

The Word-Faith Movement*

By Gary E. Gilley

The fastest growing segment of professing Christianity today is the Word-Faith Movement, also known as the [Positive Confession](#) or simply "Faith" movement. Its growth is at least partially due to the massive amounts of money the leaders are able to extract from the faithful. This influx of cash allows for huge buildings and extensive ministries, and more importantly, wide exposure on television, which translates into numerical growth. Not only do many Word-Faith preachers broadcast their services and campaigns, but Word-Faith adherents, Paul and Jan Crouch, own the largest Christian-based television network in the world. The Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), founded by the Crouches, with an estimated net worth of approximately \$600 million dollars, is capable of televising the Faith message (as well as many other errant messages) all over the world.

Well-known personalities within the movement include [Kenneth Hagin](#), [Kenneth Copeland](#), Robert Tilton (who is staging a come-back), [Paul Yonggi Cho](#), [Benny Hinn](#), Marilyn Hickey, Frederick K.C. Price, John Avanzini, Charles Capps, Jerry Savelle, Morris Cerullo and of course, Paul and Jan Crouch.

Beliefs

Faith Is a Force

As is implied by the title "Word-Faith," the supporters of this movement believe that faith works like a mighty power or force. Through faith, we can obtain anything we want -- health, wealth, success, whatever. However, this force is only released through the spoken word. As we speak the words of faith, power is discharged to accomplish our desires. Hagin's theme, as found in his booklet *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*, can be summarized as follows (*Christianity in Crisis*, pp. 74-75):

In the opening chapter, titled "Jesus Appears to Me," Hagin claims that while he "was in the Spirit" -- just like the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos -- a white cloud enveloped him and he began to speak in tongues. "Then the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to me," says Hagin. "He stood within three feet of me." After what sounded like a casual conversation about such things as finances, ministry, and even current affairs, Jesus told Hagin to get a pencil and a piece of paper. He then instructed him to "Write down: 1,2,3,4." Jesus then allegedly told Hagin "if anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father." That includes whatever you want financially. The formula is simply: "Say it, Do it, Receive it, and Tell it."

1. Step number one is "Say it." "Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive."
2. Step number two is "Do it." "Your action defeats you or puts you over. According to your action, you receive or you are kept from receiving."
3. Step number three is "Receive it." We are to plug into the "powerhouse of heaven." "*Faith is the plug*, praise God! Just plug in."
4. Step number four is "Tell it so others may believe." This final step might be considered the Faith movement's outreach program.

[Kenneth Copeland](#) states the faith formula this way: "All it takes is 1) Seeing or visualizing whatever you need, whether physical or financial; 2) Staking your claim on Scripture; and 3) Speaking it into existence" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 80).

[Paul Yonggi Cho](#), borrowing from the occult, has developed what he calls the "Law of Incubation." Here is how it works: "First make a clear-cut goal, then draw a mental picture, vivid and graphic, to visualize success. Then incubate it into reality, and finally speak it into existence through the creative power of the spoken word" (*Christianity in Crisis*, pp. 83-84).

If a positive confession of faith releases power, then according to Word-Faith, a negative confession can actually backfire. Capps says the tongue "can kill you, or it can release the life of God within you." This is so because, "Faith is a seed ... you plant it by speaking it." There is power in "the evil fourth dimension" says Cho. Hagin informs us that if you confess sickness you get sickness, if you confess health you get health, whatever you say you get. "This spoken word ... releases power -- power for good or power for evil," is the commonly held view of the movement. It is easy to see why the title "Positive Confession" is often applied to this group.

As one might guess, the teachings of the Faith movement are very attractive to some. If we can produce whatever our hearts desire by simply demanding what we want by faith, if we can manipulate the universe and perhaps even God, then we have our own personal genie just waiting to fulfill our wishes. Frederick K.C. Price wastes no words when he writes:

"Now this is a shocker! But God has to be given permission to work in this earth realm on behalf of man. ... Yes! You are in control! So if man has control, who no longer has it? God. ... When God gave Adam dominion, that meant God no longer had dominion. So, God cannot do anything on this earth unless we let Him or give Him permission through prayer" (*Prayer: Do You Know What Prayer Is. ... and How to Pray? The Word Study Bible*, p. 1178).

This is certainly a theology that would appeal to the masses, and thus accounts for the Faith movement's popularity.

The Deification of Man

Faith teachers like to teach, based upon serious mishandling of passages such as John 10:31-39 and II Peter 1:4, that Christians are "little gods." [Copeland](#) says, "Now Peter said by exceeding great and precious promises you become partakers of the divine nature. All right, are we gods? We are a class of gods!" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 116). [Benny Hinn](#) declares, "God came from heaven, became a man, made man into little gods, went back to heaven as a man" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 382 n. 43). Earl Paulk wrote, "Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the kingdom of God" (*Satan Unmasked*, p. 97).

The Humanization of God

While man is glorified, God is humiliated in the Faith system. Copeland claims that God is a being who stands about 6'2"-6'3", weighing somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds, and has a hand span of 9" across (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 121). Copeland also declares "Adam was the copy, looked just like (God). If you stood Adam beside God, they looked just exactly alike. If you stood Jesus and Adam side-by-side, they would look and sound exactly alike" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 137).

Many of the Word-Faith teachers also embrace a heresy known as Tritheism, which in essence teaches that there are really three separate Gods. Hinn, under supposed inspiration, explains:

"Man, I feel revelation knowledge already coming on me here. Holy Spirit, take over in the name of Jesus. ... God the Father, ladies and gentlemen, is a person; and He is a triune being by Himself separate from the Son and the Holy Ghost. Say, what did you say? Hear it, hear it, hear it. See, God the Father is a person, God the Son is a person, God the Holy Ghost is a person. But *each one* of them is a *triune* being by Himself. If I can shock you -- and maybe I should -- there's *nine of them*. Huh, what did you say? Let me explain: God the Father, ladies and gentlemen, is a person with his own personal spirit, with his own personal soul, and his own personal spirit-body. You say, Huh, I never heard that. Well you think you're in this church to hear things you've heard for the last 50 years? You can't argue with the Word, can you? It's all in the Word (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 123-124).

Hinn, under fire, later retracted his remarks, only to reaffirm them two years later.

Jesus supposedly told Copeland, "They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that he was in me" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 137-138). Many of the Faith heresies concerning God can be traced to the notes found in *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*.

The Distortion of the Cross

Four atonement-related errors on the part of the Faith teachers can be documented:

- 1) Christ was re-created on the cross from divine to demonic. To put it in Faith vernacular, Jesus took on the very nature of Satan himself.
- 2) Your redemption was not secured on the cross, but in hell. In fact, many Faith teachers claim that Christ's torture by all the demons of hell was a "ransom" God paid to Satan so that He could get back into a universe from which He had been banished.
- 3) Jesus was reborn (or born again) in the very pit of hell.
- 4) Christ was reincarnated through His rebirth in hell and that those who (like Christ) are born again can become "incarnated" as well.

Thus, Faith teachers take Christ, the spotless Lamb, and pervert Him into an unholy sacrifice on the cross (*Christianity In Crisis*, p.153).

Practices

While many, even within the Word-Faith churches, are unaware of some of the doctrinal heresies of the movement, none can plead ignorant of the strange and bizarre practices and emphasis of its leaders. The following things are standard occurrences in virtually every one of their television broadcasts, evangelistic campaigns, and church services.

A Prosperity Gospel

Nothing will create more euphoria in the average person than the promise to make them wealthy, and this the Word-Faith leadership knows very well. The Word-Faith teacher's

lifestyle is clearly identified by opulence, luxury, riches, and the assurance that all of this can be his followers as well -- if only they apply certain principles.

Robert Tilton is normative. On a Trinity Broadcasting Network program in 1990 he said:

"Being poor is a sin, when God promises prosperity. New house? New car? That's chicken feed. That's nothing compared to what God wants to do for you" (*Charismatic Chaos*, p. 285).

Fred Price on a similar broadcast explains how it works:

"If you've got one dollar faith and you ask for a ten-thousand dollar item, it ain't going to work. It won't work. Jesus said, 'According to your [faith],' not according to God's will for you, in His own good time, if it's according to His will, if He can work it into his busy schedule. He said, 'According to your faith, be it unto you'" (*Charismatic Chaos*, p. 286).

Of course, the road to prosperity somehow always leads to the offering plate of the Word-Faith Movement. Gloria Copeland (Kenneth's wife) pulls no punches in her book *God's Will Is Prosperity*:

"Give \$10 and receive \$1000; Give \$1000 and receive \$100,000 ... give one house and receive one hundred houses or a house worth one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. ... In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal" (p. 54).

A Health Gospel

The "name-it-and-claim-it" pundits are not content with mere wealth; they want to feel well enough to enjoy their prosperity. So do most of their listeners. So while you are giving away wealth, why not dispense health as well?

The Word-Faith teachers, as is true of many other charismatics, believe that Christ provided for physical healing at the cross. As a result, not only are Christians saved from sin, they are promised a life of health. Kenneth Copeland writes in *Healed ... to Be or Not to Be*:

"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" (p. 25).

But, if healing is part of the atonement, why do Christians get sick? Lack of faith, as Benny Hinn explains:

"The Bible declares that the work was done 2,000 years ago. God is not going to heal you now -- he healed you 2,000 years ago. All you have to do today is receive your healing by faith" (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 44).

Of course reality, in the form of sickness, has to be faced even by the Word-Faith leaders. Fred Price may proclaim "we don't allow sickness in our home," but his wife still has cancer. Kenneth Hagin brags that he has not had a headache, the flu, or even "one sick day" in nearly 60 years, but he has had four cardiovascular crises. Paul Crouch may have

healed Oral Roberts of chest pains on a TBN Broadcast, but it didn't stop Oral from having a heart attack a few hours later (*Christianity in Crisis*, pp. 237-238). How are these things explained away? Predictably, by blaming them on the devil. Sickness in the Word-Faith camp is usually seen as satanic attacks that must be repelled by words of faith (i.e., "positive confession").

Experiences

The faith leaders make some amazing claims. Hagin, for example, has visited (so he says) both heaven and hell as well as had out-of-body experiences (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 334). He has had many visits from Jesus and angels. He boasts of the ability to heal, cast our demons, and levitate people (p. 336). Hinn opens his best selling book with these words:

"It was three days before Christmas 1973. The sun was still rising on that cold, misty Toronto morning. Suddenly He was there. The Holy Spirit entered my room. He was as real to me that morning as the book you are holding in your hand is to you. For the next eight hours I had an incredible experience with the Holy Spirit. It changed the course of my life (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 1).

Hinn speaks of frequent personal visits from the Lord, the first being at age eleven:

"I saw Jesus walk into my bedroom. He was wearing a robe that was whiter than white and a deep red mantle was draped over the robe. I saw his hair. I looked into His eyes. I saw the nailprints in His hands. I saw everything. ... When it happened, I was asleep, but suddenly my little body was caught up in an incredible sensation that can only be described as 'electric.' It felt as if someone had plugged me into a wired socket. There was a numbness that felt like needles -- a million of them -- rushing through my body. And then the Lord stood before me while I was in a deep, deep sleep. He looked straight at me with the most beautiful eyes. He smiled, and His arms were open wide. I could feel His presence. It was marvelous and I'll never forget it" (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 22).

When Hinn describes his conversion, he does not mention the cross, repentance, or faith; rather, it is all couched in terms of experience:

"What I really felt, though, was that this surge of power was cleansing me -- instantly, from the inside out. I felt absolutely clean, immaculate, and pure. Suddenly I saw Jesus with my own eyes. It happened in a moment of time. There he was. Jesus" (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 31).

Hinn claims power of a supernatural nature often emanates from his body:

"Once, my mother was cleaning the hallway while I was in my room talking with the Holy Spirit. When I came out, she was thrown right back. Something had knocked her against the wall. I said, 'What's wrong with you, Mama?' She answered, 'I don't know?' Well, the presence of the Lord almost knocked her down" (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 42).

Both the appeal of the book and its dangers are evident in this quote:

"Are you ready to meet the Holy Spirit intimately and personally? Do you want to hear His voice? Are you prepared to know him as a *person*? That's exactly what

happened to me, and it drastically transformed my life. It was an intensely personal experience, and it was based on God's Word. You may ask, 'Was it the result of a systematic Bible study?' No, it happened when I invited the Holy Spirit to be my personal friend. To be my constant guide. To take me by the hand and lead me 'into all truth.' What He will uncover and reveal to you in Scripture will make your study of the Bible come alive" (*Rise and Be Healed*, p. 48).

Both the Word-Faith leaders and their followers make the same mistake of basing their lives on experiences and feelings rather than upon the inspired Word of God.

[Luminaries within the Movement](#)

[Kenneth Hagin](#) is considered the father of Word-Faith. He has a syndicated radio show carried by about 250 radio stations; a Bible School (Rhema Bible Training Center) with 12,000 graduates from 1974-1992; a magazine with 400,000 subscribers; and has sold millions of books and other publications.

[Kenneth Copeland](#) is the heir-apparent to the Faith throne (although Benny Hinn has moved in to challenge). Copeland's empire spans the globe with similar ministries as Hagin.

[Benny Hinn](#) was pastor of Orlando Christian Center in Orlando, Florida. (He recently moved his ministry to Dallas.) Hinn reaches the world through evangelistic campaigns, television, and literature. His book *Good Morning Holy Spirit* was the best selling Christian book in 1991, selling a quarter of a million copies in only three months. He is perhaps best known as a "Faith-Healer" in the traditions of Kathryn Kuhlman (his idol) and Oral Roberts. His "ability" to "slay in the Spirit" large groups of people at once (by blowing on them or waving his arm their direction) has brought him considerable notoriety.

Frederick K.C. Price, the most prominent of black Word-Faith preachers, pastors the 16,000-member Crenshaw Christian Center, and has his own television show.

John Avanzini, best-known fundraiser among the Word-Faith leaders. He has said, "A greater than a lottery has come. His name is Jesus!"

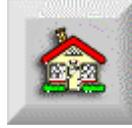
Robert Tilton perfected the Christian infomercial through his "Success-N-Life" television program.

Marilyn Hickey is (except for Gloria Copeland and perhaps Jan Crouch) the best-known woman in the movement. She teaches people to speak to their wallets and checkbooks in order that their wealth may increase.

[David Yonggi Cho](#) is the pastor of the 700,000 Full Gospel Yoido Church in South Korea. Cho, who often speaks at Robert Schuller Conferences on church growth (along with Bill Hybels), is perhaps the closest link to the occult. He teaches a concept called the "Fourth Dimension." The first three dimensions are physical and are controlled by the fourth, which is the spiritual. Cho teaches that Christians can get anything they want by calling upon the spirit world in the Fourth Dimension and visualizing what they want. When a person (Christian or unsaved) follows the proper formula of positive thinking, speaking and visualizing, they "incubate" and eventually give birth to their desires. These techniques are the same used in his occult-infested country. Cho is aware of this fact, but believes what works for "them" will work for "us" -- so use it.

* This report has been excerpted and or adapted from an article ("The Word of Faith Movement") in the April 1999, *Think on These Things*, Southern View Chapel, Springfield, IL, Gary Gilley, Pastor.

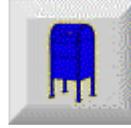
Biblical Discernment Ministries - 8/00



[HOME](#)



[NOTEBOOK](#)



[MAIL](#)
