

# What's Wrong with the Faith Movement?

## Part One: E. W. Kenyon and the Twelve Apostles of Another Gospel

What's wrong with the "Faith" movement? Its leaders include many of the most popular television evangelists. Its adherents compose a large percentage of charismatic evangelical Christians. Its emphases on faith, the authority of the believer, and the absolute veracity of Scripture could appear to be just what today's church needs. And yet, I am convinced that this movement poses one of the greatest contemporary threats to orthodox Christianity from within. Through it, cultic theology is being increasingly accepted as true Christianity.

This article will highlight several serious problems with the Faith movement by providing an overview of its major sources and leaders. Part Two will focus on the movement's doctrinal deviations as represented by one of its leading proponents.<sup>1</sup>

### ITS DEBT TO NEW THOUGHT

It is important to note at the outset that the bulk of Faith theology can be traced directly to the cultic teachings of New Thought metaphysics. Thus, much of the theology of the Faith movement can also be found in such clearly pseudo-Christian cults as Religious Science, Christian Science, and the Unity School of Christianity.

Over a century before the Faith movement became a powerful force within the Christian church, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), the father of New Thought, was popularizing the notion that sickness and suffering ultimately have their origin in incorrect thinking.<sup>2</sup> Quimby's followers held that man could create his own reality through the power of positive affirmation (confession).<sup>3</sup> Metaphysical practitioners have long taught adherents to visualize health and wealth, and then to affirm or confess them with their mouths so that the intangible images may be transformed into tangible realities.<sup>4</sup>

Although proponents of Faith theology have attempted to sanitize the metaphysical concept of the "power of mind" by substituting in its stead the "force of faith," for all practical purposes they have made a distinction without a difference. New Thought writer Warren Felt Evans, for example, wrote that "faith is the most intense form of mental action."<sup>5</sup> In treating a patient, Evans commented that "the effect of the suggestion [or positive affirmation that the patient is well] is the result of the faith of the subject, for it is always proportioned to the degree in which the patient *believes* what you say" (emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> Likewise, H. Emilie Cady, a well-known writer for Charles and Myrtle Fillmore's Unity School of Christianity, explained that "our affirming, backed by faith, is the link that connects our conscious human need with His power and supply."<sup>7</sup> Cady also claimed that "there is power in our word of faith to bring all good things right into our everyday life."<sup>8</sup> Such statements strongly indicate that the distinction between the "mind" of metaphysics and the "faith" of Faith theology is nothing but a figment of the imagination.

### SUBSTANCE, STYLE, AND SCAMS

There is no denying that much of Faith theology is derived directly from metaphysics. Some of the *substance*, *style*, and *scams* endemic to the movement, however, can be traced primarily to the teachings and practices of certain post-World War II faith healers and revivalists operating within Pentecostal circles.<sup>9</sup> With regard to substance, for example, both Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin point to T.L. Osborn and William Branham as true men of God who greatly influenced their lives and ministries. Of course, Osborn himself has consistently followed E.W. Kenyon's (*see below*) Scripture-twisting antics,<sup>10</sup> and Branham has (among other things) denounced the doctrine of the Trinity as coming

directly from the Devil.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Hagin and Copeland are not alone in affirming Branham; Faith proponent Benny Hinn gives him a hearty “thumbs up” as well.<sup>12</sup> When it comes to *style*, however, Hinn gravitates more toward such faith healers as Aimee Semple McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman. In addition, Hinn has given his endorsement to notorious revivalist A.A. Allen,<sup>13</sup> who was truly a huckster if there ever was one—which brings us to our third “s,” the *scams*.

Faith teachers such as Robert Tilton and his female counterpart, Marilyn Hickey, have copied many of the scams pioneered by Pentecostal preachers such as Oral Roberts and A.A. Allen. In fact, Tilton and Hickey have managed to exceed even their predecessors’ outrageous ploys. This is hard to believe when one considers what sort of schemes they had to outdo.

Roberts, the reader may recall, is the man who claimed that Jesus appeared and told him God had chosen him to find the cure for cancer. In a lengthy appeal, Roberts avowed that the Lord told him, “I would not have had you and your partners build the 20-story research tower unless I was going to give you a plan that will attack cancer.” Roberts then said that Jesus instructed him to tell his partners that “this is not Oral Roberts asking [for the money] but their Lord.”<sup>14</sup> (The project was completed, but has since been “shut down and sold to a group of investors for commercial development.”<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, no cure for cancer was ever found.)

In like fashion, A.A. Allen “scammed” his followers by asserting that he could command God to “turn dollar bills into twenties.”<sup>16</sup> He was also known to have urged his followers to send for his “prayer cloths anointed with the Miracle Oil,”<sup>17</sup> and he offered “Miracle tent shavings” as points of contact for personal miracles.<sup>18</sup> Allen even “launched a brief ‘raise the dead’ program.”<sup>19</sup> Of course, it died.

Allen was eventually kicked out of the Assemblies of God denomination when he jumped bail after being arrested for drunk driving.<sup>20</sup> In 1970 he died from what “news accounts report [as] sclerosis of the liver.”<sup>21</sup>

As we proceed to examine the primary purveyors of Faith theology, we will see living proof of the maxim that “error begets error and heresy begets heresy.” If, for example, one examines the cultic progression of E.W. Kenyon’s theology, one will discover that his original deviations from orthodox Christianity were minor compared to those that characterized the later stages of his ministry. And with each of Kenyon’s successive disciples, the errors become even more pronounced. Hagin, who popularized and plagiarized Kenyon prolifically, not only expanded Kenyon’s perversions but added to them as well.<sup>22</sup> The progression from bad to worse has continued with people like Kenneth Copeland and Charles Capps, and is now reaching heretical heights that are almost inconceivable through ministry leaders like Frederick Price, Benny Hinn, and Robert Tilton.

## **THE CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Twisted texts, make-believe miracles, and a counterfeit Christ are all common denominators of the Faith movement’s leading teachers. And, as all who look into the matter will clearly see, it all began with the metaphysical teachings of Essek William Kenyon.

### **Essek William Kenyon**

Essek William Kenyon, whose life and ministry were enormously impacted by such cults as Science of Mind, the Unity School of Christianity, Christian Science, and New Thought metaphysics,<sup>23</sup> is the true father of the modern-day Faith movement. Many of the phrases popularized by present-day prosperity preachers, such as “What I confess, I possess,” were originally coined by Kenyon. Kenneth Hagin, to whom we next turn our attention, plagiarized much of Kenyon’s work, including the statement, “Every man who has been ‘born again’ is an Incarnation, and Christianity is a miracle. The believer is as much an Incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>24</sup>

Kenneth E. Hagin

As I thoroughly demonstrate in my book *Christianity In Crisis* (Harvest House, 1993), Kenneth Hagin takes Kenyon's theology from bad to worse. Not only does he boast of alleged visits to heaven and hell, he recounts numerous out-of-body experiences (OBEs) on the earth as well.

On one occasion, Hagin claims he was in the middle of a sermon when, suddenly, he was transported back in time. He ended up in the back seat of a car and watched as a young woman from his church committed adultery with the driver. The entire experience lasted about fifteen minutes, after which Hagin abruptly found himself back in church, summoning his parishioners to prayer.<sup>25</sup>

Despite his propensity for telling tall tales and describing false visions, virtually every major Faith teacher has been impacted by Hagin—including such “luminaries” as Frederick K.C. Price and Kenneth Copeland.

Kenneth Copeland

Kenneth Copeland got his start in ministry as a direct result of memorizing Hagin's messages. It wasn't long before he had learned enough from Hagin to establish his own following. To say his teachings are heretical would be an understatement—*blasphemous* is more like it. Copeland brashly pronounces God to be the greatest failure of all time, boldly proclaims that “Satan *conquered* Jesus on the Cross” (emphasis in original),<sup>26</sup> and describes Christ in Hell as an “emaciated, poured out, little, wormy spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet, despite such statements, Benny Hinn ominously warned that “those who attack Kenneth Copeland are attacking the very presence of God!”<sup>28</sup>

Benny Hinn

Benny Hinn is one of the fastest rising stars on the Faith circuit. According to an October 5, 1992 article in *Christianity Today*, sales of his books in the last year-and-a-half have exceeded those of James Dobson and Charles Swindoll combined.<sup>29</sup> While claiming to be “under the anointing,” Hinn has uttered some of the most “off-the-wall” statements imaginable—including the claim that the Holy Spirit revealed to him that women were originally designed to give birth out of their sides.<sup>30</sup>

Hinn also admits to frequenting the graves of both Kathryn Kuhlman and Aimee Semple McPherson to get the “anointing” from their bones.<sup>31</sup> Despite his outrageous antics, Hinn has somehow managed to gain wide acceptance and visibility with the evangelical Christian church. His platform on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), as well as his promotion by a mainstream Christian publisher (Thomas Nelson), have catapulted him into prime-time visibility.

Whether Hinn is referring to his family history or his rendezvous with the Holy Spirit, fantasy is often passed on as fact. A case in point are the thousands of “documented” healings claimed by Hinn. Recently, he sent me three examples—presumably, the cream of the crop—as proof of his miracle-working power. One of the cases involved a man who was supposedly healed of colon cancer. A medically naive person reading the pathology report may well see the notation “no evidence of malignancy” and be duped into thinking that a bona fide healing had indeed taken place. CRI's medical consultant, Dr. Preston Simpson, however, was not fooled by the report. His investigation revealed that the colon tumor in question was *surgically* removed rather than miraculously healed. The other two cases had comparably serious problems.<sup>32</sup>

Frederick K. C. Price

Fred Price is the most notable of a growing number of black prosperity preachers. His church in Los Angeles now claims some 16,000 members. He is seen nationally on television and has referred to himself as the “chief exponent of Name It and Claim It.”<sup>33</sup> Price has added his own unique twists to

Faith theology by asserting that Jesus took on the nature of Satan prior to the crucifixion<sup>34</sup> and by claiming that the Lord's Prayer is not for Christians today.<sup>35</sup> Despite telling his followers that he doesn't allow sickness in his home, Price's wife has been treated for cancer in her pelvic area.<sup>36</sup> Referring to his wealth, Price says the reason he drives a Rolls Royce is that he is following in Jesus' steps.<sup>37</sup>

#### John Avanzini

John Avanzini is billed by his Faith peers as a recognized authority on biblical economics. The truth, however, is that Avanzini is an authority on perverting Scripture as a means to picking the pockets of the poor. He has honed his craft into such an art form that when Faith teachers need money, they inevitably call on "Brother John." Armed with a bag full of Bible-twisting tricks, he tells the unsuspecting that "a greater than a lottery has come. His name is Jesus!"<sup>38</sup>

According to Avanzini, if Jesus was rich, we should be rich as well. Thus, he recasts Christ into a mirror image of himself—complete with designer clothes, a big house, and a wealthy, well-financed advance team.<sup>39</sup> Thinking otherwise, Avanzini claims, will prevent Christians from reaping the prosperity God has laid out for them.<sup>40</sup>

Avanzini runs the gamut from teaching people how to get their hands on the "wealth of the wicked" to what might best be described as his "hundredfold hoax."<sup>41</sup> When it comes to fleecing God's people, few can match the effectiveness of John Avanzini. There is an exception, however, his name is Robert Tilton.

#### Robert Tilton

Robert Tilton hit the big time as a fisher of funds by developing a religious infomercial called *Success-N-Life*. It all began when he traveled to Hawaii to hear from the Lord. Says Tilton, "If I'm going to go to the cross, I'm going to go in a pretty place. Not some dusty place like Jerusalem. That's gravel is all that place is."<sup>42</sup> While languishing in his exotic wilderness, Tilton "realized his mission was to persuade the poor to give what they could to him—as God's surrogate—so they too could be blessed."<sup>43</sup>

Then, one day, Tilton tuned in to television and turned on to Dave Del Dotto's real estate infomercials. The rest is history. Tilton used what he saw as a prototype<sup>44</sup> for building an empire that takes in as much as \$65 million per year.<sup>45</sup>

It now appears that Tilton's ill-gotten gains may dwindle rapidly amid reports of scandal and a variety of lawsuits.<sup>46</sup> Responding to charges from ABC's *Prime Time Live* that the prayer request letters he promises to pray over end up in dumpsters, Tilton claims, "I laid on top of those prayer requests so much that the chemicals actually got into my bloodstream, and...I had two small strokes in my brain."<sup>47</sup>

#### Marilyn Hickey

Marilyn Hickey, much like Tilton, employs a broad range of tactics to manipulate followers into sending her money. Among her many ploys are anointed prayer cloths, ceremonial breastplates, and ropes that can be used as points of contact. In one of her appeal letters, Hickey promises she will slip into a ceremonial breastplate, "press your prayer request to my heart," and "place your requests on my shoulders"—all for a suggested donation.<sup>48</sup>

For the most part, Hickey's tricks and teachings are recycled from other prosperity peddlers like Tilton, Hagin, and Copeland. Her message is peppered with such Faith jargon as "the God-kind of faith," "confession brings possession," and "receiving follows giving."

#### Paul Yonggi Cho (David Cho)

Paul Yonggi Cho—pastor of the world's largest church, located in Seoul, South Korea—claims to have received his call to preach from Jesus Christ Himself, who supposedly appeared to him dressed like

a fireman.<sup>49</sup> Cho has packaged his faith formulas under the label of “fourth dimensional power.”<sup>50</sup> He is well aware of his link to occultism, arguing that if Buddhists and Yoga practitioners can accomplish their objectives through fourth dimensional powers, then Christians should be able to accomplish much more by using the same means.<sup>51</sup> In case one is tempted to confuse the size of Cho’s following with the truth of his teachings, let me point out that the Buddhist version of “name it and claim it” (Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism) has an even larger following that does Cho.<sup>52</sup>

Cho recently made the news by changing his name from Paul to David. As Cho tells the story, God showed him that Paul Cho had to die and David Cho was to be resurrected in his place. According to Cho, God Himself came up with his new name.<sup>53</sup>

#### Charles Capps

Charles Capps was ordained as a minister in the International Convention of Faith Churches and Ministers by Kenneth Copeland and derived his teachings directly from Kenneth Hagin. This unfortunate combination has led Capps to make some of the most blasphemous statements in Faith lore. Capps has gone so far as to teach that Jesus was the product of God’s positive confession: “This is the key to understanding the virgin birth. God’s Word is full of faith and spirit power. God spoke it. God transmitted that image to Mary. She received the image inside of her....The embryo that was in Mary’s womb was nothing more than the Word of God....She conceived the Word of God.”<sup>54</sup>

Capps not only preaches the blasphemous, he also preaches the ridiculous. For example, he claims that if someone says, “I’m just dying to do that” or “That just tickled me to death,” their statements may literally come true (i.e., they may *die*). According to Capps, this is precisely why the human race now lives only about seventy years instead of 900 years, as was the case with Adam.<sup>55</sup>

#### Jerry Savelle

Jerry Savelle has made his fortune by mimicking virtually all of the Faith teachers mentioned above. His greatest claim to fame, however, may well be his ability to mimic Kenneth Copeland. In fact, Savelle appears to be an exact duplicate of Copeland. Savelle demonstrates a total lack of biblical acumen, as he blindly regurgitates virtually every heresy in the Faith movement.

With regard to health, Savelle boasts that sickness and disease cannot enter his world.<sup>56</sup> As for wealth, he says that words can speak our world into existence.<sup>57</sup> Savelle now peddles his books and tapes to thirty-six countries at the astonishing rate of some 300,000 copies per year.

#### Morris Cerullo

Morris Cerullo claims that he gave up a driving ambition to be the governor of New Jersey in order to become a minister of the gospel.<sup>58</sup> He purports to have first met God at the tender age of eight. Since then his life has been one mind-blowing experience after another: he says he was taught by leading rabbis,<sup>59</sup> led out of a Jewish orphanage by two angelic beings,<sup>60</sup> transported to heaven for a face-to-face meeting with God,<sup>61</sup> and told he would be capable of revealing the future.<sup>62</sup>

On one occasion, Cerullo informed his audience, “You’re not looking at Morris Cerullo—you’re looking at God. You’re looking at Jesus.”<sup>63</sup> Not only is Cerullo a master of make-believe, he is also a master of manipulation. Claiming that God was directly speaking through him, Cerullo uttered, “Would you surrender your pocketbooks unto Me, saith God, and let me be the Lord of your pocketbooks....Yea, so be thou obedient unto my voice.”<sup>64</sup>

#### Paul Crouch

Paul Crouch and his wife, Jan, are the founders of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, which today has an estimated net worth of half a billion dollars. As Crouch himself puts it, “God has, indeed, given

us the MOST POWERFUL VOICE in the history of the WORLD.”<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, this voice is being used to promote teachings straight from the kingdom of the cults. Crouch’s influence has become so vast that he can now raise as much as \$50 million during a single “Praise-a-Thon.” What many of the well-intentioned Christians who support TBN do not know, however, is that part of this money goes to promoting cultic groups and individuals who not only deny the Trinity but claim that this essential of Christianity is a pagan doctrine.<sup>66</sup> It is indeed ironic that a broadcasting network called “Trinity” would promote anti-Trinitarian doctrine.

To those who would speak out against the false teachings proliferated on his network, Crouch has this to say: “I think they’re damned and on their way to hell; and I don’t think there’s any redemption for them.”<sup>67</sup> Shortly after I met with Crouch to prove that the Faith movement compromises essential Christian doctrine, Crouch looked into the lens of the television camera and angrily declared, “If you want to criticize Ken Copeland for his preaching on faith, or Dad Hagin, get out of my life! I don’t even want to talk to you or hear you. I don’t want to see your ugly face. Get out of my face, in Jesus’ name.”<sup>68</sup>

Sadly, Crouch refers to the Faith message as a “revival of truth...restored by a few precious men.”<sup>69</sup>

## GENETIC DEFECT?

The Faith movement was spawned by the unholy marriage of 19th century New Thought metaphysics with the flamboyance and abuses of post-World War II revivalism. It should therefore come as no surprise that its doctrine and practices are palpably unbiblical. Yet, some charge that critics of the movement are guilty of committing a logical error known as the *genetic fallacy*— “that is, rejecting an assumption because of where it comes from rather than disproving the argument.”<sup>70</sup>

While the charge appears formidable, it is in fact defective. For it assumes that the criticisms against the Faith movement are made primarily if not solely on the basis of its historical roots. In truth, the bulk of critical evaluations are leveled directly against the unbiblical teachings of the movement’s leading proponents today.<sup>71</sup> Historical discussions have, for the most part, served to place the phenomenon in its proper context.<sup>72</sup>

Now that we’ve dug up the roots and sampled the topsoil of the Faith movement, we are ready to take a penetrating look at its ripened fruit. Part Two of this article will do just that, by systematizing and critiquing the theology of the movement’s premier preacher of another gospel.

## NOTES

1This article is adapted from chapter two of my forthcoming book, *Christianity in Crisis* (Harvest House). Part Two in this series will be an article specially written for the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL.

2See, for example, Phineas P. Quimby, quoted in *The Quimby Manuscripts*, ed. Horatio W. Dresser (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1969 [orig.1921]), 32-35, 61, 165, 186, 279, 295. Quimby’s writings in this book were taken from his manuscripts dating between 1846 and 1865. Note the striking parallel in Kenneth Hagin’s remark: “It makes a great deal of difference what one thinks....The reason they [sick people] are not getting healed is that they are thinking wrong.” (Kenneth E. Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking* [Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1978], 19.)

3New Thought writer Warren Felt Evans (1817-1889) is one such example. See Charles S. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1970 ), 121-23.

4See, for example, Claude Bristol, *The Magic of Believing* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), 122; H. Emilie Cady, *Lessons in Truth* (Unity Village, MO: Unity Books, n.d.), 41:9, 43:17, 45:25, 46:31, 48:40-42, 51:6, 52:9, 53:11, 55:22, 57:32; Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1971 [orig.1875]), 376:21-27; Charles Fillmore,

*Prosperity* (Lee's Summit, MO: Unity Books, 1967), 103-4; and Ernest Holmes, *How to Use the Science of Mind* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1950), 39-45.

5Warren Felt Evans, *Mental Medicine: A Treatise on Medical Psychology*, 15th ed. (Boston: H.H. Carter & Co., 1873 [orig. 1885]), 152; quoted in Braden, 121.

6Warren Felt Evans, *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics* (Boston: H.H. Carter & Karrick, 1886), 152; quoted in Braden, 122-23.

7Cady, 56:30; cf. Holmes, 72,78.

8Cady, 52:8

9For a fine historical treatment of the healing revivalists, see David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975). A number of the healing revivalists' unsound teachings and practices can be found in the ministries of their predecessors—most notably John Alexander Dowie, Maria B. Woodworth-Etter, Smith Wigglesworth, F.F. Bosworth, and Thomas Wyatt.

10Osborn's indebtedness to both Kenyon and faith healer F.F. Bosworth (another "Kenyonite") is mentioned in T.L. Osborn, *Healing the Sick*, 23d ed. (Tulsa, OK: Osborn Foundation, 1959), 6, 203, 205. Cf. Richard M. Riss, "Kenyon, Essek William." *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burges, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick H. Alexander (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1988), 517; and Don Gossett and E.W. Kenyon, *The Power of the Positive Confession of God's Word* (Blaine, WA: Don & Joyce Gossett, 1979), 3.

11William Marrison Branham, "Revelation Chapter Four #3 (Throne Of Mercy and Judgment)" (Jeffersonville, IN: Voice of God Recordings, 1961), audio tape #61-0108, side 2; cf. William Marrison Branham, *Footprints on the Sands of Time: The Autobiography of William Marrison Branham, Part Two* (Jeffersonville, IN: Spoken Word Publications, 1975), 606-7.

12Benny Hinn, *Praise the Lord* (television program), Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), 12 April 1991.

13Benny Hinn, *Praise the Lord*, TBN, 16 April 1992.

14Quoted in Russell Chandler, "Talked with Jesus, Evangelist Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1983, 3, 16.

15Clark Morphew, "What's to Become of Oral Roberts' City of Faith?" *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 June 1992; reprinted in *The Christian News*, 20 July 1992, 2.

16A.A. Allen, *The Secret to Scriptural Financial Success* (Miracle Valley, AZ: A.A. Allen Publications, 1953); quoted in Harrell, 75.

17A.A. Allen, "Miracle Oil Flows at Camp Meeting." *Miracle Magazine*, June 1967, 6-7; quoted in Harrell, 200.

18Reported in "New Revival Tent Dedicated in Philadelphia," *Miracle Magazine*, September 1967, 15; quoted in Harrell, 200.

19See Harrell, 199.

20*Ibid.*, 70-71.

21*Ibid.*, 202. One writer describes Allen's cause of death as "cirrhosis" of the liver (see Gary L. Ward, "Allen, Asa Alonzo," in J. Gordon Melton, *Religious Leaders of America* [Detroit: Gale Research, 1991], 9).

22See D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 3-14.

23See McConnell, 24-56.

24E.W. Kenyon, *The Father and His Family*, 17th ed. (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1964), 100; cf. Kenneth E. Hagin, "The Incarnation," *The Word of Faith*, December 1980, 14.

25Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Glory of God* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1987), 13-15.

- 26 Kenneth Copeland, *Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991), 129.
- 27 Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory* (television program), TBN, 21 April 1991.
- 28 Benny Hinn, *Benny Hinn* (television program), TBN, 8 June 1992.
- 29 Randy Frame, "Same Old Benny Hinn, Critics Say," *Christianity Today*, 5 October 1992.
- 30 Benny Hinn, "Our Position In Christ #5 — An Heir of God" (Orlando, FL: Orlando Christian Center, 1990), audio tape #A031190-5, side 2.
- 31 Benny Hinn, "Double Portion Anointing, Part #3" (Orlando Christian Center, n.d.), audio tape #A03179-3, sides 1 and 2. This sermon was also aired on TBN (7 April 1991)
- 32 See the concluding section of my book, *Christianity In Crisis*.
- 33 Frederick K.C. Price, "Name It and Claim It! What Saith the WORD?...", *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger*, Summer 1989, 2.
- 34 Frederick K.C. Price, "Identification #3" (Inglewood, CA: Ever Increasing Faith Ministries, 1980), audio tape #FP545, side 1.
- 35 Frederick K.C. Price, personal correspondence, 14 October 1992.
- 36 Pat Hays, "Betty Price Speaks at 1991 'Wisdom from Above' Luncheon," *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger*, Winter 1992, 12-13.
- 37 Frederick K.C. Price, *Ever Increasing Faith* (television program), TBN, 9 December 1990, available from Crenshaw Christian Center, Inglewood, CA (audio tape #CR-A2).
- 38 John Avanzini, *Praise-a-Thon* (Television Program), TBN, April 1991.
- 39 John Avanzini, "Was Jesus Poor?" *Believer's Voice of Victory*, July/August 1991, 6-7; cf. *Believer's Voice of Victory* (television program), TBN, 20 January 1991, and *Praise the Lord*, TBN 1 August 1989.
- 40 Avanzini, "Was Jesus Poor?" 6.
- 41 See, for example, John Avanzini, *Praise-a-Thon*, TBN, 5 November 1990. According to the so-called hundredfold principle, those who financially support the Faith teachers will get back 100 times the amount (a hundredfold) of their original donation.
- 42 Scott Baradell, "Robert Tilton Heart of Darkness," *Dallas Observer*, 6 February 1992, 19-20.
- 43 *Ibid*, 18.
- 44 *Ibid*, 13.
- 45 Nancy St. Pierre, "Tilton's Wife Tells of Finances," *Dallas Morning News*, 5 March 1992, 1A, 7A; and Terry Box, "Tax Appraiser Is Scrutinizing Tilton's Church," *Dallas Morning News*, 22 March 1992, 1A. Cf. Trinity Foundation (Dallas) release, "Does Word of Faith = Wheel of Fortune?" 9 December 1991; and Terry Box, "Backers Think Tilton Will Endure," *Dallas Morning News*, 16 February 1992, 1A, 12A-13A.
- 46 At least two of these suits involve widows who have each filed a \$40-million claim against Tilton's healing ministry for sending letters seeking donations and promising to heal their already-dead husbands (see Risa Robert, "Tilton Sent Dead Man 'Personal' Mail," *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 February 1992, 7A; and Nancy St. Pierre, "2nd Widow Sues Tilton over Letters," *Dallas Morning News*, 18 March 1992, 28A).
- 47 Robert Tilton, *Success-N-Life*, 22 November 1991. Tilton has also alleged that the dumpster full of prayer requests found by ABC was actually planted by enemies to discredit him (see Christopher Lee, "Tilton's Wife Defends Ministry, Blasts TV Expose of Husband," *Dallas Morning News*, 25 November 1991, 1A, 12A).
- 48 Marilyn Hickey Ministries, direct-mail piece, on file.
- 49 Dwight J. Wilson, "Cho, Paul Yonggi," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 161.

50According to Cho, the material world makes up the first three dimensions, which is under the control of the fourth dimension—the spirit.

51Paul Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension*, vol. 1 (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1979), 37,41.

52See John Weldon, “*Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism; Mystical Materialism for the Masses,*” *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1992, 8-13.

53Paul Yonggi Cho interviewed by C. Peter Wagner, “Yonggi Cho Changes His Name,” *Charisma & Christian Life*, November 1992, 80.

54Charles Capps, *Dynamics of Faith and Confession* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1987) 86-87; cf. Charles Capps, *Authority in Three Worlds* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1982), 76-85.

55Charles Capps, *The Tongue—A Creative Force* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1976), 91.

56Jerry Savell, “*Framing Your World with the Word of God, Part 1*” (Fort Worth, TX: Jerry Savelle Evangelistic Association, n.d.), tape #SS-36, side 1.

57*Ibid*, side 2.

58Morris Cerullo, *The Miracle Book* (San Deigo: Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, 1984), x.

59“God’s Faithful, Anointed Servant, Morris Cerullo” (promotional literature, on file).

60Cerullo, *The Miracle Book*, ix; and *7 Point Outreach -World Evangelism and You* (pamphlet), 4.

61Cerullo, *The Miracle Book*, xi.

62God’s Faithful, Anointed Servant, Morris Cerullo.”

63Morris Cerullo, “The Endtime Manifestation of the Sons of God” (San Diego: Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, n.d.), tape 1, sides 1 and 2.

64Morris Cerullo, “A Word from God at the Deeper Life World Conference,” *Deeper Life*, March 1982, 15.

65Paul Crouch, *Praise the Lord* (newsletter), July 1992, 1.

66Crouch, for example, pays for and promotes people like Roy Blizzard and Joseph Good, both of whom openly deny the Trinity. Crouch also gave his staunch support to the United Pentecostal Church (UPC), a cult which claims that the Trinity is a pagan doctrine (see *Praise the Lord*, TBN, 5 September 1991).

67 Paul Crouch, *Praise-a-Thon*, TBN, 2 April 1991.

68*Ibid*.

69Paul Crouch, *Praise the Lord*, TBN, 18 February 1986, rebroadcast on 6 August 1991.

70William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1992), 230; cf. William DeArteaga, “Confusing the Roots with the Fruits,” *Ministries Today*, July/August 1991, 56-62.

71See, for example, Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Beverly, MA: Frontline Publishing, 1985); Elliot Miller, *Healing: Does God Always Heal?* (San Juan Capistrano: Christian Research Institute, 1979); Brian Onken, “The Atonement of Christ and the ‘Faith’ Message,” *Forward*, 7:1 (1984), 1, 10-15; and Ken L Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December 1986, 329-52.

72See, for example, the Fall 1988 issue of the *Trinity Journal*, which was devoted entirely to the “Health and Wealth Gospel.” This, of course, is not intended to minimize the importance of historical continuity when evaluating theological systems.

## **Part Two: The Teachings of Kenneth Copeland**

On the night of November 2, 1962, a young man twenty-five years of age, struggling against “sin, sickness, and strife,” asked Jesus to “come into [his] heart.”<sup>1</sup> His decision came two weeks after his wife

had done likewise.

Today, these two individuals head a ministry that literally stretches around the globe, while remaining in the forefront of what has come to be known as the “Faith” movement. They are Kenneth and Gloria Copeland.

Part One of this series explored the roots of the Faith movement and surveyed some of its leading proponents today. In this installment, our primary attention will be devoted to cataloging and critiquing the core theology of one of the most widely recognized and respected Faith teachers to date—Kenneth Copeland.<sup>3</sup>

## **FROM OBSCURITY TO CENTER STAGE**

Though best known for his “prosperity” message, Copeland began his ascent to Faith Stardom from a state of financial disarray. Beset by monetary problems, in 1967 he decided to resume his education at Oral Roberts University (ORU), where he subsequently “landed a job as copilot on Oral Robert’s [sic] cross-country crusade flights.”<sup>4</sup>

It was not until August of 1967, however, that Copeland experienced a revolution in his outlook through the preaching of yet another evangelist—Kenneth E. Hagin, regarded by many to be the “father of the Faith movement.” With reference to his “distant mentor,” Copeland has been quoted as saying that he ‘learned nothing’ during six months at Oral Roberts University but was so excited by Hagin’s teachings that...[he] spent the next month in his garage listening to them.”<sup>5</sup>

The Copelands returned to Fort Worth, Texas in 1968 where they established an evangelistic association. Within a few short years their home-based Bible studies reportedly grew into large revivals, sometimes with crowds large enough to fill entire “civic centers and international arenas.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1973 the ministry began publishing its own newsletter, *Believer’s Voice of Victory*. Two years later, Copeland claimed the Lord “commanded him to ‘preach the uncompromised Word on every available voice.’”<sup>7</sup> This prompted him to launch the *Believer’s Voice of Victory* radio broadcast in 1976. By 1979 Copeland’s ministry was established firmly enough to enter the arena of television, paving the way for its 1981 venture into satellite communications. And in August of the following year “the ministry made history by initiating the first *global* religious broadcast” (emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup>

Copeland continues to experience popular acceptance within various charismatic and Pentecostal circles. His books, booklets, and taped messages can be found in a number of Christian bookstores, and his crusades and revivals consistently produce large turnouts. Furthermore, the ministry’s international scope and influence is well attested by its offices in England, the Philippines, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and Hong Kong.

While not every Faith teacher holds to all of Copeland’s doctrines, they, along with his followers, consider him a leading—if not *the* leading—authority on Faith theology. “Many have already coronated Copeland as the new king of the Faith movement,” writes one observer. “In a recent article, even *Time* magazine refers to Copeland as the ‘chief exponent’ of the Faith movement,”<sup>9</sup>

## **THE FORCE OF FAITH**

Of the multiple views of faith held by Faith teachers,<sup>10</sup> Copeland focuses primarily on an understanding of faith as a force. “Faith is a power force,” he claims. “It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, “faith is a spiritual force....It is substance. Faith has the ability to effect natural substance.”<sup>12</sup> As “the force of gravity...makes the law of gravity work...this force of faith...makes the laws of the spirit world function.”<sup>13</sup>

Copeland affirms that “God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith,”<sup>14</sup> for “*faith* is God’s source of power” (emphasis in original).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, “everything that you’re able to see or touch,

anything that you can feel, anything that's perceptive to the five physical senses, was originally the faith of God, and was born in the substance of God's faith."16 In other words, "faith was the raw material substance that the Spirit of God used to form the universe."17

Copeland adds that "God used words when He created the heaven and the earth...Each time God spoke, He released His faith—the creative power to bring His words to pass."18 For "words are spiritual containers,"19 and the "force of faith is released by words."20

Copeland derives his definition of faith from Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (KJV). He interprets the word "substance" as some transcendent, primary element that makes up the universe; it was and is activated by spoken words at the onset of creation (both God's original creation of the world and all subsequent creations, whether by God or man).

Contrary to Copeland's view, the word translated "substance" in the King James Version is the Greek word *hypostasis* which, in the context of Hebrews 11:1, means "an assured impression, a mental realizing."21 Far from being some tangible material or energetic force, faith is a *channel of living trust* stretching from man to God. It is an *assurance* that God's promises never fail, even if sometimes we do not experience their fulfillment during our mortal existence. Other translations render *hypostasis* more precisely as "being sure"(NIV), "to be sure" (TEV), and "assurance" (NASB).

Neither the original Greek text nor any of the modern translations support Copeland's understanding of faith. The same holds true for his understanding of spoken words. Besides, the idea of words functioning as faith-filled containers makes no sense if there is no such thing as "force of faith" (requiring packaging and transportation) in the first place.

## SUMMARY

Kenneth Copeland stands today as one of the Faith movement's leading spokesmen. His voluminous material (in print and broadcast media), combined with his crusades and international outreach centers, attest to his vast influence.

Copeland is responsible for spreading many of the Faith movement's unbiblical teachings. He distorts the biblical concepts of faith and covenant. He reduces God to the image of man while elevating man to the status of God. He lowers Jesus to being a product of positive confession who took on a satanic nature at the cross. And he promotes the occult practice of creative visualization.

Copeland's errors are largely due to his negative stance on reasoning, his poor handling of the Bible, his aversion toward theology, and his bias against tradition.

## A GOD OF HUMAN PROPORTIONS

Copeland's view of God fares no better biblically than his understanding of faith. He describes God as someone "very much like you and me....A being that stands somewhere around 6'-2", 6'-3", that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds, little better, [and] has a [hand]span nine inches across."22

Copeland's statement is based on his *hyperliteral* reading of Isaiah 40:12 ("Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, marked off the heavens with a [nine inch] span,..."[AV]). Yet following the same line of interpretation, one would also have to conclude that God literally held a basket full of dust and weighed mountains on a gigantic set of scales (v. 12b)—an absurd proposition ruled out by the context of the passage. The fact is that Isaiah 40 makes extensive use of figurative language to underscore the vast difference between the Creator and His creation.

Giving a literal spin on verses that figuratively describe God in humanlike (anthropomorphic) terms, Copeland makes God out to be a "spirit-being with a body, complete with eyes, and eyelids, ears, nostrils, a mouth, hands and fingers, and feet."23 However, the Bible never intended to convey the

notion that God has physical features like His human creation. Anthropomorphic descriptions were simply meant to help us understand and relate to our Maker. Jesus declared, “God is spirit” (John 4:24), not a spirit-being with a body (cf. Deut. 4:12). The Creator is, after all, “God, and not man” (Hos. 11:9).

The idea of God possessing a body (physical or spirit) implies the unbiblical view that the Trinity is actually composed of three separate beings. Moreover, a God who has a body with definite, measurable dimensions cannot truly be omnipresent, unlike the God of Scripture who is present everywhere in all His fullness (Jer.23:23-24). (It is true that in His human nature Christ has a body and is localized in space and time. But in His divine nature He remains nonphysical and omnipresent, sharing this immutable nature with the Father and Holy Spirit.) Copeland’s deflation of God is best exemplified by his comment that “the biggest failure in the Bible...is God.”<sup>24</sup> In stark contrast, the biblical God is an all-powerful being (Dan.4:35) whose plans cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2) and who considers nothing too difficult (Jer.32:17; Luke 1:37).

Copeland’s diminished view of God is further amplified by a correspondingly inflated view of the universe in general and man in particular. He claims that the earth is “a copy of the mother planet [i.e., heaven] where God lives.”<sup>25</sup> Exactly how Copeland could “squeeze” God on any planet is difficult to fathom, especially since Solomon pointed out that heaven itself cannot contain God (1 Kings 8:27).

## MEMBERS OF GOD’S CLASS

Copeland overemphasizes similarities between God and man to the point where any distinction becomes virtually nil: “God’s reason for creating Adam was His desire to *reproduce* Himself....Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was God *manifested in the flesh*” (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup>

Referring to his so-called *law of genesis*, Copeland asserts, “Adam was created in God’s own image and likeness, a spirit-being...[and] takes on the nature of his spiritual father or lord.”<sup>27</sup> In explaining the terms “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26, he adds, “If you stood Adam upside God, they look just exactly alike....If you stood Jesus and Adam side-by-side, they would look and act and sound exactly alike....The image is that they look just alike, but the likeness is that they act alike and they are alike....All of God’s attributes, all of God’s authority, all of God’s faith, all of God’s ability was invested in that man.”<sup>28</sup>

Actually, the terms “image” and “likeness” refute Copeland’s point. The Hebrew word for “likeness” (*demuth*) simply means similarity or resemblance, not identity.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the term itself actually “defines and limits” the word “image” (Hebrew: *tselem*) in order “to avoid the implication that man is a precise copy of God, albeit miniature” (emphasis added).<sup>30</sup>

Humans are created in God’s image in the sense that they share, in a finite and imperfect way, God’s *communicable attributes* (e.g. rationality and morality). These attributes, in turn, give individuals the capacity to enjoy fellowship with God, develop personal relationships with one another, and take care of God’s creation as He has commanded.<sup>31</sup> God’s *incommunicable attributes* (e.g. omnipotence, omniscience, self-sufficiency), however, remain solely His.

Along with the “image of God,” Copeland also refers to “the life of God,” which he interchanges with the terms “the absolute life of God,” “absolute life,” “life force,” “life in the absolute sense,” “eternal life,” and “everlasting life.”<sup>32</sup> He applies these terms to a quality of life, the source of which is God.<sup>33</sup> But he also speaks of it as “the substance—the source, the power—the unseen force that makes God, God...[and] places Him above everything else that exists.”<sup>34</sup>

Copeland states that “man was created to know that great *life force* and he longs for it in his dreams. Adam had that *life force* in him before he committed high treason” (emphases added).<sup>35</sup> This is yet another sense in which Copeland believes Adam to be created in God’s class. He was made to partake of “the unseen force that makes God, God”—once again diminishing severely if not altogether destroying any final distinction between Creator and creature.

Furthermore, this “force” is at times spoken of as a reality more ultimate than God Himself, conferring deity not only on the Creator but on His creation, man. This again puts God and redeemed man in the same class.

In Copeland’s theology, Adam (and, consequently, the rest of humanity) does not appear to have a uniquely human nature. Initially possessing the nature of God, “when Adam committed high treason [sinned] against God and bowed his knee to Satan, spiritual death—the nature of Satan—was lodged in his heart.”<sup>36</sup> Adam had in effect, allegedly traded in his divine nature for a satanic nature, otherwise called “spiritual death.” However, Scripture reveals that mankind is wholly distinct from both God (2Sam. 7:22; cf. Mark 12:32) and angelic/demonic beings (Ps. 8:5; cf. Heb. 2:7). and even after the Fall, man is still said to bear the image of God (1 Cor. 11:7).

Copeland also claims that Adam’s transgression empowered Satan to evict God from the earth. “God’s on the outside looking in,” says Copeland. “He doesn’t have any legal entrée into the earth. The thing don’t belong to Him.”<sup>37</sup> (Psalm 24:1 says otherwise.) And supposedly, since “the sin of Adam went all the way up to, but not including, the throne of God...[even] the Heavenly Holy of Holies had to be purified.”<sup>38</sup>

### **COVENANT OF CONVENIENCE**

According to Copeland, “God had no avenue of lasting faith or moving in the earth. He had to have covenant with somebody....He had to be invited in, in other words, or He couldn’t come.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, “the reason that He’s making covenant is to get in to the earth.”<sup>40</sup> “God is on the outside looking in,” says Copeland. “In order to have any say-so in the earth, He’s gonna have to be in agreement with a man here.”<sup>41</sup>

“Since man was the key figure in the Fall,” Copeland argues, “man had to be the key figure in the redemption, so God approached a man named Abram.”<sup>42</sup> An agreement was struck between God and Abram that “gave God access to the earth.”<sup>43</sup> God, in turn, “promised to care for Abraham and his descendants in every way—spiritually, physically, financially, socially.”<sup>44</sup> Commenting on the deal, Copeland writes that God “re-enacted with Abram what Satan had done with Adam, except that God did not sneak in and use deception...and Abram bought it.”<sup>45</sup>

As his comments indicate, Copeland views *divine covenants* no differently from *business contracts*.<sup>46</sup> They are benefit-oriented, not relationship-oriented. They are formed by mutual agreement (for mutual benefit) through negotiation, as opposed to being initiated by the stronger party offering non-negotiable help (not of necessity but of grace)—which is the traditional Christian understanding of God’s covenants. They focus on the fulfillment of certain terms (performance) rather than personal loyalty. Copeland himself states that “the Word of the living God is a contract.”<sup>47</sup>

Copeland’s view deflates the biblical concept of God in numerous other ways. He parallels God’s actions with those of Satan. In effect he makes man to be the dominant party over God—even claiming that Abraham could have told God to “bug off” when God offered him a “proposition.”<sup>48</sup> And he seemingly attributes the ultimate sacredness of divine covenants not to the figure who stands behind them (*viz.* God), but to the fact that they are composed of words: “Words are the most sacred things....This is a word planet....governed by words...created by words....Words cause it to function...cause life...cause death....Words go on forever....Words are holy.”<sup>49</sup>

Copeland maintains that God “used His right that Abraham had given Him”<sup>50</sup> to provide a way for Jesus to enter the earth. Abraham gave God what He needed: “the chance to use his [Abraham’s] mouth, because what God was after was a vehicle in the earth that was a man to get His Word in there.”<sup>51</sup>

### **THE SPOKEN WORD MADE FLESH**

“God is injecting His Word into the earth to produce this Jesus,” Copeland explains. “This [*sic*]

faith-filled words that framed the image that's in Him....He had to sneak it in here around the god of this world [Satan].”<sup>52</sup> Using a combination of faith and confession, “God spoke His Word and then spoke His Word again....He kept saying, ‘He is coming. He is coming.’”<sup>53</sup> However, “the only avenue God had to get His words into the earth was through men...through the mouths of His prophets....Finally, the great moment came when that Word was brought forth in human form.”<sup>54</sup>

During this final phase, “the angels spoke the words of the covenant to her [Mary], and the Spirit of God hovered over her and generated that seed, which was the Word that the angel spoke to her. And there was conceived in her, the Bible says, a holy thing. The Word literally became flesh.”<sup>55</sup>

The notion of Jesus being the end product of generations of positive confession is categorically unbiblical. It suggests that the Word of John chapter one was a creation (the personalization of the previously impersonal words of God) rather than the eternally existent Creator (see vv.1-3), thus subverting the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Copeland also gave a “prophecy” in which Jesus allegedly said, “They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn’t claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me.”<sup>56</sup> Copeland asserts Jesus did not openly claim to be God because “He hadn’t come to earth as God, He’d come as man. He’d set aside His divine power,”<sup>57</sup> Citing Philippians 2:5-7, he states that the incarnate Christ “had no innate supernatural powers. He had no ability to perform miracles until after He was anointed by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>58</sup>

The passage Copeland cites (v.6), however, describes Christ as “*being* in very nature God.” The participle “being” is rendered in the present active tense (Greek: *huparchon*), denoting Christ’s *ongoing condition* as having the nature of God. Christ did not give up His divine attributes during His incarnation (cf. Col. 2:9; Heb. 13:8), but instead added to them (see Phil. 2:7, “taking”) a full human nature in the form of a servant. Moreover, Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man (Mark 2:5-10; cf. Dan. 7:13-14) and the unique Son of God the Father (John 5:18; 10:30-33), demonstrating His claim to be God.<sup>59</sup>

In Copeland’s view, three basic factors enabled Jesus to perform miracles. First, “the force of faith was controlling His ministry.”<sup>60</sup> Second, “He exercised that authority by the use of words.”<sup>61</sup> Third, “He used the Covenant to control the laws of nature.”<sup>62</sup> Copeland’s view, however, rests upon a false understanding of faith, the spoken word, and the Abrahamic covenant, and is therefore erroneous.

## **SPIRITUAL DEATH AND REBIRTH IN HELL**

When it comes to defining the Atonement, Copeland says, “It wasn’t a physical death on the cross that paid the price for sin...anybody can do that.”<sup>63</sup> Jesus supposedly “put Himself into the hands of Satan when He went to that cross, and took that same nature that Adam did [when he sinned].”<sup>64</sup> Copeland is here referring to the nature of Satan, as God pronounced that “Adam would die spiritually—that he would take on the nature of Satan which is spiritual death.”<sup>65</sup> He adds that “the day that Jesus was crucified, God’s life, that eternal energy that was His from birth, moved out of Him and He accepted the very nature of death itself.”<sup>66</sup>

During an alleged conversation with Copeland, Jesus is said to have remarked, “It was a sign of Satan that was hanging on the cross....I accepted, in my own spirit, spiritual death; and the light was turned off.”<sup>67</sup> We are told that Jesus “had to give up His righteousness”<sup>68</sup> and “accepted the sin nature of Satan.”<sup>69</sup>

Contrary to the teaching that Christ underwent a change of nature (into a satanic being), the Bible depicts Jesus as having an immutable divine nature (Heb. 13:8; cf. Mal. 3:6). Moreover, in saying that “spiritual death means separation from the life of God,”<sup>70</sup> Copeland tacitly admits that Jesus completely lost His deity. For, as we noted earlier, Copeland defines the “life of God” as “the unseen force that makes God, God.” However, Scripture declares that God is eternal and unchanging and thus never ceases to be God. The Father says of Christ, “But you remain the same, and your years will never end”

(Heb. 1:12).

Finally the notion of Jesus being overtaken by “the very nature of death” is contradicted by Jesus’ claim that He has “*life in Himself*” (John 5:26; cf. 1:4), is “the resurrection and the *life*” (11:25), and is “the way, the truth and the life” (14:6). The “spiritual death of Christ” teaching entails an implicit denial of Christ’s deity and, in turn, of the Trinity.

Still, Copeland insists “Satan *conquered* Jesus on the Cross and took His spirit to the dark regions of hell” (emphasis in original).<sup>71</sup> Copeland’s description of Christ’s ordeal in hell is nothing short of chilling: “He [Jesus] allowed the devil to drag Him into the depths of hell....He allowed Himself to come under Satan’s control...every demon in hell came down on Him to annihilate Him....They tortured Him beyond anything anybody had ever conceived. For three days He suffered everything there is to suffer.”<sup>72</sup>

The situation seemed hopeless, as Jesus’ “emaciated, poured out, little, wormy spirit is down in the bottom of that thing; and the devil thinks he’s got Him destroyed.”<sup>73</sup> However, Copeland explains that “Satan fell into the trap. He took Him [Jesus] into hell illegally. He carried Him in there [when] He did not sin.”<sup>74</sup> God found the opening He needed: “That Word of the living God went down into that pit of destruction and charged the spirit of Jesus with resurrection power! Suddenly His twisted, death-wracked spirit began to fill out and come back to life....Jesus was born again—the firstborn from the dead the Word calls Him—and He whipped the devil in his own backyard.”<sup>75</sup>

Copeland’s account, vivid though it may be, is not in the Bible. It misuses the phrase “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18) to bolster the “born again Jesus” doctrine. Actually, the term “firstborn”(Greek: *prototokos*) primarily denotes primacy, headship, and preeminence. And the phrase itself points to Christ’s supremacy “over all creation” (v. 15) in general and those who will be raised from the dead in particular (alluding to Christ’s bodily resurrection—not some spiritual resuscitation in hell).

Moreover, Jesus was not dragged into hell by Satan, but instead committed His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46) and went directly to paradise (v. 43). Nor was He tortured by a host of demons; He triumphed “over them by the *cross*” (Col. 2:15). Jesus paid for humanity’s sin in full (Greek: *tetelestai*) at the cross (John 19:30)—not by becoming a satanic being, but through His *physical* sacrifice (Heb. 10:10; Col. 1:22).

## THE BELIEVER’S AUTHORITY

Copeland’s basis for the believer’s authority can be viewed in three distinct stages. First, upon conversion the believer undergoes a total and immediate change of nature. At the moment of spiritual birth “the spirit of God hovered over you, and there was conceived in your body a holy thing *identical to Jesus*....And there was imparted into you *zoe*, the *life of God*” (emphases added).<sup>76</sup> Hence, “you are to think the way Jesus thought. He didn’t think it robbery to be equal with God.”<sup>77</sup> Copeland’s remarks, “You are to think the way Jesus Thought. He didn’t think it robbery to be equal with God.”<sup>77</sup> Copeland’s remarks, “you are not a spiritual schizophrenic—half-God and half-Satan—you are all-God”<sup>78</sup> and “you don’t have a God in you; you are one,”<sup>79</sup> demonstrate that being born again means nothing less to him than becoming a god.

Yet Scripture states there is only one God who indwells all believers (John 14:17,23). Additionally, the Bible views spiritual birth *not* in terms of a change of nature (from satanic to divine), but as the regeneration of a uniquely human spirit by God (2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:5).

In the second stage of his discourse, Copeland teaches that the believer’s change of nature (into a god) brings with it a proportional change in ability. “Every man that has been born again has had this faith [viz. God’s] put inside him,” he writes. “This faith is good enough to make all things possible to the believer.”<sup>80</sup>

Copeland comments, “As a born-again believer, you are equipped with the Word. You have the

power of God at your disposal. By getting the Word deep into your spirit and speaking it boldly out your mouth, you release spiritual power to change things in the natural circumstances.”<sup>81</sup>

The believer is thus allegedly able to speak things into existence by way of faith-filled words, or *positive confession*. But as we have already shown, Copeland’s views of faith and words are without legitimate scriptural warrant, and are therefore invalid when applied to the believer.

In the third stage of Copeland’s teaching on the believer’s authority, we are told that knowing and exercising the rights set forth under the covenant guarantee success in confession. He remarks that the Bible “is the wisdom of God placed in covenant contract....Everything in it is mine....You just keep looking at it, and keep reading it, and that covenant will turn you into that kind of person—whatever it is you decide to be.”<sup>82</sup>

Copeland translates his concept of covenant rights into what has been termed the “health and wealth” or “prosperity” message. “The basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary,” He asserts. “For Him to put any of this on us now would be a miscarriage of justice.”<sup>83</sup>

### **PRESCRIBING VISUALIZATION**

Copeland combines his “legal” precedent for prosperity with his “mechanics” of confession to form a formula for speaking things into existence. He insists, “you have the same creative faith and ability on the inside of you that God used when he created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>84</sup> However, he adds that most believers are not able to make full use of their inner power because “our imagination...has been so fouled up and fathered up with wasted useless words [and] wasted useless images.”<sup>85</sup>

As a corrective, Copeland instructs believers to “go to the New Testament, get the words of the covenant that cover the situation that you hope to bring to pass. Build the image of that hope inside of you....Keep the word before your eyes.”<sup>86</sup> As examples, he uses an inner picture of an 82-foot yacht that will transform into reality in the Holy of Holies in heaven, along with a “picture [of a Bible] that came right out of me and went into the Holy of Holies,”<sup>87</sup> where it developed into an actual, physical object.

Copeland also claims that “when you get to the place where you take the Word of God and build an image on the inside of you of not having crippled legs and not having blind eyes, but when you close your eyes you just see yourself just leap out of that wheelchair, it will picture that in the Holy of Holies and you will come out of there.”<sup>88</sup>

Recognizing that his technique “sounds like that visualization they do in meditation and metaphysical practices,”<sup>89</sup> Copeland counters by reversing the tables. “What they’re doing sounds like this,” he retorts. “The devil is a counterfeiter. He never came up with anything real. That is the perverted form of the real thing. Where do you think he got it? That sucker doesn’t know anything on his own. Amen.”<sup>90</sup>

During another occasion, however, Copeland revealingly affirms that both positive confession and creative visualization are based on the same principle: “Words create pictures, and pictures in your mind create words. And then the words come back out your mouth....And when that spiritual force comes out it is going to give substance to the image that’s on the inside of you. Aw, that’s that visualization stuff! Aw, that’s that New Age! No, New Age is trying to do this; and they’d get somewhat results out of it because this is spiritual law, brother.”<sup>91</sup>

Copeland says, “Any image that you get down on the inside of you that is so vivid when you close your eyes you see it, it’ll come to pass. When God came at the Tower of Babel, He said, ‘Anything they can imagine, they can do.’”<sup>92</sup> He fails to note however, that those individuals built the tower out of brick and tar (Gen. 11:3), not simply out of their imagination. Moreover, their venture incurred God’s judgment (vv. 6-9). Copeland can argue and fuss all he wants, but the fact of the matter is that through such teachings he has entered the world of the occult.

## FATALLY FLAWED

Virtually every error we have noted in Copeland's theology can be attributed to the following four reasons.

First, Copeland seems vehemently opposed to sound reasoning. "Believers are not to be led by logic," he writes. "We are not even to be led by *good sense*" (emphasis in original).<sup>93</sup> Copeland's statement is apparently based on his mistaken belief that the "ministry of Jesus was never governed by logic or reason....He was not led by logic. He was not led by the mind."<sup>94</sup> Isaiah 1:18, on the other hand, quotes God as saying, "Come now, let us *reason* together."

Second, Copeland fails to observe some basic principles of biblical interpretation (including fundamental rules of grammar and usage), at times relying instead on so-called revelation knowledge (information allegedly derived from direct, one-on-one communication with God). His neglect in this area is made embarrassingly apparent by his gross misunderstanding of key words (e.g., faith) and utter disregard of the context in which they appear. The Bible, however, stresses the importance of correctly handling the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Third, Copeland does not seem to acknowledge the importance of systematic theology, as indicated by his statement, "I don't preach doctrine, I preach faith."<sup>95</sup> Although he may not realize it, *his preaching on faith and other topics do in fact constitute doctrines*, which combined form his theology (however inconsistent). He would do well to heed the apostle Paul's advice to "watch your life and your doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Fourth, Copeland displays an open attitude of disdain and disrespect for the historically established views of the church. Admittedly, tradition must ultimately be tested by the Word of God. However, it should be recognized that certain historically accepted views, especially as they apply to essential Christian doctrine (e.g., the nature of faith, the nature of God, the nature of man, and the person and work of Jesus Christ), are significant, time-tested summations of fundamental Bible-based truths. To deviate from them is to reject the heart of Christian faith.

It is regrettable that someone so influential within contemporary Christianity continues to preach a message that overturns virtually every major biblical teaching. To date, Copeland refuses to discuss with his critics the issues raised in this article. We only hope that he will soon realize the dangerous road he is traveling. As Scripture warns, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). For now, Copeland, being a false teacher, has made himself an enemy of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

*These two articles originally appeared in the Winter and Spring issues of:  
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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Copeland, "The Word in My life....," *Kenneth Copeland Ministries Catalog* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *The Music of Ministry* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991, audiotape # 53-0018), side 1.

<sup>3</sup>Due to space limitations, this article will confine its focus on areas of Copeland's teachings that form the framework for positive confession, which in turn provide the mechanism for the "health and wealth" gospel. Attempts to contact Copeland to resolve any possible misunderstanding of his teachings have been unsuccessful. Still, every effort has been made to present and evaluate Copeland's views as

accurately and fairly as possible.

4*Living to Give* (pamphlet) (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.) 4.

5Charles Farah, "A Critical Analysis: The 'Roots and Fruits' of Faith-Formula Theology." *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Spring 1981, 15; cited in Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 183.

6*Living to Give*, 4.

7*Ibid*, 5.

8*Ibid*, 8

9D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 95. Benny Hinn, Jerry Savelle, and Charles Capps number among those Faith teachers who have been profoundly impacted by Copeland.

10*Ibid*, 135-42.

11Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1989), 10.

12*Forces of the Recreated Human Spirit* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1982), 8.

13Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 18-19.

14Kenneth Copeland, *Freedom from Fear* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1983), 11.

15*Ibid*, 12.

16Kenneth Copeland, *Spirit, Soul and Body I* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audiotape #01-0601), side 1.

17Kenneth Copeland, *Authority of the Believer II* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987, audiotape #01-0302), side 1.

18Kenneth Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1980), 4.

19*Forces Of the Recreated Human Spirit*, 15; cf. 14,

20*Ibid*, 17.

21*The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 419.

22Copeland, *Spirit, Soul and Body I*, side 1.

23Kenneth Copeland ministry letter, 21 July 1977.

24Kenneth Copeland, *Praise-a-Thon*, TBN, 1988. Copeland has, in another instance, stated that God "is not a failure" (Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* [Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, n.d.], 23)

25Kenneth Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries 1989, audiotape #01-3001), side 1.

26Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham I*, side 1.

27Kenneth Copeland, *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1987), 7-8.

28Kenneth Copeland, *Authority of the Believer IV* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987, audiotape #01-0304), side 1.

29Cf. James M. Kinnebrew, *The Charismatic Doctrine of Positive Confession: A Historical, Exegetical and Theological Critique* (doctoral dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Seminary, 1988), 157.

30R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 Vols. (Chacago: Moody Press, 1981), 1:192.

31Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988) 510; cf. 514.

32Copeland, *Walking in the Realm of the Miraculous*, 74-76. Copeland's understanding of these terms, derived from the Greek word *zoe* (life), is similar to that of ancient Gnostics. See Rudolf Bultmann, "Zoe in Greek Usage," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged in one volume), ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co./Paternoster Press, 1985), 291.

- 33 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 76
- 35 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 36 Copeland, *Our Covenant with God*, 9.
- 37 Kenneth Copeland, *The Image of God in You III* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989, audiotape #01-1403) side 1.
- 38 Kenneth Copeland, *Inner Image of the Covenant* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989, audiotape #01-4406), side 1.
- 39 Kenneth Copeland, *God's Covenant with Man II* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1989, audiotape #01-4404), side 1.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 Copeland, *Our Covenant with God*, 10.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 46 See Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 71-73. Cf. William Dymess, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979); and George Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, September 1954, 50-76.
- 47 Kenneth Copeland, "The Abrahamic Covenant" (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audiotape #01-4405), side 1.
- 48 Copeland, *God's Covenants with Man II*, side 2.
- 49 Copeland, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, side 1.
- 50 Kenneth Copeland, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1990, audiotape #02-0017), side 1.
- 51 Copeland, *The Image of God in You III*, side 1.
- 52 *Ibid.*, side 2.
- 53 Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue*, 9-10.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Copeland, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, side 2.
- 56 Kenneth Copeland, "Take Time to Pray," *Believer's Voice of Victory*, February 1987, 9.
- 57 Kenneth Copeland, "Question & Answer," *Believer's Voice of Victory*, August 1988, 8.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 On Jesus' self-witness, see Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1990), 44-126.
- 60 Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, 9.
- 61 Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue*, 15.
- 62 Copeland, *Our Covenant with God*, 21.
- 63 Kenneth Copeland, *What Satan Saw on the Day of Pentecost* (Fort Worth: Messages by Kenneth Copeland, n.d. audiotape #BCC-19), side 1.
- 64 Kenneth Copeland, *The Incarnation* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audiotape #01-0402), side 1.
- 65 Copeland, *Our Covenant with God*, 9.
- 66 Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," *Believer's Voice of Victory*, September 1991, 3.
- 67 Copeland, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, side 2.
- 68 Copeland, *The Incarnation*, side 2.

- 69Copeland, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, side 2.
- 70Copeland, *Inner Image of the Covenant*, side 1.
- 71Kenneth Copeland, *Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991), 129.
- 72Copeland, “*The Price of It all*,” 3.
- 73Kenneth Copeland, *Believer’s Voice of Victory* (television program), TBN, 21 April 1991.
- 74Copeland, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, side 2.
- 75Copeland, “*The Price of It all*,” 4-6.
- 76Copeland, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, side 2.
- 77Kenneth Copeland, *Now We are in Christ Jesus* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1980), 23-24.
- 78*Ibid*, 16-17.
- 79Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Love* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987, audiotape #02-0028), side 1.
- 80Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, 13.
- 81Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue*, 15.
- 82Copeland, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, side 1.
- 83Copeland, *The Troublemaker*, 6.
- 84Copeland, *Inner Image of the Covenant*, side 2.
- 85*Ibid*
- 86*Ibid*
- 87*Ibid*
- 88*Ibid*
- 89*Ibid*
- 90*Ibid*
- 91Kenneth Copeland, *Believer’s Voice of Victory* (television program), TBN, 28 March 1991.
- 92Copeland, *Inner Image of the Covenant*, side 2.
- 93Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, 7.
- 94*Ibid.*, 7-8.
- 95Copeland, *Following the Faith of Abraham 1*, side 2.