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Prosperity Teaching and Positive Thinking

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If not a moral problem, Prosperity teaching is at least a theological problem. If the liberationists major on social salvation, prosperity teachers major on material salvation. The author convincingly traces the origin of prosperity teaching in Norman Vincent Peale's Positive Thinking as well as a kind of Pentecostalism which has such a bent. Obviously, the prosperity syndrome need not be confined exclusively to the developed countries.

Editor

When the teaching on prosperity first appeared in Southern Africa, it was in groups outwardly very similar to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, such that the particular doctrinal emphasis on material prosperity could well be thought of as an extension of their characteristic teaching on the Holy Spirit. However, although it is true that many of these churches are now teaching an emphasis on prosperity, my contention is that the source of the doctrine is not simply an extension of the classic Pentecostal doctrines, but is to be found in a combination of these with a group of ideas, known as 'positive thinking', imported from elsewhere, particularly the USA. The prosperity teachings are '... notably different from the charismatic renewal ... of which they form a part, and from their Pentecostal and evangelical roots' (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:11).¹

PROSPERITY TEACHING

In order to demonstrate a source for these ideas it is necessary briefly to define what these ideas are.

Material prosperity is the right of a Christian. There is a strong sense of the ability of God and His relationship to the believer, such that if God [p. 198](#) is in control of all, the believer has access to it. He can and should live as a 'King's kid' (Cho 1979:10). Hence it is believed that a believer can, and should, be rich in a material sense.

Positive confession. The main means of achieving prosperity is by 'confession' of the answer to the need, not by referring to the need itself which is negative confession (Capps 1982:255). Success is therefore claimed on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#), [Philippians 4:19](#) (Copeland 1974:29). If this is done, results are assured. However doubt, which is a negative form of confession, will prevent the desired results (Copeland 1974:19, cf. [James 1:7](#)).

Bible usage. The Bible is thus used in a fundamentalist way, in which texts are extracted from the context, both written and historical, and applied to the current situation.

¹ Pentecostalism cannot be seen as the only source of these ideas because of the definite differences in various areas. For example, classic Pentecostalism tends to be spiritually rather than materially minded (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:31), it knows nothing of 'positive confession', and although it has a strong emphasis on tithing, the reason for this is not for personal gain but for Christian work.

Although the whole Bible is referred to as inspired, it is noticeable that comparatively few texts are used.

Faith. The key to receiving prosperity is the exercise of faith. However, faith is looked upon not so much as trust but as a positive action (Hagin 1978:13). If something material is claimed, then the person must act as if he has already received it, or his faith is not real, and consequently he will not receive (Copeland 1974:80, but cf. 1974:105). Faith can therefore be viewed as an instrument to influence God, with the consequent loss of Divine sovereignty to the human will.

Other techniques. In addition to positive confession, other ways of achieving prosperity are used. These are agreeing with another, on the basis of [Matthew 18:19](#), where both claim together (Copeland 1974:96), and the ideas of 'seed faith'. This latter, taken from [Mark 10:30](#), and relating to the practice of tithing, teaches that God will repay any gift to him at the rate of one hundred-fold, possibly over a period of time (Copeland 1974:66f). As in the case of positive confession, doubt as to the efficacy of the technique (taken however as mistrust of God) will stop the return.

Underlying theology. Apart from the direct approach to Biblical texts, there is an implied theology which is used to support the claims made. This is rooted in a view of the atonement as a substitutionary sacrifice (Capps 1976:43, 153), although other views of the atonement, particularly the 'Christus Victor' of Aulen, could well be similarly used. The substitutionary theory indicates that on the cross Jesus suffered for our sins, thus substituting his life for our punishment. Prosperity p. 199 teaching extends this idea to the material realm, arguing that if Jesus took on himself our sins, then he also took on himself material needs as well (McCauley 1984:14). Then just as spiritual salvation is claimed as a result of faith, so prosperity, or material salvation, may likewise be claimed (Copeland 1974:51).²

Health. Although not directly a part of the complex of ideas, teaching on health is always associated with it. Health can therefore be claimed as a Christian right (Capps 1976:42), by a faith which will treat symptoms as spurious once healing has been claimed, or as a device of the devil to cause doubt and non-receipt. The basis of the claim is again in the theory of the atonement, with perhaps a bit more substance, in so far as [Matthew 8:17](#) applies [Isaiah 53:4](#) to the healing miracles of Jesus.

POSITIVE THINKING

It was Norman Vincent Peale, more than any other, who popularized this technique, and it is on his writings that I wish to concentrate. Naturally he has also been influenced by earlier teachings.³ The ideas of Christian Science come immediately to mind here, but there are significant differences. I mention just two. Firstly Peale, and prosperity teaching thereafter, can hardly be considered to treat matter as not really existent. Secondly, and this is perhaps more significant, whereas Christian Science denies the reality of evil, Peale (1960:9) does not refuse to recognise the negative, but rather refuses to dwell upon it, and the prosperity teachers deny its existence only after the claim of health or prosperity has been made. A more likely possibility is the influence of existentialist ideas on Schuller (Voskuil 1983:151), but he insists that any influence is indirect, more likely due to the

² For a discussion of this aspect of the prosperity message, see Onken 1980.

³ Voskuil 1983:115f refers to his immediate predecessors.

‘spirit of the age’. I am not holding Peale totally responsible for the excesses of the teaching today. There have, after all, been many similarities in the past. Verryyn (1983:10) sees similarities with the Sadducees.⁴ Swaggert (1980) also connects the prosperity teaching with Gnosticism. Here Voskuil (1983:118) sees a similarity between Quimby (Christian P. 200 Science) and neo-Platonism.⁵ With both the Sadducees and the Gnostics, however, there is no historical link with the prosperity teachers. Indeed Swaggert (1980:5) doubts whether any of the present day prosperity teachers know anything about Gnosticism. It would seem rather that the very evident human desire for material success is bound to manifest itself in various ways from time to time. Peale was no scholar (Timmerman 1985), and neither are prosperity teachers. Perhaps the closest definite indication of dependence is seen in that both Peale and the prosperity teachers have been successfully propagating their doctrines in the same geographical area (the Western world, especially the USA) and therefore with respect to the same culture and problems.⁶ Similar to Schuller, Carnegie (1955:42) sees self-esteem as one of the most powerful human motivations. More specifically, one link, probably not the only one, can be seen in the clear dependence of Robert Schuller on Peale (Voskuil 1983:17), and then the influence by Schuller on Cho, seen in a foreword (Cho 1979), who openly propagates prosperity teaching. Such links are however tenuous. I want therefore to consider the aspects of prosperity teaching in turn and note similarities in the writings of Peale.

The Prosperity Teaching of Peale can be summarised as follows:

Material success is a right. An important facet of Peale, taken from his liberal background, is the idea of the love of God, coupled with a belief that Christians are God’s sons. Thus Peale believes that he can affirm his health because ‘I am a child of God’ (1960:215). Of course the entire thrust of his books concerns success and how to achieve it. Generally however he sees this as a result of the positive attitude to life which is his prime objective, rather than as an end in itself which is the stand of the prosperity teachers. However, in American culture, p. 201 the two are really inseparable. Peale thus gives many examples of how positive thinking has resulted in material success and goes so far as to say explicitly: ‘There was a time when I acquiesced in the silly idea that there is no relationship between faith and prosperity ...’ (1953:229).

Usually a disciple is more extreme than the person he follows, and this idea is more explicit in Schuller. His biographer refers to his system as ‘success through positive thinking’ (Voskuil 1983:3), and in his own writings he has no doubt that the acquisition

⁴ An example is their literalistic interpretation of the Scripture. More importantly, Verryyn notes that they did not challenge the existing order of society, but worked with it for their own prosperity. Thus they reflected the assumptions of the time. This is clearly true of Peale, and Voskuil (1983:156) says the same of Schuller, Peale’s ‘disciple’.

⁵ The major point that Swaggert makes is the syncretism of Gnosticism, and it certainly seems evident that the prosperity teaching is an amalgam of Christianity with the prevalent Western materialism. He notes a couple of other points of similarity such as the raising of man to autonomy, near divinity, and the power of the ‘word’. One of his major points, however, of a supposed dualism in the prosperity teaching between body and spirit, as occurs in Gnosticism, is, I believe, untenable, as one of the pillars of their theological position is that spiritual change should have material results. Moreover prosperity teaching does not lead in itself to either asceticism or antinomanism as the Gnostic dualism did, although the emphasis on individual revelation and authentication has led to the latter from time to time. Peale however tends to be dualistic (‘The body is but a temporary tool of the real person, who is spirit’ (1960:259)) as his spiritualist experiences also show (Timmerman 1985).

⁶ ... a self-help religious tradition has flourished in America ... [and] identified success as a product of character’ (Voskuil 1983:116).

of wealth is correct and something to thank God for (Schuller 1982:116). In fact he even claims to have removed this question from being an issue for a Christian, which it admittedly has been for centuries, seeing the solution in the idea that sacrifice is necessary for success (1982:28). In this he is anticipating the ideas of 'seed faith'.

Positive confession. The basic standpoint of positive thinking is the affirmation and concentration of the positive aspect of any situation and the rejection of any negative aspects. Thus Peale says: 'I discovered that if you expect the best you will get the best' (1953:112), or 'big thoughts get big results' (1960:36), and solves big problems by praying big prayers (1953:7). His belief is that the power of the mind will act upon the situation and itself be effective. Although he attributes the power of change to God,⁷ reference to mind conditioning is much more common although he quotes [Romans 12:2](#) as a justification for this (1960:32f). Thus he advises, 'Repeat the affirmation daily' (1957:20), 'Speak to your muscles every day and to your nerves' (1953:102) (the speaking should be aloud!). Schuller advises likewise (Voskuil 1983:85), as do other protagonists of the technique. Thus Hill & Stone (1961:200) report the effects of having a group of salesmen chant in unison 'I feel wealthy, I feel happy, I feel terrific', and advise (1961:69) the writing down 'with emotion' [sic] twice daily a statement of desire for money. Carnegie (1955:85) advises, 'Act as if you were already happy, and that will tend to make you happy.' Thus Peale refers to the '... amazing untapped power you have within you ...' (1957:27), and secular positive thinkers talk of the mystic powers of the mind (Hill & Stone 1961:67). It is a short step to clairvoyance and telepathy (cf. Hill & Stone 1967:78, Peale 1960:250f), and not surprisingly, Peale's autobiography refers to spiritualism, and visits from his dead parents (Timmerman 1985).

Peale is equally sure that negative thoughts are counter productive. p. 202 He writes, 'Positive thinking will not work unless you believe it will work' (1960:28), and, 'They water it down with timid little doubts' (1960:28). Likewise Schuller says a negative emotion must never be verbalized (Voskuil 1983:80).

In contrast to secular users of positive thought, and the prosperity teachers, Peale does not believe that anything can be achieved, irrespective of the will of God. He feels one only receives what will be good. He writes, '... on a faith basis your desire will only be for that which you can ask in God's name' (1957:4). In a similar way, Peale believes that guilt, due to wrong action, will restrict the power of thought (1960:25). Of course the prosperity teachers are in harmony with this, but believe that prosperity is always the will of God (e.g. Capps 1976:33, 153).

Bible usage. This is one of the biggest areas of difference from the prosperity teachers. Peale is not a fundamentalist, so does not regard Bible texts as effective in themselves, but as valuable for conditioning the mind. He can advise opening the Bible at random to read (1960:190). Thus [Philippians 4:13](#), which is taken by prosperity teachers as a proof text, is used by Peale as an inspiring text, to be frequently repeated. Schuller (e.g. 1982:119) does the same. A similar treatment is given to [Mark 11:24](#) (1960:155) which is one of the key texts of Hagin (e.g. 1978:6) and other prosperity teachers. Even secular positive thinkers use the Bible (and other inspiring works) in the same way e.g. Hill & Stone (1961:20, 301).

⁷ E.g. 'Always act as if it were impossible to fail and God will see you through' (1960:15, quoting an acquaintance with approval).

A similar aspect is the fact that Peale and Schuller did not emphasize their denomination (cf. Voskuil 1983:15). Peale sees the value of any faith as inspirational,⁸ and notes the acclaim of positive thought by those of all religions, 'Catholics, Protestants and Jews' (1960:6). It could well be argued, as in the case of Schuller also, that there is actually little connection between their technique and Christianity (cf. 1953:160, 1957:7). It is worth noting here that most of the churches which propagate prosperity claim to be 'interdenominational'.

Faith. The title of one of Kenneth Hagin's booklets is 'Have faith in faith', which adequately reflects the attitude of the prosperity teachers, that results come as a result of faith. This is echoed by a similar statement of Peale, 'Don't be afraid to trust faith' (1957:1). Of course [p. 203](#) both Peale and the prosperity teachers see the actual power as coming from God, although Peale often refers directly to the power of the mind (e.g. 1957:27), and this is even more so in other advocates of positive thought who even make references to the mind's 'mystic powers' (e.g. Hill & Stone 1961:67).⁹ Thus he frequently urges the imagining of the desired result, because this in itself is effective.¹⁰

Nevertheless Peale is generally seen as attributing the ultimate choice to God.¹¹ This is less extreme than the prosperity teachers, who rather, on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#) see any claim to riches as in God's will (e.g. Cho 1980:30). However Peale thinks rather of influencing God to help. He speaks of an agreement with God,¹² a belief echoed in the prosperity teachers (e.g. Copeland 1974:38f). This however is not far removed from his usual statement of the power of the mind. God helps the power of the mind,¹³ because a believer is a child of God with access to his power, and even changes the mind ([Romans 12:2](#), Peale 1960:32f). Likewise the mind enables God to act,¹⁴ although one suspects that the belief in God expressed here is functioning as inspiration rather than using the power of God itself.

Techniques. Clearly the main technique advocated by Peale is a form of mind conditioning, and this is naturally more clearly the case in secular advocates of positive thought. So Hill & Stone (1961:19) say that 'PMA (Positive Mental Attitude)' attracts wealth, success, happiness and health, whereas 'NMA (Negative Mental Attitude)' removes them. The more characteristic techniques of the prosperity teachers are however not present. Thus there is a suggestion of the agreement idea (1953:58, 1957:239), but more particularly the ideas of 'seed faith', although not explicit, are certainly present in the form that it is [p.](#)

⁸ E.g. '... I have found that the sweetness of death is intensified in all men by a childlike faith in their religion ... what men cling to is the same throughout the world (1960:250).

⁹ Peale also suggests this in places (e.g. 1960:244f). He writes, 'Attitudes are more important than facts' (1953:14, quoting a 'famous psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger'), a statement with clear similarities to the position of the prosperity teachers, and 'your belief will help create the fact' (1957:27, quoting William James).

¹⁰ E.g. 'The minute you can see them in your mind, you already have them' (1953:225).

¹¹ E.g. '... hold a mental picture ... put the wish in God's hands ... If it is His will He will grant it' (1957:5).

¹² E.g. 'God and I struck up a partnership' (1953:113, quoting a successful businessman).

¹³ E.g. 'Develop a tremendous faith in God and that will give you a humble yet soundly realistic faith in yourself' (1953:7).

¹⁴ E.g. 'affirm "God is helping me" ' (1953:15), 'believe that you now receive power from him' (1953:18).

204 profitable to the giver to give.¹⁵ This of course is a standard secular technique, so Dale Carnegie (1955:41f) advocates boosting the other person's self-esteem in order to gain contracts from him.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Peale sees the benefits as coming from far more than psychology. He quotes [Malachi 3:10](#) (1960:111), and speaks of the miraculous provision of God (1960:115). Naturally however the full doctrines of tithing and particularly the hundred fold return ([Mark 10:30](#)) are not to be found as these are more distinctly biblical.

Underlying theology. There is no connection made with the atonement in any of the writings of the positive thinkers. Peale bases his belief in success, where it is simply due to the power of the mind, on the love of God.¹⁷ Further than this he does not go. Schuller however goes further and tries to systematize a theology. Like Peale he says that 'God's plan calls for us to succeed' (Schuller 1982:120). He attempts to build his theology on the concept of self-esteem, and prosperity and success will enhance a person's self-esteem. There are perhaps a few hints of doubt about this idea. He says that society as a whole will benefit from an individual's success (Schuller 1982:12),¹⁸ and urges self-denial (1982:70) as only the self-esteemed can really give (1982:116).¹⁹ Perhaps most significantly, however, Schuller justified the building of the ostentatious 'Crystal Cathedral' rather than supporting the poor, by the need to evangelized in a culturally relevant way, by a low cost per kilogram, but especially by individual revelation (Voskuil 1983:32). It is this last point which finds many echoes in the prosperity teachers who frequently claim such personal revelation (e.g. Copeland 1974:72, Hagin 1978:19).

Health. Unlike the followers of prosperity teaching who have often eschewed medical attention, and suffered as a result, believing that a p. 205 claim of healing was effective (cf. Farah 1980:1f etc.), Peale advocates a combination of God and the doctor (1953:185, 206). There is no claiming, or laying on of hands (cf. 1953:199f), except in the application of positive thought to the illness. He thus advocates an attitude of 'I am going to be better today' rather than 'I am not going to be ill today' which tends to be negative (1960:215). His belief is in the power of the mind over the body, so sees a cause of ill-health in ill will, or links disease with wrong doing (1957:243). Similarly he treats the mind in order to treat the body, seeing a spiritual factor as a large element even in organic disability (1960:211). He believes that the mind influences the glands of the body (1960:213), and says that mental infection must be removed in order to have a healthy body (1960:206).

However healing is not prominent in his writings. Positive thought is effective for psychosomatic complaints and for headache (1960:27) but for other matters the doctor's advice is advocated.

¹⁵ Thus 'sharing ... stimulates and maintains success' (1960:45), 'learn to give ... the payoff will be more than worth it' (1960:104).

¹⁶ Cf. also Schuller's basic approach to theology which is 'self-esteem' (Schuller 1982), and Hill & Stone (1961:152) argue 'the more you give of that which is good and desirable, the more you will get'.

¹⁷ E.g. 'I am the rich child of a loving Father, all the Father has is mine ... claim ... health and wealth' (1960:117 quoting principles given in a class for businessmen based on Charles Fillmore's book 'Prosperity'), 'Vibrant life is surely God's intent' (1957:vii). (Similarly Hill & Stone (1961:20) assert that it is *never* God's will to be poor.)

¹⁸ An echo of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'?

¹⁹ Similarly McCauley (1984:15), on the basis of [2 Corinthians 9:8](#), claims that God prospers his church (Rhema) so that it can be a blessing to others as well. Cf. also Copeland (1974:57).

PENTECOSTALISM AND PROSPERITY TEACHING

It can be seen that a large number of aspects of the prosperity teaching are to be found in Peale, but by no means all, and those which are there are often carried further by the prosperity teachers. It is necessary to seek a second root to combine with the ideas of Peale in order to clarify the origins of the teaching.

The Charismatic and Pentecostal churches fill the gaps in Peale almost exactly.²⁰ Notably, although Pentecostalism has formed new denominations, the Charismatic movement is across denominations and the prosperity churches are 'interdenominational'.²¹

Material success. Here the Charismatic emphasis was originally more other worldly in that it saw the gifts of the Spirit as causing, and as a result of, a close relationship with God. Nevertheless those gifts find application in this world, particularly the gift of healing. It is probable p. 206 that a large measure of the success seen in such churches is also due to the fact that they fulfill many of the adherents' personal needs, particularly on the emotional level. The move from this to material benefits is not great.²²

Positive confession. This is absent from charismatic theology except in relation to the claiming of Bible promises which is however a secondary feature to proper positive confession.

Bible usage. This major gap in Peale is filled totally by the classic Pentecostal teaching, and to a large extent by the modern Charismatic movement. The difference in these is due to the fact that classic Pentecostalism was almost totally fundamentalist (Hollenweger 1972:29–1f, Bond 1974:15) whereas the Charismatic movement is not, although it finds most fertile ground in churches and individuals which are Bible based in their theology.²³ So although Peale treats Bible texts as merely inspiring, a fundamentalist takes them as an immediate promise of God to him; he treats texts such as [Mark 11:24](#), [John 15:7](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#) as immediately applicable to him, with all the authority of God behind them, such that they are promises to be claimed.

Faith. The fundamentalist is easily driven to the position of the prosperity teachers on faith. Treating the Bible as totally inspired by God, he is urged to trust any particular verse as the direct word of God to him. This is not, however, a distinctive of the Pentecostal

²⁰ This is not just a link with evangelical Christianity as in Schuller (Voskuil 1983:128), but specifically with the emphasis of the Pentecostals on emotional worship and the work of the Spirit. Fundamentalism, in itself, is not so centered upon miracles.

²¹ The obvious difference between Peale's services and those of the Pentecostals is that whereas the latter have exuberance in worship, Peale believed in quietness (1957:165, 225); for him the church building is filled with mysterious powers (1957:206), which can be attuned to. However, it is arguable that both Charismatic worship or quiet contemplation can have the same aim of putting the mind into the correct mode to exert power.

²² It is then noticeable that although the Pentecostal churches achieved great success, at least numerically, compared to traditional churches, the churches preaching prosperity experienced phenomenal growth. For example the Rhema Church in the Johannesburg area grew from about 15 at its establishment in 1979 to over 4000 by 1983 (cf. also Farah 1980:115, Cho 1983:33). There are however signs that a decline may have set in.

²³ Bond (1974:17) notes the doctrinal laxity of the neo-Pentecostals, who emphasize experience rather than doctrine. This of course renders them susceptible to extra ideas such as that of prosperity.

movement as such, although being Arminian in theology, they do tend to emphasize the need of a response of faith (Bloch-Hoell 1964:124).

Techniques. Here again the gap in Peale is adequately filled due to the fundamentalist emphasis. Obviously the texts referring to agreeing in prayer (e.g. [Matthew 18:19](#)) are taken as literally applicable, but also the advice on giving which in Peale is not very specific is greatly enhanced. Here the teaching on tithing which is a feature of the p. 207 Pentecostal churches (Bloch-Hoell 1964:152), but in their case for the support of the church, is linked with Peale's 'giving to get' resulting in the prosperity approach.²⁴ The relevance of the Pentecostals to this is that such folk do have a background of tithing, some of which does go to other Christians, and would then be interpreted as part of the return. Moreover, they are accustomed to 'direct revelation, and so are likely to believe that God specifically tells to give a gift, sometimes very generous, to another. These factors, without any necessary supernatural intervention, would alone lead to a form of vindication of the doctrine.

Underlying theology. Here also the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements fill a gap in Peale. Their doctrine of the atonement has been that of a substitutionary sacrifice (Bloch-Hoell 1964:149), although I suspect that in recent years the ideas of victory appropriated in the cross and resurrection has been more to the fore. In addition the practice of healing has found theological justification in this view of the atonement ([Matthew 8:17=Isaiah 53:4](#)) (Bloch-Hoell 1964:148, Hollenweger 1972:368); although the extension of the atonement to the needs caused by poverty is new, it is a relatively small extrapolation. I suspect that in early Pentecostalism, healing was regarded as a miracle, and the theological justification was not thought out. Once it was, then the extension to poverty followed rapidly.

A significant extra factor is the clear Christian anthropology. Whereas Peale tended to be dualistic in the Greek sense, separating body and spirit, the Pentecostals emphasize the unity of man, so that spirit and body interrelate closely, so that religion affects the whole man.²⁵ Similarly Schuller (1982:167), although not Charismatic, roots his ideas in Judaeo-Christian incentives.

It is worth suggesting also here that the Charismatic emphasis on 'gifts' has also contributed to a materialistic view of religion, emphasizing what is acquired, although of course these gifts are spiritual (e.g. [1 Corinthians 12-14](#)).

Healing. Again this is clearly an important part of life of Pentecostal groups, being almost as important as glossolalia in the early movement p. 208 (Bloch-Hoell 1964-147), and naturally comes over to the prosperity emphasis. Oral Roberts preached health, riches and well-being (Hollenweger 1972-363), but it is noteworthy that a professor at his university denies the prosperity emphasis (Farah 1980).

CONCLUSION

²⁴ For the early Pentecostals tithing was often required. It was seen as the key to prosperity (Hollenweger 1972:399), as it is in the prosperity teachers (e.g. Copeland 1974:106). This is definitely stated in the 'seed faith' doctrine, which again is a result of a fundamentalist approach to [Mark 10:30](#).

²⁵ In contrast to the Greek idea of the evil nature of the material, which predominated in the Church for centuries, this teaching, perhaps unknowingly, is more Hebraic in seeing good in material things (Fuller & Rice 1966:112).

As seen from the outlines above, neither the classic Pentecostal doctrine nor the ideas of positive thinking match up to the developed prosperity ideas. Nevertheless it can be seen that each supplies the lack in the other. Clearly further historical research would need to be done to verify further the validity of the conclusion, but from a theological point of view a synthesis of ideas would seem to be fairly well established.

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Affluence—The Achilles Heel

Jon Bonk

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The following thought-provoking article reached our office several months ago. In this the author describes the influence of the affluence particularly on Western missions making observations from church history and common sense as well as the theology of incarnation. It is an honest analysis of some of the root causes of the so-called Mission-Church tensions, albeit with two limitations: first, primarily it is aimed at the Western missions whereas in recent years the modern Two-Thirds World missionaries have grown to an unbelievable total of 15,000 to whom this analysis does not apply. Second, given the changing policies of missionary organizations as well as foreign exchange rates, the figures need to be taken with a pinch of salt—though the conclusions still hold good.

Editor

GLOBAL DISPARITY

Since the industrial revolution less than two centuries ago, the material and economic gulf separating the industrialized 'North' from the agrarian 'South' has grown to astonishing proportions, and most evidence suggests that the chasm will continue to widen.

This is neither the time nor the place to speculate on the *reasons* for this growing disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.¹ What is of interest is the historical anomaly which has appeared. For the greater part of the *modern* missionary movement, most Christian missionary endeavour has been undertaken by the 'rich' to the 'poor'. This is historically anomalous, since there is little if any precedent for it in the first 1700 years of Christian history, and certainly none in the earlier record of church missionary activity as recorded in the New Testament and patristic sources.

The earliest Christian missionaries operated in a world that was not as sharply polarized economically and materially as is true of its modern counterpart. The first

¹ C. Piero Gheddo, *Why Is The Third World Poor?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973); William Byron (ed.), *The Causes of World Hunger* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); and P. T. Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (London: Methuen, 1981). These three books provide a representatively diverse and stimulating analysis of the reasons for this phenomenon.