



STATEMENT DF150

BOOK REVIEW
A Different Gospel
by D. R. McConnell
(Hendrickson Publishers 1998)

Previously (Fall 1987), the JOURNAL reviewed Bruce Barron's *The Health and Wealth Gospels* and concluded that it "missed its opportunity to be the definitive work" on the "word-faith" or "positive confession" movement. When Hendrickson released D.R. McConnell's *A Different Gospel*, it seemed as though this "definitive work" had arrived. However, though it is a decided improvement over Barron's work — providing a better grasp of both the history and theology of this pentecostal movement — McConnell too has failed to provide the final word on the "word" teachers.

For the most part, McConnell has done well. His treatment of the roots of the "faith" teaching clearly demonstrates that it does not really have the multiple sources within Pentecostalism that Barron asserts; what makes the movement distinctive comes directly from E. W. Kenyon. Certainly, Barron himself noted in his book that Kenneth Hagin, Sr., — the often recognized "father of the faith movement" — is very dependent (to the point of plagiarism) on Kenyon. But McConnell takes it further and demonstrates that Kenyon fits neither the Pentecostal nor Wesleyan-Holiness movements of his day. By showing Kenyon's connection with the "metaphysical" cults of his time (Christian Science, New Thought, etc.), McConnell attempts to make a historical link between the current "faith" message and cultic theology.

Having laid this historical foundation, McConnell proceeds to evaluate the theology of the "faith" movement, accurately describing its major doctrinal distinctives. Unlike Barron, he does not fail to address the movement's most controversial doctrines — Jesus' "spiritual death" and "born again" experience and the "deification" of man.

In his analysis of these concerns, however, McConnell falls short. He does so by trying to prove that the "faith" movement is, in some sense, metaphysical thought masquerading in evangelical garb.

Because of certain similarities between metaphysical teachings and the "faith" message, McConnell argues that they share the same doctrines. In so doing he ignores critical differences between the two, and fails to address much of what is distinctive ly "faith" teaching.

This is seen, for example, in his comments on the "faith" teaching regarding *faith*. He states that the "laws and formulas [regarding faith in the "faith" gospel] can only be understood in the light of the doctrine of God in the metaphysical cults." But the premises of these two schools of thought are different. For the metaphysical cults God is an impersonal principle. For the "faith" teachers God is a personal being who operates by faith. Even if we grant that the effects of such ideas are similar, the root cause is quite different.

All poison kills. But different poisons — even those with similar effects and identical results — require different antidotes. McConnell fails to develop the *unique* antidote required for the "faith" teaching.

In spite of such weaknesses, *A Different Gospel* provides solid background on the "faith" movement, a catalogue of doctrinal problems, and an incipient response to the errors. Anything written on this subject from here on will have to build on McConnell's treatment — and it is a more than adequate foundation. — *Brian Onken*

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