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Show me the Money. The Origins of the American  
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“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”<sup>1</sup>

(3 John 2, King James Version)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Lakewood Church: America’s largest church

One of America’s largest churches is the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. According to their own count, the church hosts an astonishing 38,000 attendants on any given weekend.<sup>2</sup> Although this incredibly high number is based on the church’s own observations, several counts conducted by journalists confirm a similar number, estimating between 30,000 and 45,000 per weekend. The megachurch is led by pastor Joel Osteen and teaches a variety of the prosperity gospel theology.<sup>3</sup> In short, the prosperity message is that God grants true believers material, physical, and spiritual health and wealth.

Osteen’s father John founded the Lakewood Church in 1959. Originally, he was ordained as a pastor by the Southern Baptist Convention, but received the baptism of the Spirit<sup>4</sup> at the end of the 1950s. This subsequently led to his leaving his original denomination and the establishment of his own religious group.<sup>5</sup>

The first meeting of the Lakewood Church took place in a converted feed store, somewhat outside of Houston on Mother’s Day 1959.<sup>6</sup> The church quickly developed a charismatic style. Glossolalia,<sup>7</sup> religious ecstasy, and healing were part of the services. John Osteen became rapidly known in the scene and formed close

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<sup>1</sup> This and all further Bible quotes refer to the Authorized King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Lakewood Church, “Leadership Team,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/new-here/Leadership-Team.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Rahel Gersch, *Frommer Individualismus. Die Lakewood Church und die Phänomene Megachurch, prosperity gospel und charismatische Pastorenschaft* (Berlin: Weißensee Verlag, 2013), 7.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2.1. of this thesis for a definition.

<sup>5</sup> Gersch, *Frommer Individualismus*, 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> Lakewood Church, “Our History,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/new-here/Our-History.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> “Speaking in tongues refers to a language miracle whereby under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit one is able to speak in a language (either human or heavenly) unknown to the speaker.” Quoted from Frank D. Macchia, “Glossolalia,” in *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, 223-225 (New York: Routledge, 2006).

bonds with other charismatic figures and well-known prosperity theology preachers Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin.<sup>8</sup> During his career as a pastor, Osteen hosted a television program which was broadcast in over one hundred countries and authored forty-five books. He and his wife Dodie led the church until his death in 1999, when his son Joel took over.<sup>9</sup>

Joel studied at the Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, where he received his degree in radio and television communications. After finishing his studies in 1982, Osteen returned to Texas and started working for his father's church. He established a television ministry and produced all of his father's televised sermons until his father's death.<sup>10</sup> Under Joel Osteen's leadership, the church grew significantly. His work as a pastor as well as his bestselling books and internationally-broadcasted TV presence make him one of the most famous American preachers today.<sup>11</sup> His popular books can be characterized as religious self-help literature. Titles include *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*; *It's Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, And Increase in God's Favor*; and *Everyday a Friday: How to be Happier 7 Days a Week*. Such books not only increased his popularity, but also helped Joel Osteen become a millionaire.<sup>12</sup>

In September 2006, the American *Time Magazine* published a cover story which analyzed the rise of the prosperity gospel in the United States. In the article, the authors use the term "Prosperity Lite" to characterize the theology of the Lakewood Church and other megachurches of the country. They remark, "while they don't exclusively teach that God's riches want to be in believers' wallets, it is a key part of their doctrine."<sup>13</sup>

An interview with pastor Joel Osteen was a crucial part of the article. When asked about prosperity theology, Osteen seemingly distanced himself from the term and its associated teachings. "I don't think I've ever preached a sermon about money,"<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gersch, *Frommer Individualism*, 119-120. Find more on Kenneth E. Hagin in chapter 4.3. of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Lakewood Church, "Our History."

<sup>10</sup> Lakewood Church, "Joel Osteen," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/new-here/Joel-Osteen.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> Gersch, *Frommer Individualism*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> David Van Biema and Jeff Chu, "Does God Want You To Be Rich?" *Time Magazine*, September 10th, 2006, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448-2,00.html>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

he explained. As he elaborated however, he made comments that did indeed link him and his ministry to some version of the prosperity gospel: “I preach that anybody can improve their lives. I think God wants us to be prosperous. I think he wants us to be happy. To me, you need to have money to pay your bills. I think God wants us to send our kids to college. I think he wants us to be a blessing to other people. But I don’t think I’d say God wants us to be rich. It’s all relative, isn’t it?”<sup>15</sup>

Aside from the distancing self-identification of the Lakewood Church pastor, there of course is another side to the story. Rahel Gersch, a religious studies scholar, has conducted a qualitative analysis of the Lakewood Church in her doctoral research. She identifies several rites and theological basics that strongly suggest links to the prosperity gospel. Among others, she observed positive thinking and positive confession<sup>16</sup> as well as a seeding-reaping<sup>17</sup> approach towards giving in the services of the church—all of which are typical features of the prosperity gospel, which will be elaborated on in later chapters.

An investigation of the Church’s current website supports Gersch’s research. The synopsis of one of Joel Osteen’s recent books, *Think Better, Live Better*, that is advertised in the “Shop” section of the site, offers one basic principle of the prosperity gospel: positive confession. It highlights the power of the believer’s mind and the personal agency one has in leading a good life. With this book, Joel Osteen gives “a simple yet life-changing strategy for erasing the thoughts that keep you down and reprogramming your mind with positive thinking to reach a new level of victory.”<sup>18</sup> Positive confession is a recurring topic in Joel Osteen’s sermons. For example in one from January 2016, which can be watched on the ministry’s YouTube channel, he preaches about speaking the right words—“sowing the right seeds”—like health or victory, and eventually those aspirations will become real. He also cautions his audience to not sow the wrong seeds—negative things and thoughts—or those things will happen.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Van Biema and Chu, “Does God Want You.”

<sup>16</sup> Gersch, *Frommer Individualismus*, 183-184.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>18</sup> Lakewood Church, “Think Better, Live Better,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/Store-Product.aspx?sku=JHB0063E>.

<sup>19</sup> Joel Osteen, “Your Words Become Your Reality – Joel Osteen,” YouTube video, posted January 7, 2016, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://youtu.be/GA6uE2CPo1I>.

Two other aspects at the center of the prosperity gospel are material wealth and physical health. Both of those topics are also prominently featured on the Lakewood Church website. It offers information on “Financial Ministry.” It states, “We all need a plan for our money. You can take control of your money no matter what your current financial situation is and the Lakewood Financial Ministry is here to help. We have exciting new classes that explore God’s way of handling money. In these classes you’ll learn practical, Biblical steps and wisdom to get rid of debt, spend smart, save wisely and much more!”<sup>20</sup> There is also a “Business Ministry” that specifically deals with implementing God’s principles in all business dealings as well.<sup>21</sup>

Every Tuesday the Church offers the “Financial Peace University,” a class that deals with financial problems and offers a full plan on everything from budgeting to paying off debt. The class is taught by Dave Ramsey, a financial expert. In addition, there is a Church-specific “Financial Freedom Class” that explains what God teaches about money and how to implement it in everyday life.<sup>22</sup>

The theme of health is also a well-circulated topic within the Lakewood Church. One example of this can be found in a booklet written by Joel Osteen’s mother, Dodie, called *Healed of Cancer*. In the synopsis given on the Church’s website, there are references to what Dodie does for believers—she “courageously prays for the sick, casts out demons, and ministers with tears of compassion to hurting people”<sup>23</sup>—as well as reports that many people claim to have been healed as result of her ministry. There are also short videos on Mr. Osteen’s YouTube channel of people telling their stories of being healed, at least in part, by their faith in God.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, there are several classes and ministries offered which deal with all kinds of life issues and can be classified within the term self-help: classes on

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<sup>20</sup> Lakewood Church, “Financial Ministry,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/Ministry.aspx?mid=34>.

<sup>21</sup> Lakewood Church, “Business Ministry,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/Ministry.aspx?mid=48>

<sup>22</sup> Lakewood Church, “Financial Ministry.”

<sup>23</sup> There is no direct link to the booklet, it can be found in the online book store, when scrolling down. Lakewood Church, “Book Store”, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/Store-Books.aspx>.

<sup>24</sup> Here is only one example from Joel Osteen’s YouTube Channel: Joel Osteen, “Ana Santiago Fights Cancer Through the Power of Faith,” YouTube video, posted February 21, 2011, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://youtu.be/ZmFjnrxtJs>.

marriage and divorce, classes on being a good Christian man, woman, teen or child, as well as courses that deal with substance abuse or being a veteran.<sup>25</sup>

Joel Osteen's ministry is a very popular example for the prosperity gospel, but by far not the only one. Other ministries associated with the prosperity message offer similar courses, materials, products and insights on their websites. On Creflo Dollar's<sup>26</sup> website, there is a shop site solely dedicated to finances. You can buy books or CDs with titles such as *God's Plan for Your Finances* or *Money Does Matter and So Does How You Handle It!*<sup>27</sup> In the section for healing, one can buy *Healing 101* or *Deliverance from Addiction*.<sup>28</sup>

Paula White-Cain, who had the honor of giving the inaugural prayer<sup>29</sup> at President Donald J. Trump's inauguration ceremony in January 2017, is also associated with the prosperity gospel.<sup>30</sup> Whereas she did not make a clear reference to the prosperity message in this particular prayer, she offers texts on the matter on her website. One example is a post in which she elaborates on God's promise of prosperity: "King David declared that God takes pleasure in you prospering. God is not magnified when you are broke, busted, or disgusted. God is not glorified when you have a dream but no resources to fulfill the dream and the desire of your heart. It is God's desire that you prosper, but realize that prosperity is not just about finances."<sup>31</sup> She

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<sup>25</sup> The events are naturally very regularly updated. Lakewood Church, "Events," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/Events.aspx>.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 5.4.2. of this thesis for more on Creflo Dollar.

<sup>27</sup> Creflo Dollar Ministries, "Shop – Product Category Finances," accessed August 8, 2017, <http://store.cdmuk.org/product-category/finances/>.

<sup>28</sup> Creflo Dollar Ministries, "Shop – Product Category Healing," accessed August 8, 2017, <http://store.cdmuk.org/product-category/finances/http://store.cdmuk.org/product-category/healing/page/2/>.

<sup>29</sup> A transcript of the prayer she gave is available online: Paula White Ministries, "Paula White-Cain Inauguration Prayer," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/paula-white-cain-inauguration-prayer/>.

<sup>30</sup> Julie Zauzmer, "Paula White, prosperity preacher once investigated by Senate, is a controversial pick for inauguration," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2016, accessed August 8th, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/12/29/paula-white-prosperity-preacher-once-investigated-by-senate-is-a-controversial-pick-for-inauguration-prayer/>.

<sup>31</sup> Paula White Ministries, "Prosperity," accessed August 8, 2017, <http://paulawhite.org/prosperity-184/>.



also offers various DVDs, books and CDs on the topic.<sup>32</sup> Paula White-Cain is also “spiritual adviser” to the current president of the United States.<sup>33</sup>

So, the prosperity gospel is far from being only a niche religious phenomenon. Still, there are only a handful of academic books that deal with the movement in detail. This thesis will give an overview on the research available on the prosperity gospel as well as incorporating primary works by prosperity teachers as well as material available via prosperity churches.

But what exactly does the prosperity gospel teach? What makes its principles so popular and accessible? And most of all: how did the modern prosperity gospel come into being? These are the guiding questions this thesis will answer.

## **1.2. Outline and structure of this thesis**

In this thesis the origins, influences, and characteristics of the modern prosperity gospel will be discussed, with a special focus on the so-called Word of Faith movement. It will be shown that the modern prosperity gospel is, in its essence, a truly American religion, although it has been very successfully exported all over the world in recent decades. We will see that the history of the modern prosperity gospel is closely connected to religious and cultural phenomena that influenced American society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first part of this thesis will lay the foundation by looking at the definitions of the terms we are working with, the prosperity gospel, the Word of Faith movement, the health and wealth gospel, as well as outline some basic facts and figures about the significance of the prosperity gospel in the religious landscape of both the United States and the wider world.

The second part will closely examine the origins and influences of the modern prosperity gospel. We will separately discuss four large phenomena which had a major impact on the movement: Christianity, especially Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity will be discussed in detail, as well as their respective attitude towards healing, with a focus on Oral Roberts. Then we will look at the

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<sup>32</sup> For some products, browse through the store on her website: Paula White Ministries, “Products,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/products>.

<sup>33</sup> Noah Weiland, “Paula White, Trump’s Spiritual Adviser, Says He Has ‘a Hunger for God,’” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2017, accessed August 8th, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/us/trumps-pastor-paula-white.html>.

religious movements New Thought and Mind Cure, where we will examine specifically the power that the mind and thoughts is believed to have over the material side of life. Next, we will analyze self-help culture and one work in particular, *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale, which greatly influenced the American culture as a whole and the prosperity gospel in particular. Finally, we will look at the American Dream and certain traits of this narrative—like the ideal of upward social mobility—that also supported the rise of the prosperity gospel in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The third part of this thesis will focus on the Word of Faith Movement, which is one of the most popular prosperity gospel variations in the United States today. We will introduce Kenneth E. Hagin Sr., who is generally credited with being the “father” of the modern prosperity gospel. Then we will examine three main features of the belief system in particular: the doctrine of positive confession and the attitudes towards wealth and health. We will look at frequently cited Bible verses and their interpretation, which are the basis for those beliefs, as well as at works by prosperity preachers and some practices that they use.

Finally, in the conclusion we will revisit the origins and influences of the modern prosperity gospel, give a final overview on how it is connected with the Word of Faith Movement today and explain what is so truly American about this religious movement. Perhaps we will find an explanation to why it is so extremely successful.

## 2. Defining prosperity gospel

### 2.1. Definition of the term

Before we start to examine the origins and history of the prosperity gospel, we have to define what we mean by this term.

Prosperity gospel is a variety of Protestantism and is not organized in a single denomination, has no umbrella organization or even a single common theology, but rather is practiced by individual preachers, independent churches and ministries, who “advocate and emphasize slightly different doctrines and practices that are connected with the health and wealth concerns of Christians.”<sup>34</sup> Although it is non-denominational, it has a strong similarity in form and context to Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.

It shares certain doctrines with these movements, for example the belief in the second baptism, which defines the experience of the Holy Spirit as the second necessary blessing after conversion. The idea behind this is that “Christ baptizes in the Spirit to deepen or renew the Christian life.”<sup>35</sup> In Pentecostalism this spirit baptism becomes “the central metaphor for describing an experience of power for witness, involving various gifts of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup> The belief in those gifts, or charismata, is also a typical Pentecostal doctrine that the prosperity gospel shares. These “spiritual gift(s) that were bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon individuals or groups”<sup>37</sup> include speaking in tongues and faith healing.<sup>38</sup>

The one decisive distinguishing and singular characteristic of the prosperity gospel movement is its unique attitude towards (material) prosperity and physical health.

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<sup>34</sup> Martyn Percy, “Health and Wealth,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke, 236 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” in *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, 53 (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Scheper, George L., “Charisma,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. Vol. 3, 1549 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424500542&asid=348418357141afb7edc33be78fcea5ee](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424500542&asid=348418357141afb7edc33be78fcea5ee) (accessed August 22, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Faith healing can be defined as the “belief in miraculous healing.” Protestantism historically believed that the era of supernatural healing ended with the apostolic age and only occurred in rare exception. But the rise of Methodism, Holiness and finally Pentecostalism made this doctrine prominent again.

See Gary B. Ferngren and Darrel W. Amundsen, “Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Christianity” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. Vol. 6, 3847 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424501306&asid=397d2e5df76e6a4e9c1c1bbd722082fe](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424501306&asid=397d2e5df76e6a4e9c1c1bbd722082fe) (accessed August 22, 2017).

In short, this doctrine says that believers can gain material possessions and good health via the technique of positive confession, “the practice of thinking and speaking only affirmatively to achieve a desired end.”<sup>39</sup> This doctrine has been granted through the atonement of Jesus and is part of the promise of salvation.

To illustrate the variety within the movement we only have to look at the entries on this topic in religious encyclopedias. In the *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, there are three different articles describing the phenomenon: “Health and Wealth,”<sup>40</sup> “Prosperity Theology,”<sup>41</sup> and “Word of Faith Movement,”<sup>42</sup> all of which touch the subject. In the *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* there are two articles that deal with the subject: “Positive Confession Theology”<sup>43</sup> and “Prosperity Theology.”<sup>44</sup>

Still, there are useful attempts to narrow the definition of the movement down to some simple similarities. The *Encyclopedia of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity* offers this definition:

Allowing for differences among various brands, the label ‘prosperity theology’ typically refers to Christian worldviews that emphasize an earthly life of health, wealth, and happiness as the divine, inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to His commands.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Milmon F. Harrison, “Word of Faith Movement,” in *Contemporary American Religion*, ed. Wade Clark Roof, Vol. 2, 786 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 1999), Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3401300516&asid=ca3afa4c42e5d1fe66b2e7e5b649df14](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3401300516&asid=ca3afa4c42e5d1fe66b2e7e5b649df14), accessed August 24, 2017.

See also chapter 5.2. for details on this doctrine.

<sup>40</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 235-238.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Coleman, “Prosperity Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke, 453-455 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Hunt, “Word of Faith Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke, 623-625 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Dale H. Simmons, “Positive Confession Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, 377-380 (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Rob Starner, “Prosperity Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, 392-397 (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

The *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* focuses on three distinct features of prosperity gospel:

Prosperity theology parallels classical Pentecostalism in its emphasis on the second baptism of the Spirit and charismatic gifts, but is distinctive in the degrees to which it focuses on three specific areas of Christian life: divine healing, material prosperity, and so-called ‘positive confession’. In each of these areas, believers emphasize the goodness of God alongside the idea that faith of the born-again person can activate divine favour in predictable and tangible ways.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, The *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, which maintains a rather critical approach to the topic, offers a definition in its article on “Word-Faith Movement and Its Worship”:

The Word-Faith (or Word of Faith) Movement is a primarily North American new religious movement best known for its stance that physical healing and financial prosperity represent the will of God for all believers and are readily available to anyone with sufficient faith.<sup>47</sup>

As we have seen from these encyclopedia and dictionary entries, there are various terms used for the movement in the literature: prosperity gospel, Faith Movement or Word of Faith movement, health and wealth gospel or name-it-and-claim-it. Throughout this thesis we will generally use the term “prosperity gospel” (or “modern prosperity gospel” to emphasize that prosperity theology has roots in Christianity that predate the movement on which we will focus) to refer to the phenomenon. When focusing on the American variety that started with Kenneth E. Hagin we will also use the term “Word of Faith Movement” since that expression has been widely used when referring to that particular movement.

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<sup>46</sup> Coleman, *Prosperity Theology*, 453.

<sup>47</sup> MacGregor, Kirk R., “Word-Faith Movement and its Worship,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. by Daniel Patte, 1329-1330 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

## **2.2. The prosperity gospel in the United States and the wider world today**

In 2006 the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life conducted an extensive worldwide study on Pentecostalism in general. The study was carried out in the United States, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, India, the Philippines and South Korea, all of which have a sizable renewalist population. The Pew Forum uses the term “renewalist” to describe both Pentecostals and Charismatics, “because of their common belief in the spiritually renewing gifts of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>48</sup>

One of the themes the researchers examined in their work was the distribution of certain views that can be attributed to the health and wealth gospel we characterized in the preceding chapter. One of the statements they asked participants to agree or disagree with was: “God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith.” In the United States 46 percent of the interviewees agreed with this statement. When breaking it down according to different branches of Christianity, we can see the following: 66 percent of self-identified Pentecostals agreed with this statement, 59 percent of Charismatics and 43 percent of Other Christians.<sup>49</sup>

Another indicator on how widely spread certain beliefs of the health and wealth gospel are is a research section on keys to success. Participants were asked which of the following were very important factors in economic success: faith in God, hard work, education, fate, government policies, personal contacts, and the parent’s economic situation. In most countries people agreed that a variety of factors contribute to economic success, like education, work ethic, or contacts. Still, in all countries except South Korea, a majority of the respondents also agreed that faith is a very important reason for economic success.<sup>50</sup>

In the United States, hard work and education were named as the top factors for economic success, both reaching 84 percent agreement. Faith in God was important for 56 percent of the interviewees and personal contacts for 50 percent.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to compare those overall numbers to the numbers for certain Christian

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<sup>48</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Spirit and Power – A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2006), 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-60.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

belief systems: 56 percent of the general American population considers faith an important factor, compared to 81 percent of self-identified Pentecostals and 76 percent of self-identified Charismatics who hold this view.<sup>52</sup>

It is also shown that Pentecostals and Charismatics generally tend to have a more positive outlook concerning their financial future. Whereas only 15 percent of all respondents said they were hopeful that their financial situation would greatly improve in the next year, 20 percent of Charismatics and 32 percent of Pentecostals agreed with that statement.<sup>53</sup>

The second defining factor of prosperity gospel—the health gospel—is even more commonly believed in among American Christians. 56 percent of all interviewees agreed with the statement, “God will grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who have enough faith.” Within different variations of Christianity, 68 percent who identify as Pentecostals, 71 percent who identify as Charismatics and 52 percent who identify as other Christians agreed with that statement.<sup>54</sup>

The belief in divine healing is generally closely associated with Pentecostals and Charismatics, and is also included in some definitions of the prosperity gospel, as we have seen.<sup>55</sup> In the United States 29 percent of interviewees stated that they had witnessed divine healing, specifically, 62 percent of Pentecostals, 46 percent of Charismatics and 28 percent of other Christians. In some other surveyed countries, this number was even higher. In Nigeria, a country where Pentecostalism is emerging, 62 percent of all interviewed people claim to have witnessed divine healing.<sup>56</sup>

But what do those numbers mean for the religious practice in the United States? According to a composite survey conducted in 2011 by Kate Bowler, author of *Blessed. A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, nearly half of all megachurches<sup>57</sup> in the United States with more than 10,000 members teach some variation of the prosperity gospel. She also found that more than a million people self-identified as attendees of megachurches which teach some variety of the

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<sup>52</sup> Pew Forum, *Spirit and Power*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>55</sup> See chapter 2.1. of this thesis, which deals with definitions of the term.

<sup>56</sup> Pew Forum, *Spirit and Power*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Bowler defines megachurch as a church that has 2000 or more weekly attendees. Kate Bowler, *Blessed. A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181.

prosperity gospel.<sup>58</sup> Also, prosperity gospel churches tend to be much larger in congregational size than other churches. Of all prosperity megachurches, 36.5 percent have 10,000 or more attendees. For all megachurches, that percentage is only 4 percent.<sup>59</sup>

The Lakewood Church is one of those extremely large churches. Some other examples are Creflo Dollar's church in Georgia, which has around 20,000 members and Frederick K. C. Price's church in Los Angeles, which has between 16,000 and 20,000 members.<sup>60</sup>

It is also important to note—although we will later explore the Pentecostal roots of the modern prosperity gospel—that a large majority of prosperity teaching megachurches are non-denominational. Kate Bowler shows that almost three-quarters of those churches are non-denominational. The other quarter are either belonging to the Pentecostal/Holiness or to the Black Baptist/Methodist spectrum.<sup>61</sup> She also surveyed the regional distribution of those prosperity megachurches and found that most of them are either in Texas (21 megachurches) or California (18 megachurches).<sup>62</sup>

Whereas the prosperity gospel in its modern form has its origin in the United States, it has also successfully been exported all around the world. A few examples include pastor Paul Younghi Cho, who presides over the world's largest church in Seoul, South Korea, and preaches a variety of the prosperity gospel. In Brazil, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God claims to have over six million followers in more than 85 countries and also preaches the prosperity gospel.<sup>63</sup> “The Church offers ‘strong prayer to destroy witchcraft, demon possession, bad luck, bad dreams, all spiritual problems’ and promises that members will gain ‘prosperity and financial breakthrough.’”<sup>64</sup> They also practice types of offering that are used in

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<sup>58</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>60</sup> Catherine A. Brekus, "The Perils of Prosperity: Some Historical Reflections on Christianity, Capitalism, and Consumerism in America," in *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus and Clark W. Gilpin, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 296.

<sup>61</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 183.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>63</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 237.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65.



typical prosperity churches. The main claim is the more you give to the church, the more financial blessings will come to your personal life.<sup>65</sup>

In Lagos, Nigeria, Bishop David Oyedepo resides over a 50,000-seat megachurch with an international network that teaches the prosperity gospel. He is also Nigeria's richest pastor.<sup>66</sup> His Living Faith Church Worldwide offers many materials on its website similar to those of American Word of Faith preachers, guidelines like *Unveiling Vital Keys to the World of Financial Fortune* or *What is in the World that Heals*.<sup>67</sup>

According to Milmon F. Harrison's findings "we can estimate that the Word of Faith Movement consists of between 2,300-2,500 churches, ministries, fellowships, or television networks in the United States and in more than 60 countries abroad."<sup>68</sup>

As we will see shortly, the modern prosperity gospel originates in the United States and incorporates some very typically American ideas, but it still has a message that is appealing all over the world and also crosses cultural boundaries. It is a truly globalized religious movement.

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<sup>65</sup> Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 65. For more on theory and practice of offering in the prosperity gospel churches, see chapter 5.3.2.2. of this thesis.

<sup>66</sup> Tim Cocks, "Insight - Nigeria's 'megachurches': a hidden pillar of Africa's top economy," *Reuters*, October 12, 2014, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-megachurches-insight-idUKKCN0I104B20141012>.

<sup>67</sup> The page is regularly updated: Faith Tabernacle, "Downloads," accessed August 8th, 2017, <http://faithtabernacle.org.ng/downloads/>.

<sup>68</sup> Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches. The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

## **3. Origins and influences of the modern prosperity gospel**

### **3.1. Introduction**

In this chapter the religious, historical and cultural origins of the modern prosperity gospel will be examined.

In the first part, we will take a close look at the Christian roots of the movement, mainly the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the healing revival after World War II, with a focus on the influence of Oral Roberts. Then the notion commonly referred to as “New Thought”—the influence of which can be found in works of prosperity gospel preachers like Kenneth E. Hagin—will be portrayed. Then we will look at a phenomenon on the edge between a religious and cultural notion: the rise of self-help culture, which also had significant influence in the development of the prosperity gospel. Here our focus will be on Norman Vincent Peale and his famous book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Finally, we will look at a broader cultural phenomenon: the concept of the American Dream. Here we will examine the narrative of upward social mobility as well as equal opportunity and the myth of the self-made man.

### **3.2. Christian influences – Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement, & faith healing**

#### **3.2.1. Introduction**

Prosperity gospel has its Christian roots in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, both of which emerged in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is neither a monolithic nor an institutionalized form of religion. Still, the most popular figures, churches and strands share basic assumptions about Christianity that can be traced back to those roots.

Pentecostalism can be defined as:

This form of Christianity centers on the emotional, mystical, and supernatural: miracles, signs, wonders, and "the gifts of the Spirit" (charismata), especially "speaking in tongues" (glossolalia), faith healing, and "casting out demons" (exorcism). Supreme importance is attached to the subjective religious experience of being filled with or possessed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>69</sup>

What is true for the prosperity gospel is also true for Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement in general. They are not a single denomination with a single belief system. They are rather presented by a variety of preachers, communities and churches, "there are as many different types of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches as there are thousands of organizations."<sup>70</sup> Hardly any two are alike. Therefore, some authors suggest the use of the term Pentecostalisms, the plural, instead of the singular. In this thesis, nevertheless, the singular term will be used, while keeping in mind the many varieties of the movement.

Although there is such a vast variety of Pentecostalism in the United States and even more so all over the world, there are certain things most of them have in common. In this chapter, we will look at the history of Pentecostalism, (especially in regard to which aspects are also important in prosperity gospel today), its place in the world today, as well as the development of the Charismatic movement and its manifestation in the healing revivals, which were exemplified also in the person of Oral Roberts, who is an important connecting figure to the prosperity gospel.

### **3.2.2. Pentecostalism in the world today**

Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement are to date the fastest growing and most diverse movements within Christianity, globally speaking. David Martin calls the rise of Pentecostalism "the largest global shift in the religious marketplace over the last 40 years."<sup>71</sup> According to a study the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life published in 2011 on global Christianity, some 279 million people identify

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Mapes Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. Vol. 10, 7028 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GURL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424502393&asid=a5fd6d99a937d1c59f9a727117af9250](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GURL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424502393&asid=a5fd6d99a937d1c59f9a727117af9250), (accessed August 22, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Allen Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>71</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xvii.

themselves as Pentecostals, and another 305 million identify as belonging to the Charismatic movement. Taking those two categories together we can conclude that over a fourth of the worldwide Christian population, which consists of over 2 billion people, self-identifies as belonging to an either Pentecostal or Charismatic religious group.<sup>72</sup>

Breaking it down to the American population, the percentage is not quite as stunning, but still impressive. The Pew Forum also published an extensive study on Pentecostalism in 2006, where they found that around 23 percent of the American population identify as what they called Renewalist.<sup>73</sup> This includes both Pentecostal as well as Charismatic belief systems, whereupon 5 percent of Americans identify as the former, 18 percent as the latter.<sup>74</sup>

It is also important to note that Pentecostalism and other Charismatic Christianities have spread from their origin in the United States all over the world. There are huge Pentecostal communities in South America, Africa and Asia and the growth rates there are even more astonishing. In Nigeria for example, the largest country in Africa by population, 15.22 percent of all Christians were Pentecostal in 1970, and in 2010 that number jumped to 46.87 percent.<sup>75</sup>

Those selected numbers show that Pentecostalism indeed is an enormously important Christian denomination nowadays and underline the importance of studying it. To begin, we will take a look at the very beginnings of this hugely popular religious branch.

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<sup>72</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (Washington: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011), 15-17.

<sup>73</sup> The Pew Forum uses this term for Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians, “because of their common belief in the spiritually renewing gifts of the Holy Spirit.” See Pew Forum, *Spirit and Power*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Atlas of Pentecostalism, “Atlas of Pentecostalism,” accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.atlasofpentecostalism.net>. The Atlas of Pentecostalism offers country specific information on Pentecostal growth or number of Pentecostal Churches. By clicking on the specific countries, the information cited here can be accessed.

### 3.2.3. The origins of Pentecostalism - The Holiness Movement

The origins of Pentecostalism, which emerged on the religious scene in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, lie in Methodism and its advancement, especially in the Holiness movement.

Methodism was established in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the United Kingdom. Evangelist John Wesley and his brother Charles were important figures in founding the religion and also later exported Methodism from the United Kingdom back to the United States. It began like so many new Christian denominations: as a revival movement within established churches, but later turned into a separate church itself. John Wesley “(...) was much concerned with morality, noted that Scripture commanded one to ‘be perfect.’ He was convinced that this state must therefore be obtainable.”<sup>76</sup> His interpretation of sin as a voluntary transgression, as well as defining the term “entire sanctification”—the belief that God can not only free one of sin but also from sinful motives altogether—were decisive.<sup>77</sup> Methodism in the United States broke social and ecclesiastical boundaries. Its message was a message of the freedom and responsibility of the individual.<sup>78</sup>

The Holiness Movement, which reinforced this Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection, emerged within Methodist churches in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many Methodist preachers did not respond well to the practices and manifestations of the revival (although some of them at first thought it might be a Pentecostal blessing), which later led to many secessions and the founding of separate Holiness churches.<sup>79</sup>

The doctrine of Christian perfection, or sanctification, set important groundwork for the development of Pentecostalism. The doctrine suggests that moral perfection is neither something Christians can only achieve in the afterlife, nor that it is something that cannot be obtained at all because of human flaws. It says that perfection can actually be achieved by true believers in the here and now.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture. The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870 – 1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 73.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 7-8.

<sup>79</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 816-817.

<sup>80</sup> Harold Bloom, *The American Religion. The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 173.

The Holy Spirit is at work reaching sanctification. It...

cleansed the hearts of believers from their bent to sinning and restored in them God's image of love. It established a relationship with God of continuing faith in which it was possible to live without willful rebellion, but never without the possibility of again falling into sin through willful unbelief and disobedience.<sup>81</sup>

Some other theological principles that the Holiness movement focused on would later also be relevant in Pentecostalism, for example the focus on and hope for the arrival of a new Pentecost, and a revival and renewal of the Christian faith that started with the individual's baptism in the Holy Spirit. The typical charismatic experiences, so crucial for Pentecostalism, were also already important in the Holiness movement, especially glossolalia, visions, and divine healing.<sup>82</sup>

Another focus of the movement was on the Second Blessing—which was needed in order to experience purification in present life in order to be cleansed and saved from all sin—was an important factor. It was already described as “The Baptism of the Holy Ghost” back then, and was a term that would become very central for Pentecostalism later, as well. Phoebe Palmer, a Bible teacher, was a central figure in the Holiness movement, which was formative for Pentecostalism. She held numerous religious meetings in New York City until her death in 1874 that majorly contributed to the development of the Holiness movement. Palmer emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit for Christianity. According to her, in order to be truly saved one not only had to experience an emotional, dramatic conversion, but also a second experience in the form of a baptism by the Spirit. Only the combination of both would eventually free one from one's sins.<sup>83</sup>

Palmer's Holiness teachings were met with criticism by Methodists, mainly because they believed she simplified the message of sanctification too much by focusing on the mere faith in the Word that was necessary for it. “Palmer taught that God said

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<sup>81</sup> Dieter, Melvin E., “Holiness Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. Vol. 6, 4082 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424501373&asid=0ea90719c2f98836e8618b2b91203e63](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=43wien&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424501373&asid=0ea90719c2f98836e8618b2b91203e63) (accessed August 24, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Reinhard Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums. Ausprägungen und Herausforderungen pfingstlich-charismatischer Frömmigkeit* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1998), 34-35.

<sup>83</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 74-75 and George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991), 41-42.

it, faith grasps it, and it is done; this ‘shorter way,’ her opponents charged, was ‘un-Wesleyan’.”<sup>84</sup> Some theologians today believe that this simple formula was actually a harbinger for the “name it, claim it” message that became so popular through the prosperity gospel in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The focus on the emotional, experiential side of religion was not coincidental at this point in time. The “Holiness movement was a reaction to liberalism and formalism in established Protestant churches and stood for Biblical literalism, the need for a personal and individual experience in conversion and the moral perfection (holiness) of the Christian individual.”<sup>85</sup> And this focus grew even more important with the beginning of the Pentecostal movement.

#### **3.2.4. The beginning of Pentecostalism – From Azusa Street to the Assemblies of God**

It is hard to trace Pentecostalism back to one specific founding figure. Still, there were two people most scholars agree on emphasizing in particular when speaking of the beginnings of the movement: Charles Fox Parham and William J. Seymour.

Charles F. Parham was a Methodist preacher who focused his evangelism on holiness and healing. In 1900, Parham founded a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, which he called Bethel Bible College. There he and his students intensively debated the meaning and importance of the Holy Spirit and glossolalia in the Bible.<sup>86</sup>

Parham and his students were especially looking at chapters 1 and 2 Acts, which deal with the day of Pentecost. “They believed that the experience of Spirit Baptism and the practice of the gifts of the Spirit that occurred on that day were meant to be normative in the life of the church and of each believer.”<sup>87</sup> The gifts of the Spirit are usually seen as those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The focus on and belief in the ongoing work of charismata was lost from most mainstream churches and denominations after the apostolic age; therefore, the Pentecostal movement would mark their restoration.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, Parham and his group came to the conclusion that it must be a sign of baptism in the Spirit if people began to speak in tongues. The proof followed shortly

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<sup>84</sup> Dieter, *Holiness Movement*, 4082.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Hempelman, *Licht und Schatten*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 7028-7029.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

after, when Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's students, asked him to lay his hands upon her, so she could receive the Holy Ghost. And it happened just as they had imagined, she showed signs of glossolalia and spiritual ecstasy. The wonder of the Pentecost had occurred right there in their little group.<sup>89</sup>

Agnes later recounted her experience in her own words: "Bless HIM! I talked several foreign languages for it was manifested when a dilect [sic] was spoken."<sup>90</sup> She claimed to have spoken several foreign languages, one that she identified as Chinese. The claim to speak a foreign language which one was normally not capable of speaking is called xenoglossia, an even more powerful sign of the Spirit than general glossolalia, which could also be the utterance of unintelligible syllables in a presumed "heavenly" language. Other students of Parham and Parham himself also experienced the same signs of the Spirit in the following days.<sup>91</sup> And so, as it was described in a Missionary Manual of the Assemblies of God later, "In the year 1901 the latter rain began to fall in different parts of the country."<sup>92</sup>

At the early revival meetings people could be heard speaking in somehow familiar languages, like German, Italian, Japanese, but also in incomprehensible languages, which they would then call unknown languages. In any case, it was interpreted as the definitive sign that God had blessed them with the Holy Spirit.<sup>93</sup> Experiencing this turned out to be an extremely physical affair and frequently included spasm, falling down, and the feeling of fire, apart from the glossolalia itself.<sup>94</sup>

It was here at the beginning that speaking in tongues was established as one of the major distinguishing characteristics of Pentecostalism. It stands in line with the second baptism in the Spirit and is therefore essentially a necessary experience. However, the important aspect or innovation here was not glossolalia or Spirit baptism as such, since they had existed, and were practiced and believed years

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<sup>89</sup> Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten*, 36.

<sup>90</sup> Quote appears in Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol 1, *The Irony of it All: 1893 – 1919* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 240.

<sup>91</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit. Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 25.

<sup>92</sup> The Missionary Manual by the Assemblies of God is quoted in Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, American Society of Missiology series 45 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 89.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>94</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below. Early Pentecostal and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 38-39.



before Pentecostalism was established. The interesting thing was the connection of those two phenomena: the theory that glossolalia was the initial, the most important evidence that someone had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.<sup>95</sup> Still, healing was also an important sign. For Pentecostals, the “(...) unmistakable signs of the Spirit’s radical transforming power, especially the Pentecostal signs of faith healing and speaking in tongues”<sup>96</sup> are central to their beliefs.

However, the new Christianity was not instantly a hit. It needed a few years and another important person, to make Pentecostalism truly popular. That person was William J. Seymour. He was one of Parham’s students, and later became the central figure of what came to be known as the Azusa Street revival. Parham and Seymour met in 1905 in Houston. Seymour was an African-American Holiness preacher and the son of former slaves; he was uneducated, but very charismatic on stage.<sup>97</sup> He asked Parham to join his Bible school in Houston, but due to the racial segregation of the South, he was not allowed to actually attend the classes, only to listen in from the outside. That alone was enough for him to become a supporter of Parham’s view of the New Testament and the Second baptism.<sup>98</sup>

He was invited to preach and speak in Los Angeles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by a woman he met while studying at Parham’s Bible school. Due to some of her friends and family members being excommunicated from Los Angeles-based churches because of their belief in sanctification, they decided to organize their own small Holiness group. Miss Terry, one of the women Seymour met in Houston, invited him to come to Los Angeles and be their pastor.<sup>99</sup>

At first Seymour preached in the living room of a man who offered him lodging during his stay in Los Angeles. He held several prayer meetings there a few nights in a row, until in April of 1906 the Holy Spirit seemed to have done its work and several attendees including Seymour himself fell down on the floor in religious ecstasy and showed signs of glossolalia. The news of the wondrous incidents spread fast and more and more people wanted to take part in the meetings, which led

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<sup>95</sup> Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten*, 52.

<sup>96</sup> Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 43.

<sup>97</sup> Marty, *The Irony of it All*, 244.

<sup>98</sup> Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 62.

<sup>99</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition. Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 94-95.

Seymour to look for another, bigger location. He finally found an old Methodist Church on Azusa Street.<sup>100</sup>

Seymour's get-togethers became increasingly popular and are now widely considered to mark the beginning of the worldwide Pentecostal revival. Ecstasy was a large part of the often many-hours-long meetings. Some signs that could be observed in the audience were shaking, falling down, crying and shouting, but also calming down and feeling the Holy Spirit flowing through one's body. Miraculous healings and prophetic visions also occurred, but the ultimate climax of these meetings was speaking in tongues.<sup>101</sup>

The centrality and the experience of the Holy Spirit were a sensation within the religious landscape of the United States. Suddenly, everyone talked about the gifts of the Spirit, namely the gift of healing and the speaking in tongues, which were the most important signs of being blessed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>102</sup> The things that happened at the Azusa Street meetings were heavily publicized and picked up by the media, a fact that helped the movement to spread quickly all over the country and drew more and more people to Los Angeles. From there many of them took the news like missionaries all over the country and countless new groups and churches were founded.<sup>103</sup> "Pentecostals understood themselves to be the strategically placed last renewal movement before the coming of Christ, an assumption of self-importance shared by previous movements."<sup>104</sup> The revival itself lost force after the first few years, but the seed it had sown would grow in the religious landscape until the present day.

The emerging Pentecostalism also drew a great deal of criticism. Especially the bodily manifestations of faith sparked heavy criticism from mainline churches,<sup>105</sup> because "Of all versions of the American Religion, Pentecostalism is experientially the most daring, in trespassing upon so many taboos."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 96.

<sup>101</sup> Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten*, 36-37.

<sup>102</sup> Mark Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World. The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 2002), 151.

<sup>103</sup> Robert M. Anderson, *Visions of the Disinherited. The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 72-73.

<sup>104</sup> McGee, *Miracles*, 117.

<sup>105</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism. A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 37.

<sup>106</sup> Bloom, *American Religion*, 179.

Another important novelty of the new movement was that it seemingly managed to break down racial boundaries in religion. Seymour himself was an African-American preacher and drew his audience from equally Caucasian as well as African-American communities. An important reason for the including manner of the early Pentecostal churches certainly was that the movement was more egalitarian than most of its predecessors. It made the gifts of the Spirit, the baptism, and the speaking in tongues available to everyone, no matter what race or social status.<sup>107</sup> The lack of a formal theology gave the new movement a special democratic atmosphere. It was understandable and easy to follow; all one needed to be part of it was a Bible and faith and nothing else.<sup>108</sup> This equal opportunity approach will reoccur when we look at some other influences in the development of the prosperity gospel, for example the American Dream.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, this focus on the Bible and faith alone, that democratic approach towards religion, is something that is still present in prosperity gospel churches and also in many other modern protestant American churches.

Unfortunately, the racial element of this unity and equality could not be sustained very long in early Pentecostalism. After a few years, when churches began to be established, the racial lines once again appeared. “Blacks did come from the streets and slums to integrate the pulpits and pews, but as Pentecostalism turned respectable it also became increasingly segregated.”<sup>110</sup>

As we have mentioned briefly before, healing was another essential characteristic that was revived in the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals maintained that healing through divine power is still possible and a reality in the here and now, not only restricted to the stories in the Bible. The Apostolic Faith newspaper, a Pentecostal publication associated with Seymour’s congregation, reported several of those cases in 1906. People who wore glasses could suddenly see clearly again, the deaf could hear again. One man who suffered from asthma for over 20 years was suddenly healed, so were people with lung and heart problems.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Bloom, *American Religion*, 175 and Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Nathan O’Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 215.

<sup>109</sup> See chapter 3.5. on the American Dream in this thesis.

<sup>110</sup> Marty, *The Irony of it All*, 245.

<sup>111</sup> “Pentecost Has Come,” in *The Apostolic Faith*, no. 1 (1906), accessed August 8, 2017, [http://pentecostalarchives.org/digitalPublications/USA/Independent/Apostolic%20Faith%20\(Azusa%20Street\)/Unregistered/1906/FPHC/1906\\_09.pdf](http://pentecostalarchives.org/digitalPublications/USA/Independent/Apostolic%20Faith%20(Azusa%20Street)/Unregistered/1906/FPHC/1906_09.pdf).

It is also interesting to note that sickness was often associated with being possessed by evil forces in the early years of Pentecostalism. Unbelief and sin were commonly believed to be the reasons for illness.<sup>112</sup> When taking a closer look at the prosperity gospel, we will see that this interpretation is used in that context as well. For now, we will take a closer look at healing in the context of early Pentecostalism.

### **3.2.5. Healing in early Pentecostalism – Sister Aimee McPherson**

In the 1920s, the doctrine of divine healing became particularly popular. Some of the most prominent faith healers and preachers who focused on healing during this period were Aimee Semple McPherson, Charles Price and F.F. Bosworth.<sup>113</sup> As an example of the importance of healing during this period of American Christianity, we will take a short look at Aimee Semple McPherson, or Sister Aimee as she was also called, and her Faith Healing Ministry.

Not surprisingly, Aimee’s ministry of healing began with her very own healing story. She tripped down a flight of stairs while in Chicago with William Durham, who was one of the many receivers of the gifts of the Holy Spirit during the Azusa revival.<sup>114</sup> When she went to his house with a broken ankle, his followers started to pray for her. And suddenly she “(...) felt as if a shock of electricity has struck my foot.”<sup>115</sup> This incident marked the beginning of her healing ministry, which she very successfully took all over the country in the following years. She held meetings with thousands of people in attendance and prayed for hours over sick people for their healing.<sup>116</sup>

However, Sister Aimee did not claim any miraculous or healing power for herself. In her eyes, it was the power of God and the Holy Spirit, who did all the work. “I do nothing. If the eyes of the people are set on ME, nothing will happen. I pray and believe with others who pray and believe, and power of Christ works the cure.”<sup>117</sup>

Sister Aimee was also a true media star. She was the very first woman to hold a

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<sup>112</sup> Anderson, *Visions*, 95.

<sup>113</sup> McGee, *Miracles*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 170-171.

radio license and also the very first woman who preached via radio.<sup>118</sup> Although her healing meetings were very popular and also covered heavily by the press, the meetings were not the only thing that her followers loved about her. She was also able to present Christianity in simple language and simple pictures. She painted Jesus as a real person and made it easy for people to believe.<sup>119</sup> She called Jesus “The Great Physician,” which made his connection to healing even more apparent.<sup>120</sup>

Aimee Semple McPherson’s beliefs were very much Pentecostal, she was even a member of the Assemblies of God,<sup>121</sup> a Pentecostal denomination, for some time at the beginning of her career and had herself experienced the gift of glossolalia. Still, her belief was that it was more important to reform the historical denominations from the inside out than to found new ones.<sup>122</sup> This was a belief that later turned into practice with the charismatic revival, as we will see in the next chapter.

It is also interesting to note some of the specific practices that were used during this time. In an essay, Marie Griffith analyzed women’s testimonies in periodicals and letters connected with Pentecostalism, especially in the 1930s. She recounts the practice of anointed handkerchiefs that were used in order to achieve divine healing. For example, she tells the story of Blanche Guthrie who received one of those tokens from a Church of God minister and used it to heal her tuberculosis.<sup>123</sup> She also recounts narratives of women sending in ordinary handkerchiefs in order to have them anointed by Pentecostal preachers. Or even being healed before they got their clothes back, because the force going through those handkerchiefs was so strong, they did not even need to be physically with their owner.<sup>124</sup> The handkerchief or other anointed cloths are still a popular token in the prosperity gospel today.<sup>125</sup>

Sister Aimee’s relationship to traditional medicine is also worth noting. In one account McPherson describes just how unreliable certain medical treatments were.

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<sup>118</sup> Porterfield, *Healing in the History*, 171.

<sup>119</sup> Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>121</sup> See the end of this chapter for a few details on the Assemblies of God.

<sup>122</sup> Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 40-41.

<sup>123</sup> Marie R. Griffith, “Female Suffering and Religious Devotion in American Pentecostalism,” in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 197.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>125</sup> Paula White Ministries sell anointed cloths, for example. See chapter 5.3.2.2. of this thesis.

She uses the example of how pneumonia treatments changed over the course of time, from keeping the patient in a warm room to opening all the windows for fresh air, and uses it to illustrate her skepticism. If old treatments did not work, who can judge if the medical treatment used at that particular time would be any good in hindsight? She closes her account by saying: “But... He is as eternal as the mountains”<sup>126</sup>—“He” of course refers to Jesus, the Great Physician.

Apart from Sister Aimee’s success, Pentecostalism during this time also went through some important developments. In 1914 the first important Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God, was founded.<sup>127</sup> The Church of God in Christ, which was founded in 1895 by Elder C.H. Mason and his colleague C.P. Jones and originally focused on the doctrine of Christian Perfection, also adopted Pentecostalism. It went on to become the biggest African-American Pentecostal denomination in the United States.<sup>128</sup> Together with the Assemblies of God they make up the two biggest Pentecostal denominations in the United States today. The growth that occurred was astonishing: at the convention of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America in 1949 there were already eight denominations with a total of about one million members, twenty years later there were 1.5 million official members.<sup>129</sup>

However, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would not be the only time that the United States experienced a dramatic Pentecostal revival. A second wave was just about to start.

### 3.2.6. The charismatic revival

After World War II there was a second wave of Pentecostal awakening, especially in non-European and non-American countries, but also in the United States. Whereas classical Pentecostalism was anti-materialistic and anti-capitalistic and very much itself a kind of counterculture, that changed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted in James W. Opp, “Healing Hands, Healthy Bodies: Protestant Woman and Faith Healing in Canada and the United States, 1880-1930,” in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 247.

<sup>127</sup> Noll, *Old Religion*, 151.

<sup>128</sup> Marty, *The irony of it All*, 246.

<sup>129</sup> Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 821.

<sup>130</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 105.

This was at least in part thanks to the rise of charismatic Christianity, which

...may be understood both as a manifestation of central elements of experience, piety, and, to some extent, of the theology of Pentecostalism in the Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic churches, and simultaneously as an independent current of (neo-) Pentecostal practice and theology taking place outside these churches, as in the Pentecostal churches.<sup>131</sup>

The movement is centered on charismatic experience, but it usually appeared within already established churches, blending the Pentecostal spirituality and practices into their established system, while staying closely and thoroughly connected to the “mother church.”<sup>132</sup> Therefore, the charismatic movement can be called a movement within a movement. It did not look to establish completely new churches or denominations. Its main concern was to renew and revive faith: “All share the common hope for a renewal of the church and Christianity and for a new evangelical-missionary activity through the agency and the new ‘outpouring’ of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>133</sup>

The charismatic movement shares the basic theological assumptions of its Pentecostal roots, like baptism in the spirit and spiritual gifts. However, it rejects the more extreme cultural excesses and doctrines—the more fundamentalist notions—at least partly in a quest to be more respected and respectable in mainstream society. It also actively sets itself apart from any anti-intellectual sentiments. It puts an emphasis on education of the human as a whole, not only spiritually, but also in mind and body. This is also connected to a strong involvement of clergy in the charismatic movement. Many of the converted are trained ministers and priests. Many of the lay people are middle or upper class.<sup>134</sup> “Glossolalia was for the first time in America being practiced by sophisticated, middle-class church members.”<sup>135</sup> The acceptance of the middle class helped charismatic groups transitioning into the mainstream culture. This was a move that was also important for the development of the modern prosperity gospel.

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<sup>131</sup> Hans Gasper, “Charismatic Movement,” in *Religion Past & Present. Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz and others, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 496.

<sup>132</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> Gasper, *Charismatic Movement*, 496.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 149-159.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

The charismatic movement tried to refute the prejudices against Pentecostalism with promoting a “quiet spirit” which is practiced within formal worship. Members believe in spiritual gifts, but exercise them in a modest way. For example, falling back through the power of the Spirit during service is acceptable, but the physicality should not get out of hand.<sup>136</sup> There was an emphasis on “personal conversion, physical healing, speaking in tongues, participation in small group fellowship, and freshly written songs – but always as a range of open possibilities rather than formal requirements.”<sup>137</sup>

In its quest for acceptance in mainstream culture, the movement also counts on its leaders and their modest appearance in public. An article that was published after charismatic leader David Bennet visited Britain in 1965 gives an impression of that: “What kind of man is Bennet? A Bible puncher? A fire eater? No, he is quiet, sincere, with a great sense of humor and a very balanced view of life. And he is a High Churchman.”<sup>138</sup> It also suggests, that overtly shown enthusiasm and bodily excitement was one of the main criticisms that Pentecostalism needed to consider.

What was especially remarkable was that the movement was not restricted to Protestant churches. Charismatic renewal was also accepted so well among Catholic clergy and believers that the Catholic Church officially acknowledged its significance as a means to renew faith and to actualize the baptism in the Spirit, although it rejected doctrines like the importance of glossolalia as a sign of this baptism.<sup>139</sup>

One example of how the charismatic movement influenced the development of the prosperity gospel was the founding of the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI).<sup>140</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>136</sup> Quebedeaux, *New Charismatics*, 151.

<sup>137</sup> Noll, *Old Religion*, 181.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Quebedeaux, *New Charismatics*, 62.

<sup>139</sup> Anderson, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 7030.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Hochgeschwender, *Amerikanische Religion. Evangelikalismus, Pfingstertum und Fundamentalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag, 2007), 240.



### 3.2.7. Oral Roberts and the healing revival

#### 3.2.7.1. The healing revival – An overview

The period after World War II saw a major healing revival in the United States. This healing revival helped not only bring forth the charismatic revival we have just examined, but it also laid the foundation for the uprising of the health and wealth gospel in later decades. The religious revival of the 1950s was “formless and unstructured, manifesting itself in many different ways,”<sup>141</sup> and was at least in part a direct consequence of the trauma of World War II.

Pentecostalism always believed in the importance of divine healing, although in its beginnings other things were more in focus, like glossolalia. That changed during the healing revival, when suddenly healing became front and center.<sup>142</sup> There was a new generation of Pentecostal preachers who were “calling for a return to the movement’s expectant supernatural atmosphere.”<sup>143</sup> Some of those men were William Branham, T.L. Osborn, Jack Coe, A. A. Allen and most notably for the development of the prosperity gospel, Oral Roberts.<sup>144</sup>

William Marrion Branham was one of the major figures who is associated with the beginning of the healing revival in the 1940s. He claimed to have a healing gift in his hands—which showed itself in the form of vibrations—as well as a knowledge gift, both of which were given to him by an angel.<sup>145</sup>

Branham toured the United States and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s and made some highly publicized healings, for example one of a former United States congressman whose ability to walk he allegedly restored. In the healing scene he was a legend, it was even said he could raise the dead. Additionally, he sent anointed ribbons around the world as early as 1949.<sup>146</sup>

There were numerous other preachers that either started at the same time as Branham or were inspired by his work. The healing revival also did not only occur in the United States, it drew even larger audiences overseas, with preachers like

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<sup>141</sup> Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America. An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*, 4th ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 351.

<sup>142</sup> David Edwin Jr. Harrell, *All Things are Possible. The Healing & Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 84-85.

<sup>143</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 42.

<sup>144</sup> Opp, *Healing Hands*, 243.

<sup>145</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-36.

Tommy Hicks or Clifton Erickson. This development led to an immense international church growth.<sup>147</sup>

Although most of the preachers claimed to have healing powers themselves, no matter how great they were, healing never worked without the spiritual contribution of the individual who sought to be healed. Without the appropriate amount of true faith all the healing gifts in the world were lost. Only true faith can heal.<sup>148</sup>

It is also important to note that healing in Pentecostalism was generally associated with the atonement, which means through Jesus' death true believers were blessed with the gift of healing. Many of the preachers mentioned before wrote books and texts on that matter. A. A. Allen for example wrote in his book *How to Renew Your Youth Without Medicines*: "And it is my firm belief that God wants everyone of us to prosper and be in health UNTIL WE FULFILL THE NUMBER OF DAYS."<sup>149</sup>

Whereas many of the healings that were performed were rather ordinary, like healing headaches or curing alcoholism, in the first few years of the revival especially miraculous healings were a big part of the movement. Demonic possession for example was often part of the meetings and even resurrections were heard of. One story was especially curious, in which William Branham was said to have retrieved a fish back from the dead. It was also due to those very extreme miracles that some division within the movement began to form.<sup>150</sup> The more extreme Pentecostal healers believed, for example, that it was a sin to ask a doctor for help when sick. More moderate ones thought that medicine could be some kind of meaningful addition to faith healing. One of them was Oral Roberts.<sup>151</sup>

He was the most important figure of the healing revivals for the development of the modern prosperity gospel. He pioneered ideas such as seed-faith, a theory about donating money in order to receive financial blessings. However, it was not only him who preached about prosperity. "From the beginning the evangelists taught that prosperity was a blessing that belonged to God's people."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> McGee, *Miracles*, 194-195.

<sup>148</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 85.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

And in the 1960s, the story of prosperity and that it was part of the blessing of being a true believer had become a major theme of the revival, even surpassing healing in its importance.<sup>153</sup>

### 3.2.7.2. Oral Roberts – The “Patriarch of the Prosperity Gospel”

When Oral Roberts died in 2009, the New York Times described his legacy in an obituary as follows: “He was the patriarch of the ‘prosperity gospel,’ a theology that promotes the idea that Christians who pray and donate with sufficient fervency will be rewarded with health, wealth and happiness. Mr. Roberts trained and mentored several generations of younger prosperity gospel preachers who now have television and multimedia empires of their own.”<sup>154</sup>

Whereas scholars normally name other pastors like Kenneth Hagin as the founding figures of the modern-day prosperity gospel, most of them agree that Oral Roberts and his faith healing ministry had tremendous effect on the development of the movement. As described in his obituary, one of his main accomplishments was that his “will to succeed, as well as his fame, helped to elevate Pentecostal theology and practice, including the belief in faith healing, divine miracles and speaking in tongues to the religious mainstream.”<sup>155</sup>

Like so many other evangelical preachers, Oral Roberts himself had an impressive story of finding his faith. Not surprisingly, his involved a story of healing. He claimed that he was healed of tuberculosis as a teenage boy by a healing evangelist, George Moncey. Not only did the evangelist lay his hands on Oral and take the disease from him, Roberts also recalls in his autobiography that God Himself talked to him. He remembers God saying to him: “Son, I am going to heal you, and you are to take my healing power to your generation. You are to build me a university and build it on my authority and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>156</sup>

He did not fulfill God’s prophecy right away. First, he started out as an ordinary itinerant minister when he was still in his teens, primarily speaking in the context of Pentecostal and Holiness churches. He began practicing healing much later in

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<sup>153</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 105.

<sup>154</sup> Keith Schneider, “Oral Roberts, Fiery Preacher, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 2009, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/16/us/16roberts.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Schneider, “Oral Roberts.”

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

his life in 1947, when he was almost thirty. He did not immediately become successful with this, what helped his popularity was starting to publish his own magazine, called *Healing Waters*, as well as founding his organization.<sup>157</sup> He became “the king of faith healers.”<sup>158</sup>

Although he kept on traveling all over the country, once he was well known he decided to establish his headquarters in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He had to manage a massive amount of correspondence by then already; in 1948, his office had to answer 25,000 letters, send out 90,000 copies of his magazines and 30,000 anointed handkerchiefs.<sup>159</sup> Having this fixed base was also especially important for his next step: the building of his media empire in form of a radio network and a television program.<sup>160</sup>

In 1955, just a year after he started broadcasting on television, he became the number one figure of paid religious broadcasting and held this spot until the mid 1990s, when Jimmy Swaggart, a prosperity preacher, took this position from him.<sup>161</sup> Apart from his television success and major influence on the development of televangelism in the United States, Roberts also changed the way of fundraising for religious endeavors. In his shows, he would for example ask 420 people to donate 100 Dollars each. Along with this request, he would also make a promise: every donor would get back his/her money (and maybe even a multiple of it) from an unexpected source, with divine help. And if that would not happen, Oral Roberts himself would refund their gift. So, financial contribution to the Oral Roberts ministry would eventually also financially benefit the donor.<sup>162</sup> This approach is typical for Roberts and called seed-faith. It simply means that: “only by giving will believers be able to receive.”<sup>163</sup>

In order to reach his fundraising goals, Oral Roberts raised the bar for religious programming. He would hire popular entertainers, for example singers, to perform

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<sup>157</sup> Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers. Religion as Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 352.

<sup>158</sup> Razelle Frankl, *Televangelism. The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 74.

<sup>159</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 43. See chapter 3.2.5. on Aimee Semple McPherson for the practice of anointed handkerchiefs.

<sup>160</sup> Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*, 352-353.

<sup>161</sup> Frankl, *Televangelism*, 74.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-76.

<sup>163</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 236.

in his shows and he would buy the best time slots on the networks he used. He also discovered that special projects would raise more money than just the goal to pay the monthly bills of his ministry.<sup>164</sup>

It was also important that Roberts did not only focus on the material or business side of his projects. He also emphasized the miraculous and spiritual side of it as well. When collecting donations for building his hospital in Tulsa, for example, he claimed to have had a vision of a 900 feet tall Jesus. And that God told him that the research at his hospital would eventually be able to cure cancer.<sup>165</sup>

This approach towards medicine was also very unique about Oral Roberts. Strictly Pentecostal belief in healing was focused on the divine intervention and generally skeptical toward medicine.

Pentecostals practiced healing with a dogmatic conviction that would survive into the twenty-first century in some quarters: the provision for healing in the atonement – always available to those with sufficient faith, with resort to medicine and doctors an implicit sign of unbelief.<sup>166</sup>

This extreme view towards medicine changed over the following decades and was largely interpreted as a gift from God to humanity. Oral Roberts was very important in this development, since he promoted the use of medicine in connection with religion and faith. As we have learned, he even opened a hospital in Tulsa, showing that these two did not need to be on opposite scales of the spectrum, but could very well work together.<sup>167</sup>

From time to time his unique style of collecting money also went to curious lengths. When his hospital came into financial trouble, he made a very special call for donation in January 1987. He asked the viewers to give several million dollars or he would die. He said: “I’m asking you to help extend my life, (...). We’re at the point where God could call Oral Roberts home in March.”<sup>168</sup> It was practices like this that of course that opened him up to criticism, also from fellow religious leaders. Anyhow, he later announced that his goal had been met—even exceeded

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<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey K. Hadden, *Televangelism. Power and Politics on God’s Frontier* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1988), 121-122.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>166</sup> McGee, *Miracles*, 197.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Schneider, “Oral Roberts.”

by millions—and that his life had been spared by God. Still, his hospital had to close down a few years later.<sup>169</sup>

Apart from his general significance in influencing a whole generation of TV preachers, he also spread important prosperity gospel messages into the American mainstream. He preached that God wants the good things for people, like health, wealth and general well-being, whereas Satan wants the bad things for people, like sickness, poverty and depression.<sup>170</sup>

One of his most decisive ideas in contributing to the development of the prosperity gospel is the theory that donating money would actually produce prosperity for the donor. “The key to prosperity, according to Roberts, was for a Christian to release his faith by planting a seed. In return, God would meet his need.”<sup>171</sup> He told his financial supporters that if they would donate money, they would be able to get it back up to seven times.<sup>172</sup> “You Sow it then God will grow it,”<sup>173</sup> was one of his claims. He also wrote a book specifically about this so-called seed-faith, which had already sold a million copies in 1971.<sup>174</sup>

Another example of Roberts’ contributions in putting prosperity messages into the American mainstream was his support of the founding of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI) by Demos Shakarian. This non-denominational group was made up of businessmen who were also charismatic Christians. It was explicitly planned to establish a stronger connection between faith healers and lay people. This idea gave the movement more credibility and helped set forth the idea about prosperity among many successful middle class people. “Many converts to the charismatic movement were first brought into contact with Pentecostalism through FGBMFI, which served as a bridge from the Deliverance revival to the charismatic revival.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Schneider, “Oral Roberts.”

<sup>170</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Enthusiastisches Christentum. Die Pfingstbewegung in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1969), 410.

<sup>171</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 158.

<sup>172</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 49, 158.

<sup>173</sup> Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Anderson, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 7030.

The success of the organization was imminent. In the 1960s it was reported to have 100,000 members, and a decade later there were already 300,000.<sup>176</sup> It turned out to be “a place that reconciled old-time religion with mounting expectations for economic success.”<sup>177</sup>

It wasn't only the middle class that would be acceptant of the idea of influencing one's own financial situation with the right faith. “Among the urban poor, quick riches proved at least equally as powerful an allure as good health.”<sup>178</sup> They would contribute a great deal to the spreading of the prosperity gospel idea later.

### **3.3. New Thought and the power of the mind**

#### **3.3.1. Introduction**

We have looked at the inner-Pentecostal perspective so far, now we will take a step back, chronologically speaking. Around 20 years before Pentecostalism made such a tremendous impact on the American religious scene, another neo-religious movement came into being: New Thought. It added another perspective to healing in a broader sense, especially concerning the power of one's own mind in it. This had crucial influence on the formation of the modern prosperity gospel.

#### **3.3.2. From Phineas Quimby to Mary Baker Eddy**

Even before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an increased interest in issues concerned with mental healing could be observed in the United States. One result was the emergence of New Thought in the 1880s. This was at least partially sparked by Franz Mesmer, a German physician whose theories turned somewhat metaphysical when he developed theories about mental power. In his view, such power was based on a magnetic fluid and helped people to control others.<sup>179</sup>

An important thinker of the movement who was initially influenced by Mesmer was Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. He believed in the power of the mind and that one could access the supernatural through the practice of prayer.<sup>180</sup> Quimby was born in 1802; he went to school, though only for a short time, and later became apprentice to a clockmaker. Neither he nor his parents belonged to a specific denomination or

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<sup>176</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 146-148.

<sup>177</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 52.

<sup>178</sup> Harrell, *All Things are Possible*, 201.

<sup>179</sup> Hudson, *Religion in America*, 268.

<sup>180</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 13.

practiced a specific religious tradition. In the 1830s Phineas witnessed demonstrations by Charles Poyen, a French mesmerist, and Robert H. Collyer, experiences that urged him to educate himself on mental healing and eventually to start practicing mesmerism himself. He soon found a protégé, Lucius Burkmar, who he believed had the gift of clairvoyance and they toured through the neighboring areas to demonstrate their method. Overtime Quimby started to doubt Burkmar's skills, and questioned whether he could really see his patients' diseases at all.<sup>181</sup>

After Quimby tried certain practices such as hypnosis on himself, and seemingly cured himself, he also practiced it on others. He soon discovered something that influenced his later theories, namely that "certain of his patients were responding just as well to cheap and simple remedies as to expensive complicated ones."<sup>182</sup> This is where the decisive moment in Quimby's practice took shape. Maybe it did not matter so much which remedies were used on patients, maybe it mattered much more if patients believed in the positive effect of those remedies. This proved to be the starting point for his future work. He gave up on other practices and focused on mental suggestion; he "cultivated the power of mind or thoughts."<sup>183</sup>

He developed his theory further. He started to believe that there was a link between erroneous thoughts and physical disease. Therefore, if he could trigger changes in someone's mind, this would also have a healing effect on the body.<sup>184</sup> He did not deny that sickness did indeed exist in the world, but he firmly came to believe that an unhealthy body was actually a state of mind, rather than just a physical ailment.<sup>185</sup> From this thought process he developed his healing methods. "Through suggestion and subtle argument, he taught patients to think themselves healthy, certain that their malady would disappear with the inspired conviction of a healthy mind."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> John S. Haller Jr, *The History of New Thought. From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2012), 44-48 and Richard, Weiss, *The American Myth of Success. From Horatio Alger to Norman Vincent Peale*, (New York: Basic Books, 1969. repr., Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 196-197.

<sup>182</sup> Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*, 34.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 44-48.

<sup>185</sup> Weiss, *American Myth of Success*, 197.

<sup>186</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 49.



The influence of this idea was striking, as Kate Bowler puts it: “The New England physician eventually concluded that healing occurred because of mental and spiritual alignment, inspiring a generation of positive thinkers to follow the connection between thought and healing.”<sup>187</sup>

This connection between thought and healing was later called mind-cure by William James. He defined the movement as:

The leaders in this faith have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy minded attitudes as such, in the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind.<sup>188</sup>

Another important development in Quimby’s theory was the connection of his healing method to Christ. Slowly his belief became more spiritually fueled. He believed that he had found the key to the healing miracles of Jesus in the Bible and that his own practices were consistent with those teachings.<sup>189</sup> He believed that “he had discovered Jesus’ method of healing – instead of working miracles, Jesus had developed a highly scientific method of healing (...).”<sup>190</sup> Therefore, although religiously motivated, it was always argued that the methods he used were actually also science-based.

Quimby further refined his technique when he moved to Portland, Maine in 1859, where he met the likes of Mary Baker Patterson (later Mary Baker Eddy) and Warren Felt Evans, a Swedenborgian clergy man, both of whom went on to further develop his initial ideas. He proceeded to call his findings spiritual healing, Christian Truth or Christian Science.<sup>191</sup>

Mary Baker Eddy was likely one of Quimby’s most important encounters. She met Quimby in 1865 and experienced his teachings first hand: he healed her, which led her to be an enthusiastic believer in his method. When Quimby died in 1866 she began to study his ideas and wrote her own book on the subject matter.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 13.

<sup>188</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature. Being the Clifford lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburg in 1901-1902* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 94-95.

<sup>189</sup> Roy M. Anker, *Self-Help and Popular Religion in Modern American Culture. An Interpretive Guide* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 50 and Haller, *History of New Thought*, 53.

<sup>190</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 55.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>192</sup> Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*, 38.

Although Mary Baker Eddy was herself healed by Quimby on two occasions, she later claimed that she actually experienced her very own revelation of the divine law during that time. A discovery that “surpassed in importance Newton’s discovery of the law of gravitation when he saw the apple fall.”<sup>193</sup> She also argued that Quimby used most of her ideas in the development of his methods.<sup>194</sup> And furthermore: “She claimed that his methods were stolen first from Mesmer and then from her own original ideas.”<sup>195</sup> John S. Haller Jr. suggests in his account of the history of New Thought that Eddy’s motivation to claim such things might have stemmed from her own desire to be recognized as the founder of Christian Science, and not Quimby.<sup>196</sup>

However, Mary Baker Eddy’s influence on the movement is undisputed. And the mind-cure movement gained intense momentum in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, also due to her influence.<sup>197</sup>

(...) Mrs. Eddy was soon embarked upon an independent healing career based upon the conviction that the Eternal Mind is the source of all being, that matter is nonexistent, that disease is caused by erroneous thought (...), and that power is released through Christian Science to overcome all the illusions that have troubled humanity.<sup>198</sup>

Eddy, like Quimby, interpreted sickness as something that should be conquered in the patient’s mind. She said that, “once patients understood that their sickness was but a ‘dream’ from which they needed to be awakened (...),”<sup>199</sup> they could be healed. “For Christian Scientist, illness is an illusion, a form of evil derived from erroneous thinking. Since God is good, God can in no way authorize or condone illness for any reason.”<sup>200</sup> Prayer, therefore, was a means of the mind to act out control over illness. But she emphasized that her method of healing was different than anything before her.

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<sup>193</sup> Hudson, *Religion in America*, 269.

<sup>194</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 64.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Weiss, *American Myth of Success*, 197.

<sup>198</sup> Hudson, *Religion in America*, 269.

<sup>199</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 87.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

There was no use of suggestion or psychotherapy or similar methods: “All cure came from the power of the divine Mind in human consciousness and was best achieved by emulating the example of Jesus, the Christ.”<sup>201</sup>

That strong emphasis on the divine element of her teaching is also what distinguishes Eddy from her predecessor. For example, she claimed that her most popular book, *Science and Health* was not merely written by her, she insisted it was produced under divine inspiration, drawing a parallel to the revelation of the Bible.<sup>202</sup>

She also taught that the divine element is essential in every individual human being. Eddy believed that there is a certain unity of God and humanity, and that the “separation of the divine was only a matter of degree.”<sup>203</sup> This is also valid for the power of creation. She thought that “people shared in God’s power to create by means of thought.”<sup>204</sup> This partaking in God’s creative power through words (or thought) will also be discussed when we take a closer look at the prosperity gospel’s take on the subject.

The material world as such was not totally denied in those movements, but to them it was clear that the material world was contingent upon the mind. The spiritual level of the world was the absolute truth, the absolute reality. Therefore, the conclusion had to be: sickness and especially its cure lie within the power of the human mind. The causality was pretty simple: positive thoughts create positive circumstances and negative thoughts create negative circumstances.<sup>205</sup> A basic thought that will reappear in Norman Vincent Peale’s work as well as in the prosperity gospel many times.

There were also certain traits in the Christian Science community that laid an emphasis on wealth issues. Although it certainly was not a focus of the movement, some businesspeople who were part of the community discovered Christian Science also as a means to make good business decisions.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 87.

<sup>202</sup> Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*, 73.

<sup>203</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 14.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Stephen Gottschalk, *The Emergence of Christian Science in American Religious Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 252-254.

With Baker Eddy, what is especially important is that she actually founded an organized church out of her theory of psychotherapeutic healing.<sup>207</sup> “The chief clue to her success was her capacity for transforming run-of-the-mill students, the great majority of them women, into dedicated followers who would go out across the nation as practitioners of Christian Science, organizing societies where they could.”<sup>208</sup> The Church of Christ, Scientist had almost 100,000 members at the time of Mary Baker Eddy’s death in 1910.<sup>209</sup>

### 3.3.3. From New Thought to self-help culture

Over the years, prosperity became a steadily increasing theme in New Thought literature. It often occurred in connection with the thought that “the greatest discovery of the human race was the realization that humans possessed all the powers that formerly had been ascribed to God. This meant that each had the ability to accomplish any purpose formed in the mind.”<sup>210</sup> Books by Helen Wilmans and Elizabeth Towne in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are early examples of prosperity literature.<sup>211</sup> Another example is Frank Channing Haddock, who published a so-called *The Power Book* series, which started in 1907. He touched on topics like the power of affirmation and suggestion in order to achieve personal or financial gain.<sup>212</sup>

After World War I, there was an ever-increasing outpour of literature that could be more and more considered self-help books and were already sold in the millions with a stronger focus on getting rich.<sup>213</sup> Napoleon Hill’s 1937 book *Think and Grow Rich*, which proclaimed that by knowing one secret, various people like Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller made a fortune. And of course, Hill shared that secret method in his book, which was a mixture of auto-suggestion, discipline, inspiration, persistence, but also transcendental intuition. His book was a major success, made Hill a national celebrity, and had sold more than 20 million copies when the author died in 1970.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 90.

<sup>208</sup> Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 1021.

<sup>209</sup> Hudson, *Religion in America*, 269.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>211</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 222.

<sup>212</sup> Weiss, *American Myth of Success*, 217.

<sup>213</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 233-234.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

After World War II, success literature, that was often heavily influenced by New Thought themes began to pop up all over the country. “After World War II, it would resurface in the mainline American religious imagination as ‘positive thinking,’ equal party psychology, business, self-help, and metaphysics.”<sup>215</sup> This brand of thinking quickly also influenced the American mainstream religious and cultural landscape and tremendously shaped the modern prosperity gospel.<sup>216</sup> One book stood out among hundreds of publications during this time: Norman Vincent Peale’s *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

### **3.4. Self-help culture and *The Power of Positive Thinking***

#### **3.4.1. Introduction**

In the post-war period, the United States experienced an ever-growing economy. This economic situation went together well with the rise of positive thinking. As Kate Bowler notes, this turned out to be a defining moment for the prosperity gospel. Even the Pentecostal Christians, whose focus never was the material world, started to accept preaching about money and finances to their services: “Their new focus on mind-power to win both health and wealth would be the start of the modern prosperity gospel.”<sup>217</sup> One decisive author who mixed Christianity with mind-power and optimism was Norman Vincent Peale.

#### **3.4.2. Norman Vincent Peale**

As already mentioned, Norman Vincent Peale was specifically relevant for the popularization of self-help culture, “[a]s a popularizer of the mentalistic self-help tradition, Peale is without peer, past or present.”<sup>218</sup> He also had a significant influence on the Word of Faith movement. When he died in 1993 *The New York Times* published an obituary that read: “He told Presidents and business executives and millions of other people that a proper state of mind, induced by simple prayer, could produce spiritual and material success on earth, which he demonstrated by

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<sup>215</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 36.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-36.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>218</sup> Weiss, *American Myth of Success*, 224.

becoming a wealthy man.”<sup>219</sup> This description could also easily fit for the Word of Faith Movement as such, and therefore the author is worth being closely examined.

Norman Vincent Peale was born in 1889 in Ohio and originally had a Methodist upbringing. He went on to study theology and was ordained a Methodist pastor in 1922. In 1927, he began working as a pastor at Syracuse University. This was an important moment of his life, since it was there that he came in touch with New Thought ideas for the first time, as historians suggest. Later he moved to New York City, where he began working at a Dutch Reformed church. In this new environment, he started working on his literature on positive thinking, and remained at his ministry at the Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan for over fifty years. In 1935, he began hosting a radio program, which later turned into a television show and set the foundation of his popularity. One of his first efforts in literature was *You Can Win*, which he published in 1938. The book did not sell many copies, but it already showed some of Peale’s major themes.<sup>220</sup> In the preface to this book he writes: “Life has a key, and to find that key is to be assured of success in the business of living.... To win over the world a man must get hold of some power in his inward or spiritual life which will never let him down.”<sup>221</sup>

In 1945 Peale began another endeavor that helped him become publicly known. He founded the magazine *Guideposts*, which still had a circulation of almost four million copies in the early 1980s around the time of Peale’s death. Peale’s official biographer called the magazine “(...) a sort of spiritual newsletter for business men or factory workers with simple, down-to-earth stories of religious faith in action.”<sup>222</sup> In his autobiography Peale himself elaborates on this, calling the premise for this magazine that “if a person thinks positively, is of good character, works hard and practices his or her faith (...) the sky was the limit under the American way of Life.”<sup>223</sup> This style of writing, illustrating his thoughts and the underlying message

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<sup>219</sup> George Vecsey, “Norman Vincent Peale, Preacher of Gospel Optimism, Dies at 95,” *The New York Times*, December 26, 1993, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/26/obituaries/norman-vincent-peale-preacher-of-gospel-optimism-dies-at-95.html>.

<sup>220</sup> Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 1033 and Haller, *History of New Thought*, 240 and Anker, *Self-Help*, 107.

<sup>221</sup> Quoted in Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 1033.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted in Anker, *Self-Help*, 111.

<sup>223</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 112.

with dozens of personal stories, would later also be used in his work *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

After World War II, two of his books finally sky-rocketed him to nationwide fame and became best sellers. *A Guide to Confident Living* was published in 1948, and his most famous work *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952. The latter had sold some 2 million copies during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961).<sup>224</sup> It was also on *The New York Times* best-seller list continuously for over three years, after having been additionally popularized by Peale's appearance on two highly-rated television shows.<sup>225</sup>

The message he promoted with his work was not entirely new. He himself later in his life confessed that large portions of his ideas were borrowed from New Thought philosophy.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, Peale's specific brand of ideas changed the American religious and cultural landscape profoundly:

Indeed, Peale's lasting accomplishment – undertaken with remarkable insight, ingenuity, zeal and fortitude – was to insert the essential core of nineteenth-century New Thought theology not only into the mainstream of American Protestantism but into middle-class American culture as a whole.<sup>227</sup>

By looking at his most popular book in detail, we will examine his most important ideas, many of which also found their way into the modern prosperity gospel.

### **3.4.3. The Power of Positive Thinking**

Norman Vincent Peale's bestseller is everything but a secular guidance book for better living. It is religious—or to be more precise, Christian—from the first page to the last. His theories also stand in a tradition of New Thought, Christian Science and other modern variations of Christianity. His goal is to make Christianity practically applicable for everyone's life and to give his readers a guide on how to exactly achieve that. As he puts it: "This book teaches you applied Christianity; a simple yet scientific system of practical techniques of successful living that

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<sup>224</sup> Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 1033.

<sup>225</sup> Anker, *Self-Help*, 113.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

works.”<sup>228</sup> Still, the book is not an entirely concise narrative but rather structured as stand-alone chapters that address a variety of human, personal problems.

The book talks about how people have implemented the techniques Peale suggests and how their life has changed for the better (or for the worse, if not done right):

At the start of each chapter, Peale discusses a common human difficulty – insecurity, professional failure, heartache, despair, and so on – offers several dictums that promise help, and then concludes with six to eight compact stories that illustrate the benefits of his dictums in the lives of the troubled.<sup>229</sup>

There are dozens of men, women and children, all nameless, who he mentions in his anecdotes. This specific style certainly contributed to the immense success of the book. It achieves two things in particular: Peale’s theories and philosophy are easily accessible through those down-to-earth, real-life stories. Additionally, the countless examples he uses in his book give a certain credibility to this theory. If it had worked for numerous people as described in his book, it surely should also work for the people who are reading his book. This also underlines the supposed scientific approach of Peale’s principles.<sup>230</sup> Or, as he puts it himself: “I am certain that faith can and does work what we call ‘miracles’ but which are, in truth, the operation of spiritually scientific laws.”<sup>231</sup>

He starts off with ten simple principles—a program as he calls it—that will help people to live a better and more self-confident life. He clearly states that his method has already been applied by thousands of people, with remarkably positive results.<sup>232</sup> Some of the relevant basics are that it is helpful to “formulate and stamp on your mind a mental picture of yourself as succeeding.”<sup>233</sup> This visualization—of success, of money, of health, whether it has already been achieved or not—as a central method can later be found in the prosperity gospel as well.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Peale, Norman Vincent, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Pocket Books, 2013, first pub. 1952 by Prentice Hall), xvi. Citations are to the Pocket Books edition.

<sup>229</sup> Anker, *Self-Help*, 115.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 200.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> See chapter 5.2. on positive confession.



Peale suggests certain techniques for the believer to use. Those techniques, according to him, have their foundation in the Bible. People just need to be aware of them and use them correctly in order to achieve their goals. The way of positive thinking is a better way of being faithful, a more effective use of faith than just normal believing. He describes his formula as “picturize, prayerize, and actualize.”<sup>235</sup> He maintains, “The man who assumes success tends already to have success. People who assume failure tend to have failure. When either failure or success is picturized it strongly tends to actualize in terms equivalent to the mental image pictured.”<sup>236</sup> This is a very important formula that we must keep in mind when later looking at the prosperity gospel and its techniques as well.<sup>237</sup>

What is important to underline is the agency that people have in Peale’s theory. Everyone is responsible for one’s own happiness or unhappiness. One can take matters in his/her own hands and make things better—if he/she is a true believer of course. It is within everyone’s own responsibility, but also agency and reach to live a good, a better life. He puts it quite well, when he writes:

Suffice to say that we manufacture our own unhappiness by thinking unhappy thoughts, by attitudes which we habitually take, such as the negative feeling that everything is going to turn out badly, or that other people are getting what they do not deserve and we are failing to get what we do deserve.<sup>238</sup>

In order to make a more convincing argument that the basics of his principles are all being in the Bible already, he frequently adds some verses. He uses Mark 9:23 (“If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth.”), Matthew 17:20 (“If ye have faith (...) nothing shall be impossible unto you.”) and Matthew 9:29 (“According to your faith be it unto you.”).<sup>239</sup> Some of those specific Bible quotes are also prominently used in connection with prosperity gospel.

Still, although he lets his readers in on the secret, this does at the same time not mean, that everyone gets what he wants all the time. Peale adds a certain limit to it. He suggests that if people do not get the things they want, maybe such things would not have been good for them to have those things in the first place. In his view, God

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<sup>235</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 64.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>237</sup> See chapter 5.2. on positive confession, for example.

<sup>238</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 85.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

ultimately guides the wishes of a true believer to those things that are good for him and are in accordance with God's will.<sup>240</sup>

Another one of his principles echoes this position: "Whenever a negative thought concerning your personal powers comes to mind," he writes, "deliberately voice a positive thought to cancel it out."<sup>241</sup> We see that it is not only important to always focus on the result you want to achieve, but to also get rid of all negative thoughts you might have. As we will later see, in many prosperity gospel churches, the reason for failure is often attributed to one of those two things went wrong: either you did not picture the result positive enough or you let negative thoughts influence yourself. Or, as he neatly puts it: "So expect the best at all times. Never think of the worst."<sup>242</sup>

He illustrates those principles with countless examples, some of them rather superficial. Like a vacuum cleaner saleswoman who used Peale's techniques, arriving at every house expecting to make a sale, banishing negative thoughts from her mind and thinking positive things only. And so, God helped her to sell vacuum cleaners.<sup>243</sup> This example shows what we have discussed earlier already: one of Peale's unique selling points is this type of very easy to understand examples and success stories. When looking at books of prosperity preachers, we will find a similar style of writing.

Another one of Peale's key principles reflects the power of the word, which will also later be important in prosperity theology:

Ten times each day practice the following affirmation repeating it out loud if possible. 'I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me' (Philippians 4:13). Repeat those words NOW. That magic statement is the most powerful antidote on earth to inferiority thoughts.<sup>244</sup>

He later calls this technique "suggestive articulation."<sup>245</sup> Peale states that words actually have healing power, at least when uttered audibly. This emphasis on the

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<sup>240</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 121-122.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

power of words, their negative and positive power, is one central theme throughout his book.

Finally, he emphasizes the power of God that works in each believer and that his readers can even access it. “Remind yourself that God is with you and nothing can defeat you. Believe that you *now* RECEIVE power from him.”<sup>246</sup> In a later chapter Peale starts to call God a Higher Power. He suggests: “Draw upon it and experience its helpfulness. Why be defeated when you are free to draw upon that Higher Power?”<sup>247</sup> This apparent access of humans to divine power is something we have already seen in New Thought as well.

The picture he paints of God is summarized by Roy M. Anker as such: “The central notion in *The Power of Positive Thinking* is Peale’s conception of God as primarily a reservoir of recuperative or healing energy that responds to certain techniques of faith.”<sup>248</sup> He has an idea of the connection of God’s power to humans as it is linked to prosperity gospel, namely that “God’s power flows into people, releasing their powers so they might attain success.”<sup>249</sup>

#### **3.4.4. Healing in *The Power of Positive Thinking***

In one chapter of *The Power of Positive Thinking* Peale exclusively deals with the topic of healing. In keeping with the overall fashion of the book, he starts it off with an anecdote that shows that even medical professionals believe in the healing power of religious faith.<sup>250</sup> Although Peale stays clear of making the impression that faith alone can heal a sick body, he says that he believes recovery can happen “in the combination of God and the doctor.”<sup>251</sup>

He takes some time to describe how modern days lead to a decrease of the belief in the healing power of faith and the overemphasizing of science alone. Still, he adds, in recent years (recent being in the 1950s then) luckily there has been a certain rediscovery of the connection of faith and health. He refers to the faith revival after the Second World War here.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 20.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>248</sup> Anker, *Self-Help*, 116.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 197-198.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

Peale gives many examples on how faith has healed true believers, some stories seem to be quite similar to what we can later see in the prosperity gospel practice. For example, the mentioning of a sick man who received the best medicine but was only healed when he gave up negative feelings and thoughts in his mind: “With the aid of medical science and a new mental attitude, he was healed of his affliction.”<sup>253</sup>

This reference to a new mental attitude has remarkable parallels to what we have learned about New Thought. He gives advice that we have encountered already and will encounter again, namely that sick people do not (merely) need medicine “but better thought patterns,”<sup>254</sup> and “that they are not sick in their bodies so much as they are sick in their thoughts and emotions.”<sup>255</sup> The belief that bad thoughts equal a bad effect on the body (or the wallet, for that matter, as we will later see), will later reappear in prosperity gospel.

The chapter on healing concludes with eight tips on how to deal with sickness. Two of them are especially similar to arguments used in the prosperity gospel. One tip is to get rid of bad thoughts, for example panic or fear, because those would send negative energy towards the sick person instead of the positive and healing energy that he really needs. The other tip is that one should visualize oneself or the sick person who needs healing in a perfectly healthy state. Because what “we believe in the subconscious, we usually get,”<sup>256</sup> writes Peale. The practice of imagining oneself being already in the state that one wishes to achieve (healthy or rich, for example), is also a very common “rule” in the prosperity gospel, as we will see later.<sup>257</sup>

#### **3.4.5. Criticism of Norman Vincent Peale**

In 1953 the American magazine Newsweek put Norman Vincent Peale on the cover of its Christmas issue. The title was “An Articulate Leader of Christianity.”<sup>258</sup> This shows how great his influence on American religiosity was during this period. But of course, there was also some criticism of his unique method, especially among

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<sup>253</sup> Peale, *Power of Positive Thinking*, 202.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>257</sup> See chapter 5.2. on positive confession.

<sup>258</sup> Anker, *Self-Help*, 123.

the Protestant mainstream. Some of the arguments used will later also reappear when we will examine the critique of the prosperity gospel.

It was criticized that by giving so much focus to God's power, other attributes that are important like love of transcendence are marginalized. Also, by giving so much power to the right prayer, God Himself actually lost some of His freedom, seemingly having to answer only to rightful prayers for success and healing. Equally, the attention given to succeeding and being happy was seen as too much in line with consumerism.<sup>259</sup>

In 1955 Professor William Lee Miller of Smith College published essays on Peale in which he touched that subject. He wondered "if Peale has not gained his success by selling out his religion to his culture, becoming a prophet of a civil religion in which there is no distance between the words of a preacher and the idols and values of culture."<sup>260</sup> He especially criticized that in Peale's theory, faith merely becomes a means by which people can achieve what they desire. This occurs not in a spiritual way or world, but in the material world, and by that it enforces what popular culture (or the American Dream, as we will examine later) lets people believe what they really want.<sup>261</sup> One of the most famous critics around that time was also theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who called the method "dubious" and one-dimensional, among other things.<sup>262</sup>

Another branch of criticism dealt with the psychological implications and arguments Peale's theory made. Donald Meyer of Harvard criticized his approach for not being "the mastery of skills or tasks, but the mastery of fleeing and avoiding one's own 'negative thoughts.'"<sup>263</sup> Psychiatrist Robert C. Murphy rebuked the selectiveness of human emotions to which Peale subscribed. He saw a problem in his ignoring the evil in the world, as evil and negative emotions are naturally part of the human condition.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Anker, *Self-Help*, 118.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-125.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>263</sup> Lane, Christopher. *Surge of Piety. Norman Vincent Peale and the Remaking of American Religious Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 90.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

## 3.5. The American Dream

### 3.5.1. Introduction

In the conclusion of her work on the prosperity gospel, Kate Bowler notes that the prosperity gospel is “constituted by the deification and ritualization of the American Dream: upward mobility, accumulation, hard work, and moral fiber.”<sup>265</sup> In this section we will examine that indeed not only religious notions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced the development of the prosperity gospel, but that another truly American idea had major impact on the movement: the epic of the American Dream.

The influence of the American Dream on certain religious notions is not restricted to the prosperity gospel of course. Historian Nathan O’Hatch notes on American Christianity in general, that it “(...) has always been most dynamic at the periphery of high culture, where these movements are fed by the passions of ordinary people and express traditional values of localism, direct democracy, ruralism, and individualism.”<sup>266</sup>

Still, certain aspects of the American Dream are especially strikingly woven into the framework of the prosperity gospel. For the purpose of exploring this theme in this regard, a rather wide definition of the term American Dream is used, meaning to include a set of values and traditions that came to be seen as truly American. Topics that will be touched upon are upward social mobility as well as consumerism and individualism, because, as Kate Bowler puts it, prosperity gospel is largely influenced by “an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism and upward mobility.”<sup>267</sup>

### 3.5.2. Origin of the “American Dream”

The origins of the narrative of the American Dream can be traced back to times before the term was even coined. In the *Declaration of Independence* of 1776 some references to it can already be found, some inalienable rights for every human, like

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<sup>265</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 226.

<sup>266</sup> O’Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 212.

<sup>267</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 11.

life and liberty, and everyone's entitlement to pursue their individual form of happiness.<sup>268</sup>

This special quality to the American Dream, the pursuit of happiness and the individual agency one has while pursuing it, already existed before the term itself did. In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the American people that "(...) they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands."<sup>269</sup>

The literature suggested that the term American Dream first appeared in 1914 in a publication by journalist Walter Lippmann. In this book, he "urged readers to find a new Dream for the twentieth century that would end the malaise of government inaction that had allowed American politics to aimlessly drift."<sup>270</sup>

James Truslow Adams, an American writer and historian, made the term American Dream popular in his book *The Epic of America*, published in 1931 and previously known under the working title *The American Dream*, in which he wrote: "The American Dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world."<sup>271</sup> Still, what he described was not only materialistic. It also meant that people were able to live their life how they desired, not restricted by old social borders, like class.<sup>272</sup> This theme also influenced the narrative of upward social mobility, which we will revisit shortly.

In the subsequent years, Adams also published articles in *The New York Times* in which he elaborated on his thesis. There it is further clarified that his vision of the American Dream is not merely restricted to wealth. In 1933 for example, he wrote about the American Dream:

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<sup>268</sup> John Kenneth White and Sandra L. Hanson, "The Making and Persistence of the American Dream," in *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>271</sup> Jim Cullen, *The American Dream. A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>272</sup> White and Hanson, *Making and Persistence*, 3.

The dream is a vision of a better, deeper, richer life for every individual, regardless of the position in society which he or she may occupy by the accident of birth. It has been a dream of a chance to rise in the economic scale, but quite as much, or more than that, of a chance to develop our capacities to the full, unhampered by unjust restrictions of case or custom. With this has gone the hope of bettering the physical conditions of living, of lessening the toils and anxieties of daily life.<sup>273</sup>

The fact that Adams developed his thesis during the times of the Great Depression of the 1930s certainly played into a certain kind of notion in the American Dream. It is the narrative of “an enduring optimism given to people who might be tempted to succumb to the travails of adversity, but who, instead, repeatedly rise from the ashes to continue to build a great nation.”<sup>274</sup>

### **3.5.3. The narrative of the American Dream**

Since its introduction to the American narrative, the epic of the American Dream has become something of a national motto of the United States. It is frequently cited by everyone from the president,<sup>275</sup> to entertainers, teachers, sports players. Still, it is not entirely easy to define it in a simple way. In general, the American Dream today is perceived to mean something like: “everything is possible if you want it badly enough.”<sup>276</sup>

But the things people aspire to under the term American Dream can mean very different things and values: Democracy, freedom, fame, or wealth. As scholar Jim Cullen puts it, “(...) there have been as many American Dreams as there have been Americans.”<sup>277</sup>

However, for the purpose of this thesis we will focus on the aspects that helped to bring forth and shape the prosperity gospel. When examining the origins of the American Dream, Jim Cullen mentions an important aspect that especially connects

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<sup>273</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Samuel, *The American Dream: A Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 13. The original appeared in *The New York Times* on January 1, 1933.

<sup>274</sup> White and Hanson, *Making and Persistence*, 3.

<sup>275</sup> For a short essay on the connection between the American presidency and the American Dream see John Kenneth White, “The Presidency and the Making of the American Dream,” in *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 41-58.

<sup>276</sup> Cullen, *American Dream Short History*, 5.

<sup>277</sup> Jim Cullen, “The American Dream and the Ends of the Republics,” in *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 20.



to the prosperity gospel. He describes the influence of Puritans on the narrative and identifies one important trait, that the Puritans came to America with a mission: they wanted to live their religion freely, serve their God, raise their children in accordance to their beliefs and follow their vision of how to live a right and just life. Therefore, they took control of their own future, or as Cullen puts it “they became masters of their own destiny.”<sup>278</sup> This sense of being able to influence and take control of one’s own future will later reappear in prosperity gospel, but this notion of shaping one’s own destiny became popular even earlier than that. It influenced a whole new American lifestyle of self-help culture and positive thinking, both of which we have already examined.

Another important aspect here is the dream of upward social mobility. Whereas the origins of the American Dream may have been more religiously motivated, it became more and more secular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Work, and especially hard work, became a central part of the concept. With hard work comes commercial success, which turned out to be the most common understanding of the American Dream. Certain narratives emerged, like the story from “rags-to-riches,” the story of success through education, or the story of poor people with amazing talent who also became successful. In any case, it highlighted that anyone can climb up the social ladder if he was willing to do something for it.<sup>279</sup>

One example that is often mentioned in connection with the materialistic side of the American Dream and this upward social mobility is the dream of owning a house. The first ever survey of the American Dream was conducted in 1985 by *CBS News* in cooperation with *The New York Times*. They asked a representative sample of Americans, if they think that people who never own a house would miss out at an important aspect of the American Dream. Seventy-six percent of the people supported that view.<sup>280</sup>

This specific American Dream of owning a house was popular in the suburbs of the nation. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of the suburbs grew. The census of 1990 for example showed that most people in the United States did not live in the cities or in rural areas, but in suburban surroundings.<sup>281</sup> And those

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<sup>278</sup> Cullen, *American Dream Short History*, 18.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>280</sup> White and Hanson, *Making and Persistence*, 9.

<sup>281</sup> Cullen, *American Dream Short History*, 144.

suburban areas were where people bought and owned houses. It did not take long until owning a house got a companion: owning a car. “Like the house, the car became widely celebrated as an emblem of democracy even for those who had not yet acquired one, and for many of the same reasons.”<sup>282</sup>

Especially in the 1960s, a huge boost towards more consumerism had occurred in the United States. “The generation who came of age during the 1960s was the first cohort of young people to have been reared in a fully commercialized consumer society and to have been exposed to television advertising since birth.”<sup>283</sup> The all-consuming consumer culture did not halt in religious life, of course. Many churches adopted measures and methods they learned from the marketplace. Some bizarre approaches like drive through churches or even drive through confessionals popped up, but also a general, more long-lasting change within the religious landscape occurred. Preachers shortened their sermons, religious bookstore popped up, the religious book scene exploded, signing up to take part in religious organizations got easier, and of course churches and preachers took over the media landscape. Although they had been present in radio already for the last few decades, television gave them a whole new scope and a whole new outreach, not only in the US, but also to audiences overseas.<sup>284</sup>

Preachers also aided in exporting certain American values to other countries. Simon Coleman for example conducted an extensive study of the Swedish version of the Word of Faith movement and discovered that it was indeed, at least in part, a circulation of the capitalist ideology dominant in North America.<sup>285</sup>

But there is another important aspect that needs to be added here: the factor of opportunity. This includes opportunity to earn money and also to gain a higher social standing than one was born into. However, opportunity also goes together with some non-material, or even spiritual components of the American Dream, like optimism and happiness.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Cullen, *American Dream Short History*, 149.

<sup>283</sup> Robert, Wuthnow, *After Heaven. Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>285</sup> The study is cited in Stephen Hunt, “Winning Ways: Globalisation and the Impact of the Health and Wealth Gospel,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15:3 (2000): 336.

<sup>286</sup> Michael C. Kimmage, “The Politics of the American Dream, 1980 to 2008,” in *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 27.

The narrative of equal opportunity is a particularly strong one, when examined in contrast to other individual rights, like freedom of religion, which can more easily be taken away by a certain kind of government. The belief in equal opportunity, on the other hand, especially in connection with one's own agency in it, is more like a "state of mind that is virtually impossible to eliminate."<sup>287</sup> Equality of opportunity has a strong message, a message that also reappears in many religious contexts. In the prosperity gospel, it means that no matter where you come from, no matter what you have done in your life so far, if you have the right amount of true faith, you can achieve virtually anything. A true believer can have wealth and health, no matter into which social class he was born or what education he had so far, et cetera.

However, this interpretation also has another side to it. In a world in which wealth is achieved rather than being predetermined by class, what does it mean if you do not achieve your goals or wealth? What does the failure of the American Dream mean? It means, simply, that one just did not work hard enough. Therefore, certain inequalities that exist are somehow immanently justified.<sup>288</sup> This aspect has to be kept in mind when we later examine the justifications within the prosperity gospel with regards to why it does not work for certain people.

Historian Michael Kimmage blends together some aspects of the American Dream into a definition, which connect very neatly to the prosperity gospel. He writes: "The American Dream could be defined as the spiritualization of property and consumption, the investment of joy and dignity in consumption and property ownership."<sup>289</sup> He further elaborates on this claim, naming the middle class as the central virtue that needs to be obtained in the American Dream narrative, and further emphasizes the connection between material and spiritual (or metaphysical, as he calls it) well-being.<sup>290</sup> This is a connection that exists in a very similar way in the prosperity gospel.

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<sup>287</sup> White and Hanson, *Making and Persistence*, 8.

<sup>288</sup> Hanson, Sandra L., "Whose Dream? Gender and the American Dream," in *The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 78.

<sup>289</sup> Kimmage, *Politics of the American Dream*, 27.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

## 4. The makers of the Word of Faith Movement

### 4.1. Introduction

In his 1989 work, Nathan O'Hatch explores the democratization of American Christianity. In the epilogue, he tries to connect some of his findings to the religious situation of the United States at the end of the 1980s. One of his key characteristics for the then current situation of churches was that popular leaders played a major role in the American religious landscape. And more specifically, popular leaders that gained their authority not from an established church, or sometimes not even from a certain form of formal education they received, but solely from the "democratic art of persuasion."<sup>291</sup> Some of the most popular religious leaders of that time, for example Billy Graham, Kathryn Kuhlman, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and Oral Roberts, all seemingly came out of nowhere, but rose to prominence in those so uniquely American religious communities, which were decentralized, grass-roots, and very popular. In order to understand the modern prosperity gospel, it is therefore important to look not only at the influences and content of the movement, but also to look at the most central people who helped shape the movement to be what it is today.

We have learned so far that the modern prosperity gospel has sprung from several religious and cultural origins, especially from ideas dominant from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now we will set the focus on the Word of Faith Movement, the most popular variety of the modern prosperity gospel, mainly connected to Kenneth Erwin Hagin, that became hugely popular from the 1970s onwards.

Kenneth Hagin is regularly called the "father" of the Word of Faith movement. And although he was certainly vital to popularizing the prosperity gospel in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his ideas might not be entirely original. Numerous scholars suggest that his mixing of the aforementioned influences together to form the Word of Faith movement ideas might actually not have been his own.

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<sup>291</sup> O'Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 211.

Many writers argue that Hagin actually plagiarized a great deal of his writings:<sup>292</sup> “The most important figure in the Faith movement is perhaps Kenneth Hagin and there is strong evidence that he plagiarized the writings of E.W. Kenyon whose works, in turn, are derived from the metaphysical cults of the late nineteenth century.”<sup>293</sup>

Scholar Milmon Harrison notes that Hagin not only used ideas and philosophies similar to Kenyon’s, but that it seems some entire passages in Hagin’s work have striking resemblance to Kenyon’s, which might point to plagiarism.<sup>294</sup> In his very critical examination of the Word of Faith movement, *A Different Gospel*, pastor D.R. McConnell gives a sample of side-by-side passages by Hagin and Kenyon which show partly word-for-word similarities. Additionally, he cites Kenyon’s daughter, who is convinced that Hagin copied her father’s work.<sup>295</sup>

Although the aim of this thesis is not to verify or falsify the claim of plagiarism here, we will at least take a short look at Essek William Kenyon, before we introduce Kenneth E. Hagin.

#### **4.2. Essek William Kenyon**

Essek William Kenyon is believed to have originated some of the ideas of the modern prosperity gospel as early as the end of the 19th century. He is sometimes credited with mixing many of the influences and origins of the prosperity gospel that we have discussed so far, and that would later come to define the Word of Faith Movement: “The philosophies Kenyon drew on include: teachings of the Higher Christian Life segment of the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, and New Thought metaphysics (...).”<sup>296</sup>

Kenyon, born in 1867, was a Bible preacher in New England, where he served the Methodist church. His life with Christianity was not exactly a straight-forward, however. At one point, he even strayed from being a preacher, and went to Emerson

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<sup>292</sup> For references to the research and arguments that Hagin plagiarized, or at least borrowed some of his ideas from Kenyon see, for example: Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 5-6, 8 as well as William P. Atkinson, *The ‘Spiritual Death’ of Jesus. A Pentecostal Investigation* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19-20. *The Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* also touches on this subject, see Coleman, *Prosperity Theology*, 454.

<sup>293</sup> Hunt, *Word of Faith Movement*, 624.

<sup>294</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 6.

<sup>295</sup> Dan R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: Biblical and Historical Insights into the Word of Faith Movement*, up. ed. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995), 3-13.

<sup>296</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 6.

School of Oratory to study drama. Although he did not study anything metaphysical there, the school was home to people like Ralph Waldo Trine, a popular New Thought author, and so it is possible that he might have gotten in touch with Trine's teachings during his time there.<sup>297</sup> Although he officially rejected many of the teachings of New Thought, he— maybe unintentionally— included many of its ideas and philosophies in his work.<sup>298</sup> For example, “his insistence on making positive confession and avoiding any hint of negative confession (or even negative thought) is strikingly similar to theirs.”<sup>299</sup>

After his studies, Kenyon returned to preaching and began to travel around as an evangelist, together with his wife. He was first mainly influenced by Kewsick Higher Life, a variation of the Holiness movement, and finally founded the Bethel Bible Institute in Spencer, Massachusetts in 1900.<sup>300</sup> He re-married after his first wife died, and he and his second wife moved to Washington State in 1931, where he established the New Covenant Baptist Church and Kenyon's Church of the Air, a radio program, as well as the Seattle Bible Institute in 1935. After opening this institute, he also started publishing a paper, the Kenyon's Herald of Life.<sup>301</sup> All of this helped him to gain national prominence as a preacher and author.

His main doctrines were the authority of the Bible, the new birth (the starting point for a new Christian life), and the necessity of evangelism and sanctification.<sup>302</sup> But for Kenyon, sanctification was not the only thing that Jesus had given his believers through atonement. He believed that atonement also gave humans the promise of other blessings: “Kenyon appropriated New Thought's focus on mind, spirit, and universal laws to show that Christians could look to the cross not as a promise for things to come, but as a guarantee of benefits *already* granted.”<sup>303</sup> This had to have some kind of foundation in the Bible and the Christian doctrine of course, and Kenyon found it. He established the idea that the Fall meant the separation of humans and God; it meant that “Satan gained legal authority over Adam and

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<sup>297</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 16 and Coleman, *Globalisation*, 44.

<sup>298</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 269.

<sup>299</sup> Simmons, *Positive Confession Theology*, 378. The word “theirs” refers to New Thought and Christian Science in this paragraph.

<sup>300</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 16.

<sup>301</sup> Debra J. Mumford, “Prosperity Gospel and African American Prophetic Preaching,” in *Review & Expositor* 109:3 (2012): 373.

<sup>302</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 15-17.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

became humanity's spiritual father."<sup>304</sup> Through Christ's death, but especially through Christ's resurrection, humanity had been reunited with God, particularly on a spiritual level.<sup>305</sup> However, his conclusion went a step further, wherein the influence of New Thought can be clearly seen, mainly the access to God-like powers for faithful people: "Clear-eyed believers henceforth possessed God's ability and authority to rule over the material world."<sup>306</sup> This was the tremendous gift that humans received through Christ's atonement: "Kenyon stressed the notion that God's nature and the human spirit could be conjoined, so that the divine could become part of the believer's consciousness."<sup>307</sup>

Divine healing became an important part of Kenyon's teachings, too, especially due to his own physical healing from an inflammation in his abdomen. He soon started his own healing services, published books on the matter and even opened up special homes for the sick. His conception of sickness and belief are very similar to what would later be taught in the Word of Faith movement: "Illness, they taught, perished when a patient believed and then acted as one whom God has already healed."<sup>308</sup>

Kenyon grounded his theory on how to heal illness in the narrative of creation. The first few words of the gospel of John, specifically John 1:1—"In the beginning there was the Word"—were absolutely essential. The spoken word was the central idea and central tool of the creation. He concluded that the spoken word had priority above all other means of faith "as the source of God's power."<sup>309</sup> Through speaking God's own word believers could get direct access to the creative power that was theirs since the beginning of the world.<sup>310</sup> This interpretation blended well with some of New Thought's philosophy, for example, the belief that humans are able to create their own futures in their minds and with their words, as we have outlined in detail in an earlier chapter.<sup>311</sup> This immense power of the word, especially the spoken word, will later turn out to be one of the central claims of the Word of Faith Movement.

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<sup>304</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 17.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>307</sup> Coleman, *Globalisation*, 44.

<sup>308</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 19. See chapter 5.3.3 of this thesis for details on the Word of Faith movements attitude towards health and healing.

<sup>309</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 19.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> See chapter 3.3. of this thesis on New Thought for details.

As we have noted before, Kenyon himself denied that his work was influenced by New Thought philosophy, although some parallels are rather obvious. Additionally, Kenyon was also critical of Pentecostalism. He did not support the idea that glossolalia was the ultimate sign of baptism in the spirit and did indeed discourage people from exercising charismatic gifts at his meetings. Still, especially in his later life, he visited Pentecostal services and also preached at one of Sister Aimee McPherson's meetings at the Angus Temple.<sup>312</sup> He died shortly after World War II, a time when the real faith healing revival, and popularization of Charismatic Christianity and self-help culture was just about to start. This was also the time of Kenneth E. Hagin.

### **4.3. Kenneth E. Hagin**

Kenneth Erwin Hagin is often described as the father of the modern prosperity gospel, or the Word of Faith Movement: "Although he did not share the celebrity of other charismatic evangelists, such as Oral Roberts and Pat Robertson, Hagin became one of the most influential religious leaders in post-World War II America as a teacher of an entire generation of charismatics."<sup>313</sup>

Hagin was born in Texas on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Right from the beginning, his life was shaped by suffering both physical and emotional pain. He developed a heart condition as a young child, which made it hard for him to lead a normal life. Additionally, Hagin's father left the family when he was six, which left the family in financial troubles and his mother emotionally unstable.<sup>314</sup>

The most critical event of his life took place when Hagin was a teenage boy. His health had weakened and he had to spend a considerable amount of time in bed. He used this time to read in his mother's bible and was particularly impressed by Mark 11:24 ("Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*."), and he pondered the thought whether this could be applied to his condition. In April 1933 something even more dramatic happened, that ultimately led to his conversion experience. He claimed to

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<sup>312</sup> Coleman, *Globalisation*, 45.

<sup>313</sup> Scott Billingsley, "The Midas Touch. Kenneth E. Hagin and the Prosperity Gospel," in *Recovering the Margins of American Religious History. The Legacy of David Edwin Harrell, Jr*, ed. Dwain Waldrep and Scott Billingsley, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 43.

<sup>314</sup> Pavel Hejzlar, *Two Paradigms for Divine Healing. Fred F. Bosworth, Kenneth E. Hagin, Agnes Sanford, and Francis MacNutt in Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 25-26.



have died three times in the course of ten minutes and “each time seeing the horrors of hell and then returning to life.”<sup>315</sup>

In this phase God spoke to Kenneth, “...his heart stopped beating and his inner being sank to the very gates of hell – to be summoned back by God’s voice.”<sup>316</sup>

This motivated him to further look at the Bible:

As he further pondered Mark 11:24, it dawned upon him that if he really believed he was healed, he should stop hoping for gradual improvement, but get out of his bed at once and act as a healed person, which he eventually pushed himself to do.<sup>317</sup>

He recalls how his life changed immediately after he was saved as a teenager. He had many conversations with his peers from his then-church, about what changed in him and what made him different from the others, because he did not smoke,<sup>318</sup> did not go to dances, not even the cinema. It is especially remarkable in this story how he recalls his efforts in school after his near-death experience. He explains that he used to be really bad in school, even after he had his Godly experience, because he missed a whole year in school. But then two of his teachers miraculously let him pass the year although he had bad grades. He started to go to school every day then, talking to God on his way there and studying in the study periods in school. He reveals: “And I never took one single book home to study for the next two years of high school. I didn’t do any studying except at school. And I made nothing less than a straight-A report card. I stood at the head of the class.”<sup>319</sup> He tells this story in a section of his book titled, “Godliness ensures Promotion.”

After his miraculous healing Hagin also began to preach, first at the local Baptist church. Later he found interest in the Pentecostal practice, which led to him being expelled from the Baptist church, but started his career as a Pentecostal preacher.

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<sup>315</sup> Kenneth Hagin Ministries, “Kenneth E. Hagin,” accessed August 8 2017, [http://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=137](http://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=137).

<sup>316</sup> Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 26.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> He describes this in more detail in his personal account from these days. “I was fifteen when I got saved. When I was about thirteen, sometimes when somebody else was smoking, I would smoke. I could hardly inhale it, and then I would just puff the smoke out. But you know, the first thing I promised God when I got born again was, ‘I’ll never smoke another cigarette.’ Some way or other, my spirit just knew smoking wasn’t right. So I promised him I’d never smoke another cigarette. And I never have.” Kenneth E. Hagin, *Biblical Keys to Financial Prosperity* (Broken Arrow: Faith Library Publications, 1995), 146.

<sup>319</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 150.

He received his second baptism in 1937. First, he led an Assemblies of God community, but later started his own, independent ministry.<sup>320</sup>

In 1950 Hagin allegedly had the first in a series of visions, which were important for the future of his ministry since it was in one of those visions that he received the gift of healing. According to Hagin, “He [Jesus] laid His finger in the palm of each of my hands and then laid His hand on my head and said ‘Go, for I have called thee, sent thee and given thee a special anointing to pray for the sick.’ My hands burned like I had fire in them.”<sup>321</sup>

Receiving divine revelations turned out to be rather common in the Word of Faith movement. There are numerous teachers who claim to continuously get messages directly from God, and Kenneth Hagin also insisted that his message on prosperity was not of human origin, but of divine.<sup>322</sup>

He described his visions as conversations with Jesus, and besides shaping the theme and his preaching, this also gave his message more authority and legitimacy by claiming them it was directly inspired by God.<sup>323</sup> In one of his books Hagin gives a lengthy account of the one conversation he had with Jesus regarding the matter of money. The crucial part of the conversation is the passage where Jesus tells Hagin how to actually put this whole theory into practice. He writes: “The Lord said to me, ‘Don’t pray about money like you have been. Whatever you need, claim it in Jesus’ Name.’”<sup>324</sup>

Although God revealed this knowledge about finances to Hagin in 1950, he did not start preaching it publicly before 1954. The reason for that was that Hagin saw it as his duty to first check with the Bible and find corresponding passages to support those claims, and then to try it out for himself and see if it worked. After all, if it did not work for him, it would not work for anyone else. So, Hagin immediately started practicing exactly what God had told him and instantly had a far easier time making ends meet. People he preached to suddenly offered him more money and

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<sup>320</sup> Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 26-27 and Dennis Hollinger, “Enjoying God Forever: An Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel,” in *Trinity Journal*, 9NS (1988): 137.

<sup>321</sup> Quotes in Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 102.

<sup>322</sup> James M. Kinnebrew, *The Charismatic Doctrine of Positive Confession* (Cordova: Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 30.

<sup>323</sup> Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 27-28.

<sup>324</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 58.

he and his family had a far easier life.<sup>325</sup> In his eyes, that finally gave him the right to publicly speak about the rules of prosperity.

The narrative of his family's own struggle with finances is a very important one. In the foreword to his guide to his book *Biblical Keys to Financial Prosperity*, he mentions that his family struggled a lot financially before they heard about the prosperity gospel in the Bible. He writes: "But praise God, the Word works! Prosperity came to us as we learned to act on the Word of God in that area."<sup>326</sup> By telling his own story of suffering, struggling and finally resolving problems with God's methods, he adds authenticity to his teachings. This method of using examples as a means to prove the success of certain methods was also used by Norman Vincent Peale,<sup>327</sup> and of course by many other self-help and religious authors.

Apart from refining and developing certain parts of the theories that still are the foundation for many prosperity gospel churches today, Hagin also majorly contributed to making the movement popular nationally and internationally. Especially since the 1960s he put out books and audio tapes that helped spread the message: "Although on the fringes of Pentecostalism in the 1960s, Hagin popularized prosperity gospel through his radio broadcast, a magazine (*The Word of Faith*), and through his Bible training schools."<sup>328</sup>

In 1960 Hagin published his first book, and in the years after he began hosting radio shows before moving his ministry to Tulsa Oklahoma in 1966, just like Oral Roberts. There he started his own radio program, "Faith Seminar of the Air," as well as further expanding the production of tapes containing his message. Shortly after, he also began publishing a newsletter which later turned into a magazine called *The Word of Faith*, hence the popular name of the movement as such.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Midas Touch. A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Broken Arrow: Faith Library Publications, 2000), 33-39 and Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 58-65.

<sup>326</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, Introduction. There is no page number or other indication given on this particular page, the quote is located one page before the page marked as 1.

<sup>327</sup> See chapter 3.4 of this thesis for details on Norman Vincent Peale.

<sup>328</sup> Fredrick C. Harris, "Entering the Promised Land? The Rise of Prosperity Gospel and Post-Civil Rights Black Politics," in *Religion and Democracy in the United States: Danger or Opportunity?*, ed. Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 268.

<sup>329</sup> Billingsley, *Midas Touch*, 55.

In the early 1980s Hagin and his son, Kenneth Hagin Jr., who followed in his father's footsteps, had already published over eighty books and their magazine was allegedly delivered to 160,000 addresses. Twenty years later the number of books they had published had reached 130 and had reportedly sold around 60 million copies, and the circulation of their magazine reached half a million. Additionally, their radio shows were reportedly broadcasted in 120 countries.<sup>330</sup>

Still, Hagin is said to have stayed rather modest in contrast to some of the more flamboyant preachers that came after him. He did not partake in the large tent meetings that were popular in the charismatic revivals, he shied away from too much publicity and also did not indulge in a lavish lifestyle like some of his successors did. His calling, he found, was more one of a teacher than of a showman pastor. In this function, he would go on to influence a whole generation of preachers coming after him: "He and other new leaders, such as Gordon Lindsay or John Osteen, brought much needed teaching skills to the charismatic revival (...)"<sup>331</sup> and consequently "helped stabilize the neo-pentecostal movement, and they provided a sense of respectability that it previously lacked."<sup>332</sup> For this purpose the Rhema Bible Training Center was founded in 1974. There future prosperity teachers like Kenneth Copeland or Frederick Price received their training.<sup>333</sup> So "his Rhema Bible Training Center was his most effective tool, producing thousands of graduates who preached prosperity gospel and divine healing all over the world."<sup>334</sup>

The "school" of prosperity gospel that Hagin influenced is commonly referred to as the Word of Faith Movement. In the following chapter, we will look at the doctrines and practices of this movement, most of them being directly influenced by Kenneth Hagin's work.

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<sup>330</sup> Billingsley, *Midas Touch*, 55-56.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 296.

<sup>334</sup> Billingsley, *Midas Touch*, 47.

## 5. The Word of Faith Movement

### 5.1. Introduction

As is the case with many religious movements, the prosperity gospel and the Word of Faith movements are not monolithic entities. They have no single umbrella organization nor do they even belong to the same denomination. Rather, they are comprised of many different, largely independent churches, ministries, and pastors. Therefore, when describing the Word of Faith movement, a focus on some of the (few) common denominators is needed:

The Word-faith movement is perhaps best known for its focus on faith, as a quality of Christian life which must be spoken out and acted upon in order to become a channel for receiving God's blessing, and on abiding health and wealth as two key examples of this blessing.<sup>335</sup>

There are three main concepts that need to be explored in order to understand the distinctiveness of the Word of Faith movement in contrast to other (new) evangelical movements in the United States: its view on health, wealth, and the doctrine of positive confession. In his entry in the *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* on this topic sociologist Steve Bruce also characterizes the prosperity gospel along those three topics. First, there is an emphasis on healing. Second, there is the belief that the Bible lays foundation for the belief in not only the promise of salvation, but also the promise of prosperity. Third, in order to achieve both of those goals, the practice of positive confession is used.<sup>336</sup>

Kate Bowler agrees with this view. In her comprehensive work on the prosperity gospel, she identifies three very similar ideas that most prosperity preachers agree on: "First, healing is God's divine intention for humanity. Second, Jesus' work on the cross earned not only redemption from sin but also deliverance from its penalties: namely, poverty, demonic interference, and sickness. Third, God set up the laws of faith so that believers could access the power of the cross."<sup>337</sup>

Therefore, those three main concepts will be explored in this chapter, and will be summarized as positive confession, health and wealth. Secondary literature will be combined with Bible verses and their interpretation, original texts by Kenneth

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<sup>335</sup> Atkinson, *Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 9.

<sup>336</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 237.

<sup>337</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 141.

Hagin Sr. and other Word of Faith preachers, as well as other original sources like websites and booklets by prosperity churches and first-hand accounts conducted and written down by scholars Milmon Harrison and Kate Bowler.

## 5.2. Positive confession

One of the central and defining doctrines of the prosperity gospel is the use of positive confession. In short, the term describes a certain technique that is used by believers in order to express their faith and thereby actualizing the promises they hope for. The doctrine says, “faithful receive what they claim by their vocal declaration of faith.”<sup>338</sup> In practice that means that positive confession is “speaking one’s desire out loud in order to change the world.”<sup>339</sup>

The implementation of this doctrine can be broken down in four stages, Wolfgang Vondey explains in his book on Pentecostalism. First, the believer must assert that what he/she longs for actually has some foundation in the Bible—that means looking for a Bible verse that confirms those desires. Then the promise must be personalized, wherein the believer must be certain that his/her wish is promised to and meant for them, and will actually be granted if claimed. This is often done with a visualization of the things wished for. In a third step the faith in God and his promises must be verbalized and claimed. That means it must be spoken out loud. Finally, after the confession, the believer must immediately act as if the wish he/she verbalized had already been granted. For example, if you seek healing of an injured leg, you must immediately walk as if nothing ever happened and your leg was completely fine.<sup>340</sup> Another way of explaining the doctrine is a bit more simplified: “1. say it; 2. do it; 3. receive it; 4. tell it.”<sup>341</sup>

As we have seen in this summary of how positive confession is practiced, although the verbalizing part is essential, it always goes hand in hand with believing and thinking the right things. Kenneth Hagin writes on that: “You see, a lot of times, our thinking is wrong. It’s not in line with the Bible. And if our *thinking* is wrong, then our *believing* is going to be wrong. And if our *believing* is wrong, then our

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<sup>338</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 102.

<sup>339</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 298.

<sup>340</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 102.

<sup>341</sup> Hunt, *Word of Faith Movement*, 624.

*talking* is going to be wrong. You've got to get all three of them – your thinking, your believing, and your speaking – synchronized with the Word of God.”<sup>342</sup>

So it is important to keep all three aspects aligned. It is not enough to say things out loud if you do not really believe them in your heart. But in the same way, it is not sufficient to believe things silently within yourself without vocalizing them. The combination of believing and saying is the only method which will work, according to Hagin.<sup>343</sup>

What can be gained by positive confession is seemingly limitless. But in the context of the Word of Faith movement there are certain key aspects: “Salvation, health, and prosperity are among those prominent rewards promised to those who will make use of positive confession.”<sup>344</sup>

However, that equation does not only work in a positive way. In the prosperity gospel's view, if you think and talk about your bad finances or your lack of money, this will ultimately have a negative effect: The money will stop getting in your hands. They believe the same when talking about sickness. If you talk about sickness, you will not be healed. Quite the opposite, in this case it would even be more likely that you start getting sick. But it also works in a more abstract way, for example talking about doubt or having a lack of faith will produce exactly that inside of you.<sup>345</sup>

In the end, positive confession can be summed up by this simple formula: positive thoughts and confession produce positive effects, negative thoughts produce the opposite. We have seen this causality already in New Thought and especially with Norman Vincent Peale.<sup>346</sup>

It is also interesting to look at some personal testimonies regarding this practice. In his book *Righteous Riches* Milmon F. Harrison includes interviews he conducted with members of a Word of Faith church in California. Cassandra, one woman he interviewed, highlights the positive confession aspect of the Word of Faith movement. She says, “Your thoughts determine your destiny. And if we're thinking

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<sup>342</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 42.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>344</sup> Kinnebrew, *Charismatic Doctrine*, 67.

<sup>345</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 74.

<sup>346</sup> See chapter 3.4 of this thesis for details on Norman Vincent Peale.

along the lines of how God describes us, if we keep that in mind, we can have whatever we want. Within the realm of what God wants for us.”<sup>347</sup>

Another example he gives in regard to positive confession is Russell. He gives testimony on how he does not need a flu shot in flu season, because for him, it is health season. He says: “So the power of positive confession says that ‘by his stripes I was healed.’ If I *was*, then I *am* and I *will be*. (...) I just reach out and grab more health, ‘cause I’m already well. (...) Whatever I put my hand to prospers, so my positive confession is that all my needs are met.”<sup>348</sup> He also gives an example about how practicing positive confession has helped him get the job that he believed he should have. Even before he got accepted in his new position, he went around and told people, that he will get hired, because he believed it to be true.<sup>349</sup>

That personal experience is also reflected in the prosperity literature. Kenneth Copeland writes that when you are healed through the power of God, you should act as though you are healed immediately: “It doesn’t matter what your body says about it. If you believe this and operate accordingly, then the covenant you have with God – His Word – will become the absolute truth in your situation, and your physical body will come into agreement with the Word.”<sup>350</sup>

Word of Faith preachers cite several passages from the Bible that they interpret as a reference to positive confession as a means for true believers to achieve things they wish for, in alignment with God and their faith. Here are some examples, mainly from Kenneth Hagin’s work.

First, he mentions God establishing the power of the word right at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:3. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” The crucial aspect here is that God did not only think of light and it came into being. He actually said that there should be light, he spoke the words and thereby created light; “he literally spoke it into existence.”<sup>351</sup> Since humans were created in God’s image, this creating power is, in their belief, also inherent to the human existence.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 24.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>350</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1995), 67. This book was first published in 1974, the references used in this thesis are to the 1995 edition.

<sup>351</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 298.

<sup>352</sup> Kinnebrew, *Charismatic Doctrine*, 58.



“Believers tap into God’s power through the spoken word, which ,works when speakers possess the faith to set God’s Word in motion”<sup>353</sup>

Prosperity teachers find references to the power of the word are also in several other verses, for example Proverbs 18:21 which states “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” Or Romans 10:10, which says, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Equally Mark 11:23-24 goes in a similar direction: “(...) but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.”

This quote is used in order to explain that literally everything possible can be desired. As long as one has the right faith and is a true Christian, there are almost endless possibilities how to be rewarded. Naturally, this passage is easily abused and misused, even though it is made clear in the Word of Faith literature, that there are certain limits to getting what you want. “We’re talking about claiming what the Word says is yours. We’re not talking about claiming something that’s off the wall.”<sup>354</sup> Hagin gives the example, that one might claim ten million oil wells. This is not going to happen, since this is not something that would be in line with anything in the Bible. Still, there is space to interpret the scope of what is meant by riches. Hagin for example puts Mark 11:23-24 in a particular context. He emphasizes: “What you say will either set you free or keep you bound. It’s important what you say.”<sup>355</sup>

Hagin’s interpretation of that particular verse also has another interesting aspect. He recalls God telling him in a vision to look at Mark 11:23 and count how many times the word “say” in some form and how often the word “occurs.” When he finally realized that “say” appears in there three times instead of one like believing, he received the appropriate revelation from God. God told Kenneth that the problem with believers is not their lack of faith, but that they are leaving out the saying part. So, it was Hagin’s task to preach the saying part of this truth.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 66.

<sup>354</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 75.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

## **5.3. The promise of health and wealth**

### **5.3.1. Introduction**

When we look at the promise of wealth and health in the prosperity gospel, we have to look at the cross, because it is there and with Jesus' death that that promise was made, according to prosperity preachers. They believe that Jesus' death not only absolved humankind from its sin, but also from poverty and disease. It is important to focus on the importance of the spirit here. Poverty, but also disease, have a strong spiritual dimension. Therefore, "Poverty – as an evil spirit – required a spiritual solution."<sup>357</sup> That solution is what Jesus gave humankind when dying on the cross; he not only took the debts of sin, but also of poverty (and of illness) on him.<sup>358</sup>

Therefore, those promises became true for humankind and "faith filled individuals should expect signs and wonders in their lives as evidence of the truth of their conviction."<sup>359</sup> Those physical and material signs are material wealth and physical health.

### **5.3.2. Wealth**

#### **5.3.2.1. The promise of material prosperity**

Kenneth Hagin claims to have received the truth about finances in a revelation coming directly from God. He describes it as such: "The Lord said I was to claim whatever it was I needed in Jesus' name, to command Satan to take his hands off my money, and to send out ministering spirits to cause the money to come."<sup>360</sup>

In the first chapter of his book *The Midas Touch*, Hagin starts with referencing one of the most popular Bible verses used to prove the promise of prosperity (and health) is indeed rooted in the Bible: 3 John 2. It says: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Hagin declares: "I believe his intent and meaning was to refer to three distinct areas of life – material, physical and spiritual."<sup>361</sup> Therefore, he argues, people should

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<sup>357</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 95.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>360</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 70.

<sup>361</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 1.

prosper in every aspect of life. However, spiritual prosperity, namely the right faith, is the basis for the other forms.<sup>362</sup>

Many biblical quotes that are used to explain a Christians right to prosperity follow one main theme. They all suggest a causal relationship between the right faith and right observation of God's law and prosperity and success. Good Christians are therefore rewarded with material well-being.

Two examples for verses that are often used in this context are Joshua 1:8: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success," and 2 Chronicles 20:20: "Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." Taking the words there literally, which the prosperity gospel does, one finds that the Bible specifically mentions prosperity and success. Both of these verses establish the notion that having the right faith and being a good Christian entitles one to the promises that God makes here.

Kenneth Hagin also makes frequent use of Isaiah 1:19, which talks about the covenant and the according laws: "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." He explains the significance of that verse with a personal story, where he prayed to God about his financial situation. God told him to leave a comfortable position at a church, but somehow his situation did not get any better. God says to him, that although he is obedient, he is not willing enough. He was not willing enough to live in his new, less comfortable position as a traveling preacher. That is why he does not qualify to receive a blessing and his life did not automatically get better.<sup>363</sup>

Other quotes that are often used in this context are Nehemiah 2:20: "Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; (...)" and Psalms 1:3 "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

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<sup>362</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 9.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-15.

There are also Bible verses that suggest a more specific way to handle money, for example Mark 10:29-30. “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.” This quote can be interpreted as a specific donation policy, which can be implemented in churches. You give a certain amount of money as a donation to the church and receive it back many times over during the course of time in various material ways, whether in the form of a car, money in your bank account, or a successful career. The same is suggested in Luke 6:38, where it says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you.” Both quotes emphasize the reciprocity of financial giving and receiving. Critics of the prosperity gospel highlight this part especially, because this means: if you give a lot to your church, you will receive a lot from God. This interpretation is also encouraged by prosperity teachers. Kenneth Hagin writes, for example: “I notice those churches that give to ministers always prosper. They prosper because they’re sowing the right kind of seed.”<sup>364</sup> Donating and offering is an important part of prosperity gospel churches, therefore we will examine this practice in detail in the following chapter.

Another aspect that plays into the interpretation of material prosperity, is the financial status of Jesus. In other Christian denominations, it is often believed that Jesus was a poor man and that there is much evidence for that in the Bible. This is also a point of criticism that often comes from outside the prosperity gospel. If Jesus was poor, would it not be “more Christian” to pursue his example?

In his book *The Midas Touch* Hagin takes some time to refute those arguments. He reckons that Jesus’ poverty is a misconception that has been traded on for so many decades, that people stopped questioning it and looking for evidence in the Bible. In his reasoning, there are dozens of verses in the Bible that clearly contradict that Jesus was poor.<sup>365</sup> He believes quite the contrary, that Jesus was rich and that therefore Christians should strive after his example.

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<sup>364</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 97.

<sup>365</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 41-43.

The examples he gives are always in combination with citing Bible verses and interpreting them for his readers. He starts with the fact that Jesus was given valuable gifts already shortly after his birth by the wise men.<sup>366</sup> He continues that Jesus, contrary to the belief of some, had some sort of earthly home or residence,<sup>367</sup> which means he could not have been completely poor. He uses the story of the feeding of five thousand men with a few loaves of bread and a few fish to show that Jesus could always meet his material needs, and the needs of others, if it was necessary. That also expands to the effect that he regularly assisted people who were financially poor.<sup>368</sup> He goes on listing several more examples, like that Jesus had a treasurer, that expensive perfume was used on his feet, or that he wore nice clothes before he was crucified.<sup>369</sup>

Hagin argues that Jesus was only a poor man at one point in his life, and that was on the cross. “When did Jesus take on sin, sickness, the curse, and poverty? On the Cross. He did so we could receive health, righteousness, blessing, and prosperity.”<sup>370</sup> There is a Bible quote, that Hagin uses to support his claim: 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

It was not only Kenneth Hagin who promoted that idea of a rich Jesus. Also, contemporary ministers, like Creflo Dollar, preach on this idea. He also believes that Jesus was wealthy from the beginning, because the three kings offered him riches right after his birth. He also argues that Jesus actually had a treasurer who took care of his money.<sup>371</sup>

Another thing Hagin notes in his books is that God sometimes gives you very specific instructions on what to do, financially, and that a good Christian is to obey these instructions. For example, he mentions that once God had told him and his wife to give away one of their automobiles. And so, they did. A little later God told him that he was to give away the ministry’s airplane, and Hagin obeyed. A few months later Hagin received a letter from someone he did not even know with a

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<sup>366</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 48.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-54.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-63.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. This also refers to the doctrine of the spiritual death of Jesus. See chapter 5.3.3.1. for a short explanation.

<sup>371</sup> Harris, *Entering the Promised Land*, 269.

check for half a million dollars for the church. Hagin uses this story as an example of why it is important to obey God's words, that it will be somehow rewarded, although you should not expect anything. In connection with that, he also mentions that it would not work for any other person simply only because it worked for him. According to Hagin, only if God himself tells you that you should give your car/home etc. away, something will come from it.<sup>372</sup>

Kenneth Copeland, who is seen as one of the successors of Kenneth Hagin, also wrote many books on various aspects of the prosperity gospel. In *The Laws of Prosperity* he summarizes that just like there are physical laws in the world, there are also spiritual laws. There are laws for salvation, for healing, and for prosperity. "There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's law. Faith causes them to function. They will work when they are put to work, and they will stop working when the force of faith is stopped."<sup>373</sup> For him, they are all there in the Bible, having been revealed to Biblical figures like Abraham, and since they are divine, eternal laws, they are still working today.<sup>374</sup>

Copeland also argues—aligning with what we have learned about Hagin's attitude towards Jesus' presumed richness—that poverty is not a part of the covenant. He says that this is an idea that was brought up by religion in the Middle Ages "when the Word was taken from the people and put away from monasteries. Poverty oaths were fed into Christianity when religious hierarchy took over. The men operating it were not born-again men."<sup>375</sup>

Kenneth Hagin also spends considerable amount of time in his books explaining the right and wrong approaches towards prosperity. His model works very well as a summary of this whole topic. He describes the right way as the middle of the road, and the wrong ways as the two ditches on either side. One wrong extreme would be, to say money is evil and that God wants us to be poor, that poverty equals humility and that preachers should stay clear from talking about poverty at all.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 124-127.

<sup>373</sup> Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 15.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>376</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 184.

The other extreme would be to make money the focus of faith, to believe that God's main interest for humanity is financial prosperity, that material well-being is automatically a sign for godliness, and that preachers should teach about money more than anything else.<sup>377</sup>

The middle of the road approach is the truth for Hagin and what he teaches in his books and many prosperity teachers have gone on teaching, although some have also chosen a more extreme interpretation. His message is that "God wants to bless and prosper His children," but that a Christian's main focus should not be on material things, but the Kingdom of God. Therefore, preachers should teach about what God has to say about money, but it should not be their focus or serve their own interests.<sup>378</sup>

Finally, let us look at an example on how this works in practice for the individual believer. Katia, one of Harrison's interviewees, recalls an incident, when she came into about 200 dollars, which she decided to offer at one of Creflo Dollar's services:

So I just came and I put that that in the offering and after that, I'm telling you, the breakthrough came! Within, like, six months my debt had been paid off, my car has been paid off. And within nine months I bought a house. And this is my second year at Faith Christian Center – I'm buying my third home! (...) I can testify and testify how God blessed me, and I went through hard times.<sup>379</sup>

#### **5.3.2.2. How to give (and receive) money**

Financial prosperity is not only achieved by positive confession; there are other very specific rules of giving and receiving money that are commonly practiced in prosperity gospel churches.

One very common mode of offering is tithing. It is, in short, "(...) the Old Testament practice of giving the church 10 percent of one's gross – not net – income from every source, is depicted as more than just giving money. It is seen as a rite of worship and devotion to God."<sup>380</sup> The practice of tithing and offering is described in the respective Word of Faith literature, not only by reference to specific Bible passages, but also with stories about how it actually worked for certain people.

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<sup>377</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 184.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>379</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 68.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Kenneth Hagin gives one such example in his book *Biblical Keys to Financial Prosperity*. He reproduces the story his friend told him: An evangelist who liked to read Luke 6:38 to his congregation one day asked the community to offer money so the church could afford a new air conditioning. He specifically asked the people, “I don’t want anybody to give anything that he can afford to give. I want you to give what you can’t afford to give (...).”<sup>381</sup> In the audience there were three businessmen, all of them nearly bankrupt and out of money. Still, each one of them gave several hundred dollars to the church for this cause. About thirty days later each one of them was back in business and none of the businesses went bankrupt. Kenneth Hagin comments: “They honored God, and God honored them!”<sup>382</sup> Of course most importantly, in his retelling he emphasizes that it worked because the three men acted out of unselfish motives. They did not offer the money because they wanted to get it back from God, they offered it because they wanted the church to have a new air conditioning in order to keep on doing God’s work.<sup>383</sup>

Hagin also offers some practical background on why tithing is so important. First, it helps church in doing God’s work. The money helps in spreading the message, supporting people in need, financing missions overseas, and also compensating the pastor and therefore making his work possible.<sup>384</sup> Also, the Word of Faith movement has a certain way to showcase what they believe in. On the one hand, the firm belief in the faith-prosperity connection is made visible in the preachers themselves. Frequently the men and women at the altar wear expensive designer clothes, jewelry and watches and tailor-made shoes. Pastors, who are shining examples of true faith, are supposed to represent how the prosperity message works.<sup>385</sup> Hagin also suggests that giving to your local church and supporting its pastor and staff will ultimately also lead to God meeting your own needs, whether they are physical, material, or spiritual.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 22.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>383</sup> The full story can be found in Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 21-23.

<sup>384</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 74.

<sup>385</sup> Stephen Hunt, “Dramatising the ‘Health and Wealth Gospel’: Belief and Practice of a Neo-Pentecostal Faith Ministry,” in *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion and Education* 21:1 (2000): 79.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.



In his view, tithing does not simply benefit the work of God on earth, there is also a personal gain in it. He writes that he has heard thousand testimonies of people who paid tithes, but often were scared about how to survive with the remaining income. But, because they did it in good faith and kept on giving, they were soon blessed with a raise, a bonus, or just good weather—which brought more money for farmers, for example. “The bottom line was that when they paid their tithes, they had more financially and did better.”<sup>387</sup>

As a reference in the Bible, Hagin cites Matthew 23:23 in which Jesus talks about tithing. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Although, in his Bible version, *The Living Bible*, the last verse is translated as: “Yes, you should tithe, but you shouldn’t leave the more important things undone.”<sup>388</sup> Which, of course, makes the focus on tithing and Jesus’ positive comments on that matter much clearer than it is in the King James Version.

For Kenneth Copeland, tithing and offering have even more direct significance: “In tithing, you are laying the foundation for financial success and abundance. You are establishing deposits with God that can be used when you need them.”<sup>389</sup> He gives an example in which God told him to sell his airplane, and although he did not really want to give it away, he did and invested the money in the ministry. He did so because he “knew that God would not take it without giving more in return.”<sup>390</sup>

This attitude is very similar to another doctrine concerning giving and receiving: the seed-faith belief. We have already encountered it when talking about Oral Roberts and his influence on the modern prosperity gospel.<sup>391</sup> He stated, “that if Christians make free offerings to God, they should expect great returns.”<sup>392</sup> Basically, modern day prosperity preachers have stuck to this idea. In short, as the doctrine says in Kenneth Hagin’s own words: “You can’t just go out into the backyard and say, ‘I’m going to pick some tomatoes’ if you haven’t *planted* any tomatoes!”<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 83.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>389</sup> Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 79.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>391</sup> See chapter 3.2.7 of this thesis on Oral Roberts.

<sup>392</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 299.

<sup>393</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 116.

Kate Bowler introduces the helpful distinction between hard prosperity and soft prosperity in order to describe different approaches on how financial prosperity can really be achieved and how it is practiced in the church.

Hard prosperity is the approach mostly used in the earlier stages of the Word of Faith Movement in the 1970s and 1980s. It emphasizes the direct connection between one's circumstances in life and one's faith. "Faith operated as a perfect law, and any irregularities meant that the believer did not play by the rule."<sup>394</sup> The rules and formulas of hard prosperity are very specific and do not only include tithing, which is used in many Word of Faith churches. There is a focus on financial miracles, like divine cancellation of debt or surprising amounts of cash coming in. Another example is the practice of first fruits, which means that for example if one receives a raise, the first amount has to be given to the church. The hundredfold blessing is another example.<sup>395</sup> Gloria Copeland, the wife of popular prosperity preacher Kenneth Copeland, is quoted as saying that giving one dollar will lead to the receiving of a hundred dollars. Ten dollars will be reward with a thousand dollars and so on.<sup>396</sup>

In the 1990s the prosperity gospel adopted a softer approach concerning finances. Joel Osteen, who we have heard from in the introduction to this thesis, is one example for this new soft prosperity. He "softened the hard causality between the spoken word and reality"<sup>397</sup> and instead uses a more psychological approach. He established a connection between a healthy mind and healthy finances. His fellow prosperity preacher Paula White-Cain even called herself a life-coach rather than a pastor, and included therapeutic language and spirit in her work. Although the method of positive confession stays the same, the wording now echoes that of the self-help community. Good faith will still be rewarded by God, but in a more indirect way. For example, a faithful, positive person is highly favored over a miserable non-believer. In a sense, this development brought the prosperity gospel closer to what Norman Vincent Peale had called positive thinking in his famous book.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 97.

<sup>395</sup> One Bible verse that is used is Mark 10:29-30, as we have seen.

<sup>396</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 98-99

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-127. See also chapter 3.4. of this thesis.

In many hard prosperity communities, the preachers often emphasized the negative consequences of greediness and not offering anything to the church. In soft prosperity churches, the focus is generally more light-hearted and negative consequences are rather kept undisclosed.<sup>399</sup>

The practice of tithing is also often given a special place and special significance in the services of prosperity gospel churches, as scholars have noted. It even “eclipsed the sermon, worship, and communion as the emotional peak of the service.”<sup>400</sup> In order to make tithing the center of the service, certain show elements are often added to the practice, as Kate Bowler has observed. She explains, “giving was turned into a public spectacle, the new liturgy.”<sup>401</sup>

Obviously, the offering segment of the service varies from church to church, so only some examples are given here. Sometimes the offering part of the service is conducted by the main pastor, sometimes there are special designated people who lead this part of the worship. Most of the time, this segment will be opened by a reading—quoting the Bible, or at least referring to appropriate Bible quotes—which explains how offering works and what positive effect it will have on the individual believer.<sup>402</sup>

Bowler also notes several practices she has witnessed in her extensive research of the prosperity gospel. One central rite was the presenting of the offerings. People who plan to offer are encouraged to stand up, dance or wave, or even hold envelopes with their donations in it up in the air. In some of the hard prosperity churches, the preachers sometimes ask the people who donate more than a certain amount of money to come in front to the altar. This of course allows the donors some control over their peers, as well as a rather unsubtle pressure. This is probably best illustrated by the example of some churches use transparent buckets for their offerings, so everyone can see and control how much money the person sitting next to them is offering.<sup>403</sup>

In many communities, the tithing process is also made as easy as possible. People can not only just throw in cash or checks in envelopes; some churches also offer

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<sup>399</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 128

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Marion Maddox, “‘In the Goofy Parking Lot’: Growth Churches as a Novel Religious Form for Late Capitalism,” in *Social Compass* 59:146 (2012): 149.

<sup>403</sup> All examples are taken from Bowler, *Blessed*, 128-130.

forms for credit card payment, or even have their own cash machines in the foyer of the church.<sup>404</sup> This ease of payment has two main functions: first, it is supposed to eliminate all the barriers that could come with the practice of offering. Secondly, and probably more important, it leaves the community no excuse to not make an offering today. If you forgot cash, just use the credit card. If you rather take money from your bank account, no problem, there is a cash machine on site. Making it this easy eliminates all external obstacles and leaves the believer himself as the only one responsible for offering, or not.

In addition to direct offerings made at the church, televangelism and more recently the internet have added other dimensions and various opportunities for offerings as well. Now people can watch services online, donate money with a few clicks, or even send prayer requests via an online form. Paula White-Cain's website, for example, sells a prayer cloth by exclaiming, "When you sow your prophetic seed of \$77 or more, we will rush to you your special, anointed prayer cloth as a point of contact for this prophetic word!"<sup>405</sup> In this case, being a good Christian only seems to be 77 dollars away.

### **5.3.3. Health**

#### **5.3.3.1. The Promise of health**

"Among all activities ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament gospel, exorcism and healing are the most prominent."<sup>406</sup> Divine healing is equally as important as earthly wealth according to the prosperity gospel: "The drama of healing and health is a defining feature of the American prosperity movement, as believers use their bodies, and not just their finances as testing ground for their faith."<sup>407</sup>

Two-thirds of all American Pentecostal Christians claim that they have themselves been healed or saw someone else being healed by divine force at some point in their lives.<sup>408</sup> The belief in divine intervention when it comes to human health is a common teaching in Pentecostalism, as it is one of the Biblical charismata. The presence of sickness and death in the world is commonly associated with the

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<sup>404</sup> Maddox, *Goofy Parking Lot*, 149.

<sup>405</sup> Paula White, "Prophetic Promise Seed," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/product/prayer-cloth/>.

<sup>406</sup> Porterfield, *Healing in the History*, 21.

<sup>407</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 140.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

workings of Satan. There are some methods that are used in order to achieve divine healing: prayers, the laying of hands, or anointing are generally used in Pentecostalism and also in the Word of Faith movement.<sup>409</sup>

Basically, the promise of health is very similar to the promise of wealth that we have discussed earlier, because it is based on the same principle: “First, healing is God’s divine intention for humanity. Second, Jesus’ work on the cross earned not only redemption from sin but also deliverance from its penalties: namely, poverty, demonic interference, and sickness. Third, God set up the laws of faith so that believers could access the power of the cross.”<sup>410</sup>

What is needed in order to fulfill God’s promises and the promise of the cross is the individual faith. Hagin is cited to have said, “I can’t tell a person just how divine healing works. But I know what makes it work. It’s faith!”<sup>411</sup> And this faith cannot only be inside of the believer, it has to be expressed with the tool of positive confession. The individual’s faith of course, is also the individual’s responsibility. The human agency in connection with divine healing, in living a good Christian life, and also in abstaining from sin is essential because “by sinning people deprive themselves of divine protection.”<sup>412</sup>

This mental power over physical healing is something we already have encountered when talking about the influence of New Thought on the prosperity gospel.<sup>413</sup> However, other than proclaimed by New Thought, within the prosperity gospel, illness does indeed exist in the material world and is not only an “illusion.”<sup>414</sup> Sickness is a true fact in the material world, but it is the manifestation of something spiritual. So, although it exists, sickness, for followers of the prosperity gospel, is in its essence a spiritual problem that has to be spiritually solved.<sup>415</sup>

As we have already discussed in the chapter introducing the technique of positive confession,<sup>416</sup> one key element of this technique is to act as though the promise has already be granted to you. In the case of healing, it means after claiming a healing one should act as if they have already been healed. Bowler describes an incident

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<sup>409</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 102.

<sup>410</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 141.

<sup>411</sup> Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 99.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>413</sup> See chapter 3.3. of this thesis on New Thought.

<sup>414</sup> See above.

<sup>415</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 143.

<sup>416</sup> See chapter 5.2. of this thesis for details on positive confession.

she witnessed at the Victorious Faith Center, a prosperity gospel church in North Carolina. A man who had just been healed from a stunted leg was asked to perform certain exercises that should portray a healthy body. She saw a similar performance of health when people started to dance ecstatically right after having been healed by the same pastor.<sup>417</sup>

Healing services are in any case a central part of prosperity gospel churches. Stephen Hunt notes that they “are geared to reproducing ‘signs and wonders’ of the New Testament through a display of the miraculous.”<sup>418</sup> He notes certain common characteristics that are often part of healing services, for example the singing of praise hymns that help set an emotional atmosphere, or the collective experience of spiritual gifts, like glossolalia, that symbolizes the presence of God. Additionally, the presence of a “healer”—sometimes the pastor or a guest “healer” who channels God’s healing power through his or her person—is also essential.<sup>419</sup> The typical symbol for the healing is the pastor laying his or her hands on the head of the respective person or touching the body part that is afflicted with the sickness.<sup>420</sup> Also, material objects are often used in healing processes, like anointed objects such as handkerchiefs, aprons, or oil.<sup>421</sup>

Those things can be seen in services held by Benny Hinn, one of the most prominent prosperity gospel preachers, who focuses on health and healing and holds services all over the world. Among others, one of the guiding faith principles of his ministry is “Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement and is the privilege of all believers (Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:16-17).”<sup>422</sup>

When watching videos of his healing services it can often be observed that people are urged to immediately act as healed after Benny Hinn has laid his hands on them. This is most impressive of course with people who had problems with walking or speaking. They suddenly seem to be able to walk without pain again or utter some words coherently, actions that were not possible before the healing. Generally that

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<sup>417</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 143.

<sup>418</sup> Hunt, *Dramatising*, 75-76.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>421</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 102-103.

<sup>422</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, “Faith Statement,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.bennyhinn.org/faith-statement/>.

only happens after they have first been so overwhelmed by the healing power and Benny Hinn's laying hands on them that they collapse.<sup>423</sup>

Hinn also sells and endorses books on how to beat cancer,<sup>424</sup> special diets that prevent cancer,<sup>425</sup> and anointing oil that is "point of contact for faith in God's healing and miracle power,"<sup>426</sup> which has been imported from Israel and prayed upon by Benny Hinn himself.

The most spectacular demonstration of Hinn's ministry of healing are the services themselves. One example is a healing crusade he held in February 2017 in Brazil. In the account published on his website, Benny Hinn talks of miracles that occurred in Rio de Janeiro, including healings of cancer, hearing problems, and back pain. In São Paulo, he recalls a woman whose one leg was shorter than the other. She "began shouting as she realized her legs had suddenly grown the same length and she was no longer limping."<sup>427</sup> Another woman could suddenly hear again, although she was deaf before. According to his website he also held the largest healing service ever recorded, with three services in a row he gave in India reaching up to 7.3 million people.<sup>428</sup>

The promise that Benny Hinn acts upon can directly be traced back to the Bible. Some of the doctrines connected with the promise of health are derived from the same verses that are connected with prosperity; since prosperity that can be read as meaning both health and wealth. Here we look at some verses and explanations that are relevant for health in particular.

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<sup>423</sup> There are hundreds of videos on the official YouTube channel of Benny Hinn Ministries that show healing services: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjnhyffXt8kQfsr8dNHrihA>. Additionally, there is a privately curated video list, which includes many videos of Benny Hinn services that show healing services: <https://www.youtube.com/user/bladerskb/videos>. Both last accessed August 8, 2017.

<sup>424</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, "Beating Cancer," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.bennyhinn.org/shop/wellness/beating-cancer/>.

<sup>425</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, "Extreme Nutrition," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.bennyhinn.org/shop/wellness/extreme-nutrition/>.

<sup>426</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, "Anointing Oil of the Holy Land," accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.bennyhinn.org/shop/prayer-2/anointing-oil-of-the-holy-land/>.

<sup>427</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, "Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo Witness Mighty Miracles and Deliverances," accessed August 8, 2017, [https://www.bennyhinn.org/2017\\_brazil\\_report/](https://www.bennyhinn.org/2017_brazil_report/).

<sup>428</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, "About Pastor Benny...", accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.bennyhinn.org/biography/>.

According to Hagin's own words, "healing the sick is God's will because Christ bore our infirmities and carried our diseases. Just as He purchased our salvation through His death on the cross, He has purchased our healing."<sup>429</sup>

As Hejzlar points out in his account on divine healing, Hagin uses two verses in particular. First, he cites Deuteronomy 7:15: "And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but he will lay them upon all *them* that hate thee." Psalms 103:3 in which God is described as "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases," is also used.

Those two verses can be easily interpreted according to the prosperity message. God makes the promise to heal his people—the people who believe in him. This is the promise made for the covenant in the Old Testament, and it is seen as even more true for the new covenant established through the life and work of Jesus. Since divine healing was available for the old covenant, it must also be available for the new one. The decisive Bible verse here is Hebrews 8:6, which says, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." This means, according to Hagin, that if this new covenant were indeed better, it would make no sense if it did not have access to divine healing, especially if the old covenant did.<sup>430</sup>

Another important doctrine here that is often evoked by prosperity teachers is the spiritual death of Jesus. Basically it says that Jesus did not only die physically on the cross, but that he also had to die spiritually in order to grant humans full salvation. "To redeem us from spiritual death, the source of sickness, Christ had to die spiritually himself,"<sup>431</sup> as E.W. Kenyon's view on this can be summarized. Hagin perpetuated that idea and made it popular among the Word of Faith churches. However, this belief is not held by all Word of Faith preachers and is also a major point of criticism from outsiders, because Jesus' spiritual death would mean he "was not only separated from God, but took on 'satanic nature' (...)."<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Quoted in Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 55.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>432</sup> Atkinson, *Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 9. Since this is only a very short touch on the subject of Jesus' spiritual death: Atkinson's work offers a comprehensive insight into the doctrine, also from a prosperity gospel perspective.



As he did with financial prosperity, Kenneth Hagin also gives a summary of right and wrong approaches towards divine healing in *The Midas Touch*. One wrong extreme would be to think that the days of miracles are behind us and divine healing no longer happens. The other extreme would be to think that divine healing is the only option and all other forms of healing are equivalent with sin. And the middle of the road, the truth for Hagin is that God does still administer divine healing to his children, but other cures by natural means are also acceptable.<sup>433</sup>

This leads us to the next chapter on the prosperity gospel's relationship with medicine.

### 5.3.3.2. Relationship to medicine

In this aspect, the relationship of divine healing and modern medicine is worth a short examination. Historically speaking, Pentecostalism has traditionally been rather hostile towards academic medicine. The prosperity teachers broke with this tradition and embraced medicine, but under their own terms.<sup>434</sup>

Kenneth Hagin, for example, did not deny the need for academic medicine. But he added a condition: "We believe in hospitals and doctors. Thank God for them. But I am saying, why not put God's word first?"<sup>435</sup> If the power of the Word operates in a good Christian, the need for real medical aid does not even arise. He himself is of course his best example. Hagin claimed to have been healthy all his life, after his being divinely healed as a teenager. When asked about what medicine he takes, he is quoted saying: "I take what I preach."<sup>436</sup>

In the Word of Faith movement today, it is generally believed that medical and miraculous healing can work at the same time. Still, there is a certain preference for non-invasive and natural treatment, rather than surgeries and serious medication. However, if medical treatment of some illness was successful, it was probably God's influence rather than the doctor's that made it work.<sup>437</sup> A majority of the believers accept medicine as being a part of God's plan, however, there is a minority that still sees medicine in general as a threat to true faith.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 179.

<sup>434</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 164.

<sup>435</sup> Hejzlar, *Paradigms of Divine Healing*, 229.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>437</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 166-171.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

What follows are a few examples what some other prosperity teachers say and write on this topic. Pastor Frederick Price is quoted as defining the relationship between medicine and faith as such: “Doctors are fighting the same enemies that we are, the only difference is they’re using toothpicks and we are using atomic bombs.”<sup>439</sup>

Kenneth Copeland, on the contrary, believes that healing is only possible through God. “There is no way to get healing except through the power of God, either directly by His power or by the power He built into the human body. No man on earth can heal apart from God.”<sup>440</sup>

Gloria Copeland, wife of pastor Kenneth Copeland, who is herself preaching especially on divine healing, wrote in a blog entry on their ministry’s website on this subject. Her words show the ambivalent attitude towards medicine and emphasize the importance of faith healing, whether it be with doctor’s help or God alone:

If fear rises up within you when you think about doing without medical help, then go to a doctor. And go in faith! On the other hand, if you have a sure confidence within you that healing is yours strictly by faith, let your faith do its work and receive your healing directly. Whether or not you go to the doctor is not the issue. It is what you do with your faith.<sup>441</sup>

In the wake of the fitness and health boom in the United States, many preachers also started their own business ideas feeding into this trend. Biblical diets, bottled cures by faith celebrities, and a revival of fasting are only a few examples of what they made out of Americans’ wish to be fit and healthy. Additionally, some teachers offered confession tailor-made for weight loss.<sup>442</sup> Joyce Meyer’s Ministries, for example, offer books and CDs on how to stay thin and healthy, all with the help of God’s word: “Based on her own experience, Joyce offers practical solutions from God’s Word that will expose common misconceptions regarding weight control and help you understand (...). By the power of God’s Spirit, you can learn to eat and stay thin!”<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Hollinger, *Enjoying God Forever*, 133.

<sup>440</sup> Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 18.

<sup>441</sup> Kenneth Copeland Ministries, “God Wants You Well,” accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.kcm.org/read/faith-to-faith/05/27>.

<sup>442</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 167-169.

<sup>443</sup> Joyce Meyers Ministries, “Eat and Stay Thin,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.joycemeyer.org/ProductDetail.aspx?id=000567#ProductOverview>.

Kate Bowler also mentions an interesting thought on the matter of faith, medicine, and their connection to race and poverty. For some believers, believing in and practicing divine healing might be the only chance to better their health at all. She cites theologian Tammy Williams, who said: “In a country in which forty-two million persons lack health insurance, twenty percent of whom are African American, Jesus may be the only doctor that some African Americans encounter on a regular basis.”<sup>444</sup> This is not only due to socio-economic reasons. African-American distrust in the healthcare system stems from a broader cultural problem, namely general structural racism, or the perceived lack of fair medical or general treatment of black bodies.<sup>445</sup> The health aspect of prosperity gospel seems to cater to “(...) those in greatest need and those subject to lower life expectancy, poverty, poor diet, inadequate medical care, and lack of health insurance.”<sup>446</sup>

When thinking of the success of the prosperity gospel in the so-called Third World and emerging countries, this theory that the lack of medical care results in a high interest in divine healing also seems striking. Jenkins mentions ongoing epidemics in Africa for example, that might play into this. “Nowhere in the global South do the spiritual healers find serious competition from modern scientific medicine, since this is so far beyond the reach of the poorest.”<sup>447</sup>

#### **5.3.4. Why is it not working?**

So, if wealth and health are both promises that were made to us through the covenant and Jesus’ death on the cross, how can we explain it if those things are not happening for us? Not having the right faith or not believing at all are the obvious reasons. Because, as Hagin puts it “(...) most people are not poor because they’ve honored God. Rather, they’re poor because they’ve dishonored Him.”<sup>448</sup> What if people are good Christians though, and it still does not work?

Kenneth Hagin offers an example on why sometimes the prosperity promise doesn’t become reality for some people, although they are seemingly good Christians. There was a millionaire that had everything and was very generous in his offerings, but eventually lost everything he had because some of his business dealings were

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<sup>444</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 161.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-162.

<sup>446</sup> Hunt, *Globalisation*, 338.

<sup>447</sup> Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 126.

<sup>448</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 30.

dishonest. He not only lost his money, he also suffered spiritually and he and his wife got sick.<sup>449</sup> With this example Hagin wants to show that giving alone will not automatically earn God's blessing as a result. Only good Christians, who live their life right by God in all aspects, can expect to have the promise of prosperity fulfilled.

He identifies three main reasons, why people do not prosper. The first one is laziness—being saved and giving tithes, but not going to work or being too snobbish to take certain jobs because you are waiting for a better one, will not bring about prosperity.<sup>450</sup> This of course fits in very well with a certain American work ethic. The story of the self-made millionaire or from rags to riches is not the story of someone who was lazy. It is the story of someone who worked very hard for everything. This is a classic story of upward social mobility, the American Dream.<sup>451</sup> This fits together perfectly with Hagin's argument.

The second reason he offers is extravagance and excess. This is more or less what its name suggests, being extravagant in spending. He stresses that it is not the devil that is responsible for that, but that it is one's own decision to spend too much money on unnecessary things.<sup>452</sup> This refers of course to the importance of human agency in the belief system of prosperity gospel—the power to influence one's own life both positively and negatively.

The final reason he gives is another very pragmatic one: poor management. People who just do not know how to handle their finances. He himself is the best example on how it is done right. Whenever he made a little more money while preaching, he saved it, and when times came that he earned less, he could use his savings.<sup>453</sup>

When looking at the reason why people are sick and do not get better, Gloria Copeland gives an example in one of her blog entries. For her, there are mainly two reasons. First, it could happen because people do not take God's word seriously and deeply enough into their hearts. Secondly, it is because people do not follow the instructions that the Bible gives them: "If a doctor prescribes medicine for you to

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<sup>449</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 159-160.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-163.

<sup>451</sup> See chapter 3.5. of this thesis for a discussion of the American Dream.

<sup>452</sup> Hagin, *Biblical Keys*, 163-164.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-167.

swallow daily and you decide to rub it on your chest instead, the medicine isn't going to work for you,"<sup>454</sup> and, "if you read God's prescription for health and don't act on it, you won't reap any of its benefits."<sup>455</sup>

Arlette, one of the believers that Harrison interviewed for his study of the Word of Faith movement, has also given insights on this topic. First, she states that of course sometimes people suffer, but that true believers do not stay in this state for too long. But what if people suffer for a long, ongoing time? For her it is clear, that oneself is to blame. "Your faith must not have been strong enough, you must have been outside the will of God, you must have let The Enemy [Satan] in somewhere, you must not know the Word. Something. It's *your* fault."<sup>456</sup>

Kate Bowler also talked to some believers in her study of the Victorious Faith Center, in connection with a member's sickness and untimely death. She tried to explore the ways people explain such events. She discovered that some of them simply refused being judgmental towards other people. In other words: "Believers frequently declared themselves unable or unwilling to draw conclusions regarding another person's difficult circumstances."<sup>457</sup> A second interpretation she observed was that "[d]eath meant failure, the failure of the believer to win the spiritual battle against illness."<sup>458</sup> Sometimes, the believers simply put aside the teachings of the church and its causality between faith and healing and interpreted suffering as a test of faith. Others even struggled with the whole idea of how God could let death or other bad things happen to loved ones.<sup>459</sup>

#### **5.4. Popular ministries of the The Word of Faith Movement**

In order to give a good overview on where the movement stands today, it is necessary to at least take a quick look at the some preachers who help to keep this movement so popular and spread it throughout the world. We have already introduced Joel Osteen's ministry in a bit more detail in the introduction. Now we will look at three more pastors and ministries in the United States that are currently important in the movement.

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<sup>454</sup> Kenneth Copeland Ministries, "God's Medicine," accessed August 8 2017, <http://www.kcm.org/read/faith-to-faith/06/27>.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 60.

<sup>457</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 175.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

### 5.4.1. Kenneth Copeland

We have heard some of Kenneth Copeland's views on health and prosperity already in the preceding chapters. Now we will take a short look at his life and ministry.

Kenneth Copeland is often dubbed as being the heir<sup>460</sup> of Kenneth Hagin's legacy or his protégé.<sup>461</sup> He was born in 1937 and "committed his life to God"<sup>462</sup> in 1962. In 1966, he and his wife Gloria moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in order for him to attend the Oral Roberts University, which he started the following year. He was also employed as Roberts' pilot, drove his cars, and sang for the ministry. It was there that he also got in touch with Kenneth Hagin: "With Hagin's teachings on positive confession, Oral Roberts' healing ministry, and a developing theology of finances, Copeland's distinctive brand of faith theology took shape."<sup>463</sup> He founded his own ministry in September 1967.

He claimed to first have heard about the laws of prosperity in the same year, directly from God. Before that, he already had the notion that somehow success was not arbitrary, that it had nothing to do with luck. Still, he could not find any satisfying answers until God directly taught him about it.<sup>464</sup> He writes: "It didn't occur to me that the Bible was written by the most successful individual alive – God!"<sup>465</sup>

Without mentioning concrete dates or even years, Copeland tells the story of how the laws of prosperity given to him by God worked for him. At about thirty years of age, he went back to Oral Roberts University in order to fulfill God's wish to dedicate his (and his wife's) life to full time ministry. The couple met major financial problems at the time. They were in debt, their living standards were pretty poor, their car was worn out and they did not even have good clothes that fit them.<sup>466</sup>

Once the couple had heard about how the prosperity gospel worked, they put it into work. They promised themselves that they would never borrow a cent from anybody, as it was suggested in the Bible in Romans 13:8 ("Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.").

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<sup>460</sup> Atkinson, *Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 23.

<sup>461</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 65.

<sup>462</sup> Atkinson, *Spiritual Death of Jesus*, 21.

<sup>463</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 67.

<sup>464</sup> Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 5.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

“We would tell our needs only to God and expect what He was teaching us to produce,”<sup>467</sup> they decided. Only eleven months later, the Copelands were debt free.<sup>468</sup>

The Kenneth Copeland Ministries grew tremendously over the following decades, at least partly due to their successful way of using media to communicate their message. First, they started publishing a magazine, then they launched a radio ministry in 1975, complete with selling cassette tapes. Later came a weekly television program, which turned into a daily broadcast in 1989, and supposedly reaches 2.3 billion potential viewers today. Their ministry today also features a website with video and audio content and social media channels.<sup>469</sup> The Facebook page has more than 1.5 million fans as of August 2017.

In 1979 Gloria Copeland started preaching about healing, after receiving a message from God. She supposedly heard God say: “I want you to share what you know about being healed because I want my people well.”<sup>470</sup> They began to add a “Healing School” to their conventions and claimed “God always shows up to Healing School, and people are always healed.”<sup>471</sup>

#### **5.4.2. Creflo Dollar**

Creflo Dollar is the pastor and founder of the non-denominational World Changers Church International. He was born in College Park, Georgia, originally brought up in Methodism, but converted to Pentecostalism as a teenager. In college, as he began to more actively pursue his faith, he founded a Bible Study group. In 1986, Dollar founded his church in College Park. At first it had only mediocre success, but that changed in the 1990s. He began building an 18-million-dollar home for his ministry, the world dome in 1991. He did not take out a debt for the construction from the bank, but paid it bit by bit by himself. So, it took until 1995 that services could begin in his church. For him it was a means to prove the miracle work of God.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 6.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Kenneth Copeland, Ministries, “Kenneth Copeland Ministries: A Brief History,” accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.kcm.org/kenneth-copeland-ministries-a-brief-history>.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 135.

As it is with many churches, the numbers of membership and outreach are not completely clear. There are suggestions that Creflo Dollar's ministry has more than 23,500 members. His televised services and programs can be viewed on six continents and more than a hundred TV stations help to reach out to potentially a billion homes.<sup>473</sup> He has published hundreds of books, including some textbooks which are used in Bible colleges. His church has international offices in places like Nigeria, South Africa and Australia.<sup>474</sup>

Creflo Dollar's message fits into the prosperity gospel well. He explains his teachings of being a good Christian: "You must build a daily regimen of: (1) reading and studying the Bible; (2) thinking in line with God's Word; and (3) confessing (or speaking) scriptures that deal with your safety. When you learn to live by these principles, you will achieve the results you desire."<sup>475</sup> His teachings can be called total life prosperity, which means, "humans are, because of the covenant that exists between God and humans, entitled to the abundance in every area of life."<sup>476</sup> That includes everything from having good relationships to being healthy.

In his ministry, he has a strong focus on the financial aspect. On his website, he offers very typical prosperity gospel literature and DVDs. There are publications with titles like "The Connection between God and Money" or "The Answers to Spiritual and Financial Success."<sup>477</sup>

Tithing is an important part of Dollar's community. "During an observed service, Dollar commented that if you cannot pay your electric bill, you should tithe so that money can be released to you by God."<sup>478</sup> As it was described in earlier chapters, the formula is the same here: continuous tithing will eventually lead to the fulfillment of the promise of prosperity. And if this does not happen, if tithing people are not blessed, the answer is familiar: either the member has indeed either not given enough money, or not enough faith.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Mary Hinton, *The Commercial Church. Black Churches and the New Religious Marketplace in America* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 3.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>475</sup> Hinton, *Commercial Church*, 80.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>477</sup> Creflo Dollar Ministries, "Store," accessed August 8, 2017, <http://creflo-dollar-ministries-online-store1.shoplightspeed.com>.

<sup>478</sup> Hinton, *Commercial Church*, 87.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*



Creflo Dollar also claims to receive continuous prophecies from God. On his website one can read about the moments in which Dollar receives the prophecies (some of them are accompanied by a video). He is shown speaking in tongues and the website offers the translation of it to read.<sup>480</sup>

### 5.4.3. Paula White-Cain

As we have outlined briefly in the introduction, Paula White-Cain had the most prominent moment of her career so far when she held the inaugural prayer at Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony in January 2017.

In her daily life she is the senior pastor of New Destiny Christian Center in Florida. Like many other preachers, the beginning of her religious story is a tragic one. When she was a child she suffered a personal loss—her father committed suicide. That resulted in a troubled childhood, in which she also had to endure abuse. However, when she was 18, she finally was introduced to the Bible and everything changed: “Soon after she gave her life to God, and received a vision that she was to preach the gospel of Christ around the world.”<sup>481</sup>

Before she founded her own ministry in 2001, she preached in Washington DC as well as Los Angeles, including in multiple megachurches. Paula White-Cain especially emphasizes the humanitarian side of her work and personality. Her work includes food donations in the United States and overseas, providing help after Hurricane Katarina and after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, as well as being an example for women who want to pursue a career and a life for God. Her television program *Paula Today* potentially reaches 2.3 billion people worldwide, according to her website. Additionally, she serves as the chairperson of the Evangelical Advisory Board to President Trump as of 2017.<sup>482</sup>

Concerning her beliefs, it is not clear when looking on her website whether she propagates the prosperity gospel. The section “What We Believe” for instance has no clear reference to it, but rather focuses on Pentecostal values in general.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> World Changers Church International, “Prophecies,” accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.worldchangers.org/Bible-Study/Prophecies>.

<sup>481</sup> Paula White Ministries, “Pastor Paula White-Cain Bio,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/about/>.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid and Paula White Ministries, “Paula White’s Story,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/paula-whites-story/>.

<sup>483</sup> Paula White Ministries, “What we believe,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/what-we-believe/>.

However, there are plenty of references to her beliefs elsewhere. There is an explanation of the typical prosperity gospel doctrine of first fruits on her website: “God wants to see you succeed, and He has put a system into place based on the principle of ‘First Fruits.’ It is so important, the Bible references first fruits or first things or devoted things no less than 32 times!”<sup>484</sup> She goes on to explain that sowing a seed at the beginning of the year will ensure a harvest for the rest of the year. “Give your very best as a first fruits offering and watch God’s unlimited blessings pour into your life and your family.”<sup>485</sup> This very simple formula; to give something in order to receive is typical for the prosperity gospel.

The products she sells and endorses support these claims. In the CD set *My Praise Produces* she promises “examples of God’s desire to release supernatural blessing into your life through the power of your praise!”<sup>486</sup> In the download *Equipped to Win* she introduces the three tools giving, fasting, and praying in order to “Get ready to win and release thirty (30), sixty (60), and one hundred (100) fold harvest in your life.”<sup>487</sup>

One a side note, although not really linked to prosperity gospel as such, Paula White-Cain also believes that Donald Trump was elected president for a higher reason. She says it is important to be “loyal to Trump because it is what God wants. If God hadn’t intervened in the U.S. elections, she said, religious liberties would have eroded to such an extent that people would have had to pray in an ‘underground church’ within five years.”<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Paula White Ministries, “First Fruits 2017,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/firstfruits>.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Paula White Ministries, “My Praise Produces,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/product/my-praise-produces-3-cd/>.

<sup>487</sup> Paula White Ministries, “Equipped to Win,” accessed August 8, 2017, <https://paulawhite.org/product/equipped-win-download/>.

<sup>488</sup> Colby Itkowitz, “‘Raised up by God’: Televangelist Paula White compares Trump to Queen Esther,” *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2017, accessed August 24, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/23/raised-up-by-god-televangelist-paula-white-compares-trump-to-queen-esther/?utm\\_term=.3a80cfd382b0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/23/raised-up-by-god-televangelist-paula-white-compares-trump-to-queen-esther/?utm_term=.3a80cfd382b0).

## 5.5. Criticism of the Word of Faith movement and the prosperity gospel

The prosperity gospel and the Word of Faith movement have drawn a lot of critics, especially from other pastors, ministers, and theologians. Some of the arguments that are used against prosperity messages are similar to those we have discussed in connection to criticism of Norman Vincent Peale's book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, for example its focus on achieving material goals or the distortion of Christian doctrines.<sup>489</sup>

One argument that often appears is that prosperity churches and their message only have the goal to profit the people at the top, mainly the pastors and their families. Reverend DeForest Soaries, pastor at the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset New Jersey, is an outspoken critic of the prosperity gospel and has spoken on this matter publicly several times.

In an interview with National Public Radio, he says that of course it is in principle good to help poor people to gain control over their finances. "But when an entire ministry is dedicated to raising more money so that it can raise more money and the only person benefitting is the person at the top, that's what I call an ecclesiastical pyramid scheme."<sup>490</sup> He stresses the difference between the concept of prosperity as a holistic way of viewing things and the concept in "which prosperity is essentially an ATM machine for preachers who know how to capitalize on people's pain."<sup>491</sup> He also criticizes certain unrealistic promises and financial miracles that are advertised by certain preachers. He gives the example of a pastor who tells a person who cannot pay rent in the following week that he or she should just give a thousand dollars to the church today, and by Friday everything will be alright. "Common sense says there's something wrong with this picture."<sup>492</sup>

Some of the criticism connected with those financial aspects stems from scandals in which popular prosperity teachers have been entangled over the last decades. One example was Jimmy Swaggart's fall from grace. In the late 1980s Swaggart was an extremely popular televangelist and preacher. In the height of his popularity

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<sup>489</sup> See chapter 3.4.5. for criticism towards *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

<sup>490</sup> Michael Martin, "Pastor Seeks To Debunk Prosperity Gospel. Interview with Rev. DeForest Soaries, Jr," *Faith Matters*, NPR, October 15, 2010, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130589821>.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*

he employed 1500 people, owned a 7500-seat place of worship, had a Bible college, foreign missions, and two television programs that reached over 9 million viewers every week. His ministry made over 140 million dollars every year. Then, in 1988 a scandal came to light and Swaggart had to publicly confess that he visited a prostitute and was subsequently dismissed from his denomination, the Assemblies of God. His empire slowly fell apart. Although he managed to recover at least partly from this first scandal, the second very similar tabloid story that was published in the early 1990s finally more or less ended his career.<sup>493</sup>

The second popular scandal that shook the world of televangelism and prosperity gospel in the 1980s was the one of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. The preaching couple were the leaders of the extremely successful PTL network, a ministry and television empire, that helped them earn millions. They were known to indulge in a very lavish lifestyle and in the mid 1980s they were charged with financial fraud, in addition to Jim Bakker being caught in a sex scandal. The enormous amount of money that the couple took from the ministry for themselves was a shock for many believers and left the trust in similar ministries at least weakened.<sup>494</sup> Other examples include Robert Tilton, whose ministry was exposed in the early 1990s in a TV broadcast. The report showed that prayer envelopes were emptied for the money inside, but the accompanying prayer requests were simply thrown away.<sup>495</sup>

Scholar Catherine Brekus gives two more examples for common criticism of the prosperity gospel. One, she argues, often comes from African American church leaders, “who see them as a threat to the progressive black Christianity forged during the civil rights movement.”<sup>496</sup> The focus on the individual quest for health and wealth somehow diminishes the quest for social and political change and reform. In this context, it is important to note that the prosperity gospel has a significant following among the African American community. With prominent pastors like Frederick K.C. Price, the gospel “broke new ground in black

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<sup>493</sup> Janice Peck, *The Gods of Televangelism. The Crisis of Meaning and the Appeal of Religious Television* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Pr, 1993), 118-120.

<sup>494</sup> William E. Schmidt, “For Jim and Tammy Bakker, Excess Wiped Out a Rapid Climb to Success,” *The New York Times*, May 16th, 1987, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/16/us/for-jim-and-tammy-bakker-excess-wiped-out-a-rapid-climb-to-success.html>.

<sup>495</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 300.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

churches.”<sup>497</sup> Many black churches embraced the prosperity message, starting especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the criticism of the prosperity gospel also comes from African American pastors, who perceive it as having a negative impact on African American communities.<sup>498</sup>

The second criticism Brekus mentions reflects upon gender roles. Although human agency is an important factor in shaping one’s own destiny in the prosperity gospel, it is not always equally attributed to men and women. While there are some female led ministries, like Paula White-Cain’s, and ministers’ wives are also often preaching themselves, there is a certain tendency to see women as subordinate to men, especially in the family. Brekus writes, “since God is literally a man with a physical body, women must submit to their husbands.”<sup>499</sup>

Kate Bowler also touches on the subject of gender.<sup>500</sup> She notes that although there have been and are female pastors popular in the prosperity gospel, it is more likely that women at the front line appear in husband-wife duos, as is the case with Joel and Victoria Osteen for example. They are typically also more often involved in “stereotypically feminine domains such as marriage, relationships, child rearing, and emotional turbulence.”<sup>501</sup> She observed that there is a tendency to uphold traditional gender roles. This is also reflected in the fact that being a single woman is often seen as a very undesirable state in Word of Faith communities. “Single females are often called to the altar to be prayed over in order that they might be soon blessed with a husband.”<sup>502</sup>

Michael Horton, a theology professor at Westminster Seminary California, wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* shortly before the inauguration ceremony of Donald J. Trump. He heavily criticized Trump’s choice of Paula White-Cain to give the inaugural prayer, and he calls her brand of Christianity heresy. In this context, he heavily criticizes the Word of Faith Movement among others for seeing humans as “little Gods” with creative power. He also harshly refutes the interpretation of Jesus’ death on the cross, especially “that Jesus went to the cross not to bring forgiveness of our sins but to get us out of financial debt, not to

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<sup>497</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 89.

<sup>498</sup> For thoughts on the influence of the prosperity gospel on African American Christianity and black politics see Frederick C. Harris, *Entering the Promised Land*.

<sup>499</sup> Brekus, *Perils of Prosperity*, 300.

<sup>500</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 207-213.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

reconcile us to God but to give us the power to claim our prosperity, not to remove the curse of death, injustice and bondage to ourselves but to give us our best life now.”<sup>503</sup>

This is only one example of inner-Christian criticism on the topic. The Assemblies of God have issued publications in which they denounce the excessive focus on positive confession theology. Another common argument is that the Biblical verses used to justify the teachings are taken out of Biblical context and their meaning is therefore distorted. The eschatology that is suggested by the prosperity theology also draws criticism. If so many blessings are realized in the here and now, what is left for the life after death?<sup>504</sup> Another aspect that is criticized is the pastoral damage that can be done when dealing with those whose hopes are not coming true, because, as we have learned, people are led to blame themselves and their lack of faith for not being rich or healthy.<sup>505</sup>

In particular, the prosperity gospel churches which operate in so-called third world countries (or poor countries in general), are often criticized for exploiting people’s fears and hopes. It is suggested that the bad economic and health situations in such countries facilitate the message of the prosperity gospel of gaining health and wealth in the present by being of good faith. The focus on financial prosperity can also promote materialism and excess, sometimes in the case of the pastors themselves, although being rich and living a luxurious life is not per se a problem. It fits well with the message that having this kind of success in life might be proof that God has granted his promises.<sup>506</sup> This kind of critique often comes from liberation theologians, who take issue with exactly the “obsession with material prosperity, and its capacity to exploit the poor and vulnerable in developing nations and poor communities.”<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Michael Horton, “Evangelicals should be deeply troubled by Donald Trump’s attempt to mainstream heresy,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2017, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/03/evangelicals-should-be-deeply-troubled-by-donald-trumps-attempt-to-mainstream-heresy/>.

<sup>504</sup> Simmons, *Positive Confession Theology*, 379.

<sup>505</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 237.

<sup>506</sup> Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 77-78.

<sup>507</sup> Percy, *Health and Wealth*, 237.

These are mere examples of criticism towards prosperity gospel. When looking for material on the internet, there are thousands of articles and websites dedicated to exposing the prosperity gospel as a fraud, faux Christianity, or the like. The criticism comes from different directions; there are those that focus on the religious aspect and the interpretation of the Bible and Christian doctrines, there are those that focus on the pastors and their lavish lifestyle, and there are some that criticize the materialism or the lack of social engagement. In any case, the prosperity gospel is a very controversial version of Christianity, equally criticized from within the Christian community as well as from outside sources.

## 6. Conclusio

### 6.1. The thesis revisited

The modern prosperity gospel is a largely Pentecostal Christian variety that promotes the message that God grants true believers to be materially, physically, and spiritually healthy and wealthy. It has been promoted significantly by the writing, teachings, and persona of Kenneth E. Hagin in the second half of the 20th century in the United States, is influenced by four major religious and cultural ideas: Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, New Thought and mind cure, self-help culture (especially Norman Vincent Peale's idea of positive thinking), and the narrative of the American Dream.

In short, we can summarize that the prosperity message derives its focus on divine gifts, especially the gift of healing, from Pentecostalism. The idea that the human mind has a certain power over the material world, even if only over one's own health, is something that came to the prosperity gospel via New Thought. This idea was further developed and infused with Christianity by Norman Vincent Peale and his famous book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. His theory was that positive thoughts produce a positive outcome and negative ones a negative result. Peale also added the notion of verbally claiming your aims and desires. Finally, the focus on upward social mobility, the pursuit of happiness, and the democracy of being able to achieve your dreams, no matter your background, if you only have enough faith, can be traced back to the American Dream narrative.

What we have seen is that each of the most significant influences on the modern prosperity gospel that we have discussed left its unique mark on its teachings and practices. Now we will look at these influences one final time.

First, there is the strong Pentecostal and charismatic influence. This is reflected on the one hand in certain doctrines that are shared by prosperity churches, for example, the belief in the second baptism in the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, or charismata. The belief that those doctrines are not only restricted to the times of the Bible, but are still happening in the here in now is decisive: "The most rigorous way that divine power is manifest in the Faith movement is through claims to the



miraculous – to sign and wonders.”<sup>508</sup> In the prosperity gospel this is largely manifested through the belief in divine healing.

In the 1950s and 1960s a major healing revival took place in the United States. It brought forth one of the first preachers who not only focused on healing, but also emphasized the connection between being faithful and being wealthy: Oral Roberts. One of his important contributions to the prosperity gospel was his theory that offering money to the church would ultimately produce a financial benefit for the donor. The belief in seed-faith, that you have to sow a financial seed before you could harvest financial blessings, was also popularized by him. Additionally, he had a very successful television ministry that was a shining example for generating donations and influenced many televangelists after him.

The prosperity message also stresses the individual influence on divine blessings. This focus on personal power and agency at least partly stems from the influence of New Thought and mind cure. Phineas Quimby was significantly involved in developing the idea that sickness was not something that should be cured physically, but rather mentally. He believed in the power of suggestion and the ability of patients to think themselves healthy. This connection between the right thoughts and healing was very important, or as William James put it “an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes.”<sup>509</sup> Mary Baker Eddy further refined Quimby’s theory. She especially stressed the power of the word as a means to partake in God’s creative power, since for her the separation between humans and the divine was only of gradual nature. This belief in the power of the word can be found in the prosperity gospel under the doctrine of positive confession.

Although New Thought did not produce a mainstream religious force, some of its theories helped put forward a self-help culture that has been significant in the United States for many decades. Especially after World War II, publications that promoted the power of the individual to change their lives to the better popped up all over the country. For the prosperity gospel, Norman Vincent Peale and his book *The Power of Positive Thinking* were decisive. In it, he promoted applied Christianity. He introduced certain techniques that were supposed to help people in living a better life—materially, physically, and spiritually. His formula of picturing,

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<sup>508</sup> Stephen Hunt, “Magical Moments: An Intellectualist Approach to the Neo-Pentecostal Faith Ministries,” in *Religion* 28:31 (1998): 274.

<sup>509</sup> William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 94-95.

praying, and visualizing the things that one aims for and the idea that positive thoughts produce positive outcomes and vice versa, found their way into the belief system of the prosperity gospel as well. He also already found the evidence for those theories in the Bible. Like New Thought before him, Peale also stressed the importance of human agency in achieving one's goals. It is everyone's individual responsibility to have the right faith, thoughts, and to follow the rules.

The factor of human agency is a very important one. The prosperity gospel empowers people to gain control of their life, to gain control of the things that are not working in their lives. As we have seen when discussing the importance of self-help culture in the United States, we can argue that the prosperity gospel somehow is the self-help book within the American religious landscape. It offers practical advice on how to deal with things. It not only sells hope, it sells real techniques. It offers a formula that every individual believer can apply. Of course, it is all in a religious context and the prosperity preachers always emphasize that without the right faith, all the promises in the Bible cannot work. Still, having the right faith seems to be in the power of every individual.

This directly connects to the American Dream of being able to shape one's destiny, to strive for self-fulfillment and happiness: "The idea of the self-made individual has become part of the very fabric of the American dream of an open society where person with character and talent can rise to unprecedented heights."<sup>510</sup> In the prosperity gospel context, this means that every person who is a good Christian, has the right faith, and knows the rules of the gospel has the potential to be wealthy and healthy. The democratic factor of equality of opportunity, which makes everything possible within the American Dream narrative, also exists in this context, wherein hard work is replaced with the right faith. It strips away (birth) privilege as an influencing factor for a rich and healthy life, and instead offers each and every individual the same possibilities for achievement. This literally is the message that the American Dream sells, and so does the prosperity gospel.

However, there still is the more materialistic level of the prosperity message, and it connects very much with consumer culture and capitalism as important American ideologies: "This is perhaps most evident in the consumer 'instantism' of the Faith

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<sup>510</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 241.

teaching: health and wealth can be demanded and enjoyed immediately through the ‘currency’ of faith.”<sup>511</sup> Faith can be consumed just like any other product or any other lifestyle.

The prosperity gospel today is in the United States mainly represented in the Word of Faith movement. Most of its ideas come from the works of Kenneth E. Hagin, although it is believed that at least some of them, mainly the unique mixing of Pentecostal ideas with New Thought and positive thinking, have been borrowed from E.W. Kenyon before him. Anyhow, Hagin, especially from the 1960s onwards, helped popularize the prosperity message significantly in the United States and in the wider world.

In short, the most important doctrines are the promise of health and wealth and positive confession. According to Hagin, the promise of prosperity and health was made to humankind through the covenant between God and people in the Bible, and through Jesus’ death on the cross, which freed us not only from sin but also from poverty and sickness. This is legitimized by his interpretation of certain Bible verses.<sup>512</sup> In order to make those promises come true, only faith and the right formula are necessary: “1. say it; 2. do it; 3. receive it; 4. tell it.”<sup>513</sup> The verbal proclamation is essential and signifies the creative power of the word.

Those basic principles are differently interpreted in the various churches. Some have strict rules for offering or tithing, for example, because they believe that only donating money to the church can produce financial blessings in the private life of the individual. This is called seed-faith. Others have a stronger focus on divine healing and hold large services that focus on channeling that divine gift. All of them have the common belief that the individual’s responsibility in being healthy and wealthy is important. The belief that good thoughts produce good results and negative thoughts negative ones is also very common. In this way, failure is also explained. If negative things occur, it is most likely the individual’s personal fault for not having enough faith or not thinking positive enough. Some examples for successful prosperity gospel preachers in the United States at the moment are Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, and Paula White-Cain. Criticisms of the

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<sup>511</sup> Haller, *History of New Thought*, 241.

<sup>512</sup> See chapter 5 of this thesis for numerous examples of Bible verses and their interpretation by prosperity gospel preachers.

<sup>513</sup> Hunt, *Word of Faith Movement*, 624.

movement include claims of financial misconduct, the distortion of Christian doctrines, and the exploitation financial or physical hardships, especially in poor communities. Nevertheless, the prosperity gospel is wildly successful in the United States and the wider world today.

## 6.2. Final remarks

Finally, we can look at a greater religious theory context, one quote by historian James Hudnut-Beumler from Vanderbilt University offers an interesting insight:

Classical theories of religion like Durkheim and Weber drew a more or less hard line between magic and religion and associated them with less developed and modern society, respectively. What the gospel of wealth demonstrates is that contrary to classical theory, a human belief in something magical – that the Gods can be manipulated by human activity into providing what human beings want – is still to be found in early twenty-first-century American Protestantism.<sup>514</sup>

A lot has been written in the last few decades on the secularization thesis and the American, and later on European exceptionalism in this context.<sup>515</sup> Without going into too much detail on this, as it would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, it should at least be noted, that the prosperity gospel at least shows one thing: A religious variety as young and as successful as the prosperity gospel is an example that religion is still a powerful force and has the ability to adapt, renew and combine in ever changing and ever new varieties, no matter how “secularized” or modernized our world might be. The belief in spiritual gifts, divine intervention and, yes, in miracles is still present.

As we have shown throughout this thesis, the prosperity gospel is a truly American religion. It has incorporated religious and cultural phenomena that were important at that particular time of history, but are also still of importance in American society today. However, the prosperity gospel has been very successfully exported to other continents, especially Africa, Asia and South-America. The prosperity gospel is in

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<sup>514</sup> James Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar. A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 226.

<sup>515</sup> Some exemplary literature on this topic: Steve Bruce, *Secularization. In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Martin, *On Secularization. Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Peter Berger et al, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); José Casanova, *Europas Angst vor der Religion* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2009).

this sense not only a vehicle to expand Christianity, it is also a means, deliberately or not, to export American values about work ethic, consumerism, or capitalism overseas. This is not restricted to this particular brand of Christianity: “It is now apparent that the peoples of the world, in a more rigorous and systematic way than ever before, are exposed to the beliefs and ways of life espoused by the North American fundamentalist gospel—to doctrines and practices originating in Oklahoma, Texas, and California.”<sup>516</sup>

However, the religious practices overseas are not hundred percent replications of the American model. The prosperity gospel is modified depending on whatever pre-existing religious, cultural and socio-economic landscape it comes into. For example, in Kenya, the American Dream messages of hard work or social mobility are not so important. “Rather, the Faith teachings act as a form of motivation for rising out of the dire conditions experienced by some of the poorest people on earth.”<sup>517</sup> Religion is indeed, as already mentioned, extremely adaptable to whatever circumstance it encounters. Each of those cases would be worth researching.

Lastly, let us look at the current United States and President Donald J. Trump. As we have heard in the introduction, Paula White-Cain, a prosperity gospel preacher, held his inaugural prayer and serves as a spiritual adviser to the president. But that is not the end of the story. Donald Trump’s history with the prosperity message goes further back; he attended the Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan with his parents while growing up. The pastor there at that time was none other than Norman Vincent Peale.<sup>518</sup>

Donald Trump turned out to be quite the fan. In an article on National Public Radio he is quoted as saying: “Norman Vincent Peale, the great Norman Vincent Peale, was my pastor. ... He was so great. And what he would do is, he’d bring real-life situations, modern-day situations, into the sermon. And you could listen to him all day long.”<sup>519</sup> As we have learned in this thesis, Norman Vincent Peale is one of the major influencers on the modern prosperity gospel. Therefore, it is not surprising

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<sup>516</sup> Hunt, *Winning Ways*, 331.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>518</sup> Tom Gjelten, “How Positive Thinking, Prosperity Gospel Define Donald Trump's Faith Outlook,” *All Things Considered*, NPR, August 3, 2016, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2016/08/03/488513585/how-positive-thinking-prosperity-gospel-define-donald-trumps-faith-outlook>.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

that today Donald Trump is known to surround himself with prosperity teachers like Paula White-Cain and others.<sup>520</sup> This relationship would also be an interesting topic of research.

This presence of the prosperity gospel in current US politics should remind us that it is hardly occupying a religious niche. It has tremendous significance in the United States and even more so overseas, especially in Africa. Its message of health and wealth speaks especially to people who dream of a better life and who struggle with realizing that dream.

“In times of uncertainty, especially where material success is a central cultural value, there may be a cognitive need to attempt to create wealth and health by metaphysical means and to predict with some measure of assurance outcomes that are uncertain to realization.”<sup>521</sup> And maybe that is at least part of its success.

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<sup>520</sup> Gjelten, “Positive Thinking, Prosperity Gospel.”

<sup>521</sup> Hunt, *Globalisation*, 339.

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## **8. Appendix**

### **8.1.English Abstract**

Some of the largest churches in the United States teach the prosperity gospel, a special variety of Pentecostalism.

In short, this doctrine says that believers can gain material possessions and good health via the technique of positive confession, which requires the verbal declaration or affirmation of a desired end. This has been granted through the atonement of Jesus and is part of the promise of salvation.

In this thesis, the origins and influences that have led to the development of the modern prosperity gospel are explored: Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity and their take on divine healing; late 19th century New Thought and its focus on the power of the human mind; the rise of self-help culture and in particular Norman Vincent Peale's popular book *The Power of Positive Thinking*; and finally, the powerful narrative of the American Dream.

Finally, preacher Kenneth E. Hagin has helped to form and popularize the prosperity gospel – also referred to as Word of Faith movement – in the mid-20th century. The thesis further analyzes its unique approach towards health and wealth, including its practice, criticism, as well as the arguments used by preachers to support their teachings. The movement is still very popular in the United States today, but has also been successfully exported, particularly to Africa.

Key words: prosperity gospel, prosperity theology, Word of Faith, faith movement, American religion, American Christianity, Pentecostalism, Kenneth E. Hagin

## 8.2. German Abstract

Das Prosperity Gospel (dt. Wohlstandsevangelium) ist eine Variante des Pfingstchristentums und wird in einigen der größten Kirchen der USA gepredigt.

Zusammengefasst lehrt das Prosperity Gospel, dass gute Christen durch Gottes Wille und das Versprechen der Erlösung bedingt, Anrecht auf materiellen Wohlstand und physische Gesundheit haben, die sie durch die Technik der "Positive Confession" (dt. positives Bekenntnis) erlangen können. Bei dieser Praxis müssen die gewünschten Ziele nicht nur innerlich gewollt, sondern auch laut und deutlich ausgesprochen werden. Positives Denken spielt dabei eine ausgesprochen wichtige Rolle.

In dieser Arbeit werden vor allem die Ursprünge und Einflüsse, die zur Entstehung des modern Prosperity Gospel geführt haben, beleuchtet: Das Pfingstchristentum und die charismatische Bewegung sowie ihre jeweiligen Schwerpunkte zum Thema göttliche Heilung; New Thought (dt. Neugeist-Bewegung), eine religiöse Bewegung, die sich Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts vor allem mit der Kraft des menschlichen Geistes beschäftigte; der Einfluss der Selbsthilfe-Kultur in den USA und im speziellen das einflussreiche Werk "The Power of Positive Thinking" von Norman Vincent Peale; und schließlich das kraftvolle Narrativ des amerikanischen Traums.

Aus diesen verschiedenen Ursprüngen formte sich vor allem durch die Predigten und Publikationen Kenneth E. Hagins ab Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts das moderne Prosperity Gospel, bzw. die Word of Faith Bewegung, wie sie oft genannt wird. Der besondere Zugang der Strömung zu (gottgewolltem) Wohlstand und Gesundheit, die gelebte Praxis, sowie populäre Erklärungsmodelle von Prosperity Predigern werden beleuchtet. Auch auf die Kritik an diesem Glaubensmodell wird eingegangen.

Das Prosperity Gospel hat bis heute nicht nur in US-amerikanischen Kirchen wesentliche Bedeutung, sondern wurde auch äußerst erfolgreich exportiert, vor allem nach Afrika.

Schlagnworte: Wohlstandsevangelium, Word of Faith, amerikanische Religion, amerikanisches Christentum, Pfingstchristentum, Kenneth E. Hagin