
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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The True Origins of the Prosperity Gospel

by Anton Bosch

The prosperity gospel has to be one of the grandest deceptions of all time. A *Time* poll conducted in the USA in 2006, produced the following statistics:

“17% of Christians surveyed said they considered themselves part of such a movement, while a full 61% believed that God wants people to be prosperous. And 31% – a far higher percentage than there are Pentecostals in America – agreed that if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money” (*Time*, Sept. 10, 2006).

From America the message has permeated the whole world, most notably Nigeria where two of the biggest promoters are David Oyedepo, whose Canaanland church seats 55,000, and Enoch Adeboye, whose Redeemed Christian Church of God claims branches in over one hundred countries – 14,000 branches and 5 million members in Nigeria alone. In 2008 *Newsweek* magazine listed him as one of the 50 most powerful people in the world.

The prosperity message has mutated into many variants that all share certain common traits and roots. A closely related teaching to the prosperity message is the “word-of-faith” teaching with its erroneous views on faith. Many regard these errors as the same thing and while they are related and claim to produce the same fruit, their doctrinal and historical roots differ. The word-of-faith message developed simultaneously and parallel to the prosperity message, but its roots trace back through EW Kenyon to Christian Science, while prosperity’s roots trace back through Oral Roberts to Napoleon Hill. This article therefore only deals with the roots of the prosperity gospel which

can be summed up as “give to God and He will give back to you” or “sowing and reaping”. (Word of faith is summed up in “name it and claim it” aka “blab it and grab it.”)

Fruits from Roots

Even to the casual student of Scripture it is clear that the prosperity gospel is another gospel which preaches another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4). This message preys on people’s greed and lust for money and lures the greedy into a religion which worships Mammon rather than the true God. The fruit clearly defines this as a doctrine of devils. “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*” (1 Timothy 4:1). But what are the roots of this teaching? The conclusion of this brief article will shock you, but should not come as a surprise.

Roots

Most of the modern proponents are second or even third generation prosperity preachers. Most of them will have been influenced, either directly or indirectly by at least one of three men: Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003), Kenneth Copeland (1936-), and/or Fred Price (1932-). These three in turn were influenced by Oral Roberts (1918-2009), who has to be dubbed the father of the prosperity Gospel.

Hagin, Copeland, Price

In 1967 Kenneth Copeland attended Oral Roberts University (ORU) where he also worked as one of Roberts’ pilots. This afforded Copeland the opportunity to see Roberts in action at his healing crusades and to learn first-hand from Roberts. But during his first year at ORU he heard a tape of Hagin and he, and his wife, instantly became disciples of Hagin.

Like the Copelands, Fred Price also credits Hagin as the greatest influence in his life and

ministry. Thus almost all prosperity preachers trace their roots back to Kenneth Hagin. But where did Hagin get the teaching from?

In his book *How God Taught Me About Prosperity* (1985), Hagin says: "The Lord Himself taught me about prosperity. I never read about it in a book. *I got it directly from heaven*" [Emphasis his]. According to Hagin, he received this revelation in 1959.

But by the time Hagin received his "revelation", both Oral Roberts and AA Allan had already been preaching the message for about ten years. (Hagin and Roberts were based in the same city – Tulsa, Oklahoma.) Allan published quite a few books promoting prosperity, while Roberts was using his radio ministry and campaigns to spread the message. Allan was the first to refer to poverty as a "spirit." But in the long run Allan's influence on modern prosperity teaching was relatively minor and short-lived in comparison to that of Roberts. For this reason we will not pursue the AA Allan thread even though his legacy of greed, lust and drunkenness confirms the source of the teaching. In the light of the fact that both Roberts and Allan were promoting this doctrine long before Hagin, Hagin's claim that he had not been influenced by any man is therefore not true.

Oral Roberts

This brings us to Oral Roberts. During 1947 Oral Roberts had come to a crisis in his life and ministry. One morning he opened the Bible and was struck by 3 John 2 ("I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers"). This was a kind of epiphany for Roberts. Roberts and his wife would look back at that moment as "the point of embarkation." A few days after this revelation, Roberts would receive what he believed to be practical confirmation of the fact that God wanted him to prosper materially. Through the agency of Roberts' neighbor who owned a Buick dealership, Roberts was able to acquire a brand new Buick. The neighbor, Mr Gustavus, managed to get a very good price for Robert's old car and helped him to get a new Buick at "dealer's cost," which was not much more than

they got for the old car. This was in the postwar months when new cars were practically unobtainable. According to Roberts the "new car became a symbol to me of what a man can do if he would believe God" (David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life*).

Roberts immediately began to preach the prosperity message. By 1954 he was promising refunds to people who gave him money and who did not receive the amount of their gift returned to them, from an unexpected source, within a short period. In 1955 he published his first book on the topic entitled "*God's Formula for Success and Prosperity*." Note that this was four years before Hagin received his "revelation." This was followed by a number of other books on the topic.

It was only in 1970 that he published the book "*Miracle of Seed-Faith*," which became the book that had the biggest impact in terms of spreading the message across the world.¹ The idea of "seed faith" was based on the principle of sowing and reaping, and it taught that anything you sow into God's Kingdom will result in an abundant return. This applied especially to money, but also to things like time, energy, love etc. Elements of Seed-Faith are still present in the theology of all modern prosperity preachers.

But there was one major influence that resulted in Roberts coming to these beliefs, which we must examine if we are to discover the true roots of this teaching. That man was none other than Napoleon Hill (1883-1970).² Roberts was inspired by Hill's 1937 book, *Think and Grow*

¹ Roberts claims in his autobiography that more than eight million copies were in circulation worldwide.

² Napoleon Hill (October 26, 1883 – November 8, 1970) was an American author in the area of the new thought movement who was one of the earliest producers of the modern genre of personal-success literature. He is widely considered to be one of the great writers on success. His most famous work, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937), is one of the best-selling books of all time (at the time of Hill's death in 1970, *Think and Grow Rich* had sold 20 million copies). Hill's works examined the power of personal beliefs, and the role they play in personal success. He became an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933 to 1936. "What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve" is one of Hill's hallmark expressions. (Wikipedia).

Rich, and had established a close and longstanding relationship with Hill.

Napoleon Hill

Your Magic Power to Be Rich is a 2007 compendium of several of Hill's books. On page 207, in the foreword to *The Magic Ladder to Success*, the editor, Patricia G. Horan says: "The likes of Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, and Oral Roberts became devotees and sometimes shared speaking platforms with Hill."

It is abundantly clear that Hill had an enormous influence on Roberts, and that Roberts' views on prosperity were largely shaped by Napoleon Hill. Hill had a "Law of Compensation" which operated the same as Roberts' principles of Seed-Faith. (US Televangelist Robert Tilton, amongst others, unashamedly uses the Law of Compensation – a blatant copy of Hill's formula). We would need to devote several more chapters to examine Hill's sources and influences, which will open more cans of worms. But for now the most significant source will have to suffice.

In Hill's book, *Think and Grow Rich*, he speaks of a "cabinet of Invisible Counselors" made up of nine men, most of whom were deceased at the time when Hill had "meetings" with them:

"These nine men were Emerson, Paine, Edison, Darwin, Lincoln, Burbank, Napoleon, Ford and Carnegie. Every night, over a long period of years, I held an imaginary council meeting with this group whom I called my "Invisible Counselors." The procedure was this. Just before going to sleep at night, I would shut my eyes, and see, in my imagination, this group of men seated with me around my council table... I had a very definite purpose in indulging my imagination through these nightly meetings. My purpose was to rebuild my own character so it would represent a composite of the characters of my imaginary councilors...I deliberately assigned myself the task of voluntary rebirth through the method I have described above... After some months of this nightly procedure, I was astounded by the discovery that these imaginary figures became apparently *real*... These meetings became so realistic that I

became fearful of their consequences, and discontinued them for several months...These facts are mentioned preliminary to a statement of fact which I shall now make, namely, that during my meetings with the "Invisible Counselors" I find my mind most receptive to ideas, thoughts, and knowledge which reach me through the sixth sense. On scores of occasions, when I faced emergencies, some of them so grave that my life was in jeopardy, I have been miraculously guided past these difficulties through my "Invisible Counselors". (Napoleon Hill. *Think and Grow Rich*. 1938. pp220ff)

In, *Think and Grow Rich*, Hill tries very hard to convince his readers that these figures were simply in his imagination but his own testimony (above) makes it clear that these influences were not imaginary but were actually spirit guides. In fact, in his book, *You Can Work Your Own Miracles*, Hill refers to them as "guides" or "talismans." These are just other names for demons who impersonate any character they wish in order to deceive the living into believing that they are in touch with the dead.

The Bible clearly forbids contact with demons: "There shall not be found among you anyone who... practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. "For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Conclusion

So, let's recap. Every form of prosperity teaching can be traced back through Copeland, et al., then Hagin, then Roberts. Roberts mixed some Bible verses with what he was taught by Hill, and Hill was taught by demons. The facts are undeniable – this is a doctrine designed, not by greedy men, but conceived in hell itself!

As with the prosperity gospel, every doctrine must be examined against the Bible and in some cases the source needs to be examined.

The first thing we need to do with any teaching is check it against the plumbline of the Scriptures. The fact that people quote verses to support their teaching does not mean that it is sound doctrine. We must search the Scriptures and ask the hard questions to make sure that the teaching is based on a correct interpretation of the Bible. *"These (Bereans) were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

2 Timothy 3:13 says: *"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them".* Because there are so many false teachers, we need to be sure whom we are learning from. Paul says to Timothy that he can have confidence because of the source of the teaching. The one who taught Timothy was Paul, and Paul received his doctrine from the Lord (Galatians 1:12).

Like Hagin and Roberts, every false teacher claims to have received his doctrine from the Lord, but a bit of digging – that is, searching and studying the Word of God – will often reveal that it is contrary to Scripture. Either doctrine lines up with Scripture read in context and with a proper interpretation, or else it is of the father of lies, the devil. For further confirmation looking at the sources and influences of the teacher will confirm that the true source is not the Holy Spirit but another spirit (2 Corinthians 11:4), or man's own imagination.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Contemporary Christian Musical Artists Say: We Will Stand "United"— With New Age Sympathizer Roma Downey?

By the Editors, Lighthouse Trails

On January 21st, about 30 of contemporary Christian music's most well-known singers from the last four decades will be joining New Age sympathizer and devout Roman Catholic Roma Downey for a special live online concert called "We Will Stand." The concert is being presented by CCM United and has a motto of "One Message, Many Voices." According to an article titled **"We Are United: The Story Behind 'The Greatest Night In Contemporary Christian Music,'"** there could be over a million viewers with a potential reach globally of 40 million.

A CCM United personnel told a Lighthouse Trails researcher in an e-mail that Downey will be opening the concert and will "make other stage appearances." Sponsors of the event include the Southern Baptist resource arm, LifeWay Christian Resources, Voice of the Martyrs, and Compassion International. Artists include: Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Newsboys, Don Moen, Mark Schultz, Sandi Patti, Travis Cotrell (Beth Moore's worship leader), Love Song, Steven Curtis Chapman, Steve Green, Dallas Holm, The Imperials, Nicole Mullen and many others.

It is a sad state of affairs when a concert, billed as "the greatest night in the history of contemporary Christian music," uses a highly New Age- and Catholic-influenced celebrity to help open and close the event, which is basically making a statement to viewers as well as the church at large that Christianity is compatible with all beliefs. But after all, the cry of today's "new" Christian is unity, unity, unity, with all faiths and at any cost. This concert illustrates the terrible breach in

discernment that is happening in Christianity today.

Lighthouse Trails may be writing a follow up report after the concert, which takes place online on January 21st. In the meantime, these 10 points below are 10 reasons why musicians who call themselves Christians should not be sharing a platform with Roma Downey.

JAN. 21, 2015

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10 Important Things to Consider About Roma Downey's Spiritual Affinities:

1. Roma is a devout Roman Catholic who, among other Catholic rituals, prays to Mary, as she describes in **this** video. Roman Catholicism teaches that Mary is a co-redeemer with Jesus.
2. Roma Downey endorsed a 2010 New Age book titled *Loyalty to Your Soul* by Ron and Mary Hulnick (published by the New Age publisher, Hay House), Downey endorses the book saying:

As a USM [University of Santa Monica – a New Age metaphysical school] graduate, I know firsthand the value I received from

participating with Ron and Mary in the Master's degree Program in Spiritual Psychology. I am so grateful to have *Loyalty to Your Soul* to sweetly remind me of all I have learned. Let's just say that I went from playing an angel on TV to living more of an angelic life every day. The teachings in this beautiful book have sent me on a journey to the very center of my own being where, wrapped in the safe wings of Love, I feel as though I have come home.

Downey's endorsement in the Hulnick's book is nestled in with full-blown New Agers like Barbara Marx Hubbard, Joan Borysenko, and Gay Hendricks (*The Corporate Mystic*). (By the way, Neale Donald Walsch, the New Ager who said that Hitler did the Jews a favor by killing them, **(1)** wrote the foreword to *Loyalty to Your Soul*.) Clearly, Downey read this book and resonates deeply with it to say what she did about it. To get an idea of this "journey" that Downey is on, listen to a few quotes from *Loyalty to Your Soul*:

Center your awareness in your heart and consciously look for the Loving Essence in the person in your presence. By doing so, you're signifying your respect for the Soul before you . . . Maintain awareness that you're in conversation with another Divine Being who is engaged in having a human experience. (p. 209)

We ask for the presence, protection, guidance, and Love of the *Divine Beings* [spirit guides] who work with each of us. (from the "Invocation" – emphasis added)

When people speak of spirituality, they simply mean awareness of the sacred reality of the Divine Essence within and beyond all creation. (p. 8, quoting favorably a New Age "spiritual teacher")

You begin to recognize others as Divine Beings, and the situations and circumstances of your life as learning devices. (p. 31)

Those familiar with New Age teachings will recognize such statements as being the core essence of the occult (that man is divine) and that there are spirit guides who help us through life. *Loyalty to Your Soul* is a contemporary version of *A Course in Miracles* (the New Age book **Warren B. Smith** talks about in his biography, *The Light That Was Dark*).

3. Roma Downey also **endorsed a 2008/2011 book called *Angels in My Hair: the true story of a modern day Irish mystic*** by Lorna Bryne. The book is about spirit guides in people's lives.

4. Roma Downey **graduated in 2010 from the University of Santa Monica's Spiritual Psychology Program**. The school was founded by the late New Age spiritualist guru **John-Roger Hinkins** in 1971 (who also founded the Movement of Spiritual Awareness). Hinkins claimed to have had a spirit guide named **Mystic Traveler**. Today, University of Santa Monica is considered a New Age/metaphysical university. Some teaching points **(2)** from USM's Spiritual Psychology program (the program is one of just three degree programs offered at the school):

a. "If you are interested in really growing as a person and *awakening more fully to your Divinity*—take this course" (emphasis added).

b. "Soul-centered co-creation [a term used in New Age to signify our equality with God]."

c. "Spiritual Awakening. Designed to provide a practical working knowledge of, and appreciation for, the "giants" in the field of psychology, including Rogers, Perls, Ellis, and [Roberto] Assagioli [a world-famous occultist]."

d. "The Buddhas and the Christs are born complete."**(3)**

5. In 2010, Roma Downey did a "meditation" CD for psychic medium John Edward's 2010 book *Practical Praying: Using the Rosary to Enhance Your Life* (**see video of John Edwards**). As of Jan. 17, 2015, John Edward's is still selling the *Practical Praying* book advertising Roma Downey's CD meditation contribution. John Edward is best known for his psychic TV show in which he talked to the dead. Downey **has been on his show** and allowed him to channel her mother.

6. New Age actress and ordained minister of a New Thought church, Della Reese, plays a significant role in Downey's life. In addition to Reese teaming with Downey for 9 years in the popular TV series *Touched by an Angel*, Reese is Downey's **daughter's godmother** and also **officiated at the wedding** of Downey and Mark Burnett.

7. Downey has been **on the Oprah Show** to promote her and her husband's production *Son of God*. Oprah is the most influential New Ager today.

8. Downey and Burnett are proponents of Tony Robbins, a prolific New Ager. "For 25 years, Hollywood power producer Mark Burnett has applied Tony's strategies to his life. This past year, he decided it was time to invite his wife, Roma Downey, and their 3 children to share in an experience they won't forget."**(4)**

9. Downey resonates with Eckhart Tolle, another very prolific New Age author and teacher. Warren B. Smith has written about Tolle and his New Age/New Spirituality views. One article about Downey quotes her as saying: "My kids go to school about a 40-minute drive away. I'm open to the group's opinion about what we listen to on the way there. On the way back, I get my own selections—books on tape by Eckhart Tolle, Tony Robbins . . . My husband says

I'm so self-realized I'm practically levitating" (*First for Women* magazine, 03/31/14, pp. 44-45). To get an idea of what Eckhart Tolle believes, listen to a quote by him:

Don't get attached to any one word. You can substitute 'Christ' for presence, if that is more meaningful to you. Christ is your God-essence or the Self, as it is sometimes called in the East. The only difference between Christ and presence is that Christ refers to your indwelling divinity regardless of whether you are conscious of it or not, whereas presence means your awakened divinity or God-essence. – (Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, p. 104)

10. Former New Age followers Caryl Matrisciana, Johanna Michaelsen, and Warren B. Smith have renounced and repudiated their former New Age beliefs and have even written books warning others about the New Age. On the contrary, Roma Downey has never renounced her New Age involvement and continues to promote it in one form or another. Interestingly (and significantly), Lighthouse Trails author **Greg Reid** personally handed Roma Downey a copy of **Warren B. Smith's** book, *The Light That Was Dark: From the New Age to Amazing Grace* at the 2014 National Religious Broadcaster's Convention right after she finished premiering *The Son of God* movie. Roma Downey is in a perfect position to warn the church about the New Age, but rather she is bringing the New Age into the church. Greg Reid capsulates this situation well:

Roma and Mark's open door credentials to the evangelical church is that they are committed Catholics. That, and the movies themselves, were apparently proof enough to the higher leadership of the evangelical churches to give them carte blanche. They have been, 100%, embraced as one of us.

NO ONE has asked the crucial questions: Is Jesus the only way to God? Do we all have

the "Christ spirit?" Are we all Divine? Is the Bible the infallible Word of God? Knowing that the Bible forbids necromancy, are you sorry you worked with John Edward? Is what you learned from John-Roger's University compatible with your Christian faith? Unless Roma and Mark have gone through a massive conversion since last year, then they are still the same people who listen to audio books by New Age Gurus Eckhart Tolle and Tony Robbins, and who follow a brand of spirituality that is so strong that, as Mark said of Roma, "You're so self-realized you're practically levitating."

Why are none of these questions being asked? If we didn't know, now we do. If leaders DID know and chose to ignore it, or considered these things "little differences," then God forgive us for our spiritual blindness and willingness to let crucial spiritual darkness enter in for the sake of a movie they think will lead the masses to Christ. (from Reid's article ***Son of God—Trojan Horse***)

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