

CHAPTER 3

The implications of the theological presuppositions of the Faith movement for some central doctrines

The Faith movement has developed a distinctive theological system. Despite its historical roots in classical Pentecostalism, it is clear that the theology proper of the Faith movement cannot be adequately interpreted as a slight variation from Pentecostal thinking.

In this chapter, I shall look at four main theological doctrines, the doctrine of God, Christology, anthropology and the doctrine of revelation, to determine the influence of Faith theology on the main theological themes.

At the present stage it is not always possible to determine the influence of the presuppositions on the main theological themes, because the Faith teachers have not fully developed their theology yet. What is more, the Faith teachers often uphold two completely contradictory views. This is true of both their doctrine of God and their Christology. It is not possible to determine in advance which course the movement will eventually take.

1 THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

God didn't bless him (the unbeliever) because he was a sinner. He received God's blessing because he honoured God. God has a certain law of prosperity and when you get into contact with that law and those rules, it just works for you - whoever you are.

Kenneth Hagin

1.1 The doctrine of God in the Faith movement

Theology has never been a strong point of the Faith movement. Their emphasis has always been on the practical side, the experience of faith. The books and magazines that are being produced at a tremendous rate, centre around praying to get results (a title of one of Hagin's books), how to use your faith, how to be healed, how to be prosperous, etc.

There is, however, a clear theological basis discernible in the works of the Faith teachers. Although they differ among each other, their particular theological emphasis is the same.

In theory the Faith teachers subscribe to almost all the traditional Christian teachings on God. They are Trinitarians, they believe in the sovereignty of God, they believe in the righteousness of God, His omnipotence, His omnipresence, etc. But their theoretical confessions differ from their concept of God in the application of their faith. It is in the application of their faith that the teachers of the Faith message portray God as they really see and understand Him.

1.2 Prosperity and the doctrine of God

The so-called prosperity gospel is probably the most discernible element of the Faith message in comparison with traditional Pentecostal teaching. Prosperity (spiritual as well as material) is seen as a promise to all believers and an integral part of the gospel (K Copeland, 1974:17).

Prosperity, however, is not understood as a gift from God based on grace. Copeland (1974:18) declares that God has laid down certain rules to govern 'every single thing in existence'. Certain natural laws govern our existence in the natural world, e.g. the law of gravity, the law of lift, etc. According to Copeland (1974:19), the same applies to the so-called 'world of the spirit', and he explains how these laws work with regard to salvation:

There are certain elements which, when combined, will bring forth the result God intends. Salvation is available to every human being on the face of the earth because the Word says that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be

saved The higher spiritual law of life is here in the earth, but every day people die and go to hell. Why? Because the law of salvation hasn't been put to work in their particular lives. It will work only when it is put to work.

(Copeland 1974:19)

Thus, salvation is not a gracious gift of God, but humans putting the law of salvation to work in their lives.

The same applies to prosperity. God has revealed certain laws governing prosperity in his Word and faith causes them to function. 'The success formulas in the word of God produce results when used as directed' (Copeland 1964:20). Copeland sees these laws as God's unchangeable way of governing the world. The Jewish people are still prosperous today because they are using the formulas God taught Abraham about operating financially (Copeland 1964:21). Even an unbeliever can have prosperity if he follows the rules of prosperity (Copeland 1964:32).

Kenneth Hagin states even more clearly that Christian and non-Christian alike can have prosperity provided that he or she honours God by conforming to the laws of prosperity: 'God didn't bless him (the unbeliever - JNH) because he was a sinner. He received God's blessing because he honoured God. God has a certain law of prosperity and when you get into contact with that law and those rules, it just works for you - whoever you are' (Hagin 1974:2f).

Kenneth Copeland describes the relationship between God and Scripture almost in pantheistic terms: 'God and His Word are one. When you are in the presence of the Word, you are in the presence of God Himself' (Copeland 1974:45). He does not see the Logos of the fourth gospel as Jesus Christ, but as Scripture. This Word of God (Scripture) is the manifestation of the power of God (Copeland 1974:46). The 'Word of God' is not the history or testimony of revelation, but the textbook with God's laws and rules for success. Because Copeland believes that the existence of humans is determined by the laws of God written in Scripture, it is not difficult to understand why he identifies God with Scripture. These laws, Scripture, and even God, become principles to use.

This (prosperity -JNH) is available to you and frankly, it would be stupid of you not to partake of it! When a man realises that prosperity belongs to him, takes the Word of God, becomes prosperous, and then gives it away, he is valuable. The Apostle Paul learned the spiritual law of giving and operated it proficiently.

(Copeland 1974:51)

Gloria Copeland (1978:54) explains the law of giving with reference to Mark 10:29:

You give a \$1 for the gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1 000; give \$1 000 and receive \$100 000.... Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.

Kenneth Copeland (1974:63) sees John 10:10 as the 'absolute truth' and interprets every Scripture in the light of it.

Before you begin meditation in the Word, you must commit yourself to the absolute truth of John 10:10, 'The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly'. Whenever I read something that seems contradictory to this, I immediately stop and straighten my thinking.

(Copeland 1976:63)

As explained previously even John 10:10 as hermeneutical key to the interpretation of Scripture, has a specific meaning for Copeland: God is a good God, He does not steal from you, He does not take anything away and He gives you only the best things. This hermeneutical key and theological presupposition leads to new results in interpreting Jesus' confrontation with the rich young ruler. The young ruler was rich because he observed the law from his youth. Satan 'will try to convince you that the rich young ruler couldn't receive eternal life because he had money' (Copeland 1974:63). If the rich man should

have asked Jesus what he meant when He said the ruler lacked one thing, Jesus would have told him that he lacked 'a working revelation of the covenant' (Copeland 1974:64). Jesus actually wanted the young ruler to give his money to the poor so that He could give him hundred times what he had (Copeland 1974:66).

Many questions can be raised against Copeland's exegesis and his hermeneutical key. His concept of God poses even bigger questions. God is a good God who wants his children to have all the best things in life. He has laid down certain rules in Scripture. All people who apply these laws and rules in their lives, believer and unbeliever alike, honour God in doing so and will receive the prosperity God promised.

It is true that the Faith teachers claim to maintain a balanced view on prosperity. Steele blames the immaturity of many Christians for the disasters caused by people for whom prosperity teaching did not work.

Worldly-minded, immature Christians were dazzled by the prospect of earthly wealth. They didn't bother to listen carefully to the rest of the message, or the conditions which the Word of God set out for godly prosperity, which, of course, does not emphasise finances alone, but rather a total approach to spirit, soul and body.

(Steele 1987:55)

In the same manner K Copeland (1974:14) warns against the love for money.

Fee (1979:2f) has nevertheless pointed out that although the prosperity teachers pay lip service to the fact that money may never become a goal in itself, in the end they always promise prosperity. They continually reaffirm one thing: 'God wills the (financial) prosperity of every one of His children and therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside God's intended will; it is to be living a Satan-defeated life' (Fee 1979:3).

Gosset (1976:75) gives a good example of this line of thinking when he says if God has not been meeting your needs, perhaps you have not been putting Him first. It is clear from all the books of the Faith movement that financial prosperity plays a very prominent role in their theology. It is also clear that prosperity teaching is not an unimportant theological position that can easily be adjusted or even dropped in future. Prosperity teaching is based on a very specific understanding of God and solidly grounded in such a doctrine of God.

The prosperity teachers continuously portray God as financially rich. He is not only the heavenly Father who wills financial prosperity for His children, but He is also rich in human terms. He is the owner of a heavenly storehouse filled with material things. K Copeland quoted God as saying to him he ought to trust God's system of finance instead of the systems of the world.

Make your deposits with me according to the rate of exchange which my Word guarantees and operate under my system of finance instead of the world's system. We can make it work at the current rate of exchange at that time. It won't matter if it takes a billion dollars to buy a loaf of bread - I (God - JNH) can afford it. If God can afford it, so can I. He's my father.

(Copeland 1974:73)

1.3 The doctrine of God and the so-called faith formulas

The so-called faith formulas are closely related to the prosperity gospel. The Faith movement emphasises the power of the spoken word. Hagin (sr) explains the power of a 'negative confession': 'If you talk about your trials, your difficulties, your lack of faith, your lack of money - your faith will shrivel and dry up If you confess sickness, it will develop sickness in your system If you confess lack of finance, it will stop the money from coming in ...' (Hagin 1983a:10).

According to K Copeland (1974:18-19) 'the force of faith is released by words' and 'faith's results are determined by your confession'. The right confession will eventually result in a situation where all your words will come to pass. This faith formula should not be determined by the realities around us. 'Learn and develop this confession of faith. I am not moved by what I see or by what I feel. I am moved only by what I believe. The victory is mine. I have NOW! I can see it through the eyes of my faith' (Copeland 1974:21). Hagin (1980c:14) also teaches his followers not to trust the symptoms when they pray for healing, but to keep on confessing healing even if the symptoms return.

The name of Jesus plays a prominent role in these faith formulas. Hagin compares the name of Jesus with a signed cheque from heaven. 'He gave us individually, a signed check (sic), saying "Fill it in". He gave us a signed check on the resources of heaven If we have a low estimation and a low respect for the Name, we will not expect much, because we do not know what belongs to us' (Hagin 1979j:23).

He continues by saying that the name of Jesus is the possession of the church (Hagin 1979j:55). Although he explicitly states that the name of Jesus is not to be used like a 'magic charm or a rabbit's foot' (Hagin 1979j:59), he does say that the name of Jesus will work for us when we begin to confess what that name will do for us (Hagin 1979t:137). Hagin (1979j:16) testifies that God has answered all the prayers he prayed for himself and his little children in the name of Jesus, and God has always said 'Yes' when he asked him something. However, if you pray for somebody else, he or she can nullify the effects of the prayer and destroy the effects of faith by a negative confession (Hagin 1979j:141).

The faith formulas are so effective that Hagin (1980(3):29) can give his readers a little formula for faith to 'make it work' for them, 'Follow these four steps and you'll always get there because they are four certain or sure steps to deliverance, healing, answered prayers, or what ever it is that you are seeking'.

Fickett (1984:8) correctly identifies a belief in a deistic god as the foundation of the faith formulas. He also refers to the irony of the claims of the Faith teachers that they are presenting an active, living God, while their hidden theology implies something completely different. The faith formulas become a way to manipulate and use the rules and principles laid down by a deistic god.

1.4 The theological presuppositions underlying the doctrine of God proclaimed by the Faith teachers

The Faith teachers continuously underline the fact that God is a living God who is active in the world today. Thus K Hagin (1979:28) can say that the Christian must trust Jesus to be his or her Mediator, Intercessor, Advocate, Shepherd, Keeper and Supplier of his or her needs. In the same way, Yonggi Cho (1983:2), a Korean Faith teacher, teaches that Christians should learn to develop a personal relationship with God as a divine person.

With regard to prosperity teaching, however, little is left in the hands of the living God. Then God becomes a deistic God and humans become masters of their own lives. K Copeland (1974:38) proclaims that everything God does is determined by His established covenant on earth; K Hagin (jr) (1979:70) says that 'you can take this possibility faith and make things work for you'.

There is thus clearly a dualism in the thinking of the prosperity teachers. On the one hand God is the active, living God who is interested in His creation. On the other hand, He has determined the destiny of humans by his Word or

by a final covenant with all the saved people. When it comes to prosperity teaching, it is not the image of the active and living God that determines the level of prosperity, but one's confession, one's faith and one's deeds. The same can be said about the teachings on healing. According to the prosperity teachers God has once and for all stated that He wants to heal people and therefore one must simply accept healing.

We have seen that McConnell (1982) links the Faith movement with the metaphysical movements like Christian Science and New Age. He also tries to establish a historical link via Kenyon between these movements and the prosperity teachings. Kenyon studied at a college known for its promotion of the ideas of the metaphysical cults and he remained sympathetic towards these cults throughout his life (McConnell 1982:84ff). McConnell refers to the direct link between Kenyon and Hagin. Kenyon was not a Pentecostal, but he believed in divine healing and a personal relationship between God and the Christian. Farah (1980:4) calls Kenyon's writings a 'treasure trove which all present Faith teachers mine'. McConnell (1982:26ff) compares the books of Kenyon with those of Hagin and concludes that Hagin is not only literally dependent on Kenyon, but he actually plagiarised Kenyon. In the same way Hagin has been plagiarised by the other Faith teachers (McConnell 1982:30).

Kenyon proclaimed a cosmological theology of words: 'Faith-filled words brought the universe into being, and faith-filled words are ruling that universe today' (Kenyon 1940:20). This cosmology has been radicalised by Hagin, who transformed it into a 'deistic system of spiritual laws' (McConnell 1982:36). The faith formulas place the resources of the world and the universe at the disposal of humans. The 'law of faith' is the 'cosmological principle of the universe'.

The positive confession teachings confirm this deistic and cosmological approach to God. The famous slogan of the Faith movement, 'What I confess is what I possess', (which originated with Kenyon and not Hagin (cf McConnell 1982:98)), is just another way to bring the 'cosmological principle of the universe' into operation. The positive or negative confessions are the decisive factors in healing and wealth. According to Kenyon (1942:67) it is a spiritual law that our confessions rule us, while Hagin (1983a:8f) states that your confessions will either imprison you or set you free.

McConnell (1982:100) convincingly argues that several other teachings of Kenyon and the Faith movement link up with the metaphysical cults: their anthropology bears the marks of metaphysical pantheism; and their world view

is based on a dualistic epistemology. The positive confessions of Kenyon and the Faith movement also correlate with the so-called 'Positive Mental Attitude' of New Thought (McConnell 1982:198ff).

It is clear that the Faith theology presupposes a deistic god. This concept of Faith has nothing to do with trust in an acting, living God. It is an attitude that enables Christians to create their own circumstances. K Copeland (1974:19) defines faith as 'a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force which makes the laws of the spirit function'. Faith is not defined as trust in God, but as trust in the possibilities of the formulas.

The 'weakness' of God in comparison with the possibilities of Faith becomes evident when one compares the role of prayer with that of confession in the Faith movement. The Faith teachers discourage their followers from using the phrases 'Thy will be done' and 'if it be Thy will' in their prayers. They are contradictions of the faith formulas and therefore negative confessions. The will of God is completely overruled by the faith formulas. The Faith teachers have beforehand decided that health, wealth and happiness are God's will and they are giving to Christians the formula to attain these attributes. Prayer and the will of God lose their relevancy in this theology.

Hunt and McMahon (1985:16ff) also identify the cosmology of metaphysical cults like New Age as the source of prosperity teaching. According to them a book by Napoleon Hill, a non-Christian, *Think and grow rich*, was in many cases the flame that sparked off prosperity thinking. According to them Hill's teachings on the mind are actually based on sorcery. Although Hunt and McMahon do not condemn those Christians who used the books of Napoleon Hill, but accept them as sincere Christians, they believe that Hill actually taught people to make contact with demons.

Hill explains in some detail that he learned the mind-power techniques contained in his books from disembodied spirit entities. Demons masquerading as Ascended Masters used Hill to deceive the millions who have adopted the 'success' techniques they gave him.

(Hunt & McMahon 1985:18)

Hill is also the father of the slogan 'Anything the human mind can believe, the human mind can achieve' (quoted in Hunt & McMahon 1985:19). According to Hunt and McMahon, this principle makes humans gods. In Hill's teaching, humans are dependent on 'Masters who can disembody themselves and travel instantly to any place they choose' (Hunt & McMahon 1985:19).

Hunt and McMahon come to the conclusion that anyone who imagines that because he or she thinks certain thoughts or speaks certain words, God *must* respond in a certain way, has slipped into sorcery, and if not playing God, is at the very least attempting to manipulate God. To prove their point, they quote Yonggi Cho who says that we create our own universe of circumstances by the spoken word (Hunt & McMahon 1985:20).

Magliato (1981:107f) also sees a similarity between the faith formulas and the metaphysical cults. He sees a close relationship between the Faith teachers and Christian Science in their understanding of sickness.

Sarles (1986:340) has correctly stated that 'the proponents of prosperity have gone astray concerning the doctrine of God in at least two particulars: the will of God and the sovereignty of God'. According to Sarles (1986:341) the Faith teacher's notion that God wills prosperity runs contrary to the witness of Scripture. That has consequences for the concept of God, as can be observed in Tilton (1983). According to Tilton the Fall was a failure of God; if humans start believing something, they will inspire God to believe the same things; and God is bound by his own laws, and He cannot but comply with them. (Quoted in Sarles 1986:341f).

1.5 Conclusion

The Faith teachers are indeed working with a contradictory view of God. On the one hand He is the active and living God who is working in the world today. On the other hand Faith teachers are also working with a cosmological deistic view of God. When practical issues like prosperity are at stake, it is not the active and living God who is at work. Rather, it is the cosmological god who has laid down his rules and laws to live by.

The similarity between the faith message and the metaphysical cults is also clear. Even if one does not accept that the Faith movement received its doctrine of God via Kenyon from the metaphysical cults, it is still clear that it is using the same basic images of God. The image of God the Faith movement is portraying, is an image of a deistic god who has revealed himself once and for all in certain words and formulas, and not that of the living God.

It seems, however, that Hunt and McMahon go too far when they link prosperity teachings to the occult and sorcery. The mere fact that the prosperity teachers rely on many of the principles of Napoleon Hill, who might have indulged in the occult, does not make every prosperity teacher a sorcerer.

Prosperity teaching is not just another 'doctrine' about which Pentecostals can have differing opinions and remain brothers and sisters in Christ. Prosperity is not an 'extra' blessing added to all the goodness of God as the Pentecostals experience it. It is based on and firmly grounded in a deistic cosmological doctrine of God. Therefore even the clarion call among many Pentecostals to abandon the 'extreme' and 'fanatical' aspects of the prosperity teachings and to proclaim a balanced doctrine, seems to be inadequate to confront the real problem. One has to agree with Sarles that as long as the movement sticks to a doctrine that pre-decides the will of God and ignores the sovereignty of God, balanced teaching is impossible.

2 CHRISTOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim that I was God, I just claimed that I walked with Him and that He was in Me.

Kenneth Copeland, 'quoting' Jesus Christ

Although the healing practices, the positive confessions and the prosperity message have received a great deal of attention in the evaluations of the movement, its Christology and anthropology have been largely neglected. It is, however, possible that the path of the Faith movement will eventually part with traditional Protestantism, and especially with historical Pentecostalism on these very issues.

The Christological emphasis of the Faith movement has not acquired the same revelational value as many other doctrines in the movement itself. Christology is not nearly as developed in the movement as the other theological loci referred to. Some of the logical consequences of what Kenneth Copeland and Hagin have been saying about Jesus Christ for a long time are only becoming clearer now.

The same applies to the anthropology of the Faith movement. Most of the teachings of the Faith movement have a very specific view of humans as a basis. It is only recently that some leaders of the movement, especially Kenneth Copeland, are explicitly developing their underlying view of humanity.

2.1 The humanity and deity of Christ

Since the Council of Chalcedon in the fourth century the so-called two natures of Christ, like the Trinity, have been accepted by mainstream Christianity which includes Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and since the Reformation, Protestantism. The early Pentecostal movement did not change this emphasis. In the early days a major split occurred in the movement over the Trinity (Hollenweger 1977:311). A 'unitarian' movement focusing on the Son broke away from the Trinitarian Assemblies of God in America. Hollenweger (1977:310ff) sees this 'modalist doctrine of the Trinity' which states that there is only one God whose name is Jesus and who reveals Himself in three different forms, as more in accordance with Pentecostalism than the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.

According to Hollenweger (1977:311) Pentecostals do not understand the doctrine of the two natures, but all the Pentecostal confessions repeat it without comment. It may also be that, although often unconsciously, the doctrine of the two natures plays an important role in the Pentecostal movement (cf Horn [1989]:11ff).

Hollenweger's critique certainly does apply to the Faith movement. Although most of the Faith teachers subscribe to the traditional doctrine of the two natures, it plays almost no role in their teaching. On the contrary, there is a strong development in the movement away from the traditional confession of Jesus as God towards a unitarian movement of the First Person.

The neglect of the deity of Christ is never explicit. It is always part of a simultaneous upgrading of human beings. The new trend in the Faith movement can clearly be seen in at least two popular doctrines, the so-called spiritual death of Jesus and his rebirth and the 'incarnation' of humans.

2.2 The spiritual death of Jesus on the cross

The doctrine of the spiritual death of Jesus and His rebirth is not acknowledged by everybody in the Faith movement. Hobart Freeman, before his death probably one of the most radical proclaimers of the Faith message, wrote a book against this teaching (Freeman [s a]). The two most influential Faith teachers, Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin, both do subscribe to this teaching, which, like many other doctrines of the Faith movement, originated with E W Kenyon (1969).

According to this doctrine Jesus left His divine nature in heaven when He became a human. Thus Capps (1982:91f) interprets Jesus' reference to Himself as the Son of Man as evidence that the Second Adam (a popular way of referring to Jesus in the Faith movement) 'did not take the nature of angels nor the nature of God ...'.

With this understanding of Jesus' earthly life, the Faith movement parted from the traditional doctrine of the two natures. As an attempt to clarify the old doctrine of the two natures of Jesus - which is not really accessible to lay Christians of the twentieth century - this would have been an understandable venture. However, behind this teaching lies a dangerous misunderstanding of who Jesus really was and a definite attempt to upgrade humans to super beings. The Second Adam with his human nature was not a revelation of God to humans, but a restoration of the first Adam. When K Copeland (1979:90) speaks about the shining hair of Jesus at His appearance to John on the isle of Patmos, he adds 'Adam had that light shining out of him. He was clothed with that light. Remember, he was the very image of God'.

It is clear that the titles Son of Man and Second Adam are more than technical terms in the Faith movement. It seems as if Jesus is stripped for a while of His deity in order that humans may be adorned with it.

The incarnation, life and death of Christ do not give enough evidence of how the 'human Jesus' changed humans into gods. Because of this the death of Christ on the cross is not seen by the Faith teachers as being God's final work; it was not even the most important act in the atonement. The cross and the death of Christ actually constituted a defeat. On the cross, when Jesus became sin, He received the nature of Satan and it was only after three days in hell that the victory was finally won.

Hagin (1979l:8f) states that Jesus was the first Person to be born again. According to his interpretation Psalm 2:7, 'Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee', refers neither to the conception of Jesus Christ nor to His birth (as this Scripture is often interpreted in evangelical circles), but to His resurrection. In his speech in Acts 13:28-33: 'Paul plainly shows that when God said "This day I have begotten thee", it referred to when God raised him from the dead. Jesus was the first person to be born again' (Hagin 1979:9). But the phrase 'born again' also has a very specific meaning. Being born again means to receive the nature of God (Hagin 1979l:7).

The question that needs to be answered is why it was necessary for Jesus to be born again and receive the nature of God since according to traditional Christianity He was God the Son from the foundation of the earth.

The teaching that Jesus actually left the nature of God in heaven makes it easy for the movement to take a second step. Hagin (1979l:7) concludes that Jesus did not only bear our sins;

He bore our sin, or man's sin nature. After all it would not do me any good for Him to bear just my sins. I would still be the same kind of creature I had always been. But when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, He did something about the nature that caused me to sin.

(Hagin 1979l:7)

This teaching, like so many of the Faith doctrines, originated with Kenyon's book, *What happened from the cross to the Throne* (1969). According to him Jesus became obedient to Satan. Satan is the author of death. Therefore by dying, Jesus became obedient to Satan and actually received a satanic spirit.

Although Hagin is not as radical in his approach, the result is the same. At the cross Jesus was stripped of his good human nature (not his divine nature, because He left that in heaven) and received either a satanic or a sinful human nature.

Gloria Copeland (1972:5) concludes that Jesus, because of this 'sin nature', experienced the same spiritual death that Adam experienced in the Garden of Eden. She uses the theory of Kenyon that Jesus not only died physically on the cross, but that he died a second spiritual death.

Hagin (1979l:10) continues to say that because of this change in His nature, Jesus went to hell where He suffered for three days. Then God shouted from heaven: 'That satisfied the Supreme Court of heaven. He is justified'. Whereupon God raised Him from the dead and He became the first person to be born again.

Freeman ([s a]:9f), an able theologian who taught at Grace Theological Seminary, points to several deviations from traditional Protestant theology by his fellow Faith teachers (Hagin and Kenneth Copeland) who subscribe to the teachings of Jesus' spiritual death. He points out that in the Old Testament the sin-offering was always considered holy. In the New Testament the death

of Jesus is seen as a 'sacrificial death as a holy, sinless substitute for sinners'. Therefore the idea of Hagin and K Copeland that Jesus physically became sin, has no scriptural basis in the New Testament identification of Jesus with the sin-offering in the Old Testament (Freeman [s a]:13).

The death of Jesus on the cross is not portrayed in the New Testament as his identification with sinners on all points, but as substitution. The logical consequence of the spiritual death teaching is that Jesus was not the sinless substitute for sinners, but a substitute sinner. And if Jesus actually received the nature of Satan on the cross as Kenyon (1969:41f) thought, and if John 3:14 should mean that Jesus died spiritually when he received this nature, then Satan actually had a part in the atonement, because only by Jesus' identification with him could His spiritual death and eventual born-again experience have been possible (Freeman [s a]:18f).

Matta (1987:57) refers to another danger in this misconception of substitution and identification: 'It concludes with the happy ending that every believer is the hero and heroine. The believer is told the sooner he forgets Jesus and lives at the centre of the redemption story, the faster that prosperity and health will come his way'.

The conclusion of Matta is not the overstatement of a bitter critic. She quotes K Copeland saying 'Unless you've let Jesus die you'll never let yourself live' (quoted in Matta 1987:57). The logical result of this identification of Jesus with sinful humans is that they are upgraded to the level of God, while Jesus is simultaneously downgraded.

The overemphasis of Jesus' identification with humans opens the door for a unitarian movement of the Father. After all, if Jesus was identified with humans in all aspects and eventually took them with Him to the throne, He is not only stripped of His deity, but He also loses His equality with the Father.

The teachings of the Faith movement are often not logical and even contradictory. Therefore it is not sure that the movement (or a part of the movement) will eventually become a unitarian movement. They might teach the doctrine of Jesus' identification with humans and their sin, without ever drawing the logical conclusions. However, there are alarming signs that at least K Copeland is busy bringing his theology in line with this 'new revelation'. In his newsletter K Copeland (1987:9) printed a prophecy that quotes Jesus as saying: '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'.

The spiritual death teachers proclaim that God abandoned Jesus on the cross and thus deviate from the truth that God was in Christ on Calvary. This teaching once again creates a problem with the traditional doctrine of the Trinity: 'A study of Church History will disclose that those who taught error concerning the Godhead, including any attempt to divide or separate the Godhead as the JDS (Jesus dies spiritually - JNH) teachers do, were considered to be heretics' (Freeman [s a]:36f). If Jesus was actually sinful during His three days in the pit, the only logical way for the teachers of His spiritual death to prevent making God part of Jesus' sinful nature, is to separate the Father and the Son. 'The Church has always held, as the Scripture teaches, that the Godhead cannot be divided They (the JDS teachers) divided up the Godhead for three days by sending the Son of God to Hell, totally abandoned by the Father and the Holy Spirit' (Freeman [s a]:37).

According to Freeman ([s a]:43) the teaching that Jesus died twice was derived from the fact that Isaiah 53:9 used the word death in the plural in the Hebrew text. He argues that similar occurrences of words in the plural where one would expect a singular noun, are common in the Old Testament. 'Such plurals quite often do not signify *numerical plurality* at all' (Freeman [s a]:44). This is not the only exegetical problem with the spiritual death of Jesus. Freeman ([s a]:49) stresses the fact that although many Scriptures explicitly state that Jesus died and suffered in the flesh or in his body, 'Not once do the Scriptures state that Jesus died IN HIS SPIRIT'.

The idea of death in the spirit needs some clarification. Although the Faith teachers, like most Pentecostals, have a dualistic (or more accurately, a threefold - body, soul and spirit) concept of human nature, this concept is not at issue in the discussion of Jesus' spiritual death. 'Dying or death in the spirit' is a technical term in Pentecostal circles referring either to original sin or the state of unconverted sinners (cf Lindsay 1952:92-93; 1981:37; Wigglesworth 1972:92). When the Faith teachers say that Jesus died in the spirit, they do not say that His spirit died, but rather that Jesus became like a sinful human (cf also Hagin 1983b:26f and p 70ff below).

In the same way Freeman is not working with a division between the body and the spirit of Christ in this particular case. He is merely pointing out that there is no Scriptural evidence for the idea that Jesus died spiritually (became a sinner) on the cross.

Freeman ([s a]:51f) refers to the fact that the teaching of the two deaths, and especially the teaching of Jesus' spiritual death, make the atonement unimportant. According to Freeman one Faith teacher even states that Jesus bled just a few drops. In the end the physical death of Jesus is almost an embarrassment to these teachers.

The Faith teachers who teach the born-again experience of Jesus Christ, a concept foreign to Pentecostal thinking, use terms like 'the first born from the dead' (Col 1:18) and 'first begotten' (Heb 1:6) to prove their point. Freeman ([s a]:54ff) clearly proves that there is no exegetical justification for translating the Greek word, which is identical for both translated terms, with 'born again'.

Matta (1987:54f) asks why the Faith teachers would go to such great lengths as quoting Greek and Hebrew words to prove their point. This is indeed strange for people who often scoff at theology and scientific research while claiming revelational knowledge for their doctrines. She concludes that the underlying motive is to draw humans into a position where they are equal with God. 'If Jesus is a born-again man and is now exalted at the right hand of God, then you and I who are also born-again are equal with this God' (Matta 1987:55).

It is clear that the teachings of some of the Faith teachers open the door for a new Christological emphasis. Although it cannot be stated for certain that the Faith movement (or a part of it) will eventually deny the deity of Christ, there are alarming signs that the movement is moving away from one of the oldest confessions of the Church - Jesus as truly God and truly man.

2.3 The deification of humans

McConnell (1982:33), like Matta (1987:57) argues that the main function of the identification theory in Faith teaching is to enable the human being -

To take his 'place' in Christ, to 'exercise' the rights Christ has given him, in short, to find his 'identity' in Christ. When Christ was recreated in Hell and the satanic nature was expelled, the church was recreated as new creatures in Christ, Spiritual death (i e sin, sickness and human want) was eradicated in the new birth. Where these things exist in the Church it is because believers have failed to realise their identification with Christ.

(McConnell 1982:34)

Although Christ is still confessed as the centre of all things, it is clear that in practice humans become almost part of God himself. Thus Hagin (1977c:5) can assert that identification 'means our complete union with Him', and that we are as much an incarnation of God as Jesus Christ and K Copeland (1987:9) eventually states that all Christians are gods!

According to this teaching the devastating effects of original sin were completely neutralised in the atonement, and humans were reinstated in their original Adamic state.

It has already been pointed out that the term 'second Adam' used to describe Jesus Christ plays an important role in the Faith teachings. Faith teachers see it as proof that the first Adam was perfect and therefore a god. Thus Capps (quoted in Hunt 1985:84) states that humans were created to be gods over the earth and Adam was god of the earth.

Hunt (1985:84) quotes several Faith teachers to show that this doctrine occurs frequently in the Faith movement. K Copeland says Christians do not have a God living in them, they are gods; Tilton refers to Christians as 'a God kind of creature'; and Fred Price believes that God made humans 'gods under God'.

The importance of this 'god theology' should not be overemphasised. It is clear that the Faith teachers do not place humans on a par with God. They do not write 'god' with a capital 'G' and they always stress the fact that humans are not 'creator God'. Humans are only 'gods under God' or 'god over the earth'. The distance between God and humans is narrowed, but it is still there.

Although classical Pentecostals rejected the doctrine of the total corruption to a great extent, the idea that humans can become gods, was never accepted in the movement. There is evidence that some early Pentecostals subscribed to this doctrine (cf Van der Spuy 1985:81f; Hunt & McMahon 1985:219). However, this was not accepted by the majority of Pentecostals. On the one hand Pentecostals expect great things from the born-again Christian. They believe that the Spirit of God dwells in him or her bodily, and they believe that these new creatures in Christ can really do His will.

The 'Ye are gods' doctrine is nevertheless not in line with the strong Arminian influence found in the Pentecostal movement. Against the doctrine of the total corruption of humanity, Pentecostals believe that Christians can choose to do good. Yet over against the doctrine of eternal security, many Pentecostals do not believe in the perseverance of the saints. Nobody can call himself or herself perfect or 'god' in this world. If the doctrine is used to deify humans in any

way, it is not in line with Pentecostal thinking. If it is merely used as a technical term to describe the intimate relationship between God and his children, even the Pentecostals will be able to accept it to some extent.

Laine (1986:24ff) criticises Hunt and McMahon for their harsh attitude towards the Faith teachers. Although he sees all the dangers in this theological trend (people will think that they have creating powers, and power to 'confess' money from others, etc), he refers to the important Scriptures in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34. In Psalm 82:6 the psalmist calls humans 'god' and in John 10:34 Jesus quotes this Scripture. He thus concludes that although this teaching could undoubtedly lead to New Age thinking and could be misused, it has a basis in Scripture and those who teach it can not be summarily rebuked.

If this teaching is only used to emphasise the close link between humans and God and the important role of humans in creation, it is not as heretical as it seems at first sight. Unfortunately, there are alarming signs in the Faith movement that at least some Faith teachers would want to take it a step further and eventually make humans 'Creator God' (cf Laine 1986:24).

Hunt and McMahon (1985:86) correctly argue that Psalm 82 does not say 'Ye shall become gods', but 'Ye are gods'. It is therefore hardly possible to conclude that humans become gods when they are born again or that the psalmist prophesied so. It is more probable that God's reference to them as 'gods' must be seen in the same light as the term 'sons of the Most High' in the same verse, as honourable names (cf Ridderbos 1958:328). In this sense it merely reflects the covenant relationship between God and his people. Only time will tell if the Faith movement will eventually move towards a theology of gods similar to that of the Mormons and the New Age movement, or if they will merely use it as a technical term to describe the important position of humans in the eyes of God.

3 THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

I would not believe any vision, even if I did see You, if You could not prove what You said by the Bible.

Kenneth Hagin addressing God

a supernatural understanding of Scripture (G Copeland 1987:47). Sometimes it is also used for direct revelations that individuals received from God. Thus Hagin (1979j:9) declares words of Kenyon to be revelation knowledge, 'the Word of God'.

The mere fact that Faith teachers refer to their own interpretations of Scripture or even to their prophecies as revelation knowledge or even their prophecies as the Word of God, should not be seen as a contradiction of Pentecostal thinking *per se*. Although foreign to other Protestant traditions, the concept of revelation or revelational knowledge is not contrary to Pentecostal thinking. Sarles (1986:337f), who criticises the Faith movement from a evangelical fundamentalist position, sees a canonical problem in the doctrine of revelation knowledge:

If indeed these are newly revealed truths from God, then they ought to be added to the canon of Scripture and disseminated as widely as possible, since they would constitute divinely given moral imperatives on a par with Scripture. However, if these revelations are no more than wishful thinking of the overly zealous, then people heeding them are being led into serious error.

(Sarles 1986:337)

This criticism is similar to that of mainline Protestants concerning the Pentecostal doctrines on the interpretation of tongues and prophecy. However, the notion of giving authoritative value to utterances or writings outside the Biblical canon is not a distinctive characteristic of Pentecostals.

In the Reformed tradition the confessional writings play an authoritative role. Thus Loader (1983) says that although the confessions of the church are in theory subject to the Bible, they function as the boundaries of the interpretation of Scripture. The only difference between the authority of the confessions and the canon lies in the fact that the content of the Bible cannot be changed, while it is theoretically possible to change, reject or add to the confessional writings. In the Lutheran tradition the sermon is sometimes seen as a Word of God (Nürnberg 1975:31f), and Karl Barth (1944:87) discusses the Word of God as having three modes - the proclaimed Word of God, the written Word of God, and the revealed Word of God.

It is clear that most Protestant traditions acknowledge either the confessions or the proclamation of the church as authoritative. As long as the Faith teachers accept the final authority of the Bible, their doctrine of revelational knowledge should not brand them as heretics who deny the authority of Scripture.

Sarles (1986:337) sees only two possible ways to deal with revelational knowledge: it is either a new revelation directly from God and therefore on a par with the Biblical writings, or it is 'wishful thinking'. The third possibility, known in both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, is to accept a sermon, for instance, as a relevant Word of God for a specific situation without placing it on a par with the Bible. This would be in line with Pentecostal tradition. Pentecostals accept the gifts of the Spirit (especially interpretation of tongues and prophecy) as a direct relevant Word from the Lord if it is in harmony with the Bible and after it has been tested either by the congregation, an individual or the elders.

The Faith teachers accept the supreme authority of the Bible - at least in theory. Hagin tells of a conversation he had with the Lord. God revealed a truth to him and he answered:

You're going to have to give me some Scripture to prove it. Your Word says, 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established' (Matt 18:16). So give me more Scripture having these same few principles in it and I will believe it. *I would not see You, if You could not prove what You said by the Bible* (italics mine).

(Hagin 1983a:20f, [italics mine])

Although the doctrine of revelational knowledge is not necessarily out of step with traditional Pentecostal thinking, and even with the mainline Protestant tradition, the emphasis it receives in the Faith movement is alarming. There is hardly any book of the Faith teachers which does not have several 'the Lord said to me's' in it.

The content of the revelations often seems almost too good to be true. Although Pentecostals accept that God can speak directly to His children, the experiences of the Faith teachers are not common in Pentecostal circles. Hagin (1983a:2ff) writes about one of his visions. The Lord told him several things about his ministry, his finances and the government of the United States. When He started to walk away, Hagin called Him back. "Dear Lord Jesus, before you go, may I please ask you a question?" He retraced His steps, stood

close to where I was kneeling, and said, "You may". Hagin (1983a:4) then recounts how the Lord gave him a sermon outline and told him to get a pencil to write it down. The fact that Hagin (1983a:21) later relativises this and all other visions, does not take away the dangerous presupposition in his account of the vision. If God speaks so directly to an individual, and if visions can be so clear, the door is wide open for the acceptance of a mechanical inspiration of the sermons and writings of Hagin. In another book Hagin (1974b:19) explicitly states that the Lord said to him that He will remove 'the candlestick' of those churches who reject his ministry. 'If a church won't accept this ministry, then they don't accept His Word and He can't help them'.

The doctrine of revelational knowledge, if correctly interpreted, is not a heresy. On the contrary, it is in line with both traditional Pentecostal and Protestant thinking provided that it does not place the revelations to individuals on a par with the Biblical writings. However, there are alarming signs that some Faith teachers are claiming authority for their own ministries and revelations that will bring the authority of the Bible in jeopardy. Although all the Faith teachers accept the authority of Scriptures in theory, the trend to reject the human side of revelations and to equate it with a direct infallible Word of God might in the end create a second canon.

The real danger of the doctrine of revelational knowledge lies in the fact that it is often seen as a 'higher knowledge which carries its adherents beyond ordinary Christians into a new realm of faith thinking which releases to them health, wealth, and prosperity' (Farah 1980b:15). Farah (1980b:15ff) sees a clear resemblance between the revelational knowledge and the higher knowledge of Gnosticism. He quotes Fred Price speaking at Oral Roberts University in a typical gnostic way, stating jokingly that he is smarter than the people present because he has higher knowledge (1980b:16).

Eventually this revelational knowledge becomes a new hermeneutical principle which makes contextual, scientific exegesis irrelevant (Farah 1980b:16). Some Faith teachers even see the receiving of revelational knowledge as the final part of the pattern of salvation in the lives of Christians following conversion, baptism in the Spirit, and a crisis experience of unusual dedication. This revelational knowledge then furnishes them with a direct pipeline to truth (Farah 1980b:18).

The dangers of a gnostic understanding of revelational knowledge is evident. Farah (1980b:10) recounts his attempt to challenge adherents of this teaching in a Charismatic magazine. None of them would answer his arguments. They simply stated that he has no revelational knowledge or that they have made a

'quality decision' to live a life of faith as outlined by the Faith teachers. One of the Faith teachers even told a student of Oral Roberts University that he does not read his Bible devotionally any more because he gets his knowledge directly (Farah 1980b:18).

Farah (1980b:20) refers to the fact that K Copeland explicitly stated in a sermon that only a few dedicated Christians have revelational knowledge. This, together with the distinction Faith teachers make between the Greek words for knowledge, are clear signs of gnostic elements in the doctrine of revelational knowledge. According to Faith teachers *epignosis* means revelational knowledge. Authoritative Greek scholars like Arndt and Gingrich define *epignosis* merely as knowledge usually limited to religious and moral things (Farah 1980b:20).

One may rightly ask what the hidden agenda behind the teaching of revelational knowledge is. Why do Faith teachers want to acknowledge a superior knowledge possessed only by a chosen few? Is Farah (1980b:18) correct that its function is to justify 'new bizarre doctrinal ventures'? Is it an authoritarian way to prevent its followers from finding out the other side of the story or questioning the teachings of the Faith teachers? It is clear that all these misuses are not only possible, but even probable if revelational knowledge is seen as a work of grace or an initiation into an elite group. While these elements are in opposition to the more frequent use of the term merely to refer to an insight into Scripture, it remains to be seen what role revelational knowledge will eventually play in the Faith movement.

The link between the radical realised eschatology of the Faith movement and revelational knowledge is evident. The underlying presupposition of this doctrine is the belief that God can speak directly to his children without any possible hindrance from those to whom he speaks. The tension between the present world where we know only partially (1 Cor 13:12) and the coming world where our knowledge shall be complete is completely absent in the doctrine of revelational knowledge.

The danger of radical realised eschatology for the doctrine of revelation is that it completely loses contact with reality. Christians are not allowed to have doubts, they cannot rethink certain Scriptures or even evaluate different interpretations. Once revelational knowledge has been given on a certain text, the case is settled.

3.2 The influence of some leaders

Some of the leaders in the Faith movement, especially Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, almost play the role of modern apostles. McConnell (1982:9) quotes prominent leaders in the Faith movement like Capps, Price and Osteen stating that they received the Faith teaching from Hagin. He sees several examples of an 'almost apostolic succession' in the Faith movement. 'Hagin prophetically sanctioned and "anointed" Copeland, who, in turn, "raised up" Jerry Savelle' (McConnell 1982).

According to Barron (1987:121) many questions in the Faith movement are settled merely by stating what Kenneth Copeland says. He also points out that students of the Rhema correspondence course are taught that 'Jesus told Charles Capps' that Christians can have what they say (Barron 1987:120).

It is at least clear that the books and sermons of Hagin, K Copeland and some other prominent Faith leaders carry much weight in the movement. The question that needs to be answered is whether the strong leadership and the authority claimed by the leaders and accepted by their followers are the beginning of a cult movement. Is Hagin a modern day Joseph Smith (founder of the Mormon movement) or is he a spiritual leader on a par with the Reformers?

Steele (1986:120) sees a difference between the South African faith teacher Ray McCauley and cult figures like Jim Jones, who led more than 600 of his followers into committing suicide, in that McCauley is humbly obedient to the Word of God and not his own interpretation of it.

Steele clearly misses the point. He supposes that the Word of God can be preached without interpretation. While he tries to prove that McCauley is not a cult leader, he is actually doing exactly the opposite by placing McCauley's theology (interpretation) on a par with the Bible itself. This blind faith of the movement in its leaders and their interpretation of Scripture can easily develop into a canonising of their writings and may at its worst even result in the deification of its leaders.

The Pentecostal movement and, more specifically, the Healing and Deliverance movement, have an example of a leader becoming an apostle and finally almost a god. During his life William Marion Branham became so popular that his followers believed that he was the angel of Revelation. His writings were seen as part of the inspired writings of the church and after his death some of his closest followers believed that he was Jesus Christ incarnate.

However, we cannot conclude that the Faith movement is a cult or will eventually become a cult around Hagin, Copeland or other Faith leaders. It is possible that the leaders will remain authoritative within the broad movement without becoming cult leaders. The fact that most of the leaders subscribe to the authority of the Bible themselves will probably prevent them from becoming a totalitarian religious, authority both to themselves and to their followers.

The fact that members of Faith churches rely strongly on the teachings of two prominent Faith teachers, Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin is a sign of an unhealthy development, especially since Pentecostals have always claimed that neither did they get their doctrines from single individuals nor was the movement started by an individual. But even this does not place the movement outside mainline Protestantism. The teachings of Luther, Calvin, John Wesley, Ellen White and others play equally important roles in the lives of Lutherans, Calvinists, Methodists and Adventists.

The role that some leaders of the Faith movement play in the life of young ministers and members of Faith churches must be corrected by the traditional Pentecostal statement that refuses to accept the leadership of one or two strong leaders.

3.3 Hermeneutics

Faith teachers are also called 'Word teachers' because, according to their followers, they rely solely on the Word of God for their teachings and not on theology. Thus Steele (1986:120) asserts that Ray McCauley 'puts the Bible above any theologian's ideas or concepts of God'.

A study of the faith material shows that, like any other theology, the faith theology has its own hermeneutical key - a radical realised eschatology. All Faith teachers work with the presupposition that God always wants health, wealth and happiness for Christians. Consequently, all their interpretations 'prove' this 'truth'. The influence of this hermeneutical key on the interpretation of Scripture can hardly be overemphasised. A few examples will illustrate this point.

Hagin (1983b:12ff) tries to explain the meaning of the words 'The Lord shall smite thee' in Deuteronomy 28. The Authorised or King James version seems to say that God puts sickness and affliction upon people. However, without looking at the Hebrew text or any modern translation, Hagin (1983b:12) concludes that the verb should be translated in the permissive rather than the

causative sense. The same applies to Isaiah 45:7 which states that God formed the light and created evil. 'Does God create evil? No. That would make God a devil. God may permit evil, but he does not create it', is Hagin's response.

While 1 Samuel 16:14 states that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, Hagin (1983b:13) changes the text to read that 'God permitted the evil spirit *from the devil* to trouble him' [italics mine].

Hagin has no exegetical basis to change these passages from the causative to the permissive sense. His only justification for doing so, is the fact that the theology in these texts does not agree with his own theology. It needs to be said that Hagin's uneasiness with Isaiah 45:7 and 1 Samuel 16:14 is understandable. These are generally acknowledged to be difficult texts.

However by simply ignoring the problem and bending the Scriptures to fit into our moulds, the problem is not solved. While Isaiah 45:7 may still be 'saved' by an alternative translation (see the Modern Language, 'I make peace and create calamity'), the problem with 1 Samuel 16:14 is much more difficult. No matter how many problems we may have with it theologically (and most Christians have), the spirit is called 'the evil spirit of the Lord' in the pericope.

The point that Hagin is making (that God does not create evil and that God does not have evil spirits), is a valid point and also in line with traditional Pentecostal thinking. However, it is certainly not in line with the hermeneutical key that Hagin and other Faith teachers pretend to use. In this case it is not the clear meaning of the text that determines the interpretation, but the theological framework with which Hagin is working.

A better approach to the problem would have been to compare 1 Samuel 16 with other books in the Bible. It is clear that the author or editor of Samuel had no problem in seeing evil spirits as servants of God. This particular theological position is not the only one to be found in the Bible. Von Rad (1975:318) referring to 2 Samuel 24, points out that the Chronicler could no longer bear the theological tension of the text and changed the words 'Yahweh led David astray', to 'Satan led David astray'. The theological presupposition that God is responsible for everything that happens on earth, was not sustained by the Chronicler. It is therefore not surprising that the story of 1 Samuel 16:14ff is not repeated in Chronicles.

However, it is not the purpose of this study to determine the value and meaning of 1 Samuel 16:14ff. It is enough to point out that despite their strong

emphasis on the Word as the sole source of inspiration, the Faith teachers also work with theological presupposition, especially when they must explain difficult texts.

As pointed out previously K Copeland (1974:63) openly avers that he always interprets the Bible in the light of the 'absolute truth' of John 10:10. For him this 'absolute truth' functions not only as a guideline, but as an absolute hermeneutical principle.

G Copeland (1972:58) uses another 'faith principle', the power of the name of Jesus, to explain the meaning of the words of the Lord to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for thee' (2 Cor 12:9). 'He did not say that the messenger would not depart. He was saying to Paul, "My favour is enough. For when you do not have the ability to humanly overcome, you use My name to stop Satan's attacks and cast out the devil".' This interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:9 cannot be found in the text itself. The text speaks of God comforting Paul despite the thorn in the flesh. G Copeland interprets it as though God gave Paul a key (the name of Jesus) to cast out the devil. Once again it is not the text, but rather G Copeland's embarrassment with the text that paves the way for her strange interpretation.

Similar interpretations in the writings of the Faith teachers are not uncommon (cf Fickett 1984:29f). The Bible functions only to give credibility to the philosophical presuppositions of a good God and a bad devil. Although the Faith teachers pretend to be a 'Word movement', they are also using a specific hermeneutical framework. And this hermeneutical principle is not a legitimate exegetical principle based on modern scientific exegesis. On the contrary, it is a theological construction that makes scientific exegesis impossible. Even the traditional Pentecostal (and mainline Protestant) belief that the Holy Spirit is the final interpreter of Scripture can hardly function within the framework of the presuppositions of the Faith movement.

The claim that the Faith movement puts the Bible above any theologian's idea is without foundation. Their interpretation of Scripture, like that of any other theology, functions within a strong hermeneutical framework. The fact that the Faith teachers and their followers are often unaware of the influence of their presuppositions on their interpretation of the Bible makes their theology authoritarian and self-righteous. If their presupposition - an unrealistic radical eschatology - is tested, the weakness of their approach to the Bible becomes clear. *The Bible can only speak within the framework of the preconception that God wants to give His children heaven on earth here and now.*

CHAPTER 4

Final conclusions: The Pentecostal attitude towards the Faith movement

Much of the faith message is potentially valuable, but not when isolated from the rest of sound Christian doctrine.

Bruce Barron

Theology is certainly not the strength of the Faith movement. The worship service as an experiential encounter with God plays a very important role in Faith circles, even more than in the traditional Pentecostal movement. Because of the focus on experience, Faith churches are often unpredictable. They are also able to adhere to two contradictory viewpoints simultaneously, without making a choice between them.

These aspects make it very difficult to evaluate the Faith movement. On the one hand many people who attend Faith churches do not necessarily approve of their doctrine on prosperity and faith, but because they enjoy the worship and warmth of the meetings, they will join the church. A prominent member of the Rhema Bible Church who had a strong Reformed upbringing told me that he joined the church despite prosperity teaching and not because of it. He was attracted to the movement by its love and evangelistic zeal. Others see prosperity teaching and the emphasis on faith as the growth pains of a young movement and expect them to fade away in the future. An academic told me, for instance, that he believes that the pastoral experience with people who do not receive healing and who do not get rich, will eventually force the movement to change its theology. He was so confident of this outcome that he could leave his traditional Pentecostal denomination to join the Rhema Bible

Church. Still others, while agreeing that prosperity teaching and a wrong emphasis on faith may exist in the Faith movement, would insist that these excesses are not characteristic of the movement *per se*. They would argue that these teachings are kept 'in balance' in their churches. Steele (1986:119ff) and Anderson (1987:8ff) fall in this category. Both believe that there is a balanced prosperity teaching based on Biblical truths, while they admit that greed may result in people misusing the teachings.

There are also those adherents of the Faith movement who would point out that although the American leaders wrote many books on faith and prosperity and although they played an important role in the South African movement when it started, these teachings are no longer central in the churches. A businessman of Krugersdorp who travels 140 km every Sunday to attend the meetings at the Rhema Bible Church told me that Ray McCauley used to preach many sermons on faith and prosperity. However, in the last two years the emphasis has changed to salvation and holiness.

1 THE PROPRIUM OF FAITH THEOLOGY

Lederle suggests that the *proprium* (the typical, unique, distinctive or characteristic elements) of a theology can be understood in at least three ways:

- (a) that which it is known for in the form of *caricature*,
- (b) that which describes its *essence*, the core of its faith, or
- (c) that element or those elements which specifically distinguish it from other related and similar but not identical theologies.

(Lederle 1987:4f)

By applying this tool new light can be shed on the content of 'Faith theology'.

(a) The *caricature* of the theology of the leaders of the Faith movement will possibly be the often expressed view that they are using the gospel for financial gain, that they are misleading sincere but ignorant people, that the poor people who are attending the meetings and who are joining the churches are deprived people who are trying to use the gospel to better their positions, etc. In South Africa the secular press has often used this caricature to describe the Faith movement.

If one works with this caricature of the Faith movement, it will lead to either excluding it from the Christian community or at least seeing its followers as objects for evangelisation by the 'true church'. Matta (1984), who sees the Faith movement as a modern day recurrence of Gnosticism, takes the first option. She takes Irenaeus and his relationship to second century Christian Gnosticism as her example (Matta 1984:12ff).

Morran and Schlemmer (1984) also work with caricatures that do not always fit the rich diversity in the movement. They selected three sample groups for their investigation. Ministers of five mainline congregations provided the names of fifty persons of which thirty considered themselves as being born again. The Durban Christian Centre provided thirty names to make up the third group. Morran and Schlemmer divided the sample groups into 'New church charismatics' (Durban Christian Centre), 'Established church charismatics' (the born-again Christians of the established churches) and 'Mainline church traditionalists'.

A Pentecostal church, the Full Gospel Church, was one of the mainline churches that was asked for names. If one bears in mind that Faith teaching has had a tremendous effect on the Pentecostal movement, this fact must have had an effect on the findings.

Although Morran and Schlemmer define Charismatics as people who consider the infilling and gifts of the Spirit to be fundamental to their belief, in the sample group they included all the people who had a born-again experience (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:48). Therefore the sample that they refer to should have been called 'Established church evangelicals' rather than 'Established church charismatics'.

The sample groups have another weakness which makes the study suspect. The core group of the mainline churches is made up of names given by ministers of five congregations whereas the 'New church charismatics' come from one congregation. It is only logical to assume that the mainline churches provided the names of their best and most stable members. If they were asked to give more names, it is likely that the stability of the group would have been affected negatively, and vice versa, if the Durban Christian Centre were asked to give fewer names the stability of the group may have been positively affected.

Morran and Schlemmer (1984:187) correctly conclude that some of the teachings of the Faith movement are not only heretical, but also dangerous in the South African situation, because they will give white Christians false hope for

The confession of Jesus as Saviour, Healer and Spirit-baptiser will undoubtedly get a different emphasis in the Faith movement than in the traditional Pentecostal movement. But the common ground between the two groups seems to be substantial enough to make the exclusion of the one by the other impossible. Lederle (1987:10) suggests that this proprium is 'the heart of what Pentecostals believe', yet 'surprisingly "ecumenical"'.
(Lederle, 1987:10)

In the light of the real proprium of the Faith movement it seems unjustifiable, especially for Pentecostals, to exclude the movement from Christian fellowship, or even from a Pentecostal fellowship. This does not mean that one has to ignore the bad theology of the movement or to condone the dangerous and destructive elements in it. However, by concentrating on the positive elements in the movement and by retaining fellowship with it, the one-sidedness of Morran and Schlemmer and other critics of the movement can be evaded. Because Morran and Schlemmer see the Faith movement as apostasy (although they do not use the word), and those who join the movement as people who flee from reality, they fail to take the possibility into account that those people who left the mainline churches for the Faith movement did in fact have an experience with Jesus Christ as Saviour, Spirit-baptiser and Healer.

The possibility that K Copeland will eventually move towards a rejection of the Trinity or the deity of Christ is not excluded. It is also possible that the metaphysical elements of the movement's doctrine of God will eventually become the most prominent way of thinking about God. Should this be the outcome, the Faith movement will place itself outside both the Pentecostal movement and the broader Christian Church. It is, however, also possible that the image of God as the sovereign, living God will eventually expose the heresy of the metaphysical god of the faith formulas and prosperity teaching. The same applies to the Christological question. The strong Pentecostal background of most of the leaders in the Faith movement, as well as an ongoing interaction between the Faith movement and Pentecostals might just swing the scale in favour of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.

(c) The problem in the relationship between Pentecostals and the Faith movement arises when we look at the Faith movement's proprium, defined as those elements which specifically *distinguish* the movement from other related and similar theologies, in this case Pentecostal theology. Defined in this way, the proprium of the Faith movement may be described as a specific emphasis on faith as a mechanism at the disposal of the believer to make him or her vic-

torious; the belief that positive confession creates faith, and, linked with faith, changes circumstances; the belief that everyone who has faith can receive either healing from sickness or eternal health; and the belief that financial prosperity is, like healing, provided for in the atonement.

We have already seen that these distinctive characteristics of the Faith movement are not small deviations from some unimportant Pentecostal beliefs. The faith formulas and the doctrine of positive confession affect the sovereignty of God and the healing and prosperity doctrines are closely related to anthropology and Christology and, in their extreme form, can even lead to a denial of the deity of Christ.

The influence of Faith theology on the traditional doctrine of God is especially interesting in the light of the strong emphasis traditional Pentecostals are presently placing on the sovereignty of God. In a recent survey conducted by J Theron (1989), it was found that, in general, Pentecostal ministers thought that an emphasis on the sovereignty of God should be an even more important hallmark of Pentecostalism than the speaking in tongues. Any movement that does not take the sovereignty of God seriously will possibly find itself more and more alienated from the Pentecostal movement.

Similarly, the strong emphasis that Pentecostals have laid on Jesus Christ will make any deviation from the doctrine of the deity of Christ an immediate reason for a permanent rift. After all, the traditional Pentecostals broke with the 'Jesus-only' Pentecostals in 1913 (Jesus-only Pentecostals are 'unitarians' of the second Person). A unitarian movement of the Father will possibly be rejected even more strongly.

The disturbing elements within the Faith movement need to be monitored constantly. There is a big possibility that at least some leaders of the Faith movement will eventually cut their ties with traditional Pentecostalism in order to pursue their own direction.

It must be noted that many of the metaphysical elements of the doctrine of God were also evident in the early years of the Pentecostal movement. Time has often been a good remedy for many false doctrines. If the economic and social situations in South Africa deteriorate - which is likely in the light of the present social and political situation - prosperity teaching will be unable to survive.

The transitions in the thinking of John G Lake on healing are a good example of the positive influence of time on extreme enthusiasm (see pp 31-34 above). A doctrine that insists on healing in all situations for everyone who believes is only tenable while the leaders remain healthy. There are already signs of an adaptation in the Faith movement. During a service in the Rhema Bible Church, Benny Hinn explicitly stated that God does not make anyone sick (Hinn 1987). He also stated that death as a result of sickness is not the will of God. Referring to Kathryn Kuhlman, a prominent healing evangelist who died of heart failure, Hinn suggested that her statements that anyone, even she, can die of cancer or a heart attack, might have been the reason for her untimely death.

However, Hinn added that there are certain sacred relationships between people and God that other Christians cannot understand, and that these should be left alone. He then referred to the great ecumenical Pentecostal, David du Plessis, who died shortly before, and to himself. According to Hinn, he once asked God to prevent him from leaving his congregation, regardless of the cost. However, in 1986 he decided to leave the congregation and go back to evangelistic work. He became sick although he was still filled with the Spirit and walking with God. The doctors discovered that he had serious heart problems. When he asked the Lord for an explanation, he was reminded of his own request.

Hinn tries to hold two opposites together with his 'sacred relationships'. He has, nevertheless, already taken the first step towards a more realistic (and possibly a more Biblical) view of healing. Once Hinn's shift becomes an explicit statement in the Faith movement (even if only some adherents accept it) one of the biggest differences between the movement and traditional Pentecostals will be solved.

The mere acknowledgement by K Copeland and Steele (1986:125) that the prosperity gospel is not working equally well in affluent and poor societies, is the first step towards a realisation that prosperity is not a Biblical promise.

The future relationship between the Faith movement and other Christians (especially Pentecostals) will have to be decided upon in the light of the development of the distinctive proprium. In the meantime Pentecostal churches and Pentecostal believers must decide about their present relationship with the movement, especially in the light of the fact that many Pentecostals are attracted to the doctrines and the practices of the movement.

2 THE FUTURE RELATION BETWEEN THE FAITH MOVEMENT AND PENTECOSTALS: A FEW POSSIBILITIES

From Pentecostal literature on, and the practical attitude of Pentecostals towards, the Faith movement, it seems that several possibilities are open for the future relation between the two groups. Some Pentecostals, like Jack Hayward, are actively involved in the conferences and other activities of the Faith movement. Others feel that Pentecostals cannot have fellowship with the Faith movement at all (Hunt and McMahon), while yet others are involved without accepting the teachings of the movement (Bob Mumford, Justus du Plessis). A sympathetic, yet critical observation of the movement is also propagated by some.

2.1 Total rejection

Those who reject the movement, do so because they do not see the Faith movement as Christian, or because they see a heresy in the distinctive hallmarks of the Faith movement.

The view of Matta (1987) is a good example. Many traditional Pentecostals will have sympathy with her position, although she is an evangelical. As has been indicated, she sees a revival of early Gnosticism in the teachings of the Faith movement (Matta 1987:7ff). She takes her example from the church father Irenaeus, who branded the gnostics as heretics and then refused to have fellowship with them (Matta 1987:XV). 'The apostles, particularly John and Paul, and early leaders of the church had no problem responding negatively to the gnostic claim that they were "Christian"' (Matta 1987:8).

She condemns the Faith movement as gnostic and heretical on the ground of its doctrine of revelation, especially its emphasis on revelation knowledge (Matta 1987:9ff), its concept of the world (Matta 1987:13ff), its concept of God (Matta 1987:14ff) and its anthropology and Christology (Matta 1987:15ff). Referring to the latter, she concludes that 'anyone who does not teach the full divinity of Jesus Christ is not Christian, nor can we welcome such teachers into our assemblies or homes (even through the media) without compromising our faith in Jesus Christ' (Matta 1987:45).

Hunt and McMahon (1986) also explicitly condemn the message of the Faith movement together with several other doctrines and practices in the church. They see the Faith message as part of the devil's seduction of Christianity and the adherents of the message (even the leaders) as *victims* of this seduction

tion, he did not preach on the themes of the Faith movement. His sermons were mainly based on classical Pentecostal theology, including a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God.

Mumford is possibly correct that he will accomplish more in the movement than a critic would. This approach has nevertheless two disadvantages. It gives theological and religious credibility to the Faith movement, and it is possible that those who involve themselves may eventually be absorbed in the Faith movement.

An example of the first danger can be found in the relation between the Apostolic Faith Mission, a large classical Pentecostal church in South Africa, and the Rhema Bible Church in South Africa. In 1982 the AFM made its conference facilities available to the Rhema Bible Church for their faith convention. Although no council of the AFM discussed the church's relationship to the Faith movement, Ron Steele (1986:57) interprets the friendly gesture as 'tacit recognition' of Rhema and other preachers who followed the teachings of what has loosely become known as the 'Faith' or 'Word' churches.

The problem of absorption is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Hatfield Baptist Church and its relationship to the Faith movement. The Hatfield Baptist Church grew out of a small Baptist congregation. Its minister, Ed Roebert, led the church into the denominational Charismatic movement in the seventies. Initially the congregation remained in fellowship with the Baptist Union, while it also had strong ties with Charismatic groups in the so-called discipleship fold. After the Hatfield Baptist Church or the Christian Community Centre broke away from the Baptist Union, it became a founding member of the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. Since then the emphasis in the church has moved away from discipleship and towards the Faith theology.

Morran and Schlemmer (1984:187) see a big difference between the attitude of the traditional churches towards the Faith movement and that of the Faith movement towards the former. They quote the late Trevor Verryn, stating that many ministers of the established churches are impressed by the growth and success of the Faith churches. They do not criticise the new churches, mainly because they feel insecure in the light of the fact that they themselves are not as successful and they consider it un-Christian to criticise other Christians. The new churches, however, often ridicule or patronise the churches 'which they consider are not moving with God' (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:187). It is possible that neither of these perspectives give the complete picture.

Mumford's position is in any case preferable to criticism of the Faith movement that is so harsh that it could lead to a repetition of the negative attitude that many traditional churches maintained towards the classical Pentecostal movement long after the movement had corrected some of its early doctrines. A typical example of this negative attitude can be found in the relationship between the *Gnadauer Verband* representatives of the evangelical movement in Germany, and the German Pentecostal church. In 1909 the *Gnadauer Verband* issued the Berlin Declaration, stating that an infernal spirit is at work in the Pentecostal movement. Although the Pentecostal movement in Germany, especially the Mülheim Association, is probably closer to traditional Protestantism than any other Pentecostal church in the world, the Berlin Declaration still prevents a meaningful relationship between the evangelicals and the Pentecostal movement. In 1989 (cf *Oekumenische Rundschau* 38, 223-224) an ecumenical breakthrough was experienced when the *Association of Evangelical Free Churches* in Germany declared that the condemnations of the Berlin Declaration do not apply to the present-day German Pentecostals of the Mülheim Association.

2.3 The sympathetic yet critical attitude

Bruce Barron (1987) tries to take a balanced stand in the face of the Faith movement.

If you have opened this book looking for either an overwhelming affirmation or damning denunciation of the faith ministries, you have come to the wrong place. I am certainly disturbed by these people who, ignoring the biblical teaching to 'test everything' (I Thes 5:21), swallow every word that proceeds from the mouth of their favourite teacher. But I am equally disturbed by those who, unable to deal calmly with fellow Christians with whom they disagree, unleash vicious diatribes that, even when doctrinally accurate, do more harm than good. Instead, I propose to give a detailed description of the Faith movement I will then give a cautious, measured evaluation that - if both sides are willing - will lay the groundwork for meaningful dialogue and for resolution of conflict.

(Barron 1987:12)

In his 'cautious measured evaluation' Barron sometimes criticises the Faith movement severely. After discussing the ministry of Hobart Freeman, Barron (1987:34) calls him a false teacher and he says that several other respectable evangelists like Kenneth Hagin and the Copelands are preaching falsehoods as potentially fatal as Freeman's. He severely criticises the Faith teachers for undermining the faith of those who remain sick, and for simultaneously producing guilt (Barron 1987:87). On the other hand he also criticises Joni Eareckson Tada for having a theological tolerance of sickness that is not in harmony with the attitude of Jesus (Barron 1987:80). Although he criticises the prosperity teachings (Barron 1987:91ff), he points out that giving also plays an important role in the practices and doctrines of the Faith movement (Barron 1987:93ff). He acknowledges the efforts of many of the noted Faith teachers to balance the overemphasised prosperity message (Barron 1987:95ff). To conclude he says that 'much of the faith message is potentially valuable, but not when isolated from the rest of sound Christian doctrine' (Barron 1987:141).

The attempt of Barron to 'lay the groundwork for meaningful dialogue and for resolution of conflict' was not very successful. Walter Martin (1987), president of the evangelical Christian Research Institute wrote a letter to the publisher of Barron's book, Intervarsity Press, blaming Barron for being obviously sympathetic to the health-wealth teaching, and for failing 'to grasp the significance of word-faith teaching, especially where heresy is concerned'. He also says the signs of improvement referred to by Barron 'have nothing to do with their doctrinal error' (Martin 1987).

A close associate of Norval Hayes (a popular faith teacher), Madora Brewster (1987b), was also unimpressed by Barron's writings: 'The author of this book may be your friend, but he needs prayer and we are praying for him.' In another letter (1987a) Brewster expresses her attitude towards any criticism of the Faith movement: 'I am not in need of any unraveling of misteaching. Many have misheard and misappropriated teaching that is straight from the heavenly Father. Many more have heard it correctly and are living it correctly. We are praying that you will not be deceived into opposing the Spirit of God'.

Nevertheless Barron remains positive that the Faith movement is moving toward the mainstream. In an article in *Christianity Today* (Barron 1987b:50, 52) he refers to Kenneth Hagin admitting in an interview that 'there's always an element of mystery' in the area of healing. Recalling one instance when he wondered why a relative had to die, Hagin said the Lord directed him to Deuteronomy 29:29 (The secret things belongs unto the Lord our God) and told him, 'If I'd wanted you to know why, I would have told you' (quoted in Barron 1987b:50). Hagin also stated that the Faith teachers did not want to

put a guilt trip on anyone. Barron (1987b:50) quotes Farah who is also optimistic because '(t)he movement is buying into Oral's (Roberts) contention that prayer and medicine must go together'. Vincent Synan (quoted in Barron 1987b:52), a classical Pentecostal and director of a Pentecostal-Charismatic conference held in New Orleans in 1987, sees a positive sign in K Copeland's vigorous support of world missions. Barron (1987b:52), in spite of all the positive signs, still remains concerned about the Christology and anthropology of the Faith movement.

3 CONCLUSION

From a Pentecostal perspective, the approach of Barron seems to be the preferable one. It can be problematic for Pentecostals to take an uncompromising stand against the Faith movement. The Faith movement seems to be firmly grounded in the Pentecostal tradition. There are even developments in the movement that could make the differences between the classical Pentecostals and the Faith movement less important.

The uncompromising approach of Matta, Hunt and McMahon, and Morran and Schlemmer is certainly based on legitimate grounds. But when one keeps the unhappy history of the relationship between orthodox evangelicals and the early Pentecostals in mind, Pentecostals ought to be careful not to cut their ties with the Faith movement too early.

On the other hand, Pentecostals should be careful not to become absorbed into the Faith movement. Faith teaching with its claims of representing the classical Pentecostal movement and its authoritarian claims that it comes directly from God, cannot be left unchallenged in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Morran and Schlemmer (1984:187) are correct when they assert that the false theology of the Faith movement has to be answered intellectually and theologically.

The trends and developments of the theology of the Faith movement need to be monitored carefully. At least some of the leaders of the movement (especially Kenneth Copeland) are playing a dangerous game in the Christological and anthropological sphere. It is possible that the teaching of the spiritual death of Jesus will alienate the movement from the classical Pentecostal movement and might even lead the movement (or part of it) out of mainstream Christian thinking and into a cultic ideology. The doctrine of God is also at stake in the Faith movement and it can easily happen that the Faith movement will eventually develop an understanding of God completely unacceptable to the Christian tradition.

If the Faith movement should move into a theological direction where it denies the deity of Christ or the sovereignty of God, the Pentecostal movement will be forced to take a strong stand against the Faith teachings. Under such circumstances the approach of Matta, Morran and Schlemmer and Hunt, and McMahon will be appropriate.

One can only hope (and pray) that the positive signs of change in the movement will prevail while the heretical tendencies will not be drawn to their logical and unacceptable conclusions.

The Faith movement with its enthusiasm has done much for the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It helped many earnest seekers to find new life in Jesus Christ and its worship practices have played a positive role in the classical Pentecostal churches. If it can rid itself of the unbalanced realised eschatology, its downgrading of Jesus Christ and its upgrading of humans, and the manipulative way of thinking about God, it can become a force in the Pentecostal-Charismatic community of the future.