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This essay from her dissertation (for the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA) is titled *A Critical Analysis of the Preaching of Creflo Dollar*. In it she assesses the preaching of Creflo Dollar, Jr., discusses prosperity preaching and the Word of Faith Movement in general.

### **Prosperity Preaching & The Word of Faith Movement**

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week people in countries such as Korea, Australia, Kenya, England, Brazil, Canada, Ukraine, and the United States are able to turn on their televisions and experience the preaching of the Word of Faith movement. In the preaching of the Word of Faith movement, also referred to colloquially as “prosperity preaching,” hearers are told that God has promised financial riches and good physical health to those who believe in Christ and are faithful to the word of God.

The Word of Faith movement is an American religious subculture made up of denominationally independent churches, ministries, bible training colleges, mass media broadcast networks, and entertainment production facilities.<sup>1</sup> These entities are bound together by an informal relational network based on a “shared understanding of the bible from which is derived the movement’s doctrine or Faith Message.”<sup>2</sup> One of the primary vehicles of the Faith Message is the Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN). TBN was founded in 1973 by Paul and Jan Crouch in association with Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. As of this writing, TBN is featured on over 5,000 television stations and is broadcast internationally through 33 satellites. TBN boasts of being broadcast into 92 million U.S. households annually. Word of Faith preachers can also be experienced on the Word Network, the Angel Network, and local television networks throughout the United States and abroad.

### **Word of Faith Controversy**

To say that the preaching of the Word of Faith movement is controversial would be an understatement. However, the reasons for controversy are varied. For some in charismatic/evangelical circles, the theology of the Word of Faith movement raises doctrinal concerns. Charismatic/evangelical detractors contend that Word of Faith preaching is heretical because it espouses New Thought metaphysical teachings such as “positive confession,” “visualization,” “inner healing” and “positive thinking” which they believe to contradict orthodox Christian doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

Others inside and outside of charismatic/evangelical circles are primarily concerned about Word of Faith hermeneutics. For these hermeneutical critics, the practice of interpreting text out of

their historical and literary contexts enables Word of Faith preachers to justify their consistent messages of prosperity.<sup>4</sup>

For others, social justice is the primary concern. Social justice is a concern because people who are attracted to Word of Faith preaching are often the poor, oppressed and/or marginalized. They not only listen to Word of Faith messages but also donate money to Word of Faith ministries with the hope that when they give to God according to the instructions of the preacher, they will reap a one hundred-fold return on their money. They also expect that God will cure them miraculously when health issues arise. These poor, oppressed and marginalized masses who have not been able to realize their desires for financial prosperity while operating within their local social economies, hope that by following the laws of the divine economy explicated weekly by Word of Faith preachers, they will finally have all of their financial needs met. They also hope to receive the desires of their hearts in the form of material goods. Some proponents of social justice are concerned that preachers of the Word of Faith movement get rich at the expense of their poor congregants.<sup>5</sup> The tithes and offerings of the marginalized poor pay for the mansions, Gulfstream jets, and Rolls-Royces of the preachers. However, prosperity preachers such as Creflo Dollar, Jr. view living lives of luxury as simply practicing what they preach, even when the money comes from the poor. When asked in one interview why he was so open about his wealth, Dollar responded:

One of the things that I want to do is make sure that I am practicing what I preach. It is so important. My church gave me a Rolls-Royce. I would never spend that much money on a Rolls-Royce for several reasons. But when your church congregation – 20,000 at that time – come to you and say, “pastor, we want you to drive the best,” I’m not going to turn that down. It would be a dishonor to the people that gave it to me.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Evolution of Word of Faith Preaching**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a very quiet movement commencing in New England under the leadership of a white clockmaker named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby that would prove foundation for Word of Faith preaching.<sup>7</sup> This movement would become known as New Thought.<sup>8</sup>

Quimby was particularly interested in mental healing. It was after being healed of tuberculosis that he was inspired to better understand the relationship between illness and health.<sup>9</sup> He began to study and practice Mesmerism (hypnosis) and eventually developed his own healing theories.<sup>10</sup> For example, in a short essay entitled, “Is Disease a Belief?” Quimby writes of the relationship between the mind and disease:

If I am sick, I am sick for my feelings are my sickness, and my sickness is my belief, and my belief is my mind; therefore all disease is in the mind or belief. Now as our belief or disease is made up of ideas which are matter, it is necessary to know what ideas we are in; for to cure the disease is to correct the error; and as disease is what follows the error, destroy the cause, and the effect will cease.<sup>11</sup>

Quimby felt that by discovering the connection between the mind and disease he had rediscovered the healing technique of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Out of the New Thought movement grew several other movements. Quimby's best known student was Mary Baker Eddy who founded Christian Science.<sup>13</sup> In turn, some of Eddy's students included: Charles and Myrtle Fillmore who founded the Unity School of Christianity; Malinda E. Cramer who co-founded Divine Science; and Ernest Holmes who founded Religious Science.<sup>14</sup> Over the years, proponents of New Thought taught that changing one's thinking could not only affect one's health, but every aspect of one's life including financial well being.

### **Emergence of New Thought in Black Preaching**

During the Great Migration (1915-1920) an estimated 1.5 million Southern blacks moved to Northern states to escape sharecropping, tenant farming, and abject poverty.<sup>15</sup> During this period, Chicago's black population grew by 148 percent, Cleveland's by 307 percent, Detroit's by 611 percent. Many blacks felt they might find employment in the North and new lives for themselves and their families.<sup>16</sup> One preacher who arose during this period was George Baker better known as Father Major Jealous Divine or "Father Divine."<sup>17</sup> Father Divine established the Peace Mission Movement in Sayville Long Island, New York, in which he preached self-help and positive thinking; held his followers to a strict code of ethics including no drinking, smoking, or drugs; prohibited racial prejudice and discrimination among those in the movement; and established small black businesses while urging his followers to patronize those businesses.<sup>18</sup> Although Father Divine required his followers to maintain a strict standard of personal piety, he was also encouraged a commitment to social justice. Divine's followers were urged to develop a plan for a "righteous government" in which equality for all would be realized and such practices as Jim Crow and lynching would be repealed.<sup>19</sup> Father Divine was known for his flamboyant appearance.

Another flamboyant preacher during this period was Charles Manuel Grace, also known as "Daddy Grace" or "Sweet Daddy Grace." Sweet Daddy Grace founded the House of Prayer for All People in 1919 in West Wareham, Massachusetts, in which he promised his people they could live the good life by "placing their trust, their faith, and most of all their money in his hands."<sup>20</sup> Though the doctrine of the House of Prayer for All People is said to have resembled Pentecostalism, Daddy Grace also preached positive thinking.<sup>21</sup>

Reverend Dr. Johnnie Coleman and Reverend Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II (Rev. Ike) were preaching messages of self-reliance and individualism while preachers of the Civil Rights movement preached messages about the need for solidarity and the power of unity in the face of injustice. However, the preaching of Ike and Coleman was more comprehensive that it appeared on the surface.

Reverend Coleman is an ordained minister in the Unity tradition. After enrolling in the Unity School of Christianity and being healed of an incurable disease, Coleman began to teach Unity principles of healing and positive thinking. In 1956, Coleman founded the Christ Universal Temple in Chicago which is currently the largest New Thought church in the world with 20,000 members.<sup>22</sup> Then and now members were taught that a happy, healthy and prosperous life is

within reach of each individual who realizes that the kingdom of God is within her or him;<sup>23</sup> “God has created his people to be perfect, whole and complete, and fined and surrounded in and with prosperity.”<sup>24</sup>

Reverend Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, better known as Rev. Ike, believed that all the problems of society begin with the individual.<sup>25</sup> He preached a gospel of self-identity to get each person to believe in the “divinity or dignity within himself.”<sup>26</sup> Rev. Ike founded the Miracle Temple in Boston in 1965 and the United Church and Science of Living Institute in 1969 to teach people how to live better lives through positive thinking. Though not formally a member of the New Thought movement, his teachings were an intersection between New Thought teachings and African American religious expressions.

While Father Divine, Sweet Daddy Grace, Coleman and Ike were the first black preachers to formally incorporate New Thought metaphysics into their preaching, many of today’s black Word of Faith preachers acknowledge the teachings and preaching of Kenneth E. Hagin as a major influence on their own preaching ministries.

### **New Thought and the Word of Faith Movement**

For Kenneth E. Hagin, best known as the father of the Word of Faith Movement, the 1960s were a time of new beginnings. Hagin, a white Southern Baptist, converted to Pentecostalism because he wanted to fellowship with people who believed in divine healing.<sup>27</sup> Hagin’s belief in divine healing was undoubtedly influenced by his own divine healing at the age of seventeen. Hagin had suffered from a deformed heart and incurable blood disease all his life. However, after reading Mark 5:34 wherein Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood, he was completely healed.<sup>28</sup> Soon after his healing, Hagin began to preach.

In 1962, Kenneth Hagin began preaching and teaching that reality is “created in the minds and affirmed in the speech of believers.”<sup>29</sup> Hagin founded the Kenneth E. Hagin Evangelistic Association which was the beginning of the Word of Faith Movement.<sup>30</sup> Though Hagin claimed that his teachings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is believed that Hagin actually plagiarized his teachings from E.W. Kenyon, an independent evangelist and bible teacher.<sup>31</sup> In turn, Kenyon is believed to have adopted many of his teachings from Christian Science and New Thought.<sup>32</sup>

From the beginning of his ministry, Hagin used the media very effectively to proliferate the Word of Faith message. He moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and began broadcasting his teachings on his radio program, “Faith Seminar of the Air.”<sup>33</sup> He published his teaching in the “Word of Faith” Magazine which subsequently became the name of the movement and is still in circulation today. Hagin also published over one hundred and twenty books and numerous audio tapes. He founded Rhema Correspondence School in 1968 and the Rhema Bible Training Center in 1974. Through these educational endeavors, Hagin has trained thousands of new Faith preachers.

Hagin also founded the Rhema Ministerial Association International( RMAI) in 1985.<sup>34</sup> The members of this association are usually graduates of Rhema Bible Training Center and are licensed and/or ordained by RMAI. Currently, one thousand fifty seven churches are listed as

members.<sup>35</sup> Hagin's effective use of media and his teaching ministry at Rhema insured the proliferation of his message to divergent audiences.

### **Prominent Word of Faith Preachers**

Kenneth Copeland is the founder and of Kenneth Copeland Ministries, an internationally renowned ministry that with offices in Fort Worth, Texas, and various countries and cities in Africa, Australia, Canada, Europe and the Ukraine. Ira V. Hilliard is pastor of the New Light Christian Center of Houston, Texas, which has 20,000 members.<sup>36</sup> Jesse Duplantis, known for his sense of humor, is president and founder of Jesse Duplantis Ministries and Covenant Church Destrehand, Louisiana. Keith Butler, a Rhema graduate, is the pastor of the 18,000 member Word of Faith International Christian Center in Southfield, Michigan.<sup>37</sup> Creflo Dollar, Jr., is the pastor of World Changers International Ministries of College Park, Georgia, with a membership of 23,500. Frederick K.C. Price is founder of the Crenshaw Christian Center (CCC) in South Central Los Angeles with current membership of over 22,000.<sup>38</sup>

### **Real Father of the Word of Faith Movement**

Many Word of Faith preachers readily acknowledge Kenneth E. Hagin to be their mentor and the father of the Word of Faith movement. However, in his book, *A Different Gospel*, Dan McConnell argues that Essek William Kenyon was actually the father of the Word of Faith movement since Hagin plagiarized Word of Faith doctrine directly from Kenyon. In his book, *A Different Gospel*, McConnell displays the writing of Kenyon and Hagin side by side to illustrate the degree of Hagin's plagiarism. McConnell contends that Kenyon is the founding father of the Faith movement because Kenyon wrote the teachings upon which the Faith movement is based.<sup>39</sup>

Essek William Kenyon was an evangelist, pastor, and teacher who was born in Hadley Hills, New York, on April 24, 1867, at a lumber camp.<sup>40</sup> Having received an exhorter's license from the Methodist Episcopal Church in Amsterdam, New York,<sup>41</sup> Kenyon fulfilled his calling to ministry by: founding the Bethel Bible Institute in 1898 where he trained students in evangelism, mission and divine healing,<sup>42</sup> pastoring several churches including the Plymouth Congregational Church in Oakland, California,<sup>43</sup> and at the age of sixty-four, Kenyon launching "Kenyon's Church of the Air," a radio ministry in 1931<sup>44</sup> and founding the Seattle Bible Institute in 1935.

Kenyon has sixteen published books and two published bible courses. Many of Kenyon's books are compilations of articles written for *Kenyon's Herald of Life*<sup>45</sup> or edited transcripts of radio broadcasts.<sup>46</sup>

### **Kenyon Teachings Adopted by Word of Faith Preachers**

For Kenyon, the New Covenant that God established with humanity through Jesus, unlike the Old Covenant God established with Abraham, permanently restored the relationship between God and humanity which Adam's sin had broken. The New Covenant entitles believers to certain rights and privileges that, when claimed and acted upon, allow believers to live lives of victory and success instead of lives of defeat and failure. Rights to which believers are entitled include: status as the righteousness of God, material prosperity, authority to make confession in the name of Jesus, and victory over sickness and disease.

### **Kenyon's Hermeneutics**

Kenyon used a deductive approach to scripture in his teaching and preaching in which he made a point or drew a conclusion then cited scripture to support his conclusions (also known as proof-texting).<sup>47</sup> Kenyon's approach to scripture is common in some evangelical traditions. There are some evangelical scholars who may help us to understand better and classify Kenyon's hermeneutics.

In *God, Revelation and Authority*, Carl F. H. Henry writes about *propositional revelation*. Henry defines *proposition* as, "A verbal statement that is either true or false; it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed or doubted."<sup>48</sup> Having defined proposition, Henry argues that the bible is God's *propositional revelation* that God supernaturally communicated to chosen people in the form of "cognitive truths." The God-inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation of the bible articulates the cognitive truths "in sentences that are not internally contradictory." Therefore, for Henry, the bible is divinely inspired information that is expressed as propositional revelation in sentences that do not contradict each other.

Perhaps, it is the belief that each sentence of scripture is in and of itself a divine truth or *propositional revelation* that compelled Kenyon to use his deductive approach. Perhaps Kenyon felt no need to engage in biblical exegesis because the truth of the text is self-evident as revealed by God in sentence form. Or perhaps Kenyon's use of scripture can be simply be categorized as the "no hermeneutic" hermeneutic.<sup>49</sup> According to Douglas Jacobsen, rejecting the exegetical process is a conscious choice of many evangelicals:

One of the prevailing assumptions of North American evangelical hermeneutics has been that one really does not need to "interpret" the Bible at all in order to understand it. All one needs to do is read the Bible with an open mind, ready to hear what it has to say. I call this the "no hermeneutic" hermeneutic of traditional evangelicalism.

Whether Kenyon's method of interpretation is deemed propositional revelation or the "no hermeneutic" hermeneutic, it is a type of interpretation whose underlying premise is that the bible means exactly what it says and context is not always important.

### **Word of Faith Foundational Doctrine of the *Divine Economy***

One of the most important teachings of the Word of Faith movement is the *divine economy* which was created and popularized by Oral Roberts. Roberts is an evangelist and former president of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The divine economy is an economic system based on the belief that God wants to provide God's people with material prosperity.<sup>50</sup> An alternative to the secular economy, the divine economy is activated by faith in the goodness of God and the law of sowing and reaping or seed-faith.

Robert's doctrine of seed-faith is composed of three core principles which, if applied properly in the life of the believer, can ensure that she or he will have abundant life or a life of prosperity.<sup>51</sup> The first core principle is that Christians should turn their lives over completely to God by recognizing that God, not humanity, is the source of all their needs.<sup>52</sup> People who help Christians at various points in their lives are instruments of God but they are not the source of any blessings. God is the source.<sup>53</sup>

The second core principle is the principle of sowing and reaping.<sup>54</sup> Whatever the believer gives freely to God becomes a seed for God to multiply back to the believer in the form of their needs. When the believer sows seed of any kind by giving of their talent, time, love, compassion, or money, they will receive those things in return. If believers want God to supply their financial needs, they should give seed-money to God for God to reproduce and multiply.<sup>55</sup> Roberts is very careful to differentiate seed-faith giving from tithing. Seed-faith giving is done before the miracle is manifested or the need has been met.<sup>56</sup> Tithing is giving after one has been blessed by God financially.

Roberts is also clear that giving to God means Christians give to the church or they give to someone to whom God has directed them.<sup>57</sup> For example, there was a time when Roberts and his wife Evelyn were struggling to pay their rent. Roberts was led to give a seed-faith offering to God. After he gave the offering, a man who was a member of the church Roberts was pastoring gave Roberts an amount seven times the offering Roberts had given to the church. As a result, Roberts and his wife were able to stay in the house.<sup>58</sup>

The third core principle of seed-faith is to immediately expect a miracle after the seed has been planted.<sup>59</sup> In order to expect a miracle, the believer must “release their faith” in God by truly believing that God is going to grant them a miracle.<sup>60</sup>

Though Roberts advises believers to plant seed like the miracle they need, for example, planting a seed of time if they need time, of love if they need love, he simultaneously espouses planting of money seeds to meet other types of needs. For example, he recounts a testimony of a young woman who planted a seed of faith for reconciliation in her marriage. When she decided to plant a financial seed, it was the point of contact she needed to release her own faith. She and her husband did reconcile. However, it would seem that if believers should sow like seed, rather than giving money she should rather have helped someone else reconcile their relationship as a way of mending her own.

Roberts cites several scriptures including Luke 6:38 as evidence of God’s promise to give back to those who give. Continuing in the tradition of Kenyon, Roberts cites these scriptures out of context to justify his prosperity teachings.

### **The Problems of Word of Faith Teachings**

The approach to scripture that Oral Roberts takes in order to produce his seed-faith teaching is the same approach used by all Word of Faith preachers to justify their teachings. Oral Roberts takes the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-38, in which Jesus radically critiques human interaction based on status, privilege, and ascription and reduces it a Godly promise for abundant living. By misinterpreting the text in this way, Roberts subjugates the life and work of Christ to desire for wealth, depicts the divine-human relationship as a capitalistic exchange, erodes the sovereignty of God, dangerously equates God and the church, and construes contextual biblical texts into eternal Godly promises.

Jesus was ultimately crucified for being a social and political threat.<sup>61</sup> In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus proclaimed a kingdom of God in which the poor, the hungry, and those weeping,

those who were hated and excluded were called blessed. In this same kingdom, the rich, the full, the laughing ones and those of good repute were forewarned of ill-fated futures. In the kingdom of God as articulated by Jesus, poverty was no longer a life sentence to marginalization and condemnation (Godly or human). Wealth was no longer a sign of Godly favor or divine sanction. In the radical kingdom that Jesus proclaimed, blessings were directly dependent upon human interaction and the degree to which those interactions embodied God's kingdom. In Roberts' use of Luke 6:38, the grand eschatological vision imparted to humanity in the life and work of Jesus Christ, in which He sought to liberate humanity from its self-made systems of power and privilege, is subjugated to individual desire for wealth and material gain. The only good news that Roberts extracts from this text is that believers can live abundant lives if they give God money.

In his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber defines capitalistic economic action:

We will define a capitalistic economic action as one which rests on the expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange... Where capitalistic acquisition is rationally pursued; the corresponding action is adjusted to calculations in terms of capital. This means that the action is adapted to a systematic utilization of goods or personal services as means of acquisition in such a way that, at the close of a business period, the balance of the enterprise in money assets exceeds the capital, i.e. the estimated value of the material means of production used for acquisition in exchange.<sup>62</sup>

According to Weber's definition, in Robert's doctrine of seed-faith, the economic action would be initiated by believers in the form of monetary outlay. They offer a monetary gift to God. The material means of production is the release of the faith of believers. Once believers release their faith, God then releases God's bounty in monetary form by blessing them financially. The exchange is complete when believers have acquired from God a monetary blessing which is some multiple of the initial capital outlay. This scenario is capitalism as its best. For an investment of money and faith, believers yield many times more money than they initially invested. In capitalism, there are risks involved in every economic exchange. However, according to Roberts, sowing and reaping is a divine law. God never fails to deliver on God's promises.

In Roberts' seed-faith doctrine, the sovereignty of God is eliminated. No longer is God able to act as God wills in any given situation. Rather, God must obey God's laws as interpreted by Roberts.

In Roberts' doctrine, giving to God means giving to the church – placing God and the church on equal footing. It is not uncommon for churches to make financial appeals by claiming that by giving to the church, people are not only giving to God but also fulfilling a Godly obligation.<sup>63</sup> Many of these appeals are made to encourage worshippers to give tithes (ten percent of their income). Where Roberts' doctrine becomes particularly dangerous is in his insistence that in order to receive from God believers must give seed-faith offerings in addition to the tithes they already give. In this scenario, though believers are promised multi-fold returns, God's appetite

for money seems insatiable. It is not hard to see how the preponderance of monetary requirements can also become a financial burden.

Inherent in Roberts' doctrine is the belief that scripture texts, even when taken out of context, are promises of God for all people for all ages. By using scripture out of context, Roberts constructs his own belief system which he supports, like E.W. Kenyon, with other scripture. Texts such as the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6 illustrate the breadth and depth of the Gospel that is lost when scripture is divorced from its socio-political, historical, and literary contexts.

Oral Robert's doctrine of seed faith has been adopted by many preachers both inside and outside of the Word of Faith movement. One preacher who has incorporated Robert's doctrine into his preaching and teaching is Kenneth Copeland.

### **Copeland and Prosperity**

While Kenneth Hagin advanced Kenyon's contention that God would supply all the believer's needs by preaching and teaching that God would provide the believers with abundance (more than they need) and good success, Copeland uses Kenyon's teaching on the blessings of Abraham that are promised to all believers with Oral Robert's teachings on seed faith to argue that when believers follow the law of seed faith, God will increase whatever seed is sown by one hundred-fold.<sup>64</sup> The one hundred-fold return principle works in every area of the Christians life: personal finances, faith and spiritual growth, business, etc...<sup>65</sup>

Copeland is specific about where and how the seeds should be sown. When the believer gives in obedience to God, their heavenly account credits them with one hundred times the amount they gave.<sup>66</sup> In order to receive one hundred-fold on their finances, believers need to sow seed into good ministries. Seed should not be sown in nonproductive places. In order to find out where seed should be sown, believers should ask God. For Copeland, seed-faith has four steps: 1) make a decision to have the word be the final authority, 2) plant seed in a ministry that God has authorized, 3) verbally confess your right to receive one hundred-fold return, 4) and stand on the confession. Copeland teaches that the believer has responsibility to remember seed that has been sown in the past. Periodically, the believer should review all of the seed that has been sown and confess their right to receive one hundred-fold until that full amount has been received.<sup>67</sup>

Copeland also believes that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just and will eventually find its way into their hands.<sup>68</sup> When the believer confesses with their words that they will be prosperous, then they will receive wealth.

### **Other Word of Faith Teachings**

In order for the prosperity gospel to have any validity, proponents of prosperity gospel must argue that the central figure of the gospel, Jesus Christ himself, was not poor. Without addressing Jesus' socio-economic status, they would have no hope of being taken seriously. Therefore, the Word of Faith preachers attempt to fabricate Jesus' wealth by citing circumstantial evidence. For example, though Creflo Dollar does not cite chapter and verse, he references the occasion of John 1:39 when two of John's disciples follow Jesus and ask him where he was staying as evidence of Jesus' wealth. In this text, Jesus advised the disciples to "come and see" where he was living. The disciples followed Him and stayed with Him for the rest of the day. Dollar tells

his hearers that since the disciples stayed with Jesus the entire day, His house must have been very nice. Dollar does not seem to consider the possibility that the disciples stayed with Jesus because they were enthralled with His teachings or because the presence of the Spirit of God dwelled within and around Him.

Word of Faith preachers teach their hearers that money is the answer for all of life's needs and challenges. If money is used as a seed and named properly, it can grow up into healing. It can grow up into favor. It can grow up into deliverance. It can grow up into the anointing. On the one hand, while some teach that money is not used to buy one's way into God's favor, on the other hand, preachers such as Creflo Dollar use examples of how giving money to God can work using an example of a grandfather whose grandchild was kidnapped. After the grandfather sowed a "huge" money seed into Dollar's ministry, the grandchild was returned unharmed.

Like Kenneth Copeland, many Word of Faith preachers teach that wealth of the rich is laid up for the righteous by God. In order to access the money, believers should pray to God and claim what God has laid aside for them.

### **Word of Faith Preaching and Individualism**

Whether the topic is money, the anointing, physical healing or the righteousness of God, Word of Faith preaching encourages hearers to seek God's blessings for themselves as individuals and their families. The individualistic nature of Word of Faith preaching is exemplified in one sermon in which Creflo Dollar instructs his hearers to make confessions. Confessions are petitions or series of definitive statements (usually made audibly) detailing needs, wants and desires believers expect God to grant them. In this sermon, Dollar informs hearers that they should choose their confessions from the word of God:

We cannot receive the product of a thing until we understand the process of how to get it. And so what we're doing now, and this is a faith life, so I'm documenting what I'm believing God for. I'm not going to be saying Lord, "I'm thankful that I have money to pay the light bill this month." No! My confession will not be that. My confession will be:

Father, I will never be in lack again.

And whatever I need, there is sufficiency in all things.

And I am a millionaire.

And I have more money than any bank in this natural world can hold. And Father my body is tremendously healed.

My family is free from tragedy. I won't ever have to worry about tragedy.

No plane will crash on me and if it does, I will be the one to survive. And all of these things that I am setting in place right now.

See, instead of waiting until the devil comes to put him on the run, put him on the run right now.<sup>69</sup>

In Dollar's confession, he and his family are the beneficiaries of God's blessings. Therefore, when God honors Dollar's confessions, **Dollar's** needs will be met. **Dollar** will be a millionaire (he already is). **Dollar** and **his** family will be free from tragedy, etc. One question that comes to mind is, "If Dollar truly believes God will grant all petitions believers make that are in accord

with the word of God, then why does he only teach believers to pray for themselves?" Would it not be ideal for believers to access the power of God not just for themselves and their families, but for everyone? Why would they not pray that God provide money, food, and shelter for all of the poor people of the world? Why does Dollar instruct the hearers to confess that if a plane crashes that he/she, as an individual will be the only one to survive? Can they not just as easily petition God for the survival of everyone on the plane?

I believe the reason adherents of the Word of Faith movement are not instructed to make confessions on behalf of others is because of a sense of *Christian entitlement*. A sense of Christian entitlement is the belief that only those who choose to follow particular teachings of Christ are entitled to receive certain benefits. Those who choose not to believe, get what they deserve. A sense of Christian entitlement sees no need to pursue social justice issues. If everyone would simply follow Christ, all social justice issues would disappear. Those with a sense of Christian entitlement believe that non-Christians and other Christians who do not believe as they do not deserve benefits.

This sense of entitlement contorts the example that Christ lived for us. Jesus expressed an unconditional love for all people. When people were hungry in the text, Jesus fed them. He did not just feed people who believed or lived in a particular way. When Jesus healed the sick, He healed them all. When Jesus preached in the synagogue in Luke 4 that He had come to set free the captive and liberate the oppressed, He did not stipulate that He would only help those who believed as He wanted them to.

Perhaps, one of the reasons why a sense of Christian entitlement exists is because believers feel they are entitled to blessings because of all of the seeds they are sowing, confessions they are making, lives they are living, tapes and compact discs they are buying, etc. These believers are working hard and investing time and resources into being good Christians. Why should others who are not living Godly lives be the beneficiaries of God's blessings? If someone wants to be blessed, then they too can follow the advice prescribed by Word preachers or other Christian ministries.

### **Influence of Word of Faith Preaching**

The theology of the Word of Faith movement is not confined to the informal network of the movement. Due to the international proliferation of Word of Faith theology on television networks such as the Trinity Broadcast Network and the Word Network, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the theology has made its way into faith communities large and small, main-line Protestant and non-denominational, domestic and international. At offering time in African Methodist Episcopal, United Methodist, and American Baptist churches, Oral Robert's seed faith theology is used to persuade congregants not only to give tithes, but also offerings in return for greater financial blessings for themselves and their families. The preaching of Creflo Dollar and other Word preachers encourages hearers to make confessions for the safety and prosperity of their own families only, without regard for the welfare of their neighbors.

Christians who are nurtured with a steady dose of prosperity preaching may develop a sense of Christian entitlement which encourages them to believe that those who do not believe as they do get what they deserve. Those who suffer from oppression in society can be liberated if only they would internalize Word messages and beliefs and practice its teachings.

However, there are several deficiencies to the teachings of Word of Faith theology, all of which emerge from Word of Faith hermeneutics. Word of Faith preachers contend that their preaching is biblical because they use text from the bible by which to justify their teachings. Is preaching that uses scriptures out of context biblical preaching? Or is it simply preaching with biblical references? If we believe that consideration of biblical context is an essential component of biblical preaching, we cannot classify Word of Faith theology (as it relates to teaching about money and health) as biblical. And since Word of Faith theology is not biblical, then hearers of Word theology who give tithes and offerings expecting God to multiply their giving by one hundred-fold are doing so without contextual biblical justification.

Lack of contextual biblical justification can explain inconsistencies of results that followers of Word preaching experience. There are many people who believe they have been financially and physically (healed of sickness or disease) blessed when they have sown seed into select ministries.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, there are many people who believe they have not benefited from adherence to Word of Faith teachings.<sup>71</sup> Inconsistent results can also be explained by the limited impact of positive thinking. Critics of Kenyon believe he developed his teachings by combining the positive thinking teachings of Unity, Christian Science and New Thought with Christian scriptures. If the teachings of the Word of Faith movement are simply Christianized humanism, then the results of the teachings would vary according to abilities, gifts, degrees of internalization, motivation, social conditions, socio-economic status, education, and availability of opportunities of the persons putting them to practice. However, if the teachings were Godly promises, all people who believed and practiced the teachings would be financially wealthy and physically healthy.

By finding many Word of Faith teachings and preaching (namely those that promise financial wealth and perfect physical health) non-biblical, many of the claims of Word preachers are rendered invalid. Without a sound biblical foundation, Word theology and preaching can be compared to a house of cards that topples upon itself with the slightest touch. If the teachings are non-biblical, then the poor and disenfranchised can once again be seen and valued as children of God rather than being viewed as misguided, uninformed, and unfaithful. If the teachings are non-biblical, Jesus' constant awareness of and care for the poor during his earthly ministry can be used as a model for Christians in the twenty-first century, rather than His supposed wealth. If the teachings are non-biblical, God's sovereignty can once again be embraced and God's obligation to act according to Word teachings, dispelled. If the teachings are non-biblical, believers can be assured they are not always at fault when they experience health problems or encounter financial difficulty. If the teachings are non-biblical, making confessions **only for one's own welfare or the welfare of one's own family**, becomes a model of selfish ambition rather than Christian duty. If the teachings are non-biblical, Kenyon's classification of sense knowledge as knowledge that comes from books and revelation knowledge as knowledge that comes from God, can be refuted. Children of God with gifts of God write books through the grace of God. The spirit of God can be found within the pages of books other than the bible. And if the teachings are non-biblical, the importance of prophetic preaching returns to the fore.

Without the absolute promises of God for the attainment of wealth and good health, the responsibility for assuring equitable distribution of the earth's resources, health care, food, adequate and affordable housing, educational opportunity, and safety once again becomes the

shared responsibility of all humanity through the power of God, including the body of Christ. Those of us who claim to be followers of Christ must assume our duties as the eyes, ears, hands, feet, and voices of Christ on earth who celebrate God's goodness with the unselfish nature of our daily lives, in addition to, the praise on our lips.

### **The Most Consistent Beneficiaries**

The people who most consistently profit from Word of Faith theology are the preachers. Creflo Dollar is but one of hundreds of Word preachers whose extravagant lifestyles are supported and financed by adherents of Word theology. Dollar owns two Rolls Royces, two jets, a \$3 million mansion, and \$2.5 million apartment in Time Warner Center in New York. While he preaches that money given to God (to World Changers Church International) in return for seed sown should be used to build the kingdom of God, he uses much of the money he earns preaching and teaching prosperity gospel to enrich himself and his family. Dollar, and other preachers, cites his own financial prosperity as living proof that all hearers can become rich. However, his argument is faulty. Most hearers of Word theology are not pastors and do not have hundreds or thousands of followers who give money into their ministries – money that in turn, is used to pay ministerial salaries. Most hearers do not have homes and cars purchased on their behalf. And most hearers do not experience having money literally dropped at their feet on any given day.<sup>72</sup>

### **Importance of Theological Education**

Neither E.W. Kenyon, Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, nor Kenneth Copeland completed a formal degree program of any sort. None of them were beneficiaries of any theological education. Though Creflo Dollar earned a bachelor's degree, he also does not have a formal theological education. E.W. Kenyon developed his theology by reading the works and listening to the preaching of his contemporaries. Kenneth Hagin plagiarized Kenyon's writings and used Kenyon's theology as the basis of his preaching. Kenneth Copeland memorized the preaching of Kenneth Hagin to start his ministry. He later directly incorporated the teachings of Kenyon into his sermons as well. Creflo Dollar developed his preaching and teachings using the preaching and teaching of Copeland, Hagin, Roberts, and Kenyon as a model. Dollar interprets texts using the lenses of his predecessors. Though all people approach biblical texts with particular life experiences and beliefs that shape the way we view and interpret texts, Dollar's interpretive lenses prevent him from seeing and understanding the messages contained in the texts themselves. Dollar, along with other Word preachers and teachers, could benefit greatly from theological education.

There are many preachers who engage in responsible, contextual preaching without having had the benefit of a formal theological education. Many preachers in black faith communities, and other faith communities as well, who have not earned theological degrees were fortunate to associate with mentors who innately understood the importance of context in biblical interpretation. These mentors passed along their beliefs and practices to others. Some preachers have searched for and found for themselves a wealth of resources, such as biblical commentaries, bible dictionaries and encyclopedias that help them better understand the contexts of biblical texts.

However, the benefits of formal theological education are numerous. In seminaries and divinity schools, students are not only taught that biblical interpretation must be contextual, but are

exposed to the many options and methods of approaching texts that enable them to extract from its pages nuggets of hope, comfort, empowerment, critique, and liberation with which to bless the people of God.

### **A Final Word**

Like it or not, Word of Faith theology is ingrained in the fabric of many faith cultures in the United States and around the world. The lack of contextual biblical foundation and its proliferation of a pseudo-prophetic (a false type of preaching that only pretends to be prophetic while actually being self-interested) and individualistic message makes Word preaching a threat to prophetic religious traditions in general. Responsible and critical members of the body of Christ must not only continue to educate ourselves about Word teachings but also inform others of our concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 17. Also see John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 322-353.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Perriman and World Evangelical Alliance. Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals, *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on Word of Faith and Positive Confession Theologies by Acute (the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals)* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 88-92.

<sup>5</sup> Shayne Lee, *T.D. Jakes: America's New Preacher* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Grow, "Church of the Mighty Dollar," *Business Week Online*, May 23, 2005, [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05\\_21/b3934016\\_mz001.htm?campaign\\_i...](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_21/b3934016_mz001.htm?campaign_i...)

<sup>7</sup> Darnise C. Martin, *Beyond Christianity: African Americans in a New Thought Church* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note this movement because of the influence New Thought teachings have on the preaching of the Word of Faith Movement.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, *Is Disease a Belief?* (Ronald A. Hughes, November, 1859, accessed 2006); available from [http://www.ppquimby.com/sub/articles/is\\_disease\\_a\\_belief.htm](http://www.ppquimby.com/sub/articles/is_disease_a_belief.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Martin, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> S. Mintz, *The Great Migration* (2003, accessed July 4, 2006 ); available from [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\\_display.cfm?HHID=443](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=443).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Harrison, 133.

<sup>18</sup> Simpson, 266.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison.

<sup>21</sup> Simpson.

<sup>22</sup> Johnnie Colemon, "What We Believe," (Christ Universal Temple, 1997, accessed May, 2006); available from <http://www.cutemplelife.org/custom.asp?id=43949&page=15&shopperid=>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Joy Bennett Kinnon, "Pastor: Johnnie Colemon-the Many-Splendored Faces of Today's Black Woman" (Johnson Publishing, March 1997, accessed May, 2006); available from [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1077/is\\_n5\\_v52/ai\\_19201542](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1077/is_n5_v52/ai_19201542).

<sup>25</sup> Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1972), 204.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, "Healing and Miracles through United Prayer," *The Word of Faith Magazine*, August 1998, 4-8.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1985), 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Harrison, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 30.

<sup>33</sup> Harrison, 6.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Hagin Ministries, "Rmai Church Guide," *The Word of Faith Magazine*, August 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson Publishing Group, *The New Mega Churches: Huge Congregations with Spectacular Structures Spread across the U.S.-African American Congregations and Churches* (2001, accessed December 2006); available from [http://www.findarticlaes.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1077/is\\_2\\_57/ai\\_80850565/print](http://www.findarticlaes.com/p/articles/mi_m1077/is_2_57/ai_80850565/print).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See Frederick K. C. Price, *Faith, Foolishness, or Presumption?* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1979). Frederick K. C. Price, *Name It and Claim It!* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House Publishers, 1992). Frederick K. C. Price, *Prosperity on God's Terms* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1990). Expository sermons explain the meaning of the chosen biblical text(s) verse by verse for hearers. Often, expository preachers insert stories which with hearers can identify and relate to their own lives to help illustrate their points.

<sup>39</sup> McConnell, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Joe McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon and His Message of Faith: The True Story* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1997), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Dale H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power and Plenty*, Studies in Evangelicalism; No. 13. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41. While in Oakland, Kenyon applied for a license with the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination. However, he never followed through with his application. While also in Oakland, Kenyon decided to invest in oil using his home as collateral. When the oil dig produced no oil, Kenyon was forced to surrender his home. Shortly thereafter, Kenyon moved to Los Angeles.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 44. Kenyon moved to Seattle after his second wife Alice filed for divorce. Alice Kenyon charged that Kenyon tried to have sex with his secretary and other women. When Kenyon left Los Angeles his reputation was severely sullied. At this point in his career, rather than traveling extensively to spread the gospel as he had in earlier years, he concentrated on publishing his books and expanding his radio ministry.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> McConnell, 33.

<sup>47</sup> Proof-texting or interpreting scripture with scripture has a long history in the church. For Augustine, there are certain parts of scripture that were very easy to understand such as teachings about faith, mores of living, and charity. However, some things were obscure. As a result, Augustine suggested that a person who was familiar with the Divine Scriptures should use examples of things that are more easily understood to explain those things which were obscure. Scripture illuminates and interprets scripture. See Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, trans. Karlfried Froehlich, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 52-53. Origen also advocated the interpretation of scripture by use of other scripture, "Indeed, it seems to us that the correct method of approaching the Scriptures and grasping their sense is the following, taking it from the texts themselves."

<sup>48</sup> See Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. III (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1979), 456. At the core of Henry's writing about *propositional revelation* is a high view of the authority of scripture manifested in a belief that God reveals God-self by revealing God's own mind and God's intentions toward humanity in the bible. Henry writes, "...The bible is a propositional revelation of the unchanging truth of God." Allister McGrath attempts to explain why evangelicals have such a high view of scriptural authority when he writes, "The Christian insistence upon the authority of Scripture reflects a determination not to permit anything from outside the Christian heritage to become the norm for what is truly 'Christian.'" In other words, McGrath contends that the evangelical view of the authority of scripture is a defensive position assumed to safe-guard Christianity from unchristian influences. See Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 59.

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, "Multicultural Evangelical Hermeneutics and Ecumenical Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000): 130. Though Jacobsen identifies the tendency of some evangelicals to adopt a "no hermeneutic" hermeneutic approach to scripture, Jacobsen's ultimate goal in the article was to encourage evangelicals understand and value the interpretations of people from varied cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences.

<sup>50</sup> Perriman and Evangelicals, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Ministries, 1970), 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. Roberts cites Luke 6:38 as evidence of the need to give, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Roberts also sees no conflict of interest in accepting a personal offering from a church member.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>61</sup> Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>62</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Student's ed. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958), 17-18.

<sup>63</sup> The validity of the fusion of one's obligation to God and the monetary giving to church in order to collect money will not be debated here in respect to tithes. Rather the focus will be on the seed-faith offering as a requirement over and above tithing.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Copeland cites Genesis 26:12-14, "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of the flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him," and the parable of the sower of Mark 4:1-8 as evidence that God will bless believers with 100 fold return on any seed they sow.

<sup>65</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Hundredfold Principle* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), Audio Cassette.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *It Works for Whosoever* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), Audio Cassette.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *Authority of the Believer I* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham 6* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), Audio Cassette. Copeland does not give a scripture reference for his claim that the wealth of the righteous will be transferred into the hands of the righteous. Perhaps he is referring to Proverbs 13:22, "The good leave an inheritance to their children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous."

<sup>69</sup> Creflo Dollar, *Christ in You, the Hope of Glory Part 1* (College Park, GA: Creflo Dollar Ministries/World Changers Church International), Compact Disc.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Luo, "Preaching the Gospel of Wealth in a Glittery Market, New York," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2006. The Anderson family who attends World Changers Church New York testify in this article about the unexpected blessings they received after they started attending Dollar's services.

<sup>71</sup> Rick Sherrell, *Cult or Christianity: World Changers Promises Financial Blessing to the Faithful, but Many Leave Disillusioned* (1997, accessed June 5, 2006); available from <http://www.apoligeticsindex.org/d11.html>. In the article, Sherrell writes about people who are

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disillusioned with Dollar's ministry. The people interviewed for the article did not prosper financially while following Dollar's teachings. Some of them also believe Dollar's preaching is not biblical.

<sup>72</sup> At his church in College Park, Georgia and during his Change conventions, people who feel led by the Spirit sometimes make their way to the front of the church or auditorium and lay cash on the steps leading to the pulpit. By engaging in this practice, hearers believe they are sowing seeds in to Dollar's ministry with the expectation of receiving a one hundred fold return on their gift.