

**THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT: TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVE  
ENGAGEMENT**

**by**

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*The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the  
South African Theological Seminary.*

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work, and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'G' with a horizontal line through it, followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

Signed: Genis J. P. Pieterse

Date 18 March 2016

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study is to come to an authentic understanding of the Word of Faith movement at a variety of levels: its origins, its theology, and its influence, all for the purpose of laying a foundation for constructive and informed engagement with the Word of Faith movement.

This study is not easy to classify in terms of the standard subdivisions of theology. Since the objective of the study is to come to an accurate understanding of a contemporary religious movement so as to facilitate constructive dialogue, it involves a combination of historical, systematic, and practical theological components. The methodology throughout is based on literary methods.

The study aims to answer four key questions.

Firstly, is the Word of Faith movement a metaphysical cult or an authentically Christian movement with aberrant theology? The study concludes that the Word of Faith movement is authentically Christian; however, the movement has theological teachings and beliefs that are not supported by a contextual Bible reading.

Secondly, what is the organising framework for the theology of the Word of Faith movement, and how plausible is the movement's theology? On this point the study demonstrates how the key theological beliefs of the movement relates to its 'little gods' teaching and how these key beliefs are dependent upon an understanding and acceptance of the 'little gods' teaching.

Thirdly, why does the Word of Faith movement attract and keep adherents despite its theological deficiencies? Here the study relies, among others, on Bainbridge and Stark who showed that cults form to address people's immediate and social needs. It also makes use of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance to show that individuals respond to a tension between their beliefs and their experiences by

adapting their beliefs in terms of their perceived and/or real reward. Avery and Gobbel show how powerful the relationship between the spiritual leader and the listener can be, this results in a form of surrogate validation whereby the individual allows him or herself to be influenced.

Finally, how should the Evangelical Church engage with the Word of Faith movement? In answering this question it is clear that education is central. I further argue, that from an ethics perspective, a Christ centered approach to theology is of equal importance as is using scripture as the foundation used for the validation of beliefs and teachings. I conclude that Smith's model for doing theology addresses all these elements and, if used, arrives at a missional focused theology where theological belief and scriptural reading speaks to the contemporary church.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Introduction

There are a number of theologians who have commented on the Word of Faith movement and its theology. Amongst the most prominent authors in opposition to the Word of Faith movement and its theology is Hank Hanegraaff, who authored a book entitled *Christianity in Crisis*, and Dan McConnell, who authored a book entitled *A Different Gospel*. Other anti-Word of Faith movement critics include Gordon Fee, who addresses Word of Faith Prosperity theology in his book entitled, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, and John MacArthur.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion reached by these and other authors is that the Word of Faith movement is a metaphysical cult,<sup>2</sup> with teachings that do not represent sound Christian doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

There are also voices from within the Word of Faith movement that present a theology that, at first glance, seems to support the critics in their conclusion. Amongst these proponents are Hinn, Hagin, Copeland, Meyer and Dollar.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993); Dan McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1988); Gordon Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2006); John MacArthur, 'Does God Promise Health and Wealth? (The Wrong Jesus Christ. The Wrong Faith. Charismatic Chaos Series, 1991), retrieved 21 January 2012, <http://www.ondocrtine.com/2mac0084.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Geisler, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook of Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997); Dave Hunt and Thomas McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1985); Roger Oakland, *New Wine or Old Deception? A Biblical Perspective of Experience-Based Christianity* (Costa Mesa, CA: Word for Today, 1995); Roger Oakland, *When New Wine Makes a Man Divine: True Revival or Last Days Deception?* (Costa Mesa, CA: Understand the Times, 1997); Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*.

<sup>4</sup> Benny Hinn, *Statement of Faith* (Benny Hinn Ministries, 2012), retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.bennyhinn.org/aboutus/articledesc.cfm?id=1392>; Kenneth Hagin, *Kenneth E. Hagin: Founder's Memorial*. (Kenneth Hagin Ministries. Rhema Canada, 2012), retrieved 14 January 2012,

The tension that exists between these two extreme groups, the critics on the one hand and the Word of Faith adherents on the other, has created a divide with little constructive theological interaction taking place between the two groups. There is, however, a more moderate voice that seeks to demonstrate that some of the Word of Faith theology is 'authentically Christian.'<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. Problem

The objective of this study is to come to an authentic understanding of the Word of Faith movement. Whereas many evangelical writers have set out to criticise and correct the Word of Faith movement, my objective was to understand the movement at a variety of levels: its origins, its theology, and its influence. Ultimately, my objective is to lay a foundation for constructive and informed engagement with adherents and advocates of Word of Faith teachings. To this end, the research endeavours to answer four separate but related questions:

1. Is the Word of Faith movement a metaphysical cult or an authentically Christian movement with aberrant theology?
2. What is the organising framework for the theology of the Word of Faith movement, and how plausible is the movement's theology?
3. Why does the Word of Faith movement attract and keep adherents despite its theological deficiencies?
4. How should the Evangelical Church engage with the Word of Faith movement?

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<http://rhemacanada.myshopify.com/pages/kennethhagin>; Kenneth Copeland, *Why God Hates Sin* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 2012), retrieved 29 January 2012, <http://www.kcm.org/real-help/article/why-god-hates-sin>; Joyce Meyer, *Statement of Faith* (Joyce Meyer Ministries, 2012), retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.joycemeyer.org/AboutUs/WhatWeBelieve.asp>; Creflo Dollar, *Not Guilty: Experience God's Gift of Acceptance and Freedom* (New York: Faith Words Publishers, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2003), 213.

### 1.3. Hypotheses

My in-depth attempt to understand the Word of Faith movement has led me to propose a specific answer to each of the four key questions stated above. These four answers constitute the four hypotheses that are defended in this dissertation:

1. The Word of Faith movement is not a metaphysical cult, but a Christian movement with, at times, aberrant theology.
2. The Word of Faith movement's doctrine of human deification functions is the central organising framework for the movement's beliefs and practices.
3. The Word of Faith movement presents an attractive option for some individuals who are drawn into the movement due to the social emphasis of the movement and the way the religious beliefs and social need or want are integrated into a single theological teaching.
4. Communicative action is a viable cooperative action mechanism that can be used by the Evangelical Church in its engagement with the Word of Faith movement through which to facilitate theological debate within the confines of a Christian value system.

Although the other components are important and significant, the main truth claim of the thesis lies in the second hypothesis. The major claim being defended in this dissertation is the belief that Word of Faith theology centres on and coheres around the belief that human beings are little gods. The Word of Faith 'little gods' theology is not merely one teaching amongst many, standing alongside other distinctive documents about faith, health and wealth, or covenant. Rather, it forms the single foundation upon which the movement's entire theology rests.

Figure 1 is a relationship flow diagram compiled by the author to demonstrate how the Word of Faith movement's theology fits together. In addition it demonstrates that at the heart of the various beliefs of the movement, and central to its overall theology, is its teaching of human deification, or as it is referred to within the movement, its 'little gods' teaching. It is important to note that the influence of the 'little gods' teaching is often more subliminal, influencing the other beliefs within the movement without many of the believers and teachers realising to what extent their overall belief is directed by it.

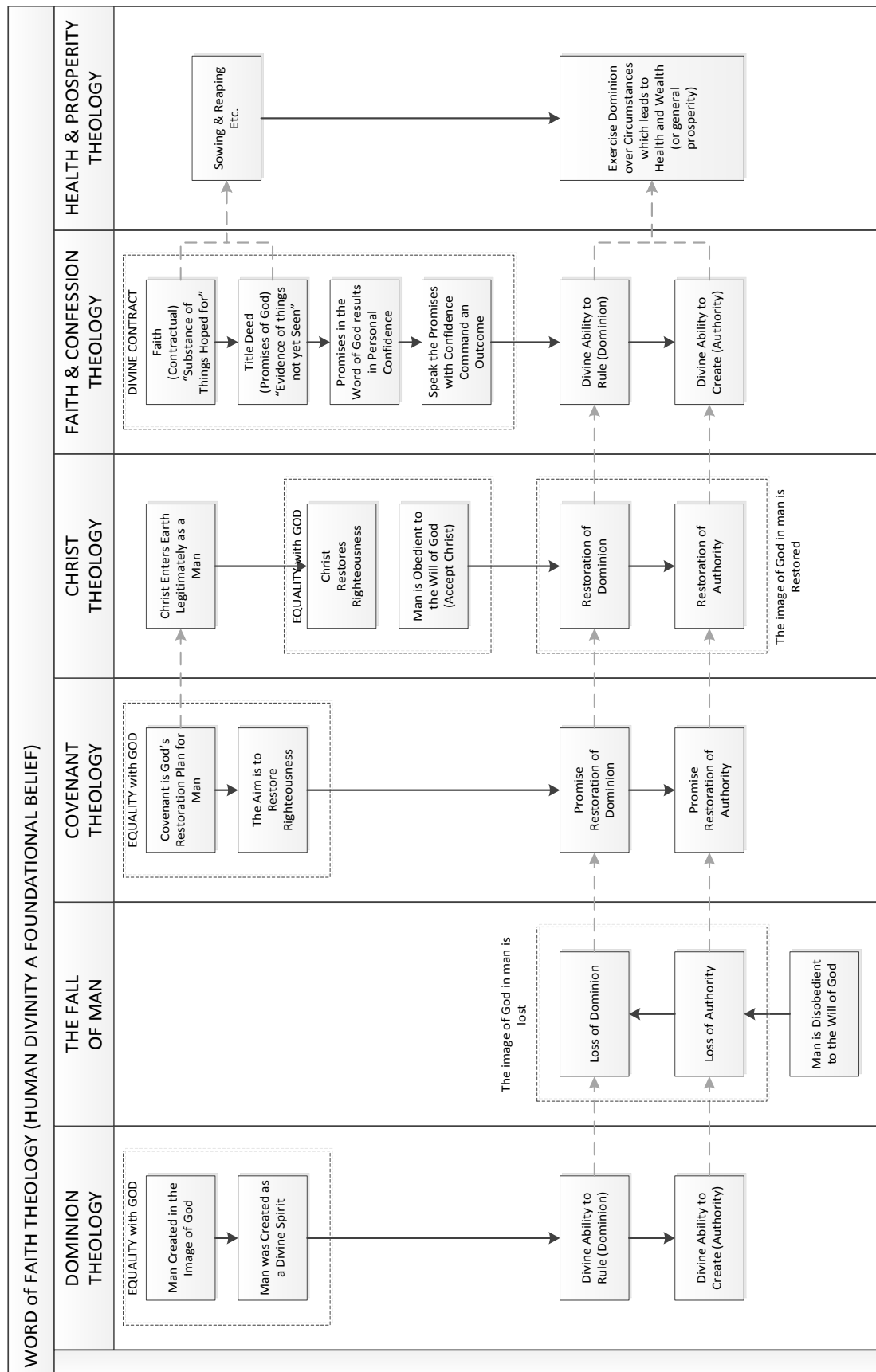


Figure 1: Relationship between the Word of Faith teaching on Human Deification and the Movement's other beliefs.

## **1.4. Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to attain an understanding of Word of Faith theology that will empower and inspire evangelicals to engage with adherents of the Word of Faith movement as brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, the researcher aims to lay the groundwork for constructive dialogue between evangelical and Word of Faith Christians.

To have a meaningful dialogue with the Word of Faith movement, evangelicals must understand it. They must recognise its origins as lying within Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, such that its adherents are indeed fellow Christians. They must understand the presuppositions that give the movement's theology at least a veneer of internal coherence, well enough to appreciate how the movement's adherents think, but also well enough to demonstrate the biblical and theological frailty of the movement's major teachings. They must understand the forces at work that account for the movement's remarkable—and indeed also surprising—ability to draw and keep adherents.

## **1.5. Methodology**

This study is not easy to classify in terms of the standard sub-divisions of theology. Since the objective of the study is to come to an accurate understanding of a contemporary religious movement so as to facilitate constructive dialogue, it involves a combination of historical, systematic, and practical theological components. The methodology throughout is based on literary methods.

### **1.5.1. Methodology for Chapter 2: The Origin of the Word of Faith Movement.**

This chapter deals with the first key question, 'Is the Word of Faith movement a metaphysical cult or an authentically Christian movement with aberrant theology?' A review of the historical development of the movement is presented which traces its evolution back to the rise of Pentecostalism. I present the arguments from critics such as McConnell and Hanegraaff that the movement has metaphysical roots on

the one hand, and on the other rely on the work of Paul King and Jacques Theron,<sup>6</sup> who show that much of the movement's beliefs are centred in, and developed from, authentically Christian beliefs.

### **1.5.2. Methodology for Chapter 3: The Theology of the Word of Faith Movement**

This chapter deals with the second key question, 'What is the organising framework for the theology of the Word of Faith movement, and how plausible is the movement's theology?' Based on an in-depth study of the writings of selected Word of Faith teachers, an attempt is made to describe the major beliefs of the movement and how they cohere to form a unified theology. Since no Word of Faith teacher has written a systematic theology of the movement, this procedure is not straightforward. The theology of the movement must be reconstructed from an array of *ad hoc* statements made by its propagators. The closest any leading Word of Faith preacher has come to a systematic presentation of his theology is Creflo Dollar's *Not Guilty: Experience God's Gift of Acceptance and Freedom*<sup>7</sup>. In describing the movement's theology, this book will be used as the primary source, which is supplemented by many other works from the movement's leading spokespersons.

The chapter not only aims to describe the movement's theology, but also aims to deconstruct it. In other words, the researcher will attempt to demonstrate that the movement's major teachings do not hold up under a close scrutiny of Scripture. The

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<sup>6</sup> Paul King and Jacques Theron, 'The "Classic Faith" Roots of the Modern "Word of Faith" Movement', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32, no. 1 (2006): 309-334.

<sup>7</sup> The author decided to use Creflo Dollar for two reasons. Firstly, Dollar has written what can be described, in some respects, as a systematic theology for the Word of Faith movement. As with all systematic theological writings there will be those within the movement who identify with some or even all of his views and statements, and there will also be those who don't agree on some of the points. It does, however, provide, for the purpose of this dissertation, a dialogue agent and foundation for the study. Secondly, Dollar is a significant influence within the Word of Faith movement. Dollar has a congregation size of 24,000, a TV reach of 2.3 million viewers via the Trinity Broadcast Network, and has published 57 books to date. The extent of his influence warrants the attention he is given. It is a fact that Kenneth Hagin is the *de facto* founder of the Word of Faith movement. However, his influence, is limited, as evidenced by the lack of response to his call for the normalisation of Word of Faith teachings in his book titled *The Midas Touch*, first published in 1996.

researcher makes no claim to originality for his critiques of Word of Faith teachings. Numerous theologians have deconstructed the individual doctrines of the Word of Faith movement, and the present study is content to show only the known weaknesses of the movement's theology.

### **1.5.3. Methodology for Chapter 4: The Influence of the Word of Faith Movement**

Answering the third key question, 'Why does the Word of Faith movement attract and keep adherents despite its theological deficiencies?' is the aim of this chapter. When the theology of the movement is presented, it seems incredible that a movement with various indefensible theological views could wield much influence, especially over well-educated people. But the Word of Faith movement wields massive influence, and has proved successful at attracting and retaining adherents from all socio-economic and educational levels of society. How can this influence be explained?

The researcher draws selectively from research in the fields of sociology and practical theology in an attempt to develop a theoretical framework to explain the appeal of the Word of Faith movement. Four primary sources are used: (a) Bainbridge and Stark's work on cult formation, (b) Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, (c) Fowler's work on stages of faith, and (d) Avery and Gobbel's research on how congregants receive the preached Word.<sup>8</sup>

### **1.5.4. Methodology for Chapter 5: Dialogue with the Word of Faith Movement**

This is the climactic chapter of the work, tackling the practical and strategic key question, 'How should the evangelical church engage with the Word of Faith movement?' It attempts to identify the basis and key issues for constructive dialogue between Evangelical Christians and adherents of the Word of Faith movement. It

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<sup>8</sup> William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, 'Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models', *Sociological Analysis* 40.4 (1979): 283–295; William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987); Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995); William Avery and Robert Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher,' *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980): 41–53.



identifies divergent understandings of revelation as a barrier to dialogue, and attempts to lay a foundation to overcome it.

## **1.6. Overview of the Study**

The approach followed in structuring this thesis is to dedicate a chapter to each of the following key questions. When the Introduction and Conclusion are added, this results in this listing of chapters.

1) Introduction

Provide an introduction to the study and a brief overview of the layout of the remainder of the dissertation.

2) The Origin of the Word of Faith Movement

Addresses key question 1: 'Is the Word of Faith movement a metaphysical cult or an authentically Christian movement with aberrant theology?'

3) The Theology of the Word of Faith Movement

Addresses key question 2: 'What is the organising framework for the theology of the Word of Faith movement, and how plausible is the movement's theology?'

4) The Influence of the Word of Faith Movement

Addresses key question 3: 'Why does the Word of Faith movement attract and keep adherents despite its theological deficiencies?'

5) Dialogue with the Word of Faith Movement

Addresses key question 4: 'How should the evangelical church engage with the Word of Faith movement?'

6) Conclusion

## Chapter 2

### The Origin of the Word of Faith Movement

#### 2.1. Introduction

How Christians understand the essential nature of the Word of Faith movement has a fundamental influence on how they engage its adherents. If they see it as a cult with its roots in Eastern Metaphysics, they will engage it as a non-Christian religion. By contrast, if they view it as an authentically Christian movement with some seriously aberrant doctrines, they will engage its adherents as brothers and sisters in Christ. So which is it? Is the Word of Faith movement a metaphysical cult or an authentically Christian movement with aberrant theology?

It is important to note what the term 'authentically Christian' means as it pertains to this dissertation. It is not a statement of theological perfection, nor is it a blanket validation of the beliefs of the Word of Faith movement. It is, however, primarily a statement that encompasses the belief of the movement's members, in that they truly consider themselves to be children of God, who have been reconciled unto God through Christ. Dr Stephen R. Holmes, Lecturer in Systematic Theology at St Mary's College in Scotland, states that "in the Pauline corpus, salvation is understood as what God has done through Christ, and particularly his death and resurrection".<sup>1</sup> It is within the Evangelical tradition that salvation is defined not within the collective, or community of believers, but rather, as something more personal.<sup>2</sup> Robert Gmeindl simplifies the theological understanding of salvation as understood within evangelicalism as the belief that "Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God; that the only hope for salvation is through personal faith in Jesus Christ; that the Bible is the Word

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen R. Holmes. 'Salvation'. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Edited by Kevin Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 713

<sup>2</sup> Robert F. Gmeindl. *An Examination of Personal Salvation in the Theology of North American Evangelicalism: On the Road to a Theology of Social Justice* (Wilfrid Laurier University, MA Thesis 1980), 1

of God and is infallible in its statements and teachings”.<sup>3</sup> This definition, on its own, implies that if an individual is prepared to believe that there is a need for reconciliation unto God, and that such a reconciliation between the individual and God can only be achieved through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, secured through his death and resurrection, then the individual would be saved. This in turn would make the saved individual a convert to the Christian faith, and in turn, an authentic Christian. It does not, however, endorse erroneous interpretations of the Word of God, or the subsequent beliefs and doctrines that may flow from such faulty interpretation.

The Anglican cleric John Stott, one of the principal authors of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, proposes a definition of the idea of salvation within the Evangelical tradition, which he states as follows:

What then is salvation? It is a great word. It urgently needs to be set free from those narrow concepts to which it has often been reduced. Salvation is not a synonym for forgiveness. It is bigger and broader than that. It denotes God’s total plan for man, and it includes at least three phases. Phase one is our deliverance from the guilt and judgment of our sins, our free and full forgiveness, together with our reconciliation to God and our adoption as His children. Phase two is our progressive liberation from the downdrag of evil, beginning with our new birth into the family of God and continuing with our transformation by the Spirit of Christ into the image of Christ. Phase three is our final deliverance from the sin which lingers both in our fallen nature and in our social environment, when on the last day we shall be invested with new and glorious bodies and transferred to a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Further, these three phases, or tenses, of salvation (past, present and future) are associated in the New Testament with the three major events in the saving career of Jesus, His death, His resurrection and

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<sup>3</sup> Gmeindl, *On the Road to a Theology of Social Justice*, 1

subsequent gift of the Spirit, and His return in power and glory. Paul calls them justification, sanctification and glorification.<sup>4</sup>

Tom Wright, the retired Anglican Bishop of Durham, states that “Justification presupposes two things, sin and grace. No sin, no need for justification: no grace, no possibility of it”, and it is within the climatic work of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, that the “divine grace” of God is revealed<sup>5</sup>. Wright states that:

Justification safeguards, because it presupposes the centrality of the cross and resurrection. Likewise, secondly, justification presupposes the work of the Spirit, promised in the Old Testament as the one who would write God's law on the hearts of his new covenant people. Justification takes place on the basis of faith because true Christian faith—belief that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead—is the evidence of the work of the Spirit, and hence the evidence that the believer is already within the covenant. If a man believes this Gospel, his religious stance is clear. He can be neither Jew nor Greek, but only Christian<sup>6</sup>.

For an individual to partake in the promise of God and to take on a Christian identity places no demand on the individual's understanding of doctrine, or the interpretation of scripture; all that is required is for the individual to accept the “grace of God freely given to undeserving sinners”.<sup>7</sup> Wright defines the limits of human ability within the saving grace of God as follows:

Justification is not how God makes someone a Christian: it is his righteous declaration that someone is already a Christian. Faith is not an achievement which earns salvation, but the evidence of saving

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<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist. The Basics of Belief* (Tyndal Press, Carol Stream, IL, 1970), 109-110

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas T. Wright, *Justification: The Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism. The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought*, (Ed. Gavin Reid, London: Collins, 1980), 13

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 13

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 13

grace already at work. Only the renewed heart can believe in the resurrection: only the penitent heart can submit to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Because of the work of the Son and the Spirit, God rightly declares that Christian believers are members of the covenant family. The basis of justification is the grace of God freely given to undeserving sinners<sup>8</sup>.

The Evangelical declaration that we are saved by grace and not through works, which formed the foundation of the Reformation, and continues to be the cornerstone of what an Evangelical believes, must separate the act of salvation from the need for an accurate theology, or at least a moderately accurate theology. Our Christian authenticity, the genuine belief that an individual is a child of God through the saving grace of Jesus Christ as manifest through His death and resurrection, cannot have, as a precondition, an accurate theology. Salvation forms the foundation of our reconciliation to God, and it is through the working of the Holy Spirit that our relationship with God, our doctrines and beliefs are formed, but it is salvation first. Again, it is Wright who notes that “Good works, as the Reformers never tired of saying, are done not to earn salvation but out of gratitude for it”.<sup>9</sup> Our salvation obtained through justification is the catalyst that initiates a relationship with God through the working of the Holy Spirit. This fellowship is what drives our evolution to holiness and an authentic and true theology of God for as much as is humanly possible. This separation, between having an accurate theology and being saved into the family and fellowship of God, has to be considered when looking at the Word of Faith movement.

Adherents of the Word of Faith movement are authentically Christian due to their acceptance of the saving grace of God, which was completed through the work of Christ. This is undeniable, and to impose another requirement, that of theological orthodoxy, is to make salvation subject to works. This does not relieve the Word of Faith adherent from the responsibility to develop a sound Biblical interpretation, nor to develop an accurate theology.

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<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 13

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 13

Professor Craig Keener of Asbury Theological Seminary, in his discussion on John 3:16, highlights two very important points. The first is that Jesus' death provides salvation to all, but that only those who receive Jesus by faith actually receive salvation. The second point is that salvation is not only an act of saving us from God's judgement, but equally, an act of birthing us into a new life; one lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> The simplicity of his exposition separates the free gift of salvation from the responsibility of salvation. On the one hand, God freely gives salvation to anyone who would accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, yet the life going forward demands submission to Christ, and fellowship with Him. Keener's separation of the free gift of salvation from the life birthed into, with its implied responsibility, is in essence what John Scott described as the second phase, one in which man is liberated from evil and transformed into the image of Christ.<sup>11</sup> The addition of having to believe in the Word of God, its infallibility, and doctrines that can be formulated from it, as required by Gmeindl,<sup>12</sup> fits into Scott's second phase and stands separate from the act of salvation.

Tom Wright's explanation, that justification is the result of belief in the death and resurrection of Christ and acceptance of Christ as Lord, and that such belief must mean that the one who believes is "neither Jew nor Greek, but only Christian"<sup>13</sup> frames my conviction that the Word of Faith adherent is a true and authentic Christian, to whom the Church as a community must, in an expression of brotherly love, extend a hand of acceptance to the individual, but also, to extend the commitment to aid the movement to develop an equally authentic theology.

The thesis of this chapter is that the Word of Faith movement has its roots within Pentecostalism, which has its roots within Evangelicalism. Although the Word of Faith movement advances some doctrines that would cause Pentecostals to wish to disassociate from it, just as some distinctives of the Pentecostalism caused Evangelicals to label them heretics and non-Christians, the roots and the core beliefs

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<sup>10</sup> Craig S. Keener. *The Gospel According to John 3:16*. (Enrichment Journal, 1445 Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO) Online: [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201203/201203\\_028\\_John\\_3\\_16.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201203/201203_028_John_3_16.cfm)

<sup>11</sup> Stott, *Christ the Controversialist*, 109-110

<sup>12</sup> Gmeindl, *On the Road to a Theology of Social Justice*, 1

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 13

of the movement in general are sufficiently Christian that it should be regarded as a Christian movement with some seriously aberrant doctrines and practices.

## **2.2. The Word of Faith Movement Has Christian Roots**

### **2.2.1. The Rise of Pentecostalism**

John Wesley ignited the Holiness movement as a revival movement within Anglicanism during the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The main emphasis of the movement was to return to a gospel life within the Church. The movement had a strong focus on pursuing Christian Perfection while meeting the needs of others within society.<sup>15</sup> The idea of Christian Perfection was further developed by Charles Finney who, together with Asa Mahan, developed it as a response to an increasing number of backsliders.<sup>16</sup>

Charles Parham, an unordained Methodist minister, in 1895 broke away from the Methodists to set up his own evangelistic ministry.<sup>17</sup> The reason for his dissatisfaction and break was his objection to the fact that ministers within the movement were not allowed to 'preach by direct inspiration'.<sup>18</sup>

By 1898, Parham had established a Bible School in Topeka Kansas, where he provided free tuition. It was in January 1901 that Agnes Ozman, a student of Parham, was 'baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. This event, together with an 'intense study of the Scriptures' led Parham to conclude that the evidence of having been baptised in the Holy Spirit, was for the believer to speak

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Cracknell and Susan White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hughes and William Adrian, eds., *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 290.

<sup>16</sup> James Johnson, 'Charles Grandison Finney: Father of American Revivalism,' *Christian History Magazine* 20 (1988, retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://www.chinstitute.org/index.php/chm/nineteenth-century/finney/>).

<sup>17</sup> Edith Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 24.

<sup>18</sup> James Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (University of Arkansas Press, 1988).

in tongues. This point was to differentiate the Christian Holiness-Perfection, as proposed by the Methodist Movement, from Parham theology.<sup>19</sup>

In 1905, Parham moved his Bible School to Houston, Texas, where the manifestation of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by *glossolalia* continued.<sup>20</sup> It was at this time that 'a Southern black Holiness preacher by the name of William J. Seymour joined Parham's Bible school.'<sup>21</sup> Seymour did not, however, receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced through *glossolalia*.<sup>22</sup> Under the leadership of, and with support from, Parham, Seymour moved to Los Angeles in February 1906. The first outpouring of the Holy Spirit under the leadership of Seymour came at the house of a janitor named Asbery on the 9th of April 1906. Soon this outpouring outgrew the venue, and Seymour moved into the unoccupied building of the African Methodist Episcopal Church at 312 Azusa Street.<sup>23</sup>

Parham visited the Azusa Street mission during October 1906 and denounced it. His reason for disapproving of the mission was the high state of emotionalism combined with the intermingling of blacks and whites in the service. Seeing what Parham described as the 'manifestations of the flesh', he declared 'God is sick at His stomach!'<sup>24</sup> The statement of Parham relating to the Azusa Street activities is often tainted by presenting it as a 'deep-south' racially motivated comment. However, he wasn't the only negative commentator of the Azusa Street revival at the time. Michael Brown,<sup>25</sup> in his book *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, claims that a number of other ministers and theologians of the day also provided their comments on the

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street: An Eyewitness Account* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge Logos Publishers, 1980), xii.

<sup>20</sup> Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, xii.

<sup>21</sup> Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, xiv.

<sup>23</sup> River of Revival Ministries, 'Bishop William J. Seymour,' *312 Azusa Street* (2006; retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.azusastreet.org/WilliamJSeymour.htm>).

<sup>24</sup> Gary McGee, 'Tongues, The Bible Evidence: The Revival Legacy of Charles F. Parham,' *Enrichment Journal* (1999; retrieved 14 January 2012, [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/068\\_tongues.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/068_tongues.cfm)).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Brown, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire: America on the Edge of Revival* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1996), 197.



Azuza Street activities, amongst them: G. Campbell Morgan stated that the Azuza Street outpouring was 'the last vomit of Satan', R. A. Torrey declared that this new Pentecostal movement was 'emphatically not of God, and founded by a Sodomite', H. A. Ironside stated that both the holiness and Pentecostal movements were 'disgusting ... delusions and insanities'. In 1912 he said of their meetings 'pandemoniums where exhibitions worthy of a madhouse or a collection of howling dervishes', were causing a 'heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity' and W.B. Godbey claimed that the Azusa Street revival was the result of spiritualism, and that its participants were 'Satan's preachers, jugglers, necromancers, enchanters, magicians, and all sorts or mendicants'. Clarence Larkin stated that 'the conduct of those possessed, in which they fall to the ground and writhe in contortions, causing disarrangements of the clothing and disgraceful scenes, is more a characteristic of demon possession, than a work of the Holy Spirit. He furthermore claimed that it was perilous times, and that all around the believers are seducing spirits, and that they will become more active as the dispensation draws to its close'.<sup>26</sup>

A sceptical response came from Phineas Bresee, a pastor at Los Angeles in 1906 and a general superintendent of the recently formed Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, wrote of the Azusa meetings:

Locally it is of small account, being insignificant both in numbers and influence. Instead of being the greatest movement of the times, as represented—in Los Angeles, at least—it is of small moment. It has had, and has now, upon the religious life of the city, about as much influence as a pebble thrown into the sea; but what little influence it has had seems to have been mostly harmful, instead of beneficent. It seems not only to have had at least some of the elements of fanaticism, but to be trying to inculcate such erroneous or heretical doctrines as mark it as not of the Spirit of Truth. The two principal things which are emphasized, and wherein they claim to differ from others, is, that Christians are sanctified before they receive the baptism with the Holy Ghost, this baptism being a gift of power upon the

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<sup>26</sup> Brown, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, 197.

sanctified life, and that the essential and necessary evidence of the baptism is the gift of speaking with new tongues.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from these statements that mainstream acceptance of the Pentecostal movement, or first wave as it later became known, was not going to be without obstacles. Part of objections focused on the function and form of worship within the movement. As the emphasis of the movement was on (1) the baptism of the Holy Spirit as evident in the (2) manifestation of speaking in tongues, the 'objectionable practices', raised by its opponents, were entrenched in its form of worship. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, established the movement within the context of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian church. It created an expectation of the restoration of the church and from an eschatological perspective placed the church within the promise of Acts 2:17.<sup>28</sup>

Dr Vinson Synan<sup>29</sup>, dean at Regent University and renowned Pentecostal-Charismatic historian, observes that:

The Azusa Street movement seems to have been a merger of white American holiness religion with worship styles derived from the African-American Christian tradition which had developed since the days of chattel slavery in the South. The expressive worship and praise at Azusa Street, which included shouting and dancing, had been common among Appalachian whites as well as Southern blacks. The admixture of tongues and other charisms with black music and worship styles created a new and indigenous form of Pentecostalism that was to prove extremely attractive to disinherited

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<sup>27</sup> Larry Martin, *Sceptics and Scoffers* (Pensacola, FL: River of Revival Ministries, 2004), 80.

<sup>28</sup> Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 3-5.

<sup>29</sup> Dr Vinson Synan also wrote *The Century of the Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), a fifteen-chapter work that charts the rise of pneumatology between 1901 and 2001. I consulted this work as a means of gaining a bird's-eye view of the development of the Word of Faith movement, and looked for confirmation on the evolution of the movement from other sources, which I quoted and listed, many of which were listed by in *The Century of the Holy Spirit*.

and deprived people, both in America and other nations of the world.<sup>30</sup>

What the Pentecostal movement, therefore, contributed to its contemporary world is a link back through the ages, to the origin of the Christian Church, a link that established the movement firmly within a Christian tradition as expressed through the baptism of the Holy Spirit as evident through speaking in tongues on the one hand. On the other hand, the movement created a progressive experience that bridged the divide that existed within the Church, by creating an inclusive body of worshippers irrespective of race and more importantly, it liberated Christian worship in that it embraced the expressive style of its adherents. It therefore embraced cultural difference and incorporated this within its worship.

It has been argued by Andrew Walker that 'Pentecostalism is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon': this is only partially correct. Dr Curtis Ward, a church historian, claims that both glossolalia and the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been recorded throughout history. Although Pentecostalism as a movement is a relatively recent development within the Christian church, the foundation upon which its worship expression is based can be traced back to the early church. It is within this link back to the early Church that the emergence of the Pentecostal movement anchored itself firmly within the Christian tradition, but as Synan points out, this was not without opposition. Synan does claim, however, that it was in part due to 'enterprising pioneers' that the Pentecostal movement gained acceptance within the larger Christian community.<sup>31</sup>

### **2.2.2. The Rise of the Word of Faith Movement**

The first wave Pentecostal movement, also known as the 'Classical Pentecostal Movement', set the foundation for the second wave or Charismatic movement, in that

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<sup>30</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement* (Oral Roberts University, 2006; retrieved 4 September 2015, [http://www.oru.edu/library/special\\_collections/holy\\_spirit\\_research\\_center/pentecostal\\_history.php](http://www.oru.edu/library/special_collections/holy_spirit_research_center/pentecostal_history.php)).

<sup>31</sup> Synan, *Origins of the Pentecostal Movement*.

following its growth through missions and the establishment of indigenous churches it became a structured and organised Christian movement.<sup>32</sup>

The acceptance of outwardly expressed 'spiritual gifts' within some of the 'mainline Protestant and Catholic churches' during the 1960s became known as the Charismatic movement. The commonly accepted start of the Charismatic movement is traced back to the Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett, who announced to his congregation in Van Nuys, California, that he had spoken in tongues.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that the Charismatic movement is not an outflow or splinter group broken away from, or evolved from, the Pentecostal movement, but rather a unique movement that retained its core 'mainstream' beliefs, but superimposed upon these beliefs the Pentecostal experience. At its core, therefore, the Charismatic movement, by retaining its 'mainstream' Christian beliefs remained fundamentally Christian, but added to these beliefs an expressive form of worship.

Morris and Lioy note that both the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are experience-centred, and that 'Pentecostalism cannot be understood through dogma and doctrine alone, but through a narrative theology, whose central expression is the testimony'.<sup>34</sup> Zeller notes that Charismatics 'are not separatists but rather reformist in character'.<sup>35</sup> In essence, Charismatics remain within their mainstream Church and denominational structures, but adopt the Pentecostal experience and incorporate that into their form of worship.

The first wave, Pentecostal movement, was primarily a movement through which the early church practice of speaking in tongues combined with the promise of

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<sup>32</sup> Synan, *Origins of the Pentecostal Movement*.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Eskridge, *Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement* (Institute for Study of American Evangelicals, 2012; retrieved 4 September 2015, <http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/Pentecostalism>).

<sup>34</sup> Russell Morris and Daniel Lioy, *A Historical and Theological Framework for Understanding Word of Faith Theology*. (South African Theological Seminary, 2014), 81. Online: <http://www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/Morris%20and%20Lioy,%20A%20Historical%20and%20Theological%20Framework%20for%20Understanding%20Word%20of%20Faith%20Theology.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> George Zeller, *The Charismatic Movement: 35 Doctrinal Issues* (Middletown: The Middletown Bible Church, 1997).

restoration of the church was ushered in. Pentecostalism functioned as a restoration movement restoring that which was lost back to the Church. The second wave, Charismatic movement, retained the belief in restoration and incorporated the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues within more traditional church worship. The Charismatic movement therefore took on the role as a revivalist movement, seeking to revive the gifts of the Holy Spirit within mainstream denominational Churches.

It was during the early part of the 1980s that the introduction of the gifts of the Holy Spirit transcended the experience of Pentecostal and Charismatic adherents by adding to their experience of speaking in tongues a more inclusive experience, that of signs and wonders. The term 'third wave' was first used by Peter Wagner, one of the driving forces behind what would become known as the Signs and Wonders movement.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Wagner summarised the evolution from first to third wave as follows:

I see historically that we're now in the third wave. The first wave of the moving of the Holy Spirit began at the beginning of the century with the Pentecostal movement. The second wave was the charismatic movement which began in the fifties in the major denominations. Both of those waves continue today. I see the third wave of the eighties as an opening of the straight-line evangelicals and other Christians to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that the Pentecostals and charismatics have experienced, but without becoming either charismatic or Pentecostal. I think we are in a new wave of something that now has lasted almost through our whole century.<sup>37</sup>

The third wave introduced 'power evangelism', a belief that the gospel and the Word of God must be 'demonstrated through supernatural signs and wonders'.<sup>38</sup> It is within this overarching theological ideal that the Word of Faith movement exists, the need

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<sup>36</sup> Zeller, *The Charismatic Movement*.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave* (Pastoral Renewal, July/August 1983), 1-5.

<sup>38</sup> Zeller, *The Charismatic Movement*.

to demonstrate or prove the power contained within the Word of God, to be able to utilise the Word of God to bring about a supernatural outcome that serves as proof of the power of God.

The foundation from which the Word of Faith movement developed its theology is therefore essentially Christian. How individual leaders within the Word of Faith movement transcended some of the core Christian beliefs, and that errant beliefs and teachings developed from this does not detract from the reality that there are clear Christian beliefs that underpin the teachings and beliefs of the movement. It is clear, however, that the Word of Faith movement developed a very specific variety of power evangelism, one in which signs and wonders as a form of worship, is aimed at improving the individual adherent's condition at all levels of human existence.

The sociologist and theologian Bryan Wilson shed some light on why such an individualistic, or egocentric, theology could prosper. He presents an early twentieth-century view of the institutional church that contextualises many of the factors that contributed to the birth and development of various movements of the past hundred years.<sup>39</sup> He claims that rationalisation and secularisation has left a void in the institutional structure of the Church. He furthermore highlights the fact that the institutional Church, during the early part of the twentieth century, lost its control over the breadth of social human affairs. The result was a decline in the Church community. He argues that where this decline was less dramatic was in communities where the Church refocused its attention beyond the spiritual, and where it fulfilled a strong social function.<sup>40</sup>

Synan adds to this by providing a contextualised historical overview of the Word of Faith movement. He sets the tone for his historical review by demonstrating that it is the social emphasis of the movement that makes it attractive to the masses. He concludes that the theological view that 'the poor will be with you always' contributes little to the well-being of the individual. In contrast, he implies that the social-gospel found in liberation theology is equally flawed. Under a social-gospel theology, the

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<sup>39</sup> John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 572-601.

<sup>40</sup> McManners, *History of Christianity*, 572-573.

individual places his trust for a better life in the hands of the government. His final comparative view is aligned to the foundational health and prosperity theology of the Word of Faith movement. In this view he demonstrates that the concept of instant deliverance from addiction, physical and moral health combined with material prosperity, develops socially responsible individuals who contribute towards the perpetuation of this theology.<sup>41</sup>

### **2.2.3. The Alleged Connection to Eastern Metaphysics**

Although Kenneth Hagin is generally considered as the father of the Word of Faith movement, there are some who point to E.W. Kenyon as the real source. The popular history of the Word of Faith movement as promulgated by the critics Hanegraaff and McConnell is that the father of the movement, Hagin, plagiarised the principal teachings of the movement from the New Thought follower E.W. Kenyon. However, the connection between the Word of Faith movement and eastern metaphysics is by no means as clear as Hanegraaff and McConnell claim.<sup>42</sup>

The principal argument of McConnell and Hanegraaff, in their historical overview of the Word of Faith movement, is that the foundation of the movement can be traced back through Kenyon to the founder of the New Thought philosophy, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby.<sup>43</sup> This connection with Quimby is convenient, as he is often credited as having influenced Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science church, who subsequently influenced Kenyon.<sup>44</sup> Both Hanegraaff and McConnell assume that such a connection would place an obvious question over the Word of Faith movement. John MacArthur is another critic who states that:

[E. W. Kenyon] was a faith-healer not in the Pentecostal tradition, but in the tradition of Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science. He attended a college that specialized in training lecturers for the metaphysical science cults. And he imported and adapted into his system most of the

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<sup>41</sup> Synan, *Origins of the Pentecostal Movement*.

<sup>42</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 331; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 3, 6.

<sup>43</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 25.

essential ideas these cults propagated. [Kenneth] Hagin absorbed them from there.<sup>45</sup>

King and Theron provide a more fair-minded assessment of the movement's origins. Although they point towards a number of Kenyon's publications as having exerted influence on the Word of Faith teaching, they rightly list the principal leaders who popularised and maintain the movement as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, and Charles Capps.<sup>46</sup>

King and Theron state that 'neither McConnell nor Hanegraaff took into consideration that some of those very teachings are surprisingly similar to orthodox Christianity and the teaching of classic evangelical writers of faith'.<sup>47</sup>

Dr Derek Vreeland, a Charismatic theologian, in his address to the 30th annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, claimed that much of this historical overview has been misrepresented by McConnell. Vreeland points out that the Kenyon connection as proposed by McConnell is dependent upon three arguments: Firstly, a misunderstanding of the relationship between Kenyon and the New Thought movement; secondly, a misunderstanding of Kenyon's theology; and finally, a lack of presenting a comprehensive view of all the influences that allowed Hagin to develop his Word of Faith theology.<sup>48</sup>

In addressing the first point Vreeland relies on the works of Joe McIntyre. He argues that when 'Kenyon attended Emerson College in 1892, the College was just beginning to be exposed to New Thought doctrines'.<sup>49</sup> Joe McIntyre himself claims to be 'greatly inspired by E.W. Kenyon' and to be 'a great representative of the Word of Faith movement'.<sup>50</sup> As New Thought is associated with Phineas Quimby who died in 1866, the main tenets of the New Thought movement were established well before

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<sup>45</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 289-290

<sup>46</sup> King and Theron, The 'classic faith' roots of the modern 'word of faith' movement, 309-312.

<sup>47</sup> King and Theron, The 'classic faith' roots of the modern 'word of faith' movement, 312.

<sup>48</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*.

<sup>49</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 4.



1892. As a matter of fact, the early 1890s saw an increase in the publication of New Thought books.<sup>51</sup>

Where McConnell fails in his argument, is by assuming that Kenyon was exclusively influenced at Emerson College, while Vreeland fails to convincingly demonstrate that the New Thought ideas were not well established within Emerson College by the early 1890s. Vreeland then continues to address the second point; the theology of Kenyon, on the basis that he established conclusively that there is no theological influence or connection between Kenyon and New Thought. This assumption is tenuous, as the attempt to show no connection between Kenyon and New Thought is not convincing. He defends the doctrinal issues highlighted by McConnell, those of deism, dualism and deification, successfully, by providing an alternative interpretation of Kenyon's teachings. In addressing the third point, Vreeland admits the influence Kenyon has had on Hagin. Vreeland correctly points to other influences on Hagin, such as that of Pentecostal healing revivalism.<sup>52</sup>

Attempting to clearly define the Word of Faith movement's history is not without controversy. What is clear, however, is that Hagin has been influenced by, amongst others, Kenyon's teachings. What is less clear is whether Kenyon intentionally absorbed metaphysical teachings, and whether these teachings passed from Quimby through Kenyon to Hagin. It is my view that to draw such a definitive conclusion, as has been done by both McConnell and Hanegraaff, is to do so beyond the merit of the available evidence. Vreeland, on the other hand, does not adequately exonerate Kenyon from the claim that he incorporated metaphysical elements in his theology. There is a clear metaphysical undertone in the writings of Kenyon. Whether this is true metaphysical absorption into his theology, or merely linguistic in nature, is less clear. William Simpson highlights the fact that Robert Bowman claims to have uncovered that Kenyon was primarily influenced by the

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<sup>51</sup> Horatio Dresser, *History of the New Thought Movement* (Harvard University, 1919; digitized 9 November 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 4-8.

Keswick – Higher Life – proto-Pentecostal movements and not the metaphysical cults.<sup>53</sup> This conclusion is supported by Dale Simmons and Joe McIntyre.<sup>54</sup>

In an unpublished paper, the Church historian Hyatt in 1991 made the following statement: ‘These critics ... display a lack of knowledge concerning the historical development of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement from its nineteenth-century antecedents and its influence on the modern movement. It is in the religious milieu [sic] out of the Holiness and Healing movements of the nineteenth century that the modern ‘Faith Movement’ finds its primary emphasis’.<sup>55</sup>

Simmons states that ‘it would be going too far to conclude that New Thought was the major contributing factor in the initial development of Kenyon’s thought’.<sup>56</sup> King and Theron conclude that ‘the majority of Kenyon’s thought remained in the realm of orthodox evangelical teaching represented by the “Higher Life” movement, although he developed some ideas that would be considered abnormal, stretching the bounds of orthodoxy. Kenneth Hagin, who is considered the most widespread populariser of modern faith teaching, draws the majority of his teaching from Kenyon, but also acknowledges the influence of evangelical and Higher Life/Keswick leaders Müller, Spurgeon, Simpson, T. J. McCrossan, J. A. MacMillan and Pentecostal leaders John G. Lake and Smith Wigglesworth’.<sup>57</sup>

Constructing a basic timeline of some of the prominent evangelists within the larger Pentecostal movement between 1900 and 1970 clearly indicates that healing revivals were commonplace. Kenneth Hagin established his crusade ministry in 1949.<sup>58</sup> By this time, prominent healing evangelist ministries were already in operation. Kathryn Kuhlman established a successful healing ministry that spanned

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<sup>53</sup> William Simpson, ‘The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Faith, Healing and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16, no. 1 (2007): 66.

<sup>54</sup> King and Theron, *The ‘Classic Faith’ Roots of the Modern ‘Word of Faith’ Movement*, 312.

<sup>55</sup> King and Theron, *The ‘Classic Faith’ Roots of the Modern ‘Word of Faith’ Movement*, 312.

<sup>56</sup> Dale Simmons, *E W Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (London: Lanham, 1997), 304.

<sup>57</sup> King and Theron, *The ‘Classic Faith’ Roots of the Modern ‘Word of Faith’ Movement*, 313.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Kenneth E. Hagin: Founder’s Memorial* (Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 2012; retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://rhemaCanada.myshopify.com/pages/kennethhagin>).

from 1935 through to the mid 1970s, pre-dating Hagin's own entry by 14 years. Oral Roberts received his revelation on prosperity in 1947 and A. A. Allen was influenced by Oral Roberts to establish a healing-focused ministry by 1949.<sup>59</sup> It was Smith Wigglesworth, however, who after being baptised in the Holy Spirit in 1907, served as the catalyst that would see a rise in miracle and healing ministries. Timothy Sims, a Charismatic movement author, views the Charismatic movement as the fulfilment of prophesy given by Wigglesworth in 1936.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear that, between Oral Roberts and Kathryn Kuhlman, the foundation for the health and prosperity movement was already in operation by the time Hagin established his ministry. Roberts conducted healing crusades while living the prosperity revelation prior to 1949. He established a radio evangelism ministry as early as 1947 and an extensive television ministry by 1957.<sup>61</sup> I do not suggest that Oral Roberts is the father of the Word of Faith movement, nor do I detract from the role Kenneth Hagin played in establishing the movement. What I am pointing out is the fact that there were more influences at work across the larger Pentecostal movement. Attempting to establish a conclusive link between Kenyon and Hagin as the primary source of the movement's theology represents an over-simplification of the dynamics involved at the time.

If we exclude, as some propose, the link with Quimby and the New Thought movement as proposed by Hanegraaff and McConnell, we are left with the birth of a post-World War II revival movement. Vreeland admits that the 'isolation from traditional denominational structures created an opportunity for theological

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<sup>59</sup> Oral Roberts, *Oral Roberts Celebrating the Life of Oral Roberts: The Man Who Obeyed God. January 24, 1918 – December 15, 2009* (Oral Roberts Ministries, 2009; retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://www.oralroberts.com/oralroberts/>). Christopher Reed, *Oral Roberts obituary* (The Guardian, London, 2009, retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/15/oral-roberts-obituary>); David Harrell, *All Things are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (First Indiana University Press, 1978), 67.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith: An Apologetic Response to Encourage Charismatic Believers* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House Publishing, 2008), 9.

<sup>61</sup> OAB. *Broadcasters Vote Three to Hall of Fame* (Oklahoma Association of Broadcasters, 2010; retrieved 16 January 2012, [http://oabok.org/documents/HOF\\_info\\_for\\_website.pdf](http://oabok.org/documents/HOF_info_for_website.pdf)).

innovations' which has often resulted in 'less than accurate methodologies and piecemeal constructs that in part have hindered the work of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>62</sup>

The premise of Word of Faith critics, such as Hanegraaff and McConnell, is primarily based upon the perceived idea that the Word of Faith movement has a metaphysical cult origin. This is due to 'the similarity between metaphysical New Thought and modern faith teaching regarding spiritual laws'.<sup>63</sup> It would be an inductive fallacy to assume association of Word of Faith and New Thought movements, based upon the similarity of some of their teachings. From the preceding arguments, it is clear that Word of Faith ministers, at times, present theological views that are inconsistent within the context of an evangelical interpretation of some of its doctrines. The emphasis of this thesis is on the deification of man theology that is promoted within the Word of Faith movement, and the attention from this chapter onwards, will be directed towards the doctrine of *theosis*.

## **2.3. The Word of Faith Movement Holds Christian Beliefs**

In terms of many of its basic beliefs, the Word of Faith movement stands in agreement with the historic Christian faith. It also has distinctive teachings that Evangelicals would deem to be unbiblical, perhaps to the point of making the entire movement inherently non-Christian.

### **2.3.1. Their published statements of faith**

The first challenge anyone wishing to discuss the Word of Faith movement's theology encounters is the fact that there is no single, definitive statement of the movement's beliefs and teachings. Acknowledging that the Word of Faith movement is not a church, but a movement of independent churches representing 'considerable diversity and disagreement' is of paramount importance. This diversity and lack of centralised representation prohibits the presentation of a universally accepted Word

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<sup>62</sup> Derek Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology: A Defense, Analysis and Refinement of the Theology of the Word of Faith Movement* (Theological Interest Group, 2001; retrieved 10 January 2012, [http://www.brothermel.net/DV\\_RWOFT.pdf](http://www.brothermel.net/DV_RWOFT.pdf)).

<sup>63</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 317.

of Faith statement of beliefs. At best, an attempt can be made to extract those beliefs that are considered as generally applicable to the larger movement, but even this is at the risk of generalisation.

A good place to start is by presenting the published 'statement of faith' of some recognised leaders within the Word of Faith movement. Few would claim it is a sufficient basis for measuring the movement's core beliefs, as in many cases it seems that the distinctive teachings and practices cause a considerable disconnect between the 'stated theology' and the 'operative theology' of the movement's most influential leaders. Nevertheless, in fairness to those leaders, it seems reasonable to summarise their statements of faith. The following leading ministries have been selected for this synopsis: Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and Joyce Meyer. What is presented is not their entire statement of faith, but a summary of its central themes.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Creflo Dollar is not included in this list of beliefs for the following two reasons: (1) Dollar has not published his beliefs on his church website and (2) the entire doctrine of Dollar is extracted from his book entitled *Not Guilty*, which is the underlying source used throughout this dissertation. The purpose of presenting the beliefs of these Word of Faith ministers is to demonstrate how their individual beliefs support that of Creflo Dollar.

<b>Summary of Beliefs</b> <b>(Independent Word of Faith Ministers)<sup>65</sup></b>				
	<b>Kenneth Hagin<sup>66</sup></b>	<b>Kenneth Copeland<sup>67</sup></b>	<b>Benny Hinn<sup>68</sup></b>	<b>Joyce Meyer<sup>69</sup></b>
<b>Ministry</b>	Rhema	Kenneth Copeland Ministries	Benny Hinn Ministries	Joyce Meyer Ministries
<b>God</b>	One God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,	One God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,	One God that reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,	One God that exists in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
<b>Man</b>	The fallen state of man,		That man fell,	That man fell,
<b>Virgin Birth</b>		The virgin birth of Christ,		

<sup>65</sup> The statements of faith listed here exclude that of Creflo Dollar, who had not published such a public statement at the time of documenting the various statements of faith. These ministers were selected as they are the contemporary Word of Faith proponents and represent the face of the movement to the larger Christian community.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Kenneth E. Hagin: Founder's Memorial*.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 'Statement of Faith', *Kenneth Copeland Ministries* (retrieved 29 January 2012, [http://www.kcm.org/about/index.php?p=what\\_we\\_believe](http://www.kcm.org/about/index.php?p=what_we_believe)).

<sup>68</sup> Benny Hinn, 'Statement of Faith', *Benny Hinn Ministries* (retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.bennyhinn.org/aboutus/articledesc.cfm?id=1392>).

<sup>69</sup> Joyce Meyer, 'Statement of Faith', *Joyce Meyer Ministries* (retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.joycemeyer.org/AboutUs/WhatWeBelieve.aspx>).

<b>Salvation</b>	Salvation through Christ, who died for the sins of mankind,	The crucifixion death of Christ, who died so that mankind may be saved,	That man is redeemed through Jesus Christ,	That man is saved through the death...
<b>Resurrection (Christ)</b>	Christ rose from the dead, and	Christ rose from the dead,		...and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
<b>Resurrection (of the dead)</b>		The resurrection of the dead,	The resurrection 'of those who have fallen asleep in Christ', <sup>70</sup>	
<b>Ascension</b>		And that He ascended into heaven,		
<b>Return of Christ</b>		From where he will return,		And that he will return,
<b>Word of God</b>	The Bible as the inspired word of God.	The Bible is infallible and inspired Word of God.	The Bible is the infallible rule of faith from God.	The Bible is the infallible and inspired Word of God.

*Table 1: Published Beliefs of Selected Word of Faith Movement Leaders*

As published, these statements of faith align in principle to both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Evangelicals as a whole—Reformed, Baptist or Pentecostal—would

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<sup>70</sup> Hinn, 'Statement of Faith'.

agree fully on all these points of belief. These formal statements are distinctively and authentically Christian.

Hanegraaff, however, argues that there is a misalignment between these published statements of faith and what these ministers truly believe and teach. He argues that the distinctive emphases of the movement cause it to fall outside the scope of an authentically Christian movement. This leads us to consider whether the disconnect, referred to by Hanegraaff, between the stated and observed belief makes the Word of Faith movement a non-Christian movement or simply a Christian movement with a different interpretation.<sup>71</sup> The next task is to outline in brief the main distinctive characteristics of the Word of Faith movement's theology.

### **2.3.2. Their distinctive theological emphases**

Scholars who write about the Word of Faith movement focus on what is distinctive about the movement's teachings. To do so, they have to identify and articulate what they view as distinctive characteristics. It is worth noting the variety of perspectives represented in such attempts to construct the distinctive teachings of the movement.

Firstly, there are voices external to both the Charismatic-Pentecostal and the Word of Faith traditions. Leading examples of such external voices are Hanegraaff and McConnell, who approach the debate from an alleged anti-Charismatic position.<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, there are commentators within the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement who express their concern about some of the theology of the movement. Timothy Sims and William Atkinson are two such commentators. Sims issues a warning pertaining to some of the teachings within the Word of Faith movement: 'possibly the most dangerous opposition we face is corruption from within, because of false teachers and apostate preachers within our community. Much of the attention and

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<sup>71</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*.

<sup>72</sup> For example, *Counterfeit Revival*, a book by Hanegraaff, deals with the Toronto Blessing ministry active within the Word of Faith movement, and has been criticised by *Christianity Today* in a 1997 book review (Beverley 1997). Although the review acknowledged that Hanegraaff 'exposes some real excesses and imbalances,' it also states that Hanegraaff presents a 'misleading, simplistic, and harmful book, marred by faulty logic, outdated and limited research.'



negative commentary directed towards the Word of Faith community is due to the erroneous and misguided teaching that has become so prevalent within our ranks.<sup>73</sup> Sims issues a call within the movement to develop 'a solid apologetic foundation that brings us back to the word of God, in the true Word of Faith tradition.'<sup>74</sup> He quotes Virginia Martin, who said that 'people began to leave the charismatic community because of extreme teachings that "took it too far". The result was mass disaffiliation. Many people returned to their former denominational churches, while others left the Church all together. The sad part is, when they left, they were disappointed, discouraged and disillusioned by the Word of Faith message'.<sup>75</sup> Sims issues a strong and urgent call to the charismatic community, including the Word of Faith movement, to embrace education as a means to enter into a meaningful debate within the larger Christian community.<sup>76</sup> William Atkinson, the Vice-Principal and Director of Research at London School of Theology writes as a Pentecostal theologian with a concern for ensuring that Pentecostals embrace soundly biblical theology. Atkinson has challenged some of the doctrinal deficiencies of the Word of Faith movement, such as its 'Jesus died spiritually' doctrine. He concludes that the Word of Faith movement is incapable of presenting biblical evidence to support its theology on this point.<sup>77</sup>

Thirdly, there are the voices of those within the Word of Faith movement, who both advance and defend its teachings. Amongst these are Word of Faith ministers such as, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, Earl Paulk, and Paul Crouch. Although they seldom write theological treatises, their writings and teachings provide a body of primary source materials from which scholars can study the distinctive beliefs of the movement and attempt to reconstruct its theology.

All attempts to construct a statement of Word of Faith theology encounter the same difficulty. The nature of the Word of Faith movement as a movement of independent

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<sup>73</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180.

<sup>75</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 177-178.

<sup>77</sup> William Atkinson, 'The Nature of the Crucified Christ in the Word-Faith Teaching,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 2 (2007): 184.

ministries and churches partially invalidates every generalisation about what Word of Faith advocates and adherents believe and teach. There is no Word of Faith preacher who can be treated as *the* representative of the movement's teachings, and there is no scholarly reconstruction that accurately represents all Word of Faith teachers. Despite these difficulties, a measure of consensus has emerged as to the main teachings of the Word of Faith movement. This tentative consensus forms the basis of the description of Word of Faith emphases that follows.

### 2.3.2.1. *Covenant*

Word of Faith covenant theology focuses primarily on the idea that the 'blessings' of the Old Testament, as promised to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant, now apply to the Christian community as the spiritual offspring of Abraham,<sup>78</sup> the 'Spiritual Israel'.<sup>79</sup> The principal teaching is that the blessings and curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28 apply to the believer in a literal and physical sense. It is believed that Galatians 3:13 links the New Testament believer to the Old Testament covenant.<sup>80</sup>

Hanegraaff, in addressing this issue, states that the 'context demonstrates conclusively that the "curse" referred to by Paul' in Galatians 3:13 has no link to the covenant in Deuteronomy 28. He states that Paul is referring to 'man's moral curse ... and not to the physical curse of sickness and disease'.<sup>81</sup> King and Theron effectively disagree with Hanegraaff and point out that 'classic evangelical leaders also make this connection'. They argue that Spurgeon, Penn-Lewis and Murray all made the link between 'redemption from the curse in Galatians 3:13 with the curses of Deuteronomy'.<sup>82</sup> Carter and Montgomery are both quoted as demonstrating that 'the cross and the curse are inseparable'.<sup>83</sup> They argue that Hanegraaff 'finds himself

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<sup>78</sup> Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2000), 28.

<sup>79</sup> Creflo Dollar, *Study Notes: The Covenant World* (Creflo Dollar Ministries, 2009; retrieved 17 January 2012, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/StudyNotes.aspx?id=822>.)

<sup>80</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 314.

<sup>81</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 252.

<sup>82</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 315.

<sup>83</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 315.

in the questionable position of calling it text abuse' due to the fact that 'older evangelical commentators' also made this link before the establishment of the Word of Faith movement.<sup>84</sup> They do, however, concede that the problem does not reside in textual abuse, but rather in misapplication. Attempting to find the balance between the Word of Faith teachers on the one hand, and the critics on the other, they point out that Tozer stated that 'truth has two wings'. They support the link between Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 28, but contextualise this link beyond the exclusively physical and immediate. They note that 'some modern faith leaders fail to see that redemption from the curse, though initiated and partially experienced through Christ today, is not yet fully consummated.'<sup>85</sup>

In the debate King and Theron successfully demonstrate that the idea of covenant theology, and the link between Galatians and Deuteronomy, did not originate within the Word of Faith movement, but is a mere extension of the beliefs of earlier Puritan Theology. Hanegraaff, however, argues that this link is primarily spiritual in its application and exclusively for the future. In this debate, the former attempts to contextualise legitimacy of the teaching within the context of historical theology, while the latter aims to demonstrate theological fallacy from an eschatological perspective. For Hanegraaff, the Word of Faith teaching represents a future human state, for Word of Faith ministers the teaching represents a contemporary state, and for King and Theron it is essentially both. Their view interprets the link between Galatians and Deuteronomy as a spiritual evolution which has not yet reached its final conclusion.

Professor Clark from the Westminster Theological Seminary, in his paper on how Covenant Theology is understood within Reformed Theology, highlights the fact that 'through the 20th century, the great consensus which had been sustained since the 1520s has fragmented.' However, even with this fragmentation, the core understanding of Covenant Theology within the Reformed tradition remains primarily

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<sup>84</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 316.

<sup>85</sup> King, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 333.

the same in that it teaches the 'covenant of redemption, the covenant of works (Law) and the covenant of grace (Gospel).'<sup>86</sup>

The primary difference between how the Reformed tradition and Word of Faith Movement interpret covenant theology is that the former focuses on the spiritual aspect found in the redemptive act of Christ, whereas the latter focuses on the immediate physical blessings that man has access to during his earthly existence.<sup>87</sup>

#### 2.3.2.2. *Dominion*

Covenant and Dominion theology are interwoven within the larger Word of Faith theology, and to view them separately would essentially lack context. In essence, dominion theology is based on the idea that the power and authority to exercise dominion over creation as instructed in Genesis 1:26-28 has been restored to believers through the restorative work of Jesus Christ. Dominion theology focuses on the atonement of Christ, which is believed to have restored the power of faith to believers.<sup>88</sup> This power of faith extends beyond belief, and requires positive confession as a means to call into existence a specific outcome<sup>89</sup>. Brandon sees the

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<sup>86</sup> Scott Clark, 'A Brief History of Covenant Theology' (Spindleworks Library, 2001; retrieved 31 September 2013, <http://spindleworks.com/library/CR/clark.htm>).

<sup>87</sup> Clark, 'Covenant Theology'; Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 28; Dollar. *Study Notes*.

<sup>88</sup> Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> This is closely linked to the Word of Faith movements practice of Spiritual Warfare. Paul King claims that John MacMillan, a Presbyterian missionary, was the first to bring the teachings of spiritual warfare to the church. He claims that the ideas of spiritual warfare did not originate within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, but rather were developed by MacMillan and shared through the publication of a series of articles in the *Alliance Weekly* during 1932. These articles were eventually republished in book form under the title '*The Authority of the Believer*'.

Paul King, 'John A. Macmillan's Teaching Regarding the Authority of the Believer and its Impact on the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements', (Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: Paul King Ministries, 2016), Online at: <http://paulkingministries.com/john-a-macmillans-teaching-regarding-the-authority-of-the-believer-and-its-impact-on-the-evangelical-pentecostal-and-charismatic-movements/> This is unfortunately not correct. In 1903, nearly 30 years before MacMillan, Jessie Penn-Lewis and Evan Roberts, both revivalists in the Pentecostal tradition, published a book entitled *War on the Saints*, laying as a foundation much of what is currently taught as spiritual warfare today. Jessie

use of language as a means of superimposing human will over creation, as an extension of the idea that humans, created in the image of God, are called to exercise dominion over creation.

According to Professor Gordon Anderson, the branch of dominion theology most commonly encountered in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement is 'Kingdom Now' theology.<sup>90</sup> Its central theme ties into the movement's restoration theology and teaches that under the restored covenant, God is seeking believers who will take back the earth from Satan by reclaiming control over all the kingdoms of the earth.<sup>91</sup> Central to Kingdom Now theology is the belief that the Church has failed, and that this failure could be rectified by embracing the restoration of the Kingdom teaching.<sup>92</sup>

Professor Thomas Ice, executive director of the Pre-Trib research centre at Liberty University, disagrees with the principle of Dominion Theology. He quotes Hal Lindsey and Dave Hunt as referring to the merging of Christian Reconstruction from within the Calvinistic community with the Kingdom Now theology of the Charismatic movement, as 'the most dangerous trend within Evangelical Christianity'.<sup>93</sup> The objection by Ice is twofold: firstly, he argues that to apply promises made to Israel to the Church is theologically wrong and represents a misapplication of scripture. This view is essentially supported by King and Theron.<sup>94</sup> His second objection relates to

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Penn-Lewis and Evan Roberts, 'War on the Saints - A Text Book for believers on the work of deceiving spirits among the children of God', (Leicester: *The Overcomer*, 1912), Online at: [https://archive.org/details/WarOnTheSaints-ATextBookForBelieversOnTheWorkOfDeceivingSpirits\\_697](https://archive.org/details/WarOnTheSaints-ATextBookForBelieversOnTheWorkOfDeceivingSpirits_697)

<sup>90</sup> Gordon Anderson, 'Kingdom Now Theology: A Look at its Roots and Branches,' *Paraclete* 24, no. 3 (1990): 1-12; William Griffin, 'Kingdom Now: New Hope or New Heresy,' *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 2 (1988): 6-36.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Ice, 'What is Dominion Theology?' *Liberty University, Pre-Trib Research Center* (5 August 2009; retrieved 17 January 2012, [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1073&context=pretrib\\_arch&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fscholar.google.co.za%2Fscholar%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Ddominion%2Btheology%2Bcharismatic%26btnG%3DSearch%26as\\_sdt%3D0%252C5%26as\\_ylo%3D%26as\\_vis%3D0#search=%22dominion%20theology%20charismatic%22](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1073&context=pretrib_arch&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fscholar.google.co.za%2Fscholar%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Ddominion%2Btheology%2Bcharismatic%26btnG%3DSearch%26as_sdt%3D0%252C5%26as_ylo%3D%26as_vis%3D0#search=%22dominion%20theology%20charismatic%22)), 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ice, 'Dominion Theology', 13.

<sup>93</sup> Ice, 'Dominion Theology' 13.

<sup>94</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 316.

timing. Ice rejects the idea of living the Kingdom Now opposed to waiting for the return of Christ, to bring into being the New Kingdom.<sup>95</sup> His argument rests on his interpretation of the Kingdom Now theology as one of works, in which the efforts of man are able to direct the hand of God.

At its most extreme, the restoration of the Kingdom of God brought about through the covenant with Abraham, when superimposed upon the Church, results in a political view of the Church rather than a spiritual view. The author George Grant in his 1987 book entitled *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action*, states the following:

Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ to have dominion in the civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness. But it is dominion that we are after. Not just a voice. It is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less. If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, as the Bible says, and if our commission is to bring the land into subjection to His Lordship, as the Bible says, then all our activities, all our witnessing, all our preaching, all our craftsmanship, all our stewardship, and all our political action will aim at nothing short of that sacred purpose. Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land – of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ. It is to reinstitute the authority of God's Word as supreme over all judgments, over all legislation, over all declarations, constitutions, and confederations. True Christian political action seeks to rein the passions of men and curb the pattern of digression under God's rule.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ice, 'Dominion Theology', 16.

<sup>96</sup> George Grant, *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Blueprints for Political Action* (Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), 50-51.

Grant, undeniably, contextualises dominion theology in terms of political power. There are, however, more moderate views within the larger Charismatic movement. John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, agrees that the Kingdom will only be established upon the return of Christ. He does, however, believe that there are times that the supernatural manifestation of the Kingdom can shine through in the form of signs and wonders.<sup>97</sup>

What is clear is that within the larger Word of Faith community there are varying views on Dominion Theology. What does remain constant throughout the various views, however, is (1) the belief in the restoration of the Abrahamic covenant, which (2) bestows certain privileges on the believer by (3) restoring the ability of the believer to exercise dominion over the physical and spiritual world. The manifestation of this restored covenant life, lived within the Kingdom of God in the present, is seen in the miraculous.

As with covenant theology, Hanegraaff, McConnell, et al., differ from the Word of Faith interpretation of dominion theology on the basis that it is a future state that will only come to fulfilment upon the return of Christ. Word of Faith ministers, on the other hand, rely on the argument of their covenant theology to substantiate their call for believers to exercise dominion in their daily lives. King and Theron, as the third voice, maintain a mediating position.

#### 2.3.2.3. *Contract*

It has been proposed by opponents of the Word of Faith movement that the restored covenant theology and the belief that the promises made throughout the Word of God are thereby transferred to the Church creates a contract type theology.<sup>98</sup> Kenneth Copeland states that 'As a believer, you have a right to make commands in the name of Jesus. Each time you stand on the Word, you are commanding God to a

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<sup>97</sup> Steve Hunt, *A Holy War at St. James's: Charismatic Christianity Confronts the New Age* (Croyances Et Sociétés, 1998), 393.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Walton, *Watch this! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 93-94.

certain extent because it is His Word.<sup>99</sup> This statement by Copeland contextualises the Word of God as an agreement to which God is subject, and therefore lends credence to Walton's claim. In general, contract theology, within the Word of Faith movement, is implied rather than taught. The contract reference is best understood within the health and prosperity context.

#### *2.3.2.4. Health and Prosperity*

Building upon the principle of a restored covenant that provides the believer with certain privilege, the Word of Faith movement contextualises the promises of health and prosperity as listed in the Word of God, as being applicable to the believer at present. By exercising dominion over the works of Satan, which include sickness, disease and poverty, the believer is able to live a kingdom life that includes health and prosperity.

Kenneth Hagin points out that to obtain health is the will of God, as stated in Isaiah 53:5, and that through positive confession and faith the believer can apply this to him- or herself. It is not, however, mere denying of the disease, such as promoted by the Christian Science movement, but an acknowledgement that it is God's will for the believer to be healed.<sup>100</sup> The health and prosperity theology of the movement defines prosperity within the context of the whole person. It extends beyond financial prosperity and includes physical and mental health, relationships and general well-being.<sup>101</sup>

McConnell states that 'the doctrine of healing in the Faith theology is based on its understanding of the atonement of Christ', which is intrinsically linked to the movement's, Jesus Died Spiritually theology. This doctrine essentially states that

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<sup>99</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Our Covenant with God*. (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1987), 32.

<sup>100</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*. (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, 1966).

<sup>101</sup> Creflo Dollar, *Study Notes: The Secret Combination for True Prosperity* (Creflo Dollar Ministries, 2006; retrieved 17 January 2012, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/StudyNotes.aspx?id=62>).



Christ had to suffer in hell; the belief is that all physical illness is merely a manifestation of a spiritual condition.<sup>102</sup>

McConnell, in critiquing the theology of prosperity, centres his argument on the relationship between legitimate need, for which God will provide, and the Word of Faith movement's interpretation of need. He argues that what the movement defines as 'need' exceeds the reasonable limit of need and is in actual fact a lust. McConnell presents a valid argument on some elements of the movement's prosperity theology. By quoting Gordon Fee, however, McConnell contextualises the argument within a more balanced Biblical view.<sup>103</sup> Fee, a scholar with an in-depth knowledge of prosperity theology, highlights two extreme viewpoints that, according to him, should be avoided: firstly the belief of rejecting all prosperity and second embracing materialism.<sup>104</sup> His statement implies that there is a legitimate prosperity theology. It further infers that an intemperate view, on either side of the debate, is prone to failure.

Dan Lioy views this debate from another angle. For him the problem with the health and prosperity theology as advanced by the Word of Faith movement stems from the way in which humans are positioned within its theology. He concludes that the movement lacks a Christocentric focus and presents a 'predominantly anthropocentric' view of man.<sup>105</sup> This distortion results in church leaders who prey on the destitute in the advancement of their own aspirations. For Lioy, health and prosperity theology is an extension of the way in which man views himself in relation to God. In essence, Lioy sees the health and prosperity teaching as a mere symptom that stems from a much deeper cause. It is the distorted view of who man is within the plan of God that is the real problem.<sup>106</sup> This view is echoed by Pretorius, in his statement on the Word of Faith movement. He concludes, that in the movement, 'the Word of God seems to be applied to serve the human desire without consideration

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<sup>102</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 148-149.

<sup>103</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 175.

<sup>104</sup> Gordon Fee, 'The New Testament View of Wealth and Possessions', *New Oxford Review* (May 1981), 8.

<sup>105</sup> Dan Lioy, 'The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or the Savior?' *Conspectus* 4 (2007): 60.

<sup>106</sup> Lioy, 'The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel', 60-61.

for the sovereignty of God. The roles of Creator and creation are exchanged. Man demands and God provides!’<sup>107</sup>

#### 2.3.2.5. *Faith and Confession*

Kenneth Hagin teaches that ‘Words make or break us. Words heal us or make us sick. ... Our words—the words we spoke yesterday—made life what it is today’.<sup>108</sup> Charles Capps claims that when the Word of God is imbedded in the spirit of man it releases a power that is greater than disease and sickness, the result is healing.<sup>109</sup> The meaning of confession and the power that is related to confessed words, for Word of Faith adherents, is not an abstract mantra as is the case with Norman Peale’s positive thinking theology. Peale relies ‘upon techniques such as the repetition of confident phrases’ to achieve an outcome. In Word of Faith theology, words only possess power when they are spoken with the God-kind of faith. Copeland states that ‘You are born of God. You are a faith being. God does not do anything outside of faith. With His faith living in you, you are to operate the same way.’<sup>110</sup> Frederick Price claims that Mark 11:22 is best translated as ‘have the faith of God’ opposed to ‘have faith in God’.<sup>111</sup> He uses Hebrews 11:3, ‘through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God’, in support of his argument that God has faith and that He operates within this faith.<sup>112</sup>

John MacArthur, in his response to the Word of Faith teaching on faith, responds with the following remark: ‘And what the error of this is, simply stated, is that this puts confidence in the nature of faith rather than in the object of faith. It assumes that there is something inherent in believing, that enacts something, when it isn’t true at

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<sup>107</sup> Stephan Pretorius, ‘Is Divine Healing in the Faith Movement Founded on the Principles of Healing in the Bible or based on the Power of the Mind?’ *HTS Theological Studies* 65, no.1 (2009): 6.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Words* (Arrow, Oklahoma: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1980), 2.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Capps, *God’s Creative Power for Healing* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1991), 14.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1983), 16-17.

<sup>111</sup> Frederick Price, *How Faith Works* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1976), 95.

<sup>112</sup> Price, *How Faith Works*, 99-101.

all. It is not the nature of faith that is effective; it is the object of faith. It is my faith in God that gets results, not my faith in faith.<sup>113</sup>

According to Hannegraaf the Word of Faith movement's faith and confession theology has three distinct elements, these are: Faith as Law, Faith as Force and the Faith of God.<sup>114</sup>

#### 2.3.2.6. *Faith as Law*

Word of Faith teachers regard faith as a law. It implies that faith has a certain predictable dynamic that can be utilised to produce a specific result. It is within this context that Word of Faith theology is able to declare, with confidence, that given certain faith-based activities that the result would be health or prosperity or both. Hannegraaff and McConnell are unable to reconcile such a view of faith within conventional evangelical theology, and they conclude that it is further evidence of the movement's metaphysical origin.<sup>115</sup> The emphasis of McConnell's argument is on the dynamic of execution. For him the ability to apply faith along a predictable path poses a problem, as it excludes 'trust in the provision of a sovereign God'.<sup>116</sup> Hannegraaff views the implication of such a dynamic law, and concludes that in essence, it distorts the position of man in relation to God and effectively denies the will of God.<sup>117</sup>

King and Theron, however, claim that the idea of faith as a law is not exclusively a metaphysical concept. They claim that 'many evangelical holiness leaders from the 19th and early 20th centuries also taught a law of faith. The idea of spiritual laws corresponding to natural laws was a common theme in 19<sup>th</sup>-century theological

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<sup>113</sup> John MacArthur. Does God Promise Health and Wealth? The Wrong Jesus Christ. The Wrong Faith. Charismatic Chaos Series. (On Doctrine, 1991) Online at: <http://www.ondocctrine.com/2mac0084.htm> (Accessed 21 January 2012).

<sup>114</sup> Hannegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*.

<sup>115</sup> Hannegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 73-85, 105-127; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 172-173.

<sup>116</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 172.

<sup>117</sup> Hannegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 105-127.

writing, such as Henry Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1884) and Horace Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural* (1885).<sup>118</sup>

King and Theron quote Spurgeon to stress the point: 'Perhaps there are other forces and laws that He has arranged to bring into action just at the times when prayer also acts – laws just as fixed and forces just as natural as those that our learned theorists have been able to discover. The wisest men do not know all the laws that govern the universe.'<sup>119</sup>

Although King and Theron do not view the concept of faith as a law as problematic, they do caution against the idea, which is held by some Word of Faith teachers, that God Himself is subject to these laws. They caution both Word of Faith teachers and critics: the former is cautioned to consider the way in which they present their theology as well as the implication of their theology, and the latter is cautioned not to reject the faith as a law theology based on a similarity to metaphysical teaching.<sup>120</sup>

#### 2.3.2.7. Faith as Force

Extending the idea of faith as a law, Word of Faith teaches that faith as a spiritual force is capable of influencing the physical world. Kenneth Copeland declares that:

We need to realize that the spiritual world and its laws are more powerful than the physical world and its laws. Spiritual law gave birth to physical law. The world and the physical forces governing it were created by the power of faith—a spiritual force. God, a Spirit, created all matter, and He created it with the force of faith. Hebrews 11:3 says, 'the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear'. The law of gravity would be meaningless if gravity were not a real force. It is the force of gravity which makes the law of gravity work. In the same way, spiritual law would be useless if the force of faith were not a real force; but faith is a real force. Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual

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<sup>118</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, page 317.

<sup>119</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 317.

<sup>120</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 317.

power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function. When the force of faith is put to work, these laws of the spirit function according to the way God says they will ... This same rule is true in prosperity. There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's Word. Faith causes them to function. They will work when they are put to work, and they will stop working when the force of faith is stopped.<sup>121</sup>

This view is echoed by Joel Osteen: 'Our words become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you allow your thoughts to defeat you and then give birth to negative ideas through your words, your actions will follow suit. That's why we need to be extremely careful about what we think and especially careful about what we say. Our words have tremendous power, and whether we want to or not, we give life to what we're saying, either good or bad.'<sup>122</sup> He reiterates that 'Your words have enormous creative power. The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative.'<sup>123</sup> Osteen stresses the point that 'Fear is a force just like faith is a force. If you give into fear and start to dwell on that junk and start to act on it, that fear can actually bring things to pass just like faith can bring things to pass. Job said, "the thing I greatly feared came upon me"'.<sup>124</sup> The implication of what Osteen teaches is summarised in his own words: 'You can cancel out God's plan by speaking negative words. God works by laws.'<sup>125</sup>

Joyce Meyer also promotes the idea that faith is a force; she states that 'Unto every man is given the measure of faith, and faith is a powerful force. ... And the two

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<sup>121</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Kenneth Copeland: Spiritual and Physical Law Part 1* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 2010; retrieved 22 January 2012, <http://www.kennethandgloriacopeland.org/208/kenneth-copeland-spiritual-and-physical-law-part-1/>).

<sup>122</sup> Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now* (Faith Words. New York, 2004), 121-122.

<sup>123</sup> Osteen, *Your Best Life Now*, 129.

<sup>124</sup> Joel Osteen, *Joel Osteen, Sermon, VL-007, April 30, 2000*.

<sup>125</sup> Joel Osteen, *Joel Osteen, Sermon, Speaking Faith Filled Words, Tape # 223*. (Daystar Television, 2 May 2004).

greatest ways that we release our faith ... [are] through sincere, heartfelt prayer and through the words of your mouth.<sup>126</sup>

Creflo Dollar, in his published bible study notes, explains the power of faith as follows:

The force of faith is explosive. Jesus said faith, the size of a mustard seed, can move a mountain into the sea. Faith is more powerful than dynamite; it is explosive energy. Spiritual forces are behind physical forces. How powerful is the force of faith? It is so powerful it has the ability to create worlds (Hebrews 11:3). All things that now exist came from things we cannot see. We can use the force of faith on purpose, like electricity or dynamite. The source of faith is the Word of God. The force of faith, if properly harnessed, can destroy sickness, lack, or any other negative thing that has manifested in the physical realm. Faith is the superior force, and physical things are secondary. The force of faith can make physical things respond to it. Jesus proved this by walking on water. He overcame the physical law of gravity. Physical laws must submit to the law of faith.<sup>127</sup>

Hanegraaff and McConnell, once again, view these statements as having New Thought metaphysical roots. Hanegraaff uses the similarity between what he sees as an un-Christian view on faith and that which is taught in New Thought, as further proof that Kenyon is the real father of the Word of Faith movement. In addressing the theology of faith as a force, Hanegraaff, focuses primarily on substantiating his claim that the movement has New Thought roots.<sup>128</sup>

King and Theron, in response to the claims made by Hanegraaff and McConnell, argue that the idea of faith as a force does not fall exclusively outside of evangelical

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<sup>126</sup> Joyce Meyer, *Interrupting Satan's Plan: Releasing the Supernatural Power of God through Prayer*. Tape series: *Violent Christians in a Violent Society*. Recorded 19 July 2001.

<sup>127</sup> Creflo Dollar, *The Power that Brings the World to Its Knees*. Bible Study Notes. 6 May 2009. (Creflo Dollar Ministries, 2009; retrieved 22 January 2012, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/StudyNotes.aspx?id=790>).

<sup>128</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 65-71; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 141-145.

theology. They quote Spurgeon, Boardman, Smith, Murray, Simpson, Cowman, MacMillan and Charles Price as adherents of this particular view. The sources used by King and Theron in arriving at this conclusion span from 1858 through to 1994, which clearly demonstrates that it is not a newly developed theological view. They conclude that 'it is obvious that modern teaching on faith as a force is derived from classic evangelical faith teaching. Thus McConnell's and Hanegraaff's claim that the concept of faith as a force is derived from New Thought metaphysics, and is thus heretical and cultic, is clearly in error.'<sup>129</sup>

King and Theron are cautious, however, to declare the Word of Faith 'faith force' teaching as Biblically sound. They point out that 'classic faith writers do not believe that words are the containers of the force of faith, nor that those words can create reality'. They, furthermore state that 'the classic leaders make it clear that it is faith imparted by God that creates, not man's faith or his words of faith. It is important to note that the classic faith writers did not believe God is an impersonal force, but a "living force", a force who is a living personality'.<sup>130</sup>

#### 2.3.2.8. Faith of God

The Word of Faith teaching on the Faith of God has been declared as heretical by numerous critics, while being strongly defended by its supporters.

'On the basis of absence of the preposition "in" in the Greek construction of Mark 11:22, modern faith leaders interpret the clause "Have faith in God" as "have the faith of God" or the "God kind of faith"'.<sup>131</sup> McConnell quotes Cranfield as having said that such a translation 'is surely a monstrosity of exegesis'.<sup>132</sup> Hanegraaff relies on the works of A. T. Robertson as a means of support for the translation, 'have faith in God'.<sup>133</sup> King and Theron present the works of Charles Farah and Charles Price in support of a translation that reads 'have [the] faith of God'. King and Theron state that 'Though "faith in God" as an objective genitive may generally seem to be the

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<sup>129</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 319.

<sup>130</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 319.

<sup>131</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 319.

<sup>132</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 143.

<sup>133</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 90.

favoured interpretation today, the idea of “faith of God” as a secondary or alternative translation is by no means uncommon among evangelical leaders and scholars, and is found in several early 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century commentaries.<sup>134</sup>

Joe McIntyre claims that Hanegraaff interprets Robertson’s comments on Mark 11:22 incorrectly.<sup>135</sup> Hanegraaff’s source, A.T. Robertson, provides no definitive answer either way. Robertson states that ‘we rightly translate “have faith in God,” though the genitive does not mean “in,” but only the God kind of faith.’<sup>136</sup> Here even Robertson concedes that from a linguistic point of view Mark 11:22 could be translated either way. Robertson does, however, seem to favour ‘have faith in God’ from a contextual perspective.

What is clear is that the debate on Mark 11:22 cannot be solved from a purely linguistic perspective, and that any theology that is derived from it should be contextualised within a Christocentric perspective that is derived from a consistent reading of the entire Biblical text.

#### 2.3.2.9. *Revelation*

There exists a tension between individuals within the Christian community who accept contemporary revelation as an act from God, and those who oppose the idea. In presenting an argument against contemporary revelation, McConnell makes the following statement, ‘The major epistemological error of the metaphysical cults incorporated into Kenyon’s doctrine of Revelation Knowledge is that of Gnosticism.’<sup>137</sup> In essence, his argument is based upon the premise that contemporary revelation knowledge, which he contextualises within the definition of gnosis as divine knowledge, falls beyond the modern-day experience of the Church. This implies that the source of such revelation is in question. McConnell uses, as the foundation for his argument, the link he had established between the teachings of

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<sup>134</sup> King and Theron, *The ‘Classic Faith’ roots of the modern ‘Word of Faith’ movement*, 321.

<sup>135</sup> Joe McIntyre. E W Kenyon and his Message of Faith: The True Story. (Charisma House, Lake Mary, Florida, 1997), 257-258.

<sup>136</sup> Archibald Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. (Initial Publisher Unknown, 1934), 500.

<sup>137</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 109.



Kenyon and those of the metaphysical cults. As noted previously, this link is tenuous at best.

King and Theron<sup>138</sup> argue that the second-century theologian Clement of Alexandria<sup>139</sup> when refuting Gnosticism, distinguished between knowledge by reasoning or the senses and knowledge by revelation in an excerpt entitled 'First principles of faith':

This type of reasoning knowledge is dependent upon our senses – that is, our abilities to see, feel, hear, touch, and taste. Through sensing we are led to reasoning and understanding, from understanding, to knowledge. And then we form our opinions. But far above this way of knowing are the first principles of our knowledge – the knowledge of God, given to us by revelation. For the principles of our faith were revealed to us by God, from above, by the Spirit ... For whatever your human senses insist that you believe must be brought under the spirit.

The 'first principles' are the essences or self-evident truths discussed by Aristotle.<sup>140</sup> This citation from Clement is significant because it unmistakably demonstrates, contrary to McConnell, that the seemingly dualistic concepts of revelation and sense knowledge are not inherently Gnostic, since Clement uses the terms in refutation of Gnosticism. King and Theron point out that, 'Kenyon and the modern faith teaching commonly distinguish between "revelation knowledge" (which comes from faith and revelation from God) and "sense knowledge" (which comes from the five senses and reason)'.<sup>141</sup> John MacArthur, in opposition to the Word of Faith acceptance of revelation knowledge, quotes J. Rodman Williams as having said the following.

The Bible truly has become a fellow witness to God's present activity. ... If someone today perhaps has a vision of God, of Christ, it is good to know that it has happened before; if one has a revelation from God,

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<sup>138</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 323.

<sup>139</sup> Paraphrased in Hazard 1995:36-38.

<sup>140</sup> Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1994), 369.

<sup>141</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' Roots of the Modern 'Word of Faith' Movement*, 322.

to know that for the early Christians revelation also occurred in the community; if one speaks a 'Thus says the Lord,' and dares to address the fellowship in the first person—even going beyond the words of Scripture—that this was happening long ago. How strange and remarkable it is! If one speaks in the fellowship of the Spirit the Word of truth, it is neither his own thoughts and reflections (e.g., on some topic of the day) nor simply some exposition of Scripture, for the Spirit transcends personal observations, however interesting or profound they may be. The Spirit as the living God moves through and beyond the records of past witness, however valuable such records are as a model for what happens today.<sup>142</sup>

Through this statement, MacArthur concludes that Williams proposes that the Bible is (1) not the final Word of God and that (2) that it can be added to.<sup>143</sup> Such a conclusion is pre-emptive, as Williams frames his view on revelation knowledge within a very narrow context of Biblical supremacy, as well as a call for discernment. In this call for discernment, he acknowledges 'the ever present danger of prophecy being abused—the pretence of having a word from God—there is need for spiritual discernment'.<sup>144</sup> He continues to contextualise the place of revelation in relation to the Bible: 'I do not intend in any way to place contemporary experience on the same level of authority as the Bible. Rather do I vigorously affirm the decisive authority of Scripture; hence, God does not speak just as authoritatively today as He spoke to the biblical authors. But he does continue to speak (He did not stop with the close of the New Testament canon); thus, he "moves through and beyond the records of past witness," for he is the living God who still speaks and acts among His people'.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> John MacArthur, 'Does God still give Revelation?' *The Master's Seminary Journal*. 14.2 (2003): 220; cf. Rodman Williams, *The Era of the Spirit* (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos Publishing House, 1971), 16.

<sup>143</sup> MacArthur, 'Does God still give Revelation?', 221

<sup>144</sup> Williams, *The Era of the Spirit*, 16.

<sup>145</sup> Rodman Williams, 'The Authority of Scripture and the Charismatic Movement', *Logos Journal* (May/June 1977): 35.

In response MacArthur asks, 'Are some of God's words less authoritative than others?'<sup>146</sup> Douglas Ottati summarises the view of H. R. Niebuhr and contextualises the use and limitation of revelation in the Church. For Niebuhr 'revelation does not impart "new beliefs about natural or historical fact" so much as it precipitates a reconstruction of these beliefs where they seem tied to human provincialism and concern for self'.<sup>147</sup> He 'maintains that Jesus Christ and the story of the Christian community disclose God. This disclosure and the Christological image, in turn, enable us to devise an alternative to our typical egoistic and anthropocentric interpretation of life and the world'.<sup>148</sup> From Niebuhr there emerges more than a simplistic debate of the relevancy of revelation in the Christian community. Niebuhr provides context by defining the limits of contemporary revelation. He views revelation as a liberating experience in which God, and not man, is at the centre.

The debate on revelation theology, within the Word of Faith context, centres on two opposing approaches in man's interaction with God. On the one hand 'Protestant fundamentalism focuses on the letter of the text' whereas 'Charismatic fundamentalism moves towards an easily available, flamboyant Spirit'.<sup>149</sup>

Archie Hui points out that 'E. Schweizer, for example, thinks that Luke "shares with Judaism the view that the Spirit is essentially the Spirit of prophecy."' <sup>150</sup> Hui views the church as 'the community of the prophets' due to the Spirit that permanently resides within 'the individual or the community'.<sup>151</sup> He interprets Menzies' view of the 'Spirit of prophecy "exclusively" as the source of prophetic inspiration, which includes

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<sup>146</sup> MacArthur, 'Does God still give Revelation?', 226.

<sup>147</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Library of Theological Ethics; Westminster: John Knox Press, 2006), xix.

<sup>148</sup> Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, xxiii.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas O'Meara, *Towards a Subjective Theology of Revelation* (Dubuque: Aquinas Institute of Theology, 1975), 402.

<sup>150</sup> Archie Hui, 'The Spirit of Prophecy and Pauline Pneumatology', *Tyndale Bulletin* 50, no.1 (1999): 97.

<sup>151</sup> Hui, 'The Spirit of Prophecy', 97.

revelatory power, special insight, esoteric wisdom, prophetic words of guidance, and inspired speech'.<sup>152</sup>

What is implied by Hui, Schweizer and Menzies, is that it is not possible to accept the Spirit, and at the same time deny contemporary revelation. For them the Spirit, as Spirit of Prophecy, is entrenched within the Christian community. McConnell and MacArthur view the Spirit as having imparted the revelation, not in the Church as Community, but in the Bible as the Word of God. Niebuhr finds a position from which he contextualises revelation, in terms of its quickening of man's understanding of God. For Niebuhr, revelation is neither exclusively Bible based nor is it an external influence, it is, however, limited to creating a better understanding of God.

#### 2.3.2.10. Deification of Man

Kenneth Hagin writes that 'man ... was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority. ... God has made us as much like Himself as possible.'<sup>153</sup> Hagin asserts that the believer is Christ.<sup>154</sup> Kenneth Copeland supports the view of Hagin in his statement that man was not created to be subordinate to God. The same basic view is held by Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, Earl Paulk, and Paul Crouch.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Hui, 'The Spirit of Prophecy', 97.

<sup>153</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1989), 35-36.

<sup>154</sup> Hagin, *Zoe*, 41.

<sup>155</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Image of God in You III. Audiotape #01-1403, Side 1 & 2*. (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas, 1989). Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I. Tape #01-3001, Side 1* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas, 1989). Benny Hinn, 'We are now Divine' *A Trinity Broadcast Network Program*. (1 December 1990). Creflo Dollar, 'Changing your World' *World Changers Program, Lesea Broadcasting*. (April 17, 2002). Creflo Dollar *World Changers Ministries Sermon, 12 August 2002* (World Changers Church International Ministry, USA, 2002). Eddie Long, 'Interview: Praise-A-Thon' *Trinity Broadcast Network*, (March 29, 2004). Joyce Meyer, *Sermon on MP4 Video File* (Source of the Video is Unknown and Undated). Online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrP3OLCH9GI&feature=related>. Earl Paulk, *Satan Unmasked* (Dimension Publishers, United States of America. 1st Edition 1984, 2004): 97. Paul Crouch, 'Interview on Praise the Lord' *Trinity Broadcast Network program* (5 February 1986).

Bowman's examination of the deification teaching within the Word of Faith movement describes the theological argument of the movement as follows:

1. God created man in in His image and likeness which is interpreted as being created 'as god kind'. As every kind produces in accordance with its own kind, this is taken to mean that we are of an exact similar kind to God. This would make us 'little gods'.
2. As gods, man was created with the ability to call objects into existence—a God kind of faith. This divine nature bestows upon man a sovereign will. By rebelling against God in the Garden of Eden, man lost this ability, because the act of disobedience replaced man's god nature with Satan's nature.
3. God's plan to restore the divine nature in man was to provide Christ. Christ became a human, died spiritually, taking on Satan's nature, went to Hell, became 'born again', and rose from the dead with God's nature.
4. Christ then sent the Holy Spirit to impart God's nature into man once again, which restored man to the initial state of creation, which is man as a god.
5. As man is now restored as a god, the ability to call things into existence through the God kind of faith means that man is in control of his own destiny, being able to call into existence health, wealth and prosperity.<sup>156</sup>

It is important to note that the Word of Faith movement does not adhere to the belief that men are gods in place of God (replacement), but rather that they are god(s) in kind (created by God and instructed by God to rule and reign as gods). The former belief stems from rebellion, and seeks to replace God, whereas the latter belief stems from an over simplistic interpretation of scripture. Ideas such as belief that children of God, co-heirs with Christ, have dominion and all authority on earth and in heaven, is oversimplified, which leads to a wrong interpretation. This does not make the collective body of Word of Faith believers, nor their teachers, heretics, but rather it makes some of their beliefs heretical, and we need to make this differentiation when dealing with the Word of Faith movement.

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<sup>156</sup> Robert Bowman, "Ye Are Gods?" Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification of Man', *Christian Research Journal* (Winter/Spring 1987): 20.

## 2.4. Conclusion

Although this author may disagree with some of the Word of Faith views, labelling the movement as a non-Christian movement, or cult, is not as conclusive as what its critics claim it to be. The view that the Word of Faith movement is not authentically 'Christian' has gained traction. Those who champion it depend on two main claims: (a) it has metaphysical origins and (b) it espouses false doctrines. In other words, neither its origin nor its teaching is authentically Christian. However, neither of these claims is as convincing as their proponents presume.

I echo Andrew Perriman's call for a fair trial of the Word of Faith movement's faith, health, and prosperity doctrine. Perriman, who represents the Evangelical Alliance in the United Kingdom, argues that although some of the theology of the Word of Faith movement has become distorted, it does still 'arise out of something authentically Christian'.<sup>157</sup> Perriman's review highlights the following possible causes for this distortion and misalignment to evangelical teaching:

- (a) the Word of Faith movement's 'isolation and separatism',
- (b) its lack of 'serious Biblical scholarship' and 'evangelical dialogue',
- (c) its lack of 'ethical' boundaries with which to counteract the dangers of radical 'faith' ministry,
- (d) its 'rhetoric preaching' approach that is aimed at 'provoking' rather than informing,
- (e) the tension between a Christ-centred ministry and one dominated by the individual minister, and finally
- (f) the image of 'greed' and 'indifference to economic injustice'.<sup>158</sup>

In essence, Perriman sees more similarities than differences between the mainstream Evangelical movement and the Word of Faith movement.<sup>159</sup> What Perriman does, is to identify the underlying causes that give rise to the errors; he does not merely critique, but attempts to find a way to correct.

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<sup>157</sup> Andrew Perriman. *Faith, Health and Prosperity* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 213.

<sup>158</sup> Perriman. *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 231-235.

<sup>159</sup> Perriman. *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 217.

As Evangelicals, the way we perceive and label the Word of Faith movement is critical. If we demonise the Word of Faith movement as a metaphysical cult, we shall engage it in ways that hinder constructive dialogue. Conversely, if we see them as Christian brothers and sisters who have erred significantly in some of their beliefs and practices, we can engage in constructive dialogue—and theological-ethicist H Richard Niebuhr, amongst others, has underscored the importance of constructive dialogue.

Niebuhr defines the ‘theological community’ as one of dialogue where the exchange takes place between ‘the teacher, the student and the common object’.<sup>160</sup> He warns that when ‘communication is a one-way process’, the result is not education but ‘indoctrination’.<sup>161</sup> Farley expands on this by defining ‘three criteria for clergy education’; the first is the acquisition of the ‘skills and methods’ that are required for theological understanding. The second is the ability to ‘assess’ or ‘discern’ ‘the truths and realities with which faith has to do’,<sup>162</sup> and the third is the requirement for a historical understanding of theology and the Church.<sup>163</sup> Likewise, Roman Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans proposes the contextualisation of theology within, amongst others, a synthetic model, which is strongly centred on dialogue.<sup>164</sup> It is, however, not a dialogue aimed at conversion or surrender, but rather on (1) defining the true meaning, (2) defending a belief, (3) confronting an erroneous view, and (4) accepting evidence as truth. Therefore, it appears that much of what Hanegraaff, McConnell, Perriman, and others identify as problems within the Word of Faith movement can be addressed within the context of cross-denominational dialogue.

If we agree with the likes of Niebuhr and Bevans that dialogue is vital if we are to promote change and growth, then demonising the Word of Faith Movement as a

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<sup>160</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 117.

<sup>161</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church*, 117.

<sup>162</sup> Edward Farley. *Theologia, The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1994), 183.

<sup>163</sup> Edward Farley. *Theologia, The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, 184.

<sup>164</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 93-94.

non-Christian cult will only serve to isolate it. Conversely, if we recognise that its members are Christians despite some aberrant teachings, we have a basis for constructive engagement.

The researcher agrees with Milmon Harrison, who avers that ‘the Word of Faith Movement is a part of the evangelical, charismatic Christian tradition that emerged in post-World War II America.’<sup>165</sup> Though the movement shares characteristics with other popular, contemporary religious phenomena (evangelicalism, charismatic practices, megachurches, and the Religious Right), the author identifies the Faith Movement as a distinct subculture in its own right.’<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals states (Eskridge 2011): “There are three senses in which the term ‘evangelical’ is used today in the early 21st-century. The first is to view as ‘evangelical’ all Christians who affirm a few key doctrines and practical emphases. British historian David Bebbington approaches evangelicalism from this direction and notes four specific hallmarks of evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and ‘crucicentrism’, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Bebbington’s definition has become a standard baseline for most scholars. However, some consider his broad categories so inclusive that they would exclude few Christians of any stripe. Historian George M. Marsden has suggested a fifth characteristic—trans-denominationalism—which takes into account evangelicals’ pragmatic penchant for cooperation in support of shared projects and evangelistic efforts. A second sense of the term is to look at evangelicalism as an organic group of movements and religious tradition. Within this context ‘evangelical’ denotes a style as much as a set of beliefs, and an attitude which insiders ‘know’ and ‘feel’ when they encounter it. As a result, groups as disparate as black Baptists and Dutch Reformed Churches, Mennonites and Pentecostals, Catholic charismatics and Southern Baptists can all come under the evangelical umbrella—demonstrating just how diverse the movement really is. A third sense of the term is as the self-ascribed label for a largely Midwest-based coalition that arose during the Second World War. This group came into being as a reaction against the perceived anti-intellectual, separatist, belligerent nature of the fundamentalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Importantly, its core personalities (like Carl F.H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga and Billy Graham), institutions (for instance, Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, and Fuller Theological Seminary), and organizations (such as the National Association of Evangelicals and Youth for Christ) have played a pivotal role in giving the wider movement a sense of cohesion that extends beyond these ‘card-carrying’ evangelicals”.

<sup>166</sup> Jonathan Walton, ‘Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (2005): 500–501.



While being within the ambit of Christianity, the Word of Faith movement has some aberrant beliefs and practices. Harrison identifies three core beliefs of the Word of Faith movement: (1) the covenant law through which believers are able to 'name' their desires and 'claim' their possession, (2) positive confession as a catalyst for faith, and finally (3) health and wealth prosperity.<sup>167</sup> Professor Jacques Theron from the University of South Africa and Dr Paul King from Oral Roberts University add the following beliefs to the list: (4) faith as a law, (5) faith as a force, (6) the faith of God, and finally (7) revelation and sense knowledge.<sup>168</sup>

Although these beliefs form the basis of the Word of Faith movement, the movement consists of various independent churches and teachers who contribute individual and independent beliefs to the overall movement. The result of this independent status is that there is no centralised review by which to evaluate the development of doctrine and theology. Care must, therefore, be taken not to over-generalise claims, but to isolate specific teachings, and to ascribe these to the appropriate Word of Faith teacher. We must remain cognisant at all times that the doctrine of deification is not openly taught by all Word of Faith ministers, but rather by a relatively small segment of the ministers within the overall movement. However, this small segment of ministers exercise great influence within the movement and has extensive media reach and influence both within the Word of Faith movement and external to it.

As we have seen, Bryan Wilson states that during the early part of the twentieth century, the Church lost its control over the breadth of social human affairs.<sup>169</sup> He claims that this led to a decline in the larger Church community: the exception, however, was within those Christian movements that extended beyond the spiritual, by fulfilling a strong social function. Dr Vinson Synan claims that what makes the Word of Faith movement attractive is, in essence, its social emphasis.<sup>170</sup> We can,

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<sup>167</sup> Walton, 'Righteous Riches', 500.

<sup>168</sup> King and Theron, 'The "Classic Faith" Roots of the Modern "Word of Faith" Movement', 314.

<sup>169</sup> John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford University Press. New York, 2001), 572-601.

<sup>170</sup> Vinson Synan, *Word of Faith Movement has deep roots in American History* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 2008: retrieved 15 January 2012, [http://www.believersstandunited.com/word\\_of\\_faith\\_movement.html](http://www.believersstandunited.com/word_of_faith_movement.html)).

therefore, conclude that one of the contributing factors that gave rise to the Word of Faith movement was the Church community's attempt to connect with a world that became less focused on religious values, and more driven by its social needs on the one hand, while on the other attempting to justify the existence of the Christian community within a largely secularised world.

Hank Hanegraaff, Dan McConnell, John MacArthur, and others base many of their arguments against the Word of Faith movement on the belief that there exists some direct link of influence to the New Thought movement. It is claimed that Hagin was primarily influenced by Kenyon, who in turn was influenced by Quimby.<sup>171</sup> The primary objection raised by these critics, in response to the Word of Faith movement theology, is that Word of Faith theology teaches primarily the same ideas as the beliefs of some of the metaphysical science cults.<sup>172</sup>

King and Theron point out that some of the objections raised by the critics are raised in relation to Word of Faith teaching that is orthodox in essence, and represents similar views to that of classical evangelical teaching.<sup>173</sup> Dr Derek Vreeland states that many of the historical claims made by McConnell have been a misrepresentation of the facts.<sup>174</sup> It is claimed by Robert Bowman that the influence over Word of Faith theology is Keswick – Higher Life – proto-Pentecostalism, and not primarily the metaphysical cults such as New Thought.<sup>175</sup> Dale Simmons and Joe McIntyre support this conclusion.<sup>176</sup> King and Theron conclude that 'the majority of Kenyon's thought remained in the realm of orthodox evangelical teaching represented by the "Higher Life" movement, although he developed some ideas that would be considered abnormal, stretching the bounds of orthodoxy'.

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<sup>171</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 25. Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 90. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 289-290.

<sup>172</sup> MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 289-290.

<sup>173</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' roots of the modern 'Word of Faith' movement*, 312.

<sup>174</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 2.

<sup>175</sup> Simpson, *The Significance of Andrew Perriman's Faith, Healing and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate*, 66.

<sup>176</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' roots of the modern 'Word of Faith' movement*, 312.

Vreeland admits that the 'isolation from traditional denominational structures created an opportunity for theological innovations' which has often resulted in 'less than accurate methodologies and piecemeal constructs that in part have hindered the work of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>177</sup> Beverley critiques Hanegraaff's book, *Counterfeit Revival*, that deals with the Word of Faith movement, and concludes that the book 'exposes some real excesses and imbalances' although in essence the book is 'misleading, simplistic, and harmful' and is 'marred by faulty logic, outdated and limited research'.<sup>178</sup>

There are also commentators from within the Charismatic tradition who is calling the Word of Faith movement towards a more responsible, ethical and doctrinally sound existence. Timothy Sims seems to identify strongly with the Word of Faith movement when he states: 'possibly the most dangerous opposition we face is corruption from within, because of false teachers and apostate preachers within our community. Much of the attention and negative commentary directed towards the Word of Faith community is due to the erroneous and misguided teaching that has become so prevalent within our ranks.'<sup>179</sup> Dr William Atkinson, a notable Charismatic academic, arrived at a similar conclusion in his review of the Word of Faith movement's assessment of the Jesus Died Spiritually theology.<sup>180</sup> Word of Faith theology on human deification is critiqued by Hanegraaff and McConnell from the basis that the primary influence has been the metaphysical cults.<sup>181</sup> The result is an outright rejection of the Word of Faith theology<sup>182</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 1.

<sup>178</sup> James A. Beverley, 'Books: Counterfeit Critique', *Christianity Today* (1 September 1997; retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1997/september1/7ta059.html>).

<sup>179</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180.

<sup>180</sup> Atkinson, *The Nature of the Crucified Christ in the Word-Faith Teaching*, 184.

<sup>181</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 25. Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 90.

<sup>182</sup> Paul Leslie King, in his thesis entitled, "A Practical-Theological Investigation of Nineteen and Twentieth Century 'Faith Theologies'" (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2001), 304, states that "Many of these misuses of Scripture in the modern faith movement have been pointed out by their critics. This does not mean that the modern faith leaders are cultic, however, as some have claimed them to be, but it does demonstrate that there is a serious problem with some modern faith exegesis". According to Henry I. Lederle, *Theology with Spirit: The Future of the Pentecostal-Charismatic*

## Chapter 3:

### The Theology of the Word of Faith Movement

The thesis of Chapter 2 is that the Word of Faith movement should be treated as an authentically Christian movement in spite of its serious deviations from orthodoxy on some important doctrines and practices. The central claim of this chapter is that the Word of Faith movement's theology of human deification serves as a central, organising framework for the movement's distinctive beliefs and practices. Figure 1 in Chapter 1 provides a graphic illustration of how the central theme of deification influenced the key doctrines of the Word of Faith movement. It is the Word of Faith movement's interpretation of what it means to be created in the Image of God that leads them to believe that man has a divine ability to rule (dominion) and a divine ability to create (authority). Their entire theological view is influenced by these two elements; it is taught by the Word of Faith movement that man lost dominion and authority during the Fall, that the restoration of dominion and authority was the central theme of the covenant between God and man, and that Christ restored dominion and authority back to man through his death and resurrection. Through faith and confession man lays claim to his restored dominion and authority and as a result is able to speak things into existence such as health and prosperity. I argue,

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*Movements in the 21st Century* (Word & Spirit Press. Kindle Edition) 152, "Hagin himself denounces the type of faith that is focused on 'getting Cadillacs' for oneself. Prosperity is defined as having sufficient for one's needs and the ability to bless the poor". Lederle summarises the work of King in the following statement: "Paul King in *Only Believe*. He has shown that the four vintage teachings of the Word of Faith movement (stripped of extreme applications and imbalanced deductions)—namely, claiming the inheritance, exercising the authority, confessing positively, and teaching prosperity (God's encompassing blessing)—are not "strange fire" or aberrations but dimensions of a biblical and historical faith that can be verified in Scripture as well as in church history, especially in the classic faith authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. King shows us that the problems that have occurred in the recent past result from over-emphasis and lack of balance. Through an admirable process of maturing and self-correction, the movement has eliminated most of the difficulties. Public perception of this, as one may expect, has lagged behind, and in theological circles, much has also gone unnoticed" (Lederle, *Theology with Spirit*, 226-227).

therefore, that it is the centrality of Word of Faith understanding of deification that lays the foundation for their entire theology.

Since the language of 'deification' has a long history in certain streams of Christian thought, the first task is to show what is meant by such allusions in Christian traditions other than the Word of Faith movement. The second section presents the teaching of leading spokespersons of the Word of Faith movement regarding human deification. The third section of the chapter constitutes the heart of the study, and one of the most significant contributions. It shows how the movement's ideas about human deification provide a central, organising framework for all of the movement's other distinctive beliefs and practices.

### **3.1. Human Deification in Historical Perspective**

In 2009, the Lausanne Theological Working Group issued a statement on the prosperity gospel. In this statement they addressed many of the Word of Faith teachings, and presented a balanced view on the movement's health and wealth theology.<sup>183</sup> Although this does not, in any way, address all the issues and concerns raised in respect of the Word of Faith movement, it contributes to the Evangelical discourse on the matters. What is absent, however, is an extension of the debate to include some of the other Word of Faith doctrines in the debate. Amongst these, is the teaching on the deification of man that is publicised by a small but influential group within the Word of Faith movement.

Mark Nispel,<sup>184</sup> a Lutheran theologian, states that 'It is a curiosity to note the large place occupied by the concept of salvation as deification in the theology of the Greek fathers and at the same time how little attention western scholarship has given to this idea.'<sup>185</sup> Nispel traces the concept of human deification back to the latter part of the first century, by arguing that Psalm 82:1 and 6-7 'were regularly used as

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<sup>183</sup> Christopher H. J. Wright, 'A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel', *Lausanne Theology Working Group, Africa Chapter, Ghana* (8-9 October, 2008 and 1-4 September 2009; retrieved 3 January 2012, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/all/twg/1099-a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel.html>).

<sup>184</sup> Mark Nispel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia' *Vigiliae Christianae* 53, no. 3 (1999): 289-304.

<sup>185</sup> Nispel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia', 289.

Christological proof' against the Jews.<sup>186</sup> He does, however, concede that it is highly unlikely that the early church would have adhered to a theology of deification, as this would be 'contrary to the church's monotheistic confession'.<sup>187</sup> Nisipel correctly notes that the persecution of the church was in retaliation to the church's rejection of the worship of deities, and in particular, the idea of a human deity as represented by the emperor.

The statements of the early Church fathers have been interpreted by some as providing support for deification. The translators Alexander Robertson and William Rambaut, translated the words of Irenaeus of Lyons (circa AD 180) as stating that God 'became what we are in order to make us what he is himself'.<sup>188</sup> Clement of Alexandria in circa AD 208, wrote in *The Stromata* that 'he who obeys the Lord and follows the prophecy given through him ... becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh.'<sup>189</sup> One of the most quoted statements in support of human deification is that of Athanasius of Alexandria, who wrote that, 'God became man so that men might become gods.'<sup>190</sup>

In the Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus from the late second century, the author demonstrates that the concept of deification, in his contemporary world, was not one of man becoming god, but rather man imitating God. His statement: 'and do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing. For it is not by ruling over his neighbours, or by seeking to hold the supremacy over those that are weaker, or by being rich, and showing violence towards those that are inferior, that happiness is found; nor can anyone by these things become an imitator

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<sup>186</sup> Nisipel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia', 290.

<sup>187</sup> Nisipel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia', 291.

<sup>188</sup> Athanasius. *De Incarnatione Verbi* (On the Incarnation of the Word). Translated by Robertson Alexander and Rambaut William, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 4* (1892), (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1990). Retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2802.htm>.

<sup>189</sup> William Wilson (translator), *The Stromata, from Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1885), Vol. 2. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 2009), retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0210.htm..>

<sup>190</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*.

of God.<sup>191</sup> For the author, imitating God is centred in a love for one's neighbour: 'he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbour ... whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who receive [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God.'<sup>192</sup>

It is clear, from this view of deification, that the author contextualises *theosis*, firstly as an act of caring for one's neighbour, through which man is imitating the selfless act of Christ, and secondly, it demonstrates human deficiency by linking our ability to care for our neighbour, ultimately, to the provision of God.

Rowan Williams, an archbishop of Canterbury, notes that deification is best contextualised within the act of imitation, in which man demonstrates the compassion of God.<sup>12</sup> This places deification within the ambient of activity and not of attribute. According to Williams, we are, therefore, only deified in as far as we express the attributes of God, through which we become partakers of His divine nature.

Orthodox scholar Professor Georgios Mantzaridis presents another view on *theosis*. He proposes that deification is the result of participating in a union with the *logos* of God.<sup>193</sup> According to him, this 'does not imply any mechanical commutation of humanity, but an ontological regeneration of human nature in the hypostasis of the incarnate Logos of God, accessible to every man who participates personally and freely in the life of Christ.'<sup>194</sup> Here also, the deification of man is not a restorative work, but one of union with Christ. Man is only deified when his human nature is aligned to the divine expression, which is the nature of God. Although Mantzaridis presents this view as an alternative, it once again contextualises *theosis* within the union between God and man through Christ. It also relates deification to human nature which contextualises it with the realm of expression. From his argument, it

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<sup>191</sup> Peter Kirby, *Apocrypha*. Early Christian Writings. 2015. retrieved 19 September 2015, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>. .

<sup>192</sup> Kirby, *Apocrypha*.

<sup>193</sup> Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1984), 12.

<sup>194</sup> Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 13.

can be concluded that man cannot have a divine nature, unless his sole expression is the Will of God.

Christian author Robert Bowman points to the fact that Eastern Orthodoxy as a monotheistic religion does not support 'literal' deification, as that would result in polytheism.<sup>195</sup> According to him, these statements ought to be interpreted within the context of their Eastern Orthodoxy source. From such an interpretive perspective 'men are "deified" in the sense that the Holy Spirit dwells within Christian believers and transforms them into the image of God in Christ, eventually endowing them in the resurrection with immortality and God's perfect moral character.'<sup>196</sup> The view of Bowman is supported by the Eastern Orthodox theologian Archimandrite George, who defines deification in Eastern Orthodoxy as the attainment of the likeness of God through reconciliation and union with God.<sup>197</sup> He defines this union exclusively within the Church as the body of Christ.<sup>198</sup> Theologian Robert Puchniak revisits the theology of Augustine of Hippo and concludes that: 'Augustine's understanding of the unity of Christ and His church is closely associated with his use of deification: the elevation of humanity as adopted sons and daughters involves not only individual believers, but the whole church. Moreover, deification is, in Augustine's thought, "a state which will be attained only in the life to come". There can be no claims to final perfection in this life; deification in its fullness is eschatological.'<sup>199</sup>

Although the Eastern Orthodox view on *theosis* is mystical in its clarification, it contextualises deification within the Church as the Body of Christ. In this form of deification, deified man remains eternally subject to the Will of God, not as an equal to God, but as a subject of God. It is not a restored position that is obtained, but a

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<sup>195</sup> Robert Bowman. "Ye Are Gods?" Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification of Man. Christian Research Journal, Winter/Spring 1987, Page 19.

<sup>196</sup> Robert Bowman. "Ye Are Gods?" Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification of Man. Christian Research Journal, Winter/Spring 1987, Page 19.

<sup>197</sup> Archimandrite George, *Theosis, The True Purpose of Human Life* (Mount Athos, Greece: Holy Monastery of Saint Gregorios, 2006), 34-35.

<sup>198</sup> George, *Theosis*, 34-83.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Puchniak, *Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2010), 125.



perfection that is developed within the life of the believer through a union with God that is an expression of the grace of God.

Strictly speaking, evangelical Christianity does not have a fully developed theology addressing the Orthodox theology of *theosis*. In the reformed tradition 'deification was for Luther the synonym for justification and sanctification.'<sup>200</sup> In his theology 'the justified Christian was seen as a divine creature.'<sup>201</sup>

The Swiss reformed theologian Karl Barth pointed out that throughout history, the interpretation of the Image of God has been limited to that of a contemporary theological or anthropological understanding.<sup>202</sup> He claims that for Ambrose, it referred to the soul of man, for Athanasius it was rationality and Augustine viewed it as 'the triune faculties of the soul, *memoria*, *intellectus* [and] *amor*'.<sup>203</sup> Within the reformed tradition, the meaning has ranged from demonstrating superiority over the rest of creation, to that of the restoration of man to his original righteousness.<sup>204</sup> Although Barth concludes his study with the remark 'One could indeed discuss which of all these and similar explanations of the term is the most beautiful or the most deep or the most serious. One cannot, however, discuss which of them is the correct interpretation of Genesis 1:26'.<sup>205</sup>

Interpreting the Image of God in man as a reflection of the divine nature of God has been presented by Stamm.<sup>206</sup> It was Humbert, however, who popularised the

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<sup>200</sup> Franz Posset, 'Deification in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993): 125.

<sup>201</sup> Roger Olson, 'Deification in Contemporary Theology', *Theology Today* 64 (2007): 186.

<sup>202</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume III, Part 1* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark Publishers, 1958), 192.

<sup>203</sup> David J. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1967): 54.

<sup>204</sup> Clines, 'The Image of God in man'.

<sup>205</sup> Barth, *Church Dynamics*, 193. Barth may be correct in his statement in as far as the attempt to define the Image of God as it relates to man, is contextualised within the meaning of man as a created being. As created being, man is not God in nature or even expression, but is, in its most perfect state, a reflection of God.

<sup>206</sup> J. Stamm, 'Die Imago-Lehre von Karl Barth und die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft', in *Antwort: Festschrift K. Barth* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956):84-98.

interpretation of Genesis 1:26 to define man as a created being 'with the same physical form as the deity'.<sup>207</sup>

More contemporary scholars such as Roos,<sup>208</sup> contextualise the works of Grenz<sup>209</sup> and Von Dehsen,<sup>210</sup> in his discussion on the use of the 'image' and 'likeness' term usage in the ancient Near East. These scholars define the use of the term 'image' as the tangible presence through which a god would establish His presence.<sup>211</sup> Von Dehsen draws our attention to the fact that 'Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings were regarded as the images of God in that they served as God's representatives on earth'<sup>212</sup>,

It is Von Dehsen who correlates the relationship between image and likeness. In his description, the term image refers to the physical, whereas likeness has a deeper spiritual meaning.<sup>213</sup> In essence the interrelatedness of image and likeness provides an image of man being the spiritual representative of God on the earth. This representative function of man is supported by Bryant.<sup>214</sup> It is, however, Grenz who relates the term in the 'likeness of God' in both its physical and spiritual meaning. For him likeness extends beyond the representative function and includes the reflection of the character of God.<sup>215</sup>

Evangelical scholar Robert Rakestraw highlights that one of the primary concerns when dealing with the theology of *theosis*, from an evangelical perspective, is the

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<sup>207</sup> Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', 56.

<sup>208</sup> Andre Roos, *St Augustine's Confessiones: The Role of the Imago Dei in His Conversion to Catholic Christianity* (Stellenbosch University, 2011; retrieved 14 January 2012, <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/6505?show=full>), 28.

<sup>209</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>210</sup> Christian D. Von Dehsen, 'The imago Dei in Genesis 1:26-27', *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1997).

<sup>211</sup> Roos, *St Augustine's Confessiones*, 29.

<sup>212</sup> Von Dehsen, 'The imago Dei in Genesis', 260.

<sup>213</sup> Von Dehsen, 'The imago Dei in Genesis'.

<sup>214</sup> David J. Bryant, 'Imago Dei, Imagination, and Ecological Responsibility', *Theology Today* 57 (2000): 37.

<sup>215</sup> Roos, *St Augustine's Confessiones*, 29.

'terminology itself'.<sup>216</sup> He expresses the discomfort of evangelicals in his statement that 'to speak of divinization, deification, and human beings "becoming God" seems to violate the historic Christian understanding of the essential qualitative distinction between God and the creation.'<sup>217</sup>

Evangelical theologians who, in recent years, participated in the deification debate include Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, Robert Rakestraw, Daniel Clendenin, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen.<sup>218</sup> For Pinnock, salvation comprises a 'transforming, personal, intimate relationship with the triune God'.<sup>219</sup> Pinnock differs from the Orthodox theology view in that this transformation is purely personal.<sup>220</sup> Grenz constructs his theology from the point of salvation. For him, salvation includes participation with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>221</sup> Olson argues that this is a 'transformation and re-creation of personal identity through the indwelling Spirit' and does not represent deification within an Orthodox sense.

I disagree with Olson on his observation, the intention of having a Protestant / Evangelical debate on deification is not simply to facilitate Orthodox assimilation, but to critically develop a sound theology. The views of Pinnock and Grenz present a strong Christocentric theology of deification that is capable of contextualising *theosis* beyond the Palamite distinction.<sup>222</sup> In the theology they advance, there is no need to draw a 'distinction between the divine essence and divine energies.'<sup>223</sup> They, therefore, present a theology of *theosis* that excludes the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as presents a view on *theosis* that is not reliant upon tradition.

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<sup>216</sup> Robert Rakestraw, 'Becoming like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 2 (1997): 266.

<sup>217</sup> Rakestraw, 'Becoming like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis'.

<sup>218</sup> Roger Olson, *Deification in Contemporary Theology* (Theology Today 64, 2007), 188.

<sup>219</sup> Olson, *Deification in Contemporary Theology*, 196.

<sup>220</sup> Olson, *Deification in Contemporary Theology*.

<sup>221</sup> Olson, *Deification in Contemporary Theology*.

<sup>222</sup> Palamite Distinction: This is the teaching that there exists in God a real or ontological distinction between his essence and his energies. Al Kimel, *The Palamite Distinction: Is it Dogma?* 2010, retrieved 29 November 2013,

[http://www.byzcath.org/forums/ubbthreads.php/topics/342561/the\\_palamite\\_distinction\\_is\\_it](http://www.byzcath.org/forums/ubbthreads.php/topics/342561/the_palamite_distinction_is_it).

<sup>223</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005),

The protestant theologian Emil Brunner wrote that ‘the origin of sin is the deification [by man], the grasping after the divine right.’<sup>224</sup> This statement is important, as it provides a clear boundary within which a theology of *theosis* is allowed to be constructed.

The theology of human deification, *theosis*, within an Eastern Orthodox context, places man both as subject to the Will of God, and reliant upon the grace of God. This is not turning man into ‘a god’ but rather defining man, from a christological perspective, as a partaker of the nature of God. We find this same tone in both the larger Protestant and in specific Evangelical theology. Man is saved through grace, and the unselfish act of the Son of God. The acceptance of Christ opens the door for man to, once again, have fellowship with the Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The working of the Holy Spirit in man, combined with the wilful obedience of man, sanctifies man by imbedding the Image of God, His divine nature, in man.

I am in no way suggesting that there are no differences between Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical understanding of *theosis* and sanctification, but rather, that inevitably there emerges a pattern of man, not as a god in the classical sense of divinity, but rather as a conduit for the nature of God to shine through.

Bowman attempts to classify the type of deification, as taught by the Word of Faith movement, but expresses his frustration in this matter.<sup>225</sup> He concludes that the Word of Faith theology on deification is ‘neither soundly monotheistic nor fully polytheistic.’<sup>226</sup> It is his view that the Word of Faith ‘teaching of deification cannot be regarded as orthodox’.<sup>227</sup> He concludes that the Word of Faith theology teaches a ‘heretical view of God, as well as a heretical view of the nature of the believer’.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort: der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers* (trans. J.C.B. Mohr. University of Michigan, 1924. Digitized 7 July 2006), 224.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Bowman. “Ye Are Gods?” Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification of Man. Christian Research Journal, Winter/Spring 1987. Page 20.

<sup>226</sup> Bowman, “Ye are Gods?”

<sup>227</sup> Bowman, “Ye are Gods?”

<sup>228</sup> Bowman, “Ye are Gods?”

In an effort to determine whether Bowman's description is supported by observation, it is necessary to view the statements of the selected Word of Faith ministers, Copeland, Hagin, Hinn, Dollar, Long, Meyer, Paulk and Crouch as they pertain to points 1, 2 and 5 above. These points specifically relate to the 'ye are gods' discourse, whereas points 3 and 4, although important from a theological perspective, contribute nothing meaningful to this study.

### **3.2. Human Deification in the Word of Faith Movement**

In general, the Word of Faith movement lacks a central theological statement. To be able to interact with its theology it is often required that the movement's theology be extracted from various sources in an effort to define a coherent theological view. The danger of such an approach is that a certain level of generalisation and bias may occur which may distort the interaction with the movement's theology.

My aim is to construct the Word of Faith movement's theology on deification from various sources within the movement. It is, however, with less subjectivity that this reconstruction is approached, as much of the movement's theology had recently been documented by one of the its most prominent ministers, Creflo Dollar, in his book entitled *Not Guilty*.<sup>229</sup> I will, therefore, utilise as core his published theology on human deification and demonstrate the support his views hold within the movement by showing that there is great consensus amongst prominent ministers within this movement.

Amongst the varying views of Deification, there exists a view of the 'image of God' that places it within a christological context. In this view, the 'image of God' in man reaches its fulfilment in Christ, this view points towards redemption.<sup>230</sup> Even amongst the diversity of interpretations and views on the *imago Dei* in man, the dominant understanding within the Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical movements

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<sup>229</sup> Creflo Dollar, *Not Guilty: Experience God's gift of Acceptance and Freedom* (New York: Faith Words Publishers, Hachette Book Group, 2006).

<sup>230</sup> Leroy Howe, *The Image of God: A Theology for Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995), 50-52.

is that the 'image' emanates from God, reflecting the holy character of God through man.

Word of Faith theology on deification stands in stark contrast to the understanding of deification within the Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical movements. Kenneth Hagin<sup>231</sup> writes that 'man ... was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority ... God has made us as much like Himself as possible.'<sup>232</sup> Hagin, furthermore, asserts that the believer is Christ.<sup>233</sup>

Kenneth Copeland supports the view of Hagin in his statement that man was not created to be subordinate to God.<sup>234</sup> The same basic view is held by Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, Earl Paulk, Paul Crouch,<sup>235</sup> and others.

Word of Faith theology on deification or *theosis* is distinctly different from the understanding of *theosis* in other Christian traditions (see below). For the Word of Faith minister Creflo Dollar righteousness means that 'you are right with God even when you have done wrong.'<sup>236</sup> He states that 'Sin is our birthright as human beings.

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<sup>231</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 35-41.

<sup>232</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 35-36. '[Man] was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority... God made us as much like Himself as possible... He made us the same class of being that He is Himself... Man lived in the realm of God. He lived on terms equal with God.'

<sup>233</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 41, '[The] believer is called Christ... That's who we are; we're Christ.'

<sup>234</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Image of God in You III. Audiotape #01-1403, Side 1 & 2* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989). Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I. Tape #01-3001, Side 1* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries,).

<sup>235</sup> Creflo Dollar, *Changing your World. World Changers Program* (Lesea Broadcasting; April 17, 2002). Creflo Dollar, *World Changers Ministries Sermon* (World Changers Church International Ministry, USA, 12 August 2002). Benny Hinn, 'We are Now Divine' (A Trinity Broadcast Network Program, 1 December 1990). Eddie Long, *Interview: Praise-A-Thon Trinity Broadcast Network*, (29 March 2004). Joyce Meyer *Sermon on MP4 Video File*. Source of the Video is Unknown, retrieved <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRP3OLCH9GI&feature=related>. Earl Paulk, *Satan Unmasked* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Atlanta, Georgia: K-Dimension Publishers, 2004), 97. Paul Crouch, 'Interview on Praise the Lord' *Trinity Broadcast Network* (5 February 1986).

<sup>236</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 19.

We are born into it. However, righteousness is our birthright as Christians.<sup>237</sup> This view leads him to conclude that 'Righteousness is the ability to stand before God without the sense of guilt or inferiority.'<sup>238</sup>

The Word of Faith movement's deification theology, also referred to as 'the little gods' teaching, is primarily constructed on the belief that man was originally created to be like God.<sup>239</sup> This likeness, or image, is contextualised along the lines of two arguments; the first is that man has become a living soul, 'just like God',<sup>240</sup> and the second that man possessed 'dominion and authority over everything in the earth, as God did.'<sup>241</sup> Dollar views man as having restored righteousness, which means that when man stands before God he has 'rights'<sup>242</sup> and 'equality'.<sup>243</sup> Other Word of Faith ministers such as Copeland, Benny Hinn, Eddie Long, Earl Paulk, Paul Crouch and Morris Cerullo—who states that 'when we stand up here, brother, you're not looking at Morris Cerullo; you're looking at God. You're looking at Jesus'<sup>244</sup>—all express the same underlying principle of man having equality with God.

The principle of equality understood by Copeland is best demonstrated in the following statements by him, and reveals that his view of equality spans across both physical and spiritual dimensions:

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<sup>237</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 21.

<sup>238</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

<sup>239</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 88.

<sup>240</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

<sup>241</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

<sup>242</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>243</sup> Dollar, *Changing your World (World Changers Program. 2002)*. Dollar, *World Changers Ministries Sermon* (2002). Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>244</sup> Kenneth Copeland. *Now We are in Christ*. Kenneth Copeland Publications. Fort Worth, Texas, 1980. Page 23-24. Benny Hinn. *Praise-a-Thon Television Program*: 6 November 1990. Trinity Broadcast Network, USA, 1990. Eddie Long. *Interview: Praise-A-Thon*. Trinity Broadcast Network. March 29, 2004. Earl Paulk. *Satan Unmasked*. Dimension Publishers, United States of America, 2004. Page 97. Paul Crouch. *Interview on Praise the Lord*. Trinity Broadcast Network program 5 February 1986. Morris Cerullo. *The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God*, San Diego Outreach: Audiotape No.1, sides 1 & 2, 1991.

- He (Adam) was not a little like God. He was not almost like God. He was not subordinate to God even ... Adam is as much like God as you could get, just the same as Jesus ... Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was God manifested in the flesh.<sup>245</sup>
- You are not a spiritual schizophrenic—half-God and half-Satan—you are all-God.<sup>246</sup>
- You don't have a God in you; you are one.<sup>247</sup>
- When I read in the Bible where he (Jesus) says, 'I AM,' I just smile and say, 'Yes, I AM, too'.<sup>248</sup>

The principle of man's equality with God is traced back to Kenneth Hagin,<sup>249</sup> who wrote that 'man ... was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority ... God has made us as much like Himself as possible.'<sup>250</sup> Hagin, furthermore, asserts that the believer is Christ<sup>251</sup> when he states<sup>252</sup>:

[Man] was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority... God made us as much like Himself as possible... He made us the same class of being that He is Himself... Man lived in the realm of God. He

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<sup>245</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Image of God in You III. Audiotape #01-1403, Side 1 & 2* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989). Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I. Tape #01-3001, Side 1* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989).

<sup>246</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Now We are in Christ*. (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1980), 16-17.

<sup>247</sup> Kenneth Copeland. *The Force of Love; Audio tape number #02-0028* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987).

<sup>248</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 'Believer's Voice of Victory' *Trinity Broadcast Network* (9 February 1987). Kenneth Copeland, 'Believer's Voice of Victory' *Trinity Broadcast Network* (9 July 1987).

<sup>249</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 35-41.

<sup>250</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 35-36.

<sup>251</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*, 41.

<sup>252</sup> Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*.



lived on terms equal with God... [The] believer is called Christ... That's who we are; we're Christ.<sup>253</sup>

The Word of Faith ministers Charles Capps and Jerry Savelle believe that to be created in the likeness of God means that man is 'an exact duplication in kind.'<sup>254</sup> This is supported by Dollar who states that 'He [God] made us to look like and reflect His image. Not only was humankind to look like and reflect God's image, but to be like Him in character.'<sup>255</sup> Dollar expands on this by stating:

God is Spirit. So if man is made in His image, then man is a spirit. God is a speaking Spirit. Therefore, if we are made like Him, we have to speak as well.<sup>256</sup>

Dollar believes that:

When God made Adam, He made an exact duplicate of Himself. God was the original image, and from His image He created another image of Himself – the man Adam.<sup>257</sup>

Copeland supports these views by describing God in an anthropomorphic way when he states that God is:

very much like you and me. ... A being that stands somewhere around 6'2", 6'3", that weighs somewhere in the neighbourhood of a

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<sup>253</sup> In Hagin's interpretation, it is no longer the character of God that shines through man, but man now possesses the character of God. The consequence of such an interpretation would, at its extreme, suggest that, if God created man as an equal, man would not have to submit to the Will of God. The implication of man as god would imply that man's will is in actual fact the will of God. Such a theology would question why man was punished for disobedience in the Garden of Eden, and would furthermore imply that the character of God is potentially so flawed, that God himself can commit sin.

<sup>254</sup> Charles Capps, *Authority in Three Worlds: Learn to use the Authority God has given you for victory in every area of your life*. (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House Publishers, 1980), 15. Jerry Savelle, 'The Authority of the Believer', in *The Word Study Bible* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House Publishers, 1990).

<sup>255</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 106.

<sup>256</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 107.

<sup>257</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

couple of hundred pounds, little better, [and] has a [hand] span nine inches across.<sup>258</sup>

His literal interpretation of biblical texts ultimately defines God as a spiritual being with a physical body. Dollar's theological view adds to this when he concludes that to be created in the image of God means that 'God in heaven had made Adam god on the earth. Adam was crowned god of all physical things formed from the dust of the earth: Let him have dominion (Gen. 1:26). That included dominion over the moon, the stars, and the planets.'<sup>259</sup>

Such an understanding of man as god, as an exact duplicate for God the Creator, in both form (anthropomorphically) and in substance (spirit) directs the understanding of what salvation is within Word of Faith theology. Dollar views the act of redemption in terms of man being restored to his divine or godly state. This is clear from his statement that:

We become sons and daughters of God when we were adopted into the family of God the day we became born again. If we are sons and daughters of God, and Jesus is the Son of God, then that makes us equal to and joint-heirs with Jesus (Rom. 8:16-17). Remember, adoption makes us family with equal rights. It makes us, in a sense, equal to Jesus, who is God.<sup>260</sup>

The general view within the movement is that 'you and I are not God. There is only one God. However, as His children, we are like Him. He's the big G, and we're the little g.'<sup>261</sup> Dollar<sup>262</sup> claims that 'You are an adopted son and therefore equal with Jesus',<sup>263</sup> and states that 'It is absolutely God's will for you to be just like Jesus.'<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Kenneth Copeland. Spirit, Soul and Body. Audiotape #01-0601, side 1. Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985.

<sup>259</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty* 109.

<sup>260</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty* 113.

<sup>261</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty* 117.

<sup>262</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty* 104. Dollar, furthermore, states that 'If all that you are learning had been written twenty-five or thirty years ago, many would have considered these words heresy. Many would have said that it was blasphemous to declare that man has equality with God. We are always told not to

Salvation is, therefore, viewed essentially as restoring the authority man lost in the Garden of Eden. The Word of Faith movement views human rebellion in the Garden of Eden as an event that caused man to lose his god nature and to have this replaced with Satan's nature.<sup>265</sup> This theology is constructed on the principle that man was created as a god with authority that could be transferred: 'The authority God had given to Adam went all the way up to heaven, where God was seated. Adam, through disobedience, turned it over to God's enemy.'<sup>266</sup> Salvation as a restorative act in the Word of Faith movement relates to righteousness.

Dollar states that 'righteousness is available to all Christians and non-Christians alike. Though non-Christians may not choose to walk in righteousness, it is available to them.'<sup>267</sup> He clarifies that 'we know that God's righteousness comes through a declaration. The effect of the declaration is upon those who believe and receive Jesus by faith as Lord and personal Saviour into their lives.'<sup>268</sup> The result of this declaration of righteousness is that man obtains 'the ability to stand before God without the sense of guilt or inferiority. It is the ability to stand before God and talk to Him as a child to a Father, expecting His response, and knowing that we have the right to receive what we ask because of what He has declared over us.'<sup>269</sup> 'When you accept that you are the righteousness of God, you can rule over your circumstances and your environment just as Jesus did.'<sup>270</sup>

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compare ourselves with God. We were told that He is a holy, awesome God and we are just dirty, old, good-for-nothing, undeserving sinners. Here is what I consider blasphemous: the idea that you are born again but consider yourself a sinner when God says you are His righteousness. Your actions say to God that you really don't receive what His Word says about you. What we must understand is that being made the righteousness of God and being like Him, having an equality with Him, is not something new. This was God's idea from the very beginning.'

<sup>263</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 124.

<sup>264</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 126.

<sup>265</sup> Bowman, 'Ye Are Gods?', 20.

<sup>266</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90.

<sup>267</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 17.

<sup>268</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 21.

<sup>269</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

<sup>270</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 27.

Ultimately the Word of Faith theology of salvation leads towards authority and dominion. Dollar states that 'the devil does not rule in this earth. The righteousness of God rules in the earth and I am the righteousness of God. I rule over cancer. I rule over debt. I rule over my enemies. Through the Word, I have been given dominion over the earth.'<sup>271</sup> Righteousness according to Dollar, is central to activating God's promises of healing and prosperity.<sup>272</sup>

He states that: 'You are not a sinner saved by grace. That is not possible. When you accept Jesus as your Saviour, you are rescued from sin. Once rescued, you can no longer be a sinner. You become the righteousness of God. He graces you with His willingness to get involved in your life and gives you His righteousness so that you can be like Him.'<sup>273</sup> 'Salvation does not only mean that you have a new life in Christ. It also means that you have all the rights and privileges available to those who are born again. Salvation is the right to be delivered; it is the right to preservation; it is the right to healing; it is the right to soundness. It is also your right standing with God.'<sup>274</sup> And ultimately 'being made the righteousness of God also means you have equality with God.'<sup>275</sup>

Human deification, as taught by the Word of Faith movement stands in direct contrast to how Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed and Evangelicals interpret what deification truly means. For the Word of Faith teacher deification is a restorative act, one in which man is restored to his original state of creation. In this interpretation man is seen as equal with God, not a subordinate to God but in all aspects a god. For the non-Word of Faith Christian community human deification is not restorative in the sense of restoring man to a position of equality with God, but rather restoring man to a state of true submission where man is restored in union with God through Christ. It is not dominion that is restored but union through Christ, an adoption of man into fellowship with God. It is in essence reconciliation and not restoration.

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<sup>271</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

<sup>272</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 49.

<sup>273</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 49-50.

<sup>274</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 59.

<sup>275</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

### 3.3 Human Deification as a Central Organising Tenet of Word of Faith Theology<sup>276</sup>

A conventional reading within the larger Christian Church, including mainstream evangelicals interprets Genesis 3:1-5 as a fall from grace, as man's separation from God.<sup>277</sup> The Word of Faith movement, however, views this passage not in terms of separation, but rather, in terms of a loss of authority and position.<sup>278</sup>

The implication of this theological shift is discussed throughout this chapter and a conclusion reached that, it is the Word of Faith movement's Dominion Theology that sees man as a deified being, which forms a foundational pillar upon which the entire theology of the movement rests. This chapter highlights the fact that the movement primarily constructs its Theology of Deification on the basis that man stands as an equal to God.<sup>279</sup> This view of equality with God has given rise to the movement's 'little gods' theology. It is, however, the view that man was created as a god in his own right that influences the various doctrines of the movement.

As a consequence, Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden is interpreted as a form of treason against God,<sup>280</sup> resulting in man transferring ownership of the earth to

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<sup>276</sup> From this point onwards I will be making use of a large number of direct quotations. I do this to (a) ensure fairness in my treatment of primary sources and (b) to provide a clear, uncontaminated interpretation of Word of Faith movement statements. It has been my experience that when some Word of Faith statements are discussed, many individuals find the statements unbelievable and even question whether such statements were actually made. My primary purpose in using such an extensive list of direct quotes are to demonstrate, from primary sources, what the Word of Faith proponents say and how a cohesive thread runs through the major tenets of their teaching. This is to avoid any claim of unfair treatment of Word of Faith theology.

<sup>277</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2011), 768. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 490.

<sup>278</sup> Myles Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom: Ancient Hope for our 21st Century World*. (Shippensburg, Pasadena: Destiny Image Publishing, 2004), 56. Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 89.

<sup>279</sup> Myles Munroe. *Releasing your Potential* (Shippensburg, Pasadena: Destiny Image Publishing, 1992), 71; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 25; 38-40; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 113, 159.

<sup>280</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 89.

Satan.<sup>281</sup> This leads the movement's theology of Christ and the Atonement along a path of restoration opposed to reconciliation. Their Christology, therefore, interprets the role of Christ as restoring man's equality with God,<sup>282</sup> resulting in man regaining his position as god of the earth.<sup>283</sup> The consequence of the restoration of dominion and authority is that man, as a god, has the ability to confess through verbal expression, a desired outcome which then becomes a reality due to the creative authority associated with man's divinity.<sup>284</sup> The movement's interpretation of covenant theology is merely seen as a series of promises that express God's will for man to be restored to his divine position as the god of the earth.<sup>285</sup> The final resolve of this restorative position is that man has the ability, as god, to live in health and prosperity.<sup>286</sup>

The lack of a universal statement of belief, or in terms of its theological development, a universally-agreed-upon Systematic Theology makes it difficult to definitively engage with the movement's theology. At best a systematic theological view of the movement's theology is extracted from the verbal statements and books published by some of its more prominent leaders. This, however, poses a problem in the sense that a theological view is constructed using various authors, some of which might not necessarily adhere to the entire interlinking of various teachings of the overall theology. Again, I caution that the reading of this chapter must be done within the context of the individual statements; however, the implication of the statements must be viewed within the context of how the Word of Faith movement does theology. As a movement, Word of Faith theology is expressed not only within its written and spoken statements but sometimes more subtly, in what members infer or experience.

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<sup>281</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 56; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90-91.

<sup>282</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 75-76, 92.

<sup>283</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90-91, 109.

<sup>284</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53, 105; Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 72.

<sup>285</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 92, 95-96; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35.

<sup>286</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8-9, 23, 57-58, 62-63; Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in your Mind* (New York, NY: Warner Faith Publishers, 1995): 205-206, 297.

As there is no single leader within the Word of Faith movement, and there is no single declaration of its theology, it is with some apprehension that I decided to use as the basis of this chapter the book published by Creflo Dollar entitled *Not Guilty*.<sup>287</sup> This book, although written as a popular Christian book for the lay reader, holds promise as a systematic text of the Word of Faith theology taught by Dollar. He is, however, not alone in his interpretation, as is evident from the various other Word of Faith theologians and teachers who support many of his statements. Dollar in this text, creates an interwoven view of the movement's theology that defines the movement's Dominion, Covenant, Faith, Confession and Health and Wealth, or Prosperity Theology, as well as contextualises this within a Word of Faith specific Christology.

### **3.3.1. Dominion Theology**

Dominion theology within the Word of Faith movement relies upon the movement's interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 (KJV):

And God said; Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (v27).

The movement's understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God ranges from an anthropomorphic interpretation in which God's image implies physical similarity, to an authoritative view in which it implies that God transferred his power and authority to man.

Copeland's understanding of man being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) is derived from his purely anthropomorphic interpretation of Isaiah 40:12, this is evident when Copeland claims that God is:

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<sup>287</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*

A being that stands somewhere around 6'2", 6'3" that weighs somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred pounds or a little better, and has a hand span of 9 inches across.<sup>288</sup>

This statement by Copeland is not an isolated reference. He claimed that 'God and Adam looked exactly alike,<sup>289</sup> and that God is a 'spirit-being with a body, complete with eyes, and eyelids, ears, nostrils, a mouth, hands and fingers, and feet'.<sup>290</sup> Benny Hinn, although having recanted<sup>291</sup> his teaching on this particular aspect of Word of Faith theology, used to teach that the appearance of God the Father was 'like that of a man ... God has the likeness of fingers and hands and a face'.<sup>292</sup> Hinn, furthermore, taught that God the Father looks like Jesus looked while he was on earth.<sup>293</sup> This anthropomorphic view of the image of God is imbedded in both Copeland's reference edition study Bible<sup>294</sup> and in the Dake's<sup>295</sup> annotated reference Bible.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Spirit, Soul and Body* (Audiotape #01-0601, side 1, 1985).

<sup>289</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 'Believer's Voice of Victory', *Trinity Broadcast Network* (9 February 1987); Copeland, 'Believer's Voice of Victory', *Trinity Broadcast Network* (9 July 1987).

<sup>290</sup> Kenneth Copeland, (Kenneth Copeland ministry letter,). Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 21 July 1977).

<sup>291</sup> Benny Hinn is on record as retracting his teaching on the 'little gods' theology (*Charisma* 1993:25): 'I did teach the little gods doctrine. Today I don't believe it one iota. In fact it's been erased off all my tapes'. He continues to provide some insight into how the Word of Faith movement develops some of its theology: 'People can take a few verses of Scripture and say, See, it says it here. But they need to read the entire chapter or the entire book. When I taught the little gods doctrine, I was using scripture that didn't fit'.

<sup>292</sup> Benny Hinn, *Good Morning Holy Spirit* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 82.

<sup>293</sup> Hinn, *Good Morning Holy Spirit*, 87.

<sup>294</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition Bible* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1996), 45.

<sup>295</sup> 'Dake's influence on the word of faith message in general is unmistakable. First, Dake (1950:91) asserts that God's blessing of Abraham with great wealth serves as an example that every believer has access to this aspect of the Abrahamic covenant' (Morris and Lioy 2012:92).

<sup>296</sup> F. Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Dake Bible Sales Inc., 1996), 1.



Dollar, on the other hand, interprets the image of God in terms of the rights and privileges imparted to man. His view is predominantly focused on the aspect of authority:

Adam and Eve were already like God. They were made in His image and likeness; they were His reflection of God on the earth. They had become living souls, just like God. They had dominion and authority over everything in the earth, as God did.<sup>297</sup>

At first, this statement of reflection seems to align Dollar's view of the image of God in man with a more traditional or mainstream evangelical and orthodox view. However, he goes on to expand on his interpretation by contextualising this reflection of God in terms of power, authority and equality:

It is important to understand that you are not second-class. You are an exact duplicate of the image of God. This does not mean that you are God. It means that you are made in God's image and His likeness, with the ability to create with words as God did.<sup>298</sup>

A rudimentary and overly simplistic logical argument is proposed by Dollar et al., in which they seek to support their particular interpretation of man being created in the image of God. Dollar furthermore writes:<sup>299</sup>

Let's go even further. Genesis 1 provides an interesting aspect of the law of creation. And God said, let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after his kind, and every thing that creepeth upon earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:24-25). It was no different when God created man. He subjected Himself to His own Law. Genesis 1:26 says, And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... We are created

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<sup>297</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 88.

<sup>298</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 107.

<sup>299</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 105.

after God's kind, which tells us that we are not mere human beings. Instead, we are super-human beings, possessing supernatural, creative power.

Paulk applies this logic of reproduction to further state the case that man is of the same kind as God, the so called 'godkind':

Adam and Eve were placed in the world as the seed and expression of God. Just as dogs have puppies and cats have kittens, so God has little gods; ... Until we comprehend that we are little gods, we cannot manifest the kingdom of God.<sup>300</sup>

Charles Capps has this to say: 'God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. The word likeness in the original Hebrew means an exact duplication in kind ... Adam was an exact duplication of God's kind.'<sup>301</sup> He is supported by Copeland, who expands upon this by stating that, 'You see Adam was walking as a God, Adam walked in God's class, Adam did things in the class of gods,'<sup>302</sup> and 'Adam walked into God's class. Adam did things in the class of gods ... All right, are we gods? We are a class of gods.'<sup>303</sup>

Dollar ties this theological view of 'god-type' or 'god-class' to divine authority by relying on Genesis 1:26: in this regard he states: 'We are supernaturally created and are God-natured in spirit, soul and body. And verse 26 let's us know that our likeness to the Father comes with dominion over His creation.'<sup>304</sup> In support of this view on man, possessing divine authority and being able to create through confession, Dollar states that:

The Chumash translates Genesis 2:7 this way: God breathed into the nostrils of man, and man became another speaking spirit. This is an

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<sup>300</sup> E. Paulk, *Satan Unmasked* (Atlanta, Georgia: K-Dimension Publishers, 1984), 97.

<sup>301</sup> Charles Capps, *Authority in Three Worlds: Learn to use the Authority God has Given You for Victory in Every Area of Your Life* (Tulsa Oklahoma: Harrison House Publishers, 1980), 15-16.

<sup>302</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 'Following the Faith of Abraham I', Tape #01-3001, Side 1' (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989).

<sup>303</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 'Praise the Lord Program broadcast', *Trinity Broadcast Network* (2 May 1986).

<sup>304</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 105-106

accurate translation of the verse because God said ... Let us make man in our image ... (Gen 1:26). God is a Spirit. So if man is made in His image, then man is a spirit. God is a speaking Spirit. Therefore, if we are made like Him, we have to speak as well.<sup>305</sup>

Dollar's reference to the translation and version of the *Chumash* quoted is incomplete and can, therefore, not be verified. However, the Jewish Publication Society has a Torah translation that is commonly used and accepted as an accurate English translation of the original. In this text Genesis 2:7 is translated as follows: 'the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.'<sup>306</sup> The 1866 Old Testament Masoretic text translates Genesis 2:7 as 'And Jehovah God formed the man out of dust from the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.'<sup>307</sup> According to Hoffman, the term, *nephesh*, refers to the reality of life.<sup>308</sup> To infer the meaning of man being a spirit, the translation of the original text would have to replace, *nephesh* with *rûach*. Richard Friedman, Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, favours translating *nephesh* as a living being in his work entitled *The Bible with Sources Revealed*. He derives at this favoured translation by demonstrating that the combined J and E texts support such a translation.<sup>309</sup>

This is not an argument against the interchangeable use of the concepts of spirit and soul as is evident throughout the Bible,<sup>310</sup> nor is it a statement for or against the Trichotomy argument. It is, however, intended to demonstrate that the 'god-type' or 'god-class' argument of the Word of Faith movement lacks a sound biblical foundation. An attempt by the movement to employ rudimentary logic to describe

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<sup>305</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 107.

<sup>306</sup> Jewish Publication Society of America. (1967/1962). *The Torah: the five books of Moses*. 2d ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America. (1992), 5.

<sup>307</sup> J. Green, ed., *The Interlinear Bible*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 2.

<sup>308</sup> J. Hoffman, *And God Said: How Translations Conceal the Bible's Original Meaning* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

<sup>309</sup> Friedman, R (Richard). 2003. *The Bible with Sources Revealed*. Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, page 3-4.

<sup>310</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 472-477.

human heritage is taken even further by Dollar, who attempts to define man as a spirit. In doing this, Dollar endeavours to draw an even greater similarity between God and man by implying that man is a spirit just as God is a spirit.

Miles Munroe completes the argument with the statement that 'you are in God's class because you are spirit.'<sup>311</sup> This elevation of man to a god-kind, or a divine spirit, evolves Word of Faith theology to the point that it claims equality with God. Munroe extends his view on the spiritual nature of man to that of divine similarity which frequently leads to an interpretation of divine equality within Word of Faith theology.<sup>312</sup> Geisler<sup>313</sup> notes that 'Human beings are reducible neither to pure matter nor to pure spirit,' this statement is important, as it draws a clear differentiation between man, a created being, that possess both spirit and body and God, the creator of mankind, that is spirit. He furthermore notes that 'humans are morally responsible to the Moral Lawgiver – God, the creator.'<sup>314</sup> In Geisler's view the spirit in man is not a sign of equality with God; it is, however, what makes man responsible before God. The similarity signified by the spirit of man to that of God as spirit is, therefore, not a similarity based upon equality, but rather a similarity centred in moral responsibility.

Dollar demonstrates the Word of Faith theological interpretation which views man in terms of equality when he states:<sup>315</sup>

It is important to understand that you are not second-class. You are an exact duplicate of the image of God. This does not mean that you are God. It means that you are made in God's image and His likeness, with the ability to create with words as God did.

At first this would seem to imply that there is a clear distinction between God and man, a distinction in which man occupies his rightful place as created being living to fulfil his purpose to worship God. However, Dollar expands on this by stating that

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<sup>311</sup> Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 71.

<sup>312</sup> Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 71.

<sup>313</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume*, 740.

<sup>314</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume*.

<sup>315</sup> Dollar, C. 2006. *Not Guilty*, page 107.

‘Adam had authority. He was god of this physical realm just as God was God of the spiritual realm. Adam was god of this planet and all the handiwork of God. The book of James talks about this as well. [With the tongue] bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude (or likeness) of God. James 3:9.’<sup>316</sup> He teaches that ‘If we are sons and daughters of God, and Jesus is the Son of God, then that makes us equal to and joint-heirs with Jesus. (Rom 8:16-17). Remember, adoption makes us family with equal rights. It makes us, in a sense equal to Jesus, who is God.’<sup>317</sup>

Dollar attempts to restore this theological view to a point of normality. However, its implications permeate many of the other doctrines of the movement. Its exclusion would jeopardise the foundation upon which many of the movement’s doctrines are based. Dollar points out in his attempt to restore normality that ‘It’s understood that you or I are not God. There is only one God. However, as His children, we are like Him. He is the big G, and we’re the little g. In Him we have been given the authority to rule and reign in this earth just as Jesus did. We have the mind of Christ. Even Jesus said that we would do the works He did and greater works as well. (John 14:12.).’<sup>318</sup>

This theological view is based on the proposition that ‘Man was created for the purpose of rulership and leadership’ and that God’s original plan was to create man as sons not as subjects or servants. Man was created to dominate the earth and to rule it as kings.’<sup>319</sup>

It is clear that the movement’s understanding of being created in the image of God is contextualised within the idea that man received divine power and authority. The power and authority described by the movement provides impetus to its Health and Prosperity as well as Confession theology.

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<sup>316</sup> Dollar, C. 2006. Not Guilty, page 111.

<sup>317</sup> Dollar, C. 2006. Not Guilty, page 113.

<sup>318</sup> Dollar, C. 2006. Not Guilty, page 117.

<sup>319</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 25, 38-40, 45, 52-54.

The movement constructs its theology of rulership on the basis that 'All of God's handiwork was now placed in the authority of the god of the earth – Adam.'<sup>320</sup> This authority is extended by Dollar to include participating in creation. Discussing Genesis 2:19-20, Dollar notes: 'Notice again, God formed the physical bodies of the animals out of the ground just as He had Adam, but nowhere do we find God breathing life into them. They did not have life until Adam spoke words of life over them. God was training a god in the earth. He had to teach him how to do what He does. This god would have authority over the animals. The reason he would have authority over the animals is that they would not live until he gave them life, just as God had given Adam life.'<sup>321</sup> This is the ultimate divine authority, the power to create or breathe life itself.

Miles Munroe adds another dimension to what it means to be created in the image of God; this view is contextualised within his theology on the Kingdom of God.<sup>322</sup> For Munroe 'the purpose of the invisible God would be served by a visible creation that was the result of His creative genius. His plan would be carried out by creating from His own Spirit being a family of offspring who would be just like Him, created in His exact image. As His representatives they would release, establish, and implement His invisible Kingdom in the visible, natural world.'<sup>323</sup>

The temptation in the Garden of Eden and the fall of man as a result of disobeying God (Genesis 3:1-7) is interpreted by the Word of Faith movement as an act that

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<sup>320</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 109.

<sup>321</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 110.

<sup>322</sup> Munroe defines his theology on the Kingdom of God in terms of dominion theology. It is, therefore, primarily constructed as a theology that views the Kingdom of God in terms of a physical ownership and rulership, exercised by man upon the earth (Munroe 2004). In contrast Deist and Du Plessis (1987:147), and others, view the Kingdom of God as God's sovereignty being established upon the earth and all of creation being brought in under the will of God. Munroe's theological view places man at the centre of the Kingdom of God and has a distinct Anthropocentric focus, whereas, the theological view of Deist and Du Plessis places God at the centre of the Kingdom of God. In this view man is a subject that submits to the will of God, whereas, in Munroe's view man is the ruler and god exercising unrestrained authority over creation.

<sup>323</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 26.

resulted 'in man transferring his authority to Satan'.<sup>324</sup> Dollar agrees with Munroe and describes it as follows:

When Adam sinned, he committed high treason; treason is betrayal in its highest form. God entrusted Adam with full authority as His reflection on this planet, as long as Adam was obedient to the limitations God had established ... Because Adam did not receive who he was, he accepted Eve's offer to eat of the forbidden fruit. Adam had complete authority over everything in the earth, yet he allowed Eve to convince him to do something he knew was wrong. When Adam ate the fruit, he committed treachery. He took advantage of his authority and betrayed the trust God had placed in him.<sup>325</sup>

Dollar defines how he understands the authority possessed by man in the following statement:

The authority God had given Adam went all the way up to heaven, where God was seated. Adam, through disobedience, turned it over to God's enemy ... Adam turned all his authority and dominion over to Satan. Satan did not steal it; it was given to him. It was perfectly legal because it was Adam's to give ... as a result, Satan is known as the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4) ... This is why God had to develop a plan to redeem what was lost. But there was a problem: Satan now had the authority and dominion once given to Adam. Therefore God was limited in how He could do things in the earth.<sup>326</sup>

This interpretation of the Fall builds upon the concept of man as a god with authority received from God. It implies that it is the authority received from God that made man a god. It is also through the transfer of this authority that Satan was empowered to become the god of this earth. It would, therefore, imply that the Word of Faith theology primarily understands and defines God based upon authority and power. It

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<sup>324</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 56.

<sup>325</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 89.

<sup>326</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 80-89.

appears as if God or god implies position secured through power and authority rather than that of a true divine being. Munroe provides support for this conclusion on how Word of Faith theology views the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden when he states that it was 'the forfeit of authority' that places man under a false or 'unauthentic' authority which ultimately leads to 'self-destruction' which is regarded by him as spiritual death.<sup>327</sup> According to him, the real consequence of the fall is that man 'lost his true home'.<sup>328</sup> The fall of man is therefore contextualised purely within the realm of the ownership of position, power and authority and not in terms of spiritual death which is the result of eternal separation from the presence of God.

This leads Munroe to express his theology of man by defining the purpose of man as follows: to express God's image by bearing the fruits of the spirit as defined in 1 Corinthians 14:4-8, to enjoy fellowship with God, to dominate the earth, to bear fruit as defined in Galatians 5:22-25 and to reproduce.<sup>329</sup>

Word of Faith theology proposes a mechanism through which God intended to correct this loss of ownership of position, power and authority. It centres on restoring man to his former position as god of this earth by creating a legitimate entry point through a covenant between God and man. On this point, Dollar states that 'the righteousness Abraham received was provided to him by the covenant God established with him. Out of that covenant, righteousness was born. Genesis 15 foreshadows our connection with the righteousness we are able to receive through Jesus.'<sup>330</sup> Dollar claims that this establishment of righteousness through the covenant that was fulfilled by Christ holds the following benefits for man:

Righteousness is the ability to stand before God without the sense of guilt or inferiority. It is the ability to stand before God and talk to Him as a child to a Father, expecting His response and knowing that we have

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<sup>327</sup> Munroe, *The Purpose and Power of Authority*, 68-69.

<sup>328</sup> Munroe, *The Purpose and Power of Authority*, 69.

<sup>329</sup> Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 108-113.

<sup>330</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 92.



a right to receive what we ask because of what He has declared over us.<sup>331</sup>

It is, therefore, clear that the Word of Faith theology on the death and resurrection of Christ has two fundamentally important results. Firstly, it restored man to his original state of authority. Secondly, it bestowed upon man certain undeniable rights before God. To further enforce this theological view Dollar makes these two claims:

You need to realize that you have been created in His image; that you are an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ Jesus; and that you are a son of God.<sup>332</sup>

Righteousness means right standing with God. We have heard it before, but now it makes sense. You are right with God. You stand on a solid footing with Him. You have authority, and a right to stand before God and talk to Him just as you would talk to your earthly father. You can expect answers from Him because you are right with Him. Righteousness is the act of being able to go before God and stand in His presence without any sense of guilt, shame, or inferiority.<sup>333</sup>

When you are the righteousness of God, it not only means that you have rights before God because of your right standing with Him; it also means you can now stand before God without any sense of guilt, condemnation, or inferiority. You can stand before God as if sin never existed.<sup>334</sup>

This theology of righteousness and equality is further developed around the adoption principles of the New Testament. Dollar believes that 'To become a son of God, one must be adopted into His family... Adoption is a legal process that makes someone else's child part of your family and equal with your natural children in rights and privileges. In the natural, there is an equality that comes through adoption. ... We

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<sup>331</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

<sup>332</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 75-76.

<sup>333</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28.

<sup>334</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 103-104.

became sons and daughters of God when we were adopted into the family of God the day we became born again.<sup>335</sup>

The day you were born again and put on Christ, you became just like Him. Romans 8:16-17 says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs.” When you put on righteousness, you put on sonship. Do you really believe you are a son of God? You are if you have made Jesus your Lord and Saviour. That makes you an heir. Sons become heirs. Since you are an heir, you have an inheritance. You are an adopted son and therefore equal with Jesus.<sup>336</sup>

Relying on Galatians 4:7, Dollar states that

the Scripture says that you are no longer servants. Moses was a servant. Elijah was a servant. Read the Old Testament, and you will see what God did for His servants. If He did all that for His servants, just imagine what He is willing to do for His sons ... You might be tempted to think, I am just a Christian. Jesus is the Son. No, Jesus was the firstborn; and if there were not going to be a second-born or third-born, Jesus would not be referred to as the firstborn of many brethren (Rom. 8:29.) Jesus was the firstborn of many brethren, of which I am one. So are you if you are born again.<sup>337</sup>

Dollar uses Philippians 2:5-6 in support of the claim that man is divine; he states that ‘This Scripture says that even though Jesus had taken on the form of a man, He did not consider it an act of robbery to think of Himself as equal with God. He advises us to have the same mindset.’ ‘We have discovered that we have equality with God.’<sup>338</sup>

This theological view on human deification is not unique to Dollar, although he may have articulated it more fully than most within the movement. Kenneth Hagin states:

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<sup>335</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 113.

<sup>336</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 123-124.

<sup>337</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 129-130.

<sup>338</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 131, 159.

'It's an absolute Bible fact. We have the same standing with God that Christ had when He was here on earth.'<sup>339</sup>

The implication of being restored to the same position of power and authority as Adam, or as articulated by Dollar, as gods, is that there is a need for a kingdom to rule and reign over. Dollar states that:

The Scripture says that you are a king. Every king has a kingdom. God cannot make you king and not give you a kingdom. The Bible says, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). So the kingdom is wherever the king is. God has made you a king. Not only that, He has also made you a priest. The job of a priest is to mediate between God and man.<sup>340</sup>

This restoration of the ownership of authority and power is important for the movement as it contextualises its foundational theology as one of dominion over creation. This ultimate power and authority forms the basis of the movement's health and prosperity theology, and without it the movement will find it difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate its claims of confession, faith and promise fulfilment.

Hagin adds yet another dimension to the movement's dominion theology by interpreting 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 as follows: 'the Church is called Christ! The Church has not yet realized that we are Christ.'<sup>341</sup>

The focus of this dominion theology is summarised by Dollar in his statement that:

You cannot convince me that the economy or my circumstances are going to have a negative impact on me. My attitude is that I am the righteousness of God. The Bible says that I have ruling power in this earth. The devil does not rule in this earth. The righteousness of God rules in the earth and I am the righteousness of God. I rule over

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<sup>339</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *The Name of Jesus* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 1983), 109.

<sup>340</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 137.

<sup>341</sup> Hagin, *The Name of Jesus*, 105.

cancer. I rule over my enemies. Through the Word, I have been given dominion over the earth.<sup>342</sup>

It is evident from the preceding statements that the Word of Faith interpretation of righteousness is a central core around which its dominion theology is developed. Dollar asserts that 'The blood of Jesus restored us to righteousness',<sup>343</sup> and that such restoration, in which man is 'Being made the righteousness of God also means you have equality with God.'<sup>344</sup> This 'righteousness is activated by faith. When we operate in faith, we no longer walk by sight, or by our feelings. (2 Cor 5:7). We lose our sin consciousness and refuse to stand before God in inferiority, shame and fear.'<sup>345</sup> Ultimately the restoration of man's righteousness bestows certain privileges and rights upon man as the restored god of this earth for the purpose of exercising dominion over all of creation. Dollar states that: 'I now realize that my life should prove that I am righteous. Without proof, it is all a religious mask.'<sup>346</sup>

### **3.3.2 Covenant Theology**

In interpreting Genesis 3:15-16, Munroe views the work of Christ as breaking 'the power of the adversary over mankind and regaining the authority and dominion Adam once held, and through a process of conflict, restoring the Kingdom back to mankind.'<sup>347</sup> Genesis 3:15-16 is considered as the first covenant between God and man, the Adamic Covenant, that promised full restoration of power, authority, ownership and position for man. However, the Word of Faith theology teaches that at the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden, man transferred all rights and authority for the earth over to Satan. Dollar states it as follows:

The authority God had given Adam went all the way up to heaven, where God was seated. Adam, through disobedience, turned it over to God's enemy ... Adam turned all his authority and dominion over to

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<sup>342</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 27.

<sup>343</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 165.

<sup>344</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>345</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 192.

<sup>346</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 196.

<sup>347</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, )35.

Satan. Satan did not steal it; it was given to him. It was perfectly legal because it was Adam's to give ... as a result, Satan is known as the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4). ... This is why God had to develop a plan to redeem what was lost. But there was a problem: Satan now had the authority and dominion once given to Adam. Therefore God was limited in how He could do things in the earth.<sup>348</sup>

God had to find a way of regaining a legal entry into the earth to be able to fulfil the Adamic Covenant through Christ. The way in which God gained this legal access was through entering into a covenant with Abraham as described in Genesis 15. To fully comprehend the Abrahamic Covenant as understood by the Word of Faith movement, it is important to follow the rationality that underpins the development of their theology on this matter. Firstly, Dollar states that:

The centrepiece of everything God has provided in the Bible is the righteousness of God. Everything hinges on receiving righteousness by faith. If righteousness is not received, we cannot receive healing or prosperity. In fact, you must come to a real understanding of righteousness by faith before anything in God's kingdom will work for you.<sup>349</sup>

Righteousness, therefore, is a core aspect of Word of Faith restoration theology; in this regard the second aspect of the rationale that drives their theology is found in the faith of Abraham that was counted to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). It is for this reason that God entered into a covenant with Abraham, and through Abraham, He was able to secure legal access to the earth which was eventually fulfilled through the birth of Christ.<sup>350</sup> This covenant with Abraham, however, is the basis for the movement's health and prosperity theology.<sup>351</sup> It is important to note that as the Abrahamic covenant restored the promises of God for man, it has done so by restoring righteousness through faith in God, but righteousness in terms of the

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<sup>348</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90-91.

<sup>349</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 49.

<sup>350</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 95-96.

<sup>351</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 57-58.

Word of Faith movement relates back to the image of God in man. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the concept of righteousness and the image of God are interpreted by the Word of Faith movement to mean that man has equality with God.<sup>352</sup> Dollar states that: 'The righteousness Abraham received was provided to him by the covenant God established with him. Out of that covenant, righteousness was born. Genesis 15 foreshadows our connection with the righteousness we are able to receive through Jesus.'<sup>353</sup> It is clear from this statement that the promise of redemption in Genesis 3, the Adamic covenant, is linked to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15, which in turn finds its fulfilment in the life of Christ on the earth. What this means in terms of Word of Faith theology is that the Adamic covenant translates its fulfilment through Christ to an act of restoration of power, position and authority.<sup>354</sup> The Abrahamic covenant translates its fulfilment through Christ to the activation of the primary promise of health and prosperity to restored man.<sup>355</sup> Dollar states that:

When whatever you desire seems as if it will never show up, go and look at the title deed to remind yourself that somewhere, everything you could possibly desire from God is yours. You do not have to accept no for an answer once you find the title deed. Operate in this world as the righteousness of God. You have the right to rule and reign. Your title deed is what puts pressure on the unseen to deliver what you hope for, as you wait in faith.<sup>356</sup>

Gloria Copeland writes that it is the covenant Abraham had with God that 'would bring him success no matter where he lived.'<sup>357</sup> She instructs believers to claim the same promises God made to Abraham on the basis that we are the seed of

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<sup>352</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>353</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 92.

<sup>354</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 59, 103-104; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35, 139; Prince, *The Promise of Provision*, 53.

<sup>355</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 56-69.

<sup>356</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 57.

<sup>357</sup> Gloria Copeland, 'Receive Your Inheritance' (retrieved 21 April 2012, <http://www.kcm.org/real-help/article/receive-your-inheritance>).

Abraham. Kenneth Copeland summarises the principle of living in the covenant in the following quote:

Instead of saying, I'm just an old sinner saved by grace, we're starting to say, I'm the blessed! The same blessing that was on Adam and given to Abraham is mine! THE BLESSING is flowing through my body and everywhere I go, I am a blessing to people! He told Abraham, I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing ... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3). ... Do you realize what that means? It means those of us who have believed on Him have been restored to the spiritual position Adam and Eve occupied in the Garden of Eden. Through Jesus, we have received the same blessing and divine commission they did. We've been called to perpetuate God's love in the earth, to fill it up with His compassion, to be a blessing everywhere we go, to everyone we meet! That's God's plan for every New Testament believer. God said it to Adam and Eve. He said it to Abraham. He said it to Jesus. And now He has said it to us. You are called to be a blessing! So wives, bless your husbands. Husbands, bless your wives. Love one another as I have loved you. Do good to all men. Bless, bless, bless!<sup>358</sup>

Morris makes the following comment in dealing with the covenant theology of the Word of Faith movement:<sup>359</sup>

The significance of the Abrahamic covenant concerning particular aspects of word of faith theology cannot be overemphasized. Word of

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<sup>358</sup> Kenneth Copeland, 2012, 'Compassion Has a Plan', retrieved 29 January 2012, <http://www.kcm.org/real-help/article/compassion-has-plan>; K. Copeland, 2012, 'Why God Hates Sin', retrieved 29 January 2012 <http://www.kcm.org/real-help/article/why-god-hates-sin>).

<sup>359</sup> Morris, R. 2012. A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Specific Tenets of Word of Faith Theology: Pastoral Implication for the Church of God. South African Theological Seminary. Online at: <http://www.satsonline.org/userfiles/Russell%20Morris,%20PhD%20Dissertation.pdf> (Accessed 15 February 2012), page 98-99.

faith proponents often reference this covenant (Copeland G,<sup>360</sup> Copeland K<sup>361</sup>; Pousson,<sup>362</sup>; *et al.*) as the biblical foundation for numerous theological assertions. Here, the various facets of God's covenant with Abraham hold equivalent and corresponding application for the contemporary Christian. According to word of faith theology, one of the primary purposes of this covenant is to bless Abraham with material possessions. ... Copeland<sup>363</sup>; (cf. Hagin 1963:1) argues that since God established the covenant, Christians too are entitled to its provisions. To support such a claim, Copeland appeals to Galatians 3:14, 'the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ'. Here, he concludes, Christians also have the promises defined within the covenant. The Galatians 3:13–14 passage is interpreted as meaning that all Christians are redeemed from the curses listed in Deuteronomy 28:15–68. Copeland<sup>364</sup> posits that, 'all sickness and all disease, even those not mentioned there, come under the curse; therefore, we are redeemed from all sickness and disease'.

For the Word of Faith movement there exists a clear relationship between the covenant promise made to Abraham and the born-again believer. It is interpreted that the redemptive work of Christ that is obtained through faith, restores man to a position of authority and in this act reactivates the covenant promise made to Abraham.

Word of Faith dominion and covenant theology shares a single argument construct. In its dominion theology the movement extends the meaning of righteousness to that

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<sup>360</sup> Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications. 1978), 4-6.

<sup>361</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications. 1974), 51.

<sup>362</sup> Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame: Charismatic Churches and Missions Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1992), 158.

<sup>363</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 50-51.

<sup>364</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1987), 28.



of equality with God,<sup>365</sup> which in turn is interpreted to mean that the power and authority of God is available to men, who are now restored to their former position as gods of this earth.<sup>366</sup> Their covenant theology provides a restoration catalyst for this view of righteousness by contextualising the promise God made to Abraham in terms of the restoration of man.<sup>367</sup>

### 3.3.3 Faith Theology

Word of Faith theology, as with most evangelical theology, is primarily constructed beyond a purely Christocentric perspective. For the Word of Faith adherent, Hebrews 11:1 is interpreted within the context of material and other physical gains, and is not limited to Christ as the ultimate fulfilment of the will of God. Creflo Dollar states that:

Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. Hebrews 11:1 AMP. Faith is the assurance of things you hope for. It does not matter what it is you hope for – a car, a house, a happy marriage, a ministry, a loved one to be saved – you have to have faith before you will see anything come to pass. Your faith is the proof, or the evidence, of what you cannot yet see. For example, the Bible says, All things were made by him [God] (John 1:3). Faith is the substance of those things that have already been made by God. Several verses in Genesis 1 say the same thing: And God said ... He spoke everything he created into existence. What was the result of all that God said? When he said it, He saw it. And God saw everything

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<sup>365</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 75-76, 92.

<sup>366</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90-91, 109.

<sup>367</sup> Word of Faith covenant theology lacks a true Christocentric foundation, and even a purely theocentric interpretation is lacking. The primary aspects of both of these theologies centre on the material benefits for man opposed to the spiritual reconciliation between God and man. It is, therefore, anthropocentric to the point of diminishing the true spiritual aspect of the Christian faith.

that he had made ... (Gen 1:31). The words God spoke created everything He said.<sup>368</sup>

He continues to expand on the movement's theology by shifting faith from an obedience view, to the command of the promises of God view. For him faith is a concept of promise, it is through faith that man is able to create a desired outcome. It, therefore, shifts faith from a divine and human interaction perspective to that of an instrument deployed for the execution of the human will. He states, furthermore, that:

We are to have faith that is in our heart coming out of our mouth continually. Mark 11:22-23 NKJV says, So Jesus answered and said to them, Have faith in God. For assuredly, I will say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Faith in your heart is activated by what you say. Your words give faith power to bring what you believe from the spiritual realm into the natural realm – your faith to see something grow bigger and bigger in your heart until that faith comes out of your mouth and then your words make it reality in your life. Romans 10:8 NKJV says, The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach. Faith has to be in your heart and your mouth to see results in your life.<sup>369</sup>

Word of Faith understanding of the term, *hypostasis*, used in Hebrews 11:1 is contextualised within a very narrow definition in which it develops a contract type quality. Their interpretation of verse 1 reads that faith is the title deed with which man can call his desires into existence. According to Dollar:

When whatever you desire seems as if it will never show up, go and look at the title deed to remind yourself that somewhere, everything you could possibly desire from God is yours. You do not have to accept no for an answer once you find the title deed. Operate in this world as

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<sup>368</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 52-53.

<sup>369</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 54-55.

the righteousness of God. You have the right to rule and reign. Your title deed is what puts pressure on the unseen to deliver what you hope for, as you wait in faith.<sup>370</sup>

Faith theology, within Word of Faith teaching, centres on a recurring theme of the restoration of dominion and authority, and righteousness, which represents equality with God. In the movement's theology, faith becomes a force that can be applied to secure positive results for the believer.<sup>371</sup> It is believed that

if you see a promise in God's Word, then you know by faith it is yours. Knowing that you are the righteousness of God gives you the right to confess that you do not have to be sick and die. By faith, you are healed (1 Peter 2:24). You do not have to be broke. By faith, wealth and riches are in your house. (Ps 112:3). You do not have to be on the bottom of the economic ladder. By faith, you are prosperous in the name of Jesus (Ps 35:27). You do not have to be in debt all your life and then pass it on to your children. By faith, you are delivered out of debt and your needs are met (Deut 15:2). You do not have to live with a family of sinners on their way to hell, because by faith, your whole household shall be saved (Acts 16:31). By faith, this will be the best year of your entire life (Isa 58:14).<sup>372</sup>

This principle of faith is extended, by the movement, to define faith as the catalyst that ensures righteousness and ultimately equality with God. Here faith is a contractual condition whereby man holds on to the title deed, which guarantees righteousness. It is stated that 'Righteousness is activated by faith. When we operate in faith, we no longer walk by sight, or by our feelings. (2 Cor.5:7). We lose our sin consciousness and refuse to stand before God in inferiority, shame and fear'.<sup>373</sup> The

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<sup>370</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 57.

<sup>371</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith* (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 2001).  
Joel Osteen, 'Speaking Faith Filled Words' (Tape # 223. Daystar Television, 2 May 2004).

<sup>372</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 62-63.

<sup>373</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 192.

implication of a faith theology based upon such an interpretation divorces faith from obedience and submission.

Dollar holds a view of Scripture that illustrates the title deed construct of his faith theology. In terms of Hebrews 11:1, the assurance or confidence that ultimately defines the reality is the promises contained within the Word of God. By locating these promises in Scripture, the reader will grow in confidence, and will, accordingly call these promises into existence. Dollar expands on his interpretation of Hebrews 10:35 by stating that

The writer of Hebrews tells us not to cast our confidence away, not to get rid of it. How does a man cast away his confidence? By casting away the Word of God. If you don't have the Word of God on a certain subject, you won't have confidence in that particular subject. For instance, if you don't have the Word of God on the subject of sowing and reaping, you won't have confidence in sowing; therefore, you won't experience reaping. If you don't have the Word of God on divine health, you won't experience that either.<sup>374</sup>

According to Dollar, 'Confidence is the force that launches your faith.'<sup>375</sup> The catalyst for this confidence is found within the Word of God which leads to the interpretation of Romans 10:17 that 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' This scripture is used together with Psalm 45:1 and Proverbs 3:1, 3 to stress the importance of confession as a catalyst for faith fulfilment.<sup>376</sup>

To stress the similarity between man and God, Munroe, in discussing Genesis 1:26 states that 'The Hebrew word translated into the English word likeness means to operate like, not to look like. God's original design for man requires that we function like God ... How does God operate? God operates by faith'.<sup>377</sup> By implication God is

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<sup>374</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 93

<sup>375</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8.

<sup>376</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 9, 105.

<sup>377</sup> Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 72.

required to operate in faith, to call into existence through confession,<sup>378</sup> and to find confidence in what He confesses.<sup>379</sup>

In terms of the Word of Faith movement's theology on monetary giving, Morris and Lioy conclude that most of the scriptures used in support of its theology 'are taken out of context and interpreted via a faulty hermeneutic'.<sup>380</sup> I agree with their observation on this point, and suggest that the use of such a faulty hermeneutic is more widespread across the movement's theology.

The subtlety is well illustrated with reference to the movement's interpretation that 'the Just shall live by faith' (NKJV), or 'the righteous will live by faith' (NIV) (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Dollar interprets Romans 1:17 and states that: 'your whole life is based on faith when you receive the righteousness of God. You live by faith; therefore, if sickness shows up, you stay in faith. If bills arrive, you stay in faith. If a bad report shows up, you stay in faith. When something adverse happens, that is the perfect time for you to open your mouth, declare your righteousness, and exercise your faith'.<sup>381</sup> According to Word of Faith terminology, the righteous is an individual with a right standing with God,<sup>382</sup> who has been restored to a position of dominion, power, authority and equality with God.<sup>383</sup> Faith is the ability to identify, claim and declare a specific outcome on that basis that it belongs to the righteous.<sup>384</sup> The movement's theology therefore leads to an

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<sup>378</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53.

<sup>379</sup> In such a view God is not almighty; He is limited in his actions to the law or force of faith. There is a misalignment between a traditional evangelical view of faith and that proposed by Word of Faith theology. The construct of faith, from a largely evangelical perspective, does not limit faith to a force to be used in the materialisation of individual desires, nor does it subject God to it. Word of Faith theology views it primarily as a means to an end. Within the movement's theology, it is a force used to make man righteous, and a law that directs scriptural promise to fulfilment. A contextual reading of the passages presented in support of the movement's theology delivers a different interpretation.

<sup>380</sup> Russell Morris and Daniel T. Lioy, *A Historical and Theological Framework for Understanding Word of Faith Theology* (South African Theological Seminary, 2014): 105.

<sup>381</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 51.

<sup>382</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 56.

<sup>383</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>384</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

interpretation of Romans 1:17 that can loosely be translated as: the believer to whom dominion, power and authority has been restored shall live by identifying, claiming and declaring specific positive outcomes.<sup>385</sup> Such a theological construct is directed toward man and banishes God to the fringes of its theology.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> In relation to Habakkuk 2:4, the original reference, Ira M. Price ('The Just Shall Live by Faith: Habakkuk 2:4', *The Biblical World* 35 [1910, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/3141826>]) provides an image of Luther's interpretation as 'the one who is just, having been so made by God himself, shall live, endure, through his belief and faith in God'. He further states that 'Belief and faith in the church, in popes and decrees, is ineffectual, does not make for endurance, for salvation, for eternal life' (Ibid., 44). From this image, it is clear that Luther interpreted the reference of faith to an expression of faith in God: it is not a force or catalyst through which man is capable of bringing about the materialistic desires of his heart. Price continues to provide an analysis that contextualises verse 4 as follows: The 'righteous' man is then the true, sincere one whose words and works are in full harmony with the laws of right and so of God. 'Shall live by his faithfulness': Paul adopted the Greek and other versions, and rendered the last word 'faith', and confined it apparently to the act of believing unto salvation as seen in Romans (1:16, 17). The Hebrew term used is much larger than faith, and carries in itself the idea of firmness, steadfastness, faithfulness. It is used of the holding-up of Moses' hands by Aaron and Hur (Exod 17:12): 'his hands were steadiness'; of the stability of the times (Isa. 33:6); of the trustworthiness of one in office (II Kings 22 :7); of an office as a trust (I Chron 9: 22, 26); in connection with righteousness (Prov 12:17); and of right conduct in general. The basis of its meaning is the verb to 'believe', and in its many connections to believe in God. The root-idea of the noun is belief in, and faithfulness exercised toward, God in true whole-hearted obedience (Price, 45).

For Price, therefore, the relationship between Habakkuk and Romans is found in man's obedience to God that ultimately leads to salvation. Garlington holds a similar view that the relationship between Habakkuk and Romans is based in salvation through faith in God (Don Garlington, 'A "New Perspective" Reading of Central Texts in Romans 1-4' [2006], 13, retrieved 13 September 2012, <http://www.thepaulpage.com/Rom1-4.pdf>). He notes that 'Hab 2:4 is an outstanding instance of God's intervention to save his people' (Ibid. 16). As with Price, Garlington, does not interpret faith as a catalyst for man to act and direct his own destiny, but rather, as an act of trust in God who extends His hand of salvation to rescue man.

<sup>386</sup> It is in Galatians 3:11 that the true meaning of the verse is most clearly contextualised. Here Paul once again deals with the term 'the righteous will live by faith'. He contrasts this statement against the inability of the law to justify man before God. In doing so Paul clearly demonstrates that his understanding of faith in both Romans and Galatians is done so, in relation to justification through Christ and not the law. There is no context to suggest an interpretation of faith beyond justification through Christ in either of the two verses. Romans 1:17, within the context of verse 16, places Paul's

The interlinking of the Word of Faith movement's dominion, covenant, and faith theology rests upon its view of righteousness that is defined in terms of the restoration of man. As a restored being, man has certain rights, which he now exercise by expressing the desired outcome while having the confidence or title deed as a type of enforceable contract. This reduces faith from a concept of obedience to the will of God to that of an enforceable contract that is able to direct the will of God.<sup>387</sup>

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faith theology firmly within the framework of salvation. Likewise when Galatians 3:11 is viewed within the larger context of Chapter 3 the interaction between faith and the law is paramount. Paul clearly contextualises faith in terms of obedience to God's will as it finds its climax in the redemptive work of Christ. It is in Hebrews 10:38 and 39 that the author once again demonstrates that his theology of faith is centred in salvation: 'but my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

<sup>387</sup> In Word of Faith theology, it is man who designs his own path based upon his own interpretation of what is best. Such an egocentric approach leaves little room for a God that desires man to stand in a relationship with Him through obedience willing to allow the will of God to radiate through his life.

In seeking a Scriptural definition for faith, Professor Daniel Treier sees a certain tension between a cognitive understanding of faith that is derived through theological exegesis on the one hand, and an interpretation that primarily excludes cognition on the other (Daniel J. Treier, 'Faith' *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* [ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005], 226). In his discussion he highlights that the 'Hebrew noun, *'emunah*, is primarily used to designate truth, honesty, or loyalty, especially characteristic of God. The hiphil form of the verb *'mn* is used for the appropriate response to God's fidelity, in faithful trust and obedience'. Treier's principal understanding of faith, therefore, is contained within the expression of God's character and the response of man's obedience and submission to God. Wayne Grudem expands on this view by pointing out that 'faith is the one attitude of heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves' (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 730).

Such an understanding of faith is clearly in agreement with Abraham's response to God's will in Genesis 12:1-4. In this passage Abraham responds to God's will (verse 4), which contained both instruction (verse 1) and promise (verse 2-3). These three elements, (1) instruction, (2) promise, and (3) obedience are a recurring theme throughout both the Old and New Testament. It is in the instruction and promise that the character of God as being true and loyal to His word finds expression. However, faith only finds purpose when man becomes obedient to the instruction and promise of God. Paul in Hebrews 11 lists a number of men and women throughout history and highlights how God's

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will and promise was fulfilled in each of their lives. The discussion of Hebrews 11 finds its context in Chapter 12:1-2: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The author of Hebrews points back through history demonstrating the faithfulness of God through this 'cloud of witnesses'. His words, 'let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us' urge every believer to be obedient to the will of God. Paul, therefore, views faith in terms of the promise made to Abraham that finds its fulfilment in Christ (Hebrews 12:2). Faith, is understood by Paul, to find its conclusion in obedience to God's will by accepting Christ as our source of salvation (John 3:16). It is clear from Hebrews 11, that faith has a deeper spiritual meaning and stands in direct contrast to material comfort (verse 23-28); it is an unwavering obedience to the will of God. Treier states that 'in classic terms, faith involves a tradition that shapes moral action and perception by way of participation in God' (Treier, 'Faith' *Dictionary*, 228). The emphasis here is primarily on the participation with God. In such a relationship the image of God shines through our moral actions, allowing for a clearer understanding of the character of God. From such a personal revelation of God, obedience follows. Faith, from man's perspective is therefore, best, defined as the human acceptance of the will of God and our willingness to submit to His will without reserve. Professor Eric Springsted argues that our 'Christian faith is thinking with assent – not so much chosen, willed and judged from a critical spectator's standpoint; it is, rather, thinking and willing and doing from a participant's standpoint' (Eric O. Springsted, *The Act of Faith* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002], 223). He contextualises faith as a wilful act where man actively participates by fulfilling the will of God. Professor Simon Kistemaker in reference to the book of Hebrews states that the 'use of the concept faith must be understood primarily in the context of the eleventh chapter of his epistle. The heroes of faith have one thing in common: they put their undivided confidence in God. In spite of all their trials and difficult circumstances, they triumphed because of their trust in God. For the author, faith is adhering to the promises of God, depending on the Word of God, and remaining faithful to the Son of God' (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Baker's New Testament Commentary*. Electronic Version: e-Sword. 1984). Faith, therefore, demands action, it requires an intimate relationship with God to understand and fulfil His will. Hebrews 11:1 states: 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see'. This verse has two embedded concepts used to define faith. The first is our 'confidence in what we hope for' and the second our 'assurance about what we do not see'. The Greek scholar Philip Comfort in his New Testament Text and Translation Commentary highlights the fact that papyrus contains the word ἀπόστασις, meaning storehouse or repository, instead of ὑπόστασις which is commonly translated as confidence (Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* [Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2008], 712). He further states that the use of ἀπόστασις was supported by Origen (712). In seeking to understand the construct of faith the use of ἀπόστασις provides some contextual clarity. Comfort translates the first part of verse 1 as 'faith is the storehouse of things hoped for (712). By implication this does not materially change the



### 3.3.4 Confession Theology

Word of Faith confession theology is inseparable from its faith theology, and the two elements form an integral part in the movement's understanding of what faith is. Therefore, although confession theology is dealt with independently in this chapter, it must be interpreted within the context of the faith discussion that precedes it.

John MacArthur states the following about the movement:

as the name Word of Faith implies, this movement teaches that faith is a matter of what we say more than whom we trust or what truths we embrace and affirm in our hearts. A favourite term in the Word Faith movement is positive confession. It refers to the Word Faith teaching that words have creative power. What you say, Word Faith teachers claim, determines everything that happens to you. Your confessions, that is, the things you say – especially the favors you demand of God –

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meaning of the verse but provides greater clarity as to what the author of Hebrews intended to convey. In the context of faith being man's response to God's will, this portion of the verse points to the fact that it is in God that all our hopes are seated. Faith has no meaning beyond the will of God, it simply does not exist, and therefore, all that we hope for is contained within the will of God. Christ, in teaching on prayer, demonstrates the prominence of this by placing man in reverence under the will of God from the outset (Matthew 6:9-10). Here Christ demonstrates that man can ask from God, for provision (verse 11), forgiveness (verse 12), and deliverance (verse 13) but always subject to the divine will of God. Faith is, therefore, the act through which man submits to the instruction of God through obedience in expectation of the fulfilment of God's promise. This is supported by verse 6 which reads: 'and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him'. The second part of the verse having 'assurance about what we do not see' is contextualised by the author in the remainder of Chapter 11. Here Abraham finds his assurance, the total conviction, that the promise of God will be fulfilled (verses 8-10) and Moses acted under the conviction that God will fulfil His will through Christ (verses 24-27). A richer understanding of faith is centred in Christ, as the will of God, that is both commanded (e.g. John 3:16, 14:1-6) and promised (Genesis 3:15, et al). But without submission and obedience to this will of God, there is no benefit. It is only in obedience to the will of God that Abraham, Moses, Paul and others throughout history were able to look to the future with assurance.

must all be stated positively and without wavering. Then God is required to answer.<sup>388</sup>

Dollar states that 'a successful life is the fruit of a mind renewed through the Word of God. Although you are already righteous, a constant renewing of your mind ensures your ability to rule and reign in life. For if by one man's offences death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign [rule] in life by one, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17'.<sup>389</sup> In other words, those who receive the gift of righteousness rule in this life. The interlinking between faith and confession is more clearly evident in the following statement:

Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. Hebrews 11:1 AMP Faith is the assurance of things you hope for. It does not matter what it is you hope for – a car, a house, a happy marriage, a ministry, a loved one to be saved – you have to have faith before you will see anything come to pass. Your faith is the proof, or the evidence, of what you cannot yet see. For example, the Bible says, All things were made by him [God] (John 1:3). Faith is the substance of those things that have already been made by God. Several verses in Genesis 1 says the same thing: And God said... He spoke everything he created into existence. What was the result of all that God said? When he said it, He saw it. And God saw everything that he had made... (Gen 1:31. The words God spoke created everything He said.<sup>390</sup>

The movement's confession theology is based upon the premise that faith has to be spoken and that it is only through confession that faith comes to fulfilment.

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<sup>388</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 342.

<sup>389</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 206.

<sup>390</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 52-53.

We are to have faith that is in our heart coming out of our mouth continually. Mark 11:22-23 NKJV says, So Jesus answered and said to them, Have faith in God. For assuredly, I will say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Faith in your heart is activated by what you say. Your words give faith power to bring what you believe from the spiritual realm into the natural realm – your faith to see something grow bigger and bigger in your heart until that faith comes out of your mouth and then your words make it reality in your life. Romans 10:8 NKJV says, The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach. Faith has to be in your heart and your mouth to see results in your life.<sup>391</sup>

A person who accepts his or her righteousness speaks the Word of God with confidence at all times. This person says, By His stripes, I am healed. I am absolutely delivered for ever and perfected in Him. I walk in the favour of God. I am anointed from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. When I pray as the righteousness of God, I get answers to my prayers. You are the righteousness of God. Therefore you have a right to say and receive whatever it is that is rightfully yours. This righteousness, which is by faith, speaks.<sup>392</sup>

Word of Faith confession, faith, salvation and dominion theology is intertwined, but its primary catalyst remains dominion theology. This is evident in the statement that:

salvation does not only mean that you have a new life in Christ. It also means that you have all of the rights and privileges available to those who are born again. Salvation is the right to be delivered; it is the right to preservation; it is the right to healing; it is the right to soundness. It is also your right standing with God. As a born-again believer you must speak God's Word continually. When you speak faith-filled words,

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<sup>391</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 54-55.

<sup>392</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 57-58.

believing in your heart that you are the righteousness of God, you must declare your rights. In doing this, you come into agreement with what God Himself has already said in His Word. That is why it comes to pass. ... In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. 2 Corinthians 13:1. When you speak what the Word has already said, you become the establishing witness, and God can bring to pass what you have declared.<sup>393</sup>

If you see a promise in God's Word, then you know by faith it is yours. Knowing that you are the righteousness of God gives you the right to confess that you do not have to be sick and die. By faith, you are healed (1 Peter 2:24). You do not have to be broke. By faith, wealth and riches are in your house. (Ps. 112:3.) You do not have to be on the bottom of the economic ladder. By faith, you are prosperous in the name of Jesus. (Ps. 35:27.) You do not have to be in debt all your life and then pass it on to your children. By faith, you are delivered out of debt and your needs are met. (Deut. 15:2.) You do not have to live with a family of sinner on their way to hell, because by faith, your whole household shall be saved. (Acts 16:31) By faith, this will be the best year of your entire life. (Isa.58:14).<sup>394</sup>

The relationship of Word of Faith confession, faith and dominion theology is clarified by Dollar in his statement that 'it is important to understand that you are not second-class. You are an exact duplicate of the image of God. This does not mean that you are God. It means that you are made in God's image and His likeness, with the ability to create with words as God did'.<sup>395</sup> It is, therefore, clear that the movement's theological understanding of being made in the image of God relates not only to having dominion over all of creation, but to have the ultimate dominion, the ability to create through the spoken word. Dollar describes how he confesses the promises in the Word of God over his life daily to ensure that he remains successful, amongst the areas in his life he confesses prosperity over are, worry and fear, weight control,

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<sup>393</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 59.

<sup>394</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 62-63.

<sup>395</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 107.

material needs, and wisdom and guidance.<sup>396</sup> According to Dollar, 'Confidence is the force that launches your faith.'<sup>397</sup> The catalyst for this confidence is found within the Word of God. The interpretation of Romans 10:17 that Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, is used together with Psalm 45:1 and Proverbs 3:1,3 to stress the importance of confession.<sup>398</sup>

At its most extreme, Word of Faith Confession theology takes on the form of command. Robert Tilton states that 'we can tell God on the authority of his word what we would like him to do. That's right! You can actually tell God what you would like his part in the covenant to be!'<sup>399</sup>

Charles Capps describes a revelation he received from God. This revelation declared that:

if men would believe me, long prayers are not necessary. Just speaking the Word will bring you what you desire. My creative power is given to man in Word form. I have ceased for a time from my work and have given man the book of MY CREATIVE POWER. That power is STILL IN MY WORD. For it to be effective, man must speak it in faith. Jesus spoke it when He was on earth and as it worked then so it shall work now. But it must be spoken by the body. Man must rise up and have dominion over the power of evil by my Words. It is my greatest desire that my people create a better life by the spoken Word. For my Word has not lost its power just because it has been spoken once. It is still equally as powerful today as when I said, 'Let there be light.' But for my Word to be effective, men must speak

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<sup>396</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 101-106.

<sup>397</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8-9.

<sup>398</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 105.

<sup>399</sup> Robert Tilton, *God's Miracle Plan for Man* (Dallas, TX: Robert Tilton Ministries, 1987), n.p. This statement presents a skewed view of the covenant relationship between man and God, elevates the Word of God from its position as defined in 2 Timothy 3:16, to that of a contract with the ability to control God and finally, presents an image in which God submits to the will of man.

it, and the creative power will come forth performing that which is spoken in faith.<sup>400</sup>

The emphasis of confession in the statement by Capps is linked to the creative power that is found in the movement's dominion theology. This statement demonstrates that as far back as 1976 the underlying foundation for the movement's faith and confession theology had been its dominion theology.

Confession as a means of expressing faith and receiving a specific outcome is being taught, and has been in the past, by the majority of Word of Faith ministers, amongst these are Hagin, Capps, Tilton, and many more.<sup>401</sup>

In a more traditional Evangelical sense, confession is taken to mean something vastly different from that which is taught by the Word of Faith movement. This will become evident if we consider the three foundations upon which the Word of Faith movement builds its confession theology.

*1) The first element of Word of Faith theology on confession is constructed on the principle of having a renewed mind.* Romans 12:2 is interpreted by the Word of Faith movement in terms of the believer (1) gaining clarity on his or her position and (2) becoming knowledgeable about the promises that are claimable. It is stressed that the renewing of the mind is centred in the Word of God. However, the Word of God in this context is understood as a contract, or title deed, that bestows rights on man due to the restored position of dominion.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Charles Capps, *The Tongue: A Creative Force* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House Publishing, 1976), 136-137.

<sup>401</sup> Hagin, Kenneth, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1979), 5-8. Capps, *The Tongue*, 91. Tilton, *God's Miracle Plan for Man*, 36.

<sup>402</sup> It is, however, a less than adequate reading of Romans 12:2. The author urges the believer: 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will'. It is within the context of verse 1 that the passage gains its clarity: here the writer stresses true and proper worship, as the believer's sacrifice to God. Jeremy Begbie from Cambridge University points out that Paul's use of 'sacrificial terminology ("present", "sacrifice", "holy", "acceptable")' is a call to all believers to give 'their entire lives to God' (Jeremy S. Begbie, 'Worship', in the *Dictionary of Theological*

2) *The second element of Word of Faith confession theology centres on the word of God, that is on the one hand viewed as a contract to which God is irrevocably bound and on the other hand viewed as a catalyst that builds confidence that enables faith to work.*<sup>403</sup> Word of Faith theology contextualises the view of the Word of God as a catalyst that builds confidence through which faith is activated. In Romans 10:17, Paul writes: ‘Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message

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*Interpretation of the Bible* [ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005], 856). Grudem notes that ‘worship is an act of glorifying God’ (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1003) and that it is ‘an expression of our ultimate purpose’ (1005). He points out that worship is about ‘doing the will of God’ (1010). It is the call to fulfil the will of God that binds verses 1 and 2 together. Thomas (Griffith Thomas, *St. Pauls Epistle to the Romans: A Devotional Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1988], 326) states that verse 2 contrasts the life of the believer in God as opposed to a life outside of God. He states in relation to the term ‘do not conform to the pattern of this world’ that the world’s objective is ‘gratification of self rather than doing the will of God’. The emphasis Paul is placing here in verses 1 and 2 is that as believers we have been called to do the will of God. But having been called from a position of self-gratification (the world) to fulfilling the will of God is found in transformation from the one condition to the other. Paul continues this theme of renewal in Colossians 3:10-25 by relating the believer’s renewal to a transformation into the image of God (verse 10) which he defines as mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing, forgiveness, but above all else, charity, ἀγάπη. In 1 Corinthians 13 we see a similar construct in which Paul concludes that love, ἀγάπη, is the greatest expression of all. A more accurate interpretation of Romans 12:2 would, therefore, view the transformation that comes from the ‘renewing of your mind’ not in terms of gaining an awareness of a restored position or dominion, nor does it speak to the realisation or knowledge of promises for personal benefit. It does, however, represent a call to reflect the image of God by radiating God’s love into the world, thereby fulfilling the will of God, and through it to worship Him. Such an interpretation of Romans 12:2 would present well within the context of the entire passage, which once again draws a clear focus on love.

<sup>403</sup> What is evidently lacking in Word of Faith theology is a contextual and complete approach to scripture. The point is best illustrated in Matthew 4:6-7. Satan, in tempting Christ, quotes scripture: ‘If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’ (verse 6). Christ responds by contextualising scripture, not in terms of human benefit but rather in terms of God: ‘It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ (verse 7). It is clear that the Word of God is not a mere collection of promises that can be claimed and possessed, but that it is a collection of inspired statements that requires careful and meticulous handling. It is not to be abused or exploited for personal gain but rather for diligently seeking an understanding of God and how the believer can find expression in God. It is, therefore, evident that an anthropocentric approach to scripture produces a limited and often skewed view of the recorded will of God.

is heard through the word about Christ.’ In its isolation, the verse might be taken to imply that the Word of God can indeed activate faith: however, this reading would firstly contextualise faith from an anthropocentric view, and secondly miss the real meaning Paul tried to convey in the passage.<sup>404</sup>

3) *The third and final element of Word of Faith confession theology relates to confession as a creative command that directs the hand of God in terms of the hopes, desires and ultimately the will of the believer.* This theological view is primarily an outflow of the movement’s dominion theology. An assumption is made that man is restored to his position as a divine being. The result of this restored position is that man has divine, creative expression through which the believer is able to direct a specific outcome.<sup>405</sup> It is clear that the Word of Faith confession theology is an offshoot of its dominion theology and forms the mechanism through which the movement claims to express its position of dominion over creation.

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<sup>404</sup> An anthropocentric view of faith limits faith within the context of human benefit. In such an interpretation faith is seen as a mechanism through which the individual derives some physical or material benefit. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the author of Hebrews clearly contextualises faith in terms of obedience to God’s will as it finds its climax in the redemptive work of Christ. It is in Hebrews 10:38-39 that we find the idea that faith is centred in salvation. Both Romans and Hebrews have a unified theme and an underlying consistency that applies to the construct of faith. It is, therefore, not an anthropocentric interpretation of faith that provides a contextual view, but rather a Christocentric view. Once the view of faith is contextualised in terms of salvation, and Romans 10:17 is read within the context of the entire Chapter 10, the meaning becomes clear. Paul is not referring to hearing the Word of God as a confidence builder through which faith is activated, but rather as the source of the good news that is proclaimed to the world and through which the seed of everlasting life is planted.

<sup>405</sup> I stated earlier in this chapter that to be created in the Image of God does not denote a divine position or equality with God, but rather submission to the will of God and obedience to the Word of God. It is seated in the love which God extends to man, and which man must reflect back to God as an expression of worship. The believer, therefore, does not obtain a divine position through Christ but becomes an obedient servant that submits to the will of God (Matthew 6:9-10; 26:42; Acts 21:13-14). The belief, therefore, that the words of believers have the power to create or direct a desired outcome has no theological foundation. As worship relates to man in submission to the will of God, creative expression has no purpose.



### 3.3.5 Health and Prosperity Theology

Closely related to the Word of Faith dominion, covenant, faith and confession teachings are its health and prosperity theology. Word of Faith health and prosperity theology is the culmination of the movement's dominion theology, which teaches that man has a restored and divine position. This restored position allows the believer to exercise power and authority over the natural world. Within the Word of Faith movement, covenant theology is viewed as the contract through which man regained this lost divine position, and its faith theology finds a means through which the promises contained in the Word of God can be activated, which, if confessed, will result in the fulfilment of the desires of the believer. These desires are typically found within the realm of health and prosperity, which is under the control of the believer who exercises dominion or authority over the natural world due to a restored divine position.

Hanegraaff, MacArthur, McConnell, and others, have claimed that it is the health and prosperity teaching of the Word of Faith movement that is at the core of the Word of Faith theology. My hypothesis, however, is that the movement's health and prosperity teaching is a natural outflow of the movement's true core belief, the idea that man has been restored as an equal before God and that as a result of this restored equality man now has the power and authority to call into existence the desires of his heart. This view is held and taught by Hagin, Munroe, Dollar, et al.<sup>406</sup>

Dollar argues that our restored 'Righteousness is the ability to stand before God without the sense of guilt or inferiority. It is the ability to stand before God and talk to Him as a child to a Father, expecting His response and knowing that we have a right to receive what we ask because of what He has declared over us'.<sup>407</sup>

He views this concept of righteousness as a rite of passage, which brings with it the rewards of wealth and health. This connection is evident when he writes:

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<sup>406</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*; Hagin, *Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*; Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*; Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

<sup>407</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

I am righteous; therefore, I can be healed. I am righteous; therefore, I have angelic protection. I am righteous; therefore, I will always triumph in Christ Jesus.<sup>408</sup>

The same foundation for the health and wealth teaching is evident again in this statement:

You cannot convince me that the economy or my circumstances are going to have a negative impact on me. My attitude is that I am the righteousness of God. The Bible says that I have ruling power in this earth. The devil does not rule in this earth. The righteousness of God rules in the earth and I am the righteousness of God. I rule over cancer. I rule over my enemies. Through the Word, I have been given dominion over the earth.<sup>409</sup>

Dollar states that it was through divine revelation that he came to believe that the Body of Christ has the right to 'operate in the abundant life'. He claims that man has authority and a right to stand before God as an equal. For Dollar, healing and prosperity are dependent upon the believer's understanding and acceptance of equality with God.<sup>410</sup>

It is, therefore, clear that the outcome of the restored position as defined in the Word of Faith dominion theology is perfect health and ultimate prosperity. The establishment of health and prosperity for the believer is considered to be contractual.<sup>411</sup>

There is a corollary to this doctrine of health and wealth: sickness or poverty is an indication of man's rejection of his righteousness. This leads to the emphasising of signs and wonders as the primary means of evangelism.<sup>412</sup> However, prosperity extends beyond the normal provision of God. Within the Word of Faith movement, Prosperity means being successful in any endeavour in your life, or making good

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<sup>408</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

<sup>409</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 27.

<sup>410</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 219; cf. 28, 49.

<sup>411</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 62-63.

<sup>412</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 152-153, 195.

progress in the pursuit of anything desirable. The key is that true prosperity will always extend beyond your needs, and is seated in 'the ability to be in control of your circumstances and situations. It is the ability to choose how you want to live'.<sup>413</sup> Joyce Meyer adds that it is meditation on the Word of God and the renewal of the mind that activates faith and delivers prosperity and health. She contextualises our right to receive all of God's promises on the basis that we are heirs and not servants.<sup>414</sup>

Although criticism of the Word of Faith prosperity teaching has primarily originated from outside the movement, coming from authors such as Hanegraaff, MacArthur, and McConnell,<sup>415</sup> there have also been voices from within the Word of Faith movement that have called for a more moderate view. Among these is Kenneth Hagin, who, in *The Midas Touch*<sup>416</sup> states the following:

In this time of affluence and abundance, there is increasing concern among responsible Christian leaders over the alarming increase of confusion, error, and extremism regarding the prosperity message. I

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<sup>413</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 235; cf. 226.

<sup>414</sup> Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind*, 60, 205-206, 297. Gordon Fee (*The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* [Vancouver, British Columbia, 2006]) provides context to a Biblical interpretation of prosperity. He states that a true Christian life 'does not require poverty, but it does require righteousness, which in this context means to use our wealth not to manipulate others, but to alleviate the hurt and the pain of the oppressed'. For the individual, this means that sufficiency is enough, while excess must be used for the betterment of those that are less fortunate. MacArthur (*Charismatic Chaos*, 325) takes a more direct approach in his rejection of prosperity teaching: 'Word of Faith teachers have corrupted the heart of New Testament Christianity, moving the believer's focus off sound doctrine, worship, service, sacrifice, and ministry; shifting it instead to promised physical, financial, and material "blessings"'.

<sup>415</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*.

<sup>416</sup> *Another Look at Faith*, authored by Kenneth Hagin Jr in 1996, was followed up by *The Midas Touch*, by Kenneth Hagin Snr in 2000. The two books promoted the same ideas: the concepts of 'having rights', having 'the faith of God', and our 'spiritual nature', continue to permeate both books. The call by the Hagins (both Jr and Snr) between 1996 and 2000 had little effect in normalising Word of Faith theology. It is important to note that the 'little gods' teaching, as well as the dominion teachings of the Word of Faith movement, reached its peak between 2004 and 2006, a decade after the call to theological moderation and normalisation.

feel compelled to speak out to the Church at large about these issues and especially to address the subject of finance and giving. This book is an effort to bring clarity and understanding to those honestly seeking to find the main road of truth concerning biblical prosperity <sup>417</sup>

Hagin goes on to reject wealth and health as an indicator of spirituality and faith. He states that 'material wealth can be connected to the blessings of God or can be totally disconnected from the blessings of God. Certainly, financial prosperity is not an infallible gauge of a person's spirituality'.<sup>418</sup> On this point he differs from the view held by Creflo Dollar, who relates a lack of wealth and health to an individual's lack of understanding as to his or her position of righteousness within the Kingdom of God.<sup>419</sup>

Hagin also criticises the concept of giving to receive. Within the Word of Faith movement, a doctrine emerged that relates receiving to giving, or in Word of Faith terms, sowing and reaping. Hagin does not, however, completely reject the principle of sowing, but definitely urges the movement's leadership to approach this aspect of the prosperity theology with more caution.<sup>420</sup> In dealing with this issue, Hagin makes a most valid statement that has the potential to restore the balance to the movement's theology if embraced. He states: 'I believe that healing is for all. But Jesus declared that not all people will be healed in the way that Naaman the leper was. I believe that prosperity is for all, but Jesus said that not all people are going to be prospered the way the widow of Zarephath was'.<sup>421</sup>

This view is similar to that held by Gordon Fee in that it places no demand for poverty on the believer, but places an absolute focus on the individual's own

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<sup>417</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Midas Touch: A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Keneth Hagin Ministries, 2000), xi. This is a position contrary to what Hagin has held previously. It is, however, encouraging, as within this statement there seems to be a clear call to a more moderate and contextual interpretation of scripture by Hagin.

<sup>418</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 116-118.

<sup>419</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 152-153.

<sup>420</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 117-121.

<sup>421</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 119-120.

motives.<sup>422</sup> Hagin continues by stressing that ‘our motives are crucially important. We need to be willing to give in obedience to God even if we never receive one thing in return’.<sup>423</sup> This is a direct call to all believers to submit without compromise and reservation to the will of God. He continues to reject a critical component of the sowing and reaping teaching, that of naming your seed, by stating that: ‘I’m not sure that “naming your seed” is necessarily scriptural. I can’t find any verses that specifically support the practice’.<sup>424</sup>

Another aspect that ties into the sowing and reaping theology of the movement is that of receiving a hundredfold return, which is rejected by Hagin. He lays this wrong teaching at the door of a narrow reading of Mark 10:28-30, and argues that care must be taken in developing teachings beyond the context of scripture. In his argument it becomes clear that he considers the problem to be hermeneutical in nature. Although Hagin addresses unscriptural issues related to the movement’s health and wealth theology in *The Midas Touch*, he maintains a strong belief in the teaching of prosperity as a right that man possesses due to having been created in the image of God, and specifically as this relates to exercising dominion over creation.<sup>425</sup>

It is clear that the health and prosperity theology of the movement is constructed on a number of theological beliefs that are not interpreted within context, and as a result, poses some theological difficulties in terms of its doctrinal value and accuracy<sup>426</sup>. Proponents, both for and against the prosperity theology have identified

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<sup>422</sup> Fee, *The Disease of Health and Wealth*, 45.

<sup>423</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 120.

<sup>424</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 120. This is an indictment that extends the problem with much of the movement’s theology beyond hermeneutics; it extends it to a fundamental aspect of how the movement develops its theology, by including extra-biblical interpretation that at times extends to special revelation received by an individual leader, and which is often without any scriptural support.

<sup>425</sup> Hagin, *The Midas Touch*, 25-42, 122-128.

<sup>426</sup> It is Allan H. Anderson who finds a midpoint between the two extremes of those who consider health and prosperity as something to be looking forward to in the future, and the Word of Faith adherent who considers it to be a right in this life, when he states: “On the other hand, criticisms of the Word of Faith message have also to reckon with the fact that the Bible is not silent on the question of material need, that Christ’s salvation is holistic, making provision for all human need and the

aspects within the teaching that are at times not scriptural, and at other times interpreted beyond context. A number of evangelical writers have discussed Word of Faith health and wealth theology, and have come to question much of what the Word of Faith movement teaches on the matter, among these are King and Theron, Lioy, MacArthur, McConnell, Morris, Perriman and Wright.<sup>427</sup>

### 3.3.6 Word of Faith Soteriology

On the surface, the Word of Faith movement's theology of atonement appears to be similar to the ransom theory.<sup>428</sup> However, there are crucial and fundamental

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enjoyment of God and God's gifts. Salvation means a restoration of wholeness to human life, in which people have communion with God and enjoy the divine gifts. God does desire to bless God's children, and this blessing seems to include provision for all their needs. But this is nowhere portrayed in the Bible as an irreversible law of cause and effect, as some 'prosperity' teachers indicate. I have suggested that a 'realised eschatology' which always sees the 'not yet' as 'already' is no worse than one that sees the 'not yet' always as 'not yet'." Allan Anderson. 'Pentecostal faith and healing as signs of the Kingdom' (San Francisco, CA, Academia, 2002), Online at:

[https://www.academia.edu/6068841/PENTECOSTAL\\_APPROACHES\\_TO\\_FAITH\\_AND\\_HEALING](https://www.academia.edu/6068841/PENTECOSTAL_APPROACHES_TO_FAITH_AND_HEALING)

<sup>427</sup> King and Theron, *The 'Classic Faith' roots of the modern 'Word of Faith' movement*; Lioy, *The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel*; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*; Russell Morris, 'A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Specific Tenets of Word of Faith Theology: Pastoral Implication for the Church of God' (PhD dissertation; South African Theological Seminary, 2012); Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003); Christopher Wright, *A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel*.

<sup>428</sup> Ransom theory formed part of the theological views 'held by various fathers of the church, beginning with Origen (circa AD 185–254), who proposed that Christ's death was paid to Satan to purchase human beings, who were captive in sin, and set them free' (Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 829). Origen viewed the payment of ransom to Satan as a price paid for the release of man from the bondage of sin (Glen J. Gould, *The Precious Blood of Christ* [Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1959], 13). Dr John Miley, as quoted in Stephens, in his treatment of the meaning of ransom theory states that it is a 'price given for the liberation of a captive, the recovery of anything forfeited, or the satisfaction of penal obligation'. He concludes that the ransom that was paid, was for our 'deliverance from sin and death, and for the recovery of our forfeited spiritual life' (Gertrude Stephens, *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation* [New York: Scribner, 1905], 138). From these discussions it is clear that the prevailing idea surrounding ransom theory centres on the fact that man belongs to God and that due to sin Satan now holds man in bondage through sin. The ransom, therefore, is a payment for the release of man from this bondage of sin. This is the principal idea behind the view

differences between the historical articulations of the ransom theory and the view held by many Word of Faith teachers. The Word of Faith movement departs from the central understanding of the ransom theme by viewing atonement in terms of the restoration of a position of authority and power. It therefore departs from the idea of man being reconciled to God through Christ by superimposing a view on to atonement that man is being restored to a position of equality with God. The prevailing thought that was maintained throughout the evolution of the ransom theory of atonement is one of liberation from the effects of sin which is the control and oppression exercised by Satan over man. The result is the separation between man and God.<sup>429</sup>

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held by Origen. Gregory of Nyssa, in his defence and expansion of the ransom theory, changes nothing material in relation to the purpose and effect of the ransom. For him the ransom was paid for the release of man from the bondage of sin, which enslaved man to Satan (Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 829). Both Augustine and Anselm adhered to a view that man was under the bondage of Satan, being oppressed, and that atonement through the payment of a ransom released man from this bondage (Sydney Cave, *The Doctrine of the Work of Christ* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959], 119). Anselm, however, makes a clearer distinction that is found in his migration of terminology from ransom to satisfaction. He argued in his 1098 work on the atonement, *Cur Deus Homo?*, that Satan had not obtained just rights over man through sin, and is, therefore, tormenting man and holding him captive unjustly (Eugene R. Fairweather, ed. and trans., *Why God Became Man. A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* [London: SCM Press, 1956]). Kelly in his work on early Christian doctrines highlights the fact that 'the Devil owned no rights, in the strict sense, over mankind' (Joseph F. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* [San Francisco: Harper, 1978], 392). In more recent theological development, Gustaf Aulen in 1931 published his now famous book entitled *Christus Victor*. In this he states that 'the work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil' (Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* [trans. A. Herber; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003], 20). Elwell (Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1990], 124). summarises atonement from Aulen's perspective as 'a divine victory overcoming the destructive powers of hell and death making available and visible the reconciling love of God'.

<sup>429</sup> It is important to revisit Genesis 3 to gain a clearer understanding of the effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience. In this passage there is no indication of a loss of dominion or authority. This is evident in the fact that God exercised total authority over all creation through punishing both Satan and man (verses 14-19) after the act of disobedience. God furthermore demonstrates his ownership of the earth by banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (verse 23) and establishes his presence

To appreciate fully the Word of Faith view on salvation, it has to be interpreted within the overall context of the movement's dominion, covenant, faith and confession theology, all of which are constructed on the premise that God created human beings as gods of this world with the primary aim to rule and reign.<sup>430</sup> The fall in the Garden of Eden is, therefore, contextualised in terms of the loss of authority, power and dominion. In essence, Word of Faith theology teaches that it is the authority to be gods that was lost when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. According to Dollar, this act of disobedience resulted in the loss of righteousness, which in turn caused man to lose his equality with God. Such a view has a substantial impact on the way the Word of Faith movement understands salvation. Within the larger Evangelical movement Christ is viewed as the redeemer of mankind, in that man has

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(verse 24) in protection of the Tree of Life. God's ability to curse the ground (verses 17-18) clearly demonstrates his ownership and rulership thereof. The question, then is, what was lost in the act of disobedience. It is clear from verse 8 that disobedience of the will of God immediately caused a separation of man from God. The death spoken about in verse 3 resulted in man's no longer being able to stand in the presence of the Holy God. I argued previously that the true image of God in Adam is the image of submission and obedience that God communicates to man, His desire for man to submit to the will of God through obedience to the instruction or law of God. This is, however, not the Law of Moses, but rather the law that Christ referred to in Matthew 22:37-40, to love God (Berkouwer 1962:380). Disobedience then resulted, not in a loss of dominion, but rather in a loss of the ability to reflect, due to separation, the pure love of God. Being separated from God results in spiritual death which is overcome by believing in Christ (John 3:16). It is important to note that even in John 3:16 God demands obedience, as in Eden, the most simplistic obedience of it all, a simple act of submission to the will of God. Christ, therefore, does not restore dominion in the sense of having equality with God or dominion in the sense of subjecting creation to the will of man, but rescues man, in the true sense of the meaning of σωτηρία, from eternal separation from God. Man is reunited with God by submitting to the Will of God. The result of this σωτηρία, is that man, once again can stand in the presence of the Holy God in true worship. Previously in this chapter I pointed out that Christ states that two elements for human interaction with God are exclusively set aside for God, the first is worship and the second is to serve God. The first, προσκυνέω, speaks to submission (Psalm 51:17, Romans 12:1, Phillipians 2:17, 4:18) and the second, λατρεύω, refers to obedience. It is in Matthew 6:24 that we see the intimate connection Christ conveyed, which exists between serving and love, but it is in John 12:26 that we see that it is only through serving Christ that the relationship between God and man can be restored. Redemption, therefore, is not a restoration of power but a return to union with God, it is man's ability to experience God and to reflect this experience as pure divine love.

<sup>430</sup> Paulk, *Satan Unmasked*, 97; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 88; Munroe, *Releasing Your Potential*, 40-52.



been saved, through the cross, from being eternally lost and separated from God.<sup>431</sup> Within the Word of Faith movement, the cross represents restoration of power, authority and dominion, and ultimately equality with God. Word of Faith soteriology teaches that God has provided a way for man to be restored in terms of righteousness.<sup>432</sup> However, as I have presented throughout this chapter, the term righteousness means something very specific within Word of Faith theology—the restoration of man to have equality with God. Munroe views the work of Christ as breaking the power of the adversary over mankind and regaining the authority and dominion Adam once held, and through a process of conflict, restoring the Kingdom back to mankind. The Cross, therefore, signifies restoration of a kingdom as opposed to redeeming man from damnation. Even the concept of adoption as taught by Paul in Romans 8, is seen by the Word of Faith movement within the context of the restoration of a position of dominion.<sup>433</sup>

For the Word of Faith movement, salvation through Christ is considered an act through which Christ regained the dominion Adam gave to Satan, and restored this to man.

Word of Faith Christology is centred in obtaining equality with God through adoption.<sup>434</sup> The Adoption principle is taken as evidence that man is restored back

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<sup>431</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, 'Salvation', in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 711-714; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 657-850.

<sup>432</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 21, 28, 153, 165.

<sup>433</sup> Munroe, *Releasing Your Potential*, 92, 139; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 113.

<sup>434</sup> To interpret adoption as described in Romans 8:15 as a restorative act through which man obtains equality with God has no scriptural foundation. Paul writes in Romans 8:15: 'The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father"'. The key to interpreting verse 15 is found in verse 14. Paul clearly attempts to convey obedience and submission as the true measure of man's relationship with God. Verse 14, 'For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God', clearly contextualises our adoption as children of God to our obedience and submission. This view of ultimate submission is supported by Luther when he states 'to be "led by the Spirit of God" means to despise and renounce everything that is not of God' (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* [trans. Theodore J. Mueller; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Classics, 1954], 121). Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, 737-738) contextualises adoption and being a child of God with clarity when he

to his 'god kind' of nature which makes man equal to God.<sup>435</sup> Within Ransom theory human beings are bought through the redemptive act of Christ from Satan and are presented to God as subjects and servants but with the privilege of adoption. This restored position is not, as Word of Faith theology teaches, a restoration of position or authority, but a restoration of the relationship between God and man.

### 3.4 Summary of Word of Faith Theology

Figure 1 in Chapter 1 is a graphic representation of the main theological beliefs of the Word of Faith movement, and demonstrates the interlinking between the various

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writes: 'although Jesus does call us his "brothers" (Heb 2:12 NIV) and he is therefore in one sense our older brother in God's family (cf. Heb 2:14), and can be called "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29), he is nevertheless careful to make a clear distinction between the way in which God is our heavenly Father and the way in which he relates to God the father. He says to Mary Magdalene, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17), thus making a clear distinction between the far greater and eternal sense in which God is his Father, and the sense in which God is our Father'. Our adoption into a position in which we can call God 'Father' demonstrates the transition from a distance religion to a personal relationship with God (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 737). It is in the way Christ teaches us to pray that we find true context of what it means to be adopted as a child of God, Matthew 6:9-13 states: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. In this prayer the dependency of man is clearly demonstrated in the fact that we ask from God to provide for our various, spiritual and physical needs. As a child of God, one who calls Him father, there is no exhibition of power, dominion or authority but rather ultimate dependency. Clearly there is no equality here as Christ tells us to declare that God's will should be done. Within this context man is not only dependent upon God but is also in wilful submission and obedience to His will. Word of Faith Christology, therefore, lacks a sound Scriptural foundation, the distortion of the meaning of salvation and the meaning of adoption is the result of the movement's Dominion Theology, which in turn is built upon a distorted view of what it means to be created in the image of God.

<sup>435</sup> I concluded earlier the image of God in man does not denote equality with God but rather submission to the will of God and obedience to the Word of God. It is seated in the love God extends to man and which man must reflect back to God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love (1 John 4:7-8). The importance of love is stressed throughout 1 John 4 with John stating that '...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him' (verse 16).

theological beliefs. In essence the entire Word of Faith theology centres on man as a god.

From a Dominion theology perspective, the movement constructed its theology from the view that the Image of God in man relates to (1) the equality of man and God, (2) man's divine right to exercise dominion over all of creation, and (3) the authority possessed by man that allows man to express his will as an act of creation.

The fall of man is contextualised as an act of disobedience that transferred the dominion and authority possessed by man to Satan. It is, therefore, implied by Word of Faith theology that the image of God in man was lost. The movement's proponents have no clear theology on whether Satan now achieved god-like status as a result of the dominion and authority he received from man. It is hinted at by some of the movement's teachers.<sup>436</sup>

The primary aim of the Abrahamic Covenant between God and man, as claimed by the movement, is for God to restore man legally to his original created position. By restoring righteousness it is believed that equality with God is restored, and that man once again possesses Dominion and Authority over all of creation.

The movement's Christology, therefore, contextualises Christ in terms of restoring righteousness, which is viewed by the Word of Faith movement as restoring man to his original created position of (1) having equality with God, (2) man's divine right to exercise dominion over all of creation and (3) authority that allows man to express his will as a creative act. The redemptive aspect of salvation, in which man is redeemed from an eternity without God is largely replaced by a restoration view. The latter clearly contextualises the Word of Faith theology in terms of man while the former focuses primarily on God. Word of Faith Christology is viewed as a legal fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant which aims to bestow certain rights and privileges to man. These restored rights, if believed and confessed, allow man to exercise his dominion and authority by divine right. This means that man now has the ability to exercise his will in creating a life of health and prosperity.

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<sup>436</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 90-91.

Word of Faith theology on *imago Dei* lacks a historical perspective, is weak in its source language understanding and is beyond the context of scripture. It is clear that the movement lacks a sound hermeneutical model in constructing its theology. What is evident is that the movement's lack of a clear understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* has resulted in the evolution of a theology that lacks a sound biblical context, and which extends the idea of *imago Dei* within a purely anthropocentric framework. Word of Faith Covenant Theology, Christology, Faith and Confession Theology as well as its Health and Prosperity Theology all find their foundation, purpose and validation within the movement's distorted view of *imago Dei*. In essence Word of Faith theology, therefore, has a single underlying theology, that of *imago Dei*, which invalidates to a large extent its larger theological understanding.

### 3.5 Chapter Three Conclusion

Our historical focus on the health and wealth aspects of the Word of Faith movement, and in particular our belief that it is the central tenet of the movement failed to identify the root cause of the teaching, and did not consider the interrelatedness and dependencies of the various components of Word of Faith theology. In this chapter I demonstrated how every aspect of Word of Faith theology can be traced back to the movement's understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God, how the movement understands the fall, and how salvation became a mechanism of restoration opposed to redemption.

I demonstrated how Word of Faith theology confers an anthropomorphic interpretation upon God, and how salvation is seen as a restorative process whereby man is perceived as equal to God. In this assessment I found a single theological construct that binds the movement's diverse theological views together. Its dominion theology is central to all of its primary theological beliefs. Word of Faith dominion theology teaches that the initial created state of man was that of a god.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Word of Faith reliance on Psalm 82 in the advancement of this theological view lacks validity, as the passage is not a proclamation of human divinity, but an accusation against the representatives of God who had been placed by God over God's children to act as God would have, had they been in His presence (Ron Rhodes, *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* [Eugene, Oregon: Harvest

What is evident is that the movement's lack of a clear understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* has resulted in the evolution of a theology that lacks a sound biblical context and which extends the idea of *imago Dei* within a purely anthropocentric framework. Word of Faith Covenant Theology, Christology, Faith and Confession Theology as well as its Health and Prosperity Theology all find their foundation, purpose and validation within the Movement's distorted view of man as god. In essence Word of Faith theology, therefore, has a single underlying theology, that of human deification, which underpins and directs to a large extent its larger theological views. The movement contextualises Christ in terms of restoring righteousness, which is viewed by the Word of Faith movement as restoring man to his original created position of (1) having equality to God, (2) man's divine right to exercise dominion over all of creation and (3) authority that allows man to express his will as a creative act. The redemptive aspect of salvation, in which man is redeemed from an eternity without God, is replaced by a restoration view. The latter clearly contextualises the Word of Faith theology in terms of man, while the former focuses primarily on God. Word of Faith beliefs are viewed as a legal fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant, which aims to bestow certain rights and privileges to man. These restored rights, if believed and confessed, allow man to exercise his dominion and authority by divine right. This means that man now has the ability to exercise his will in creating a life of health and prosperity.

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House, 2008], 83). It is an indictment of the corruption of the power or authority given by God resulting in the exploitation of the children of God. Projecting an alternative interpretation in support of human deification onto the meaning of Psalm 82 is not possible for two reasons. The first is that God himself proclaims that there is no god besides Himself (Isaiah 44:8), there is none that preceded him and none that will follow after him (Isaiah 43:10); God is undeniably the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). The second reason is that Israel as a monotheistic religion would have rejected any interpretation of Psalm 82 as elevating man to the same status or position as God. To have contextualised it any differently would have been blasphemous and clearly beyond the context of a Judaic understanding of the position and role of man (Bowman, 'Ye are Gods', 19).

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Influence of the Word of Faith Movement**

The central argument of this thesis has been that the Word of Faith movement has authentically Christian roots, but it has developed some unsound theological perspectives that cohere around the movement's beliefs about human deification and dominion. When the belief system of the Word of Faith movement is analysed, it becomes apparent that it has a measure of internal coherence. In other words, if one accepts the movement's foundational premises about the deification and dominion of humankind, its remaining belief system has a measure of internal logic. However, the belief system as a whole is flimsy at best, since neither the foundational premises nor the beliefs that are built upon them withstand responsible exegesis and synthesis of scriptural teachings. As the preceding chapter showed, evangelical scholars have deconstructed the movement's core teachings to the point where one would not expect the movement to retain a great following or exert much influence. But this expectation would be fallacious. The Word of Faith movement has a massive global following, and exerts considerable influence in the broader Christian church.

This leads to the question which this chapter addresses: how can the Word of Faith movement, the theological foundations of which have been so thoroughly discredited, continue to attract such a following and exert so much influence? The objective of the chapter is to provide a theoretical framework that helps to understand the phenomenal influence of the Word of Faith movement. The explanatory framework is sought through a synthesis of the writings of several philosophers, sociologists and theologians. By bringing together insights from several streams of research and theory, the chapter proposes an explanation for the growth and influence of the Word of Faith movement.

Bainbridge and Stark, two American sociologists, developed models through which to understand social and religious influence. Reconceptualising these models by adding organisational, economic, and behavioural dimensions and viewing these in

terms of the believers' spiritual maturity, seems to offer a theoretical framework that goes some way in explaining why both individual Christians and larger Christian communities are willing to embrace a set of beliefs that appear incoherent at best, and at worst absurd.

Although the foundation of my argument in this chapter focuses on the work of Bainbridge and Stark that was first formulated during the 1970s and 1980s, the value their work holds as a possible means of explaining the forces at work in the development of Word of Faith theology is no less relevant in our modern day and age. The underlying view promoted by the work of Bainbridge and Stark, that there is essentially a supply and demand economic principle at work within religion, a principle that I argue is strongly present within the Word and Faith movement, is supported by modern day sociologists and economists, such as Professor Laurence R. Iannaccone from George Mason University, and Harvard University's Robert J. Barro. In their independent article responses during 2004 to the question of economic driving forces present within religion, both demonstrated the relevancy of the original Bainbridge and Stark view of the economic principles that underpin modern day religious institutions.<sup>1</sup> As recently as 1994 the validity of the views originally promoted by Bainbridge and Stark was debated,<sup>2</sup> following a series of discussions and papers, spanning from 1985 to 1993,<sup>3</sup> the key premise that a

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Weber and Peter Coy, 'Economists Are Getting Religion', *Bloomberg Business* (5 December 2004; <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/stories/2004-12-05/economists-are-getting-religion>).

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994): 230-252.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America – 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Laurence Iannaccone, 'The Consequences of Religious Market Structure', *Rationality and Society* 3 (1991): 156-177. Laurence Iannaccone, 'Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives', *Journal of Political Economy* 100 (1992): 271-292. Laurence Iannaccone, 'Why Strict Churches are Strong', *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1994): 1180-1211. Laurence R. Iannaccone and Roger Finke, 'Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change', *The Annals* 527 (1993): 27-39. Rodney Stark, 'From Church-Sect to Religious Economies', in *The Sacred in a Post-Secular Age* (ed. Phillip E. Hammond; Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985), 139-149. Rodney Stark, ed., 'Europe's Receptivity to Religious Movements', in *Religious movements: Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers* (ed. Rodney Stark; New York: Paragon, 1985), 301-343. Rodney Stark, 'Do Catholic

religious institution will respond to market forces in an effort to meet the needs and wants of its consumers, was once again confirmed, as was the response from the consumers. During a recent 2015 paper by Sriya Iyer,<sup>4</sup> submitted to the Faculty of Economics and St Catharine's College at the University of Cambridge, entitled 'The New Economics of Religion', the author clearly demonstrates how entwined religious entities and foundational economic ideas, such as supply and demand, remain in our contemporary world. This, once again, lends credence to the foundational work undertaken by Bainbridge and Stark.

I argue, therefore, that at a fundamental and practical level the understanding afforded us by Bainbridge and Stark as a means of developing a view of what underpins theological development within the Word of Faith movement is as relevant today as it was during the 1970s and 1980s when the theory was first proposed. The remainder of my discussion will, primarily, reference Bainbridge and Stark as they provide the most uncontaminated and clearly articulated view of what their original hypotheses propose.

Where the preceding models focus on explaining the influence dynamic on adherents or insiders, a second more practical argument will be dealt with next, that of Biblical literacy and Bible reading pattern is used to propose a possible reason for the absorption of false or unbiblical teachings and doctrines by the larger, and external, Christian community. This will demonstrate the extent of the influence that the Word of Faith movement exerts over both its own adherents and the larger, external, Christian community.

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Societies Really Exist?' *Rationality and Society* 4 (1992): 261-271. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *'The Future of Religion': Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985). Rodney Stark, *A Theory of Religion*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987). Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'Sociology of Religion', *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (ed. Edgar F. Borgatta and Marie L. Borgatta; New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2029-2037. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'Rational Choice Propositions about Religious Movements', *Handbook of Cults and Sects in America* (ed. David G. Bromley and Jeffrey K. Hadden; Greenwich: JAI Press, 1993): 109-125.

<sup>4</sup> Sriya Iyer, 'New Economics of Religion' (Faculty of Economics and St Catharine's College at the University of Cambridge; [http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/people/faculty/si105/lyer\\_2015\\_%20JEL.pdf](http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/people/faculty/si105/lyer_2015_%20JEL.pdf)).



The Oxford Dictionary defines influence as ‘the power to produce an effect’ and ‘the ability to affect someone’s character or beliefs or actions’.<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster’s dictionary extends this definition by defining influence as ‘the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command’.<sup>6</sup>

The definition of influence, therefore, defines it as power that is exerted over an individual without force. This implies that the individual allows such influence willingly. The concept of ‘willingly’, however, warrants further investigation. On the one hand, an individual can ‘willingly’ accept influence by having full comprehension of all the elements involved, such as the motives of the one exerting the influence, the immediate and future implications of the influence, and the true meaning of the influence. On the other hand, a person can ‘willingly’ accept influence without such certainty. Often such an acceptance is based upon surrogate factors such as peer acceptance, tradition, historical belief or even desperation that emanates from the individuals present position.

#### **4.1. Bainbridge and Stark: *Models of Cult Formation***

Why do people bring themselves under the influence of social or religious groups? To understand how the Word of Faith movement attracts adherents and exerts influence over them, it is essential to understand why a social or religious group is susceptible to such influence. What drives a group of individuals to be united in a community that allows them to be subjected to the influence exerted by either an individual or an institution?

Part of the answer may be found in the work of William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, two sociologists who conducted extensive research into the dynamics involved in the formation of social or religious groups.<sup>7</sup> They refer to such groups as ‘cults’,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Hawkins, ed. *Oxford Universal Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981), 365.

<sup>6</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary* (XXth ed. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam Webster Inc., 1994), 454.

<sup>7</sup> William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, ‘Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models’, *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1979): 283–295. William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

and define a cult as a social enterprise 'primarily engaged in the production and exchange of novel and exotic compensators.'<sup>9</sup> Compensators are elements of reward. They explicitly state that 'not all cults are religions' and explain that they refer to cults as 'movements that are innovative alternatives to the traditional systems of religious compensators.'<sup>10</sup> Within this context, then, the term cult simply implies a social bond that exists between various entities which exchange rewards with one another.

Defining what Bainbridge and Stark mean by compensators and rewards, within a religious context, the accompanying table 2 has been reproduced from their 1987 work entitled, *A Theory of Religion*.<sup>11</sup>

REWARDS	COMPENSATORS
<b>Church Membership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confers status and legitimate standing,</li> <li>• Provides access to other religious rewards.</li> </ul>	<b>Religious Doctrine</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualises contemporary suffering,</li> <li>• Provides hope,</li> <li>• Source of guidance, and</li> <li>• Provides reparation.</li> </ul>
<b>Attendance at Worship Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides social interaction.</li> </ul>	<b>Religious Experience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release of emotions,</li> <li>• Validation of compensators.</li> </ul>

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<sup>8</sup> In religious and theological literature, the word 'cult' often carries a derogatory and prejudicial connotation. This is especially relevant to this thesis, since many critics of the Word of Faith movement have defined it as a cult in the pejorative sense. In this chapter, however, the word 'cult' is used with a completely different intention. The chapter depends heavily on sociological, psychological and anthropological theories and observations. The source materials use the word 'cult' without any derogatory intentions. Adopting a predominantly sociological definition, in this chapter the word 'cult' refers to a group that has a sacred ideology and a set of rites which centre on sacred symbols. This usage of the term 'cult' does not confer judgement over the beliefs, and as such does not imply erroneous doctrines or beliefs.

<sup>9</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 284.

<sup>10</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 284.

<sup>11</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, *A Theory of Religion*.

<b>Participation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In church-related activities, and</li> <li>• Organisation.</li> </ul>	<b>Prayer &amp; Private Devotionalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divine aid and guidance,</li> <li>• Confessing guilt,</li> <li>• Securing comfort.</li> </ul>
<b>Child Socialisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural heritage,</li> <li>• Moral heritage,</li> <li>• Acceptable membership.</li> </ul>	<b>Particularism or Moral Superiority</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassurance of individual worth,</li> <li>• Religious identity.</li> </ul>

*Table 2: Bainbridge and Stark: Rewards and Compensators*

Bainbridge and Stark propose three different models to explain how cults form. The three models are variations of the root idea that cults form by offering innovative alternatives to contemporary religious thought. The three models are

- a) the psychopathology model,
- b) the entrepreneurial model, and
- c) the subculture-evolution model.<sup>12</sup>

The psychopathology model stems from a response to a general environment of deprivation. The response by a social group functioning within this environment is to rise above their contemporary circumstances, which leads them to develop 'novel cultural responses to personal and social crisis.'<sup>13</sup> The authors relate their model to social movement theory, which aims at describing the reaction of people in terms of various 'deprivation theories of revolution and social movements.'<sup>14</sup> Although the theologian Christian Smith would later demonstrate that there is a relationship between social movement theory and liberation theology,<sup>15</sup> Bainbridge and Stark

<sup>12</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation,' 283.

<sup>13</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 285.

<sup>14</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 284.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

concede that the psychopathology model (on its own) is inadequate to explain all cult phenomena.<sup>16</sup>

Although the psychopathology model is rooted in the study of mental or psychological illness, this does not imply that all cult leaders have some form of psychosis.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to account for the exceptions, Bainbridge and Stark turn to the entrepreneurial model of cult formation.<sup>18</sup> The focus of the psychopathology model is on cult leaders who structure the reward system exclusively for themselves. By contrast, in the entrepreneur model the cult leader develops a meaningful reward system that is beneficial to all the participants. As entrepreneurs, these cult leaders are motivated by profit that is derived through the exchange of compensators. Bainbridge and Stark identify three types of entrepreneurial cults. The first, audience cults, provide weak compensators, are entertainment orientated, and have no formal membership. The second, client cults, provide specific compensators, such as healing. These cults have a stable following but also no formal membership. They call the final type cult movements. These movements have a more elaborate compensator offering, have a committed following, and offer membership.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that, to achieve success, the cult must innovate. The cult is incapable of seizing 'a significant part of the market unless they achieve product differentiation.'<sup>20</sup>

The final model is the subculture-evolution model of cult innovation, which focuses on group interaction as opposed to individual innovation. It is proposed that a social dynamic can lead to a cult without the vision or leadership of an individual. A group of individuals with a similar social, political or religious need dynamically interacts and develops reward systems collectively.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 287.

<sup>17</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 286.

<sup>18</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 287.

<sup>19</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 288.

<sup>20</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 291.

<sup>21</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 291.

All human action 'is an on-going series of efforts to solve problems.'<sup>22</sup> Picking up on this idea, Bainbridge and Stark argue that all human beings deal with similar problems, share certain desires, and face related frustrations. Therefore, it stands to reason that they sometimes join together to solve shared problems. Bainbridge and Stark theorise that people tend to resort to political or criminal means when they attribute the source of their problems to other people or to society at large, but form cults when they see improving themselves or their relationship to the world as the key, but have found other methods unsatisfactory.<sup>23</sup>

The dynamic is best described by Popper, who states that man lives within the comfort of that which is familiar to him. Popper calls this the 'horizon of expectations.'<sup>24</sup> Within this horizon, man has an expectation of what is considered in his contemporary context as normal. The philosopher and student of Karl Popper at the London School of Economics, Ian Jarvie, draws our attention to the fact that at times external influences may result in the unexpected, which challenges this 'horizon of expectations'. To restore the familiar, man creates a new 'horizon of expectation'.<sup>25</sup>

The following table provides a summary overview of the three types of cults proposed by William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark.

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<sup>22</sup> Albert K. Cohen, , *Delinquent Boys* (New York: Free Press, 1955), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', 292.

<sup>24</sup> K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1963), 23, 41, 387.

<sup>25</sup> Ian C. Jarvie, 'Theories of Cargo Cults: A Critical Analysis', *Oceania* 34, no.1 (1963): 6.

<b>Psychopathology Model</b>	<b>Entrepreneur Model</b>	<b>Subculture-Evolution Model</b>
1. Founder develops compensators for his own use. 2. These compensators are then passed on to followers. 3. The followers compensate the founder with rewards.	1. Founder seeks rewards and to gain this he develops compensators. 2. These compensators are then passed on to the followers. 3. The followers compensate the founder with the appropriate rewards.	1. Various individuals develop a diversity of compensators to meet specific personal and social needs. 2. These compensators are then shared amongst the group.

*Table 3: Summary of Bainbridge and Stark's Three Models of Cult Formation*

As can be seen more clearly now, the psychopathology and the entrepreneur models are primarily focused on the actions and motivations of an individual who acts as the founder. The difference between these two models is centred in the motivation of the founder. The psychopathology model proposes no alternative motive at the outset. In this model, the founder seeks to develop compensators for his personal application; however, seeing the possible benefit of these compensators for others and for himself, the founder shares them with others who compensate him. The entrepreneur model, on the other hand, starts with the reward in mind, which gives rise to an innovative development of a compensator for the purpose of exchange. The subculture-evolution model is different in that it does not describe the development of the cult from the founder's point of view, but rather from a demand point of view.

Viewing the development of a cult, and re-contextualising these three models *within the basic concepts of supply and demand economics*, it becomes clear that these

are not three independent models in competition with one another. Rather, they are three elements of the same model. It is best described within the demand that is placed by the consumer (the group). The demand is the need that is identified within the social-network; a perceived compensator is conceptualised by this group, which then seeks to find such a compensator. On the supply side is the entrepreneur, who, either through personal experience or observation, identifies the compensator need and sets out to develop such a compensator. By matching the supply with the demand, both the entrepreneur and the consumer are adequately compensated, the entrepreneur through reward and the consumer by means of the appropriate compensator or need fulfilment.

Contextualising this sociological explanation of cult formation within a religious context, we see that the development of innovative alternatives to contemporary religious thought is driven by the need that drives the requirement for innovation. This need is expressed by the 'religious consumer' and is fulfilled by the 'religious supplier'.

Kent Miller, an organisational strategist, states that 'regardless of the origin and nature of their beliefs, the survival and growth of religious organizations depend on access to resources from the external environment ... This is the fundamental challenge shared by all organizations.'<sup>26</sup> Although Miller is using the language of management or leadership theory, he is saying essentially the same thing as Bainbridge and Stark: the survival of specific groups within the larger church depends on their ability to provide an innovative solution to a contemporary need.

Considering Word of Faith doctrine from this perspective, it shares the responsibility between minister (supply side) and congregant (demand side). This does not exonerate the minister from his responsibility to present an accurate theology. It merely presents one possible explanation of why the Word of Faith theology has evolved to include a variety of doctrines that differ, to some extent, from traditional evangelical theology. Bryan Wilson arrived at a similar conclusion when he recorded his observation that the decline of the church was less dramatic in communities

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<sup>26</sup> Kent Miller, 'Competitive Strategies of Religious Organizations', *Strategic Management Journal* 23, no. 5 (2002): 435–456.

where the church extended its involvement beyond the spiritual, and included a strong social offering.<sup>27</sup>

Part of the influence exerted by the Word of Faith movement can be attributed to the ways cults form. The movement derives some of its influence from personal and social needs, and some of the followers within the movement participate in driving the development of its theology. The dynamics of our contemporary socio-economic society has entrenched a culture of entrepreneurship, which has now found its way into the realm of theological development. Miller states that the 'boundaries between religion and other industries can be blurry. Blurring occurs through secularization of religious organizations.'<sup>28</sup> The rise of the Word of Faith movement suggests that the differentiation between the spiritual and organisational functions of the church has become blurred. This blurring allows a supply and demand culture to influence the theological development of the movement.

Dr David Beckworth, Assistant Professor of Economics at the Texas State University, conducted research on the 'dynamic effect of economic shocks on religiosity.'<sup>29</sup> Based on an analysis of historical data from the Seventh-day Adventist Church of America, he concluded that there is a correlation between consumer need and the church. He states that the church is 'found to [be] sensitive to economic shocks in the following manner: negative economic shocks typically lead to an increase in SDA religious participation and a decline in religious giving. The reverse is true for positive economic shocks. These results indicate that religious participation and religious giving in the SDA Church act as substitutes in response to economic shocks.'<sup>30</sup> His conclusion supports the view that the church community is greatly influenced by innovation. The church is affected by socio-economic

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<sup>27</sup> Bryan Wilson, 'New Images of Christian Community', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (ed. J. McManners; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 572.

<sup>28</sup> Kent Miller, 'Competitive Strategies of Religious Organizations', 437.

<sup>29</sup> David Beckworth, 'The Dynamic Effect of Economic Shocks on Religiosity: Evidence from the Seventh-day Adventist Church' (paper presented at a conference of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture, Washington, D.C., 2-5 April 2009), 1–21.

<sup>30</sup> Beckworth, 'The Dynamic Effect of Economic Shocks on Religiosity', 14.



conditions, which opens the door for entrepreneurial leaders to exert great influence through innovative responses to the socio-economic context.

Beckworth is not the only economist to offer a supply-and-demand-based explanation of phenomena in the church. For example, Professors Elzinga and Page, economists from the University of Virginia, in their paper entitled, 'Congregational Economies of Scale and the Megachurch: An Application of the Stigler Survivor Technique', conclude that the majority of protestant denominations in the USA are not characterised by megachurch congregations, as foreseen by Druker, but that individual congregant preference demanded more intimate community-based organisations.<sup>31</sup> In my view, this contextualises the development of the organisational function and structure of the church within the realm of individual preference.

#### **4.2. Festinger's 'Theory of Cognitive Dissonance'**

It is within the context of Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance that we find the evidence that this supply and demand need, which is being superimposed upon the organisational function of the church, can find its way into the spiritual and theological functions of the church.<sup>32</sup> In essence Festinger's theory states the following:

Dissonance and consonance are relations among cognitions that is, among opinions, beliefs, knowledge of the environment, and knowledge of one's own actions and feelings. Two opinions, or beliefs, or items of knowledge are dissonant with each other if they do not fit

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<sup>31</sup> Kenneth G. Elzinga and Colin T. Page, 'Congregational Economies of Scale and the Megachurch: An Application of the Stigler Survivor Technique' (paper presented at a conference of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture, Washington, D.C., 2-5 April 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957).

together; that is, if they are inconsistent, or if, considering only the particular two items, one does not follow from the other.<sup>33</sup>

The result of this is a desire or 'pressure' on the individual 'to reduce the dissonance and to avoid increases in dissonance'.<sup>34</sup> He furthermore states that reduction or avoidance of dissonance is achievable through 'behaviour changes, changes of cognition, and circumspect exposure to new information and new opinions'.<sup>35</sup> What is significant in determining what an individual will change, his or her beliefs or behaviour, is dependent upon the perceived reward. Various experiments, notably amongst these are the \$1–20 experiment conducted by Festinger and Carlsmith, as well as the Counter Attitudinal Advocacy experiments that were conducted by Leippe and Eisenstadt in 1994, have demonstrated the relationship between change and reward. *In essence, if the real or perceived reward demands or better fits a belief change than a behavioural change, then the individual will rather change his or her beliefs than his or her actions.*<sup>36</sup>

Prof. Nico Frijda, an authority on human emotion studies, contributes to the dissonance theory of Festinger. Frijda concludes that 'there thus are good reasons for thinking that emotions influence beliefs'.<sup>37</sup> He applies Festinger's theory within human emotional studies and demonstrates, as Festinger has, that the tension between belief and experience causes people to adapt their beliefs rather than their behaviour. It is stated as follows:

a perceived discrepancy between two or more conditions gives rise to an uncomfortable tension-like state that motivates the individual to seek ways of reducing this discrepancy between cognitions. The

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<sup>33</sup> L. Festinger, H. W. Riecken, and S. Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 25.

<sup>34</sup> Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> L. Festinger and J. M. Carlsmith, 'Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58 (1959): 203-210; Leippe and Eisenstadt, cited in E. Aronson, *The Social Animal* (9<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Worth Publishers, 2004), 166.

<sup>37</sup> N. Frijda, A. Manstead, A. and S. Bem, eds., *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

reviewed research supports the notion that cognitive discrepancy produces negative affect, and that this in turn motivates attempts at discrepancy reduction. One way in which discrepancy can be reduced is through belief change.<sup>38</sup>

Revisiting Bainbridge and Stark's examples of rewards and compensators as part of a response to a socio-economic and socio-political environment, against the backdrop of Festinger's theory, defines unrestricted influence within a dangerous framework. Where the socio-economic and socio-political environment produces a specific human need, influence is exerted through an agent that produces a product aimed at meeting the specific need. The innovation that is employed differentiates the agent (organisation, community, or individual) from its competitors. The perceived or experienced benefit, if in opposition to an established belief system, challenges the individual's beliefs, which can result in the re-evaluation of the individual's beliefs. Such re-evaluation may result in an adaptation of the belief itself.

Essentially, the implication of Festinger's statement within the context of the Word of Faith movement is that the movement innovates a spiritual product that comes with the promise of a better life, which meets the felt need. The need and its associated emotional impact is so strong that people are prepared to alter their beliefs in the hope that the innovation will ultimately meet their individual needs.

This theory demonstrates the influence dynamics, and how influence relates to physical, social, and emotional needs. It contextualises influence within a physical survival context, where immediate benefit outweighs future reward. It is at this point that there exists a tension between the physical and spiritual. In essence, it proposes that immediate physical, emotional, and social needs have the ability to overpower future spiritual rewards, resulting in reshaping individual theological beliefs.

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<sup>38</sup> Frijda et al., *Emotions and Beliefs*, 8.

#### 4.3. Fowler's 'Stages of Faith' and Allport's 'Theory of Group Formation'

Believers' spiritual maturity plays a part in the dynamics of influence. In his book *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler demonstrates the dynamic link between individual faith and social interaction when he states:

I believe faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith. How these capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and what kinds of environments we grow in. Faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual and nurture.<sup>39</sup>

The accompanying table 4 provides a brief overview of Fowler's six stages of faith:<sup>40</sup>

Stage	Stage Name	Description / Meaning
Stage 1	Intuitive-Projective	This stage applies primarily to preschool children, aged between three and seven. It is characterised by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the unconscious, and is marked by a relative fluidity of thought patterns. Religion is learned mainly through experiences, stories, images, and the people who interact with one another. It is during this stage that our most basic ideas about God are usually developed and is a reflection of the influences picked up from our parents' society.

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<sup>39</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), xiii.

<sup>40</sup> This table is compiled from various interpretive sources including, James Fowler's 'Stages of Faith' as presented by the website, *Psychology Charts*, <http://www.psychologycharts.com/james-fowler-stages-of-faith.html>; James Fowler, 1995, 'Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning. HarperOne.

Stage	Stage Name	Description / Meaning
Stage 2	Mythic-Literal	This stage applies to children of school age. These individuals understanding the world in a more logical way. During this stage individuals possess a strong belief in justice and universal fairness. Their understanding of God is almost always anthropomorphic. During this time metaphors and symbolic language are often misunderstood and are taken literally. They generally accept the stories told to them by their faith community, but tend to understand them in very literal ways.
Stage 3	Synthetic-Conventional	Most people move on to this stage as teenagers, reaching it as adolescents at around 12 years of age remaining in this stage into adulthood. This stage is characterised by conformity to authority and the religious development of a personal identity. Any conflicts with one's beliefs are ignored at this stage due to the fear of threat from inconsistencies.
Stage 4	Individuative-Reflective	This stage usually reaches from the mid-twenties to late thirties and is considered as a time of high tension and personal struggle. The individual takes personal responsibility for his or her beliefs and feelings. As one is able to reflect on one's own beliefs, there is openness to a new complexity of faith, but this also increases the awareness of conflicts in one's belief system. Individuals begin to critically examine their beliefs which may lead to disillusionment with what they have held onto for most of their life.

Stage	Stage Name	Description / Meaning
Stage 5	Conjunctive Faith	This stage is typically reached after 40, or during what is referred to as mid-life, and sees the person acknowledge the paradoxes and transcendence that are seated behind the symbols of their inherited system of belief. The individual resolves conflicts from previous stages by a complex understanding of a multidimensional, interdependent 'truth' that cannot be explained by any particular statement. In essence it is during this stage that individuals begin to realise the limits of logic and start to accept the contradictions as it pertains to their own belief system.
Stage 6	Universalising Faith	This is sometimes referred to as a period of 'enlightenment'. The individual would treat any person with compassion as he or she views people as part of a universal community, and considers that everyone in this universal community should be treated with universal principles of love and justice. Few people reach this stage. Those who do live their lives to the full in service of others.

*Table 4 – Fowler's Six Stages of Faith*

Fowler arrived at his view on the stages of faith as an attempt to describe how faith and belief mature within an individual over time. In developing his theory of how faith matures, he relied upon the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg and those that attempted to develop an understanding of how a person's values and perspectives change during the different stages in their life.<sup>41</sup> Among these

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Atkin, 'Critical Review, Response and Application of Reading based on Fowler's Theory on Stages of Faith (2014; retrieved 20 November 2015, <http://robertatkin.net/essays/critical-review-response-application-reading-based-fowlers-theory-stages-faith/>).

predecessors are Erik Erikson, Daniel Levinson, the Swiss psychologist Piaget, John Dacey and John Travers.<sup>42</sup> Fowler believed that faith is a universal construct and that its development followed a progressive linearity that is, in essence, linked to individual intellectual ability and personality development.<sup>43</sup> This idea of progressive development and faith development is supported by C. S. Lewis who states that 'there are a great many things that cannot be understood until you have gone a certain distance along the Christian road.'<sup>44</sup>

Way back in 1950, Gordon Allport advanced a theory to distinguish between mature and immature religion.<sup>45</sup> Green and Hoffman support the claim of Chirban that there is a link between Allport's intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity and Fowler's stages of faith.<sup>46</sup> Allport related extrinsic religion, which he called *religion as means*, to prejudice. By contrast, he argued that intrinsic religion, which he called *religion as an end*, is free of prejudice.<sup>47</sup> Allport defined *prejudice* as a belief that is held without understanding. He calls it prejudice because holding beliefs without understanding often leads to an 'unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence'.<sup>48</sup> This kind of non-rational conviction causes individuals with shared beliefs to cluster together and to exclude those who do not share these beliefs. This prejudice serves as the catalyst that binds certain individuals together within a worshipping community. Chirban identified the presence of prejudice as a motivating factor in faith stages 1–3, but noted that such prejudice was lacking in stages 4–6.<sup>49</sup>

The prejudice that is present in faith stages 1–3 establishes unique communities. Faith communities form with a more simplistic approach to faith. They rely on 'stories and visual impressions' that are 'interpreted literally' and are understood at a

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<sup>42</sup> Atkin, 'Fowler's Theory on Stages of Faith'.

<sup>43</sup> Atkin, 'Fowler's Theory on Stages of Faith'.

<sup>44</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount, 1977), 124.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1950).

<sup>46</sup> Charles W. Green and Cindy L. Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others', *Review of Religious Research* 30, no. 3 (1989): 246–254.

<sup>47</sup> R. Hood, 'Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religiosity' (*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Society*, ed. William Swatos; Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1998), 246–247.

<sup>48</sup> R. Rosnow, 'Poultry and Prejudice', *Psychology Today* 5, no. 10 (1972): 53.

<sup>49</sup> Green and Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others', 247.

superficial level only. There is a reliance on the group to provide validation for certain beliefs which are 'not subjected to serious scrutiny'. This group also attaches a high level of reverence to leadership figures, which enforces the group synergy and diminishes the probability of scrutinising beliefs. Green and Hoffman point out that many adults remain at this level.<sup>50</sup> They continue:

Fowler's descriptions of the ideal types of each of his faith stages can be used to develop predictions as to how people in various stages would view others who were perceived as being similar to or dissimilar to themselves. For example, adults in Stage Two are said to emphasize a literal interpretation of their beliefs and traditions. Such an approach should lead to negative perceptions of those who do not share those views, especially if the group believes that it possesses the only valid interpretation of faith. Stage Three people are said to be oriented very strongly toward the members of their in-group. Such relationships make up the foundation of their faith. Since it is very rare that strong in-group ties exist without negative out-group attitudes (Dion 1979), people in this third stage also are likely to express positive attitudes toward people in their in-group and negative attitudes toward people in an out-group.<sup>51</sup>

Green and Hoffman conclude that the 'data support the contention of Fowler and others that one's faith stage has an important impact upon other aspects of one's behaviour.'<sup>52</sup> Beliefs and values that are appealing to members in faith stages 1–3 will be further reinforced through group synergy, which is strongly based upon the trust placed within a central authoritative figure. In this dynamic, the influence finds a willing recipient that lacks the spiritual maturity through which to comprehend the implication of the acceptance.

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<sup>50</sup> Green and Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others', 246-247.

By implication there exists a direct correlation between a person's faith stage and his/her experiential intelligence derived from their interaction with the world around them and the experiences individuals have over time.

<sup>51</sup> Green and Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others', 248.

<sup>52</sup> Green and Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others', 253.



These two theories—Fowler’s six stages of faith and Allport’s religion with prejudice—help to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how people become committed members in Word of Faith churches. The groups are formed by people in faith stages 1–3. They embrace a literalistic understanding of Scripture and an uncritical acceptance of their beliefs, which are reinforced by trusting allegiance to a charismatic leader. These characteristics lead to the formation of faith communities that have strong in-group ties, but are averse to out-group engagement. Their ‘prejudice’ insulates them; they defend an uncritical allegiance to the in-group beliefs.

#### **4.4. Avery and Gobbel’s ‘Minister Validation’**

William Avery and Roger Gobbel published a field research paper in which they examined how ‘laity understand the relationship between the words of the preacher and the Word of God’ as well as the criteria used by laity to determine whether a preacher has in fact proclaimed the Word of God.<sup>53</sup> They concluded that:

The laity closely identify the Word of God with the Bible. Sermons containing overt and explicit biblical material are judged to be a proclamation of the Word of God. Also, the interpersonal relationship between clergy and laity was a major determining factor in judging sermons as a proclamation of the Word, frequently regardless of content of sermons. Where there were differences between clergy and laity concerning the Bible and matters of the Faith, there was a tendency for laity to rely on some unspecified individualistic, privatistic criterion.<sup>54</sup>

Their conclusion was based upon five primary observations. First, there is a correlation between the use of biblical materials and language and the congregation’s perception that the preacher is proclaiming the Word of God. If the preacher quotes or references much Scripture, he is preaching the Word of God.

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<sup>53</sup> William Avery and Robert Gobbel, ‘The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher’, *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980): 41–53.

<sup>54</sup> Avery and Gobbel, ‘The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher’, 41.

Similarly, if the preacher's language is salted with biblical words and phrases, the laity is likely to believe that he is preaching the Word of God.<sup>55</sup>

The second observation relates to the expertise of the minister. Laity placed reliance on the expertise of the minister, and look at the minister as a source that will accurately interpret and dispense 'facts and information in the Bible'.<sup>56</sup>

Third, people listen to sermons through the filter of their personal needs. The researchers identify the generic underlying need or filter as *individuals seeking comfort in dealing with life in general*. Christians deem the sermon to be vital for spiritual growth, but they hear the message selectively through their expectation that God will speak to them to provide guidance and comfort for daily life.<sup>57</sup> This perspective of self-interest significantly affects the way adherents hear the message. They are not keenly attuned to matters of doctrine purity or rational coherence. They background the theological arguments and forefront the elements of the sermon that offer them hope, comfort, or guidance. This implies that they engage the sermon more emotionally than rationally, and messages that positively affect their emotions are readily associated with the Word of God.

Fourth, the laity deem the minister to be the 'congregation's expert on the Bible and matters of faith,' but they 'do not permit the preachers to do their own personal interpretation. They reserve for themselves the 'right' to determine if the Word of God has been spoken. The researchers conclude that the 'laity are active interpreters of the preaching event and the significance of that event for their lives.'<sup>58</sup> This is surprising, even alarming. It poses a fundamental problem, in that it confers a requirement for an intimate and contextualised understanding of the Word of God on individuals who have no solid foundation from which to execute such a function effectively. This liberty opens up the interpretation to personal bias and has the potential to present a skewed interpretation of biblical doctrine.

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<sup>55</sup> Avery and Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher', 50.

<sup>56</sup> Avery and Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher', 50.

<sup>57</sup> Avery and Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher', 51.

<sup>58</sup> Avery and Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher', 51.

The fifth and final criterion that laity use to decide whether the Word of God has been spoken is the relationship between the minister and individual congregants. Avery and Gobbel judge this as the most important of all the criteria:

The laity's attitudes toward their minister determines the way in which they listen to sermons. Moreover, there is the strong suggestion that those attitudes are dominant in determining if the Word of God has been spoken in a sermon. In determining the presence of the Word of God, relationships between the minister and the laity appear to take precedence over what is said in a sermon. Laity do not demand moral perfection of their clergy, but they do seek attempted consistency between words and action. Yet, these are not crucial items for the laity. Rather, they are far more sensitive to, and influenced by, the personal relationships they have with the pastor. When the laity perceive kindness and understanding in their minister, and that the minister has concern for them expressing openness, warmth, and empathy, they consider seriously interpretations of the Gospel which may be at variance with their own understandings. When that relationship is positive, the laity are most prone to say that their minister is 'preaching the Word of God'; they are likely to assert that the Word of God has been spoken with almost no reference to the content of a particular sermon. Where that relationship is perceived as negative, the laity quickly dismiss sermons which express understandings contrary to their own. That negative relationship becomes the occasion for doubting the presence of the Word of God in a minister's preaching without reference to the content of particular sermons.<sup>59</sup>

Avery and Grobbel's research helps to explain why members of Word of Faith churches often fail to perceive the movement's theological flaws. The sermons of Word of Faith preachers are saturated with biblical phrases and references. They quote many verses, and often lift the exact wording of scripture to make their points. In addition, their messages speak faith and hope to people desperately seeking

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<sup>59</sup> Avery and Gobbel, 'The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher', 52.

comfort. The promise of health and wealth to those who trust God resonates with people's emotions, so that doctrinal or logical inconsistencies are overlooked. The relationship between the preacher and the hearer is a doubled-edged sword for Word of Faith ministers. In most cases, there is not a close relationship comparable to the biblical metaphor of a shepherd knowing his sheep. What is observable, however, is a deep allegiance to 'the man of God', who is upheld by his followers as a man with an especially close relationship with God. The members of his church feel privileged to have access to a man who is privy to such special revelation from God, and thus feel a deep allegiance to him. This allegiance can be so strong that they are willing to overlook many a flaw and defend whatever he says or does.

#### **4.5. Towards an Explanatory Model**

Although there may be many more competing and supporting variations of the theories describing the dynamics of influence, the small selection presented above seems to represent a firm understanding of the dynamics.

Bainbridge and Stark showed that cults form to address people's immediate and social needs. Influence is an exchange between the influencer and the influenced. The relationship is dependent upon the success of the influencer in identifying and meeting the felt needs of individuals. The concept of *felt needs* is important, because the influence is not necessarily tied to the influencer's ability to meet the needs. If the influencer can persuade the influenced that he has a solution, the person may buy into the transaction.

Festinger showed that individuals respond to a tension between their beliefs and their experiences by adapting their beliefs in terms of their perceived and/or real reward. He demonstrates that the physical reality associated with experience can be utilised to challenge and change the beliefs of an individual. In other words, the desire for a better life can be so strong that people will believe someone who gives them the hope of attaining it. In relation to Bainbridge and Stark, Festinger's observation has the potential to allow an influencer to exert sufficient influence over the individual, through meeting social and personal needs, to change longstanding beliefs without proper evaluation and validation.

It is easy to see how the dynamic interplay of these two theories—(a) Bainbridge and Stark and (b) Festinger—plays a role in the acceptance of the health and wealth gospel. Recognising people's felt need for physical and emotional health and their desperate desire to escape from poverty, the Word of Faith preachers have innovated a theological message that promises to meet adherents' felt needs for personal well-being and economic freedom. Their persuasive propaganda coupled with the enticing power of their promises are sufficient to cause many to accept their message without subjecting it to rigorous intellectual evaluation.

Avery and Gobbel show how powerful the relationship between the spiritual leader and the listener can be. The dynamic that they observed demonstrates how surrogate validation is used by individuals, and how this allows these individuals to be influenced. Avery and Gobbel's case studies fit Fowler's hypothesis that there is a segment of people who rely on literal interpretation in the development of their beliefs: they do not subject their beliefs or new beliefs to serious scrutiny and at the same time place their trust in a central authoritative figure.

Avery and Gobbel noted that listeners interpret the validity of what they hear in terms of the fact that scripture has been quoted. These individuals also accepted as true what they heard from a trusted spiritual leader, and did not necessarily subject what they heard to scrutiny. Again, as with Bainbridge, Stark and Festinger, understanding and acceptance was contextualised in terms of individual and private needs.

What is evident is that personal needs play a vital part in the dynamic of an individual's understanding of and accepting what they are taught by a spiritual leader. In terms of theology, an influencer may structure a doctrine aimed at addressing a specific need, and in doing so depart theologically from the truth. This is probably seldom intentional. The spiritual leader is himself influenced by the quest for solutions to felt needs—either his personal needs or his need to ensure the success of his ministry through innovation. The leaders themselves are not immune to the power of felt needs to influence theological convictions. They need a high level of spiritual and emotional maturity to submit new teachings or ideas to rigorous intellectual evaluation. They also need a deep commitment to a Christocentric approach to theology.

What is equally evident is the influence that a spiritual leader can exert over a listener through an established trust relationship. The observations by Avery, Gobbel and Fowler, that such a trust relationship results in an acceptance without subjecting the teaching to scrutiny, are most disconcerting. The potential for exploitation is evident.

In context, it is clear that the relationship between the influencer and the influenced is not a one-way exertion of power of the influencer over the influenced. There exists a subtle dynamic of mutual response. On the one hand, the influencer responds to the needs of the individuals who willingly accept the influence, due to the fact that they derive a reward or benefit from it. Their acceptance validates the actions of the influencer. The trust relationship between both parties strengthens, and the influencer is empowered by the influenced to exert even more influence. This is a symbiotic and not a parasitic relationship, and in my view is best described as the economics of religious influence. Using the term economics contextualises influence in terms of a mutually acceptable exchange that is, at the time, considered by the parties as mutually beneficial.

#### **4.6. Influence over Non-adherents**

The preceding argument defines the influence exerted over believers within a specific movement and attempts to demonstrate the dynamics at work. However, the influence of the Word of Faith movement is by no means confined to its adherents. The movement exerts considerable influence over the broader Christian community. Although this is a secondary consideration in this chapter, this section will attempt to demonstrate how the influence exceeds the boundaries of the particular movement and spills over to non-adherents.

The movement's influence over non-adherents is exerted through its prominent use of mass media—literature, radio, and television. In her research on the use of television as a means of reaching the masses in Ghana, Marleen De Witte made the following observations:

Although the mediation of religion in itself is nothing new, the relation between religion and mass media is only now being developed as a

specific field of scholarly interest. Various forms of mass mediation of religion all over the globe challenge the hitherto widely held assumption that with the global spread of 'modernity' societies would become more and more differentiated and religion would retreat into its own domain of 'the sacred' and 'the Private'.<sup>60</sup>

De Witte identifies the important role mass media has to play in the survival and growth of the larger Christian church. She recognises the element that makes the Charismatic broadcast appealing is its spontaneity and departure from structure. In doing so, she contextualises influence within the charismatic leader, whom she describes within the definition provided by Max Weber.

Max Weber built his theory of charisma (1978) on a long tradition of theological thinking about the difference between the institutionalised and the spiritual aspects of Christianity (Fabian 1971:4). He described charisma as a type of authority based not on traditional, inherited power, nor on rational-bureaucratic power, but on a special grace, a supernatural gift of power, or, more precisely, on the perception of such gifts among the followers of a charismatic leader. From Weber's logical opposition of the flowing, spontaneous character of charisma and fixed, institutionalised forms of authority and behaviour, one could conclude that non-spontaneous, ritualised behaviour would destroy or at least counteract charisma.<sup>61</sup>

An important point, which Weber highlights, is that the influenced allow the charismatic leader to influence them, by relying on a form of surrogate assessment that is based on personal perception. This personal perception, once again, contextualises influence within an individualistic framework. De Witte's research highlighted the fact that the influence of mass media Pentecostal and Charismatic

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<sup>60</sup> Marleen De Witte, 'Altar Media's "Living Word": Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2003), 173. For the sake of readability, footnotes have been omitted from the quotation.

<sup>61</sup> De Witte, 'Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana', 174.

broadcasts extends beyond the movement and exerts a direct influence over individuals irrespective of 'religious orientation or affiliation'.<sup>62</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation on the Word of Faith movement, Russell Morris addressed the extensive influence of the Word of Faith movement on the larger Christian church and society through the use of mass media. He claims that Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) reaches over 100 million homes in the USA. TBN broadcasts to more than 75 countries, and has programming in 11 languages. Morris says that Daystar Television Network has a potential audience of 80 million homes in the USA and 670 million homes worldwide.<sup>63</sup> 'Much of the programming on these stations is word of faith in orientation.'<sup>64</sup> By implication Morris concludes that the influence exerted is acceptable to the listener or viewer due to the personal, physical and social needs of the individual. His conclusion about the dynamics of influence echo the view expressed earlier in this chapter with reference to how the Word of Faith movement influences adherents:

Religious media has become the venue from which many find a worldview that reflects their values and justifies their behaviour and way of life, producing a consumer-oriented spirituality. William Hendricks describes the theology of the electronic church as the hope that God is unambiguously on the side of the believer who claims the promises of faith.<sup>65</sup>

During 2012 the South African Theological Seminary conducted an online survey with the aim of gaining insight into Bible reading practices. The results of this survey were published in January 2013 in a report entitled *Bible Reading Practices in South*

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<sup>62</sup> De Witte, 'Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana', 197.

<sup>63</sup> Morris, 'Word of Faith Theology', 129.

<sup>64</sup> Russell Morris, 'A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Specific Tenets of Word of Faith Theology: Pastoral Implication for the Church of God' (PhD dissertation; South African Theological Seminary, 2012), 129.

<sup>65</sup> Morris, 'Word of Faith Theology', 130.



*Africa*.<sup>66</sup> I used both the published report as well as the available research data in the discussion that follows.

The survey responses seem to demonstrate a high level of influence exerted by mass media over how the Christian community learn about the Bible. The question: how I learned about the Bible has four critical mass media elements, these are (a) the Internet, (b) television, (c) radio and (d) Christian books. A significant number of respondents indicated that they make use of these four media sources to learn about the Bible, and inevitably, construct their theology. To be specific, 45 per cent of respondents indicated that Christian books are the source from which they learn about the Bible, 16 per cent indicated the use of the Internet as a source, 13 per cent use television and 11 per cent radio.<sup>67</sup> When the extent to which Word of Faith content dominates leading Christian television stations, the fact that 13 per cent of evangelical Christians in South Africa indicate that Christian television is a meaningful force at work on their understanding of the Bible is noteworthy. This underpins the research done by Marleen De Witte and Russell Morris.

Although the focus of this chapter is upon the way that the Word of Faith movement attracts and influence adherents, this short survey of the research conducted by De Witte, Morris, and Smith shows that the movement also exerts considerable influence upon the larger Christian community through its use of media.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The reach of the Word of Faith movement, as described by Morris, is represented within the television statistics above. The extent to which the reach is able to influence listeners and/or viewers external to the Word of Faith movement would

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<sup>66</sup> Kevin G. Smith, comp., *Bible Reading Practices in South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Theological Press, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Bible Reading Practices*, 36–37. Smith notes that ‘we assume the reason for Bible college attendance, television broadcasts, and radio broadcasts scoring so low relates more to their reach than their potential impact’ (39). It is worthwhile noting that 45 per cent of respondents indicated that Christian books are the source from which they learn about the Bible, 16 per cent indicated the use of the Internet as a source, 13% use television and 11% radio. Although small by comparison these figures remain significant in real terms.

depend upon the individual viewer and will be dictated to by very personal, physical and social needs. This then implies that a viewer, dissatisfied with his or her physical or social condition, if exposed to Word of Faith teaching, has the potential to be influenced by the movement. This is supported by both Fore and Hull, who see individuals using religious media as a means to justify their behaviour and, to a large extent, a consumer type spirituality. Again this is supported by the theory of Bainbridge and Stark, which contextualises influence within the realm of immediate social and personal needs.<sup>68</sup>

Festinger's theory holds true here as well, and the non-Word of Faith Christians, if faced with a tension between their beliefs and experience will seek to resolve this tension at the hand of rewards. Synan's claim that what makes the Word of Faith movement attractive is in essence, its social emphasis,<sup>69</sup> demonstrates how the Word of Faith movement reach of influence is extended. Effectively the psychological factors that drive the dynamic between exerting influence and accepting influence does not differ between adherent (internal) and non-adherent (external): what differs is access, and that is what mass media offers the Word of Faith movement's leadership in exerting an influence over non-adherents.

The aim of this chapter is to propose a possible model through which to understand how entire Christian communities, comprising well-educated and intelligent members, are willing to accept teachings and doctrines which are incapable of withstanding examination. Through Festinger, Bainbridge and Stark's theories one possible scenario of how influence can be exerted over both adherents and non-adherents has been presented. What this discussion presents is a reasonable argument to demonstrate that the influence of the Word of Faith movement, or any other movement for that matter, is a reality and that both the exertion of influence and the acceptance or submission to influence is driven by very personal and individualistic factors.

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<sup>68</sup> Morris, 'Word of Faith Theology', 129; William F. Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture* (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1987), 24; Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 39.

<sup>69</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

## Chapter 5

### Dialogue with the Word of Faith Movement

I have argued that the Word of Faith movement is *authentically Christian* with *aberrant theology* but *extensive influence*. The widespread influence of the movement is generally recognised by critics, but its Christian roots and theological centre are not. The preceding chapters have attempted to establish three hypotheses:

- 1) The Word of Faith movement is Christian in both its origin and its beliefs.
- 2) The deification of man lies at the heart of the Word of Faith movement's theology, and serves as something of an organising framework for the movement's other core beliefs.
- 3) The influence of the Word of Faith movement, which is surprising at first, is not all that surprising when the dynamics of factors like cult formation, cognitive dissonance, and minister validation are considered.

If these three hypotheses are accepted, then they require a certain type of response from the broader evangelical church towards the Word of Faith movement. They require that the broader evangelical church attempt to engage in constructive dialogue with the Word of Faith movement. Rather than treat the Word of Faith movement as a non-Christian cult, evangelicals need to engage its adherents as Christian brothers and sisters.

The thesis of this chapter is that the broader Evangelical Church should treat the Word of Faith adherents as Christian brothers and that through dialogue Word of Faith theology should be debated in an attempt to develop reconciliation with the Word of Faith movement, while at the same time assisting the movement to develop, through education, sound Christian doctrine.

## 5.1. Introduction to Word of Faith Engagement

A single theological construct seems to bind many of the Word of Faith movement's diverse theological views together. Its dominion theology is central to its primary theological beliefs. Word of Faith dominion theology teaches that the initial created state of man was that of a god who held equality with God,<sup>1</sup> a teaching that lacks scriptural support. The movement's appeals to passages like Psalm 82<sup>2</sup> and 2 Peter 1:4 as scriptural support for its view of human deification illustrates one of the root problems with the movement—its deficient hermeneutic. There is an obvious deficiency in a consistent scriptural reading. Word of Faith theology seems to contextualise God in terms of his attributes only, denying God's true substance. Such a single dimensional view of God results in moral-attribute similarity being interpreted as divine similarity (2 Pet 1:4), which, in turn, is interpreted as man possessing divinity.<sup>3</sup> Word of Faith theology on *imago Dei* lacks historical perspective, is weak in its source language understanding and is beyond the context of scripture. It is clear that the movement lacks a sound hermeneutical model in

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<sup>1</sup> Munroe, *Releasing Your Potential*, 71; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 25, 38-40; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 113, 159.

<sup>2</sup> The movement relies, *inter alia*, on Psalm 82 in the advancement of this theological view, but this lacks validity as the passage is not a proclamation of human divinity but an accusation against the representatives of God, who had been placed by God over God's children to act as God would have, had they been in His presence (Rhodes, *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses*, 83). It is an indictment of the corruption of the power or authority given by God, resulting in the exploitation of the children of God.

Projecting an alternative interpretation in support of human deification onto the meaning of אלהים within the context of Psalm 82 is not possible for two reasons. The first is that God himself proclaims that there is no god besides Himself (Isaiah 44:8), there is none that preceded him and none that will follow after him (Isaiah 43:10); God is undeniably the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). The second reason is that Israel as a monotheistic religion would have a firm understanding of אלהים in terms of its meaning as judge as it refers to humans. To have contextualised it any differently would have been blasphemous and clearly beyond the context of a Judaic understanding of the position and role of man.

Word of Faith interpretation of Psalm 82 and John 10, therefore, lacks scriptural context. A historical understanding is absent as is the contemporary meaning that was assigned to terms, ideas and words at the time of the original recording of these.

<sup>3</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53, 90-91, 109, 113 159, 105; Munroe, *Releasing Your Potential*, 71-72.

constructing its theology.<sup>4</sup> What is evident is that the movement's lack of a clear understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* has resulted in the evolution of a theology that lacks a sound biblical context and which extends the idea of *imago Dei* within a purely anthropocentric framework. Word of Faith Covenant Theology, Christology, Faith and Confession Theology as well as its Health and Prosperity Theology all find their foundation, purpose and validation within the Movement's distorted view of man as god.<sup>5</sup> In essence Word of Faith theology, therefore, has a single underlying theology, that of human deification, which invalidates to a large extent its larger theological views.

The movement's Christology contextualises Christ in terms of restoring righteousness, which is viewed by the Word of Faith movement as restoring man to his original created position of having equality with God,<sup>6</sup> man's divine right to exercise dominion over all of creation,<sup>7</sup> and authority that allows man to express his will as a creative act.<sup>8</sup> The redemptive aspect of salvation, in which man is redeemed from an eternity without God is replaced by a restoration view.<sup>9</sup> The latter clearly contextualises the Word of Faith theology in terms of man while the former focuses primarily on God. Word of Faith Christology is viewed as a legal fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant which aims to bestow certain rights and privileges to man. These restored rights, if believed and confessed, allow man to exercise his dominion

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<sup>4</sup> Derek E Vreeland, 'Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology: A Defense, Analysis and Refinement of the Theology of the Word of Faith Movement'. (Theological Interest Group, 2001; retrieved 10 January 2012, [http://www.brothermel.net/DV\\_RWOFT.pdf](http://www.brothermel.net/DV_RWOFT.pdf). Accessed 10 January 2012); Sims, 'In Defence of the Word of Faith', 180, 177-78; William P. Atkinson, 'The Nature of the Crucified Christ in the Word-Faith Teaching', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 2 (2007): 184.

<sup>5</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 75-76, 90-92, 109.

<sup>6</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 75-76, 92.

<sup>7</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35-36; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53, 90-96, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 72; Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53; Dollar, 'Study Notes: The Secret Combination for True Prosperity' (retrieved, 17 January 2012, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/StudyNotes.aspx?id=62>), 105.

<sup>9</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 92, 95-96; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35.

and authority by divine right. This means that man now has the ability to exercise his will in creating a life of health and prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

*What, then, is the cause of the Word of Faith movement's aberrant theology?* Vreeland, in addressing Word of Faith doctrinal problems, proposes that the 'isolation from traditional denominational structures created an opportunity for theological innovations,' which has often resulted in 'less than accurate methodologies and piecemeal constructs that in part have hindered the work of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>11</sup> It is Sims, however, who issues a call for the Word of Faith movement to develop 'a solid apologetic foundation that brings us back to the word of God, in the true Word of Faith tradition'.<sup>12</sup> As Vreeland has done, Sims also identifies a lack of education and meaningful debate between the Word of Faith movement and the larger Christian community as part of the problem.<sup>13</sup> Another notable Charismatic academic, William Atkinson, also identifies a lack of sound hermeneutics as a contributing factor.<sup>14</sup> We can thus identify these major contributing causes: (a) lack of theological training, (b) ignorance of historical theology, (c) isolation from the theological community, and (d) deficient and inconsistent hermeneutics.

Andrew Perriman confirms these as causes. He argues that although some of the theology of the Word of Faith movement has become distorted, it still 'arise[s] out of something authentically Christian'.<sup>15</sup> He then claims that it is the Word of Faith movement's 'isolation and separatism', combined with a lack of 'serious Biblical scholarship' and 'evangelical dialogue' that is the cause of many of its theological errors.<sup>16</sup> Perriman, however, highlights another very important point which speaks to an even deeper underlying issue—a lack of ethical boundaries with which to counteract the dangers of radical faith ministry. Associated with this 'ethical' aspect

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<sup>10</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8-9, 23, 49, 57-58, 62-63, 92, 95-96; Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in your Mind*, 205-206, 297.

<sup>11</sup> Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180.

<sup>13</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 177-178.

<sup>14</sup> Atkinson, *The Nature of the Crucified Christ*, 184.

<sup>15</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 213.

<sup>16</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 232-233.

is the individual-centred ministry of much of the movement and its image of 'greed' and 'indifference to economic injustice'.<sup>17</sup> This latter part is entrenched in its prosperity theology, which is an outcome of its 'little gods' doctrine.

We can consolidate the reasons identified above into two primary causes of or catalysts for the Word of Faith movement's departure from mainstream evangelical theology. On the one hand, we have education—the naïve hermeneutic, historical ignorance, and isolation from theological discourse are all rooted in a lack of theological training. On the other hand, arguably at a much deeper level, we have ethics. The distorted ethic evidenced by many of the movement's leaders is rooted in its glorification of man as 'god' and its exaltation of greed as 'faith'.

Word of Faith theology is, however, not beyond correction.

## **5.2. Primary Focus Areas for Word of Faith Engagement**

### **5.2.1. Education: A Precondition for Sound Theological Development**

It is the theological-ethicist Richard Niebuhr who contextualises many of the underlying causes identified by Perriman within the realm of education. He defines the 'theological community' as one of dialogue where the exchange takes place between 'the teacher, the student and the common object'. He warns that when 'communication is a one-way process' the result is not education but 'indoctrination'.<sup>18</sup> Farley defines 'three criteria for clergy education'; the first is the acquisition of the 'skills and methods' that are required for theological understanding. The second is the ability to 'assess' or 'discern' 'the truths and realities with which faith has to do' and the third is the requirement for a historical understanding of theology and the church.<sup>19</sup> Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans<sup>20</sup> proposes the

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<sup>17</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 234-235.

<sup>18</sup> Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 117, 162

<sup>19</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 181-184.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 93-94.

contextualisation of theology within, amongst others, a synthetic model, which is strongly centred on dialogue. It is, however, not a dialogue aimed at conversion or surrender, but rather on defining the true meaning, defending a belief, confronting an erroneous view and accepting evidence as truth.

Education is a precondition for sound theological development. Niebuhr's call for a theological community is not a call for dialogue to be centralised within a denominational community, but rather a dialogue that spans across the entire Christian church. It is only in such a transparent and open engagement that the 'isolation and separatism' identified by Perriman can be adequately addressed.<sup>21</sup> The Word of Faith movement has to be invited by the larger Evangelical theological community to participate in contemporary theological debate, and the Word of Faith movement needs to accept the invitation and commit itself to the dialogue. This is obviously dependent, first and foremost, on the premise that the larger Evangelical movement accepts the Word of Faith Movement as part of the Christian community.

Niebuhr stresses that there has to be mutual dialogue.<sup>22</sup> However, for mutual dialogue to exist there has to be conformity of definition. This means that all parties should, at the very least, understand what the other party implies when they use certain theological ideas or terms. An example would be the difference of interpretation of what the term means, and its interpretive implication, means to both Evangelicals and Word of Faith believers. Bevans states that this mutual dialogue is not aimed at conversion or surrender, but rather on defining the true meaning.<sup>23</sup> By defining the true meaning the conformity of definition is achieved and meaningful dialogue can take place. Throughout this thesis I have highlighted the misalignment between theological terms as understood by the Word of Faith movement and the larger Evangelical movement. No term stresses the implication of non-conformity more than the Word of Faith definition of righteousness. Word of Faith superimposes

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<sup>21</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers*; Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 232.

<sup>22</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 93-94.



upon the term righteousness a meaning of equality with God.<sup>24</sup> Bevans's call, therefore, to identify and define the true meaning as part of dialogue, is critical.

The third aspect of communication speaks to confronting error, defending beliefs and accepting evidence as truth.<sup>25</sup> To do this, however, there is a requirement on the dialogue parties to develop the skills and methods that will enable them to become true participants in the dialogue process. Farley identifies three main areas within which skills and methods have to be acquired for a theologian to become a true participant within the theological debate. Primary amongst these are theological understanding, followed by the ability to assess and discern the underlying realities and being able to contextualise contemporary theology in terms of its historical roots.<sup>26</sup>

However, communication and the acquisition of skills and methods cannot be treated as two independent elements of education. It is, rather, a dynamic interplay between the two that ensures a sound evolution of theological thought. It is critically important that debate takes place between all parties within the ecclesiastical community with equal and mutual participation. Niebuhr warns that when 'communication is a one-way process' the result is not education but 'indoctrination'.<sup>27</sup> Kevin Smith proposed that 'theology is the study of God' and that 'we do theology when we reason and discourse about the nature and purposes of God'.<sup>28</sup> He constructs a model of doing theology by viewing theology as 'faith seeking understanding through reasoning and discoursing about God'.<sup>29</sup> Smith defines his model of doing theology as follows:

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<sup>24</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>25</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 93-94.

<sup>26</sup> Farley, *Theologia*, 181-184.

<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers*, 117

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 10. From this point onwards Smith's work is referenced as it presents a solution that can easily be adopted to address some of the weaknesses within Word of Faith theology. It is, however, important to note that Smith has not focused his work towards the Word of Faith movement nor has he derived the particular application from it. I am merely applying Smith's model and proposing a possible solution to aid in correcting Word of Faith theology.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 39.

We can only do theology to the extent that we have a clear vision of what theology is and, flowing from that vision, a clear commitment regarding how it should be done. Theology, as we see it, is the systematic study of God's revelation (as recorded in the scriptures) and people's faith (as encoded in their statements and enacted in their practices). The goal of theology is [to] discern the will of God in our generation and context, so that we might live and act in ways that are faithful to his nature and purposes. To accomplish this task, theological study must flow from a passionate love for God; it can only be done by those who have faith and crave understanding. It must be centred on Jesus Christ, based on the Bible, guided by the Holy Spirit, and informed by church history. Evangelical theology, must, in addition, be mission-minded, context-sensitive, and practically-orientated. Finally, since we are seeking truth, our conclusions must be plausible in the light of the current state of scientific knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

Smith's theological model meets all the criteria for the establishment of an education-based solution as identified by Niebuhr, Perriman, Farley, and Bevans. In Smith's model it is clear that the underlying theological education model consists of a strong hermeneutical focus, followed by a critical approach that is made subject to dialogue and contextualised within its correlation between diverse elements. He, does, however, expand on Niebuhr, Perriman, Farley, and Bevans in one critical regard, that of ethics.

### **5.2.2. Ethics: the Case for a Christ-Centred Approach to Theology**

Smith states that 'if theology is the quest to know God and his will for us, then it should be Christ-centred. God has revealed his nature, will, and purpose for humanity in various ways, but supremely through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3)'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 17.

Linnemann, as quoted by Smith, contextualises the point of Christo-centricity by stressing that there is interplay between man as the centre of our Christian faith on the one hand, and Christ as the centre on the other. This is important, as Smith's model is entirely a Christocentric theological model. Smith's understanding of Linnemann demonstrates that she effectively defines liberal theology as anthropocentric in nature.<sup>32</sup> If this is true then the anthropocentric nature of Word of Faith theology would position the movement's beliefs within a more liberal interpretation of theology. This is not a claim that the Word of Faith theology is liberal but rather that the movement has a clearly liberal approach to much of its beliefs.

First, evangelical theology is doxological. She notes that liberal theologians make a name for themselves by advancing ideas that radically diverge from the teachings of scripture and the traditions of historical Christianity. By contrast, evangelical theologians do not attempt to construct their own theology; they try to remain faithful to God's word. The evangelical is only trying to make a name for God, not for himself.

In the light of this statement by Linnemann, the Word of Faith movement is clearly more liberal in their engagement with theology. This is an important departure point, as it provides an engagement platform that views Word of Faith theology within the context of being a different view without merely rejecting it as purely metaphysical. It allows for a framework whereby engagement can take place. This does not imply that the Word of Faith movement is a liberal theological movement, but that, as with many of its developments, it embraced certain ideas and views which have to be understood for the larger Evangelical movement to find the appropriate and correct approach to engagement.

### **5.3. Proposing a Shift in How the Word of Faith Movement Does Theology**

With the problem identified, and a high level solution proposed by Niebuhr, Perriman, Farley, and Bevans, the search for a comprehensive and practical solution led to Smith's model for doing theology. His Christocentric foundation proposes a promising solution to the underlying cause of Word of Faith departure from sound

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 17.

biblical theology, while his hermeneutical model addresses theological education engaging three core principles, namely dialogue, truth and belief.

It is worthwhile noting that Smith is not proposing something new or foreign in his hermeneutical model, but rather consolidates a variety of hermeneutical focus areas into a single model for doing theology. Contextualising Smith's model in terms of the solutions proposed by Niebuhr, Perriman, Farley, and Bevans, the twelve components of his model are grouped into four distinct areas to address Word of Faith hermeneutical and ethical concerns.

Truth	Belief	Dialogue	Ethics
Truth refers to establishing a singular foundation or core belief so that all theological debate can have a singular source.	Belief refers to the church, its history, doctrines and understanding of the revelation of God to man.	Dialogue refers to seeking practical application for theological beliefs.	Ethics in this context refers to an attempt to address, a dominantly, anthropocentric theology of the Word of Faith movement.
Smith's Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canonical</li> <li>• Exegetical</li> <li>• Trinitarian</li> </ul>	Smith's Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecclesiastica</li> <li>• Historical</li> <li>• Missional</li> </ul>	Smith's Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextual</li> <li>• Logical</li> <li>• Practical</li> <li>• Systematic</li> <li>• Scientific</li> </ul>	Smith's Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christocentric</li> </ul>

*Table 4: Contextualising Smith's Model*

### 5.3.1. Truth: Scripture as the Foundation

The first area aims to address truth by establishing a non-negotiable anchoring point. Scripture, and scripture alone, is the source of God's revelation. This statement is clearly addressed by Smith under the heading Canonical, where he insists that

scripture represents the final revelation from God to man. Smith clearly states that 'the Bible in its entirety and the Bible alone is our normative guide for faith and practice. It is God's inspired record and interpretation of his revelation to us. Therefore, the canon is the locus of theology. Our theological perspective on any question or problem must come to grips with what the entire word of God teaches about the topic'.<sup>33</sup>

Smith's claim that Evangelical theology is exegetical theology is based upon the reality that 'scripture plays a normative and authoritative role in evangelical theology'.<sup>34</sup> Smith reiterates the importance of scripture as an absolute foundation from where all theological views must emanate when he states that 'since God and his will are infallibly revealed only through his written word, the quest to discern God's will must be grounded in scripture'.<sup>35</sup>

Smith addresses the problems highlighted by Vreeland, Sims, and Atkinson when he defines his exegetical model within the context of five exegetical focus areas, each representing an acceptable approach to exegesis, each differing, however, in the level of exhaustiveness, and as such has a correlating caution that must be considered when developing theology.<sup>36</sup> Smith, correctly, states that 'in an ideal world, we would be able to exegete every biblical text that addresses our study. In the real world, however, we often have to settle for a selective study of texts. We should attempt a full exegetical study of the biblical texts which teach most directly and extensively about our subject'.<sup>37</sup> It is this latter part that is vital for sound theological development, and which is lacking in much of the Word of Faith movement's theological development.

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 108; cf. Vreeland, *Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology*, 1; Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180; Atkinson, *The Nature of the Crucified Christ*, 184.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 108.

Unfortunately, Word of Faith reliance on *special revelation*,<sup>38</sup> would stand in opposition to Smith's claim that (1) 'the Bible alone is our normative guide for faith and practice', and that (2) 'God and his will are infallibly revealed only through his written word'.<sup>39</sup> Their claim would be that such a restriction eliminates the Holy Spirit as source of God's ongoing revelation, and as such would argue that Smith's reliance on exegesis is a hindrance to God's work.

Smith's model, however, contextualises both canon and exegesis in terms of a theocentric approach where the role of the Holy Spirit is not diminished or denied. He states that 'authentic theology is Spirit-dependent. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide'.<sup>40</sup> His model is based on the premise that the Holy Spirit 'reveals the Father and the Son, and he guides us into all truth. He opens our minds to understand the deep things of God. Without his presence and tutelage, we are blind guides. Our human minds and methods are necessary, but not sufficient. They must be yielded to God's Spirit in prayer, seeking his help to divide the word of truth rightly'.<sup>41</sup> Smith's model, therefore, denies neither the Spirit nor revelation, but rather contextualises the working of the Holy Spirit as the revealer of truth from within the inspired and revealed Word of God.

Smith, therefore, presents a sound model that centralises the core foundation from which theology is to develop as the Word of God made understandable to the human mind through the Holy Spirit. His model accepts revelation as an act of the Holy Spirit whereby the Spirit reveals the truth about God and Christ as contained within the inspired Word of God. Smith's model, however, clearly excludes 'revelation knowledge', as defined by the Word of Faith movement, as a source of theological development.

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<sup>38</sup> It must be noted that the Word of Faith understanding of special revelation goes beyond the traditional Evangelical understanding of the term, by superimposing revelation beyond or additional to scripture into the meaning.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 100, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 118.

### 5.3.2. Belief: Centred in a Missional Focus

Smith's second area aims to address belief as it refers to the church, its history, doctrines and understanding of the revelation of God to man as well as its purpose. He accepts that theology has implications beyond the church but stresses that 'we see the chief task of theology as trying to discern the will of God for the people of God in a particular context or situation'.<sup>42</sup> His ecclesiastical approach places the church as a community of believers at the centre of knowing and living the will of God. It is a theocentric approach, in which the focus is on the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

By looking back through history, Smith places a demand on contemporary theologians to seek an understanding of how previous generations understood the Word of God in an attempt 'to remain faithful to God'.<sup>43</sup> The ability to understand beliefs and practices from a historical context allows contemporary theologians to look at the churches' heritage critically.

The focus in this partition of Smith's model is on the church, firstly to understand that the community of believers (ecclesiastical) has throughout history attempted to identify and live the will of God as they have understood it in the context of their time and place (historical). But, secondly, the present community of believers has to continue in their aim to understand 'the mission of God for creation so that we can discern our place in his purpose'.<sup>44</sup>

Such a missional focus contextualises the church as an agent of God's will to 'save the lost and restore his rule over creation'.<sup>45</sup> The hermeneutical question that has to be central in the development of theology is how the Church can fulfil the will of God by reaching the lost and establishing the Kingdom of God.

Word of Faith dominion theology would seem to meet these criteria, but that would only be true at a superficial level. Dominion theology differs from a true missional

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 106.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 108-109.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 109-110.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 110.

approach in that it is neither concerned with salvation as an act of man being restored to God nor establishing the Kingdom of God, but rather concerned with the restoration of dominion to man and the human subjection of creation.<sup>46</sup>

Smith's model, therefore, provides a promising shift, which, if adopted has the potential to change the Word of Faith departure point sufficiently to realign its theology along more traditional evangelical lines.

### **5.3.3. Dialogue: Contextualisation of Scripture for the Church Today**

The third element, that of dialogue, refers to seeking a practical application for the church's theological beliefs. Smith presents a comprehensive model through which to tie the past into the present. He places a demand to contextualise the Word of God for the contemporary church. Smith states that:

God spoke through his words and works in biblical times, and supremely through the coming of Christ. He inspired the writers of scripture to record and interpret his acts of revelation, so that future generations would have a truthful and authoritative account of his nature, will, and purposes. We have a trustworthy written record of God's revelation – the scriptures. However, the scriptures were addressed to God's people in a vastly different time and context to our own. (This can be said by every generation of Christians.) The word of God was given to them (there and then), but it was also given for us (here and now). The task of theology is to interpret his word and our world in such a way that the timeless truths of God's word can speak afresh to the timebound people of God.<sup>47</sup>

Smith seeks to bring the inspired and revealed truth of God into the present. He does, however, reject the notion of faith as something irrational that goes against reason. He places a demand on instilling a logical approach into contemporary theology. The logic Smith demands seeks to find the 'rational explanation of reality

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<sup>46</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 28, 75-76, 90-92, 95-96, 109; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35, 56.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 103.



that is consistent with the premises of our faith'. God's revelation extends 'beyond reason but not against it'. This logical approach to developing theology is essential if our theology is to be practical. Smith defines the goal of theology as our desire 'to understand the will of God in the complexities of contemporary life so that the people of God might respond in ways that are faithful to him'.<sup>48</sup>

In his insistence that our theology should 'seek to systemise and contextualise the teachings of scripture for the church today', Smith continues to address a critical deficiency in Word of Faith hermeneutics. His model places an immediate requirement on the theologian in the defence of his developed theology. The theologian must 'engage in critical dialogue', formulate 'a holistic view' and 'defend [his] position persuasively', and 'where relevant' there has to be a cohesive 'integration of important insights from the human, social, or natural sciences'.<sup>49</sup>

Smith's model, therefore, leaves little room for a committed theologian to arbitrarily develop and promulgate an erroneous theology. It has imbedded a series of controls that, if followed, will highlight deficiencies and errors. As throughout history, this model allows for our human view of God to expand, but only in terms of God's revelation of himself in his word. The requirement for a theologian to 'engage in critical dialogue', formulate 'a holistic view' and 'defend [his] position persuasively', breaks down the isolation that the Word of Faith movement finds itself in, and allows theologians of different persuasions to present and defend their interpretation or revelation of what the word of God reveals.<sup>50</sup>

#### **5.3.4. Ethics: Adopting a Christocentric Approach**

In my argument thus far, I maintain that the core beliefs of the Word of Faith movement ultimately lead to a man-glorifying ethic that itself leads to grave ethical problems, the most overt being pride and greed. By contrast, a Christocentric worldview would encourage humility and sacrificial living in the cause of honouring the name of Christ alone.

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<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 109-110.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 113

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 112-113.

Much of the Word of Faith's theology is anthropocentric in nature.<sup>51</sup> This shift from Christ as the central theme in God's revealed plan, to man as the central theme, can only be addressed if the Word of Faith movement adopts a Christocentric approach to the interpretation of scripture.<sup>52</sup>

Although the movement will argue that they are essentially Christ-focused in their theology, this claim does not seem to hold up under critical examination. The movement's Christology contextualises Christ in terms of restoring righteousness, which is viewed by the Word of Faith movement as restoring man to his original created position of (1) having equality with God,<sup>53</sup> (2) man's divine right to exercise dominion over all creation,<sup>54</sup> and (3) authority that allows man to express his will as a creative act.<sup>55</sup> The redemptive aspect of salvation, in which, man is redeemed from an eternity without God is replaced by a restoration view.<sup>56</sup> The latter clearly contextualises the Word of Faith theology in terms of man while the former focuses primarily on God. Word of Faith Christology is viewed as a legal fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant which aims to bestow certain rights and privileges on man. These restored rights, if believed and confessed, allow man to exercise his dominion and authority by divine right. This means that man now has the ability to exercise his will in creating a life of health and prosperity.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Lioy, *The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> During informal discussions with Kevin Smith on Christocentricity, he raised a valid and important issue: Christocentricity should not simply be a scriptural interpretive lens but must permeate into our Christian 'life and mission'.

<sup>53</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104; Copeland, *Now We are in Christ* (Forth Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1980), 23-24; Hagin, *Zoe*, 35-41; Hinn, *We Are Now Divine*; Long, Eddie, 'Interview: Praise-A-Thon', *Trinity Broadcast Network* (March 29, 2004); Paulk, *Satan Unmasked*, 97; Morris Cerullo, 'The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God', San Diego Outreach (Audiotape No.1, sides 1 & 2; 1991).

<sup>54</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 88, 113, 159; Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 71; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 25, 38-40.

<sup>55</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 53, 105; Munroe, *Releasing your Potential*, 72.

<sup>56</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8-9, 23, 57-58, 62-63, 92, 95-96; Munroe, *Rediscovering the Kingdom*, 35; Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind*, 205-206, 297.

<sup>57</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 8-9, 23, 49, 57-58, 62-63, 92; Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind*, 205-206, 297.

A Christocentric view adheres to the belief that 'Jesus Christ is the unifying theme of scripture, as all the promises and purposes of God find their ultimate fulfilment in and through him. ... What Jesus said and did should function as an interpretive lens for knowing God'.<sup>58</sup> It would not be possible to interpret the mission of the church through a Christocentric lens and still derive an anthropocentric approach to theology<sup>59</sup>.

#### **5.4. Revelation: The Chief Barrier to Meaningful Dialogue**

The researcher has argued for meaningful dialogue between the Word of Faith movement and the broader theological community, on the premise that the Word of Faith movement falls within the broad ambit of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, which fall under the broader umbrella of Evangelicalism. Even if the broader Evangelical community welcomes dialogue with Word of Faith churches and leaders, treating them as part of the Christian community rather than as a cult or sect, there remains a serious barrier to meaningful dialogue—the contrasting attitudes that the two groups have regarding *revelation*. Although Evangelical and Word of Faith leaders would both affirm belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, in practice they have divergent ways of knowing God and his revealed will. If the two groups are to dialogue in a meaningful way, they will have to find some sort of epistemological common ground. This requires that at least a basic level of agreement about how to interpret Scripture and the role of contemporary revelations in knowing God and interpreting His Word must be found. The objective of this section is to examine the doctrine of revelation in the hope of finding common ground. I begin by reviewing some major thinkers regarding revelation in the broader theological community,

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, 'Christocentric Principle', 102.

<sup>59</sup> For the most part, the Word of Faith believer will view himself as highly Christocentric in his interpretation of theology. However, the non-Word of Faith believer views the Word of Faith's Christocentric lens as having a distortion, in that it filters the view of Christ through a cost benefit type analysis. It is the investment benefit that leads to a very non-Christocentric interpretation. The Word of Faith adherent would also claim that miracles, power, influence, excellence, health and prosperity, to name a few of the benefits, are all demonstrations of the power of God, and in their own right bring glory and honour to God. This would, for the Word of Faith believer be the absolute expression of their Christocentricity.

which includes, but is not limited to, evangelical thinking. I then examine revelation in the Word of Faith movement and finally propose a means of bridging the divide.

#### **5.4.1. Importance and Relevancy of Revelation**

‘The theologian in me has always been convinced that there cannot be a theology without a secure concept of revelation, while the historian in me whispers back that revelation is in serious trouble, and has been since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’.<sup>60</sup> Dulles adds to this by making an important observation when he states: ‘the writings of Paul and John bear witness to serious confusion even in NT times. Many of the early heresies ... had to do with the notion of revelation’.<sup>61</sup>

These statements, in no small way, encapsulate the real issue. On the one hand, our Christian faith is firmly founded on the reality of revelation. Indeed, our Protestant faith has its birth in the revelation of justification through faith alone. On the other hand, the statement shows a stark reality of what happens to revelation when it is divorced from its divine source. When revelation becomes a point of philosophical debate and its divine origin is dealt with as a matter of unconfirmed source, then revelation becomes nothing more than a theological tool that is bent to the will of man.

The debate on revelation, however, is not new, and has been, in its present form, raging for more than a century. It would be unrealistic to present a detailed chronological progression of the debate in a single chapter. I have, therefore, selected highlights in the debate, which I believe, represent the core of the debate. On this point, I have focused on the meaning of revelation as understood by many giants of theological thought; that God has revealed Himself to man through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>60</sup> Brian Gerrish, ‘Errors and Insights in the Understanding of Revelation: A Provisional Response’, *The Journal of Religion* 78, no. 1 (1998): 64.

<sup>61</sup> Avery Dulles, ‘The Theology of Revelation’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 25, no. 1 (1964): 50.

#### 5.4.2. Revelation in Contemporary Perspective

Richard Niebuhr defines revelation as an illuminating event that helps man to discover a rational pattern.<sup>62</sup> He does, however, point out that an anthropocentric world view contextualises revelation in terms of the 'self', and views such an interaction with revelation as imposing an individualistic self-importance. The result is a personal view that contextualises revelation in accordance with an individual's own self-interest. In contrast, Niebuhr claims that a Christocentric view imposed upon revelation enables man to interpret his future in terms of his spiritual rebirth. For Niebuhr, revelation provides man with a better understanding of God, and in doing so frees man from his self-interest. Niebuhr demonstrates, through the use of Genesis 1, that a shift from an anthropocentric to Christocentric world view defines man not in terms of his lordship over creation but, rather in terms of his position as 'a child of God'.<sup>63</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr, the brother of Richard Niebuhr, sees revelation as the experience of 'being seen, commanded, judged and known beyond ourselves'. This revelation experience is constructed upon a reverence for God, man's moral obligation before God, and our longing for forgiveness. In Reinhold Niebuhr's view, revelation consists of God as Creator, God as Judge and God as Redeemer: it equally contextualises man as created being, fallen creature and adopted child of God. The Christocentric approach taken by Reinhold Niebuhr in his construct of a view on revelation is unmistakable. He concludes that any uncertainty about God's love and mercy is resolved in the revelation of Christ as redeemer.<sup>64</sup>

Both Niebuhr brothers constructed their views on revelation from a broad-based general revelation foundation, but culminated their thesis in special revelation. For

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Library of Theological Ethics; Westminster: John Knox Press, 1977), 66.

<sup>63</sup> Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, xix, 54, 68.

<sup>64</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume 1* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), 131, 140-145.

them this special revelation is found entirely in the revelation of God as redeemer through Christ.<sup>65</sup>

For the philosopher-theologian Paul Tillich, revelation is the dynamic interaction between the questions posed about God through philosophy, and the answer provided about God through theology. This response is not an event, but a continuous interaction between question and answer, which is precipitated by the existence of man. Revelation, for Tillich, is centred in answering the questions about God which are implied through human existence.<sup>66</sup> For Tillich, revelation 'is seen as knowledge of God'.<sup>67</sup> Tillich states that everything has the ability to reveal or disclose an understanding of God, and in doing so, primarily constructs his view on revelation from a general revelation foundation.<sup>68</sup>

Tillich does, however, consider revelation as something special, an illumination that speaks to man in a specific circumstance. He states that 'revelation is never revelation in general, however universal it claims to be. It is always revelation for someone and for a group in a definite environment, under unique circumstances'.<sup>69</sup> He concludes, though, that 'there is no pure revelation'.<sup>70</sup> What causes him to arrive at such a conclusion is the interaction between the imparted revelation and the recipient of the revelation, who contextualises it in terms of his own unique

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<sup>65</sup> 'This is, of course, not an evangelical view *per se*. For many conservative liberals, the ones who retain genuine faith in God, but who do not accept the infallibility of Scripture, God's self-disclosure is sought and found in the life and work of Jesus Christ. They do not trust fully the written record of the Old Testament. Evangelicals, who trust the whole Bible, tend rather to see Christ as the pinnacle of revelation whose life and work help to define our understanding of all previous revelations, but nevertheless trust the Old Testament as genuine revelations' (Kevin Smith 2016, a discussion between the author and his supervisor).

<sup>66</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 61, 64.

<sup>67</sup> James Cameron, *Systematic Theology 1953-1954* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 2.

<sup>68</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Reality of Revelation*, 118-125. It would not be an honest reflection to state that Paul Tillich held an exclusively General Revelation view. He did hold a view that God is revealed in Christ, which would contextualise, at least part of his view on revelation within the context of Special Revelation (Tillich 1963:107-137).

<sup>69</sup> Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 5.

environment. On this point Tillich demonstrates the caution of Richard Niebuhr, in that an anthropocentric world view would inevitably contextualise the revelation in terms of the individual's self-importance.

Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans provides a historical view of revelation in the Roman Catholic Church. He quotes Karl Rahner as defining revelation as God's complete expression of Himself to man in the person of Jesus Christ. For Bevans, revelation is both complete and on-going. It is complete in the sense that God fully revealed Himself to mankind through Christ Jesus, and on-going, in the sense that the revelation of Christ is made real to the believer through the illumination by the Holy Spirit, in his or her daily life. Bevans correctly asserts that revelation is found in the life of the believer who is open to 'the words of scripture'. His definition extends this openness and acceptance to individual experience, which, in my view, has the potential to extend it too far.<sup>71</sup> It cannot merely be an arbitrary acceptance of experience; such personal experience has to be acknowledged as an expression of the love of God for man. This expression reveals the nature and character of God as a loving God who expresses His love for mankind through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The crux of attempting to define revelation is summarised by Diehl who states that: 'revelation is the source of all true human knowledge'.<sup>72</sup> Bevans, therefore, sees revelation primarily as special revelation, where the love of God in Christ forms the central theme.

For the Catholic theologian Cardinal Avery Dulles, in his critique on the works of René Latourelle's concepts on revelation, the Old Testament law is seen as God's declaration of his will for man, the prophets are God's promises for man, the historical writings reflect God's image of the consequence to man when he departs from God's grace, and finally, in the wisdom literature, God shows how man can live within this relationship. As with the view held by Tillich, Dulles's view on revelation is not only composed of illumination from God, but has a second component which is found in the response of man. Dulles sees all New Testament imagery as focused on

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<sup>71</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Culture*, 13, 91, 105.

<sup>72</sup> David W. Diehl, 'Evangelicalism and General Revelation: An Unfinished Agenda', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Volume 30, Number 4, December (1987): 441.

God making known his plan for man.<sup>73</sup> The Christocentricity of Dulles's view on revelation is expressed in the following statement: 'Without repudiating its own foundations Christianity cannot deny the permanent and universal significance of Jesus Christ as the preeminent "real symbol" of God's turning to the world in merciful love'.<sup>74</sup>

Dulles published five models of revelation, all of which contextualise revelation in terms of Christ. In the first model, revelation is viewed within the confines of doctrine, and defines revelation as pointing to Christ, as climax of God's revelation. The second model defines revelation as history. In this model, man is in need of redemption, and the revelation that is received is that which is available to man through Christ Jesus. The third model relates revelation to a direct inner divine experience, and contextualises revelation in terms of man living in communion with God through the restorative act of Christ. His fourth model views revelation as dialectical presence. By this he means that Christ is revelation, not in a historical sense, but in a progressive and real sense. In his final model, revelation as new awareness sees Christ as the conduit of all revelation.

Although his views stem from his Catholic foundation, his Christocentric approach transcends his own Christian community and has been absorbed by various Protestant theologians, most of whom have expanded on his views.

In summary, his view on revelation as doctrine, finds support in the works of theologians.<sup>75</sup> Cullmann and Pannenberg hold a similar view to Dulles on revelation as history.<sup>76</sup> Revelation as an inner experience, based upon the communion

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<sup>73</sup> Dulles, *The Theology of Revelation*, 46

<sup>74</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 275.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation Publishing, 1986); Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé, *La Providence et la Confiance en Dieu* (transl. Bede Rose; Oregon, 1932; retrieved 7 April 2012, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/theology/provid.htm>; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1964); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (transl. David Granskou and E. Quinn; London: Sheed and Ward, 1969).



between man and God is supported by Schleiermacher, Rahner, and Ritschl,<sup>77</sup> while Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann<sup>78</sup> view Christ as revelation, and hold a similar view to Dulles's revelation as dialectic presence. His view on revelation as new awareness is supported by Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin and Blondel.<sup>79</sup>

It is worthwhile noting that Dulles holds a predominantly special revelation view, and that both he and this core of catholic and protestant theologians have varying degrees of understanding and conceptualising revelation as Christocentric. Although their view on what exactly Christocentric means may vary, there is an underlying consistency in that it relates God's love for man through the redemptive work of Christ.

Schleiermacher, is an exception here. He follows in his theology a more general religion than a Christian theology approach. His view is expressed in a letter to his father and states that:

Faith is the regalia of the Godhead, you say. Alas! dearest father, if you believe that, without this faith, no one can attain to salvation in the next world, nor to tranquillity in this—and such, I know, is your belief—oh! then pray to God to grant it to me, for to me it is now lost. I cannot

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<sup>77</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1999). Schleiermacher has played such a prominent role in theology that it would be an incomplete study to exclude his views. It is, however, with caution that I include his views here. His approach to the Christian faith posed a clearly non-Christian view at times. His motive for developing his specific approach to revelation was an attempt to generalise God beyond the Judeo-Christian view of God. Karl Rahner, *Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1980); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (transl. W.V. Dych; New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982); Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine* (London: T&T Clark, 1900).

<sup>78</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV, Book 3, Part 1* (London: T&T Clark, 1988); Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Portland, Oregon: Stevens Book Printers, 1984); Rudolph Bultmann, 'What is Theology?' (*Fortress Texts in Modern Theology*; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology, vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man – "Omega Point"* (London: Harper Collins, 2008); Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (University of Michigan, Michigan: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

believe that He, who called Himself the Son of Man, was the true eternal God: I cannot believe that His death was a vicarious atonement, because He never expressly said so Himself; and I cannot believe it to have been necessary, because God, who evidently did not create men for perfection, but for the pursuit of it, cannot possibly intend to punish them eternally, because they have not attained it.<sup>80</sup>

Schleiermacher therefore attempts to construct a theology that is religiously all-inclusive. He departs from orthodoxy and specifically from the salvation through Christ foundation of Protestantism, by developing a theology of inward revelation. Although not purely Christian in his theology, Schleiermacher is by no means an atheist. This much is evident in his statement that:

The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.<sup>81</sup>

It is Schleiermacher's attempt to explain the universal concept of God found in a diversity of religions, which leads him to develop a theology on revelation that is predominantly inwardly directed and universal in nature.

I am unwilling to accept the further definition that it [divine communication] operates upon man as a cognitive being. For that would make revelation to be originally and essentially doctrine; and I do not believe that we can adopt that position, whether we consider the whole field covered by the idea, or seek to define it in advance with special reference to Christianity. If a system of propositions can be understood from their connexion with others, then nothing supernatural was required for their production. But if they cannot, then they can, in

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<sup>80</sup> Frederica Rowan, transl., *Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Life of Friedrich Schleiermacher, As Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol. 1. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1860).

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), §12

the first instance, only be apprehended ... as part of another whole, as a moment of the life of a thinking being who works upon us directly as a distinctive existence by means of his total impression on us; and this working is always a working upon the self-consciousness.<sup>82</sup>

Karl Barth recognises the influence of Schleiermacher's theology which is contained in the following statement made by Barth:

Schleiermacher is not dead for us and his theological work has not been transcended. If anyone still speaks today in Protestant theology as though he was still among us, it is Schleiermacher. We study Paul and the reformers, but we see with the eyes of Schleiermacher and think along the same lines as he did. This is true even when we criticize or reject the most important of his theologoumena or even all of them.<sup>83</sup>

It is, therefore, with caution that Schleiermacher's views are included in this chapter. They do, however, hold a certain value which is imbedded in the concept of general revelation being made real through an inward awakening in the individual. It is on this point that Karl Barth attempts to extract from Schleiermacher that which is true. It is in Barth's view that only by turning from the anthropocentric view of Schleiermacher, to a clearly Christocentric view, that God is truly revealed.

Barth, thus views revelation as the Word of God being heard by man through the working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>84</sup> Barth clarifies this by stating that 'Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the only Word of God whom we must hear'.<sup>85</sup> For Barth then, Christ is revelation, and indeed the only revelation relevant to man. Barth warns that the Bible is not to be viewed as revelation.<sup>86</sup> This statement ties into his view that it is the objective of proclaiming the character of God in Christ which is the

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<sup>82</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §10.3

<sup>83</sup> Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher* (ed. Dietrich Ritschl; transl. Geoffrey Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), xiii.

<sup>84</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume IV, Book 3, Part 1* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 165

<sup>85</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 126.

real revelation, and not the mere recorded words. The Word illuminated by the Holy Spirit, which testifies of Christ, reveals to us the redemptive work of God through Jesus Christ. For Barth this is the only true revelation.<sup>87</sup>

Professor Gabriel Fackre correctly asserts that 'Karl Barth's understanding of the trajectory of revelation is kindred to an evangelical narrative view of doctrine. His "Christological concentration" secures the centre of that story, and no chapter is lost from view'.<sup>88</sup> The central theme of Barth's view on revelation is that it is irrevocably linked to salvation; is the expression of God's love in the redemptive work of Christ. Within this context, Kenneth Surin views Barth's interpretation of revelation as a form of extreme Christocentrism.<sup>89</sup> Surin's main objection is that such a marriage between revelation and salvation effectively excludes other religions and unbelievers from salvation. Surin's statement echoes the view held by Schleiermacher, and demonstrates how influential Schleiermacher has become. Such an interpretation of Barth, however, would be misreading him. Barth centralises revelation of God through the redemptive work of Christ within the working of the Holy Spirit. For Barth, it is the Holy Spirit that allows the Word of God to be heard; it is within the working of the Holy Spirit that the Word which is heard reveals redemption in Christ to man.<sup>90</sup>

From this perspective, Barth views revelation as special. It is his reliance on the Holy Spirit that presents a Christocentric view that is not found in scripture alone, but rather in the illumination of scripture breathed by the Holy Spirit. However, Barth, sees revelation as the golden thread that presents man with a limited understanding of God's love, which is perfected in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>87</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 322.

<sup>88</sup> Fackre, quoted in Sung W. Chung, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 12.

<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Surin, 'Revelation, Salvation, the Uniqueness of Christ and Other Religions', *Religious Studies* 19.3 (1983), 323.

<sup>90</sup> The implication of this is that the church as community of redeemed believers has a responsibility to fulfil the great commission under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. As it is the Spirit who makes the Word of God heard, which reveals Christ as the loving sacrifice of God for mankind, the emphasis on the Church is to fulfil the commandment of Christ to make this Word known to the ends of the earth.

The theologian Gerald Downing denies divine revelation on the basis that God will only be revealed in the second coming of Christ.<sup>91</sup> This view is supported by James Barr in his statement that 'There is little basis in the Bible for the use of "revelation" as a general term for man's source of knowledge of God or for real communication from God to man'.<sup>92</sup> Both Downing and Barr have been criticised for their narrow view on revelation. One such criticism comes from Dulles, who disagrees with their conclusion on the basis that God is revealed in the expression of His love for man.<sup>93</sup>

Niebuhr's contrast between the anthropocentric and Christocentric interpretation of revelation implies that human motivation and self-interest may distort the true meaning of the revelation given by God. This, I believe, is true for Schleiermacher. Within the view presented by Tillich, the focus is once again shifted from man to God. The revelation that is sought after, and which is given by God, is not focused on the need, privilege or position of man, but on God. Bevans points out that revelation is limited to God expressing Himself through Christ, and that such revelation is complete.

Dulles and Tillich differ on the point of what God reveals. For Tillich, revelation is about God, whereas for Dulles it is about the relationship between God and man. Niebuhr views revelation as an expression of man's belonging in God, an expression that is found in the father-child imagery. Bevans defines revelation as a living experience for the believer where God's love is expressed through Christ. This is aligned to Barth's view in which he contextualises revelation within the limits of a Christocentric view. For Barth, there is no other revelation possible than the revelation of God's love for man, through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Even Downing and Barr agree, to some extent, that revelation is focused on knowing God. For Dulles and Barth, knowing God is not possible beyond the revelation of God's love for man which is revealed in Christ.

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<sup>91</sup> Gerald Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Publishing House, 1964), 290.

<sup>92</sup> James Barr, *The Concepts of History and Revelation, in Old and New Interpretation* (London: Blackwell, 1966), 88.

<sup>93</sup> Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 12.

Evangelical scholars such as Professor Stephen N. Williams from Union Theological College see revelation as gaining an understanding of God through Christ. He states that 'the theological discussion of revelation is completely unbalanced unless it keeps two connecting things in view. First, the root of the matter is the conviction that God is to be conceived of as a personal agent. Jesus is the exegesis of that claim'.<sup>94</sup> 'Second, revelation aims not only at intellectual response or cognitive acknowledgement, but also at personal repentance and transformation'.<sup>95</sup> For Williams, therefore, revelation is a means of obtaining knowledge and an understanding of God through the work of Jesus Christ, and that the purpose of this awareness is to lead man to God through repentance. Its aim is to transform man from lost soul to child of God.

From this diversity of views, it is difficult to construct a theology of revelation beyond God revealing his love for man in Christ. It is therefore, ultimately, a Christocentric view that interprets God's revelation of Himself to man, that frames revelation within its most appropriate context. Departing from such a Christocentric foundation contaminates the theological view, and presents a less than adequate understanding of what revelation is. Through the illumination of scripture by the Holy Spirit, the full revelation of God's love is made known to man. Tillich, Dulles, Niebuhr, Bevans and Barth are all correct in their view of revelation. Each has a slightly different angle from which revelation is viewed, but ultimately the foundation is contextualised within a broad view where 'revelation is a divine initiative in the sphere of interpersonal relations, and as such is ultimately ordered to the achievement of communion, not to the imparting of information'. Williams's use of the term 'achievement of communion' is critical here, as it ties together the different views into a single act of man being able to have fellowship (1 John 1:3) with a holy (Psalm 99:9) but gracious and merciful God (Hebrews 4:14-16), who made such fellowship possible (1 Corinthians 1:9), through the love that God has for man through Christ (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:3).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Stephen N. Williams, 'Revelation', in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 680

<sup>95</sup> Williams, 'Revelation', 680.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, 'Revelation', 680.

It is important to note that Dulles limits the interpretation and understanding of revelation, within the context of the community of faith and in particular, in the participation of believers in living out the revelation.<sup>97</sup>

For him, 'the deeper insights of revelatory knowledge are imparted, not in the first instance through propositional discourse, but through participation in the life and worship of the Church'.<sup>98</sup> Revelation is for Dulles, therefore, not passive in the sense of God communicating and man listening, but rather active in the sense that man responds to this revelation within the context of his faith.

The Evangelical theologian Bernard Ramm adds another dimension in defining revelation. For Ramm, human insight is one of many functions that equates to divine revelation. It is, however, not mere insight into human affairs that is considered as revelation, but insight in man understanding God. Ramm states it as follows: 'Accordingly, what is called insight or intuition as man gropes for spiritual reality can also be seen as revelation as God meets man in man's quest for God'.<sup>99</sup>

Irrespective of the various views, there is an underlying foundation that defines revelation in terms of the interaction between the divine, as source of revelation, and man, as the recipient of the revelation.

However, there seem to be two central themes associated with revelation. The first of these themes is proposed by Niebuhr, Barth, Ramm, Williams and Bevans who view revelation in terms of God illuminating what he has revealed about our human rebirth. The foundation of their argument is imbedded in the redemptive work of Christ that is able to reconcile man to God, when man reaches out to God. It is Barth, however, who defines the desire to call out, within the context of the Holy Spirit illumination that reveals Christ to man. The second theme is proposed by Bevans, Diehl, Dulles, Tillich, Williams and Ramm, who view revelation in terms of illuminated knowledge. For these theologians, revelation is a means of gaining a

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<sup>97</sup> Ross A. Shecterle, *The Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles 1980-1994: Symbolic Mediation* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 18; Dulles, *The Craft of Theology* (Crossroad Publishing House, New York, USA, 1992), 18.

<sup>98</sup> Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Bernard L. Ramm, 'How Does Revelation Occur?' *Spectrum Journal* Number 2 (Winter 1970): 8.

better understanding of God. Such an understanding has the potential to lead man to the knowledge, through illuminating the revealed character and will of God, which from a Christocentric point of view defines the will of God for man within the redemptive work of Christ.

#### **5.4.3. Basic Aspects of General and Special Revelation**

In contextualising the diversity of views, it is worthwhile discussing the basic aspects of general and special revelation next. Berkouwer, in his book on general revelation raises an interesting point on the issue of special and general revelation which is expressed in his statement below:

The increased knowledge of the various religions also led to further generalization of revelation. For many the denial of the absoluteness of Christianity became the background of the dilemma: general or special revelation? They thought they could see one broad, universal revelation of God in the background of the various religions, and they hesitated to accept the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the revelation in Christ on the basis of an a priori of faith.<sup>100</sup>

The purpose of revelation is found in the statement that 'because humankind is finite and God is infinite, we cannot know God unless he reveals himself to us, that is unless he manifests himself to humans in such a way that they can know and fellowship with him'.<sup>101</sup> Evans states that within the Christian tradition the view is held that 'it is impossible for anyone to gain knowledge of God unless God is willing for this to occur. In some sense, all knowledge of God is made possible by God's decision to allow himself to become known'.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 12.

<sup>101</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 42.

<sup>102</sup> C. Stephen Evans, 'Faith and Revelation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (ed. William J. Wainwright; Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 2011; retrieved 9 April 2012, <http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/The%20Oxford%20Handbook%20of%20Philosophy%20of%20Religion.pdf#page=277>, 277.



Gerrish refers to the 'twofold knowledge of God' as our classical understanding of revelation.<sup>103</sup> He states that this 'has been virtually the consensus of Christian theologians throughout the history of the church'.<sup>104</sup> The first source of the knowledge of God is found through natural reason (general revelation) while the second source 'exceeds the capacity of the intellect' and requires divine revelation (special revelation).<sup>105</sup>

In essence, 'General revelation is the expression used to refer to that taught by Romans 1:19-20, as well as in some of the Psalms, that God's eternal power and deity is made known in the things that have been made'.<sup>106</sup> Gunton highlights the fact that at times general revelation has been closely related to human reason. In essence general revelation reveals 'God through the things that have been made',<sup>107</sup> and as such is related to creation.

Erickson points out that the 'general revelation of God has been found in three areas: nature, history, and humanity' and that this has led to what is commonly known as natural theology.<sup>108</sup> It is worthwhile noting that Barth opposed any notion of natural theology, and by implication general revelation. This has been a key focus of his work on revelation.<sup>109</sup> Erickson highlights the fact that there can be 'general revelation without natural theology, but the effect of sin prevents the unbeliever from coming to the knowledge of God'.<sup>110</sup> This point is critical in understanding the true nature of revelation, it is clear when this distinction is made, that revelation is, as highlighted throughout this chapter, related to salvation through Christ.

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<sup>103</sup> Brian Gerrish, 'Errors and Insights in the Understanding of Revelation: A Provisional Response', *The Journal of Religion* 78.1 (1998), 65

<sup>104</sup> Brian Gerrish, 'Errors and Insights in the Understanding of Revelation: A Provisional Response', *The Journal of Religion* 78.1 (1998), 65.

<sup>105</sup> Gerrish, 'Errors and Insights in the Understanding of Revelation', 66.

<sup>106</sup> Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 40.

<sup>107</sup> Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, 42

<sup>108</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 41.

<sup>109</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV.*

<sup>110</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 41.

By contrast, the second source of knowing God comes from special revelation. It is in special revelation that God has revealed Himself through 'historical events, divine speech and the incarnation of God in Christ'.<sup>111</sup> There is some disagreement 'as to whether special revelation is propositional or personal'.<sup>112</sup> For Erickson, the propositional view includes personal knowledge of God; in contrast, the personal view excludes propositional truths from what is revealed. Wainwright states that propositional revelation reveals only truths to be believed, whereas revelation as personal focuses on knowing God.<sup>113</sup> William Hordern summarises the argument for viewing special revelation in terms of a personal focus as follows: 'What God reveals is not propositions or information—what God reveals is God. In revelation, we do not receive a doctrine or esoteric piece of information, in revelation we are brought into a living relationship with the person of God'.<sup>114</sup> This does not imply that one can know God personally without communication with God, or having information about God, but rather that God uses revelation to bring man into fellowship with God.

#### **5.4.4 Tension and Support between General and Special Revelation**

Anyone who reflects on divine revelation in the world, and permits himself to review the history of the Church and theology, quite naturally encounters a frequently expressed differentiation between general and special revelation.<sup>115</sup>

Berkouwer traces the tension between general and special revelation to nineteenth-century religious thought. Within theological circles at the time, there developed a reluctance to view non-Christian religions as false. A centralised Christocentricity, one in which Christ is the only way to God, was seen as a stumbling block. The special revelation from which this emanated was considered a boundary between man and God's revelation. The result was the development of an all-inclusive

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<sup>111</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 51.

<sup>112</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 51.

<sup>113</sup> Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 278

<sup>114</sup> William Hordern, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 61.

<sup>115</sup> Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1959), 13.

understanding of revelation that acknowledged that 'all religions contain elements with hidden indications of a revelation of God'.<sup>116</sup> This generalisation of revelation claimed that there is a natural (or universal) knowledge of God which is not brought about through special revelation but is, rather, more general and emanates from 'the natural light of reason'.<sup>117</sup>

The result was that:

The liberal theology that developed during this period basically shared the traditional understanding of revelation as propositional in character, but as a result of critical study concluded that the Bible could not be seen as a divinely inspired, infallible book, as many theologians had thought. Rather, the Bible must be seen as a record of the evolving religious consciousness of the Jewish people, a witness to increasingly profound religious experiences, rather than a set of writings directly inspired by God. On such a view the truths of the Bible are truths that contemporary humans must verify through their own religious experiences and reflection rather than believe because they have been revealed by God.<sup>118</sup>

It was the implied rejection of special revelation, and its replacement by general revelation, that resulted in a response by Barth and Brunner. Their aim was to restore special revelation. The simplification of their argument states that it was through special revelation that God made himself known to man throughout history, and that God, within contemporary society, continues to reveal Himself to man through reading the Bible or hearing it preached.<sup>119</sup> The premise for their argument is that the historical record of revelation, the Bible, is a witness of God's revelation to man. In the view of Barth, however, it is only a witness of the revelation and not the actual revelation.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation*, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation*, 14-15.

<sup>118</sup> Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 279.

<sup>119</sup> Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 279.

<sup>120</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV, Book 3*, 126.

Berkouwer proposes a unification of sorts between general and special revelation. He states that 'because of the twentieth century situation, it is certainly not necessary to abandon the doctrine of general revelation; but to clarify and to guard it against misunderstanding is urgent'.<sup>121</sup> His solution is based upon two pillars, the first is that general revelation cannot replace the true meaning of revelation, which is found in Christ, and which is made known through special revelation. In this regard Berkouwer states the following:

First of all, we must insist that 'general' revelation does not and cannot mean an attack upon the special revelation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, neither the Church nor theology can ever speak of general revelation if in so doing it fails to do justice to the absoluteness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who was 'God revealed in the flesh' (I Tim 3:16).<sup>122</sup>

His second pillar rests upon the meaning of general revelation, and on this point he attempts to divorce the Protestant definition of general revelation from the Catholic view, which inevitably leads to natural theology. On this point he claims that:

It is necessary to clarify the term 'general revelation' in order to distinguish it from the Roman Catholic idea of natural theology fixed in 1870. It is clear that the Christian Church, in speaking of general revelation, never intended to assert that true knowledge of God is possible through the natural light of reason. Assuredly, in the time of the Reformation men believed in the general revelation of God, but not with the understanding that through this revelation they could arrive at the idea of a natural, true knowledge of God.<sup>123</sup>

Berkouwer concludes that Brunner identifies a valid and vital point, which forms that basis of the tension between general and special revelation. For him, Brunner 'demonstrates the tendency of modern theology, namely, the failure to appreciate the

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<sup>121</sup> Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation*, 16-20.

<sup>122</sup> Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation*, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Berkouwer, *General and Special Divine Revelation*, 17.

uniqueness of the Christ-revelation'.<sup>124</sup> This echoes what Barth based his argument on. For Barth, it is not a matter of a series of revelations that leads to God, but a single (*einmalige*) revelation which is Christ, that reveals the grace of God to man.<sup>125</sup>

Erickson adds clarity by stating that through general revelation 'God has given us an objective, valid, rational revelation of himself in nature, history, and human personality'.<sup>126</sup> He highlights the fact that due to sin, God cannot be clearly perceived through general revelation only. The implication is that general revelation is incapable of leading the unbeliever to an intimate knowledge of God<sup>127</sup> and as such, special revelation is needed to introduce Christ to mankind.

#### **5.4.5. Interpretation Dimension of Revelation**

The Catholic theologian Ormond Rush relies on what he refers to as the hermeneutical triad as the framework required for a human understanding of God.<sup>128</sup> In this triad comprising understanding, interpretation and application, he demonstrated that there is a constant movement between the familiar and the unknown, which inevitably contextualises the unknown in terms of the familiar.

As I have discussed in this chapter, revelation is God making himself known to man, as loving father through the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. In this definition of revelation the unknown, which is God as father, is made known to man through the familiar, which is the recorded fact of Jesus Christ. It is therefore the historical record contained in Biblical text that, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, reveals God, as loving father, to man. This means that revelation is incapable of being contextualised in the abstract. It requires a fixed reference point to provide meaningful human understanding. It is within this setting that Barth et al, considered general revelation to be limited.

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<sup>124</sup> Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.

<sup>125</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV.*

<sup>126</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 47.

<sup>127</sup> Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Ormond Rush, 'Sensus Fidei: Faith "Making Sense" of Revelation', *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 233.

On this point, revelation and interpretation form a bond that, within the correct context, leads to an understanding which can be contextualised with relevance to the now. In this dynamic Dulles states that God is the only source of revelation, and that man is the agent that responds to God's transfer of an understanding of Himself.<sup>129</sup> Ramm sees this new-found knowledge as insight that has been illuminated by God, and is therefore truly divine revelation.<sup>130</sup> There are, thus, two agents at work in revelation. On the one hand, it is God as the agent and source of revelation, and on the other hand, man as the recipient of revelation. As man is incapable of understanding God, man has to contextualise this revelation, as Rush claims, within the familiar.

In turning, for a moment, from the divine impartation of knowledge to the human recipient of such revelation, we find ourselves as the community of believers in a vulnerable position. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer demonstrated this position as well as the solution in the following statement:

The essence of the church is not to practice theology but to believe and obey the word of God. But because it has pleased God to make himself known in the spoken human word and because this word is subject to distortion and dilution by human ideas and opinions, the community needs clarity about what constitutes true and false preaching – it needs theology not as an end in itself but as a means to help keep its proclamation authentic and combat false preaching.<sup>131</sup>

For Bonhoeffer the revelation of God is pure, but the human interpretation of such revelation falls short of an 'authentic' and pure expression. He finds the purpose of theology as the custodian of the purity of God's revelation. In this Bonhoeffer relies on the principle that 'the norm for interpreting Scripture and for judging the truth or

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<sup>129</sup> Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 18.

<sup>130</sup> Ramm, *How Does Revelation Occur?*, 8.

<sup>131</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God* (ed. and transl. Manfred Weber: Peabody, Massachusetts: Henderson Publishing, 2004), 89.

falsity of interpretations of sacred Scripture is sacred Scripture itself, which is the voice of God'.<sup>132</sup>

According to the evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch, the key to a true interpretation of scripture is the Holy Spirit.<sup>133</sup> He states that 'reason can be enlisted in the service of revelation, but it cannot establish the truth of revelation'.<sup>134</sup> On this point, however, Bloesch affirms that 'we should not thereby conclude that we are passive in the process of understanding. We strain with all our efforts to discern the full impact and meaning of a biblical passage as it bears on our lives here and now. But this meaning will elude us until we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit in order to see the relation of the text to the cross of Christ, the centre and apex of scripture'.<sup>135</sup>

For both Bloesch and Barth, it is the Holy Spirit that illuminates our understanding and guides our interpretation.<sup>136</sup> It is Bonhoeffer who seeks to define the relevancy of our enlightened understanding within a scripturally-based interpretation which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit reveals the application of this truth to the believer.<sup>137</sup>

For these theologians, neither revelation nor interpretation is a passive action. The first requires a willingness to receive God's revelation, while the latter places a demand on man to seek context and validation of the revelation within scripture. It is only under the influence of the Holy Spirit that man is capable of making the connection between the revelation and scripture beyond a superficial level. Here is, therefore, a dual responsibility that relates to the believer and in specific the theologian. The first responsibility is related to the interpretation of scripture which 'entails both exegesis and exposition. In the first we seek to discover the original intent of the author; in the second we try to assess the significance of the text both

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<sup>132</sup> Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood, eds., *The Living and Active Word of God. Essays in Honor of Samuel J Schultz* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbauns, 1983), 243.

<sup>133</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>134</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 180.

<sup>136</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, 322.

<sup>137</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible*, 89.

for its time and for our time'.<sup>138</sup> The second responsibility is related to a deeper insight into the revelation of Christ: such insight, however, is not obtainable through exegesis but is the product of submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>139</sup>

Bloesch, in dealing with Martin Luther's views on revelation and interpretation, concludes that:

It is not enough to claim to have the apostolic interpretation. We must test the claim by subjecting it to the affirmations of Holy Scripture ... We must not impose our interpretation on the text but allow it to be transposed by the light within the text.<sup>140</sup>

It is clear that there exists an inseparable bond between revelation and interpretation. As revelation is divinely given, we as humans lack the ability to fully comprehend its meaning and intent. However, revelation must be contextualised for our present circumstance to have any real meaning for man. It is, therefore, the aim of interpretation to find the true context. But without a fixed reference point the true context can never be known. For the community of believers, the church, the fixed point of reference is and must remain the Bible as the recorded Word of God. But even that on its own is not enough. We must have not only a fixed reference point, but rather the right reference point. Within the Christian community that reference point must remain the revelation of God in Christ.

The interaction between interpretation and revelation is therefore found in the contextualisation of our human interpretation of divine revelation, in terms of scripture. It is within this triad of actions that the need for hermeneutics becomes evident. It is within this understanding that there is scope for engagement with the Word of Faith movement. By not denying or excluding revelation, as practised by the Word of Faith movement, but bringing personal revelation within a sound hermeneutic where continuity between 'new' revelation and Biblically recorded revelation has to be maintained.

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<sup>138</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 173.

<sup>139</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 175.

<sup>140</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 183.



#### 5.4.6. Reception of Theology

Anderson states that:

I have found that theology is more than written, academic theology; it is also to be found in the preaching, rituals and practices of churches that have contextualized Christianity in such a way as to make it really meaningful to ordinary people.<sup>141</sup>

In this statement, Anderson expresses the Christocentric true danger of a departure from a Christocentric acceptance and interpretation of scripture. Christian worship, if it takes place beyond the context of scripture, has the potential to contaminate and erode the true meaning of what it is to be Christian. From his statement, it is clear that if the preaching, rituals and practices within the church depart from Christ as anchor, and become contextualised within meeting the needs of man as its primary objective, that it develops a new theology that is anthropocentric rather than Christocentric. Dan Liroy draws such a conclusion on the Prosperity Gospel, which forms an integral part of the Word of Faith movement, when he states:

The title of this essay questions whether self or the Savior is at the heart of the prosperity gospel. An analysis and critique of its dogma indicates that it is predominately anthropocentric, rather than Christocentric, in its theological orientation. Adherents superstitiously treat faith as a magical force that can unleash the power of the Spirit to bring them health and wealth. Proponents of success operate as if it is their God-given entitlement to be rich and happy in every way possible. Also, those who take a dissenting view are labeled as being weak in faith and unwilling to claim God's promises for their life.

This 'me'-centered outlook is also present in the prosperity gospel movement. While there are some potentially constructive aspects of it (as mentioned earlier in the essay), these are overshadowed by a crass emphasis on achieving personal

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<sup>141</sup> Allan Anderson, 'The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 102.

success. Self-appointed church leaders manipulate Scripture to advance their own egotistical aims and aspirations. Also, they prey on the destitute in their local communities to build their ecclesiastical empires. In this scenario, the so-called ‘Man of God’ is the king of his dominion. Indeed, the congregation he leads—including its people and resources—exist to do his bidding. It is hard to imagine a church setup that could be any more pagan and materialistic than this.<sup>142</sup>

It is clear that there exists an inseparable bond between God’s revelation, given to man, through the working of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, John 16:13), as recorded in the Word of God, and its interpretation.<sup>143</sup> As revelation is divinely given, we as humans lack the ability to fully comprehend its meaning and intent. Here the Holy Spirit illuminates the Word of God for man in aiding man’s understanding.<sup>144</sup> There is, however, an inseparable bond between revelation and salvation in that God’s revelation of Himself, inevitably, leads to the revelation of salvation through Jesus Christ.<sup>145</sup> In the words of Doctor Timothy Ward from Edinburgh University:

The doctrine of scriptural sufficiency claims neither that God has ceased to prompt, guide, and direct (‘speak to’) disciples and the church, nor that he has told us everything about himself and every question we face. Rather, it asserts that, when responded to in trust and love by us, the revelatory, covenant-making act that God performs in and through Scripture can confidently be believed to be sufficient for salvation and for truthful, faithful discipleship of Christ.<sup>146</sup>

The systematic theologian Professor Stephen Williams from Yale University speaks to the core of what revelation is, and should be, within our contemporary context when he states that ‘revelation is a divine initiative in the sphere of interpersonal

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<sup>142</sup> Daniel T. Lioy, ‘The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or the Savior?’ *Conspectus* 4 (2007): 60.

<sup>143</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108.

<sup>144</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 645.

<sup>145</sup> Stephen N. Williams, ‘Revelation’, in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 679.

<sup>146</sup> Timothy Ward, ‘Sufficiency of Scripture. Revelation’, in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 730.

relations, and as such is ultimately ordered to the achievement of communion, not to the imparting of information'.<sup>147</sup>

Ward touches on the relationship between revelation and scripture when he states:

Ultimately, the meaning of Scripture can at no point be definitively decided by the declaration either of a particular church magisterium or of an individual claiming special and decisive divine revelation, presenting themselves as the contemporary mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the Spirit's ongoing speaking activity is consistent with the meaning of biblical texts, which he once inspired. This is what is meant by the principle that 'Scripture interprets itself': again, not that every question of interpretation can be easily settled just by reading the Bible, but that no external institution or individual may impose final interpretive fiat on Scripture. Any act of biblical interpretation is only truly authoritative to the extent that it demonstrates its legitimacy with careful and thoughtful reading of Scripture itself.<sup>148</sup>

The larger Evangelical tradition does not reject the working of the Holy Spirit and receiving revelation, illumination, guidance or spiritual direction, but rather, finds the Holy Spirit working through the Inspired Scriptures to reveal the heart and mind of God to man. It is within the context of 2 Timothy 2:15 that mainstream evangelicals see the responsibility to read, study and understand the scriptures, as fundamental in interpreting God's revelation to man. Grudem argues that all contemporary revelation is entirely subject to scripture and that 'God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his redemptive work that is not found in Scripture'. Grudem highlights the fact 'that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority'.<sup>149</sup>

The requirement for scripture as the fundamental point of reference for the believer, dictates that, irrespective of what view is held by a diversity of Evangelicals, some

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<sup>147</sup> Williams, 'Revelation', 680.

<sup>148</sup> Ward, 'Sufficiency of Scripture. Revelation', 731.

<sup>149</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 131-132.

who might accept the idea of ongoing, contemporary revelation while others approach it more cautiously, all find a common departing point in their theology. As no contemporary revelation can be considered equal to scripture, there can, therefore, be no new revelation that defines God or man contrary to what a consistent reading of scripture is able to produce.<sup>150</sup>

It is, therefore, within John 14:26 that I find the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide, who directs the believers to live as Christ has commanded. This is done by bringing the scriptures to life for the believer, who immerses himself in the revealed truths of God as recorded in scripture. This also means that as the Holy Spirit directs the believer towards Christ constantly, that a Christocentric approach is not optional as an interpretive lens, but a fundamental requirement.

#### **5.4.7. Perspectives on a Christocentric World View**

‘The term “Christocentric” means different things to different people, applied to the theologies of past scholars such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Bonhoeffer. The wide range of theological positions flying under the flag of “Christocentricity” indicates that the word does not mean the same to everyone, and it does not necessarily imply a uniform hermeneutical approach’.<sup>151</sup>

Dr Christopher Peppler, founder of the South African Theological Seminary, concludes that ‘various past and current Christocentric approaches fall into two categories’.<sup>152</sup> The first of these views aligns to the view held by Karl Barth and Bryan Chapell, and is based on the principle that ‘a passage of scripture retains its Christocentric focus not because of its implied or imagined reference to Christ, but rather, because the text serves to contribute to the great unfolding revelation of the divine work in and through Jesus Christ’.<sup>153</sup> The second aligns to the view of Augustine and Goldsworthy and is based upon the principle that ‘the whole bible

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<sup>150</sup> Ward, ‘Sufficiency of Scripture. Revelation’, 730-731; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 131.

<sup>151</sup> Christopher L. Peppler, ‘The Christocentric Principle: A Jesus-Centred Hermeneutic’, *Conspectus* 13. (2012): 118.

<sup>152</sup> Peppler, ‘The Christocentric Principle’, 120.

<sup>153</sup> Peppler, ‘The Christocentric Principle’, 119.

bear[s] a discernible relationship to Christ and is primarily intended as a testimony to Christ'.<sup>154</sup> In this differentiation Peppler draws a distinction between the view that the 'life, teaching, and person of the Lord Jesus Christ' [serve] 'as the locus of doctrinal formulation and proclamation' and the view that 'all scripture must be read as revealing something about Jesus Christ and his saving work'.<sup>155</sup>

The first category seeks to find a consistent reference against which to formulate doctrine, but in my interpretation of the statement, effectively limits this reference point to the Gospel. This restriction does not do justice to the Bible as the Word of God, and in my view limits our understanding of the true meaning of salvation. Kevin Smith, Vice-Principal of the South African Theological Seminary, expresses the same concern and contextualises his concern in terms of 'treating the gospels as a canon within a canon'.<sup>156</sup>

The second category seeks to find a narrow reference in that it demands that everything read should relate to salvation: it does not, however, have any limiting scope, and as such presents an all-inclusive reference. This differentiation relates back to the statement by Bloesch that the key to a true interpretation of scripture is the Holy Spirit.<sup>157</sup> His statement that 'reason can be enlisted in the service of revelation, but it cannot establish the truth of revelation'<sup>158</sup> should serve as an underlying warning, irrespective of which of the two views of Christocentricity is applied. He further states that we must rely on scripture as our point of reference, but must guard against imposing 'our interpretation on the text'.<sup>159</sup> Smith warns that we must take care not to impose a 'distorted picture of Christ upon other biblical texts'.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 119.

<sup>155</sup> Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 120.

<sup>156</sup> Kevin G. Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle: Promise, Pitfalls, and Proposal', *Conspectus* 13 (2012): 157.

<sup>157</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 72.

<sup>158</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 76.

<sup>159</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 183.

<sup>160</sup> Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle', 157.

Peppler addresses the limitation he placed on the first category when he defines what he means by Christocentric Principle:

What I refer to as the Christocentric Principle is an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to understand all parts of scripture from a Jesus-perspective. In other words, it is a way of interpreting scripture primarily from the perspective of what Jesus taught and modelled, and from what he revealed concerning the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead.<sup>161</sup>

In this statement Peppler addresses the issue of having a canon within a canon by not limiting interpretation within the context of the New Testament, but rather by proposing that we look at the entire biblical text through the life of Christ, he calls this a 'christological lens'.<sup>162</sup>

Smith summarises the essence of Christocentricity as comprising four primary elements, these are: 'In all we do, we seek to give due honour and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. The goal of the Christian life is to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to all Christian life, doctrine, and ministry'. And 'the nature of God as revealed in the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ is a lens for interpreting God's word and discerning his will'.<sup>163</sup> He highlights the fact that the last point, the issue of Christocentricity as a hermeneutic, is what Peppler addressed in his 2012 paper.

Considering these four points in order or subordination, or stated in another way, their order of dependency, it is possible to construct an argument for the fourth point. In my view, it is impossible for man to give honour and glory to Christ through our actions unless we have a firm understanding of what actions and thoughts would

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<sup>161</sup> Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 120.

<sup>162</sup> Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 123.

It is my view that Peppler's apparent restriction is not intentional or dogmatic but rather illustrative. It does, however, have the potential to be misread. I personally grappled with Peppler's view and only gained a clearer understanding of what he actually meant after having a personal discussion with him on this during various exchanges throughout 2012.

<sup>163</sup> Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle', 158.

bring honour and glory to Christ. For me, therefore, this understanding is derived from a true and correct interpretation of God's word. Likewise, if man's goal is to become like Christ, the historical image of Christ in terms of God's will for man has to be discerned, and to do so, scripture will have to be viewed from a Christ-centred perspective, or in terms of Peppler and Smith, viewed through a christological lens. Anything less would contextualise man's goal in terms of a mechanical activity, rather than its true and worthy motive. It would constitute the same mechanical and indeed compassionless approach to life which the Pharisees employed, and which Christ opposed. The third point, the fact that the person and work of Christ are central to life, doctrine and ministry, makes it inseparable from having a comprehensive view of Christ.

It is these three points, (1) an understanding of how to please God, (2) a knowledge of the historical significance of the life of Christ and (3) an in-depth knowledge of the life and teachings of Christ, that place a demand on an interpretation of the Word of God that (a) points to the plan of God through which man is capable of being reconciled to God as father, (b) the action of the 2nd person in the Godhead in bringing this plan of God as Father to fulfilment, and finally (c) establishing a basis for living a fulfilled life. None of this can be revealed, interpreted or assimilated without interpreting God's word through a Christ perspective.

Smith, however, presents a valuable and most relevant solution to the problems identified in Peppler's Christocentric approach to hermeneutics. The first solution is in viewing Christ, and the revelation of God through Christ, from the whole of scripture. The second solution is similar to the first, and is focused on gaining an understanding of Christ through the entire body of scripture. It is, therefore, a prerequisite to view scripture as a central and single reference source that must be interpreted within the expression of God's love for man through Jesus Christ. It is this expression focus that contextualises Christocentric hermeneutics.

In essence, the Christocentric interpretation contextualises Christ at the centre of God's plan for man; in opposition, the anthropocentric interpretation contextualises man at the centre of God's plan for man. In terms of interpreting revelation there exists a real danger that man can interpret the divine and pure revelation of God in a false way. This subtle difference is best demonstrated through redemption and

restoration. Redemption views Christ in terms of reconciling man to God, as loving father, whereas, restoration sees Christ as a mere agent that restores man to a position of authority. The former contextualises man in terms of God, and sets man in a relationship that is similar to that between Christ and the Father, whereas the latter contextualises man in terms of man. It restores man to a perceived position of authority.

#### **5.4.8. Revelation in Word of Faith Perspective**

Jeff Kluttz, a Baptist theologian who discusses the Word of Faith movement's concept of revelation, has this to say: 'Revelation, as a theological term, refers essentially to the manner by which information is given to man by God. In classic and normative theological study, revelation has been understood to fall into two general categories; general and special'.<sup>164</sup> Kluttz points out that 'special revelation is the basis by which most doctrinal teachings on the scriptures were revealed to man... Thus, special revelation is universally understood by those who love and trust the scriptures to be valid, impeccable and trustworthy in the biblical accounts'.<sup>165</sup>

For Kluttz, special revelation is relevant only within a Biblical context. Any special 'insight' has to be subjected to the Bible to determine its validity and correctness. Kluttz points out that the Word of Faith movement, however, understands and uses the term special revelation within a different context.

Word of Faith ministers developed another term, that of Revelation Knowledge, to describe their understanding. The use of this term implies the receiving of 'special revelation ... outside of the scriptures'.<sup>166</sup> It is within this context that Word of Faith ministers claim to receive 'new truths' and as such claim the same authority as the 'biblical writers', effectively placing their special revelation on an equal level to the Bible.

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<sup>164</sup> Jeff Kluttz, *Apostasy: The Word of Faith Doctrinal Deception* (Needville, Texas: ReturningKing.com Publishers, 2011). 41.

<sup>165</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy*, 42.

<sup>166</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy*, 42.



It is important to note, as previously stated, that the independent nature of the Word of Faith movement leads to some difficulty in making a definitive statement about a generic belief that flows consistently throughout the movement. On the one hand, an external observer would interpret the actions of some the movement's leaders as demonstrating that special revelation received is taken as being on equality with the Word of God: this would depend on the interpretation of the observer and may be either a fair or unfair conclusion. Yet on the other hand, there are other leaders within the Word of Faith movement who openly state that the revelation they received from God is as definitive as the Word of God. An example here would be the statement by Creflo Dollar; in sharing his revelation on righteousness he states that:

For more than eighteen years I have repeatedly studied the subject of righteousness, and am still amazed by it. Each time I thought I fully understood righteousness I uncovered deeper layers of revelation knowledge, which forced me to admit I had much more to learn.<sup>167</sup>

He claims that his theology on righteousness is the direct result of revelation knowledge. In presenting the ultimate conclusion of his theology on righteousness, that man has equality with God;<sup>168</sup> Dollar demonstrates the authority that is assigned to this revelation knowledge when he claims that:

We have reached a critical point in this book. In fact, sometimes when I share this topic in church, I give people the opportunity to leave the service because I know they will be held accountable for what they hear. If they do not step into the Word they hear and do it, God says He has no choice but to judge them (John 12:48).<sup>169</sup>

Kenneth Copeland deals with revelation knowledge on his website and presents his argument as follows:

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<sup>167</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, vii.

<sup>168</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>169</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 103.

He told Peter, This truth has not come to you from flesh and blood, but from My Father in heaven. What did Peter receive? A revelation from God—a spiritual revelation. That did not come through his eyes or his ears or any of his physical senses. It came from his spirit into his mind. Jesus said to Peter: Your physical senses did not reveal this truth to you. My heavenly Father revealed it to you. Because of this revelation, you are a rock. You have a foundation. A revelation of God's Word comes from your spirit into your consciousness. No human being on earth can take that away from you. Only you can turn it loose or ignore it until it becomes inoperative in your life. It will lie there dormant until once again it becomes the foundation for your faith. If you stir it up, the seed will germinate again. It will come alive. Jesus told Peter: You are a rock, because what you have received is a revelation from God. I will build My Church on that rock—the foundation of revelation knowledge—and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.<sup>170</sup>

It is clear from Copeland's statement that there exists an understanding in his theology, that revelation knowledge stands over and above that which can be discerned through physical action. By default this means that those elements of the physical realm, including scripture, have to be subordinate to revelation knowledge.

However, it would be an error to assume that the Word of Faith movement excludes scripture. Harrison in his discussion with Word of Faith members demonstrates how scripture is used and understood by the movement: 'A significant part of what you know the Bible teaches is shaped by the present state of revelation from God through the pastor to the congregation. What you know the Bible teaches, then, might be subject to change as the pastor's revelation develops and changes over time'.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Kenneth Copeland 2009. 'The Foundation of Revelation Knowledge', *Kenneth Copeland Ministries* (2009, retrieved 21 April 2012, <http://www.kennethandgloriacopeland.org/117/the-foundation-of-revelation-knowledge-by-kenneth-copeland>).

<sup>171</sup> Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111.

From this statement there emerges a picture of what revelation is to the Word of Faith minister and congregant. For them revelation is not subject to scripture, but is the means of interpreting scripture. It is, therefore, scripture that is subjected to revelation knowledge and not revelation that is subject to scripture. On this point there seems to be a theological dilemma as 1 John 4:1 clearly states that the believer must be able to identify false prophets. Without scripture as a sound foundation how can this be done? If revelation interprets scripture, there is no way of identifying what teachings are false, as the constant in the equation is missing. There also seems to be a total disregard for 2 Timothy 3:16 which states that: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'.

Word of Faith understanding of revelation knowledge as special revelation is a 'word from the Lord' which is capable of redefining and reinterpreting existing Biblical texts.<sup>172</sup> In contrast, the majority of mainstream evangelicals interpret revelation as God communicating His will to man through his Word, which God confirms through 'gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>173</sup> In essence, the Word of Faith view is that special revelation is a direct communication from God to man through the Holy Spirit, and that such revelation stands separate and independent from scripture 'and through scripture in the sense that revelations frequently take the form of spirit-given insights into scripture, which evangelicals would label allegorical interpretations' . The mainstream evangelical view, on the other hand, views special revelation in terms of God expressing His will for man through the Word of God which is illuminated by the Holy Spirit<sup>174</sup>.

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<sup>172</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy*, 43

<sup>173</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy*, 43.

<sup>174</sup> The notable Charismatic theologian, Rodman Williams, provides, in his definition of subordinate revelation, a stepping stone between the Word of Faith movement's acceptance of revelation as God speaking to man in this day and age, and the insistence of those who claim that God no longer speaks except through the Word of God alone. Williams provides a mechanism whereby the Word of Faith adherent can still hear the voice of God, but that the interpretation of this revelation must be found in the Word of God, thereby making the dynamic and contemporary, and often very personal revelation subject to the revealed word of God. This deals, however, only with the barrier as it pertains to the acceptability of personal revelation, but the deficiency in sound Biblical interpretation still

Kluttz points out that when the Word of Faith ministers use the term 'revelation knowledge' 'they do not mean that God has confirmed in their spirits the teaching of scripture... What they mean instead, is that God has told me something that he hasn't told you or anyone else. It is not in the Bible, so you will just have to trust me about the new doctrines it establishes'.<sup>175</sup>

Kluttz is not alone in his observations. Morris and Lioy, in dealing with the history of the Word of Faith movement highlight the fact that Kenneth Hagin 'attributes his theological system (faith-formula theology) to visions, revelations, and personal visitations of Jesus. Hagin's writings facilitate an understanding not only of the origin of many of his teachings, but also, the development of specific aspects of word of faith theology'.<sup>176</sup> These authors correctly point to the influence of the Word of Faith movement over the larger Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.

The Charismatic theologian and principal at London School of Theology, William Atkinson, noted in his PhD thesis that Word of Faith teachers draw a distinction between Sense Knowledge and Revelation Knowledge. The implication of this differentiation is that the works of Paul, for instance, have a higher interpretive value than the gospels. This is due to the former having learned his insights by means of revelation, whereas the latter merely recorded observations.<sup>177</sup>

The implication of this differentiation is profound, as it no longer limits the problem to the application and understanding of revelation only, but extends it to hermeneutics, in which the Bible consists of various canons of scripture with various levels of

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remains. It is, therefore, critical that the focus, in this regard, should be even more on developing a sound hermeneutic. Rodman J. Williams. *Theology Q&A – Gifts* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Christian Broadcasting Network, 2016), Online at: <http://www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/theology-q%26a-gifts>; Rodman J. Williams. *Theology Scripture: God's Written Word* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Christian Broadcasting Network, 2016), Online at: [http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/biblestudyandtheology/drwilliams/bk\\_scripture\\_ch01.aspx?mobile=false&u=1](http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/biblestudyandtheology/drwilliams/bk_scripture_ch01.aspx?mobile=false&u=1)

<sup>175</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy*, 44

<sup>176</sup> Morris and Lioy, *Understanding Word of Faith Theology*, 85.

<sup>177</sup> William P. Atkinson, *The Spiritual Death of Jesus: A Pentecostal Investigation* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 75.

relevancy and validity. These two issues compound the problem, as it allows for a selective reading on the one hand, and the ability to incorporate extra-biblical knowledge on the other. Atkinson identifies the connection between false Word of Faith teaching and the distinction that is made between revelation and sense knowledge.<sup>178</sup>

The need for the development of a definition for revelation, as proposed by revelation knowledge and its existence beyond scripture, poses the question why such a type of revelation would exist or be needed in contemporary society. One possible answer would be that scripture does not contain a complete self-revelation of God, and another would be that God has revealed man's role in his plan in a limited manner. I am confident that there could be more possibilities, but propose that these two elements would form the central themes of any other arguments. The first contextualises the need for revelation knowledge within God, and the second within man.

It is in the words of Ned Stonehouse, the theological scholar and founder of the Westminster Theological Seminary, that we see what importance Christ ascribed to scripture as a full revelation of God to man:

But we may not pass over the evidence provided by our Lord's utter commitment to the divine authority of Scripture which comes to expression in his application of its teaching to his own life and ministry. He was not content with insisting that it and it alone was to be acknowledged as the Word of God by the men he addressed. Regardless of what it might cost him in the way of humiliation and suffering, even if obedience to it marked out for him a course of action and submission from which his soul shrank with the utmost intensity of feeling, even if it demanded that he die the accursed death of the

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<sup>178</sup> Atkinson, *The Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 95.

cross, he was resolved and determined that the Word of God declared in Scripture should be perfectly fulfilled in him.<sup>179</sup>

It is from this perspective that Stonehouse, Barth, Niebuhr, Ramm, Bevans, and others, have seen God's complete self-revelation as Christ. Redemption is not merely a historical act, but God revealing his complete nature as loving father to man, through the selfless act of Jesus Christ. Therefore, to assume the need for revelation knowledge beyond scripture, as God's revelation to man, on the basis that God had not fully revealed Himself, is lacking substance.

The need for revelation knowledge, therefore, has to be seen in terms of man's search for his role within God's plan. Such a search for self-meaning beyond scripture is problematic in terms of context. From a context perspective, extra-biblical revelation redefines man beyond the image God revealed about man in scripture. Any such revelation is subjective as it lacks an objective source of reference, and as such, is prone to misinterpretation as a result of human imperfection.

The effect of such a reconceptualisation is demonstrated by Allan Anderson, professor of global Pentecostal studies at Birmingham University. He proposes a contextualisation of Christianity within contemporary culture that, in my view, focuses too intently upon accommodating human needs.<sup>180</sup> He deals with the church of Paul Yonggi Cho in Korea, and expresses a sensitivity and accommodating view towards the reconceptualisation of Christianity along the lines of eastern religion, as a means of referencing Christianity within its contemporary society.<sup>181</sup> In this argument the departure from scripture and the reliance on revelation knowledge brings about an assimilation of eastern religious doctrine into Christian theology.

Anderson's observation about the nature of theology<sup>182</sup> highlights the true danger of Christian worship that takes place beyond the context of scripture. The result is that

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<sup>179</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, 'Special Revelation as Scriptural: Revelation and the Bible', in *Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (ed. F. H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1905), 80.

<sup>180</sup> Allan Anderson, 'The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no 1 (2004): 123.

<sup>181</sup> Anderson, 'Theology of David Yonggi Cho', 122.

<sup>182</sup> Anderson, 'Theology of David Yonggi Cho', 102.

the true meaning of what the Christian faith is becomes contaminated, it erodes the anchor the Church has in Christ and shifts the focus from Christ to man.

#### **5.4.9. Toward Epistemological Common Ground**

Within the larger community of believers, the interpretation of scripture is to a large extent governed by specific hermeneutical techniques. This means that scriptural interpretation is approached carefully, with the aim of deriving an interpretive view that is contextual and uncontaminated. Care is taken not to superimpose an individual's view on scripture, but rather, to derive the true meaning that God intended.

Henry Virkler<sup>183</sup> in his book on hermeneutics, proposed a five step hermeneutical procedure in Biblical interpretation, which comprises the following: A Historical-cultural and contextual analysis, Lexical-syntactical analysis, Theological analysis, Genre identification and analysis, and Application. In his model Virkler attempts to interpret the Bible within the context of history, linguistics, theology and culture and inevitably aims to find its historical applicability to the contemporary student.

Professor Howard Hendricks from Dallas Theological Seminary has a simpler hermeneutical approach. He approaches hermeneutics from an observation point of view in which he attempts to establish the facts, as contained within the scriptural reference. He then proceeds to interpret these facts within the context of its meaning, and finally, seeks to identify how this works or applies to our contemporary life.<sup>184</sup>

David Barr, on the other hand, constructs his process hermeneutical approach on Whitehead's view that the value of language is not in the reality it describes, but rather in the way it directs thinking and feeling.<sup>185</sup> Barr's process hermeneutic,

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<sup>183</sup> Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

<sup>184</sup> Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007).

<sup>185</sup> David L. Barr, *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta, GA: The Society for Biblical Literature, 2003), 110.

therefore, is primarily focused on language, and seeks to identify the undercurrent or tone of the text.<sup>186</sup> For him it is this focusing on the tone, rather than the literal image described by the text, that provides the true meaning and context.

What Virkler, Hendricks and others have in common, is a deep-rooted acceptance of the Bible as the inspired word of God, which forms that absolute foundation of our understanding of God. Their adherence to the Bible is best understood in the view expressed by Hendricks: 'The Bible is relevant because it is revealed. It's always a return to reality. And for those who read it and heed it, it changes their lives'.<sup>187</sup>

From the preceding discussion it is clear that the evangelical Christian tradition, as many other non-evangelicals, does not reject the working of the Holy Spirit and receiving special revelation, but rather finds the Holy Spirit working through the Inspired Scriptures, to reveal the heart and mind of God to man. It is within the context of 2 Timothy 2:15 that mainstream evangelicals see the responsibility to read, study and understand the scriptures as fundamental in interpreting God's revelation to man.

In contrast, the Word of Faith movement has diverse views on hermeneutics which support its interpretation of scripture. It must be noted that the Word of Faith movement has as its foundation a Pneumatological approach as its source of interpretation. The question, therefore, is whether such a reliance on the Holy Spirit as source of interpretation of revelation is sufficient motivation for the introduction of extra-biblical revelation, or whether the Holy Spirit as source of God's revelation has spoken a complete revelation into the scriptures.

In my view, the Holy Spirit has spoken completely, and fulfils His function as part of the triune God, by reminding us constantly of Christ. It is, therefore, within the context of John 14:26 that I find the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide, that directs the believers to live as Christ has commanded. This is done by bringing the scriptures alive to the believer who immerses himself into the revealed truths of God, as recorded in scripture. This also means that as the Holy Spirit directs the believer

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<sup>186</sup> Barr, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 110.

<sup>187</sup> Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 40



towards Christ constantly, that a Christocentric approach is not optional as an interpretive avenue, but as a fundamental requirement.

Within this view, the Word of Faith movement is not excluded from a sound hermeneutical framework nor is it excluded from adhering to a strong Christocentric interpretation. Unfortunately, Word of Faith hermeneutics remains subjected to text interpretation within the context of personal experience and the notion to apply a certain level of literal relevance to all biblical texts, translating this to contemporary life.<sup>188</sup> It is the experiences and traditions of the larger Pentecostal movement, from which the Word of Faith movement ultimately evolved, that constitute its primary hermeneutic. In reality, 'Pentecostals expect to see what they read in the Bible happen in their life',<sup>189</sup> and as such their hermeneutic is contextualised within pragmatism. The experience which serves as answer to a personal problem, acts as a filter through which scripture is interpreted which, in turn, formulates the interaction between scripture and experience as belief or doctrine. MacDonald in his PhD thesis states it as follows:

Reading the Bible is still the major source of Revelation, but not the only one. Often 'out-of' context and 'correct' meanings are irrelevant, but not merely due to lazy thinking or lack of academics, but because they 'fit' the problems asked.<sup>190</sup>

MacDonald maintains that scripture is not the only source of revelation, and in doing so objects to the statement of Mueller.<sup>191</sup> Mueller, like many evangelicals, maintains that the 'illuminating witness of the Holy Spirit never takes place apart from God's

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<sup>188</sup> Yee Tham Wan, 'Bridging the Gap between Pentecostal Holiness and Morality', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 165; R. MacDonald, *A Pentecostal-Charismatic Hermeneutic Model in a Postmodern Context* (Commonwealth Open University, 2006) 47

<sup>189</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal-Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*, 60.

<sup>190</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal-Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*, 49.

<sup>191</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal-Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*, 101-102.

Word as set forth in the Scriptures'.<sup>192</sup> MacDonald sees this as restricting the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the life of man to scripture.<sup>193</sup>

The expectation of contemporary relevance and experience as an answer to personal problems or needs clearly contextualises revelation and interpretation within an anthropocentric view. As a Christocentric view is lost, or at best pushed out to the fringes of interpretation, there exists a real danger that a lack of context will exalt man to the centre of God's plan, instead of placing Christ and the revelation of God's love for man through Christ at the centre.

MacDonald deals with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics established in 1978, and in particular with Article IV which was reaffirmed in 1982 and which states:

We affirm that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives. We deny that the natural man is able to discern spiritually the Biblical message apart from the Holy Spirit.<sup>194</sup>

This article was reworded but affirmed the same meaning in 1982 as follows:

We affirm that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message. We deny that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to anyone anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.<sup>195</sup>

By implication, the statement contextualised the larger evangelical view that scripture as inspired by the Holy Spirit contains all revelation, and that man's primary point of interaction would be the Bible. It is the claim of the statement that the Holy Spirit will reveal to man that which is in scripture. MacDonald disagrees with this statement

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<sup>192</sup> Theodore J. Mueller, 'The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures', in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (ed. Carl F.H. Henry; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 273.

<sup>193</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal-Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*, 102.

<sup>194</sup> ICBI. *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: Articles of Affirmation and Denials*. (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 1.

<sup>195</sup> ICBI. *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: Articles of Affirmation and Denials*. (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982).

and particularly in relation to its denial of extra-biblical revelation.<sup>196</sup> His retort to the articles is that the authors of the statement afforded themselves Papal-like infallibility.<sup>197</sup>

Such reaction demonstrates the frustration experienced by Pentecostal and Charismatic believers in dealing with the attempt to contextualise experience as source of personal revelation, with contradiction observed in scripture. Their pragmatic approach to revelation ranks higher than scripture, resulting in a view that scripture contradicts their experience. At times the movement's leadership neglect to recognise that it might be the experience that is in contradiction of scripture. It is this personalisation of the spiritual experience that results in an anthropocentric interpretation of both experience and scripture.

The Word of Faith movement's hermeneutic has been criticised for its lack of accuracy. Atkinson summarises the Word of Faith hermeneutics criticism as follows:

It is not surprising that within the debate about the Word-faith movement, criticisms of its reading of scripture are common. They are often brief and general: Brandon indicates that the movement isolates passages and indulges in 'proof-texting'; Dal Bello regards Hagin's use of Psalm 22 as 'eisegesis' rather than exegesis; and Hanegraaff and de Castro claim that Copeland sometimes misses grammatical rules, misunderstands important biblical words, and ignores textual context. Perriman, however, is more detailed. He regards the movement's handling of scripture as 'utilitarian' and, as he mentions more often, 'contractural', by which he means that they regard the scripture as merely comprising a 'set of promises, rules, laws, conditions, etc., which must be appropriated and activated by the believer' and 'the univocal clauses and conditions of a legal contract.' Furthermore, Perriman notes that they fail to take due account of how such factors

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<sup>196</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal – Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*, 107.

<sup>197</sup> MacDonald, *A Pentecostal – Charismatic Hermeneutic Model*.

as genre, literary style and rhetorical purpose of passages ought to affect the ways they are understood.<sup>198</sup>

Atkinson in his assessment of the Jesus Died Spiritually doctrine, promoted by some leaders within the Word of Faith movement, affirms the following hermeneutical deficiencies within the Word of Faith exegesis:<sup>199</sup>

- (1) Single verses are isolated from their original context and considered atomistically,
- (2) A superficial approach to the words themselves is employed, no consideration being given, for instance, to the social location or personality of the human author; or the genre of the writing involved, and
- (3) Texts are applied with remarkable immediacy: no mention is made of the historical and cultural distances lying between text and reader.

This lack of a sound hermeneutic, however, is not limited to the Word of Faith movement only. Gordon Fee, himself a Pentecostal, criticised the larger Pentecostal movement for the same lack of sound hermeneutics in the following statement: 'their attitude towards Scripture regularly has included a general disregard for scientific exegesis and carefully thought-out hermeneutics. In place of scientific hermeneutics there developed a kind of pragmatic hermeneutics – obey what should be taken literally; spiritualise, allegorise or devotionalise the rest'.<sup>200</sup> The Pentecostal hermeneutic as 'experience-certified theology' <sup>201</sup> is, therefore, grounded in three hermeneutical levels according to William Menzies. The first is the Inductive level, the second the Deductive level, and the third Verification level validates the

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<sup>198</sup> Atkinson, *The Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 72.

<sup>199</sup> Atkinson, *The Spiritual Death of Jesus*.

<sup>200</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, USA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1985), 85-86.

<sup>201</sup> Roger Stronstad, 'Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics'. *Enrichment Journal* 4 (2010): 2.

movement's hermeneutics.<sup>202</sup> It is this pragmatic approach to hermeneutics that drives the larger movement's theology.

The call on the Word of Faith movement to embrace a strong and well defined hermeneutical process as core to its theological development is critical, and must become the central theme within the engagement between the larger evangelical Church and the Word of Faith movement.

### **5.5. Conclusion to Word of Faith Engagement**

It is possible for the Word of Faith movement to redefine its theology along sound biblical interpretation lines. However, for this to happen, there has to be an acknowledgement, by the independent theologians within the movement, and possibly even by individual adherents, that many of their core beliefs are unsound, and there must be an unquestionable will to correct this by adopting a model, such as that proposed by Smith, to aid in the establishment of a sound hermeneutic for the movement. Smith is but one model that was highlighted here; there are other models as well that can be employed<sup>203</sup>.

I am somewhat doubtful that this will happen, for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that the approach and rather unfair treatment by critics such as Hanegraaff<sup>204</sup> and McConnell has done more damage by fuelling Word of Faith resentment of structure and an academic approach to doing theology. From the outset, Hanegraaff and McConnell viewed the Word of Faith movement as a movement with predominantly

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<sup>202</sup> William W. Menzies, 'The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics', in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin*, (ed. by Paul Elbert; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 13.

<sup>203</sup> The acknowledgement of both adherents and teachers within the Word of Faith movement, that they do adhere to beliefs that are unsound cannot become a prerequisite to dialogue, but should be the outcome of dialogue. It should follow the process of rigorous theological debate. To make such a declaration a prerequisite would, in actual fact, remove equality, and would simply be perceived as dictation and not dialogue. This would be no different from the approach taken by Hanegraaff, McConnell and others.

<sup>204</sup> James A. Beverley, 'Books: Counterfeit Critique'. *Published in Christianity Today* 1 (1997, retrieved 15 January 2012, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1997/september1/7ta059.html>).

non-Christian roots.<sup>205</sup> They presented a critique on the Word of Faith movement that projected the movement as less than authentically Christian. Perriman<sup>206</sup> takes an opposite view and states that the theology of the Word of Faith movement still ‘arise[s] out of something authentically Christian’. The harshness of criticism and the unfair representation of much of the movement’s theology by other noted critics such as Dave Hunt, John MacArthur, Bruce Barron and Gordon Fee,<sup>207</sup> has done little to close the divide between the Word of Faith movement and the larger Evangelical community.

Smith’s model once again places an underlying requirement on the Christian theologian when defending a theological view; it is to be done ‘humbly and graciously’.<sup>208</sup> We have to remember that we are all members of the same body with much more in common than what is often visible.<sup>209</sup>

The second reason why I am doubtful is that many of the Word of Faith ministers have not risen to the call issued by Kenneth Hagin in his book entitled the *Midas Touch*.<sup>210</sup> There is clear apathy in response from within the movement to answer the call that emanates from within.

But all is not lost; Smith’s model creates the level of fairness that can bridge the divide. However, for this to take place, the larger Evangelical movement has to approach the debate with conviction, defending the truth, but as a prerequisite, has to engage the debate in a humble and gracious manner<sup>211</sup> relying on the Holy Spirit to guide the debate.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 3, 6.

Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 331.

<sup>206</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 213

<sup>207</sup> Paul King and Jacques Theron, ‘The ‘Classic Faith’ roots of the modern ‘Word of Faith’ movement’. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. 32, no. 1 (2006): 310.

<sup>208</sup> Smith, ‘*The Christocentric Principle*’, 112.

<sup>209</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 213

<sup>210</sup> K. Hagin, *The Midas Touch: A balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Keneth Hagin Ministries, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2000).

<sup>211</sup> Smith, ‘*The Christocentric Principle*’, 112.

<sup>212</sup> Smith, ‘*The Christocentric Principle*’, 118.

To aid constructive engagement between the larger Evangelical community and the Word of Faith movement, Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* has the potential to establish a fair platform from which both parties, or in Habermas's terminology – actors,<sup>213</sup> have the opportunity to engage as equals. According to his theory, Communicative Action is intended to develop a mutual understanding aimed at promoting cooperation between the actors.<sup>214</sup> The essence of Habermas's theory is that he defines:

‘Communicative freedom’ as the possibility – mutually presupposed by participants engaged in the effort to reach an understanding – of responding to the utterances of one's counterpart and to the concomitantly raised valid claims, which aim at intersubjective recognition.<sup>215</sup>

However, Habermas's theory has a critical dependency which defines the confines within which communicative freedom exists: according to him:

Communicative freedom exists only between actors who, adopting a performative attitude, want to reach an understanding with one another about something and expect one another to take positions on reciprocally raised validity claims.<sup>216</sup>

Habermas's model of engagement speaks directly to Smith's requirement for the debate to take place with conviction, defending the truth, but done in a humble and gracious manner.<sup>217</sup> It also satisfies Niebuhr's rejection<sup>218</sup> of one-way communication

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<sup>213</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society, Volume 1 of The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) (transl. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, originally published in German in 1981), ix.

<sup>214</sup> Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, 86

<sup>215</sup> Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, 119

<sup>216</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, (transl William Rehg. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996, originally published in German in 1992), 119.

<sup>217</sup> Smith, ‘*The Christocentric Principle*’, 112.

<sup>218</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers*, 117.

and supports Bevans'<sup>219</sup> departure point that the dialogue should not be aimed at conversion or surrender, but rather at defining the true meaning, defending a belief, confronting an erroneous view and accepting evidence as truth.

It is, therefore, vital that the larger Evangelical community invite members from the Word of Faith movement as theological and Christian equals, to participate in meaningful dialogue. The Word of Faith movement clearly has a contribution to make within the realm of theological development in, amongst others, the areas of prosperity, and forms of worship and how the Church should approach health. If a common hermeneutical model can be developed, the Word of Faith movement would be in a position to contribute sound Biblical theology, adding practical theological living to the Body of Christ.

Word of Faith understanding of special revelation represents an overarching obstacle to a meaningful dialogue: it serves as a counter to the requirement for scripture as the foundation from which theology is to be developed.<sup>220</sup> The challenge would be to overcome this stumbling block through patience, and non-judgemental engagement. Dialogue, based in scripture, and expressed as the love of Christ to true brothers and sisters in Christ, can lay a foundation of inclusion and acceptance upon which constructive dialogue can take place.

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<sup>219</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Culture*, 93-94.

<sup>220</sup> Smith, '*The Christocentric Principle*', 110.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. Introduction

The research contained within this thesis is aimed at an understanding of Word of Faith theology within the context of their 'little gods' teaching. Such an understanding is important, as meaningful engagement between the larger Evangelical movement and the Word of Faith movement is almost impossible without understanding the Word of Faith interpretation and meaning of various theological terms and concepts.

#### 6.2. Summary of Research

This research aimed to understand the concept of deification as taught by some of the ministers within the Word of Faith movement. Ultimately the intent of this research was to determine how extensively the 'little gods' theology, as taught within the Word of Faith movement, influences the overall theology of the movement.

The approach followed in research consisted of identifying the Word of Faith movement in Chapter 2. It is noted that the Word of Faith Movement consists of various independent churches and teachers, who contribute individual and independent beliefs to the overall movement. It is equally evident that the movement has met a very specific need in society by extending beyond the spiritual, fulfilling a strong social function. Dr Vinson Synan noted that what makes the Word of Faith movement attractive is, in essence, its social emphasis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vinson Synan, *Word of Faith Movement has deep roots in American History* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 2008; retrieved 15 January 2012, [http://www.believersstandunited.com/word\\_of\\_faith\\_movement.html](http://www.believersstandunited.com/word_of_faith_movement.html) .

Various views on the movement and its theology were discussed, and it became clear that the claim by McConnell<sup>2</sup> and Hanegraaff,<sup>3</sup> that the movement and its theology are metaphysical, is not without challenge. It emerged that there is an equally strong view, that Word of Faith theology, although somewhat distorted, and at times exaggerated, still 'arise[s] out of something authentically Christian'.<sup>4</sup> King and Theron point out that some of the objections raised by the critics, are raised in relation to Word of Faith teaching that is orthodox in essence, and represents similar views to those of classical evangelical teaching.<sup>5</sup>

Against this backdrop, the larger evangelical community must view the Word of Faith movement as Christian Brothers with some deficiency in their theology. Within this reality, research of and engagement with the Word of Faith movement, its teachings and theology must be approached from a Christian Brotherhood perspective (1 John 3:10; 1 John 4:20-21) and within the spirit of Christian love (Romans 14:10-13; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8), rather than mere criticism.

Dr Derek Vreeland raises an important issue, one that speaks to apologetic integrity, in his statement that many of the historical claims made by McConnell have been a misrepresentation of the facts.<sup>6</sup> He admits that the 'isolation from traditional denominational structures created an opportunity for theological innovations', which has often resulted in 'less than accurate methodologies and piecemeal constructs that in part have hindered the work of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>7</sup>

It is, however, not only McConnell's work that has come under attack, Beverley<sup>8</sup> critiques Hanegraaff's book, *Counterfeit Revival* that deals with the Word of Faith movement, and concludes that the book 'exposes some real excesses and imbalances' although in essence the book is 'misleading, simplistic, and harmful' and is 'marred by faulty logic, outdated and limited research'.

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<sup>2</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*.

<sup>3</sup> Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*.

<sup>4</sup> Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, 213-235.

<sup>5</sup> King and Theron, 'The 'Classic Faith' roots of the modern 'Word of Faith' movement', 312.

<sup>6</sup> Vreeland, 'Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Vreeland, 'Reconstructing Word of Faith Theology.

<sup>8</sup> Beverley, 'Books: Counterfeit Critique'.

Much of the available critique of the Word of Faith movement relies on statements made by McConnell and Hanegraaff. It is, therefore, disconcerting that there are claims made of misrepresentation, as this would directly point towards critical integrity.

There are acknowledgements from within the larger Charismatic and Word of Faith movement that call the movement towards a more responsible, ethical and doctrinally sound existence. Timothy Sims states that 'possibly the most dangerous opposition we face is corruption from within, because of false teachers and apostate preachers within our community. Much of the attention and negative commentary directed towards the Word of Faith community is due to the erroneous and misguided teaching that has become so prevalent within our ranks'.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 3 was aimed at identifying the root cause of why the Word of Faith movement is perceived the way it is by non-Word of Faith adherents, as well as the root cause of its various theological views. In the light of the conclusion of Chapter 2 my attitude towards any deficiency identified was to pursue an understanding in terms of its fundamental cause, with the ultimate responsibility of addressing the issues as part of the Body of Christ. This approach did not detract from the reality that some Word of Faith theology may not be entirely accurate: on the contrary, it demanded, from a Christian Brother perspective, that it should be highlighted and addressed (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

The key theological beliefs of the Word of Faith movement were deconstructed with the single aim of identifying the 'logical argument' that forms the basis of the belief. I demonstrated that the foundation of the movement's covenant, dominion, contract, health and prosperity, faith and confession, and revelation theology as well as their Christology, are centred on the idea that man is a 'little god'. In doing so, I demonstrated that these key doctrines of the movement all rely on the Word of Faith understanding of deification, and that the movement's misunderstanding of what it means to be righteous, and what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God, result in a largely skewed theology.

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<sup>9</sup> Sims, *In Defence of the Word of Faith*, 180.

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated how the Word of Faith movement is capable of exerting influence over both adherents and non-adherents. The use of mass media as a platform demonstrated the movement's reach, while the theory of Bainbridge and Stark contextualised influence within the realm of immediate social and personal needs. What was more startling came from Festinger's theory, which concluded that when individuals are faced with a tension between their beliefs and experience, individuals will seek to resolve this tension at the hand of rewards. Synan's claim that what makes the Word of Faith movement attractive is, in essence, its social emphasis,<sup>10</sup> demonstrates how the Word of Faith movement's reach of influence is extended. Effectively the psychological factors that drive the dynamic between exerting influence and accepting influence do not differ between adherent (internal) and non-adherent (external), what differs is access, and that is what mass media offer the Word of Faith movement's leadership in exerting an influence over non-adherents.

In Chapter 5 I concluded that it is possible for the Word of Faith movement to redefine its theology based on sound biblical interpretation, but that it would require a sound hermeneutical model and the abandonment of a reliance on special revelation. I also expressed my concern that unfair criticism of the past may have widened the divide between the Word of Faith movement and the larger Evangelical movement to such an extent that bridging the gap might be extremely difficult.

Highlighting Smith's model for doing theology<sup>11</sup> created what I considered the right atmosphere, within which engagement takes place inside the framework of real Christian values. Smith's model requires a humble and gracious engagement.<sup>12</sup> I demonstrated that to aid constructive engagement between the larger Evangelical community and the Word of Faith movement, Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action has the potential to establish a fair platform from which both

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<sup>10</sup> Synan, *Word of Faith Movement has deep roots in American History*.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle'.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle', 112.

parties can interact as equals. It was within Smith's model that I found a consolidated approach that met the requirements of Habermas,<sup>13</sup> Niebuhr,<sup>14</sup> and Bevans.<sup>15</sup>

### **6.3. Contribution to Academic Research**

It is my opinion that the research presented in this thesis contributes to the body of academic knowledge on three primary points. Firstly, by contextualising Word of Faith 'little gods' theology in terms of the movement's other theological beliefs, those of dominion, covenant, faith, confession, health and prosperity, as well as their Christology, the true impact of Word of Faith human deification teaching becomes apparent. The benefit of this contextualisation is that it paves the way to a better understanding of Word of Faith thought, which means that mainstream Evangelical engagement with the Word of Faith movement is better positioned in terms of understanding and response.

The second area where this research makes an important contribution is in terms of how the Word of Faith movement is presented. I have abandoned the notion that the Word of Faith movement is not 'authentically Christian' by default. This means that engagement with the Word of Faith movement is now no longer from two opposite poles, but rather from within the Body of Christ, and as such, both participants have a responsibility to work towards healing the body (Ephesians 4:12-15).

The third and final area of contribution is in the merging of various social science theories, from psychology, economics, communication, and sociology, in aid of presenting a possible view of the dynamics at work in both influencing individuals, as well as how the Word of Faith movement can be approached for meaningful discourse.

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<sup>13</sup> Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*.

<sup>14</sup> Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministers*, 117.

<sup>15</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Culture*, 93.

#### **6.4. Additional Research**

One critical area identified for additional research that pertains to the interaction between the Word of Faith movement and the larger Evangelical community is how to effectively deal with the Word of Faith movement's reliance on special revelation.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY WORDS OF FAITH TERMS

### Glossary of Common Theological Terms as Used and Understood by the Word of Faith Movement

#### Confession:

Word of Faith confession theology is inseparable from its faith theology, and the two elements form an integral part in the movement's understanding of what faith is. The movement's confession theology is based upon the premise that faith has to be spoken, and that it is only through confession that faith comes to fulfilment. MacArthur<sup>16</sup> points out that 'your confessions, that is, the things you say – especially the favors you demand of God – must all be stated positively and without wavering. Then God is required to answer'.

Confession as a means of expressing faith and receiving a specific outcome is being taught, and has been in the past, by the majority of Word of Faith ministers, amongst whom are Hagin,<sup>17</sup> Capps,<sup>18</sup> Tilton,<sup>19</sup> et al.

In Word of Faith theology words only possess power when they are spoken with the God-kind of faith. Copeland states that 'You are born of God. You are a faith being. God does not do anything outside of faith. With His faith living in you, you are to operate the same way'.<sup>20</sup> According to Kenneth Hagin, receiving health is the will of God, as stated in Isaiah 53:5, and that through positive confession and faith the believer can apply this to him or herself.<sup>21</sup> The catalyst is found within the Word of

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<sup>16</sup> MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 342.

<sup>17</sup> Hagin, *How to Write your own Ticket with God*, 5-8.

<sup>18</sup> Capps, *The Tongue: A Creative Force*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Tilton, *God's Miracle Plan for Man*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, 1966).

God,<sup>22</sup> which leads to the interpretation of Romans 10:17 that Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This scripture is used together with Psalm 45:1 and Proverbs 3:1, 3 to stress the importance of confession<sup>23</sup> as a catalyst for faith fulfilment.

### **Faith:**

In Word of Faith theology words only possess power when they are spoken with the God-kind of faith. Copeland states that 'You are born of God. You are a faith being. God does not do anything outside of faith. With His faith living in you, you are to operate the same way'.<sup>24</sup> This principle of faith is extended, by the movement, to define faith as the catalyst that ensures righteousness and ultimately equality with God. Here faith is a contractual condition whereby man holds on to the title deed which guarantees righteousness.<sup>25</sup> It is stated that 'Righteousness is activated by faith. When we operate in faith, we no longer walk by sight, or by our feelings. (2 Cor.5:7). We lose our sin consciousness and refuse to stand before God in inferiority, shame and fear'.<sup>26</sup>

### **Revelation Knowledge:**

Word of Faith ministers developed another term, Revelation Knowledge, to describe their understanding of revelation. The use of this term implies the receiving of 'special revelation...outside of the scriptures'.<sup>27</sup> It is within this context that Word of Faith ministers claim to receive 'new truths', and as such claim the same authority as

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<sup>22</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 9

<sup>23</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 52-53.

<sup>26</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 192.

<sup>27</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy: The Word of Faith Doctrinal Deception*, 42.



the 'biblical writers',<sup>28</sup> effectively placing their special revelation on an equal level to the Bible.

### **Righteousness:**

For the Word of Faith minister Creflo Dollar, righteousness means that 'you are right with God even when you have done wrong'.<sup>29</sup> He states that 'Sin is our birthright as human beings. We are born into it. However, righteousness is our birthright as Christians'.<sup>30</sup> This view leads him to conclude that 'Righteousness is the ability to stand before God without the sense of guilt or inferiority'.<sup>31</sup> Dollar views man as having restored righteousness which means that when man stands before God he has 'rights'<sup>32</sup> and 'equality'.<sup>33;34;35</sup> Other Word of Faith ministers such as Copeland<sup>36</sup>, Benny Hinn,<sup>37</sup> Eddie Long,<sup>38</sup> Earl Paulk,<sup>39</sup> Paul Crouch<sup>40</sup> and Morris Cerullo<sup>41</sup>, who states that 'when we stand up here, brother, you're not looking at Morris Cerullo; you're looking at God. You're looking at Jesus'<sup>42</sup>, all express the same underlying principle of man having equality with God.

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<sup>28</sup> Kluttz, *Apostasy: The Word of Faith Doctrinal Deception*. .

<sup>29</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>33</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*.

<sup>34</sup> Dollar, 'Changing your World'. World Changers Program, Lesea Broadcasting. (April 17, 2002)

<sup>35</sup> Dollar, World Changers Ministries Sermon'.

<sup>36</sup> Copeland, *Now We are in Christ*, 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> Hinn, 'We are now Divine'.

<sup>38</sup> Eddie Long, 'Interview: Praise-A-Thon'. *Trinity Broadcast Network*. (March 29, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Paulk, *Satan Unmasked*, 97.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Crouch, 'Interview on Praise the Lord'. *Trinity Broadcast Network* (5 February 1986).

<sup>41</sup> Morris Cerullo, 'The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God', San Diego Outreach: Audiotape No.1, sides 1 & 2 (1991)

<sup>42</sup> Cerullo, 'The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God'.

Dollar asserts that 'The blood of Jesus restored us to righteousness'<sup>43</sup> and that such restoration, in which man is 'Being made the righteousness of God also means you have equality with God'.<sup>44</sup> This 'righteousness is activated by faith. When we operate in faith, we no longer walk by sight, or by our feelings. (2 Cor.5:7). We lose our sin consciousness and refuse to stand before God in inferiority, shame and fear'.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately the restoration of man's righteousness bestows certain privileges and rights upon man as the restored god of this earth for the purpose of exercising dominion over all of creation. Dollar states that: 'I now realize that my life should prove that I am righteous. Without proof, it is all a religious mask'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 165.

<sup>44</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Dollar, *Not Guilty*, 196.

## **PERSONAL TESTIMONY**

My Christian journey has been one upon which I look back with happiness, gratefulness, and some sadness, but most of all with hope. I grew up in a Christian home and went to the Dutch Reformed Church throughout most of my pre-adult life. At age 13, I had made a conscious decision to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour during a visit to an Apostolic Faith Mission church. This started my journey in Christ. I am not perfect, nor has the work of God in my life reached a pinnacle of perfection or completion. My theological understanding continues to evolve as my life in Christ finds new meaning and dimension as I age. Over the years I have taken on new beliefs as the Holy Spirit has made me aware, and at the same time I have abandoned beliefs, some even previously held beliefs, this also because the Holy Spirit had made me aware of the errors in those beliefs. Yet throughout all this change and growth, I have remained a child of God, adopted into His family, through the simple act of salvation.

My conversion was simply an act of accepting Christ, with no real understanding of what it meant to be saved or what the process would entail. What I did know, was that I had a profound inner awareness that God had an immense love for me and that Jesus Christ, whom I had grown up to know as a Bible character, was real, and extended to me a means to be reconciled to God. I “knew” in my being that I wanted to have some form of fellowship with God, and that accepting Christ made this possible. It was the message that God loved me, that Jesus died for my sins, that He has risen from the dead, and that by simply accepting this as undeniable truth, that I would obtain this wonderful opportunity, a true gift, to have fellowship with God.

Beyond this I knew very little of the theology, the dogma, the teachings and the liturgy that were to follow. My salvation was not a process, or a period of maturity, or a means of growing into salvation, but was, for me, an instantaneous event that happened in a moment in time. It was not dependent upon my history, my knowledge, my understanding of key doctrines, or my intellect. It was simply and totally dependent upon one thing and one thing only, my acceptance of Jesus Christ. I must admit, that looking back today, the miracle of salvation is that through all the noise of life, the lack of understanding and the preconceived ideas we all grow up

with, that God, through the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit, would quiet it all down and bring such clarity to my mind.

But this liberation from total cognitive understanding, combined with the disparaging way in which the traditional Protestant churches, such as the Dutch Reformed and what was commonly referred to as the three sister churches in South Africa, would view Pentecostals, and to a great extent the Pentecostal conversion, would set the tone, and may I say a very dangerous tone, for my Christian journey.

The way in which the reformed churches, with their very intellectual approach to ministry and worship, acted towards those outside their own community created a fertile ground for the rejection of any form of intellectual debate. The Pentecostal experience created such an intense clarity of my position in Christ, allowed such liberating expression of worship and service, that it became difficult to understand how those who rejected such liberty and expression could possibly know better. At times it even created a situation in which I questioned whether they, those in the reformed churches with their “dead” and unliberated education, even knew Christ. A reality was created in which the euphoria of having such a profound religious experience created a barrier. The barrier was erected firstly to protect from the attack launched by the reformed churches, and secondly to protect the experience itself from contamination. Intellectual debate was rejected, as was open dialogue, and instead of liberation and truth, isolationism gave rise to a very restrictive understanding and interpretation of the Word of God.

My zeal as a Child of God, a born again Christian, drove me to find practical expression of my faith and in doing so I eventually migrated to the Word of Faith movement. Under the ministry of Pastor Johan Greyling I was fortunate to meet some of the great men of the power evangelistic movement in South Africa, amongst them Pastor Nickey van der Westhuizen. Their influence of power evangelism, healing and miracles would have a profound influence on my life. The practical expression of faith, the courage to commit to the calling and their unwavering resolve to preach the gospel made these men role models for a young Christian.

Even today, I look back at myself and must acknowledge that I was without a doubt a Christian, although I knew very little about the underlying theology that defined my

Christian faith. My faith was a practical one and my heart served God passionately, even with many wrong theological ideas and even practices. By the time I was 16, I held my first power evangelism ministry crusade, a healing and miracle crusade in the true fashion of those great influences on my life. The Johannesburg City Hall became the central focus for a week-long revival meeting, and I knew that God was working through me. There was no doubt in my mind that as a child of God, the Holy Spirit was working through me.

It was only two years later that I would attend the Durban Christian Bible Training Centre, the official training school of Durban Christian Centre, an institution that had its roots in the Full Gospel Church, but which has over time grown and adopted firstly a clear Charismatic and eventually a strong Word of Faith approach. This was home for a time, and it was here that for the first time I received formal theological training. However, the training was simply an affirmation of what I already believed, and due to the limited scope of the syllabus my true understanding of many of the doctrines of what it is to be Christian remained unknown, and unchallenged. Yet, I was still the same person, with the same conviction of conversion and love for God as when I had first accepted Christ five years earlier. Looking back now, I realize how limited my understanding of theology was at the time, and yet, it would be an untruth to deny that I was still a born again child of God.

I would continue in my Charismatic and Word of Faith beliefs, serving God with the knowledge that I am His Child, until around 2005, when, 24 years after my initial conversion, the Holy Spirit placed upon my heart the conviction that many of the beliefs I held were not true, and that many of the teachings in which I was participating could not be justified. I set out to re-educate myself theologically, a journey that I now know will never end.

Today I can affirm that I have abandoned many of my former beliefs, and that I am continuously gaining a better understanding of the theology that underpins my faith. Yet I cannot deny that I have been a Christian, born again, through the acceptance of Jesus Christ because of the grace of God, and that I have been adopted as a child of God since 1981. Neither my faith nor my position in Christ has changed over the past 35 years, irrespective of the erroneous beliefs I may have held during that time.

This is, for me, the true meaning of the love God has for us, and the undeserving grace he bestows on each of us.

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