind, I resolved in the strength of Jesus, to confess His glorious work to the uttermost, and not to allow a single thought of the future to enter my mind for a moment. Anyone can see that, professing to trust Christ for exemption from sickness, while you are contemplating the possibility of speedily falling ill, is not trusting Him at all....Such professions are only an insult to God, and are miserable travesties on true faith.⁴¹

Faith confession as related to divine healing was a part of the theological system during the Faith-Cure movement, although it did not hold the same position of importance as it does in the current strand of faith theology.

Hagin does make note of some of the direct Holiness and pre-Pentecostal influences on his theological development. During the message, "Why Do People Fall Under the Power," Hagin comments,

Did you ever read after John Wesley? I began to read John Wesley's writings first way back in 1938. John Wesley, of course, is the father, you know, of Methodism...(and) it became quite a frequent thing in his services for people, sometimes hundreds of them, to fall under the power.... Did you ever read the autobiography of Charles G. Finney? I have more than once. It has blessed me immeasurably....

George Whitefield, who was a co-laborer with John Wesley actually, came over here to America. And it is a historical fact. You can read about it actually in some books that are in the Library of Congress or the library up there, you see....Did you ever read after Peter Cartwright? The Wesley-Methodist preacher, you know. I read his autobiography – great – blessed ya'.⁴²

Hagin cites these historic figures as precedent for charismatic manifestations, but beyond that, it reveals some of the Revivalism/Holiness influence on his theology. Hagin also testifies that Pentecostal forerunner John Alexander Dowie influenced him. Hagin cites an account from Dowie's 1888 healing campaign in San Francisco. Hagin found a pragmatic example in Dowie who prayed intuitively for only one woman out of hundreds, because he perceived that she alone had faith.⁴³ All of these pre-Pentecostals, Wesley, Finney, Whitefield, Cartwright and Dowie, laid the groundwork that would form faith theology as taught by Kenneth Hagin. Charles Farah, in his historical analysis, identifies that the true root of faith theology is in the theology of Charles Finney. He writes, "Historically, the roots of their theology (faith theology) go back to the thought of Charles Finney...(whose) contribution to present day faith-formula teaching was indirect;

⁴⁰ R. Kelso Carter, *The Atonement for Sin and Sickness*, (Boston: Willard Tract Repository, 1884), 110. Reprinted by Garland Publishing. See *Russell Kelso Carter on Faith Healing*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1985.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118,119.

⁴² Kenneth E. Hagin, "Why Do People Fall Under the Power" *Classic Favorites Series* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1976), Audio Tape 17H06.

⁴³ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Healing Belongs to Us*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1991), 18-19.

rather than direct."⁴⁴ Farah does acknowledge that Kenyon is the "most important" of all of the influences on the development of faith theology, but he does not deny the influence of Finney, a historical root to word of faith theology. Finney's theology defines faith as that which always obtains the blessing it seeks. Finney writes, "I am speaking now of the kind of faith that ensures the blessing. Do not understand me as saying that there is nothing in prayer that is acceptable to God, or that even obtains the blessing sometimes, without *this* kind of faith (emphasis his)."⁴⁵

Faith theology also has a strong root in Pentecostalism. Smith Wigglesworth, an early Pentecostal pioneer, had a substantial impact on Hagin and his theology. Wigglesworth writes in *Ever Increasing Faith*,

It is a blessed thing to learn that God's word can never fail. Never harken to human plans. God can work mightily when you persist in believing Him in spite of discouragements from the human standpoint...I am not moved by what I see. I am moved *only by what I believe*. No man considers how he feels if he believes. The man who believes God has it (emphasis his).⁴⁶

Hagin cites Wigglesworth in *The Believer's Authority* concerning discouragement during spiritual warfare. Hagin writes,

Faith is involved in exercising spiritual authority. Yes, there are times when evil spirits come out immediately, but if they don't when you speak the word of faith, don't get disturbed about it. I base my faith on what the Word says. Some people's faith is not based on the Bible, however, it's based on a manifestation.... As Smith Wigglesworth often said, "I'm not moved by what I feel. I'm moved only by what I believe." So stand your ground.⁴⁷

Wigglesworth's theology parallels that of Kenyon with its distinction between perceptual knowledge and revelational knowledge. For Wigglesworth, the latter is knowledge communicated by Scripture through faith. This Holiness/Pentecostal root from Finney, through the Faith-Cure healing theology, through early Pentecostalism, formed an orthodox foundation for word of faith theology to emerge. Historically, Kenyon's influence on Hagin added to the Holiness/Pentecostal root that had been developing over the previous decades.

Faith Theology's Exaltation of the Biblical Authority

Correction and theological reconstruction of word of faith theology is preferable to condemnation not only for its orthodox historical roots, but because word of faith theology consistently exalts the authority of Scripture. Faith theology is built upon a charismatic spirituality that values the experience of the Holy Spirit that illuminates biblical authority.⁴⁸ Bruce Barron observes in his analysis, "In general, it is unfair to

⁴⁴ Farah, "A Critical Analysis," 5.

⁴⁵ Charles G. Finney, *Revival Lectures*, (Grand Rapids: Flemming H. Revell), 76.

⁴⁶ Smith Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith* Revised Edition, (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1924), 30.

⁴⁷ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1984), 24. Hagin also quotes Wigglesworth concerning knowing God through Scripture. See Kenneth E. Hagin, *What Faith Is* Second Edition, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1998), 63. See also Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Real Faith*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1980), 13.

⁴⁸ This statement does not exonerate every word of faith teacher or proponent. Critics have documented cases where word of faith teachers seem to elevate their subjective commentary above Scripture in the

equate faith teaching with Christian Science, since faith teaching shows much more respect for biblical authority and the person of Jesus than do the ingenious but indefensible interpretations of Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy."⁴⁹ In the vernacular of word of faith teachers, the issue is "the integrity of the Word of God." This is the name of Hagin's first step in the "Seven Steps to the Highest Kind of Faith." He writes,

The first thing we need to know is that the Word of God is actually what it declares itself to be. It is a revelation from God to us. It is God speaking to us now. Not only is it a book of the past and a book of the future, it is also a book of now. This book is a God-breathed, God-indwelt, and a God-inspired message.... So we see that the first step toward the highest kind of faith is to accept and understand the integrity of God's Word. The Word is of foremost importance.⁵⁰

The integrity of Scripture finds its authority in God's self-revelation in the text. Hagin's doctrine of inspiration attests to his influence from the revivalist movements as noted above. As his evangelical/Pentecostal predecessors before him, Hagin elevated Holy Scripture to a level of primary authority in statements of doctrine and practice.

Furthermore, the integrity of Scripture, and not subjective revelation, is the foundation for faith theology. In *What to Do When Faith Seems Weak and Victory Lost*, Hagin writes, "You are in trouble when you get beyond the Word of God. That's what bothers me about many of the things some people are teaching – "new revelations," and so forth."⁵¹ He continues with an account of a minister who challenged a guest minister on the biblical source for his message. The guest minister replied, "Oh, you'll not find what I'm teaching in that thing. I'm way out beyond that. I know much more than what's in there." Hagin comments, "When they know so much more than what's in the Bible, they are too far out for me."⁵² Hagin's epistemology holds to the primacy of Scripture. McConnell rightly concludes, "Hagin does theology just like the rest of us: right here on planet Earth, not in some superhuman state nor through some hot line to heaven."⁵³ And Hagin's theology and practices of ministry begin with the Bible. Hagin comments, "God's Word comes first. Faith in God's Word comes second. Feeling comes last."⁵⁴ Outside revelation, such as ecstatic visions or spiritual gifts of knowledge or wisdom, take on a subordinate role in shaping Hagin's theology and the theology of the word of faith movement.

The primary cause for theological weaknesses in word of faith theology is not due to a lack of respect for biblical authority, but in an ignorance of strong hermeneutical principles. The word of faith movement carried over the "anti-intellectual" tendencies of Pentecostalism that opts for pragmatism over traditional hermeneutics. Gordon Fee observes,

name of revelation knowledge. This is serious error, but I would interject that it is the exemption and not the rule. See Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 123ff.

⁴⁹Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, 110.

⁵⁰ Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1977), 56. "The Integrity of God's Word" is also the chapter heading for chapter 6 in Kenyon's *In His Presence*.

⁵¹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *What to Do When Faith Seems Weak and Victory Lost*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1979), 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵³ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 72.

⁵⁴ Hagin, *What Faith Is*, 68.

(The Pentecostal movement's) attitude toward Scripture regularly has included a general disregard for scientific exegesis and carefully thought-out hermeneutics. In fact, hermeneutics has simply not been a Pentecostal thing. Scripture is the Word of God and is to be obeyed. In place of scientific hermeneutics there developed a kind of pragmatic hermeneutics-obey what should be taken literally; spiritualize, allegorize, or devotionalize the rest.⁵⁵

Hagin uses this loose pragmatic hermeneutic considering a more scholastic hermeneutic as unnecessary. At the root of each unsound doctrine or unbiblical extreme in word of faith theology lies a problem with the interpretation of the text.

The Process of Refinement

The theological systems of the various word of faith ministries, churches and faith teachers lack precise similarity. The faith theology of Hagin differs somewhat from the theology of Copeland, etc. This presents a methodological problem in identifying what is "word of faith theology." The most efficient analysis and reconstruction of word of faith theology proper is to concentrate on the theology of Kenneth Hagin in particular. The various faith ministries may lack systematic cohesion, but a common denominator can be found in the influence of Hagin. Therefore, the most effective reconstruction is accomplished using the writings of Hagin as the basis of word of faith theology. The most distinct and crucial tenants of word of faith doctrine requiring reconstruction are the nature of faith, positive confession, healing and prosperity. The method of reconstruction first includes analyzing Hagin's theology at each doctrinal point within his epistemological context. Second, a process of biblical refinement that removes the elements of faith theology that lack a substantial exegetical/historical foundations. Third, each point of the theology is rebuilt upon a solid biblical foundation within the word of faith framework. The result is a word of faith theology that retains its distinctiveness as a theological system without the extra-biblical excesses.

Reconstructing the Nature of Faith

The primary distinction of the nature of faith from a word of faith perspective begins in the exegesis of Mark 11:22, "Have faith in God," which Hagin translates "the God kind of faith." The exegetical issue is to identify which type of genitive produces the best rendering of *theou* in the phrase *echete pistin theou*. English texts are consistent in translating *theou* as an objective genitive, noting that the noun *theos* receives the action of the verb *echete*.⁵⁶ Hank Hanegraaff claims that the "God kind of faith" is a perversion that has "no basis in the original Greek." Furthermore, he calls it "misleading" and a violation of "more than one principle of biblical interpretation."⁵⁷ While the choice to translate *theou* as a subjective genitive is the minority opinion, it is not excluded as an

⁵⁵ Gordon D. Fee, "Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent – A Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, Russel P. Spittler ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 118-132. As quoted by Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 313.

⁵⁶ "Have the faith of God" is found in the KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, NLT and is often a classic example of an objective genitive in Greek Grammars. For example, see James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1979), 16.

⁵⁷ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 91.

exegetical alternative. Charles Farah in his critique of faith theology also selects the subjective genitive as the preferable translation. He writes,

But the more usual way to translate the same passage (Mark 11:22) and one that is equally valid grammatically would be to understand (*theou*) as a subjective genitive, denoting possession which then translates not "faith in God" but "faith of God," i.e., God's own faith. The context determines the usage.⁵⁸

McConnell claims that Hagin derived this interpretation from Kenyon,⁵⁹ but Hagin explains that he chooses the subjective over the objective genitive, because of a marginal note in the King James Bible. Hagin notes, "'Have faith in God,' or as the margin reads, 'Have the faith of God.' Greek scholars tell us this should be translated, 'Have the God kind of faith.'"⁶⁰ Much to his detriment, Hagin has no formal training in exegesis, hermeneutics, or biblical languages. Hagin depends on the marginal notes added by the publisher of the English Bible that he studies. Most King James Versions of the Bible that provide marginal notes include this note to Mark 11:22, "Or, Have the faith of God."⁶¹ *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* includes the following note and explanation to Mark 11:22, "Literally, 'Have the faith of God.' Such is possible or it would not be a command. Man was created with God's faith but doubt entered in at the fall (Gen. 3:1-7)."⁶² Hagin is dependent upon the "scholarship" of others for his exegesis. From the reading of the marginal note, Hagin makes the unfounded assumption that the "Greek scholars" (assumed to be the writers of the marginal notes) imply that "faith of God" implies "the God kind of faith," i.e. God's own faith.

This mistaken (and not deliberately misleading) exegesis creates a reification of faith, whereby faith becomes an independent power upon which God himself is dependent. Hagin concludes that the "God kind of faith" as evidenced by God in creation is released by words. Hagin writes, "God created the universe with words. Words filled with faith are the most powerful things in all the world."⁶³ Instead of God creating the universe by divine *fiat*, by the sheer force of his nature, in Hagin's theology, God's words in *creatio ex nihilo* are made efficacious by something outside himself, a reified "faith." This destroys the omnipotence of God, limiting the quality of God's power resident in his nature. To prevent the reification of faith and the destruction of God's omnipotence, the choice to translate *theou* as a subjective genitive is rejected. The greater theological context demands an objective genitive translation, rendering the translation, "Have faith in God."

The choice to reject the "God kind of faith" does not remove the indispensable quality of faith, which is clearly a distinctive in this theological system. Word of faith theology utilizes the "God kind of faith" construct as a foundation to build an

⁵⁸ Charles Farah, *From the Pinnacle of the Temple*, (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International, 1978), 101.

⁵⁹ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 139.

⁶⁰ Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, 74.

⁶¹ See *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1985), 1022.

⁶² Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible: New Testament*, (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Dake Bible Sales, 1961), 48. There is no historical evidence that Hagin is familiar with Dake's Annotated Reference Bible. The reference to Dake's note is provided as an example of marginal notes that include the subjective genitive as an exegetical alternative.

⁶³ Hagin, *New Thresholds*, 77.

anthropology that humanity was created to operate in faith in reflection of God's "use" of faith. The underlying assumption is that a part of humankind's creation in *imago dei* includes a replication of the "God kind of faith." In this, faith theology elevates faith to the chief virtue in Christian experience. However, the "God kind of faith" with its weak exegesis is not requisite to maintain an emphasis on faith in Christian practice. Faith can remain an essential Christian virtue upon a host of biblical evidences that are interpreted upon a stronger exegesis.⁶⁴ A reconstructed word of faith theology retains its emphasis on faith as paramount in Christian experience without the "God kind of faith" that only stands to weaken the word of faith perspective. Only a complete rejection of the reification of faith can give word of faith theology a constructive platform to promote a biblical accentuation of faith in Christian experience.

Reconstructing Positive Confession

The most distinct characteristic in the nature of faith in word of faith theology is the relationship between inner conviction and verbal confession, in what word of faith proponents label "faith confessions" or "positive confession." This doctrine has drawn heavy attacks from within and outside the charismatic movement. The primary mistake by critics in regard to positive confession is the false claim that it is rooted in the cognitive power of a metaphysical positive mental attitude, the theological center of Christian Science and other mind science cults. McConnell notes,

The working presupposition of positive confession is that one's mental attitude determines what one believes and confesses, and what one believes and confesses determines what one gets from God. As Hagin puts it, "What we believe is a result of our thinking. If we think wrong we will believe wrong....If we believe wrong, our confession will be wrong. In other words, what we say will be wrong and it will all hinge on our thinking." Positive mental attitude (PMA) is the fount from which all positive confession flows.⁶⁵

This represents McConnell's inaccurate reading of Hagin's writings in an attempt to justify his own faulty historical analysis from Hagin's theology. For Hagin, positive confession is not rooted in one's mental capacities, although there is a cognitive element involved in the process. Positive confession is rooted in biblical authority.⁶⁶ In *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, Hagin writes,

You can always tell if a person's believing is right by what he says. If his confession is wrong, his believing is wrong. If his believing is wrong his thinking is wrong. If his thinking is wrong, it's because his mind has not been renewed with the Word of God. I never have been able to understand how anybody thinks he can get help from God apart from the Word. God moves in line with His Word. We should treat His Word with the same reverence that we would treat Jesus if He were here in the flesh.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Concerning the essential quality of faith see Luke 18:8, 22:32; II Corinthians 1:24, 5:7; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8, 3:17; I Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 6:1, 11:6, I Peter 1:5,7; I John 3:23, Jude 1:3.

⁶⁵ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 135. McConnell's quote from Hagin is taken from *Right and Wrong Thinking*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1966), 3.

⁶⁶ McConnell acknowledges that Faith teachers say that their confession is rooted in God's word, but he dismisses this with the argument that the metaphysical cults also use Scripture as their foundation for their confessions. However, in word of faith theology, the confession is a verbal utterance of Scripture.

⁶⁷ Kenneth Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1978), 17.

Hagin clearly states that faith confession is not empowered by a positive mental attitude, but it is the fruition of the "living and active" *logos* of God. The cognitive element is the needed theological shift, the renewing of the mind. The concept of confession is not merely justified by biblical precedent, but the positive confessions themselves are positive affirmations of biblical statements. Hagin gives a three-part description of confession. He writes, "First, it's affirming something that we believe. Second, it's testifying to something that we know. Third, it's witnessing of a truth that we've embraced."⁶⁸ The word of faith confession finds expression in a sinner's confession of the lordship of Christ, a Christian's confession of sin to restore broken fellowship with God, and finally the Christian's confession of his or her faith in God's word.⁶⁹

The biblical precedent for this third expression of confession is Romans 10:9,10. In word of faith theology, evangelical faith is paradigmatic of the faith by which the believer exists with God in *koinonia*. Hagin writes,

"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). The text says, "unto salvation," but it is also true concerning anything else that you receive from God. All that you receive from God comes the same way: through faith. With the heart man believes for healing, and with the mouth that confession is made.

This is somewhat of an assumption upon the text, because Scripture does not point to this soteriological procedure as a paradigm for the nature of faith. The confession of faith "made unto salvation" may not be a rigid formula, but it does provide insight into the nature of faith and its inter-relatedness to verbal confession. In quoting Psalm 116:10, Paul comments that believing and speaking in the midst of hardship are the *pneuma tes pisteos* – the spirit of faith.⁷⁰ True heart faith produces an internal desire for verbal expression either through devotional meditation or prophetic proclamation of the gospel. The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart.⁷¹ Confessions of faith as a verbal witness to biblical truths cannot be overlooked in Christian practice. Bruce Barron notes the devotional worth of positive confession,

Positive confession does have valuable uses. (Charles) Capps, for example, encourages Christians to learn key Scriptures and recite them regularly in order to remind themselves that God wants to meet their needs, comfort and strengthen them and free them from the bondage of worry and fear. Though some of the verses he selects seem to have been taken out of context, the general idea that God's Word can conquer negativism and bring victory is a true and proper emphasis.⁷²

The weakness in the word of faith doctrine of positive confession is the emphasis on the words themselves and their efficacious nature to create reality.⁷³ The claim that faith as spoken over human lips has the power to create contradicts the word of faith insistence upon God's provision for human need. It destroys whatever positive components the doctrine may contain. Ultimately, it breaks the most fundamental characteristic of God's nature, his unique ability to create reality.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰ II Corinthians 4:13

⁷¹ Luke 6:45

⁷² Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, 105.

⁷³ See Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, 23.

The reconstruction of this doctrine consists in making a shift from a *fidecentric* confession to a *theocentric* confession. This shift places the power not upon the words of faith themselves, but on God's sovereign choice to honor (or not to honor) what is spoken. This frees God to operate in his sovereignty, which can be trampled under the current state of word of faith theology. God is not compelled to honor the confession of faith by some higher spiritual law. God is not compelled to move upon the behalf of the confessor because of the confessor's "legal rights." God is not overwhelmed by a (faith?) force and obligated to submit to the verbal commands of any person. The theological shift demystifies "faith-filled words" from mystical power to initiatory request and devotional worship. The confession of faith in this manner is only as powerful as God's desire to act in accordance to the word spoken. This takes into account God's freedom to act in his preordained time. This theological innovation of confessing not just sin, but confessing the truth of God's word cannot be lost in the process of reconstruction. Yet the spirit of the practice – which pertains to confessing statements within the boundary of Scripture – must replace the unfortunate practice of confessing things outside of God's purposes.

The mystery of God is also incorporated by making a shift to a *theocentric* confession of faith. God in the innumerable dimensions of his nature contains an element of mystery. When a theological system removes all mystery from God and his action in history (as is the common assumption in the word of faith movement), that system ceases to relate to the God of Scripture. Old Testament theology proclaims a transcendent God. The worshiper of Yahweh experiences a God whose actions defy human comprehension. Worshipers stand in holy awe of the God who declares, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."⁷⁴ From this perspective, confessions of faith can be made in a spirit of holy fear, culminating in a greater faith that is empowered by a transcendent God who controls the outcome.

Reconstructing Healing

The context in which observers most readily see the nature of faith from a word of faith perspective in operation is in the ministry of divine healing. The active practice of healing in the word of faith movement has also been a touchstone for some of the critiques of the movement. The emphasis on healing affirms the Holiness/Pentecostal roots of the faith movement not only in praxis, but theology. Pentecostal theology roots healing in the atonement of Christ. The word of faith theology of healing consistently uses this soteriological approach in that redemption purchased a "double cure," both the forgiveness of sins and healing of the body. The most distinguishable characteristic of healing in word of faith theology is the accentuation of faith as the primary variable in the reception of divine healing. Faith was certainly a part of the theological forerunners of Hagin, but faith did not receive the same emphasis by the Pentecostal and pre-Pentecostal healers. For example, Dowie writes,

I do not like the term, Faith Healing.... While faith is a very precious grace, yet it is only the medium of the communication of God's infinite love and power, and we must never put it in the place of God Himself. There I am glad the subject is expressed in the words Divine healing, or

⁷⁴ Isaiah 55:8,9

'Healing through Faith in Jesus;' not healing by faith, but THROUGH faith; through faith in Jesus, by the power of God (emphasis his).⁷⁵

Dowie was aware that faith had the potential to replace the power of God as the source of healing. Thus he notes in his initial remarks concerning healing that he does not prefer the term "faith healing." For Hagin and the leaders of the word of faith movement, "faith healing" is an appropriate title, because faith is central in the appropriation of healing even above the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, in his 30-page book *Healing Belongs to Us*, Hagin emphasizes the role of "faith" or "believing" in the process of divine healing approximately 58 times in brief commentaries and anecdotes.⁷⁶ In one reference Hagin writes,

Why doesn't the manifestation (of healing) always come instantly? There are several reasons. One is that healing is by degree, based on two conditions: (1) the degree of healing virtue ministered; (2) the degree of the individual's faith that gives action to that healing virtue. If there is no faith to give action to it, it will not be manifested at all, even though the healing virtue is actually ministered.

Hagin's exaltation of faith over spiritual power is a deviation from classical Pentecostal theology with its soteriological and pneumatological roots of healing. Faith has always been an integral part of Pentecostal healing, but it has been subordinate to "the power of the Lord present to heal."

Faith as a positive component in the healing process is a biblical concept. Jesus often draws attention to the faith of the ones receiving healing by using the phrase "your faith has healed you."⁷⁷ In the explanation of the healing of the man at the Gate Beautiful, Peter emphatically testifies, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."⁷⁸ Paul healed a man in Lystra upon detecting faith in the man.⁷⁹ James includes the prayer of faith as prescriptive in the sacrament of healing to be ministered by church elders.⁸⁰ Yet word of faith theology takes this biblical truth to an unbiblical extreme by creating a system that draws a "strict causality between faith and healing" as noted by Ken Blue.⁸¹ By this, word of faith theology absolutizes the relative by assuming that faith is the absolute prerequisite to divine healing.

A reconstruction of the word of faith doctrine of healing includes a decentralizing (without eliminating) the role of faith in healing. The direct cause and effect relationship between faith and healing in the word of faith movement is a pitfall of pastoral problems. If faith is the only variable to receiving healing and a sick person does not experience healing, the person can only look to their own lack of sufficient faith. The inevitable

⁷⁵ Alexander Dowie, *Talks with Ministers on Divine Healing*, (Chicago: International Divine Healing Association, 1892), 1.

⁷⁶ This includes references to unbelief in the lack of healing as well as positive affirmations of the presence of faith or "believing" in the manifestation of physical healing.

⁷⁷ See Matthew 9:22 (Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48); Mark 10:52 (Luke 18:42); Luke 17:17

⁷⁸ Acts 3:16

⁷⁹ Acts 14:9

⁸⁰ James 5:14,15

⁸¹ Ken Blue, *Authority to Heal*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 42.

conclusion is for the sick person to question the quality of their faith. This centralized role of faith causes the attention to be on faith itself and not God, the intended object of faith. Thus the degree of expectation (faith) is in the sick person's faith and not God. Francis MacNutt testifies, "My faith is not in my faith. My faith opens up doubts once I begin to look at its quality.... Once we look at our faith, however, rather than at God, we concentrate on our own inadequacy."⁸² Determining the quality of faith in healing is counterproductive from a pastoral perspective and biblically unsubstantiated. In the healing process, faith is necessary, but relative. God is the absolute and faith for healing is relative to God's purposes and God's timing. This reconstructed theology of healing celebrates aggressive faith, but only to the degree that faith maintains an external focus on the agent of healing – Christ the healer.

Reconstructing Prosperity

The word of faith movement has received the label "health and wealth" gospel by various critics because there is an emphasis not only on physical healing, but on material wealth. In word of faith theology, financial prosperity is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant that the believer enters into by the atonement. Hagin writes,

Abraham's blessing is ours!...Abraham's blessing was a threefold blessing. The first thing God promised Abraham was that He was going to make him rich. "Do you mean God is going to make us all rich?" Yes, that's what I mean. "Do you mean He's going to make us all millionaires?" No, I didn't say that. But He is going to make us rich. You may not understand what the word "rich" means. The dictionary says it means "a full supply" or "abundantly provided for." Praise God, there is a full supply in Christ!⁸³

The *eulogia tou Abraam* – blessing of Abraham – recorded in Galatians 3:14 is a singular blessing (i.e. the justification of Abraham by faith) however the undeniable result of covenant blessing in Old Testament theology is material prosperity. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. observes, "Material blessings in the Old Testament were used by God for various ends. First of all they were given that God might confirm his covenant promise to build a mighty nation."⁸⁴ God glorified himself in his covenant(s) with Israel by blessing them materially for specific purposes. The provisions of Yahweh were not only spiritual/ceremonial, but material/physical. The Psalmist declares, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."⁸⁵ In Word of Faith theology, these material blessing are conferred upon the Christian as the child of Abraham in Christ.

The doctrine of financial prosperity has its value especially in its missiological concern. Edward K. Pousson observes, "(Charismatics) now see their vast deposit of spiritual and material wealth as a resource for empowering and financing an army of

⁸² Francis MacNutt, *Healing*, (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1988), 120.

⁸³ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness, and Spiritual Death*, (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1983), 5.

⁸⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Old Testament Case for Material Blessings and the Contemporary Believer," *The Gospel and Contemporary Perspectives*, Douglas Moo, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 31.

⁸⁵ Psalm 103:2-5

laborers for world-wide evangelism and church planting."⁸⁶ This does not excuse the selective hermeneutic of word of faith exegetes. The writings of word of faith teachers emphasize texts that refer to wealth, but they exclude other texts that bring a biblical balance. They theologically stack the prosperity Scriptures (often out of their context) and declare it to be the truth of God. Yet their interpretation of Scripture does not include the full biblical material on the subject; it only includes the texts that support their position. For example, Hagin writes,

Paul said, writing to the church at Philippi, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). All your needs would include your financial, material, and other needs. In fact in this chapter, Paul is talking about financial and material things.⁸⁷

Hagin's selective hermeneutic draws attention to verse 19 which mentions prosperity (God meeting our needs), but he excludes the context of the passage. In Philippians 4:11 & 12, Paul writes,

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

God's promise of provision is true, but this does not imply secured wealth at all given times. The context of Philippians 4:19 contests the notion that anyone in the will of God will always experience prosperity. Paul freely admits his moments of lack. The biblical balance is not absolute prosperity at all times, but contentment. Promoting contentment over greed is the initial step to reconstructing prosperity.

A reconstructed prosperity is built on the whole counsel of God concerning wealth. This includes the blessings bestowed from the Abrahamic covenant and God's nature to care for the needs of his children. This is held in tension with the biblical warning concerning the deceitfulness of wealth. Jesus clearly warned, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."⁸⁸ This tension between the blessings of wealth and the deceitfulness of wealth is maintained by devaluing wealth in the scope of Christian experience. Financial blessings are considered a part of God's purpose for the church, but to avoid a gospel of greed that feeds the fallen nature's lust, those blessings are considered merely an appendix. The superior blessing is right relationship with God through Christ.

Within this biblical realignment, word of faith theology can reprioritize social and evangelical concerns over materialistic egoism concerning prosperity. The primary purpose for the blessing of prosperity is not the accumulation of possessions, but for the

⁸⁶ Edward K. Pousson, *Spreading the Flame*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publications, 1992), 83. He also notes that the Rhema churches of South Africa, which are associated with Hagin's ministry, have been considered "the most compassionate and generous Christians" in South Africa. He quotes Allan Anderson, a local pastor in South Africa, who testifies, "Far from abandoning their responsibilities towards the poor, these Christians see it as their God-given duty to do what they can to alleviate poverty – and not just through the proclamation of 'prosperity,' but in practical giving!" See Pousson, *Spreading the Flame*, 144.

⁸⁷ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness, and Spiritual Death*, 2.

⁸⁸ Luke 12:15

realized ethic – "love thy neighbor." This ethically reinforced doctrine values the sharing of wealth above the mass accumulation of possessions to satisfy individual lust. Oral Roberts, a pioneer in the word of faith doctrine of prosperity, provides a suitable definition for this type of reconstructed prosperity. He writes,

Prosperity is the possession of everything you need for yourself and loved ones with enough surplus to give to those who need help. If you have only the bare necessities, you are not prosperous. And if you have all the sufficiencies of life but no more, that is not prosperity. But, if you have everything you need with something left over for the poor, that is prosperity. If, after you have paid the tithe, you have enough for offerings to spread the gospel and help the needy, that is prosperity.⁸⁹

In this definition, prosperity's purpose is to meet personal needs, provide for the household of faith, help the poor and advance the gospel. Kenneth E. Hagin, Jr., pastor of Rhema Bible Church, understands the need to devalue material possessions. He writes, "Acquiring material possessions is not the focus of Christianity. We are promised material goods, but they are not to be our focus."⁹⁰ This adjusted understanding of prosperity honors biblical authority and becomes an asset to the purpose of world evangelism.

Looking toward the Future

If the vitality of the word of faith movement is to remain, second and third generation word of faith leaders must enter the process of restructuring word of faith theology. Pastors and ministers who have been influenced by the word of faith perspective cannot sit by and allow poor hermeneutics and unreflective theology to undermine a movement with such potential. Reflective theology must begin in the pastor's study. Solid theology must be preached for the pulpit. Pentecostal history has taught the lesson that charismatic movements begin in the flurry of spiritual intensity that produce a raw and somewhat primitive theology. Only conscientious biblical reflection illuminated by the Holy Spirit can develop a "systematic" word of faith theology. The art of doing theology within Pentecostalism requires a commitment to time and energy incorporating cognitive skills and spiritual sensitivity. It is a practice that word of faith leaders must commit to in order to produce a solid word of faith theology. It requires humility to admit areas of excess and biblical weakness. It includes an intellectual fellowship with other theology streams within the Body of Christ. The anti-intellectual feelings that have plagued the development of Pentecostal theology must be shaken off in the building of word of faith theology. An attempt must be made to join the Pentecostal struggle to synthesize experience and scholarship in the pursuit to understand the truth of God's Word and proclaim it to the world.

⁸⁹ Oral Roberts, *My Favorite Bible Scriptures*, (Tulsa: Oral Roberts Evangelist Association, 1963), 51.

⁹⁰ Kenneth E. Hagin, Jr., *Another Look at Faith*, (Tulsa: Faith Publication Library, 1996), 101.