

## V THE "FAITH IN FAITH" MOVEMENT

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Alternative titles for the "faith in faith" movement are positive confession theology, faith formula theology, faith movement, or the word movement. It has been on the American religious scene for many years. Its roots are in the nineteenth century "faith cure" movement. One of its leading practitioners was Charles Cullis (1833-1892), who found in James 5:14-15 a basis for "spiritual healing." He wrote and published the influential healing testimonials *Faith Cures*, which appeared in the latter 1870s, and which was translated into several foreign languages. It was followed by two sequels: *More Faith Cures* (1881) and *Other Faith Cures* (1885) (Cunningham, 1974, p. 503).

In 1885, Rev. Robert L. Stanton, a Presbyterian who had defended faith healing in a debate, died from malaria after refusing medical aid while sailing to attend a faith cure convention in London (Cunningham, 1974, p. 506).

### "FAITH IN FAITH," NEW THOUGHT, AND CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

The 19th century interest in the faith cure must be viewed against the larger backdrop of the rise of "mind cure" or "mental therapeutics" of this period. Although the theoretical foundations are different, the faith cure movement offered similar hope of relief from many symptoms which regular medical practice seemed unable to treat effectively (Cunningham, 1974, p. 512).

New Thought belief can be traced to Phineas P. Quimby (1802-66). He studied spiritism, occultism, hypnosis, and other aspects of parapsychology. He claimed to have healed Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science in 1862. It appears that Eddy borrowed the term Christian Science from Quimby (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 719). She taught her followers to ignore their senses as well as their physical symptoms of sickness. Richard Quebedeaux, a well-known lecturer, ecumenical consultant, and observer of trends in American religion, points out that in New Thought men and women can save themselves and become happy, healthy, and holy individuals, with holiness being just a state of mind (1982, p. 43). Critics of the "faith in faith" movement have noted that its teachings on healing have their origin in the metaphysical teachings of New Thought/Christian Science as presented by E. W. Kenyon, who inspired several contemporary televangelists (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 719). Hank Hanegraaff; President of the Christian Research Institute, observes that the "devotees of the Faith movement are so committed to the cultic concept of denying symptoms that they seldom, if ever, admit they are *sick*" (1993, p. 247).

Salvation for the "faith in faith" televangelists means deliverance from suffering and poverty, which are considered consequences of negative thinking and beliefs, remediable by positive thinking and positive confession.

### Some Leading Characters

*Essek William Kenyon (1897-1948)*

Kenyon, a pastor, educator, author, and pioneer in radio evangelism influenced the ministries of Kenneth Hagin, T. L. Osborn, Jimmy Swaggart, and many others. He is considered the "true father of the modern-day faith in faith movement" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 32). New Thought metaphysics had an enormous impact on him. Kenyon coined many of the phrases used by modern faith in faith preachers, such as "What I confess, I possess." He regarded the power of the tongue as a key to his confession theory. The phrase "positive confession" refers quite literally to bringing into existence what we state with our mouth, since faith is a confession (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 719).

### ***William Marrion Branham (1909-65)***

One of the major shakers was Branham (Hunt, McMahon, 1987, p. 217). He was a mystic from youth, who reported divine visitations at ages three and seven. He recounted that throughout his life he was guided by an angel who first appeared to him in a secret cave in 1946. He believed that he was given the power to discern people's thoughts and illnesses. He even claimed to have raised the dead (Branham, 1950, p. 93). Many extraordinary claims have been made about him. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity. He insisted that believers baptized by a Trinitarian formulary must be rebaptized in the name of "Jesus only." Faith in faith evangelists Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Benny Hinn viewed Branham as a true man of God who greatly influenced their lives and ministries (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 30).

### **Kenneth E. Hagin (1917- )**

Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon claim that Hagin uses the power of God for his own end (Hunt, McMahon, 1987, p. 106). Hagin, a prolific author and founder of the Rhema Bible Training Centre and the daily radio program "Faith Seminar of the Air," testifies of alleged visits to heaven and hell. He also recounts numerous out-of-body experiences (Hanegraaff, 1993, pp. 32, 332f). He popularizes Kenyon's publications. He wrote about his prophetic ministry:

When the word of knowledge began to operate in my life after I was filled with the Holy Ghost, I would know things supernaturally about people, places, and things. Sometimes I would know through a vision. Sometimes while I was preaching, a cloud would appear and my eyes would be opened so that I would see a vision concerning someone in the congregation. (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 345)

### **Kenneth Copeland (1937- )**

Televangelist, leading proponent of the "Word of Faith" message, former copilot on Oral Robert's cross-country crusade flight, Copeland is strongly influenced by Kenyon, Hagin, and even Mormonism. He has reported many healings, even of victims of cancer. He also teaches that his converts can create their own wealth (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 33, 337f).

### **John Avanzini**

Avanzini advertises himself as a noted Bible teacher and recognizes authority on biblical economics. He attempts to demonstrate that Jesus and his disciples were wealthy. He teaches that people should give to get. Benny Hinn testified: "The wicked are piling up the funds and I love the way John teaches on thus. He's the best there is when it comes to teaching you on how to get wealth out of the wicked. Man, I like it!" (Hanegraaff; 1993, p. 349).

### **Morris Cerullo (1931- )**

Cerullo was raised in an Orthodox Jewish orphanage. At the age of 14 he was converted. He was ordained by the Assemblies of God in the early 1950s, and in 1956 he began a healing ministry. He has been quite closely associated with the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International. His own San Diego-based organization is called World Evangelism (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 126). He claims to have visited heaven. He saw God and described him as "about six feet tall and twice as broad as a human body." He says that he is a mouthpiece for God capable of "revealing things which had not yet come to pass" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 358). He also stated that God directed him to say, "Would you surrender your pocketbooks unto Me, saith God, and let Me be the Lord of your pocketbooks .... Yea, so be thou obedient unto My voice" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 38).

*Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN)*

The founder and president of TBN is Paul Franklin Crouch (1934- ). TBN owns or carries more than 300 stations. It is also carried on over 1,315 cable systems. TBN features the faith in faith preachers. Crouch calls their message a "revival of truth that comes along in the Word of God," restored by "a few precious men" like Kenyon, Hagin, and Copeland (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 361). Benny Hinn's program on TBN's cable system reaches some 16 million households. Crouch does not believe that Hinn preaches error in any sense (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 249). He judges those who speak out against the faith movement as "being damned and on their way to hell" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 219). Every time TBN has a fundraising drive, Avanzini is featured with his "people should give to get" message.

### **Faith in Faith Theology**

Hanegraaff's book *Christianity in Crisis* offers one of the best outlines of the faith movement's theology. Those who wish to study it in detail should consult his work.

#### *God*

God is humanized. On the basis of a tortured exegesis of Isaiah 40:12, Copeland claims that God is a "being that stands somewhere around 6'2"-6'3", that weighs somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred pounds, little better, [and] has a [hand]span of nine inches across." *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, promoted by faith in faith teachers, states, "God ... goes from place to place in a body like all other bodies .... He wears clothes ... eats ... rests ... dwells in a mansion and in a city located on a material planet called heaven" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 298).

## ***Jesus Christ***

Jesus Christ is reduced to the status of a man. Faith in faith teachers proclaim that believers are as much incarnations of God as was Jesus. Our redemption was secured not on the cross, but in hell. Many faith teachers contend that on the cross Jesus took on the very nature of Satan himself (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 163). In hell, Jesus endured three days and nights of unimaginable abuse at the hands of Satan and his hordes of demons. Jesus defeated Satan. Jesus regained his divinity the moment he was reborn in hell.

## ***Satan***

Satan is the god of this world. God and Satan are both activated by the power of words spoken by human beings. **Copeland teaches, "Fear activates Satan the way faith activates God"** (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 131). God is seen as a failure and Satan as sovereign. God has no legal right to interfere in a world supposedly under control by Satan.

## ***Man***

Christians are little gods. Copeland states, ". . . you don't have a God in you. You are one" (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 719). This statement has more affinity with New Age than with Scripture.

## ***Faith***

Faith is a positive confession. It is a force, a mental action. Man has to have faith in faith as opposed to having faith in God. As a little god, man has the "divine right" to manipulate the divine. The key on which this teaching is based is Romans 10:8. The premise is that whatever is spoken by faith becomes immediately inspired and therefore dynamic in the particular situation or event to which it is addressed (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 79).

## ***Word of Revelation***

Since the faith in faith preachers believe in the "word of revelation," it is extremely difficult to have a meaningful discussion with them on the basis of Scripture. As they are well aware of the fact that much of their theology has no scriptural basis, they claim to have "revelation knowledge," which supposedly bypasses the mind and goes directly into the spirit (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 172). Kenyon defined it as "the knowledge that deals with things that the senses cannot discover or know without assistance from revelation knowledge" (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, p. 719).

## ***Faith and Health***

Healing is seen as a divine right and not as a gift. Illness is denied. Frederick K. C. Price (1932-) boldly asserts, "We don't allow sickness in our home." He also discourages the use of medication (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 346). The emphasis is on the

divine healing and atonement, and that believers have the authority to bind demonic power in the name of Jesus. The key passage is Isaiah 53:4-5. We are now free from sickness and Satan cannot make us sick without our consent. Gloria Copeland, the wife of Kenneth Copeland and partner in his ministry, testifies, "I remember the night we heard that we were healed by the stripes of Jesus. We realized then that we didn't have to be sick anymore. Getting healed when you are sick is great but staying healed-walking in divine health is much greater." Sickness and death are consequences of unbelief. She further states, "The Bible tells us why God's people are sick, broke, tormented by fear, and why they die young. `My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge' " (Hosea 4:6) (Copeland, 1978, pp. 42, 109). Ultimately, sickness then is a result of sin. Hanegraaff comments, "Christians with such diseases as cancer or congenital birth defects are condemned for suffering as a result of some unknown sin" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 263). Faith in faith teaching is cruel. It torments followers who do get sick. It lays a heavy guilt trip on them.

## **Faith and Wealth**

In the original Protestant work ethic, thrift and industry were the keys to material success. Modern faith in faith preachers pander to greed and promise instant gratification. They are the ones who get the wealth at the expense of their followers. In their broadcasts they rarely offer any items for sale; rather they are sent "without cost" to anyone who makes a "free will" offering or sends a "love gift" (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, pp. 8f ).

### ***Asa Alonso Allen (1911-1970)***

Healing evangelist A. A. Allen, born in Sulphur Rock, AR was one of the first to appeal for financial support for his ministries by using the theme of financial blessing for the giver. He based his "power to get wealth" theology on Deuteronomy 8:17, 18 and on 2 Kings 4, the story of the widow and the jar of oil. He taught that "Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil ... and the devil works on many people with the double curse of sickness and poverty! If you will claim the promises of God, He will lift that curse of poverty and let the blessings of prosperity come upon you" (Allen, 1963, p. 13). "Claim something from God now. Claim POWER TO GET WEALTH. Claim power over the demon spirits of poverty" (Allen, 1963, p. 29).

### ***Oral Granville Roberts (1919- )***

The key to Roberts' ministry is his belief that God is a good God and that he will heal and prosper his people. The main text on which his theology is based is 3 John 2 (Burgess, McGee, Eds., 1988, pp. 760). He has been exceptionally good in employing the "if you really give to God, He will return the gift to you" technique. He calls it the "seed-faith" concept. Give first by faith and "expect a miracle" (Quebedeaux, 1982, pp. 175ff).

### **Gloria Copeland**

Gloria's formula for success is based on Genesis 17:1-9, the blessing of Abraham, and Deuteronomy 8:17, 18. She claims that as heirs of the covenant of Abraham we have inherited the resources of God's power and ability to back us and establish our success in the earth. "He has guaranteed His blessing with you in this generation" (Copeland, 1978, p. 18). She testifies:

God's success formula has produced in our lives over and over again. It has never failed to produce. We have personally used this formula to receive healing, airplanes, houses, office buildings, equipment, clothes, food, cars, boats, wisdom, guidance, help with our children, and national radio coverage-to name a few. We have used the Word to receive in every area of our lives. The Bible tells us that the just shall live by faith. We have lived by faith and enjoyed tremendous blessings. (1978, p. 77)

What if you don't believe the faith in faith preachers? They don't mince words in telling you what will happen. Hagin said that ministers who don't accept his teaching "will fall dead in the pulpit." Benny Hinn boldly declared on national television that he wished he could blow the heads off his "stinking enemies" with a "Holy Ghost machine gun." He did apologize for this remark, but a year later he came back with a vengeance. He told his audience, "The Holy Ghost is upon me .... The day is coming when those that attack us will drop dead" (Hanegraaff, 1993, p. 336).

## **EVALUATION**

The faith in faith movement gives no thought to the context of Scripture. Scripture is subordinated to the "word of revelation." It twists Scripture. In its theology there is no room for suffering and poverty. It is an appeal to humanity's basic selfishness and sense of well-being. Gordon D. Fee comments, "It is evangelism tied to the apron strings of the American profit motive mentality" (1979, p. 10).