

Current Literature on Word of Faith

BEFORE THE ASSUMPTIONS AND initial methodology of this researcher are set out, this chapter will review material relevant to this book, which others have written, about the Word of Faith or Health Wealth and Prosperity Movement. The material is divided into three categories:

1. critical confessionally based approaches
2. apologetic confessionally based material
3. scholarly critiques

It should be noted that most, if not all, of the confessional critiques consider their approaches to be scholarly. All of the confessional critiques are written by evangelical authors, some writing from a Pentecostal/Charismatic perspective, others from a cessationist perspective.¹

The critiques labeled scholarly are mainly sociological/anthropological in nature.

Before I consider the critical and apologetic literature, it is necessary to introduce Essek W. Kenyon, the person who many critics allege effectively syncretized ideas from New Thought metaphysics with evangelical revivalism. Before I do, I need to explain the use of the terms “metaphysics” and “metaphysical” used throughout this book. In this context, “metaphysics” is not the strict definition of classical philosophy, which understands metaphysics as the branch of philosophy that deals with the basic nature of all that is. The term originates with Andronicus of Rhodes (first century BC),

1. Cessationists take the view that spiritual gifts, e.g., the gift of tongues or the gift of healing, ended with the apostles, and that alleged spiritual gifts today are counterfeit.

who arranged the writings of Aristotle (382–322 BC). Andronicus put the writings that Aristotle called *First Philosophy* After the writings on *Physics*, hence meta-physics (after physics) and is a term used in recent philosophy, for example in the writings of A. J. Ayer,² to cover any aspect of the subject that is neither analytic or scientifically verifiable.

What I understand by “metaphysics” or “metaphysical” in this book, particularly in discussing New Thought metaphysics and its antecedents, is the same as that of Charles Braden, who understood metaphysics to be a religious orientation that is common to a variety of religions and beliefs such as American New Thought, Theosophy, Christian Idealism, Spiritualism, and Christian Science. “This broad complex of religions,” he wrote, “is sometimes described by the general term “metaphysical” because its major reliance is not on the physical, but on that which is beyond the physical.”³ I am also indebted to J. Stillson Judah for his description of “metaphysics” as a “practical type of philosophy,” that is, “both scientific and religious.” He quotes an American metaphysical source as saying, it “stands for the deeper realities of the universe, the things which stand above and beyond the outer phenomenal realm . . . it especially concerns itself with the practical application of that absolute Truth of Being in all the affairs of our daily and hourly living.”⁴

1.1 E. W. Kenyon

Dan McConnell records that Kenyon was converted between the ages of fifteen and nineteen and preached his first sermon in a Methodist church when he was nineteen. In 1886, he was ordained a deacon in that church.⁵ What McConnell does not say, or appear to know at that time, was that, despite an early enthusiastic evangelistic ministry, Kenyon became disillusioned and became an agnostic.⁶ Joe McIntyre records the testimony of Kenyon’s first wife, who said that her husband was disillusioned by,

“disgust arising from the many inconsistencies in the motives and lives of Christian leaders,” and some failings in his own life, namely, “the pride of life, desire for fame and money in his own nature.”⁷

2. See Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic*.
3. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*, 4.
4. Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America*, 21, 11.
5. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 30.
6. McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon*, 3–8.
7. *Ibid.*, 7.

In 1892, Kenyon moved to Boston where he attended the Emerson College, or Emerson School of Oratory, as it was known.⁸ McIntyre records that from an early age Kenyon wanted to be an actor and attended the college to get ready for the stage.⁹ According to McConnell, both the school's founder Charles Wesley Emerson and many of the students and tutors had a strong affinity for New Thought.¹⁰ Bearing in mind that Kenyon was going through an agnostic stage, it seems likely to me that his state of mind and his own natural failings would have left him open to influence by New Thought, even if he subsequently rejected the movement's major teachings. New Thought was very popular in New England in the time that Kenyon was at Emerson College, and McConnell argues that, while disagreeing with the theology of the movement, he unwittingly took on board some of its key practical principles and syncretized them into his gospel, resulting in a blend of evangelical revivalism and New Thought metaphysics.¹¹ So McConnell concludes that some of the principles that Kenyon taught originated in the mind-science cults of the nineteenth century, specifically New Thought metaphysics.

1.2 Critical Confessional Material on the Faith Movement

1.2.1 Gordon Fee

Many of the earlier critics of the movement attempted hermeneutical critiques, arguing that the teaching of the movement is theologically unorthodox. Perhaps one of the best of these is Gordon Fee's *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*.¹²

Fee does not refer to Kenyon at all in this book, but does refer to those who were influenced by his teaching, including Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. Fee was a widely respected biblical scholar, especially among charismatics and Pentecostals, and is an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God; his approach is to point to the hermeneutical misunderstandings of the movement. For example, Fee points to a key biblical

8. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 29, 34.

9. McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon*, 15.

10. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 38–41. New Thought, otherwise known as New Thought Metaphysics, is a way of thinking that originated in early nineteenth-century America in particular through the teaching of Phineas P. Quimby.

11. *Ibid.*, 48.

12. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*.

text used by Faith teachers, 3 John 2 (KJV): “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” Fee notes¹³ that Faith teacher Kenneth Copeland interprets this to mean, “John writes that we should prosper and be in health.”¹⁴ Fee then comments on this text,

In the first place, the Greek word translated “prosper” in the KJV means “to go well with someone,” just as a friend in a letter two days ago said, “I pray that this letter finds you all well” (cf. 3 John 2 in the KJV, GNB, NEB, RSV, etc.). This combination of wishing “things to go well” and for the recipient’s “good health” was the standard form of greeting in a personal letter in antiquity.¹⁵

Fee points to a large collection of similar personal letters from the same era.¹⁶ He also comments,

To extend John’s wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is *totally foreign* to the text. John neither intended that, nor could Gaius have so understood it. Thus it cannot be the “plain meaning” of the text. We might rightly learn from this text to pray for our brothers and sisters that “all will go well with them,” but to argue from the text that God wills our financial prosperity is to abuse the text, not use it.¹⁷

1.2.2 John MacArthur

From a fundamentalist perspective, there are those who do not distinguish between the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Movement (otherwise known as Word of Faith) and the charismatic movement in general, and who critique the Faith Movement as yet another charismatic error. An example of this is *Charismatic Chaos* by John MacArthur (1992). MacArthur dismisses the entire charismatic movement in what his book calls “biblical evaluation” and analysis of “the doctrinal differences between charismatics and

13. *Ibid.*, 10.

14. See Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 14.

15. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 10.

16. See, for example, the collection of ancient personal letters in the Loeb series: Hunt and Edgar (eds.), *Select Papyri*, 269–395.

17. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 10.

non-charismatics in the light of scripture.”¹⁸ However, in his critique of the Word of Faith Movement, MacArthur significantly points to the critique of D. R. McConnell, who describes himself as a charismatic.

1.2.3 Dan McConnell

Three key critiques of the Word of Faith Movement’s theology are written by people who are themselves charismatic evangelicals: McConnell, Simmons, and Bowman. However, as the argument of each of the three is slightly different, I will review their contribution to the debate somewhat comparatively.

Perhaps the most well known analysis of the movement is *A Different Gospel* by D. R. McConnell.¹⁹ Published in the UK as *The Promise of Health and Wealth*,²⁰ the book is a reworking of his Master’s thesis submitted to the Oral Roberts University in 1982: “The Kenyon Connection: A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Cultic Origins of the Faith Movement.” McConnell describes himself as “a confirmed, unapologetic advocate of and participant in the charismatic renewal.”²¹

Dan McConnell considers the idea of revelation knowledge distinct from sensory knowledge to be key because, as he says, it is the epistemology of the Faith Movement.²² This, he argues, is an epistemology that is both dualistic, in the sense that it reduces reality to two opposite principles, and fideistic, in the sense that religious truth can only be based on faith, not on sensory evidence. He concludes, “both the dualistic and fideistic aspects of Revelation Knowledge come from the metaphysical cults.”²³ British scholars Walker, Wright, and Smail acknowledge their indebtedness to D. R. McConnell and his book *A Different Gospel*²⁴ for their understanding of Hagin and his revelation knowledge.²⁵

McConnell’s thesis is that while Kenneth Hagin, leader of the movement for many years, claimed that his teaching was based on direct revelation from God, he did, in fact, extensively plagiarize the writings of an earlier preacher, E. W. Kenyon.²⁶ McConnell demonstrates this with exam-

18. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, back cover and 18–19.

19. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (originally published 1988).

20. McConnell, *The Promise of Health and Wealth*.

21. *Ibid.*, xx.

22. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 102.

23. *Ibid.*, 102–3.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Smail, et al. *The Love of Power or the Power of Love*, 79.

26. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 6–13.

ples of significant parallel passages from both writers to argue that Hagin plagiarized Kenyon's books. McConnell introduces this section of his book by saying: "Hagin has, indeed, copied word-for-word without documentation from Kenyon's writings. The following excerpts of plagiarisms from no less than eight books by E. W. Kenyon are presented as evidence of this charge. This is only a sampling of such plagiarisms. Many more could be cited."²⁷ McConnell argues that Kenyon's thinking on healing and prosperity has its origin in New Thought, otherwise known as New Thought Metaphysics, a way of thinking that originated in early nineteenth-century America in particular through the teaching of Phineas P. Quimby.²⁸ Quimby was interested in alternative medicine, mesmerism, and healing, and believed that people's problems and sicknesses are caused by problems of the mind. McConnell states that Mary Baker Eddy was healed through Quimby,²⁹ and she adopted much of his thinking in her writing of *Science and Health*,³⁰ and in the formation of the Christian Science Church.³¹

Walker, Wright, and Smail comment with regard to Kenyon's dependency on New Thought, "This might be unproblematic if such writings were secondary to Faith teaching, but they would appear to provide their very *raison d'être*."³²

McConnell's book was first published in 1988, so the substance of his argument is twenty-five years old and has not remained unchallenged.³³ He points to a key approach to receiving healing from God, in Kenyon's writings, which he describes as the "Denial of Sensory Reality."³⁴ (See my reflections on Denial of Sensory Reality at section 3.8.4.) According to McConnell, Kenyon's idea of revelation, imported into the Faith Movement, has at its root the epistemological error of Gnosticism. (See my reflections on neo-Gnosticism at section 2.3.3.5.)

27. Ibid., 8.

28. Ibid., 37–38. Many of those who adhere to New Thought acknowledge Quimby as the founding father of the movement; see, for example, Anderson and Whitehouse, *New Thought*.

29. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 38. For more detail on the thinking and practice of Quimby, see Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power and Plenty*, 209.

30. Baker Eddy, *Science and Health*.

31. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 42.

32. Smail, et al. *The Love of Power or the Power of Love*, 76.

33. See the challenges of Bowman and McIntyre noted in sections 1.2.5 and 1.3.1 of this thesis.

34. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 104.

1.2.4 Dale H. Simmons

A scholarly approach to the life and theology of Kenyon (from more or less the same time as Joe McIntyre's book, *E. W. Kenyon: The True Story*)³⁵ is to be found in *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power and Plenty* by Dale H. Simmons 1996.³⁶ This is a reworking of Simmons's PhD thesis on Kenyon. "Postbellum" means "after war," and the title refers specifically to the desire of Americans, after their terrible civil war, to seek power over wealth and health, both mental/spiritual and physical. Both Simmons and McIntyre fill in many of the gaps in McConnell's knowledge of Kenyon's life and theology. At the time McConnell's book was written, a biography of Kenyon had never been attempted.³⁷

According to Simmons, the main purpose of his book was to focus on Kenyon and the historical development of Kenyon's thought. However, he also had a secondary goal, a comparison of New Thought and Evangelical sources.³⁸ In Simmons's opinion,

although the two groups differed in their definitions of the nature of the individual's power source, the methods employed in tapping into this power and the promised results of its proper exercise were strikingly similar . . . on a practical level, New Thought and the Higher Christian Life movement were birds of a feather emerging from the same gilded cage. This is not to say that the two groups were of the same species, but it is to recognize that they were certainly of the same genus.³⁹

He also argues that,

a thorough investigation of Kenyon's writings makes it clear that both the teachings of the Higher Christian Life movement and New Thought played a central role in the development of his own thought.⁴⁰

35. McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon*.

36. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon*.

37. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 29.

38. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon*, xiii.

39. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon*, xiii.

40. *Ibid.*, xi.

1.2.5 Robert M. Bowman Jr.

Another important book that examines the Faith Movement is *The Word-Faith Controversy* by Robert M. Bowman Jr. (2001).⁴¹ Bowman disagrees with McConnell, and argues that Word-Faith theology does not have its roots in New Thought Metaphysics, but in the evangelical faith cure movement of the late nineteenth century.⁴²

Bowman goes to great lengths in demonstrating that Kenyon's thought is similar, if not identical, particularly in teachings about healings, spiritual laws and positive confession (or avoiding negative attitudes), to the teaching of evangelical leaders of the previous generation, A. B. Simpson and John G. Lake, thus placing Kenyon in this more orthodox stream of teachers.⁴³ Interestingly he admits that,

the possibility exists that the evangelical faith cure movement and early Pentecostalism were also influenced in some respects by metaphysical thought. . . . Many of the ideas and expressions one finds in all of these movements, Christian and non-Christian, seem to have been "in the air" in late nineteenth-century American culture.⁴⁴

At this point, one might ask, what difference does it make whether Kenyon was influenced by New Thought, or the faith cure movement, if the faith cure movement was itself influenced by metaphysical thought? If Bowman is right his view does not change the origin of these ideas; their origin is the metaphysical cults.⁴⁵

Bowman considers Kenyon to be the grandfather of the Word-Faith Movement with its gospel of health and wealth and principles of positive confession.⁴⁶ He further thinks of Kenneth Hagin as one of the "fathers" of the movement, who used Kenyon's material and doctrines, and added his own developments to the teaching. Other "fathers" who he says have influenced the movement are William Branham and Oral Roberts.⁴⁷ Bowman argues that the Word-Faith Movement is an extreme form of Pentecostalism, or as he says, "Pentecostalism at its (near) worst."⁴⁸ He considers

41. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*.

42. *Ibid.*, 11.

43. *Ibid.*, 72–76.

44. *Ibid.*, 82.

45. See definitions of "cult" and "metaphysical" in the introduction of this thesis.

46. *Ibid.*, 36.

47. *Ibid.*, 86–89.

48. *Ibid.*, 12.

the Word-Faith views on healing and prosperity to be the least problematic aspects of their theology.⁴⁹

In the view of both Bowman and Simmons, McConnell and those who have utilized his thesis (for example, Hank Hanegraff in his book *Christianity in Crisis*)⁵⁰ have failed to acknowledge the significant influence of the “Higher Life,” often called the “Keswick,” faith cure teachings of the nineteenth century on Kenyon.

Bowman takes a different view to Simmons on the similarity between Higher Life and New Thought and is keen to distinguish between the movements. In his view,

New Thought is thoroughly heretical; the Higher Christian Life movement, while deservedly subject in my opinion to some theological criticisms, is an orthodox Christian tradition.⁵¹

Bowman fails to recognize that Simmons is not talking so much about doctrines but about common practices. Kenyon’s practical teaching has much in common with the practices of New Thought and Christian Science. As Bowman himself acknowledges in a table in his book,⁵² all three believed that the main causes of sickness are mental/spiritual, that healing is primarily through the mind or spirit, and that humans are basically spiritual beings. Higher Christian Life and Word-Faith writers utilize in practice, in the same way, the same biblical verses as New Thought teachers. All do so without consideration of their context or original meaning.

1.3 Apologetic Confessional Material

As I said earlier, McConnell’s thesis has not remained unchallenged. In response, adherents and supporters of the Faith Movement have attempted to make a defense of the teaching by pointing to weaknesses of detail in his argument.⁵³ They have particularly pointed to the orthodox and evangelical nature of Kenyon’s teaching in contrast to the thinking of New Thought Metaphysics and Christian Science.

49. *Ibid.*, 11.

50. Hanegraff, *Christianity in Crisis*.

51. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 58.

52. *Ibid.*, 47.

53. For example, DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*.

1.3.1 Joe McIntyre

A more recent detailed book in defense of Kenyon from this viewpoint is *E. W. Kenyon: The True Story* by Joe McIntyre (1997).⁵⁴ McIntyre has examined the books, diaries, and sermon notes of Kenyon in an attempt to demonstrate that Kenyon's influences were purely orthodox. Although McIntyre points to what appears to be the clearly evangelical influences on Kenyon, he fails to explain some of the stranger, more metaphysical sayings that appear in Kenyon's books.⁵⁵

In the section that follows, I seek to set out the background of these ideas in the writings of leading Word of Faith teachers, and their original expression in Kenyon's books.

In order to identify their presence in the case study material we might ask what are the principles, insights, and practices of positive confession as taught by the Faith Movement? What are Faith teachers, following Kenyon's lead, saying about God and faith?

Recognizing that Kenyon is the teacher, through whom many of these ideas have come into the Faith Movement, as the principal commentators do (McConnell, McIntyre, Simmons, Bowman, etc.), it is interesting to look at his thinking on these principles and how others have built on them.

1.3.2 Don Gossett

First of all is the idea of creative speech or "what you say is what you get," which incidentally is the title of a book by Don Gossett, a well known Faith teacher.⁵⁶ Gossett, like many of the Faith teachers, simply passes on ideas that originated in Kenyon. In fact, Gossett has written two books in which he puts his own thoughts alongside the teaching of Kenyon and cites him as his co-author.⁵⁷

Kenyon argues that God himself had faith when he created the universe. He wrote, "Faith-filled words brought the universe into being, and faith-filled words are ruling the universe today."⁵⁸ He argues that God's words "let there be" caused the creation to come into existence. He points to

54. McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon*.

55. In reading Kenyon's books the narrative is very much what a reader might expect from a revivalist author of this period until one reads a phrase which seems to be "metaphysical" and strangely out of place in revivalist writing.

56. Gossett, *What You Say is What You Get*.

57. Gossett and Kenyon, *The Power of Your Words & The Power of Spoken Faith*.

58. Kenyon, *The Two Kinds of Faith*, 20.

Hebrews 11:3 that says, “By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God,” and that from Hebrews 1:3 Christ is “upholding all things by the word of his power.”⁵⁹

Now the suggestion by Kenyon and those who have followed is that instead of the creation being created directly by the will of God, he himself spoke in faith, thus operating within some sort of spiritual laws that govern the universe along with the laws of physics. Kenyon describes these laws as “the great spiritual laws that govern the unseen forces of life. . . . They are to the spirit realm what iron, copper, gold and other metals are to the mechanical realm.”⁶⁰

1.3.3 Kenneth Hagin

Kenneth Hagin has built on the teaching of Kenyon to suggest that words spoken in faith by anyone according to these unseen laws or principles will result in that person getting what they say. Hagin claimed that in December 1953, Jesus appeared to him when he was “in the Spirit” and gave him a sermon with four points.⁶¹ Jesus apparently said, “If anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father.”⁶² The four steps were (1) Say it, (2) Do it, (3) Receive it, and (4) Tell it.

The first and key point was “Step 1: Say it.” During this first point Jesus gives, as an example of this “speech faith,” the actions of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:28: “For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.” According to Hagin, Jesus said, “That is the first thing she did: She said.”⁶³ In Hagin’s vision, Jesus continued, “Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive.”⁶⁴

Hagin suggests that Jesus told him that the woman could have been negative, and she would not have been healed. He goes on to apply this positive/negative thinking idea to the struggles of life as well as just sickness. He writes, “If you talk about your trials, your difficulties, your lack of faith, your lack of money—your faith will shrivel and dry up. . . . If you confess sickness, it will develop sickness in your system. If you talk about your doubts

59. Ibid.

60. Kenyon, *The Hidden Man*, 35.

61. Hagin, *How To Write Your Own Ticket With God*, 3–5.

62. Ibid., 5.

63. Ibid., 8.

64. Ibid.

and fears, they will grow and become stronger. If you confess your lack of finances, it will stop the money from coming in.”⁶⁵

Building on Kenyon’s thoughts, Hagin teaches that if believers discover these “spiritual laws” they can be used for their own ends. Hagin writes,

In the Spiritual realm God has set into motion certain laws, just as He set laws in the natural realm. Those laws in the natural realm work don’t they? Just as you get into contact with those natural laws or put them into practice they work for you. Over the spiritual realm the same thing is true. I have come to the conclusion that the law of faith is spiritual law, that God has put this law into motion, and that as surely as you come into contact with it, it will work for you.⁶⁶

1.3.4 Kenneth Copeland

Kenneth Copeland repeats this idea in his teaching particularly in the area of prosperity. It is clear that Copeland believes that if people follow certain “spiritual laws,” they can become prosperous. One of these spiritual laws is to do with giving. He encourages the depositing of money “in your heavenly account”⁶⁷ by tithing to the church, giving to the poor, investing in the gospel and giving as a praise to God. According to Copeland, these deposits attract returns of 100 to 1 based on what Jesus says in Mark 10:29–30.⁶⁸ This money can be withdrawn later.⁶⁹ Of course, another of the spiritual laws that Copeland teaches is positive confession.⁷⁰

This is also taught by Jerry Savelle as we shall see in chapter 6 of this book.

1.4 Scholarly Treatments of “Word of Faith”

1.4.1 Andrew Perriman

In 1994 ACUTE (The Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals) identified the “prosperity gospel” as a theme for study.

65. *Ibid.*, 10.

66. Hagin, “The Law of Faith,” 2.

67. Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 76.

68. *Ibid.*, 76–92.

69. *Ibid.*, 92.

70. *Ibid.*, 98–99.

A working group was appointed,⁷¹ chaired first by Dave Cave and then David Hilborn, to undertake an analysis of the prosperity movement. This study was initially stimulated by the ministry in the UK of Morris Cerullo and “the direct link he [Cerullo] appeared to make between the level of donors’ contributions to his own particular ministry and the extent of God’s blessing upon those donors’ lives.”⁷² The book *Faith, Health and Prosperity*⁷³ is the result. Although this is a report from the Evangelical Alliance on Word of Faith and Positive Confession theologies and, therefore, undoubtedly a confessional critique, it is also a thorough and critical academic work. On its back cover, Andrew Walker describes it as “a critical but by no means dismissive report on the Faith Movement by leading evangelical scholars.” And Paul Gifford describes it as

a comprehensive, perceptive and nuanced examination of the biblical sources and theological tradition regarding the power and generosity of God. The report can be critical of the Faith Movement, but its eirenic and respectful tone, its determination to understand rather than condemn, will make it a tool for fruitful dialogue. It is a model of its kind.⁷⁴

This book offers a detailed history of the Faith Movement. It starts with a chapter introducing the main beliefs and leading representatives of the movement—Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland—and describes the globalization of the movement. The book continues with an analysis of the basic premises of the movement and looks at their beliefs about creation, the fall of Adam and the nature of the atonement.

The report points, on one hand, to the Word of Faith Movement’s assertions that “we may transcend the limitations of human understanding by receiving ‘revelation knowledge’ directly from God; and on the other, that by activating certain spiritual ‘laws’ that have been built into the universe, the most important being the law of faith, we may gain access to a supernatural power than can dramatically change our material circumstances.”⁷⁵

71. The Working Group consisted of Rev. Roger Abbott (British Evangelical Council), Rev. Hugh Osgood (Pastor, Cornerstone Christian Church, Bromley, Kent), Dr. Keith Warrington (Lecturer in New Testament, Regent College, Nantwich), Dr. David Allen (Lecturer in Church History, Mattersey Hall, Doncaster), and Mrs Pauline Summerton (Associate Chaplain, Whittington Hospital, London).

72. Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, x.

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*, back cover.

75. *Ibid.*, 30.

Chapter 5 of the book looks at the philosophical and theological background of the movement. The analysis then proceeds by examining the hermeneutics of Word of Faith and highlighting the movement's "highly utilitarian use of the biblical texts. Scripture," the report points out, "is treated as a contractual or covenantal document whose practical value lies almost entirely in the fact that it comprises a set of promises, rules, laws, conditions, etc., which must be appropriated and activated by the believer in order to achieve spiritual and material success."⁷⁶ The report further comments that Word of Faith teaching "operates with a naive hermeneutic which largely disregards historical and literary distinctions within the text and refuses to engage in dialogue with the scholarly community."⁷⁷

Following chapters make a critical analysis of the movement's theology of double atonement (that Christ died both physically and spiritually), Christ as the second Adam, his alleged descent into hell and subsequent rebirth, and the relationship between salvation and material prosperity. The questions of healing in the atonement and the relationship of God's will to physical health are also addressed.

In the final chapter, the authors make the following observation,

In order to ensure the efficacy of faith in the life of the ordinary believer, the Word of Faith Movement has developed a highly functional and formulaic spirituality. Success in the spiritual life is not a haphazard affair: we can be certain of achieving our spiritual objectives if we act in accordance with the various laws that were embedded by God in the universe at creation—rather as the Jews were guaranteed prosperity if they observed the rules prescribed in the Torah.⁷⁸

They further add,

Word of Faith spirituality is dominated by the determination to get results, to prosper, and this is where the legalism comes into play: the practical outworking of the spiritual life, whether as personal sanctification or as ministry, is governed by the operation of spiritual laws.⁷⁹

This book is a very thorough work and, while making a strong confessional assessment, it gives a great deal of information on the roots and development of the movement. However, it is not without its critics, for

76. *Ibid.*, 82.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, 196.

79. *Ibid.*

example, Sally Jo Shelton critiques the work as having British disdain for the “faith message” because it is an American export exhibiting American exuberance and optimism. She also says the book’s attempt to summarize the key teachings of the movement is problematic because of the wide diversity of teachings of faith teachers, so the report’s attempt to generalize them is speculative. She also finds problems with the personal tone of the discussion. The greatest criticism from Shelton is the failure of the report to address certain topics fully because of the lack of consensus among evangelicals themselves.⁸⁰

1.4.2 Milmon Harrison

Harrison’s book *Righteous Riches*⁸¹ is an ethnography that explores the Word of Faith Movement and particularly, towards the end, its African-American forms. He is himself a former Word of Faith adherent and utilizes participant observation by drawing on the testimony of several informants active in the movement, some of whom he has apparently known for years. In conducting formal interviews, with twenty primarily lay people, he seeks to show how these people seek to apply the message they hear in church to everyday life.

Harrison’s assessment of the movement is fair and free from too many negative criticisms about the movement as he attempts an objective and simple sociological analysis. He starts with a summary of the key figures in the movement and their teachings and the way the movement has developed. While he refers to McConnell’s book, he stops short of describing Hagin’s indebtedness to Kenyon in his writing as plagiarism.⁸²

Harrison then offers a concise summary of the Word of Faith message that he considers under three basic points. First, the Gnostic principle of knowing who you are in Christ;⁸³ second, the practice of positive confession;⁸⁴ and third, the argument that every Christian has the God-given right to prosperity and health.⁸⁵ He then goes on to list common critiques of these ideas, that these teachings are the result of poor exegesis of scripture, that they are an oversimplified formulaic approach to faith that

80. Shelton, Review of Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*.

81. Harrison, *Righteous Riches*.

82. *Ibid.*, 5–8.

83. *Ibid.*, 8–10.

84. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

85. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

is viewed by some critics as in the realm of witchcraft and the “New Age.”⁸⁶ However, the distinctive analysis of this book is of the African American manifestation of “Word of Faith.” Harrison describes a typical experience of being a new member of a black Word of Faith church by observing the fictitiously named Faith Christian Centre in Sacramento.⁸⁷ Here, he demonstrates how religious meaning is constructed in this sort of context. The author provides an “illuminating” discussion on the distinct influences of black Word of Faith theology including precursors like Johnnie Coleman and Rev. Ike (Significant leaders who have gone virtually unexplored until now).⁸⁸ He also investigates aspects of contemporary black culture and economics that cause black churches to be strategically situated for prosperity theology.⁸⁹ Overall this book gives a good explanation of the key differences between Classic Pentecostalism and the Word of Faith Movement and the author makes a good attempt to demonstrate the connection between New Thought and the Word of Faith Movement and how New Thought influences the movement more than Pentecostalism.⁹⁰

1.4.3 Simon Coleman

*The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*⁹¹ sounds like it should be an all-embracing work describing the spread of charismatic Christianity across the world. However, Simon Coleman undertakes an ethnographic, anthropological study of Livets Ord (Word of Life), a charismatic church/movement in Sweden. In doing this, he aims to show that the church is not only part of the global prosperity or Word of Faith Movement, but that its members’ beliefs and behavior reflect the sort of global processes indicated by theories of globalization put forward by Roland Robertson, Arjun Appadurai and others.⁹² Coleman also draws on insights from Berger and Luckmann, and their concept of the social construction of reality,⁹³ in his analysis of how the church’s members’ lives and faith are a local manifestation of globalization. Coleman’s aim is to show how exactly this works in this particular example.

86. Ibid., 12–14.

87. Ibid., 81–2.

88. Ibid., 134–36.

89. Ibid., 131–40.

90. Ibid.

91. Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*.

92. Ibid., 4.

93. Ibid., 6.

The analysis centers on three interrelated dimensions of this local form of globalization: media, forms of organization, and orientation.⁹⁴ Under each heading, Coleman goes to great depths with insights from various scholars to unearth the local/global aspect of this movement and the way that individuals relate to it and view it.

So in thinking about media, Coleman does not just look at techniques, such as television, video, and the internet, to communicate a local message, he examines how these things make the movement global. Videos, for example, become like “quasi-relics” that transmit sacred power to non-locals. When it comes to organization, he emphasizes how the local church sees itself as a focus that transmits its products, not just locally but nationally and globally. In his understanding of orientation, Coleman describes something like Bourdieu’s *habitus*,⁹⁵ learned attitudes, habits, style, taste, body language, etc., through which particular groups structure their lives.⁹⁶ So members of Livet’s Ord have a definite attitude, they see themselves as not just local and global but of this world and the spiritual world. They have taken on board Word of Faith principles, and in practicing them, they understand physical health and prosperity to be manifestations of the Spirit’s activity in the movement. They are like capitalist consumers of religion, part of a worldwide movement of which Sweden is the northern center.

They understand Christian mission as being focused on nations, and they see themselves as agents of their movement, seeking to change first Sweden and its identity and also, as a part of the global movement, to change the world. Coleman observes that they offend many fellow Swedes, who see Livet’s Ord not merely as unswedish, but as an invasion of American culture.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Most of the books in this literature review are confessional materials that concentrate on the historical development of the movement and its biblical exegesis. While McConnell and others critique the movement’s erroneous theology, Coleman (and to an extent Harrison) attempt to explain with sociological and anthropological methodologies how the Faith Movement works and operates. While all of the literature in the review gives valuable information, my aim in this book is to examine the rhetoric, self-presentation,

94. Ibid., 55–65.

95. Ibid., 62–64.

96. Ibid., 141.

97. Ibid., 208–9.

and persuasive, performative actions, sayings of my case studies, and their use of media and suggestion. I want to investigate how people are persuaded to follow the lead of the charismatic leaders that I use as my case studies. Thus, I will set out my initial methodology in the next chapter.

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