

Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction? An Apologetic study

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SECTION A: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. Proposed title

Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction?

An Apologetic study.

Keywords: Law of attraction; Positive confession; New Age movement; New Thought movement; Word of Faith movement; Prosperity gospel; Charismatic churches; Christian worldview.

Slutelwoorde: Wet van aantrekking; Positiewe belydenis; *New Age*-beweging; *New Thought*-beweging; *Word of Faith*-beweging; Voorspoedsteologie; Welvaartsteologie; Charismatiese kerke; Christelike wêreldbeskouing.

2. Abstract

This study is an apologetic evaluative study of the so-called spiritual law of attraction as used by certain Christians, focusing as an example on sermons of Pastor Boshoff of the Christian Revival Church (CRC). Many people, under the influence of especially Eastern religions, believe that they can shape their own lives through the power of their thoughts and words. Even though the idea to influence your own future with your thoughts and words originated from New Thought teachings, that underwent great influence from Eastern religions, there are Christian pastors preaching the law of attraction in the name of Christianity. This study evaluates this phenomenon in the light of Biblical teaching, to establish whether there is a place for the law of attraction in the Christian worldview. If it is established that the law of attraction is in conflict with the Christian worldview, the implications of preaching it from the Bible are far-reaching.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie is 'n apologeties evaluerende ondersoek na die sogenaamde geestelike wet van aantrekking, soos gebruik deur sekere Christene. Daar word as voorbeeld gefokus op preke van Pastoor Boshoff van die Christian Revival Church (CRC). Baie mense, onder die invloed van Oosterse gelowe, glo dat hulle hul eie lewens kan vorm deur die krag van hul denke en woorde. Alhoewel die idee dat mens jou eie toekoms kan beïnvloed deur jou denke en woorde afkomstig is van *New Thought* leringe, wat grootliks deur Oosterse gelowe geïnspireer is, is daar Christenpredikers wat die wet van aantrekking verkondig in die naam van die Christelike godsdiens. Hierdie studie evalueer die verskynsel in die lig van Bybelse lering om vas te stel of daar plek is vir die wet van aantrekking in die Christelike wêreldbeskouing. Indien vasgestel kan

word dat die wet van aantrekking in konflik is met die Christelike wêreldbeskouing, hou dit verreikende implikasies vir die verkondiging daarvan vanuit 'n Bybelse perspektief in.

3. Background

Since I started my studies at the Faculty of Theology on the Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University in 2009, I was gradually exposed to people from different church denominations – especially from the Charismatic churches, proclaiming a prosperity gospel. As debates intensified I realised the importance to find answers in this regard about the hope that is in me (1 Pet. 3:15-16¹), not only for the purpose of engaging in a conversation, but also in order to express sound Biblical convictions and beliefs concerning these teachings. Although I always felt discomfort with most of the prosperity gospel's teachings, I didn't understand exactly why. During conversations questions were asked and statements were made about topics such as the following: speaking in tongues, miracles, healings, direct revelations from God, first-hand meetings with God, heaven experiences, the power of words, positive confession, as well as wealth, health and prosperity through faith. These questions and statements prompted me to start reading books about the prosperity gospel, which brought me to researching the Word of Faith movement.

Researchers consider the Word of Faith movement as a cultic infiltration of the Charismatic movement that teaches the same doctrines of positive confession and prosperity, clearly seen in New Thought and Christian Science (McConnell, 1995:16, 20). Hanegraaff (2009:13) emphasises that it would be wrong to put the Word of Faith movement on the same level as the Charismatic movement. According to him, teachers of the Word of Faith movement successfully disguise themselves as Charismatics.

The reason why this movement is called the Word of Faith movement is because the name 'Word of Faith' emphasises the importance and power of your words. Faith, as seen by the teachings of this movement, does not imply the usual Christian understanding of faith in God, but rather faith in the power of your own words. Kenyon (1998:66-67), who is considered the grandfather or father of the Word of Faith movement, explains that people with negative confessions will certainly go to the level of their confession. According to him it is a spiritual law that we are ruled by our confessions. Hagin (1979a:8) further explains this idea when he writes: "For you can have what you say. You can write your own ticket with God. And the first step in writing your own ticket with God is: Say it!" The term for this teaching is widely known as 'positive confession' (MacArthur, 1992:342; Sarles, 1986:332). Through positive confession

¹ "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed."

many people believe that their words can cause good or bad things to happen to them or someone else.

In my research I came across references to the 'law of attraction' as a theological and philosophical term. The literature clearly indicates that positive confession bears striking similarities to the law of attraction, as practised and taught by New Thought pioneers such as Rhonda Byrne (Hanegraaff, 2009:97-98; McConnell, 1995:136). The law of attraction states that your thoughts and words determine or create your entire reality and life experience. It literally draws the things you desire or fear into your life (Atkinson, 1906:2; Byrne, 2006:5). Thus the law of attraction shows a strong resemblance with the teaching of positive confession, since positive confession relies on the power of words in order to bring about physical environmental changes in your life (Souders, 2011:121).

In discussions with people who advocate the positive confession teaching, I came to the conclusion that the belief that your words and thoughts can determine your reality must be addressed through more thorough research. What urged me even more was the fact that the well-known South African church leader, Pastor A. Boshoff from the Christian Revival Church (CRC) proclaimed from the pulpit the law of attraction as a Biblical, and thus a Christian principle – especially in two of his sermons in 2010 (Boshoff, 2010a; Boshoff 2010d). Pastor Boshoff established the CRC in 1994 and today the combined membership of the CRC is more than 53 000 members (CRC, 2015a). These two sermons will serve as valuable sources during this study, especially since the law of attraction is preached, supported and explained from the Bible. I will refer mostly to these two sermons to establish the motivation of preachers who support this doctrine of the law of attraction within a Christian worldview.

Other contributions to this research, expanding on the law of attraction as a New Thought principle and teaching, are: *Thought vibration or the law of attraction in the thought world* (Atkinson, 1906), *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006), *The law of attraction: the basics of the teachings of Abraham* (Hicks & Hicks, 2006), *The everything law of attraction book: harness the power of positive thinking and transform your life* (Lester, 2008) and, *Law of attraction: the science of attracting more of what you want and less of what you don't* (Losier, 2006).

Besides the Bible, supplemented by Christian creeds, the contribution of the following authors, among others, will be referred to in this evaluative study: *Christianity in Crisis: 21st century* (Hanegraaff, 2009), *Charismatic chaos* (MacArthur, 1992) and *A different gospel* (McConnell, 1995).

4. Problem statement

The need to address and evaluate the law of attraction, preached as a Biblical, and a Christian principle, is of vital importance. The fact that the teachings of the Word of Faith movement are growing around the world also makes it an urgent matter to address from a theological perspective (Hunter, 2007; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:16). If this phenomenon is false, it places the church before a crisis that amounts to a struggle between orthodoxy and heresy, or even greater, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults (Hanegraaff, 2009:14). There is a serious need for this study, and therefore this study aims to address this need with a specific evaluative focus on the law of attraction.

In the first of two sermons on the law of attraction in 2010, Pastor Boshoff (2010a) started by explaining that he wanted to talk about a powerful law that governs your life. Later he defined this powerful law – the law of attraction – as follows: “The law of attraction simply says: like attracts like. You’re attracting to yourself who you are.” In his second sermon on the law of attraction Boshoff (2010d) further explained: “You live by the simple law of attraction. All the time you’re attracting things into your life, good or bad, wanted or unwanted. You attract what is at the core of your heart.” Later on he made it clear that your biggest enemy is nothing or nobody else than what you allow to go on in your heart, mind and thoughts.

When we turn to Byrne’s (2006:5) definition of the law of attraction in her book *The Secret*, it is clear that, according to her, everything that happens in your life happens because the law of attraction formed it through your thoughts. It must be added that, whatever you attract into your life by giving it your attention, energy and focus, can be positive or negative (Losier, 2010:12). The law of attraction fully responds to your thoughts, so that you will attract into your life whatever it is you are thinking about most. When you look at your life experiences thus far, you will be able to determine your dominant thought on every subject of your life (Byrne, 2006:7, 9; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:30).

It is important to investigate whether the New Thought and New Age pioneers embrace a monistic, pantheistic worldview (all is one, and all is God) under the influence of Eastern religions (Finnegan, 1992:353-354; Martin & Zacharias, 2003:412).

The law of attraction is also supported and advocated by New Thought pioneers as a universal law, important in our theological thinking (Rinaldi, 2008:7). They believe that there is a place for the law of attraction in the Christian worldview because you determine your reality with your words and thoughts. It differs from the orthodox Christian belief that God, in His infinite wisdom, determines our lives.

In view of the fact that the law of attraction is preached as an important Biblical teaching, the central research question is: *Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction in theology?*

Specific questions to be asked include:

1. What is the law of attraction?
 - a. Definition.
 - b. Origins and development.
 - c. Philosophical and worldview background.
 - d. How does it function in practice?
 - e. How can one use it?
2. Does the law of attraction correspond with New Age and New Thought teachings?
3. What are the similarities between the law of attraction and positive confession?
4. Can the law of attraction be preached as a Biblical principle?
 - a. How does A. Boshoff explain the law of attraction in his sermons?
 - b. What does the Bible say?
 - i. Analysis of the key Biblical passages.
 - ii. What are the doctrinal implications of the law of attraction?
5. Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction?
 - a. What is the outcome of the evaluation?
 - b. What is the comfortless alternative if there were a place for the law of attraction?
 - c. What is the conclusion concerning the law of attraction?

5. Aim

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the law of attraction, preached as a Biblical principle, in order to determine whether the law of attraction has a rightful place in the Christian worldview.

6. Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To discuss in detail what the law of attraction is, where it comes from, how it works, whether it can be used, the corresponding features of the law of attraction and New Age, as well as New Thought teachings, and the similarities between the law of attraction and positive confession;
2. To determine whether the law of attraction can be preached as a Biblical principle, by examining Pastor Boshoff's sermons on the law of attraction, and by formulating the evaluative Biblical perspective concerning the law of attraction;
3. To determine whether the law of attraction has any rightful place in the Christian worldview, according to the Bible, and what the possible destructive effect may be if the law of attraction has a place in the Christian worldview.

7. The central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the law of attraction does not have any place in the Christian worldview, and therefore can't be preached from the pulpit as a Biblical, and thus a Christian, principle.

8. Methodology

This evaluative study will be done from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. The entire discussion will henceforth assume that Reformed theology, based on the Bible as the infallible Word of God, is the best and most consistent expression of the Christian faith. A brief summary of the Reformed theology, can be found in the three forms of unity, namely The Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.

This is a literary study in which I will make use of the relevant literature and audio-visual material.

Where appropriate, the applicable passages of the Bible will be identified. Exegesis of these texts will be done according to the grammatico-historical method.

9. Concept clarification

The following concepts need clarification:

- The law of attraction: It refers to an all-powerful universal law that is always working, without any exceptions. It is the law that determines every moment of your entire life by responding to your thoughts, whether they are positive or negative. If your thoughts are positive, you're attracting good things into your life, but if your thoughts are negative,

you're attracting bad things into your life. It responds utterly to your thoughts and everyone can use this universal law to create their own lives (Boshoff, 2010a; Byrne, 2006:5, 15, 17; Rinaldi, 2008:7).

- Positive confession: It refers to the teaching that words have creative power to bring about physical environmental changes in your life. Thus, what you say will determine what happens to you and what you get from God. This is undoubtedly the most distinctive teaching of the Word of Faith movement that, like the law of attraction, relies on a positive mental attitude (MacArthur, 1992:342; McConnell, 1995:135; Souders, 2011:121).
- New Age movement: It refers to an extremely widespread, but loosely structured, mega-network of individuals, groups and organisations who share common values, characterised by mysticism and monism, and a common vision of a coming age of peace and mass enlightenment. Since this mega-network portrays the growing penetration of Eastern and occult mysticism into Western culture, it brings a powerful syncretism to the table. Although this movement includes cults, sects and even denominations, it is not restricted to any one of these (Finnegan, 1992:353-354; Groothuis, 1988:18; Martin & Zacharias, 2003:409). It is important to keep in mind that the New Thought movement is considered to be a forerunner and in effect a tributary to the New Age movement. In this way there is clearly a direct connection between the two movements and representative sub-movements (Clarke, 2006:27; DeChant, 1990:331; Hanegraaff, 2000:299; Steyn, 1994:61).
- Prosperity gospel / Word of Faith movement: It refers to the modern faith movement which is sometimes also known as the Health, Wealth and Prosperity gospel. It is found in churches that preach a promise of health and wealth to Christians who are prepared to exercise their faith in the proper way (King & Theron, 2006:309-310). Hollinger (1988:131) defines it as follows:

The health and wealth gospel is an identifiable religious movement comprised of distinct teachings, key preachers, a particular clientele, conferences, massive publications, media ministries, local congregations that identify with the teachings and preachers, educational institutions, and a loosely-knit organization called the International Convention of Faith Churches and Ministries (ICFCM). Adherents have often labelled themselves "Word" or "Word of Faith Churches" as well as "faith movement".
- The Charismatic movement: It refers to a loosely-structured, predominantly lay movement that has made its presence felt throughout the churches. It began in North America and is now world-wide. The characteristics of this movement include the

exercise of spiritual gifts, especially divine healing, baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues (glossolalia). The theology of the Charismatic movement is progressively less rigid with the immediate allowance of greater diversity of experience (Mather, 1984:17, 21; Cross & Livingstone, 2005:324).

- Worldview: “The comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things” (Wolters, 2005:2)

SECTION B: ARTICLE

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the infiltration of secular practices in the Christian church with specific evaluative focus on the so-called law of attraction. In 2010 Pastor At Boshoff of the Christian Revival Church (CRC) preached two sermons on the law of attraction in which he claimed it as being a powerful principle in the Word of God. This spiritual “law” provides you with a physical manifestation of your thoughts and words. The prominent claim is that you can create your own future realities using this law. The law of attraction evidently is a New Age practice that flows from a New Age worldview. It bears striking similarities to the positive confession doctrine as taught by popular Word of Faith teachers. Boshoff’s claim regarding the law of attraction cannot be deduced from the key Scripture passages he uses, which reflects a unfounded use of Scripture. Preaching prosperity through the law of attraction is not in accordance with orthodox, historical Christianity or the Christian worldview.

Keywords: Law of attraction; Positive confession; New Age movement; New Thought movement; Word of Faith movement; Prosperity gospel; Charismatic churches; Christian worldview.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die infiltrasie van sekulêre praktyke in die Christelike kerk, met ’n spesiale, evaluerende fokus op die sogenaamde wet van aantrekking. In 2010 het Pastoor At Boshoff van die *Christian Revival Church (CRC)* twee preke gelewer oor die wet van aantrekking, waarin hy die aanspraak maak dat dit ’n kragtige beginsel in die Woord van God is. Die geestelike “wet” laat jou woorde en denke fisies manifesteer. Die belangrikste aanspraak is dat ’n mens jou eie toekomsrealiteite kan skep deur hierdie wet toe te pas. Die wet van aantrekking is ’n praktyk wat voortvloei uit die *New Age* wêreldbeskouing. Dit toon treffende ooreenkomste met die leerstelling van positiewe belydenis, soos verkondig deur populêre *Word of Faith* leermeesters. Dat Boshoff nie sy aanspraak oor die wet van aantrekking skriftuurlik bewys nie en tog hom op die Skrif beroep, bring ’n wanaanwending van die Skrif mee. Die idee om die wet van aantrekking te gebruik om eie voorsped te bewerkstellig, is nie in ooreenstemming met die ortodokse, historiese Christendom en die Christelike wêreldbeskouing nie.

Sleutelwoorde: Wet van aantrekking; Positiewe belydenis; *New Age*-beweging; *New Thought*-beweging; *Word of Faith*-beweging; Voorspoedsteologie; Welvaartsteologie; Charismatiese kerke; Christelike wêreldbeskouing.

1. INTRODUCTION

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

These are the words of the apostle Peter, which are not only meant for the church of his time, but, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the true church of Christ throughout the ages. It is these and similar words that inspired the New Testament church through centuries to look apologetically, not only at arguments that are brought against the Christian faith, but also to maintain a watchful eye for those in her midst that deviate from the true Scriptural understanding of Christian doctrines (Edgar & Oliphint, 2009; Edgar & Oliphint, 2011).

With regard to 2 Peter 2:1², Calvin (2010a:393) writes: “As to the word opinions or heresies, it has not, without reason, been always deemed infamous and hateful by the children of God; for the bond of holy unity is the simple truth. As soon as we depart from that, nothing remains but dreadful discord.” Oliphint (2013:29) explains that Christian apologetics is the application of Biblical truth to unbelief and that there have been, are, and will continue to be attacks of every sort that seek to destroy the truth of the Christian faith.

The founder and leading pastor of one of the biggest charismatic churches in South Africa, the Christian Revival Church (CRC), Pastor At Boshoff³ delivered two sermons in 2010 that caused the writer to consider the need for the Christian church to address it apologetically. In these sermons, titled *The law of attraction part 1* and *part 2*, Boshoff (2010a) claimed that the spiritual law of attraction is indeed a powerful principle in the word of God (Boshoff, 2010d). Even though the term ‘law of attraction’ never occurs in the Bible, it is proclaimed to be a central doctrine of Christianity based on the Bible.

While the task of apologetics is to defend the Christian faith against any deviation from Biblical truth or heresy, this article tests this teaching of the law of attraction against Holy Scripture to answer the question whether it is indeed a Biblical doctrine, by applying sound hermeneutical use of the Scripture.

² “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.”

³ Boshoff established the Christian Revival Church (CRC) in 1994 and today the combined membership of the CRC is more than 53 000 members (CRC, 2015a).

This article aims to discuss and evaluate the law of attraction. It will seek to answer preliminary questions with regard to this so-called spiritual law. It will attempt to connect the law of attraction directly to the modern New Age movement. It will further attempt to point out the similarities between the law of attraction and positive confession, and ultimately evaluate Boshoff's sermons on the law of attraction apologetically. All of this will be done to establish whether there is a place for the law of attraction in the Christian church and worldview.

2. PRELIMINARY ISSUES REGARDING THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

2.1. What is the law of attraction?

The law of attraction as a theological and philosophical concept⁴, refers to an all-powerful, impersonal, unbiased and universal law that is always working without any exceptions (Byrne, 2006:5, 13; Gray, 2015:7; Lester, 2008:8; Rinaldi, 2008:7). According to its proponents it is the law that determines every moment of your entire life by responding to your thoughts, whether they are positive or negative (Byrne, 2006:5, 7, 13; Gray, 2015:29-30; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:32). If your thoughts are positive, it is meant to attract good things or circumstances into your life, but if your thoughts are negative, it is meant to attract bad things or circumstances (Byrne, 2006:9; Byrne, 2010:15; Che, 2010: 16; Lester, 2008:10; Rinaldi, 2008:11).

The law of attraction is also connected to certain sayings in life such as “like attracts like”, “birds of a feather flock together”, “as above, so below” or “ask and ye shall receive” (Boshoff, 2010a; Byrne, 2012:7; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:29; Lester, 2008:2). Consequently everyone can use this universal law to create and dictate the course of their own lives with their thoughts and also with their words (Byrne, 2006:5, 15, 17, 66; Gray, 2015:6, 68; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:83-84; Rinaldi, 2008:7).

2.2. How does the law of attraction work according to its proponents

Hicks and Hicks (2006:29) considered it essential to understand how the law of attraction functions, because without this knowledge one can apparently never live a purposeful life. Byrne (2006:15) believes that the law of attraction has always been working in every person’s life throughout history (see also Gray, 2015:7). In her opinion this law governs all the energy in the universe and it affects and forms every single person’s life experience, whether they are aware of it or not, whether they understand it or not, whether they like it or not, or whether they believe in it or not (Boshoff, 2010a; Byrne, 2006:5; Byrne, 2012:6; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:32; Losier, 2010:19). It is totally unbiased in the sense that your own personal background and worldview doesn’t concern the working of the law (Byrne, 2006:13; Lester, 2008:8; Rinaldi, 2008:7-8). The law of attraction functions permanently and universally without any exceptions (Byrne, 2006:5; Gray, 2015:7; Trine, 1897:522).

Even though it is held that the law of attraction is a universal law and that it works without any exceptions, affecting absolutely everyone in every corner of the globe, there seems to be some

⁴ It’s not the same as the physical law that describes the influence of material things on one another, such as magnetism.

extent of ignorance towards this law that supposedly determines the order in the entire universe (Atkinson, 1906:1-2; Byrne, 2006:5, 15; Gray, 2015:7; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:31). Proctor (s.a.) clearly expresses his concern regarding this profound ignorance as follows: “Most people are ignorant of one very important law of life – the law of attraction: You attract to you everything that is in harmonious vibrations with you.”

Proctor (s.a.) also explains that you can't understand the law of attraction without first understanding the law of vibration. The law of vibration states that everything in the universe is energy, and energy is firstly a vibration before it is matter. Everything is therefore always moving or vibrating at one speed or another (Burras, s.a.:1; Taylor, 2010:26; Proctor, 2011). These vibrations, in which everything is constantly moving, can either be positive or negative (Losier, 2006:13; Proctor, 2011).

According to this worldview of cause and effect, the moment a person thinks about something, that thought will dictate the vibration in which that person's mind and body are (Hicks & Hicks, 2004:25; Proctor, 2011). The reason for this is that a thought affects the brain cells and, in turn, these brain cells, depending on the thought, start to vibrate positively or negatively (Hicks & Hicks, 2004:26; Proctor, s.a.). Lester (2008:5) refers to this as thoughts that have become energised and these thought vibrations will then send out electromagnetic waves or extended vibrations or signals of some kind and soon the individual will become aware of the vibration in which he/she is (Hicks & Hicks, 2004:25; Proctor 2011). Your general feeling therefore describes the conscious vibration in which you currently are. In other words, if you feel good, you are in a positive vibration and *vice versa* (Byrne, 2006:32; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:84-85; Losier, 2006:14; Proctor, 2011). Byrne (2006:33) goes further to suggest that your feelings are in fact communication from the universe itself to inform you about your thoughts.

Because everyone is allegedly always sending out these positive or negative vibrations, which are determined by their thoughts, this is the point where the law of attraction comes into play (Hicks & Hicks, 2006:63; Losier, 2006:13-14). When these positive or negative vibrations are sent out by your thoughts, it will attract positive or negative things and circumstances into your life (Byrne, 2006:9; Lester, 2008:2, 5; Losier, 2006:19). Eventually positive vibrations that are caused by positive thoughts are viewed to bring positive and good things into your life, while negative vibrations that are caused by negative thoughts are viewed to bring negative and bad things into your life (Byrne, 2010:15; Che, 2010:16; Hicks & Hicks, 2004:26-27; Lester, 2008:2; Rinaldi, 2008:11). Byrne (2006:28) writes: “Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts.” Lester (2008:19) compares this principle to the positive and negative poles of a battery. Just as a battery functions to attract and repel, so your thoughts possess the power to attract and repel things and circumstances.

Byrne (2006:7) illustrates the principle of the law of attraction by suggesting that you should think about yourself as a magnet. Every single individual is the most powerful magnet in the universe and this unfathomable magnetic power that is within every individual can only be emitted through your thoughts. Through the law of attraction it seems that your thoughts become reality in your life (Atkinson, 1906:4-5; Byrne, 2006:9). The magnetic power of the law of attraction apparently reaches out from your thoughts into the universe and attracts the things that are at the same positive or negative vibrational level (Hicks & Hicks, 2006:83; Proctor, 2011). The law of attraction's reaction to a person's predominant thoughts is therefore responsible for every little detail that comes into that person's life experience (Gray, 2015:23; Haanel, 1917:627; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:32-33).

Ponder (1984:37) presents a clear explanation of this magnetic illustration:

... as a magnet, you do not have to force success and prosperity to yourself. Instead, you can develop that exalted, expectant, prosperous state of mind that is a magnet for all good things of the universe to hasten to you, rather than entertaining the tense, critical, anxious, depressed, unforgiving, possessive state of mind that is a magnet for all kinds of trouble and failure.

This far it is clear that the law of attraction responds to your thoughts and sooner or later it should provide you with a physical manifestation of whatever is mostly in your thoughts (Byrne, 2006:7, 13; Gray, 2015:53; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:31, 45; Lester, 2008:5). According to Lester (2008:7), the law of attraction makes anything possible and all that a person needs to change is his/her mindset, in order to decide what one wants to be, do and have in life – because the law of attraction guarantees it (Byrne, 2006:23, 36; Lester, 2008:5; Proctor, 2011). This is valid for experiences, relationships, prosperity, money, wealth, and all the things one desires most (Byrne, 2006:98; Gray, 2015:8; Lester, 2008:7; Trine, 1897:522, 575).

It must be added that the consequence of this law for each individual is that no one can ever be surprised by what happens, because thoughts determine reality (Byrne, 2012:7; Gray, 2015:68; Haanel, 1917:643; Hicks & Hicks, 2004:27; Hicks & Hicks 2006:30). The law of attraction makes each individual the sole creator of his/her entire life by using his/her thoughts and words (Byrne, 2006:15, 46; Gray, 2015:68; Hicks & Hicks, 2006:83-84; Taylor, 2010:29). When you look at your life experiences so far, you should be able to determine your dominant thought on every subject of your life (Byrne, 2006:9, 15; Lester, 2008:6, 8).

An important presupposition of these authors is that, according to them, the principle of the law of attraction is real and functioning on the grounds that there is some kind of energetic or quantum connection of oneness between everything in the entire universe (Byrne, 2006:160-163; Che, 2010:73; Taylor, 2010:68, 121, 135). In this great oneness and interconnectedness

the universe is regarded to be an infinite supplier from where everything in your life is delivered by using such means as the law of attraction (Byrne, 2006:163; Proctor, 2011; Taylor, 2010:68). In this way the universe also plays a godly providing part, by arranging or rearranging certain elements to provide a manifestation of people's thoughts through the law of attraction (see Byrne, 2006:40, 150-151; Lester, 2008:7).

2.3. The origin of the idea of a spiritual law of attraction

Apart from the questions of what the law of attraction is and how it works, we must also consider the origins and the development of the underlying principle of the law of attraction.

Although Lester (2008:3) believes that it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when and where the concept of the law of attraction entered into human consciousness, she still provides a couple of explanations. According to one of these explanations the law of attraction most probably originated at the very moment of creation, with the beginning of thought. In another explanation Lester (2008:4) adds that it may date back 6000 to 7000 years ago, where it found expression in the mystical traditions and beliefs of ancient magicians and sages. The Emerald Tablet of Hermes seems to be an example of this phenomenon, and states that everything in the world is interconnected and that thoughts always influence things.

Taylor (2010:32-66) spends a whole chapter explaining his view on the origins of the law of attraction. According to him, it was used throughout the ages by ancient religions and philosophies. After mentioning religions such as Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism and Christianity, together with Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, he comes to the conclusion that the law of attraction is deeply rooted in the history and mind of humanity, which is also somehow in tune with the rest of the universe (Taylor, 2010:15, 66).

Burras (s.a.:1) assumes that the law of attraction has most certainly been around for ages, but that it was always hidden from the masses to keep the people uninformed, or, as he puts it 'unconscious'. Rinaldi (2008:8), in turn, is of the opinion that Buddha was the first to introduce the human race to the principle of the law of attraction and that the whole concept of karma in Eastern religions is based on the principle behind the law of attraction⁵. Proctor (2011) also mentions that all the great leaders throughout history were in agreement of the apparent fact that you become what you think.

⁵ If the concept of karma is based on the law of attraction, it could not have originated in Buddhism, because centuries before Buddhism, Hinduism taught the concept of karma.

Byrne (2006:4) elaborates by explaining that religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, together with ancient civilisations like the Babylonians and Egyptians, allegedly delivered it throughout the ages in their writings and stories. She adds that, since the law of attraction began at the beginning of time, there is no limit to its existence – it has always been and will always be (Byrne, 2006:5).

Even though it is claimed that the principle of this ‘universal law’ has been around for a long time, it has not always been officially labelled the ‘law of attraction’ until recently. P.P. Quimby⁶ never called his theory the ‘law of attraction’, but he did lay the foundation for a mind-cure philosophy, which stated that the source of all health was in the mind and any cure for sickness must also begin in the mind (Clarke, 2006:113; Hanegraaff, 1998:485; Quimby, 1921:186, 194). Hanegraaff (1998:485-486) recognises Quimby as the father of the New Age belief that you can create your own reality.

Rinaldi (2008:9) claims that the term ‘law of attraction’ was first introduced to the public in a book titled *Thought vibration or the law of attraction in the thought world*, by W.W. Atkinson⁷ in 1906. This is actually not correct since the term ‘law of attraction’ already appeared in P. Mulford’s⁸ book *Thoughts are things*, in 1889, and later in R.W. Trine’s⁹ book *In tune with the infinite*, in 1897.

As far as this research could establish, the term ‘law of attraction’ was first used in a more theological and philosophical manner in 1877 by H.P. Blavatsky¹⁰ in her two-volume book titled *Isis unveiled: the master-key to the mysteries of ancient and modern science and theology* (Taylor, 2010:55). Unfortunately it is not clear what exactly she meant when she used the term.

⁶ Quimby (1802-1866) is regarded as the founder of the metaphysical New Thought movement, which is considered to be a forerunner or a tributary of the modern New Age movement (Clarke, 2006:27; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:29; Peters, 2013; Steyn, 1994:61, 105; Travis, 2007:1022). M.B. Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science movement, was one of Quimby’s patients whom he apparently cured using his theory (Fogarty, 2008:22; Steyn, 1994:105).

⁷ Atkinson (1862-1932) was an active participant in the New Thought movement and also the editor of the *New Thought magazine* (Weinberger, 2006:188). He claimed that the doctrines of karma and reincarnation serve as a key that can unlock the most mysterious aspects of the Christian doctrine (Bender, 2007:598).

⁸ Mulford (1834-1891) is considered to be one of the earliest writers and founders of the New Thought movement (Byrne, 2006:193).

⁹ Trine (1866-1958) is mentioned as a significant individual who contributed to the circulation of theories on positive thinking (Steyn, 1994:105). He is considered to be the most prolific New Thought writer in the early 20th century (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:32). Butler (2006:58) vividly mentions Trine’s book *In tune with the infinite* as one of the New Thought movement’s most popular publications.

¹⁰ Blavatsky (1831-1891), under the influence of spiritualism and eastern sources, embraced the practice of contacting advanced upper spirit beings to ensure that their plans were fulfilled (Clarke, 2006:28; Heelas, 1996:44). She was also the co-founder of The Theosophical Society in 1875 (Honsberger & Halverson, 1996:161).

The 'law of attraction' was further popularised by C.H. Haanel's¹¹ book *The master key system*, in 1917, and N.V. Peale's¹² book *The power of positive thinking*, in 1952. In 2006 the concept of the 'law of attraction' gained a lot of renewed interest with the appearance of R. Byrne's book titled *The Secret*. Bond (2007:20) expressed her big surprise regarding the large number of copies of *The Secret* that were sold and further mentioned that the appearance of *The Secret* caused great curiosity among people to explore similar concepts of how you can use thoughts to attract prosperity and happiness.

The multiple explanations of the origin of the law of attraction is an indication of this spiritual law's unreliable grounding. When the proponent's backgrounds are taken into consideration nearly all of them were involved in New Thought practices.

¹¹ Haanel (1866-1949) was a very successful businessman who advocated his own methods that he allegedly used to achieve greatness (Byrne, 2006:191). In his book *The master key system*, he developed an entire plan to instruct people how to live by the law of attraction (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:40).

¹² Peale (1898-1993) is considered to be a well-known advocate of New Thought, who dangerously merged secular thought with Biblical ideas (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:33-34).

3. THE NEW AGE WORLDVIEW AND THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

When considering the development of the law of attraction above (2.3), it became clear that its relation to the beliefs and practices of the New Age movement¹³ should also be contemplated and discussed. According to Deck (cited by Bond, 2007:20) *The Secret* has certainly revitalised the New Age knowledge base, and one should prepare for many more books on the same subject. It is important to keep in mind that the New Thought movement is considered to be a forerunner, and in effect a tributary, of the New Age movement. In this way there is clearly a direct connection between the two movements and representative sub-movements (Clarke, 2006:27; DeChant, 1990:331; Hanegraaff, 2000:299; Steyn, 1994:61).

Finnegan (2003:346) emphasises that the New Age movement will be present for some time to come (Clarke, 2006:39-40). It has swept across the U.S.A., Europe and Asia, and it is also penetrating the continent of Africa to the point that it is very much alive in South Africa (Chepkwony, 2006:313; Steyn, 2007:265).

It is considered extremely hard to describe, locate and capture the New Age movement because there are no fixed creeds and just one identifiable organisation connected to it (Chepkwony, 2006:313; Clarke, 2006:25; Collins, 1998:91; Hanegraaff, 1998:1; Heelas, 1996:16-17; Klippenstein, 2005:391; Redden, 2012:55). Zacharias (2012b) describes the New Age spirituality as a jellylike substance which is very hard to identify. The New Age movement is rather a loose umbrella term referring to a variety of people, organisations, events, practices and ideas. Although this movement includes cults, sects and even denominations, it is not restricted to any one of these (Aupers & Houtman, 2007:201; Chepkwony, 2006:313; Eide, 2010:130; Groothuis, 1988:18; Steyn, 1994:6; Steyn, 2007:267).

Accordingly, the New Age movement can be described briefly as an extremely vast and widespread, but loosely structured, mega-network of individuals, groups and organisations, who share common values and ideas characterised by mysticism and monism, and a common vision of a coming age of peace and mass enlightenment (Finnegan, 1992:353). Martin (2015) considers the New Age movement to be the enthronement of man and the demotion of God.

It is of paramount importance to note that the basic beliefs of the New Age movement do indeed portray the growing infiltration of Eastern and occult mysticism into Western culture, which

¹³ The term 'New Age' is derived from astrology to indicate the arrival of the supposed new age of Aquarius (Matzken, 1990:15; Zacharias, 2012a:8). Zacharias (2012b) also refers to this as 'New spirituality' and '21st century spirituality'. Although Steyn (2007:266) mentions that it is trite to assume there is nothing new to the New Age movement, Martin and Zacharias (2003:407-408) indeed describe it as nothing new.

brings forth a strong syncretism of Eastern and Western worldviews (Honsberger & Halverson, 1996:161, 163; Campbell-Jack, McGrath, & Evans, 2006:484-485; Martin & Zacharias, 2003:409; Steyn 2007:266). Consequently, the New Age ideology is presented by a mixture of a wide variety of sources that often contradict one another (Aupers & Houtman, 2007:201; Finnegan, 1992:354; Redden, 2012:56). Due to the strong influence of Eastern religions and philosophies, New Age pioneers commonly adhere to a monistic, pantheistic worldview. The simplest way to describe this worldview is “all is one, and all is God” (Chepkwony, 2006:317-318; Finnegan, 1992:353-354; Joseph, 2012:180; Martin & Zacharias, 2003:412).

Monism views ‘God as one’ in the sense that there is absolutely no duality or differentiation within this oneness. Within this view the whole universe is made up of one substance and there is only one unified consciousness, of which everybody is part. This absolute oneness is then characterised as a kind of force or energy, which is not a lifeless energy, but rather a Cosmic Mind or Consciousness, often called the Universal Self, the Divine Mind, the Universe, the Source, Divine Intelligence, the Force of the Universe, the One Supreme Power, the totality of Universal Life Energy, et cetera (Byrne, 2006:162; Chepkwony, 2006:317; Finnegan, 1992:356; Gray, 2015:69; Honsberger & Halverson, 1996:163-164; Lester, 2008:4; Skinner, 2006:104-105).

In turn, pantheism is the belief that ‘all is God’, which means that everything is somehow inherently a manifestation of God. The divine oneness emanates in absolutely everything, so that everything is God and God is everything. Thus, if God is the impersonal Universal Self, then we as humans are the particularisation of that Universal Self (Chepkwony, 2006:318; Honsberger & Halverson, 1996:164; Skinner, 2006:105-106).

Honsberg and Halverson (1996:164) explains this concept by referring to each individual as a stream that flows from the infinite lake, and just as the water in each stream is of the same essence as the water in the lake, so every individual’s essence is one with God. According to this monistic pantheistic worldview, the oneness or the interconnectedness between all things should be viewed as a manifestation of the Divine. This causes New Agers to believe that each individual is inherently a divine being who is capable of great and powerful things (Chepkwony, 2006:318; Collins, 1998:93; Skinner, 2006:107; Velarde, 2007:3).

Byrne (2006:164), for instance, seems to underline this when she writes:

You are God in physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet.

The beliefs and practices within the New Age movement place a strict emphasis on the self. The main focus is about empowering yourself rather than a transcendent being with absolute authority (Farias & Lalljee, 2008:277-278; Klippenstein, 2005:397; Martin, 2015). Everything revolves around the principle that you must turn inward to reach a higher consciousness and to experience the God-self (Collins, 1998:93; Hanegraaff, 2000:305; Huss, 2014:50). Maclaine (cited by Chepkwony, 2006:318) explains that every individual is his/her own best teacher and that there is no place for any other idol to be worshipped, because the God everyone is seeking, apparently lies within yourself and not outside.

Many of the New Age beliefs and practices are in one way or another based on creating your own reality, as some of the law of attraction authors also claim (Amarasingam, 2009:279; Byrne, 2006:15; Haanel, 1917:643; Hanegraaff, 1998:230-231; Hicks & Hicks, 2004:27; Hicks & Hicks 2006:30; Honsberger & Halverson, 1996:164; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:38-39; Steyn, 2007:267; Velarde, 2007:2). Proctor (2011), for instance, says:

“Do you know that you are the architect of your own life? You truly are and you can tap into this infinite source of supply – and it is an infinite source of supply.” Taylor (2010:68) also contributes to this belief when he writes: “What we have to do is prove to ourselves that the universe is abundant, we are all connected with each other and the universe, and our thoughts shape our reality.” Lastly, Byrne (2006:150) leaves one with no doubt when she writes:

The Universe offers all things to all people through the law of attraction ... Each of us has the ability to tap into that unlimited invisible supply through our thoughts and feelings, and bring it into our experience. So choose for You, because you're the only one who can.

Zeller (2011:6) adds that New Agers usually have a high regard for science, but that science is then used in their practices to support and legitimise spiritual worldviews and also to criticise the existing scientific consensus (Hanegraaff, 1998:62; Heelas, 1996:36). Zacharias (2012a:62) also affirms that the perils of the New Spirituality are made to look wonderful and that pseudoscience is connected to a mystical vocabulary that results in absurd deductions. This might also be the case with the law of attraction, since it is claimed to be a phenomenon in quantum physics (Byrne, 2006:15; Che, 2010:3; Taylor, 2010:68). However quantum physics is often hijacked by New Age spirituality to support their worldview that everything is interconnected energy in a pantheistic, religious sense (Ankerberg & Weldon, 1996:509; Velarde, 2007:4; Zacharias, 2012a:87). The implication of encouraging a science of consciousness is that it opens the door to mysticism and the occult (Ankerberg & Weldon, 1996:513). Physicist Pagel (cited by Zacharias, 2012a:87) states that no qualified physicist would claim these kind of connections without committing fraud.

4. THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE LAW OF ATTRACTION AND POSITIVE CONFESSION

The law of attraction is a New Age practice that accordingly flows from a New Age worldview. Peters (2013) points out that there are a lot of New Thought and New Age overtones in the modern Word of Faith movement¹⁴. Hanegraaff (2009:15-16) also emphasises that the similarities between the Word of Faith movement and New Thought metaphysics are significant. This research considers it important to look at the similarities between the law of attraction and the doctrine of positive confession within this Word of Faith movement.

The reason why this movement is called the Word of Faith movement is because the name 'Word of Faith' emphasises the importance and power of your words (MacArthur, 1992:342). Faith, as seen by the positive confession teaching of this movement, does not imply the usual Christian understanding of faith in God, but rather faith in your own faith and consequently the speaking of so-called faith-filled words. Faith is therefore not faith in God but a force you direct at God to manipulate Him or to equip Him to do as the faith practitioner sees fit (Frigulti, 2015:25; Hanegraaff, 2009:93-95, 97; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:87-88; Kenyon, 2013:36; MacArthur, 1992:342, 346; Peters, 2013).

The doctrine of positive confession is considered to be the most distinctive and dominant doctrine of the Word of Faith movement. The working presupposition of this doctrine is that your mental attitude determines what you believe and confess, which in turn determines what you get from God. If you think rightly, believe rightly and confess rightly, nothing is impossible. It is seen as some kind of spiritual shove that sets into motion the spiritual laws governing the universe (McConnell, 1995:135-136; Neuman, 1990:32, 34). Souders (2011:121) refers to positive confession as the power of words in order to bring about physical environmental changes in your life. It can also be summarised as 'what you say is what you get' (Togarasei, 2011:341). Positive confession is seen as the vehicle through which God's promises have the opportunity to influence your life (Hollinger, 1988:136).

¹⁴ The Word of Faith movement is sometimes also known as the Health, Wealth and Prosperity gospel. It is found in churches that preach a promise of health and wealth to Christians who are prepared to exercise their faith in the proper way (King & Theron, 2006:309-310). Hollinger (1988:131) defines it as follows: "The health and wealth gospel is an identifiable religious movement comprised of distinct teachings, key preachers, a particular clientele, conferences, massive publications, media ministries, local congregations that identify with the teachings and preachers, educational institutions, and a loosely-knit organization called the International Convention of Faith Churches and Ministries (ICFCM). Adherents have often labelled themselves 'Word' or 'Word of Faith Churches' as well as 'faith movement'."

Essek W. Kenyon¹⁵ (2013:66-67), who is considered to be the grandfather or father¹⁶ of the Word of Faith movement, describes it as a spiritual law that everyone is governed by their own confessions (Hanegraaff, 2009:17; King & Theron, 2006:311; McConnell, 1995:24; Peters, 2013). Accordingly, everyone sooner or later becomes what they confess. He further adds that it is not only your thinking, but also your words, that build power or weakness in yourself (Kenyon, 2013:72). Kenyon and Gossett (2009:33-34) also explain that 'confession' is not the confession of sin, but rather that of faith and that faith as such is not faith until a positive confession comes from the lips. It is a positive mindset that becomes faith by confession. You must therefore cultivate the habit of thinking big things, and then learn to express those big thoughts in words, because you intently become what you think you are (Gossett & Kenyon, 1977:66; Kenyon & Gossett, 2009:70). This is considered possible because exactly the same creative ability that God possess apparently also lies in yourself, and it can only be manifested through your confession (Kenyon & Gossett, 2009:39).

According to the faith teacher Kenneth E. Hagin¹⁷ (1979b:2), your words will either lead to destruction or it will lead to life, happiness and health. According to him, the words one spoke yesterday made life what it is today (Hagin, 1979a:23). Everyone is considered to be a product of their own words, because in life you always get and receive what you believe and say (Hagin, 1979b:14; Hagin, 1979c:3). Hagin (1979a:8), for instance, writes: "For you can have what you say. You can write your own ticket with God. And the first step in writing your own ticket with God is: Say it." Furthermore, your words are allegedly able to create spiritual things, as well as natural and physical things (Hagin, 1979b:12). Hagin (1979b:29, 32) uses Mark 11:23¹⁸ as the supposed Biblical teaching to motivate the statement that one will have whatever one speaks.

¹⁵ Kenyon (1867-1948) was born one year after the death of Quimby. He attended the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston where New Thought metaphysics flourished. Trine was one of Kenyon's classmates there. Kenyon quickly became familiar with the tenets of New Thought and Christian Science (McConnell, 1995:15, 24). This is evidenced by his advancement of positive confession theology, his elevation of human beings and explicit teachings on health and wealth (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:51).

¹⁶ Most faith teachers will refer to Hagin as the father of the Word of Faith movement, but in truth it is Kenyon (Hanegraaff, 2009:17).

¹⁷ Hagin (1917-2003) is widely accepted as a guardian, teacher and prophet by faith teachers. He claimed to have died and been resurrected on three separate occasions (Hanegraaff, 2009:21). He further stands accused of extensively plagiarising Kenyon's work. Although Hagin denied this accusation, it evidently seems to be correct when his writings were compared to Kenyon's (McConnell, 1995: 6-8, 50; Neuman, 1990:54). The health and wealth theology can thus clearly be traced from the mind-healing cults via Kenyon to Hagin (Neuman, 1990:54). He embraced and spread the teachings of Kenyon with great success (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:54).

¹⁸ "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea', and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."

The well-known faith teacher Kenneth Copeland¹⁹ (1974:14-15), speaks of the so-called force of faith, which makes the universal laws of the spirit world function (Copeland, 1983:15). He also explains that God created the entire universe using this force of faith. Each time God spoke, He released His own faith, which is considered to be the creative power by which His words came to pass (Copeland, 1980:6-7). Because God created the universe through His faith-filled words, this universe is also controlled by words. Copeland (2010:5) suggests that we live under a so-called word-activated system that no one can change. However, in this word-activated system, each individual can choose his/her words to change their environments and circumstances (Copeland, 1983:15; Copeland, 2010:5). Copeland (2015) also says: “Any image that you get down on the inside of you that is so vivid when you close your eyes you can see it, it’ll come to pass.” According to Copeland, intangible words do indeed take on tangible reality (Hanegraaff, 2009:25).

In turn, Joyce Meyer²⁰ (2015) also seems to adopt a similar concept when she explains the importance of one’s thoughts. She says that what you think about is what you end up doing, to the extent that it becomes your reality. If someone keeps sowing negative thoughts, attitudes and words, it will produce negative results in life (Meyer, 2013:11). Therefore you must rather speak of the things you desire most, as if they already exist in your life, even if they don’t. Apparently you can reach into the spiritual realm with your faith and talk of the things you want most, as if it is already a reality in your life, and it will be delivered (Meyer, 2013:51-52). Words are to be understood as containers of creative and positive or destructive and negative power, with the consequence that, what you say today you will end up having tomorrow (Meyer, cited by Hanegraaff, 2009:96). Meyer (2005:9-10) also writes about a principle that she finds in Matthew 9:29²¹: “The Bible says it will be unto us as we believe (See Matt. 9:29). That principle works in the negative as well as the positive. We can receive by fear as well as by faith.” She applies this principle to Job who feared the bad things that happened to him (Job 3:25²²) and so he seemingly brought the bad things upon himself. Peters (2013) connects this statement of Meyer directly to the law of attraction.

¹⁹ Copeland started his ministry as a direct result of memorising Hagin’s messages. In 1988, on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), he called God the greatest failure in the Bible (Hanegraaff, 2009:24-25, 387).

²⁰ Meyer earned a PhD in theology from Life Christian University (LCU), which lacks scholastic accreditation. Apart from Meyer’s belief that your words create future realities, she also adheres to the so-called little gods doctrine (Hanegraaff, 2009:40-42; Meyer, 2011).

²¹ “Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’”

²² “For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.”

It is clear that Joel Osteen²³ (2004:129, 139) also underlines this same principle when he explains that everyone draws into their experience what they're constantly thinking about. It is not just thoughts that are important, but also words. According to Osteen (2004:165), it is not enough to just imagine things, one must also speak words of faith over one's life to give birth to it with enormous creative power. This is considered to be a spiritual principle that works positively or negatively, depending on the words one use.

To some extent it seems that At Boshoff (2008:40) also writes about this positive confession doctrine, explaining that we must change from the negative to the positive because, in the same way our faith can be seen and heard, our unbelief is also very visible and audible. Although God is all-powerful, He can't override our will since He gave men free will. Accordingly, God can only work with the positive or negative power that is within us. Everyone must therefore be careful with their thoughts and words since God, the angels and the demons are all always listening to our faith or unbelief. The moment we open our mouth to speak, we can invite God into the equation or leave Him out of it. If there is a 'no' in our words, God can't intervene on our behalf (Boshoff, 2008:40-41).

Jones and Woodbridge (2011:59) compare proponents of the New Thought with many of the faith preachers²⁴ who believe that words – both thought and spoken – are a force that somehow has creative power over reality (Coleman, 2004:425). Until believers visualise, and speak with faith-filled words, God is unable to act on their behalf. Positive confession seems to be a doctrine that is proclaimed to be Christian, but it works on exactly the same basis as the law of attraction (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:62; Peters, 2013). Some critics connect positive confession to the world of the occult as a New Age practice (Simpson, 2007:85). Frigulti (2015:61) even affirms a strong link between the doctrine of positive confession and the occult, specifically the use of the law of attraction.

While New Agers use the law of attraction to obtain what they desire from the universe, Christians who advocate positive confession believe they are ordering their desires from God, or ordering God for their desires (Hanegraaff, 2009:103; Peters, 2013). Peters (2013) describes this practice as cultic doctrine, wrapped in Christian terminology, which obscures the line between God the Creator and humans as His created.

²³ Osteen is the pastor of the largest church in America (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:72). Jones and Woodbridge (2011:76) affirm that, in his teachings, he is simply reciting New Thought metaphysics. He explained that the reason why God took Zachariah's speech away is because God knew how powerful our words are and that Zachariah's negative words would somehow cancel out His plan (Peters, 2013).

²⁴ Some of the other popular faith preachers not mentioned include: P. Crouch, T.D. Jakes, B. Hinn, F. Price, J. Hagee, C. Dollar, E. Long, J. Duplantis and P. White (Hanegraaff, 2009:26-82; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:15, 56).

5. PREACHING THE LAW OF ATTRACTION: IS IT BIBLICAL?

5.1. The issue at hand

In light of the discussion this far, the preaching of the law of attraction as being Biblical is profoundly important. This issue can best be described in the words of Hanegraaff (2000:311): "... what we are dealing with is the way in which secular religion manifests itself in the context of the Christian churches. This is a phenomenon too important to be passed over lightly."

The South African church leader, Pastor At Boshoff from the CRC, proclaimed the law of attraction as a Biblical, and a Christian principle, from the pulpit – especially in two of his sermons in 2010 (Boshoff, 2010a; Boshoff 2010d). According to the CRC's statement of faith, the CRC believes in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as the inspired word of God and the final authority for faith and life (CRC, 2015b). This church clearly claims to hold the Scriptures in high regard, as any Christian church should.

Seeing that the law of attraction was preached from the Bible by Boshoff, the question that must be answered, is: Is it Biblical to preach the law of attraction? To answer this question one must search the Scriptures to see if it is biblically true (Acts 17:10-11²⁵). If the following analysis of the two sermons of Boshoff (2010a; 2010d) is valid, it places the church before a crisis that amounts to a struggle between orthodoxy and heresy, or even greater, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults (see Hanegraaff, 2009:14).

This analysis will take the following form: First a broad outline of Boshoff's two sermons will be provided after which his exegesis and understanding of Scripture will be evaluated. The evaluation will be done by consulting different commentaries within the reformed tradition. Finally the dogmatic implications of the law of attraction will be indicated by referring to the Bible and using other supplementary dogmatic sources. In At Boshoff's sermons he used the New King James version (NKJV) of the Bible. To ensure that the study is reliable, the same Bible translation will be used in this analysis.

5.2. A broad outline of Boshoff's sermons on the law of attraction

Boshoff (2010a) begins his series of sermons on the law of attraction in 2010 by explaining that he wants to talk about a powerful law that governs one's life. He defines this powerful law – the

²⁵ "Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These 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."

law of attraction – as follows: “The law of attraction simply says: Like attracts like. You’re attracting to yourself who you are.” He elaborates further on this by saying: “... we’re creating our own future all the time, whether we like to know it or not.” (Boshoff, 2010a).

In these sermons he claims that every child of God should always live a blessed life, because the life blessed with goodness is God’s highest desire for every Christian. He refers to Bible verses such as Jeremiah 29:11²⁶, John 10:10²⁷, 1 Corinthians 2:9²⁸, Galatians 3:13-14²⁹, Ephesians 1:3³⁰, 2 Peter 1:3³¹, and 3 John 2³² to support this claim. When he refers to 3 John 2, he states that if it is translated literally it would mean to succeed in financial matters. Accordingly every Christian has already been blessed to live a great and prosperous life in material wealth (Boshoff, 2010a).

After this claim he asks his listeners the following question:

How come so many people still falter and fall and live in defeat and just don’t live this life that the Bible guarantees? How come? I believe it’s very simply, people don’t understand this powerful law (Boshoff, 2010a).

Boshoff (2010a) then goes on describing the working of this law:

Whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not, you’re attracting things into your life all the time, good or bad, wanted and unwanted. All the time you are sending out a force, a power, an energy, that either attracts good things and good people into your life, or it repels good things and good people.

After referring to Matthew 12:33-35³³, Boshoff (2010a; 2010b) explains that some people seem to struggle in life, because they’ve never allowed the grace of God to change their inner treasure. He explains further with regard to these people: “Although they say the right thing, on

²⁶ “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

²⁷ “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”

²⁸ “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*”

²⁹ “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

³⁰ “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ...”

³¹ “... as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...”

³² “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”

³³ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

the inside they are controlled by something else, and that something else all the time is sending out an invisible signal.” He claims, according to Matthew 12:33-35, that our entire life flows forth from our heart and for that reason we must develop and build our treasure on the inside (Boshoff, 2010b).

Referring to Matthew 12:33-35, he also states:

Notice that the Bible says what is in your heart you’re attracting into your life all the time, whether you like it or not. You live by the simple law of attraction. All the time you’re attracting things into your life, good or bad, wanted or unwanted. You attract what is at the core of your heart (Boshoff, 2010d).

According to Boshoff (2010d), it is the thoughts of man that limit his life and one must somehow enlarge oneself on the inside. He makes it clear that your biggest enemy is nothing or nobody else than what you allow to go on in your heart, mind and thoughts. That seems to be the place where you can neutralise yourself.

Boshoff (2010b) also refers to Proverbs 4:23³⁴ to assert that, whatever we hold in our heart, we will attract into our life. It is from within ourselves that we constantly release some kind of energy that attracts things and people to us. He writes:

So whatever you think about all the time you’re attracting in your life all the time. Whatever you give your energy and whatever you put your focus upon you’re attracting to yourself – all the time (Boshoff, 2010b).

As an illustration of Proverbs 23:7³⁵ he lists many possible negative thoughts one can think about and then elaborates on it:

If you’re thinking those negative thoughts all the time you’re releasing a negative energy from your heart that repels good things from you. It’s like you have this invisible shield that repels and whatever you fear you begin to bring into your life. (Boshoff, 2010b).

According to Boshoff (2010b) one’s heart was created by God to produce one’s future. He describes it as the soil that brings forth whatever you put in it and this is then the reason why the Bible says you must guard it more than anything else. Your heart is consequently releasing and attracting things, people and circumstances into your life (Boshoff, 2010c).

When Boshoff (2010c) turns to Genesis 39:2-4³⁶, he directly connects the favour that Joseph found in the sight of his master to the law of attraction. Joseph supposedly attracted this favour

³⁴ “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life.”

³⁵ “For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he. ‘Eat and drink’” he says to you, but his heart is not with you.”

because he believed in the good will of God for his life. Boshoff (2010c) applies this to his listeners by explaining that they can also attract favour to themselves if they believe.

With all this said, Boshoff (2010a; 2010c) has to admit that, to a certain extent, there are tribulations in our life that is beyond our control. He vividly refers to Psalm 27:3³⁷ and 13³⁸, Psalm 23:1³⁹, 4⁴⁰ and 6⁴¹ and Psalm 30:5⁴² to motivate this. Following these verses he explains that one must always expect good things in bad situations. In the light of the totality of his sermons on the way the law of attraction works, these comments seem to be in contradiction with what was explained, and it raises inevitable questions.

5.3. Evaluating Boshoff's use of Scripture

5.3.1. Do Proverbs 4:23 and 23:7 support the law of attraction?

Two key Scripture texts that Boshoff (2010b) uses to support the law of attraction are from the book of Proverbs. Following Proverbs 4:23, it must first of all be mentioned that the 'heart' is considered to be the central organ in wisdom literature. It does, however, not refer to the physical organ of the human body, but rather to the mind, or as Lange *et al.* (2008:73) describe it: "the pure moral consciousness of man ..." (Garret, 1993:88; Keil & Delitzsch, 1996:82; Murphy, 1998:28).

In this way, the heart as one's innermost being, is portrayed as a water source from which life erupts in a figurative sense (Longman, 2006:154; Murphy, 1998:28). It is the wellspring of life in that the capacity to live with true joy comes from within and not from our circumstances (Garret, 1993:88). A true meaningful life can be described as the spiritual vitality which wells up as truth, is made man's own, and flows abroad wherever his renewed outlook makes itself felt (Kidner, 1964:65). It is sufficient to state that the heart as your intellectual, and especially moral centrum,

³⁶ "The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority."

³⁷ "Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I *will be* confident."

³⁸ "*I would have lost heart*, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

³⁹ "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want."

⁴⁰ "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

⁴¹ "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

⁴² "For His anger *is but for* a moment, is favor *is for* life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy *comes* in the morning."

will determine your everyday approach to life. A person with a bad heart will sooner or later reflect that in his/her everyday life (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996:82). The verb 'spring' can hardly refer to the heart's ability to attract or repel things into or from one's life. It seems that Boshoff's (2010b) remark regarding Proverbs 4:23, namely, "Whatever is in your heart you're attracting into your life", is foreign to this passage.

It is clear that the heart was not created by God to literally produce your own future (Boshoff, 2010b). If you read verses 10-27⁴³, it is also clear that the common Biblical metaphor of comparing two paths with each other is initiated here (see Matt. 7:13-14⁴⁴). It is the path of the wicked and the path of the righteous which serves as a metaphor to compare the behaviour, lifestyles and fate of these two paths (VanGemeren *et al.*, 1997:1097).

When one further considers the broader context of this verse (verse 20-27⁴⁵), Longman (2006:154) makes the following remark:

The father is not interested in just a superficial response from his son, some kind of behaviour modification; he desires that his child be wise at his very core. Action and speech will flow from a wise character. Verse 22 gives motivation to the son to pay attention to his father. If he takes the message to heart, then that will lead to a life wholeness ... It is most important that the son preserves the integrity of his heart. It is from the heart that life derives. The father is not speaking literally. The heart can remain beating, but a person be dead in other ways. An evil heart is a dead heart.

⁴³ "Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble. My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil."

⁴⁴ "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

⁴⁵ "My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they *are* life to those who find them; and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil."

When one turns to Proverbs 23:7, both Keil and Delitzsch (1996:339) and Murphy (1998:173) emphasise the fact that the translation of the first phrase in this verse is difficult and uncertain. Toy (1914:430) proposes a possible translation to read as follows: “as he reckons within himself, so is he.” Longman (2006:425) adheres to the translation of the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV): “For it is like a hair in the throat.” In turn, Geisler (1997:73) rests with the translation of the *New International Version* (NIV), which reads: “He is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost.” None of these different translations can support the teaching of the law of attraction.

Apart from the difficulties concerning the translation, it is clear that verse 7 must be interpreted together with verses 6⁴⁶ and 8⁴⁷. Where Proverbs 23:1-3⁴⁸ gives advice about table manners with a ruler, here one finds advice about eating with a stingy person (Longman, 2006:425). Geisler (1997:73) explains the whole context of this passage as follows:

The whole context of this passage (vv. 6-8) is warning about eating “the bread of a miser” (v. 6). Speaking of the miser, the last verse says, “ ‘Eat and drink,’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.” This fits with the idea that the miser’s heart is not there because “he is always thinking about the costs,” as the NIV translates it.

After listing a couple of negative thoughts and referring specifically to Proverbs 23:7, Boshoff (2010b) says: “If you’re thinking those negative thoughts all the time you are releasing a negative energy from your heart that repels good things from you. It’s like you have this invisible shield that repels and whatever you fear you begin to bring into your life.”

Boshoff’s (2010b) exposition of this passage is totally foreign to it. Proverbs 23:7 doesn’t support the law of attraction in any way, because it says nothing about changing your reality through thoughts (Geisler, 1997:73).

5.3.2. Does Matthew 12:33-35 support the law of attraction?

It seems that Matthew 12:33-35 is the key text in Scripture that Boshoff (2010a; 2010b; 2010d) relies on in his attempt to support the law of attraction. Hagner (1998:350) mentions that the point being made in this text is the same as in Matthew 7:17⁴⁹. A good tree automatically produces good fruit while a bad tree automatically produces bad fruit. The conclusion is therefore obvious in the sense that a tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces.

⁴⁶ “Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies”

⁴⁷ “The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up, and waste your pleasant words.”

⁴⁸ “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what *is* before you; and put a knife to your throat if you *are* a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they *are* deceptive food.”

⁴⁹ “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”

Blomberg (1992:205), Hagner (1998:350), Hendriksen and Kistemaker (2001:530) and Calvin (2010b:79) are all in accord that Jesus in Matthew 12:33-35 is addressing the Pharisees and applying the similarity between the tree and the fruit to nothing more than our heart and speech. Hendriksen and Kistemaker (2001:530) write:

As a teeming population will overflow into adjoining territory, and a too full cistern into an overflow pipe, so also the overplus of the heart will burst out into speech, as it certainly did in the case of these wicked Pharisees. The opposite is also true: when the heart is filled with good and noble intentions the good man's speech will prove this to be a fact. The rule according to which whatever a man has set his heart on, so that the very core and center of his being is full of it, will sooner or later be disclosed in his speech, holds for good and bad alike.

The heart is considered to be the centre of a person's being and according to Matthew 12:33-35, the mouth will speak accordingly (Hagner, 1998:350; Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 2001:350). The New Testament usage of the word 'heart' agrees with the Old Testament use thereof, for it is seen as a person's main organ of spiritual life. It is the seat of understanding and the source of thought and reflection (Kittel *et al.*, 1964:611-612). But does this mean that your entire life flows forth from your heart and that the things you cherish in your heart, you will always attract to yourself, as Boshoff (2010b; 2010d) claims? Boshoff (2010b; 2010d) even replaces the words 'good' and 'evil' in verse 35, with 'positive' and 'negative' to try to bring his ideas into the text so that it reads: "A positive man out of the positive treasure of his heart brings forth positive things, and a negative man out of the negative treasure brings forth negative things."

When Jesus calls the Pharisees a "brood of vipers" it is a clear indication that He believes the Pharisees to represent the bad tree with its bad fruit (Blomberg, 1992:205). Therefore they are described as being incapable of speaking good things, since their bad speeches are indications of bad hearts (Blomberg, 1992:205; Hagner, 1998:350; Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 2001:530; Calvin, 2010b:80).

It is clear that the word "treasure" in verse 35 is used figuratively, referring to the inner store of a person's heart. In the New Testament this word is normally used in situations where there is a contrast between heavenly and earthly treasures (see Matt. 6:19-21⁵⁰). In this way Jesus takes up the Jewish teaching that man should not assemble earthly and material things through ungodly deeds, but rather do godly deeds, by which the righteous lay up treasure in heaven (Kittel *et al.*, 1964:137).

⁵⁰ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The verb “brings forth” in verse 35 can hardly be applied to anything other than a person’s words. Sayings of Boshoff (2010a; 2010b; 2010d) such as “sending out an invisible signal”, “from within you release the energy that attracts things and people to you all the time”, “... what is in your heart you’re attracting into your life all the time whether you like it or not” and “Your heart is going to attract to you.” is once again foreign to Matthew 12:33-35. In fact, Calvin (2010b:80-81) rather describes the purpose of this passage as follows:

We must also observe the purpose for which Christ employs those parables; for he reproaches the Pharisees with having manifested by words the malice which they had inwardly conceived. Besides, knowing them to be sworn enemies, he takes occasion from a single calumny to expose their whole life, and to destroy their credit with the people, which gave them too great influence in deceiving and in doing mischief. Though good speeches do not always proceed from the inmost heart, but originate (as the phrase is) on the tip of the tongue, yet it is an invariable truth, that bad speeches are indications of a bad heart.

Matthew 12:33-35 clearly doesn’t support the law of attraction. The principle can only be applied to your speech and not to the idea of attracting things into your life. If you were to use Matthew 12:33-35 in a sermon, verse 36 and 37⁵¹ should also be added to your reference, since it is considered to be appended as a climax to the preceding verses, which point not only to the danger of bad words, but even useless words. It assumes the view of the preceding verses that the words of a person reflect his/her inner identity, since words, like deeds, are indicators of a person’s discipleship of Jesus and relationship to the kingdom (Hagner, 1998:350-351; Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 2001:531).

5.3.3. Did Joseph use the law of attraction?

According to Boshoff (2010c), Joseph used the law of attraction to attract the favour he received in Genesis 39:2-4. Potiphar, the officer of Pharaoh, bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites and Joseph served in his house as a slave. Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and so Joseph found favour in the sight of his master, who then made him overseer of his house.

The word describing Joseph as a ‘successful’ man is a verb in the original Hebrew. It is important to notice that the success is merely stating God’s grace in Joseph’s life. Theologically this verb emphasises that only God is the one who gives success and the success this passage is referring to is about the intended accomplishment in the different activities of life (VanGemeren, 1997:804).

⁵¹ “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Mathews (2005:731-732) notes that the phrase: “The Lord was with Joseph ...” occurs again in verse 21⁵². This draws an explicit parallel between Joseph’s success in the house of Potiphar and his achievement in prison. One can conclude that Joseph’s success must be connected to God’s graceful presence in his life and not his ability to attract favour and success. Wenham (1998:374) adds to this that the Lord’s presence in his life also places the coming unfortunate events into perspective (see Gen. 39:19-21⁵³). Despite the setbacks Joseph was about to face, God was always with him.

Calvin (2010d:293) rightly draws attention to the following principle in this narrative of Joseph:

How much more base is our ingratitude, if we do not refer all our prosperous events to God as their author; seeing that Scripture often teaches us, that nothing proceeding from men, whether counsels, or labours, or any means which they can devise, will profit them, except so far as God gives his blessing.

Notice that Boshoff (2010c) sets a condition to his listeners when applying this passage to them: just as Joseph attracted this success and favour because he believed correctly and used the law of attraction correctly, so they can also attract success and favour using the law of attraction correctly and believe correctly.

Joseph’s success and favour can’t be attributed to him using the law of attraction in the correct way. He didn’t attract Potiphar’s favour into his own life. It was God’s gracious act to provide it for him in his circumstances. God sovereignly set the course for Joseph to receive this success and favour. Using the law of attraction through the correct way of believing to channel prosperity into existence can’t be called faith. Faith is rather a channel of living trust between a creature and his Creator (Hanegraaff, 2009:277).

5.4. Evaluation of the doctrinal implications of the law of attraction

5.4.1. The dethronement of God

The first doctrinal implication of the law of attraction is the dethronement of God. If one believes that the idea of the law of attraction is true, God can’t act on your behalf unless you visualise, speak and believe correctly. Immediately God is limited to a genie in service of people (Peters, 2013). He cannot operate outside of the universal law of attraction because even He is

⁵² “But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.”

⁵³ “So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, ‘Your servant did to me after this manner,’ that his anger was aroused. Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.”

governed by it (Hanegraaff, 2009:119-121; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:62). Accordingly, God must obey this spiritual law of attraction and deliver whatever his children desire in life. Boshoff (2010a) starts with the assumption that our lives are governed by the law of attraction without even mentioning God in the sentence. The teaching of the law of attraction and similar ideas is a direct disregard of the sovereignty and omnipotence of God – it destroys the essentials of historical Christianity (Hanegraaff, 2009:147; MacArthur, 1992:350-351; McConnell, 1995:140).

When it comes to the truth about God, Van Til (1955:241) rightly emphasises that one must appeal to his authoritative Word: “My primary interest is now, as it always has been, to teach what the Bible contains as the infallible rule of faith and practice in the way of truths about God and his relation to man and the world.” In Revelation 1:8⁵⁴ God clearly makes himself known as “the Almighty”. When one considers Psalm 115:1-3⁵⁵, it is clear that God always does whatever he wants. He is therefore not governed by anything outside of Himself – especially not the plans in the heart of man (see Prov. 21:1⁵⁶ and 19:21⁵⁷). Following Psalm 115:3, Calvin (2010c:334) warns one not to abuse the sovereignty of God:

That God can do whatsoever he pleaseth is a doctrine of great importance, provided it be truly and legitimately applied. This caution is necessary, because curious and forward persons, as is usual with them, take the liberty of abusing a sound doctrine by producing it in defence of their frantic reveries. And in this matter we daily witness too much of the wildness of human ingenuity. This mystery, which ought to command our admiration and awe, is by many shamelessly and irreverently made a topic of idle talk. If we would derive advantage from this doctrine, we must attend to the import of God’s doing whatsoever he pleaseth in heaven and on the earth.

God is absolutely sovereign in His decisions and actions and it is not determined by anything outside of Himself (Smith, 2012:90; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:183, 194). The greatness of His power and might is more than enough ground to praise Him and there are many more passages from Scripture⁵⁸ to support the absoluteness of God’s almighty power, who certainly has the last say (Frame, 2013:337).

It is clear that no man can force the hand of God using some formula or spiritual law. The Bible teaches the absolute reign of God in the universe and it seems that the law of attraction places

⁵⁴ “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

⁵⁵ “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. Why should the Gentiles say, ‘So where *is* their God?’ But our God *is* in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.”

⁵⁶ “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

⁵⁷ “There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.”

⁵⁸ Consider 2 Chron. 20:6, Job 23:13, Ps. 24:7-8, Ps. 135:6, Prov. 16:1, Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13, Dan. 4:35, Mk. 14:36, Eph. 1:18-23, Phil. 3:21.

a limit on God which is unbiblical (McConnell, 1995:140-141). Oliphint (2012:218) sets this unbiblical assumption right: “There is nothing outside of God that initially limits Him; nor is there anything that ever limits His essential character.”

5.4.2. The enthronement of man

Another doctrinal implication of the law of attraction is the enthronement of man. It is considered theologically inevitable that a demotion of God leads to an exaltation of man (McConnell, 1995:142). Boshoff’s (2010a) claim that we’re creating our own future through the law of attraction rather seems like a way to invert the relationship between the Creator and the creature (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:63). According to the law of attraction, humans can use thoughts to attract things into their lives (Boshoff, 2010b). This gives humans the leading part in the universe, and the only part left for God to play is to meet all their needs, including good relationships, sound health, and financial gains (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:63; Peters, 2013). The teaching of the law of attraction dangerously exalts man to the extent where he can manipulate God to control his own future (Hanegraaff, 2009:121).

In Genesis 3:4-5⁵⁹ one reads of the big lie of the serpent to Eve: “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The serpent depicts God to be selfish and deceptive trying to prevent Adam and Eve from achieving the same position as *Elohim* (Matthews, 1996:236). Regarding this first sin of man, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:390) remarks: “Man sought to usurp God’s position. He reached for God’s crown and claimed what was only due to God.” Mere humans as creatures of God can never claim to be like God or to whatever extent try to play God’s role in their own lives. The desire to do so was the sin that led to the fall in the first place (see Isa. 14:12-15⁶⁰; Peters, 2013).

According to James 4:13-16⁶¹ it is clear that your future is in God’s hands and that you must therefore not pretend to know more about it than what you do (Frame, 2013:155, 670). The

⁵⁹ “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

⁶⁰ “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the pit.”

⁶¹ “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

claim that we can create our own future rather seems like a secularised attempt to elevate man to the king of creation in God's place (Boshoff, 2010a; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:378). There should be a very crisp line between us as God's creatures and God as our Creator, which Calvin (1845:49) expresses very clearly in his *Institutes of the Christian religion*:

So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms, and seem only less than demigods. But should we once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and reflect what kind of Being he is, and how absolute the perfection of that righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue, to which, as a standard, we are bound to be conformed, what formerly delighted us by its false show of righteousness will become polluted with the greatest iniquity; what strangely imposed upon us under the name of wisdom will disgust by its extreme folly; and what presented the appearance of virtuous energy will be condemned as the most miserable impotence. So far are those qualities in us, which seem most perfect, from corresponding to the divine purity.

Scripture clearly indicates that there is only one God and that it is a sin to claim otherwise⁶². When writing with regard to the first commandment, Frame (2008:415) emphasises that it is a clear violation thereof when we worship our own power and capabilities or ourselves. In question and answer 95 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the answer to the question: "What is idolatry?", is: "It is, instead of the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word, or along with the same, to conceive or have something else on which to place our trust." (Schaff, 1882:342). If you believe in the law of attraction you place your trust in something else than God. It gives man the power and capabilities to play god over their own lives and instead trusting their own plans, while any man's plans are in fact totally contingent (Smith, 2012:89-90). The life of a Christian should always be a pursuit of God's will and not a strategy to get Him to go along with ours (MacArthur, 1992:351). Our will, heart, plans and everything is in a state of total depravity⁶³, there is nothing in us worthy of any praise (Hanko, 2012:114).

The law of attraction clearly steals the glory of God and gives it to man. Instead of glorifying ourselves, we must turn to God who makes all things possible, and confess in absolute humble dependence upon Him:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36).

⁶² See Ex. 20:3-4, 2 Sam. 22:32, Ps. 50:1, Isa. 44:6-8, Mk. 12:29, Rom. 16:27, 1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 5:6, 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5 and Jm. 2:19.

⁶³ See Gen. 6:5, Ps. 14:2-3, Isa. 64:6, Jer. 17:9 and Eph. 2:1-3.

5.4.3. God's all-encompassing providence and the question of suffering

Another doctrinal implication to discuss concerns the doctrine of God's providence⁶⁴. Boshoff's (2010a; 2010d) claim that the law of attraction governs our life, that we are creating our own future and that we live by the law of attraction, is a direct assault on God's providence (MacArthur, 1992:350-351). God's providence refers to His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all His creatures, and their actions⁶⁵ (Frame, 2013:141).

Boshoff (2010a) refers to seven passages in the Bible to support his claim that a materially prosperous and blessed life is always God's will for a Christian. According to him, Christians who still struggle in life and don't live such a blessed, prosperous life simply do not understand the law of attraction. Piper (2010:24) explains that, on the one hand we may trust in the Lord to be our helper, because He will provide and protect us – there is thus a measure of prosperity He will give us. But on the other hand there is a line between trusting God for our needs and using God for our wants. The law of attraction rather seems like an attempt to use God for our wants, than trusting in His providence.

God graciously provides for all of creation. His children who know that in God we live and move and have our being, will be forever thankful, not only because God protect our spiritual life, but also because God gives us, day by day, life and breath and all things (see Acts 17:25⁶⁶). One who trust God for everything can die in peace in the confidence that the One who gives and preserves life also takes it away again, and that God is the faithful Father of His children, even in suffering and death (Hanko, 2012:93; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:291).

According to Velarde (2007:5) the fatal flaw of the law of attraction is its inability to adequately solve the problem of suffering. If everything that comes into our life experience is the result of our ability to create our own future, then what is the explanation for those that have been raped, tortured or persecuted? Following the only logical outcome the law of attraction can provide, everyone always brings these bad things upon themselves. Boshoff's (2010a) claim that people

⁶⁴ Article 13 of the Belgic Confession of Faith reads as follows with regard to God's providence: "We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them, according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment; nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner even when the devil and wicked men act unjustly."

⁶⁵ Here are some of the many passages in Scripture which expresses God's acts of providence: Neh. 9:6, 1 Sam. 2:6-7, Job 42:2, Ps. 33:10-11, Ps. 37:23-24, Ps. 65:9-11, Ps. 145:15-16, Ps. 147:15-20, Isa. 14:24-27; 46:10, Jer. 5:24, Jer. 23:20, Lam. 3:37-38, Dan. 4:35, Matt. 6:25-26, Matt. 10:29-31, Jn. 3:27, Ac. 17:25-28, Eph. 1:11, Heb. 1:3,

⁶⁶ "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."

who struggle in life do not understand the law of attraction, implies that they are the cause of their own suffering and struggles in life. A view such as this is atrocious (Velarde, 2007:5). It is the same as to claim that all Paul's imprisonments, hardships, hunger and afflictions were a direct result of his own negativity that he allowed to dwell in his thoughts (see 2 Corinthians 11:22-29⁶⁷). According to the law of attraction, Job, the righteous man, brought all the tragedies in his life unto himself (Job 3:25).

Preaching prosperity through the law of attraction, as Boshoff (2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d) does, conceals the fact of suffering in the Christian life and it doesn't provide any comfort for someone enduring suffering in whatever way (Piper, 2010:26). More than the notion of material prosperity, the New Testament emphasises the fulfilment of your calling amidst suffering⁶⁸. Piper (2010:26-27) considers it a disservice if one doesn't tell young disciples of Christ about the necessity of suffering. He further explains that God has definitive purposes for suffering, which is crucial to know. One must indeed search very hard to find one person in the Old and New Testament that lived a pain-free life on account of their faith (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:109; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:289).

Jones and Woodbridge (2011:122) write the following with regard to suffering:

While the Bible does not present suffering as desirable, it likewise does not view suffering as a hindrance to God's plan of redemption. While a day is coming in the future in which there will be no more pain and suffering, Scripture teaches that in the current world trials are a tool that the Lord uses in order to foster the sanctification of His people.

There is no easy answer to the question of suffering, but the Christian faith, and specifically the doctrine of God's providence, is very unique regarding the incarnation of Christ. God Himself took on flesh and voluntarily became part of human suffering. Christ is the only person in history who, without any sin, went through the pain of immense and unjust suffering. Therefore, when one as a believer suffers, the fact that the fellowship of suffering includes Christ, should be comforting (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:119-120; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:311). The implications of the law of attraction rob the Christian faith of this uniqueness.

⁶⁷ "Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?"

⁶⁸ Consider Matt. 10:25, Jn. 15:20, Ac. 14:22, Rom. 8:16-18, Eph. 6:10ff, 1 Pet. 4:12-14, 2 Tim.3:12.

God's sovereignty includes both what He does, as well as His allowance of events that He knows will happen. In His absolute sovereignty, God also uses suffering to accomplish His plans and conform His children to His image (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:121). The apostle Paul writes:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:17).

Suffering should remind us of the sovereignty of God (Frame, 2013:300). When Job wanted to know from God why such dreadful suffering came upon him, God asked Job a question: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding." (Job 38:4). An answer like this reveals the truth that God is sovereign even amidst suffering. The deepest hope for the Christian is eternal, not in health, wealth and prosperity in this lifetime, but rather a resurrected body in the life to come. Christians have the certainty that their future are in God's hands and not theirs, for we don't know what is best for us (Hanegraaff, 2009:277-278). We can know that through God's providence, whatever evil is sent upon us "... He (God) will turn to my good; for he is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing also, being a faithful Father." Therefore "... we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love ..." (Schaff, 1882:316).

5.4.4. Evaluating the worldview behind the law of attraction

The last doctrinal issue of the law of attraction to briefly evaluate is the worldview behind it. As noted earlier, the core worldview behind the law of attraction is a combination of pantheism and monism. Anderson (2014:81) notes that pantheism is very often associated with monism.

Within monism any diversity we experience is an illusion. Any distinctions that we make between things are only in the mind, because any distinction between things destroys the oneness of everything in monism. The implication is that any experience of the diverse world is unreliable because, either all the diverse things are indeed identical, or it is unreal. In this great oneness there is furthermore no fundamental difference between God and the world (Anderson, 2014:71-72; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:249; Velarde, 2007:4).

At the heart of pantheism lies an impersonal god which can rather be described as a force or energy. If everything is a manifestation of God, then everything is good, like God ought to be. The implication is that the Holocaust was good, child abuse is good, cancer is good and everything is good because everything is God. Pantheism consequently raises serious

questions when it comes to the reality of good and evil. The basis for this distinction disappears and evil is completely denied (Anderson, 2014:81-82; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:289; Velarde, 2007:4).

When it comes to the Christian worldview, it begins with God, but not with God as man wants Him to be in his service. It begins with the God who is really there and everything is about Him and not about us. Christianity is therefore a God-given, Bible-based, Christ-centred worldview, which begins with the personal, not-silent God (Ryken, 2006:13, 15).

6. CONCLUSION

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:1) start their book, *Concise Reformed dogmatics*, expressing that there will be times when dogmatics are in demand, but also some periods when sound doctrine is not highly regarded. It seems that the latter is an accurate description of the time in which we find ourselves when we consider spiritual teachings such as the law of attraction.

Preliminary issues regarding the law of attraction have been answered adequately to describe what it is, how it works and from where its underlying principle originated. The New Age worldview, underlying the law of attraction, has also been described to establish that the law of attraction is a New Age practice that flows forth from a New Age monistic, pantheistic worldview. A direct line was drawn from the law of attraction to the positive confession doctrine within the Word of Faith movement. Serious attention was given to the sermons of At Boshoff on the law of attraction, to show that secularised practices are infiltrating the Christian church, with far-reaching doctrinal implications that destroy some of the fundamental tenets of historical Christianity.

All of this was done to answer the question: *Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction?* The answer to this question is evidently *no*. The Christian worldview makes no place for an impersonal law that even governs and limits the almighty God of heaven and earth.

When discussing 2 Peter 2:1⁶⁹, Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:281) write:

The word heresies derives from the Greek verb which signifies to take something for one's self, to choose, or to prefer. It refers to a chosen course of thought or action that an individual takes or that a group of people adopts as an article of faith or way of life. The inevitable result is the act of separation which gives the term heresy an unfavorable connotation... What is the result? Peter leaves no doubt that he uses the term heresy in a negative sense, for he says that false teachers "will secretly introduce destructive heresies." The literal reading is, "heresies of [for] destruction". The false teachers, then, slyly entered the Christian community with doctrines designed to destroy the spiritual and moral lives of the Christians.

In the light of the entire discussion it would suffice to say that the law of attraction is a good example of a "destructive heresy" that is "secretly" introduced to Christians. It is not the law of attraction that governs our lives, but God. We do not create our own future through manipulating

⁶⁹ "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction."

things with our minds; our future is safe in the hands of God alone. We do not live by the simple law of attraction; we live only by the grace of our heavenly Father.

SECTION C: CONCLUSION

What urged this study was the fact that the well-known South African church leader, Pastor At Boshoff from the Christian Revival Church (CRC) proclaimed from the pulpit the belief in a spiritual law of attraction as a Biblical, and a Christian, principle – specifically in two of his sermons in 2010.

The need to address and evaluate the law of attraction, preached as a Biblical, and a Christian principle, is shown to be of vital importance. That teachings that built on it, such as the prosperity gospel, are growing around the world, also makes it an urgent matter to address from an apologetic perspective. If this phenomenon is false, it places the church before a crisis that amounts to a struggle between orthodoxy and heresy, or even, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults.

In the first of two sermons on the law of attraction in 2010, Boshoff started by explaining that he wanted to talk about a powerful law that governs our life. Later he defined this powerful law – the law of attraction – as follows: “The law of attraction simply says: Like attracts like. You’re attracting to yourself who you are”. In his second sermon on the law of attraction Boshoff explained it further: “You live by the simple law of attraction. All the time you’re attracting things into your life, good or bad, wanted or unwanted. You attract what is at the core of your heart”. Later on he made it clear that our biggest enemy is nothing or nobody else than what we allow to go on in our heart, mind and thoughts.

According to Boshoff the teaching of the law of attraction is a powerful principle one finds in the Holy Scriptures – an important law that every Christian must understand to be successful in life, without struggling.

Far from encouraging the teaching of the law of attraction, the Holy Scriptures rather reject teaching that forces like the law of attraction govern your life. Boshoff’s use of Scripture to support the law of attraction testifies to poor and irresponsible hermeneutics. The term ‘law of attraction’ doesn’t appear in the Bible and, considering the cultic origins and doctrinal implications of teachings such as this, it is rather a good example of a destructive heresy against which the Bible warns us.

The Research Proposal of this study (Section A) stated the following objectives:

1. To discuss in detail what the law of attraction is, where it comes from, how it works, whether it can be used, the corresponding features of the law of attraction and New Age, as well as New Thought teachings, and the similarities between the law of attraction and positive confession;
2. To determine whether the law of attraction can be preached as a Biblical principle, by examining Pastor Boshoff's sermons on the law of attraction, and then by formulating the evaluative Biblical perspective concerning the law of attraction;
3. To determine whether the law of attraction has any rightful place in the Christian worldview, according to the Bible, and what the possible destructive effect may be if the law of attraction has a place in the Christian worldview.

The law of attraction has been discussed in great detail, confirming the corresponding features with a New Age worldview and practices. The great similarities between the law of attraction and the heaven idea of positive confession have been shown.

Boshoff's key references to passages in Scripture in his sermons on the law of attraction, for the support of this idea, are not only hermeneutically ungrounded, but clearly show that his applications thereof are rather a mirror of his own ideas. The key Biblical passages he used are used to preach his own convictions and not the truths of the Bible. In light of the greater doctrinal implications of the law of attraction, it is clear that teachings such as this are dangerous – especially concerning the faith and hopes of suffering believers. It may turn Christians away from being a living sacrifice unto God and His purpose (Romans 12:1⁷⁰), to create a self-centred, and even selfish, world for themselves.

Evidently, the conclusion of this research is that there is no place for the law of attraction in the Christian worldview. It clearly endangers and destroys important doctrines that the Church of Christ held dear throughout the ages, and may change believers from being free in Christ to being slaves of a self-focussed force.

An important future apologetic study can be to determine the connection between the law of attraction and the little gods doctrine and the influence it has on the life and worldview of Christians.

⁷⁰ "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service."

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