

# A Historical and Theological Framework for Understanding Word of Faith Theology

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## Abstract

This journal article offers a historical background and contemporary framework in order to facilitate a better understanding of word of faith theology. The essay first considers the historical origins of the word of faith movement. In this section, three principal sources are noted. Second, the essay offers several contextual influences which have affected the word of faith movement. Here, five influences are briefly assessed. Third, an assessment of four key persons in the development of the movement is presented. Fourth, key components in the development of the word of faith message are appraised. Finally, four primary tenets of word of faith theology are assessed per their continuity with orthodox evangelical theology.

## Introduction

The modern faith movement is referred to by many names. Those most frequently cited are the Prosperity Gospel, the Word of Faith Movement, the Faith-Formula Movement, the Health and Wealth

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Gospel, and the Positive Confession Movement. Word of faith theology is not confined to a particular faith tradition, but has been assimilated into many evangelical churches, and even into congregations in the more liberal mainline denominations (Van Biema & Chu 2006). According to Farah (1982:15), the word of faith message is perhaps the most attractive message preached in the contemporary church. In the main, word of faith theology posits an anthropocentric worldview, in which Christians are entitled to health, wealth, and prosperity, all of which is obtainable by utilising one's faith. Because of its popularity, word of faith theology is often modified to suit the particular context of its adherents, producing various hybrid strands of the movement (Anderson 2004:158). While some assume that the word of faith movement finds its origins in the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions, McConnell (1995:xx) argues that this assumption is not historically accurate; rather, that specific tenets of the movement can be traced historically to extra-biblical, non-biblical, even cultic sources. The following assessment of various aspects of the word of faith movement will hopefully facilitate a better understanding of its theology.

## **1. Historical Origins of the Word of Faith Movement**

Indeed, numerous sources have informed and influenced the word of faith movement. Consequently, identifying the origins of the movement is no minimal task. Although the influences often intersect in terms of specifics, research suggests that three primary sources provide the historical origins of the movement, namely, (a) the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions, (b) 19<sup>th</sup> century American revivalism, and (c) specific cultic influences and teaching. The task of this article is to differentiate among the proposed sources.

## 1.1. Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions

Some suggest that the movement arose primarily within the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions (cf. Barron 1990; DeArteaga 1996; Moriarty 1992). Even pre-Pentecostals (e.g. John Wesley, Charles Finney, and George Whitefield) are cited as having laid the groundwork that would later facilitate the formation of word of faith theology (Vreeland 2001:9). Because the word of faith movement utilises a large portion of evangelical and Pentecostal terminology, it often has the appearance of orthodoxy (Bjornstad 1986:69). Consequently, some assume that that the word of faith movement is the product of those traditions (Coleman 1993:355; Ezeigbo 1989:7; Sarles 1986:330). Unquestionably, some early adherents of the word of faith movement were connected to the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, if not through specific ecclesiastical ties, at the very least by embracing various tenets from those traditions. As a result, the word of faith movement currently enjoys influence within various sectors of the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions (Smith 1987:27–30).

Specific tenets of both the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are evident within the word of faith movement. While classical Pentecostalism emphasises the need for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the elements of healing, signs and wonders, as well as an emphasis on spiritual gifts were at the heart of the movement from its earliest days (Hollinger 1997:20). Several distinguishing tenets of early Pentecostalism are evident within the word of faith movement, although in the latter, they are often manifested in more extremist terms (Moriarty 1992:27–29), namely, (a) the belief that God is reviving the church within the present generation, (b) the tendency to exalt spiritual manifestations, (c) a tendency to be personality centred, (d) a tendency to produce adherents who are theologically thin (this due primarily to

an anti-education mentality at the popular level), and (e) the belief that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will bring unity to the church at large. Although elements of Pentecostalism at large exist within the word of faith movement, many of those elements are hermeneutically appropriated outside the mainstream of Pentecostal theology.

## 1.2. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century revivalism in the United States

Some posit that the word of faith movement realises its antecedent in the revivals of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States (cf. Hollinger 1997; Perriman 2003 et al.). During the height of and immediately following the World War II era, numerous evangelistic associations were established, many founded by persons with Pentecostal roots (Harrell 1975:4). Under the leadership of persons who were dissatisfied with established denominational Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement surged on the scene of post-World War II healing revivalism (Vreeland 2001:1). The healing revivals were often characterised by (Moriarty 1992:41–42) the following characteristics:

- Sensationalism and exaggerated announcements of supernatural intervention
- Cult-like figures who took centre stage of the meetings
- Exaggerated views of deliverance
- Scandalous fund-raising techniques
- A distorted view of faith
- A preoccupation with Satan and demons
- New revelations as a way to obtain spiritual truth

The word of faith movement does indeed contain elements of the healing revival movement, but here too, in terms of praxis, appropriation of these elements is often in more extreme forms.

### 1.3. Extra-biblical and cultic influences

A number of researchers (cf. Hanegraaff 2009; Neuman 1990; MacArthur 1992) argue that the word of faith movement is an infiltration of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements via extra-biblical, even cultic influences. In making a distinction between cult and cultic, Ronald Enroth (1983:12–15) uses three approaches, namely, the sensational, the sociological, and the theological. The sensational approach highlights the more extreme and unconventional elements of a movement or teaching. The sociological approach lends itself to a descriptive focus on the social, cultural, and internal dynamics of a cult. The third approach, the theological, is primarily evaluative in that it compares and contrasts the teachings of a given group with scripture. A fourth approach has been posited by McConnell (1995:17–18), a historical approach, in which the history of a religious movement or group is assessed in conjunction with the theological approach. The intent is to determine whether or not specific teachings within a group are cultic in nature, an approach utilised in this research as it relates to specific tenets of word of faith theology. The array of cultic movements that emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century America can be classified in two groups (Perriman 2003:66–67): the historically or eschatologically oriented cults such as Mormonism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and so on, and, the ahistorical or gnostic cults, which originated from a fascination with the powers of the mental and spiritual worlds, ranging from transcendentalism to the occult. It is the latter group that profoundly influenced aspects of the word of faith movement.

Research (cf. Bloodsworth 2009; Bowman 2001; Ezeigbo 1989; Farah 1981; Matta 1987; McConnell 1995; Neuman 1990) suggests that due to its many evangelical tenets, the word of faith movement is not technically classifiable as a cult. Yet, specific aspects of the movement

may, indeed, be understood as cultic. For example, the movement holds to several tenets that place it within the broader parameters of evangelical orthodoxy. Vreeland (2001:3) notes two tenets, namely, its exaltation of the authority of scripture, and its partial origins in Holiness/Pentecostalism. Bowman (2001:226) argues that, firstly, none of the contemporary word of faith proponents explicitly reject the orthodox doctrines of salvation by grace or the Trinitarian concept of God, and, secondly, word of faith teachers at times affirm the orthodox doctrines of the virgin birth, Christ's physical death, bodily resurrection and Second Coming. At the same time, elements of the movement tend to stretch the boundaries of orthodoxy. McConnell (1995:19) suggests that the 'word of faith movement is not a cult in the sense and to the degree of Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Science. No, the faith movement is not a cult, but it is cultic'.

Undeniably, elements from the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century healing revival movement, as well as tenets of cultic teaching are found within the word of faith movement. The word of faith movement's extreme appropriation of elements from the first two sources, and the biblically deficient nature of the latter source, provide the framework for further analysis.

## **2. Contextual Influences on the Word of Faith Movement**

Beyond the primary religious sources, various contextual influences also contribute to the development of the word of faith movement. Three influences in particular provide a context favourable for the fostering of specific tenets of the movement (Bloodsworth 2009:75).

## 2.1. The American dream

The concept of the 'American dream', or America's fascination with all things material, facilitates certain tenets of the word of faith movement. More of a social than religious influence, the fascination with materialism offers context for the development of the movement. Coined by James Adams in his 1931 volume, *The Epic of America*, the phrase 'American dream' suggests that life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone (cf. Adams 1931). Written during the early part of the Great Depression, the concept articulates the hope of a brighter and better tomorrow. American society experienced profound socioeconomic changes in the post-World War II period. Rising from the dearth of the Great Depression, American culture began to experience a growing pragmatism that led to the active pursuit of anyone and anything that promised to impact personal wealth and health (Simmons 1997:195).

The optimism of the post-World War II years, along with an unprecedented economic surge, produced several factors that changed the religious landscape: (a) denominational divisions were no longer as significant as they were prior to World War II; and (b) transdenominational special-purpose groups, including those that tout the prosperity message, are proliferating (cf. Wuthnow 1988). The better and richer and fuller life suggested by the American dream came to be defined primarily in terms of money (Cullen 2003:7). The lure of materialism attracted not only those of minimal socio-economic status, but also many in the upper strata as well. During this time of economic transition, the Charismatic movement helped to widen social acceptance of the Pentecostal message, producing numerous converts from the middle and upper classes (Crews 1990:159). This singular influence produced a context ripe for the message of the word of faith movement.

## 2.2. Peale's positive thinking and Rogerian psychology

The word of faith movement owes much to the concept of positive thinking promoted by Norman Vincent Peale (Cox 2001:272). The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with its expanding post-World War II enthusiasm, produced numerous innovations regarding positivity and a focus on the possibilities of the individual (cf. Meyer 1965). Peale (1989–1993) served for fifty-two years as senior pastor of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. Among his extensive writings is the book, *The power of positive thinking*, written in 1952. The book is actually an informal compilation of Peale's sermons, written to assist the reader in achieving a happy, satisfying, and worthwhile life. In the introduction, Peale (1952:xi) writes, 'this book is written to suggest...that you do not need to be defeated by anything, that you can have peace of mind, improved health, and a never-ceasing flow of energy. In short, that your life can be full of joy and satisfaction'. Peale's father, Charles Clifford Peale, a former physician turned Methodist minister, summarised the younger Peale's theology as 'a composite of New Thought, metaphysics, Christian Science, medical and psychological practice, Baptist evangelism, Methodist witnessing, and solid Dutch Reformed Calvinism' (Braden 1966:391). Peale's integration of New Thought principles with biblical theology provides the fertile soil later utilised in developing word of faith theology.

In addition, an innovative concept of psychology, a non-directive, person-centred, psychotherapeutic approach to counselling began to make its mark (cf. Rogers 1951). The goal of this novel approach was to facilitate self-actualisation. The Rogerian model emphasised the counslee's ability to determine what was best for him, while the role of the counsellor was to assist the counslee by encouraging and reinforcing positive thinking (Starner 2006:394). Here, as in Peale's



positivity, there is an anthropocentric focus. Such elements of context are noted because of their ultimate influence, whether directly or indirectly, on the word of faith movement. The possibility thinking promoted by Peale, along with a novel approach to psychology promoted by Rogers (1902–1987), produced a climate ripe for the cultivation of specific tenets of word of faith theology.

### **2.3. Experience-centred Christianity**

Birthered in the mind of 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, experience-centred Christianity came to fruition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements (Bloodsworth 2009:75). Because of the spontaneous spirituality, the two movements expanded rapidly at the popular level. The emphasis on experience spread via testimony and personal contact, affecting people emotionally (Anderson 2004:62). So much so, that the essence of Pentecostalism cannot be understood through dogma and doctrine alone, but through a narrative theology, whose central expression is the testimony (Cox 2001:58, 68–71). Theology and experience deeply influenced each other within the Pentecostal movement (Jacobsen 2003:5). While not all within the Pentecostal or Charismatic movements held an experience alone posture or an anti-education mentality, there was indeed an emphasis on experience-centred Christianity. Consequently, the word of faith movement was influenced by the religious context of one of its antecedents (cf. Anderson 2004:157).

## **3. Key Persons in the Development of the Word of Faith Movement**

Because the movement is so diverse, even complex in its many nuances, it is possible to cite numerous persons. Four in particular are

noteworthy because of their influence on specific biblical tenets of word of faith theology.

### 3.1. Phineas Parkhurst Quimby

The origins of the word of faith movement is traceable back to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866), whose teachings form the nucleus for numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century mind-cure healing movements, and who is considered the forefather of New Thought (Jacobsen 2003:396; Harley 1991:77–79 et al.). Although Quimby is not the sole founder of mental science, being only one of many mental healers plying the trade during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Tucker 1989:153), his teachings fully embody the concept. After experiencing a personal illness, Quimby became disillusioned with the conventional medical practice of his time. In 1838, he witnessed a public demonstration of mesmeric healing. Quimby researched mesmeric healing for approximately two years before beginning the practice himself in 1840 (Smith 1995:58).

Quimby popularised the idea that disease and suffering originate from incorrect thinking, positing that illness is curable through healthy attitudes and positive thinking.

If I believe 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 [spiritual] matter, it is necessary to know what beliefs 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...Your error is the cause of your sickness or trouble. Now to cure your sickness or trouble is to correct the error (Quimby 1921:186).

Quimby held that one could create one's own reality via the power of positive affirmation (confession) (Braden 1966:121–123). As such, one could visualise health and wealth, affirm or confess them with one's words, with the result of intangible images becoming reality (Bristol 1948:122). This concept is espoused by other key persons cited in this section and is central to specific tenets of word of faith theology.

### **3.2. William Essek Kenyon**

The person who represents the genesis of the word of faith movement is William Essek Kenyon (1867–1948) (cf. Hanegraaff 2009; MacArthur 1992; McConnell 1995). Kenyon's early religious affiliation was with the Methodist Episcopal Church. He later established and pastored several Baptist churches, remaining a Baptist minister until his death. Kenyon enrolled in the Emerson College of Oratory in 1892, an institution known for its dissemination of metaphysical, transcendental, and New Thought teachings. Although some researchers (cf. DeArteaga 1992; Simmons 1997; Vreeland 2001) diminish this influence, others (cf. Cannon n.d.; Hanegraaff 2009; Matta 1987; McConnell 1995) posit that his association with Emerson greatly influenced the development of his theology. Believing the stale Protestant churches of his day were unable to offer what aspects of mind-science teaching could offer, Kenyon sought to forge a new kind of Christianity—a meld of Christianity and New Thought science (Geracie 1993:55).

Indeed, Kenyon's writings reveal influences beyond the scope of his Protestant theological affiliation. For example, Kenyon (1942:76–84) suggests that when David's soldiers appropriated the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, they became supermen and were shielded from death during warfare. Kenyon alludes to the formation of supermen, a master race of Christians no longer bound by external realities. He (Kenyon 1943:90) advances the notion of living in perfect health, free

from the limitations of the physical nature, and (Kenyon 1945:93) proposes that the creative ability of God observed in creation is imparted to believers in the present reality (cf. Rom 4:17). Although Kenyon believed he had rediscovered hidden/lost truths from scripture, his efforts to revitalise the churches of his day involved the incorporation of metaphysical religious concepts, i.e. a meld of evangelical Christianity and transcendental mind-science (Smith 1995:153–154, 168). Many of the phrases popularised by contemporary word of faith proponents, such as 'What I confess, I possess', were coined by Kenyon (Hanegraaff 2009:18).

### **3.3. William Marrion Branham**

The word of faith movement can be traced to the more extreme healing revivalists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century such as William Marrion Branham (1909–1965) (Anderson 2004:157; Jacobsen 2003:396). Branham is called the second father of the modern word of faith movement (Bowman 2001:86). Since he was influenced by, and often quoted the works of Kenyon (Simmons 1985:386), aspects of Branham's ministry and teaching facilitate the development of the word of faith movement. Branham was the major influence on the Latter Rain movement, a movement characterised by the following seven tenets: (a) belief in a complete restoration of 1<sup>st</sup> century truths; (b) the restoration of the five-fold ministry of apostles and prophets to accompany pastors, evangelists and teachers; (c) the spiritual disciplines of deliverance, fasting and the laying on of hands for impartation; (d) restoration of personal prophecy to the church; (e) recovery of true worship in the church; (f) the belief that those operating in the truth of Latter Rain restorationism would be blessed with immortality before Christ's return; and (g) the belief that the various segments of the church will receive unity of the faith before Jesus returns (Bowman 2001:44–47).

Branham also held several highly controversial views. First, the belief that God's message to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 were directed toward various epochs in history. He stated that Paul was the messenger to the Ephesian church, Irenaeus was messenger to the Smyranean church, Martin was messenger to the Pergamean church, Columba was messenger to the Thyatiran church, Luther was messenger to the Sardisean church, Wesley was messenger to the Philadelphian church, and that he (Branham) was messenger to the Laodicean church. Second, the bizarre serpent seed doctrine of Genesis 3, in which Eve is purported to have been sexually intimate with the serpent, with Cain produced as a result of the union. Third, an inordinate emphasis on supernatural manifestations, in which Branham is dependent on the presence of an angel to effectively minister to the attendees.

Branham is representative of numerous healing ministries of his day, many of which devolved into an emphasis on the miraculous that led to shameful showmanship, moral decadence, exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims of healing, and a triumphalism that betrayed the humility of the cross (Anderson 2004:59). Many contemporary word of faith televangelists are heavily indebted to the Latter Rain movement and especially to Branham (Bowman 2001:89).

### **3.4. Kenneth Erwin Hagin**

While EW Kenyon is often referenced as the father of the word of faith movement, Kenneth E Hagin (1917–2003) is initially responsible for disseminating Kenyon's material at the popular level (Hanegraaff 2009:17). Converted in 1933, Hagin purportedly received healing the following year of a congenital heart disease (Riss 2003:687). He began his ministry as a lay preacher in a multid denominational church. In 1937, Hagin was baptised in the Holy Spirit and began ministering in various

Pentecostal churches. An itinerant ministry began in 1949, culminating in the establishment of a ministry base in 1963 (Tang 2006:2). In 1974, Hagin founded Rhema Bible Training Centre, which, by 2000, boasted 16,500 graduates.

Hagin's influence among Pentecostals and Charismatics at large is important because of the implications of his theology, much of which is plagiarised from the writings of EW Kenyon. Researchers (cf. Hanegraaff 2009; McConnell 1995) cite extensive and frequent plagiarism from at least eight of Kenyon's books. Hagin, however, attributes his theological system (faith-formula theology) to visions, revelations, and personal visitations of Jesus (Moriarty 1992:83). Hagin's writings facilitate an understanding not only of the origin of many of his teachings, but also, the development of specific aspects of word of faith theology. Through his writings, mass media, and Rhema Bible Training Centre, Hagin influenced many within the broader Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.

## **4. Key Components in the Development of the Word of Faith Message**

Having examined various origins and key persons in the development of the word of faith movement, the assessment now shifts to the message of the movement. Here, we suggest several influences as to why the word of faith message gained popularity and expanded in influence.

### **4.1. Various sources of the message**

A succinct treatment of mind-cure is prerequisite to the task of analysing the development of specific tenets of the word of faith

message. The mental healers of postbellum America used the term metaphysics in reference to the causative view of the mind and its control over matter. Said differently, the relationship between mind and matter was believed to enable one to experience bodily healing (Smith 1995:34). It is difficult to find an adequate term for this movement as it existed in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, the descriptive most often used is mind-cure (Gottschalk 1973:99). Within the mind-cure movement reside numerous streams of thought, from absolute monism to objective idealism (cf. Anderson 1991). The fundamental sources that contribute to the mind-cure worldview are: (a) philosophical idealism; (b) Swedenborgianism; (c) Mesmerism; (d) Unitarianism; and (e) Transcendentalism (Smith 1995:vi). What follows, is a brief assessment of each, as per its influence on specific aspects of the word of faith message.

First, philosophical idealism provides the core element of the mind-cure worldview. Here, the relationship between mind and matter is critical. Philosophical idealism is the view that matter does not exist in its own right, but is produced by the mind. Origins of this view are found as early as Plato (427–347 BC), who held that in addition to the world of sensible objects, there exists a world of ideas and forms (not merely ideas in the mind, but ideas which exist objectively or absolutely) (Smith 1995:36). Plato learned to focus his attention not on the fluctuating objects of sense experience, but on the fixed and abiding essence of things as the only possible objects of true knowledge; a practice assimilated by mind-cure in an attempt to harmonise the physical and ideal (Miller 1992:75). Although there are numerous variations of both objective and subjective idealism, the common thread within mind-cure is the belief that the mind defines matter. Mind is primary, while matter is secondary. Based on this premise, mind-cure, as well as myriad mental healers-at-large, proceed a step further by

claiming that matter is causative—hence, mind over matter (Smith 1995:37–38). This aspect of philosophical idealism provides a valid source for specific aspects of the word of faith message, namely, positive confession and physical healing.

The second source to influence the word of faith message is Swedenborgianism, officially known as The Church of New Jerusalem. A sect born during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century from the writings and mystical experiences of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Swedenborgianism is a heterogeneous theology, much of which is a corrective to orthodoxy. Like Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism, Swedenborg was convinced he was a messenger from God to his generation. He authored more than thirty religious volumes, based on communication from spirit guides who offered new biblical interpretations and extra-biblical revelations (Tucker 1989:381). Swedenborg (Sigstedt 1952:211) writes, 'I have written entire pages, and the spirits did not dictate the words, but absolutely guided my hand, so that it was they who were doing the writing ... as flowed from God Messiah'. Smith (1995:39) argues that Swedenborg's spiritual approach to hermeneutics became a common feature among the exponents of mind-cure: the correction of the traditional, literal, sense-derived interpretation of scripture by a deeper, spiritually perceived understanding of revelation. This tenet of Swedenborgianism, a hermeneutic that seeks to correct orthodoxy, is also found in aspects of the word of faith message, and can therefore be listed among its myriad sources.

A third source to influence the word of faith message is Mesmerism. Holding doctorates in both medicine and philosophy, Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) utilised magnetic cure to purportedly realign the body's electricity. Mesmer's theories and practices were rejected by the traditional medical community of his day, however, aspects of his



theory continued to be explored. In 1784, Count Maxime de Puysegur replaced the use of magnets with verbal commands and touch. Through mesmeric experimentation, Puysegur discovered two of the central elements of hypnosis: artificially induced somnambulism, and posthypnotic amnesia, which, according to Zweig (1932:72), birthed the modern science of psychology. The premise of this discovery is at the very least foundational to the theory of suggestion (subjective mental suggestion) in modern psychology. Although Mesmer is not considered the father of mind-cure, his discoveries provide the foundation for what becomes the scientific component of mental healing, a premise that is obviously transitional to Christian Science and mind-cure (Smith 1995:44). Mesmeric healing introduces Phineas Quimby to the concept of mental healing, which in turn influences EW Kenyon, and ultimately becomes a source for specific aspects of the word of faith message.

A fourth source to influence the word of faith message is Unitarianism. The Unitarian movement burst on the American scene with the election and installation of Henry Ware to Harvard's Divinity chair in 1805. Orthodox reaction to this event was the founding of Andover Seminary (1807), to train candidates for orthodox divinity, a task for which Harvard was no longer deemed adequate (Wright 1975:8). Unitarianism conveyed an overt anti-orthodox sentiment, embracing much of Enlightenment thinking, namely, a deistic worldview, utilitarian ethics, and an epistemology combining empiricism, rationalism, and scepticism (Smith 1995:46). Such emphases later influenced and affected the mind-cure movement (Atkins 1923:220–222). Mind-cure, while disregarding much of supernatural theology, understood the miraculous in terms of discovering and utilising various laws of the universe. Although mind-cure is not in the main Unitarian, indeed, aspects of Unitarian theology can be found to have influenced its development in that, it nurtured an anti-orthodox sentiment, it held a

deep reverence for natural law, it emphasised the employment of reason in the inner life, and, a number of leading figures in mind-cure were Unitarians or from that background (Atkins 1923:226). Consequently, Unitarianism is among the sources of the word of faith message.

A fifth source to influence the word of faith message is Transcendentalism, which brings together several core elements of mind-cure; specifically, the mystic character of eastern philosophy, a deified view of human potential, and the Swedenborgian understanding of cause and effect. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), a former Unitarian minister, pioneered the concepts of Transcendentalism in America, along with literary talents such as Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, William Channing, and Theodore Parker. In Transcendentalism credits the human spirit with unlimited potential. The physical senses are inadequate to reveal reality, which is knowable only by the inner perception of the human spirit. Gaining revelation knowledge is by direct influx of divine wisdom to the individual, transcending the natural science of the physical world (Judah 1967:26). Kenyon, ultimately finding its way into aspects of the word of faith message, champions the concept of revelation knowledge.

From the five sources briefly assessed emerge five characteristics that inform mind-cure as a worldview: (a) an idealism that stresses mind over matter; (b) a subjective epistemology aimed at the ascendancy of inner spiritual perception over external physical sensation (with application both to bodily conditions and word meanings); (c) the discovery and application of universal laws governing mind and matter (with application to bodily healing and spiritual enlightenment); (d) a mystic tendency concerning the nature of mind and matter and their underlying harmony tending to deify humanity; and (e) an on-going connection to the world of paranormal/occult knowledge and spiritism

in particular (Smith 1995:55). Indeed, elements of the religious climate of this period inform the development of the word of faith message by providing an atmosphere in which specific tenets of the movement are cultivated.

#### 4.2. Scripture with notes: the Dake annotated reference Bible

Another factor in the development of the word of faith message is the popularity among its adherents of a particular study Bible. Study Bibles have the potential to significantly influence readers at the popular level. For example, the footnotes and marginal notations of the *Scofield study Bible* are viewed by many of its readers as containing absolute truth (Anderson 2004:21). Such is the case with the *Dake annotated reference Bible*, which profoundly influenced, at the popular level, many Pentecostals, Charismatics, and word of faith advocates. Written by Finis Jennings Dake (1902–1987), he published the New Testament portion in 1961, with the complete Bible published in 1963. The influence comes via the commentary notes and theology posited by this study Bible—more than 8,000 outlines, 35,000 commentary notes and over 500,000 references for study—as well as numerous ancillary books and booklets. Dake's efforts to systematise biblical teachings on numerous topics seem to be sincere, however, his over-simplistic, hyper-literal approach results in many incorrect interpretations (Spencer and Bright 2004). Many of the commentary notes are derived from the volume, *God's plan for man* (Dake 1949), originally a fifty-two week Bible study series compiled in book form. Dake's impact on conservative Pentecostalism cannot be overstated (Alexander 2003:569). Prior to the Dake's Bible, the Scofield Bible was a fixture among conservative Christians. Alexander (2003:569) argues that, after 1963, the notes contained in the Dake's Bible became the 'bread and butter of many prominent preachers'.

The Dake Bible is extremely popular among word of faith advocates, perhaps due to its embrace and usage by word of faith luminaries such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland (Ferraiuolo 1994:50). As a result, the Dake Bible has greatly influenced the development and escalation of the word of faith message. The Dake Bible has persuasively influenced numerous word of faith teachers, as noted by the following endorsements (Dake 2006):

- Joyce Meyer states, 'I thank God for the people who produced the Dake Bible, their hard work has made it easier for me to teach God's Word'.
- Marilyn Hickey states, 'the Dake Bible is the best reference and study Bible you can get. I have personally worn out four Dake Bibles'.
- Creflo Dollar states, 'the Dake Bible helped me build a solid foundation in the Word'.
- Rod Parsley states, 'the Dake Bible is one of the greatest literary works every made'.
- Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland have also utilised Dake as a source for certain of their quizzical doctrines (Spencer n.d.).

Dake's influence on the word of faith message in general is unmistakable. First, Dake (1950:91) asserts that God's blessing of Abraham with great wealth serves as an example that every believer has access to this aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. This is a resounding concept in the word of faith message. Second, Dake (1949:253; 1950:79) posits that the atonement of Christ guarantees physical healing to be God's will for every Christian who appropriates adequate faith. This, too, is a recurring theme within the word of faith message. Third, Dake (1950:53) suggests that the nature of faith reflects in the believer based on God's activity described in Romans 4:17, a calling into

existence things that are not. The word of faith message asserts that every believer, via positive confession, may enjoy the creative power (*ex nihilo*) of Romans 4:17. Fourth, Dake (1949:222; 1950:95; 1963:282) argues that God desires abundant prosperity and material wealth for every believer, a theme regularly disseminated within the word of faith message.

Evangelical scholars and apologists have expressed serious concern over Dake's teachings, some of which fail to align with historic Christian orthodoxy (Spencer and Bright 2004). Although Dake has influenced many Pentecostals, Charismatics, and word of faith adherents, not all within these communities have welcomed his theological suppositions. Indeed, many of Dake's theological assertions fail to align with classical Pentecostal theology, and some of his most fervent critics have arisen from within this tradition. Assemblies of God general secretary, George Wood, states that many of Dake's opinions are in direct conflict with the denomination's statement of fundamental truth (Ferraiuolo 1994:50).

### **4.3. Significance of mass media**

Utilisation of mass media is a major contributing factor to the global influence of the word of faith message, particularly US-based religious media (Phiri and Maxwell 2007; cf. Folarin 2007:71). Each form of mass media is significant in its own right. The purpose of this section is to appraise the influence of two forms of mass media—radio and television—on the rapid dissemination of the word of faith message during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

First, the utilisation of radio as a form of mass media is significant in the propagation of the word of faith message, in that, radio laid the foundation for the subsequent media form of television. The potential of

radio for propagating the gospel received recognition early by forward thinking religious entrepreneurs. The purpose of Christian radio programming is to convert people to Christianity and to provide teaching and preaching opportunities for Christians. Initially, the clergy denounced the use of mass media and railed against it; however, the possibilities of this new form of media became evident. Congregationalist minister S Parkes Cadman (1864–1936) was one of the first religionists to utilise the medium of radio, pioneering the field in 1923 (cf. Radio 1946). In 1928, Cadman began a weekly Sunday radio broadcast on NBC, reaching a national audience of some five million (cf. Air 1931). Aimee Semple McPherson, a pioneering tent-revivalist, is another who utilised the medium of radio to reach a larger audience. McPherson was one of the first women to preach via radio, airing programming over her own radio station beginning in 1924. Roman Catholic priest, Father Charles Coughlin (1891–1979), reached millions of listeners in the early 1930's via a thirty-six station network (Severin and Tankard 2001:111). Other early Christian radio entrepreneurs in the United States include (dates of broadcast in parenthesis) Bob Jones, Sr. (1927–1962), Ralph Sockman (1928–1962), GE Lowman (1930–1965), and Charles E Fuller (1937–1968) (cf. Televangelism). Indeed, radio established the potential of utilising mass media as a platform for expanding the Christian message. Although, for the word of faith message, the full extent of this potential would not be realised through radio, but television; however, radio did provide the framework within which the potential of mass media could be visualised.

Second, television, and specifically the advent of religious television, most profoundly influenced the rapid dissemination of the word of faith message. American Roman Catholic archbishop, Fulton J Sheen (1895–1979), was perhaps the first professional religionist to realise the

immense potential of media as a means of shaping religion in the laity (Tickle 2008:68). Sheen hosted a night-time radio program from 1930–1950, then a television program from 1951–1968. Rex Humbard (1919–2007) was among the first Pentecostals to utilise television, beginning his broadcasting career in 1949 (Jenkins 2007), eventually being inducted into the Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 1993. Pentecostal evangelist Oral Roberts (1918–2009) began broadcasting via television in 1954, attracting millions of followers worldwide to his faith-healing ministry (Schneider 2009). Schneider (2009) further observes that Roberts trained and mentored several generations of younger word of faith preachers, who now have television, multimedia, corporation, and business empires of their own.

Throughout the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, word of faith-friendly ministries came to dominate religious media via television. Modern technology has given the word of faith message a potential global audience of multiple millions, via not only secular television stations, satellite, and cable networks, but also, through Christian television networks, which began to emerge in the early 1970s. The Inspiration Network (INSP), founded in the early 1970s as the PTL Satellite Network by televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, is available to over 66 million U.S. homes. Paul and Jan Crouch founded Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), the largest Christian television network in the U.S., in 1973. TBN reaches over 100 million homes in the U. S., with programming translated into eleven languages and broadcast to over 75 countries. Daystar Television Network, which traces its roots to 1993, has a potential U.S. audience of over 80 million homes and a global potential audience of 670 million homes. The majority of broadcasts are from groups and individuals aligned with various Charismatic and Pentecostal movements (cf. Daystar). Much of the programming on these stations is word of faith in orientation.

Perhaps no version of televangelism is more clearly American than the word of faith message which, over the past several decades, has grown to represent over half of the highest-rated religious programming (Schultze 2003:133). Many Americans derive their sense of purpose from religious television, much of which is inherently word of faith in orientation (Schultze 2003:16–17). Religious programs contain much 'good cheer'. They celebrate affluence. Their featured players become celebrities. Though their messages are trivial, the shows have high ratings, or rather, because their messages are trivial, the shows have high ratings (Postman 1985:121). Religious media has become the venue from which many find a worldview that reflects their values and justifies their behaviour and way of life, producing a consumer-oriented spirituality (Fore 1987:24; Hull 1988:39). William Hendricks (1984:64) describes the theology of the electronic church as the hope that God is unambiguously on the side of the believer who claims the promises of faith.

Because of this, many newcomers to the faith are increasingly disciplined not by pastors, church discipleship programmes, or other believers, but by religious media (Bowers 2004:4–5). Superstitious, and often biblically illiterate, many Americans are easily persuaded to believe and hope for things that reflect America's affluence as a nation, express selfishness, and manifest individualism (Schultze 2003:131–132). Such a message reflects the American dream and the hope of attaining affluence. Through myriad fundraising methods, such as telethons, praise-a-thons, share-a-thons, and Christian-oriented infomercials, support is gleaned in order to continue such programming. Messages bombard viewers exhorting them to plant a seed of faith and believe that from it they will reap an unimaginable harvest of plenty (Folarin 2007:83; Lioy 2007:47; cf. Robison 2003; Sarles 1986:333). One study revealed that health-related issues remain the most frequent personal



concerns, including spiritual or religious concerns (Abelman and Neuendorf 1985:106). Many word of faith proponents excel in these types of communication methodologies.

Schultze (2003:81) argues that the reason for the current popularity of the Charismatic movement, and, by virtue of its doctrinal relationship the word of faith movement as well, is a culture increasingly dominated by the medium of television. WR Godfrey (1990:164–165), professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, writes that the great danger posed by much of contemporary religious programming is twofold, namely, it threatens to replace the local church as the central place of religious life for many people, and, since religious television cannot do all that Christ commissions the local church to do, religious programming as one's sole source of spirituality will be a religion that is sub-Christian. Said differently, even if the doctrine is not errant (as it often is), it will certainly be incomplete. The utilisation of mass media in general, especially the two forms assessed in this section, has greatly enhanced and expanded the influence of the word of faith message.

## **5. Key Tenets of Word of Faith Theology: A Scriptural Assessment**

A core group of theological tenets is fundamental to word of faith theology. The essay will now focus on a brief assessment of these tenets, in terms of their continuity with orthodox evangelical theology. The tenets are (a) the Abrahamic covenant, (b) the atonement, (c) faith, and (d) prosperity.

## 5.1. The Abrahamic covenant

The significance of the Abrahamic covenant concerning particular aspects of word of faith theology cannot be overemphasized. Word of faith proponents often reference this covenant (Copeland G 1978:4–6; Copeland K 1974:51; Pousson 1992:158; et al.) as the biblical foundation for numerous theological assertions. Here, the various facets of God's covenant with Abraham hold equivalent and corresponding application for the contemporary Christian. According to word of faith theology, one of the primary purposes of this covenant is to bless Abraham with material possessions. Harvey Cox (2001:271) succinctly observes the word of faith perspective on this subject when he writes, 'through the crucifixion of Christ, Christians have inherited all the promises made to Abraham, and these include both spiritual and material well-being'. Copeland (1974:50–51; cf. Hagin 1963:1) argues that since God established the covenant, Christians too are entitled to its provisions. To support such a claim, Copeland appeals to Galatians 3:14, 'the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ'. Here, he concludes, Christians also have the promises defined within the covenant. The Galatians 3:13–14 passage is interpreted as meaning that all Christians are redeemed from the curses listed in Deuteronomy 28:15–68. Copeland (1987:28) posits that, 'all sickness and all disease, even those not mentioned there, come under the curse; therefore, we are redeemed from all sickness and disease'.

Evangelical theology recognises that specific components of the covenant are understood as extending solely to Abraham's biological posterity (e.g. the promise of a geographical location; the development of a great nation). Yet, other aspects of the covenant extend to all humankind, specifically, that 'all peoples on earth will be blessed' through Abraham (cf. Gen 12:3). This is critical in understanding the

issue of continuity between word of faith theology and orthodox evangelical theology. The former holds this specific aspect of the covenant as referencing primarily material or financial blessing. Although orthodox evangelical theology lifts up the blessing component, the issue is concerning how the blessing is defined and realised. From the position of the latter, living under the new covenant implies that one is a spiritual descendant of Abraham. The promise of blessing is understood primarily as soteriological rather than material. Recognising the blessing component as primarily redemptive in realisation, as opposed to guaranteed material entitlement, finds validation in several New Testament passages (cf. Gal 3:7–9; 3:11–14; Rom 11:17–24). The blessing inference reveals that privileges once available only to Israel are now available to Gentiles (Johnson 1999:765). This covenant establishes the fundamental premise of God's choice of Abraham, and ultimately his biological posterity, as the primary means of redemptive grace. Fulfilment of this covenant is first seen in Abraham, then through his posterity, and ultimately, through Christ's revelation of the new covenant (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). However, the blessing component of the Abrahamic covenant is understood primarily as being fulfilled in redemptive terms, not a guarantee of material entitlement or financial prosperity. Consequently, regarding the Abrahamic covenant, word of faith theology fails to maintain continuity with orthodox evangelical theology. Clearly, it is an issue of hermeneutics.

## **5.2. The atonement**

Two primary components are essential in assessing word of faith theology in terms of continuity, namely, the nature of the atonement, and the results of the atonement. Regarding the nature of the atonement, word of faith theology suggests the following three things: (a) re-

creating Christ on the cross from a sinless deity to a symbol of Satan; (b) not the cross, but hell secures redemption; and (c) Jesus is born again in hell. Hagin (1979c:31) posits that, 'spiritual death also means having Satan's nature', providing Numbers 21:8–9 and John 3:14 to support the position that Jesus assumed the nature of Satan. Corroborating this position, Jesus is referenced as 'a sign of Satan that was hanging on the cross' (cf. Copeland 1990). Taken further, word of faith proponents suggest that the cross is inadequate to secure redemption; that Jesus must suffer as a sinner in hell, which means the work of redemption is completed in hell. 'Do you think that the punishment for sin was to die on a cross? If that were the case, the two thieves could have paid your price. No, the punishment was to go into hell itself and to serve time in hell separate from God' (Price 1980:7). Consequently, if Jesus assumes the nature of Satan, he must be born again.

Per the nature of atonement, did Jesus become sinful? Was he required to be born again? Did Christ's atoning work on the cross secure redemption? Orthodox evangelical theology posits that Christ lived a perfect [sinless] life (cf. Heb 4:15) and died a death of perfect obedience in order to satisfy the requirements of God's justice—a necessary sacrifice so that humankind could be saved from the penalty and guilt of rebellion against God (Sims 1995:147). Atonement in the Old Testament is based on the efficacy of a sacrificial offering (cf. Gen 4:4; Lev 17:2–11). Although the blood of animals is inadequate to cleanse from sin (cf. Heb 10:4), it symbolises the perfect sacrifice and his atoning blood (cf. Heb 9:11, 15; 10:12). Here, Christ did not become sin in the sense of becoming a sinner; rather, he became the sacrifice who bore the sin of humankind. Evangelical theology posits that the death of Christ dominates the New Testament as the central event of history and is the only sufficient ground to receive God's forgiveness

for sin. To suggest that Jesus had to experience additional suffering in hell is to misunderstand the nature of the atonement. For it was on the cross that Christ pays the full penalty for sin (cf. 1 John 4:10), decisively defeats Satan (cf. Heb 2:14), and publically humiliates the powers of evil (cf. Col 2:15) (Arrington 1993:61–79). Here, too, word of faith theology fails to maintain continuity with orthodox evangelical theology.

The second component focuses on the results and benefits of the atonement and how those benefits apply to the Christian, particularly the concepts of physical health and healing. Copeland (1996:6) teaches that 'the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary'. He further suggests that 'the first step to spiritual maturity is to realize your position before God. You are a child of God and a joint-heir with Jesus. Consequently, you are entitled to all the rights and privileges in the kingdom of God, and one of their rights is health and healing' (Copeland 1979:25; cf. Dake 1949:244–245; 1963:282; Hagin 1974:53–54; Price 1976:20; Savelle 1982:9–10). Word of faith theology decrees divine healing as the right of every Christian and sets forth divine health as the norm for all who understand their rights and authority as a believer. This approach to physical sickness and disease enjoys wide acceptance among word of faith advocates.

Regarding the results or benefits of the atonement, several biblical passages lend support to the relationship between divine healing and the atonement (cf. Isa 53:5; Matt 8:16–17; 1 Pet 2:24). However, within evangelical theology, the critical issue is the timing and application of this provision. Rather than a guaranteed right, the following perspectives constitute the correct understanding of divine healing:

- God healed individuals throughout human history and does indeed heal in the present time.
- Christians enjoy the privilege and responsibility to pray for healing, for both themselves and others.
- Divine healing is not relegated to adherence to criteria of human origin (i.e. a set of laws or steps).
- God heals in many different ways.
- The provision of divine healing is not synonymous with a guarantee of divine healing, i.e. not everyone receives physical healing in this life.
- When healing does not occur, God gives the grace to successfully persevere.
- The believer receives ultimate healing in the life to come.

Regarding the atonement, aspects of word of faith theology fail to maintain continuity with evangelical theology.

### 5.3. Faith

The concept of faith as understood in word of faith theology is essential to the theological system it posits. From this perspective, faith is not merely a theocentric act of the will in which one exercises simple trust in God, but rather, it is an anthropocentric spiritual force one directs toward God. Here, the concept of creative faith is posited as the logical result of the believer's relationship with God. Based on Hebrews 11:3, which states, 'through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God' (KJV); per this theology, since words spoken in faith brought the universe into being, words are ruling the universe today. Just as God created the universe via his spoken word (cf. Rom 4:17), the believer is purported to have the same creative ability via words spoken in faith (Hagin 1974:74). This belief is central to

contemporary word of faith theology (cf. Kenyon 1969:67 Capps 1976:12–13; Copeland 1980:4–5 et al.). Hagin (1980:3–4) expands this understanding of faith to include not only Christians, but non-Christians as well, stating that 'it used to bother me when I'd see unsaved people getting results, but my church members not getting results. Then it dawned on me what the sinners were doing: They were cooperating with this law of God—the law of faith'.

The rendering of Mark 11:22, in order to validate this view of faith, is thus (KJV), 'have faith in God'. However, it is 'have the faith of God' based on Kenyon's (1942:103) writings. This is purported to include creative ability via the power of words spoken in faith. Hence, there is frequent use of the phrase 'the God kind of faith' (cf. Capps 1976:131; Copeland 1974:19). Here, faith and the spoken word are woven together to form the powerful force of positive confession, which allows one to write one's own ticket with God by saying it, doing it, receiving it, and telling it (cf. Copeland 1985; Hagin 1979:3–5). Based on this faith formula, one need only speak words of faith, that is, make a positive confession regarding whatever one desires. The spoken word, coupled with creative faith, initiates the process of obtaining the desires of one's heart. To further validate this view of faith, one that contradicts numerous biblical references (cf. 1 John 5:14; Rom 8:27, et al), Hagin (1983:10) writes, 'It is unscriptural to pray, "If it is the will of God." When you put an "if" in your prayer, you are praying in doubt'. In this theological system, faith is often reduced to faith in faith rather than faith in God. Such assertions are the result of faulty exegesis, and at times, blatant misrepresentation of the biblical text. Further, they serve to reinforce the anthropocentric nature of much of word of faith theology.

In contrast, orthodox evangelical theology understands faith as 'trust in the person of Jesus Christ, and the truth of his teaching, and the redemptive work he accomplished at Calvary' (cf. Douglas 1999). Indeed, faith is applicable to both orthodoxy and orthopraxy (cf. Heb 11:6). At all levels, faith finds its essence in God, who is the giver of faith. Reducing biblical faith to mere formula, that is, neatly packaged sets of principles, for the purpose of personal aggrandisement or material gain, is unwise. On the contrary, the very nature of biblical faith enhances the covenant relationship and communion with God. The focus of faith is ever on God, the source of all good things (cf. Jas 1:17). Here, faith is recognised as soteriologically essential and indispensable for effectively living the Christian life. As such, word of faith theology fails to maintain continuity with evangelical theology.

#### **5.4. Prosperity**

Word of faith theology is perhaps best known for its emphasis and teaching on prosperity, hence, the moniker 'prosperity gospel'. Allowing for differences among its numerous proponents, prosperity typically refers to an earthly life of health, wealth, and happiness as the divine, inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to his commands (Starnier 2006:393). Luminaries of the movement encourage their followers to pray, and even demand, from God 'everything from modes of transportation (cars, vans, trucks, even planes), [to] homes, furniture, and large bank accounts' (cf. Pilgrim 1992:3). Dake (1963:282) offers numerous biblical references to suggest that God's will for every believer is material prosperity. To augment this position, he (Dake 1949:217) argues that, 'poverty ... should not exist [because] ... God wants you to be prosperous'.

Biblical support for guaranteed material prosperity is garnered from the Old Testament via the Abrahamic covenant. New Testament texts used



to support this view are 3 John 2, 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth' (KJV). Oral Roberts utilised this verse as the master key of his ministry (Harrell 1985:66). Because of Roberts' teaching on prosperity, such phrases as 'expect a miracle' and 'seed-faith' enjoy widespread popularity (Perriman 2003:64). Another passage used in support of material prosperity is John 10:10, where Jesus proclaims, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (KJV). Prosperity proponents interpret this text as affirming the provision of 'financial prosperity and entrepreneurial success' (Lioy 2007:44) for all believers. Here, the abundant life is understood not as righteousness, peace, and joy through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17), but rather, it is understood in terms of material abundance. Corroborating such an interpretation, Fred Price (cf. 1990b) writes, 'He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. That's the reason I drive a Rolls Royce. I'm following Jesus' steps'. Numerous word of faith proponents are fixated with the act of giving, specifically monetary giving. To support this fixation, myriad biblical references are utilised (Mark 10:30; Ecc 11:1; Pro 13:22; 2 Cor 9:6; Gal 6:7; 3 John 2 et al.), most all of which are taken out of context and interpreted via a faulty hermeneutic. For example, Gloria Copeland (1978:54) asserts, 'Give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000 ... in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal'. According to prosperity proponents, believers are to appropriate the promise of Proverbs 13:22, 'the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just' (KJV) (cf. Pro 28:8; Job 27:13–17; Ecc 2:26; Isa 61:5–6).

Evangelical theology posits a different approach to prosperity. Indeed, God is a god of provision who promises to meet the needs of his own (cf. Gen 22:8; Phil 4:19). Here, the understanding of prosperity is, having success in a matter, or completion of a 'journey' (as εὐοδόω in

its primary usage implies). An evangelical perspective regarding prosperity encompasses, but is not limited to, the following:

- God promises to provide for his people.
- The focus of the Christian is primarily spiritual in nature.
- The motive for giving is not remuneration.
- Modesty, not excess, should govern the Christian's life and lifestyle.
- Inordinate attention to material possessions is contrary to the teachings of Christ.
- Christian integrity mandates the wise and frugal assessment of all things material.
- Christians who possess great material wealth have a greater responsibility to invest in the kingdom.

Regarding prosperity, aspects of word of faith theology fail to maintain continuity with evangelical theology.

## Conclusion

Miroslav Volf, professor of theology at Yale University, grew up in the home of a Pentecostal minister in Croatia. His father, who endured incarceration in a Communist concentration camp, fasted for weeks to receive the baptism in the Spirit, practised speaking in tongues, had a gift of interpretation, and practised laying on of hands and prayer for the sick. Volf was also active in Pentecostalism prior to his move to the United States in 1977. He soon found that much of American Pentecostalism differed greatly from what he had experienced in his native Croatia. While channel surfing, Volf stumbled upon a flamboyant televangelist engaged in bizarre antics. He saw that many were peddling a compromised gospel of health, wealth, and power,

which believers had a right to claim as their own via the medium of faith. Rather than promote a striving toward God, this brand of gospel fed the abyss of self-absorption and greed. Reflecting on his experience, Volf (2010:xvi–xviii) writes, 'my father's Pentecostal faith and American Pentecostalism clashed ... I knew, of course, that there was much more to it than the health and wealth gospel'.

This article was an attempt to facilitate a better understanding of word of faith theology. To accomplish this objective, the essay has considered the historical origins of the word of faith movement, offered several contextual influences which have impacted the word of faith movement, assessed four key persons in the development of the movement, appraised key components in the development of the word of faith message, and finally, it assessed key tenets of word of faith theology in terms of their continuity with orthodox evangelical theology. From these areas of assessment emerge several significant conclusions. First, word of faith theology originates from multiple sources, not all of which originate from orthodox Christianity. Second, persons embracing varied theologies were instrumental in the development of the word of faith movement. Third, numerous key components contributed to the development and expansion of the word of faith message. Fourth, specific tenets of word of faith theology differ significantly from their evangelical counterparts. According to Starner (2006:395), 'the church's constant theological task is retrospection and repair'. This is certainly true regarding specific tenets of word of faith theology.

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