

Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction? (Part 1): An apologetic evaluation of the roots of this doctrine



Authors:

Daniël J. Maritz¹
Henk G. Stoker¹

Affiliations:

¹Faculty Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Daniel Maritz,
dan.jacobus.maritz@gmail.com

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This article investigates the roots of the so-called spiritual law of attraction that some Christian preachers today describe as an important biblical law. One of the proponents of this idea, Pastor At Boshoff of the Christian Revival Church (CRC), refers in his sermons to the law of attraction as a powerful principle derived from the Word of God. This idea bears striking similarities to the positive confession doctrine as taught by popular Word of Faith preachers. The basic claim of this spiritual 'law' is that human beings create their own future through their thoughts and words. The article shows the idea of a spiritual law of attraction as a New Age doctrine that flows from a New Age worldview. Preaching prosperity through the law of attraction is not in accordance with orthodox, historical Christianity or the Christian worldview.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article challenges the secular view that intangible thoughts and words can take on tangible reality. This is important since this secular idea is infiltrating the Christian church. It is already being preached as biblical although the roots thereof are clearly shown to originate from the New Age movement.

Introduction

The founder and leading pastor of one of the big charismatic churches in South Africa, the Christian Revival Church (CRC), Pastor At Boshoff¹, delivered two sermons in 2010 that caused us to consider the need to address the theme of his sermons apologetically.² 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 2010b). Even though the term 'law of attraction' never occurs in the Bible, he proclaimed it to be a central doctrine of Christianity based on the Bible.

While the task of Christian Apologetics is not only to defend 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 (Oliphint 2013:29),³ this article aims to provide a background to the law of attraction. It will attempt to furnish a framework that will help to understand the so-called law of attraction better. To achieve this, it will seek to answer preliminary questions with regard to this spiritual law. It will research the roots of the law of attraction and its ties to the modern New Age movement. It will further investigate the similarities between the law of attraction and positive confession as taught within the Word of Faith movement.

This is the first article of two that deals with the question if there is a place for the law of attraction in the Christian worldview.⁴ It will serve as a broad base to understand what the law of attraction is and where it comes from.⁵

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

2. This evaluative study will be done from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. The entire discussion will thus 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. For a brief summary of Reformed theology one can look at the three forms of unity (The Belgic confession of faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort).

3. This article will work with Oliphint's definition of apologetics. There are many different ways to define apologetics. When discussing the essence of apologetics, McGrath (2012:16) for instance emphasizes that apologetics helps to open the eyes of people to the reality, reliability, and relevance of the Christian faith and that the task of apologetics still continues today as new cultural and intellectual challenges arise.

4. After discussing the Christian theistic worldview in detail, Sire (2009:46) comes to the following conclusion of what the Christian theistic worldview is: '... Christian theism is primarily dependent on its concept of God, for theism holds that everything stems from him. Nothing is prior to God or equal to him. He is *he Who is*. Thus theism has basics for metaphysics. Since *he Who is* also has worthy character and thus *The Worthy One*, theism has basics for ethics. Since *he Who is* also is *he Who knows*, theism has a basis for epistemology. In other words, theism is a complete worldview'. The Christian worldview always starts with God how he reveals himself and not how we think of him.

5. The second article evaluates the claim that the law of attraction as a doctrine derives from the Word of God. This evaluation will take the form of a content analysis.

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Preliminary issues regarding the law of attraction

What is the law of attraction?

The law of attraction as a theological and philosophical concept,⁶ 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, 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).

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, 2012:6; Hicks & Hicks 2006:32; Losier 2010:19). This law of attraction is totally unbiased in the sense that your own personal background and worldview does not 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 everyone in every corner of the globe, there seems to be some 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 (n.d.:n.p.) 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'.

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

Proctor (n.d.) also explains that you cannot 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, n.d.:1; Proctor 2011; Taylor 2010:26). These vibrations, in which everything is constantly moving, can either be positive or negative (Losier 2010:13; Proctor 2011).

According to this worldview of cause and effect, the moment a person thinks about something, that thought will dictate the vibration which that person's mind and body are in (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 n.d.). 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 or 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 but if you feel bad you are in a negative vibration (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 cause to bring positive and good things into your life, while negative vibrations that are caused by negative thoughts cause 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 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 reaction of the law of attraction 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) 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. (p. 37)

This far it is clear that the law of attraction, according to its proponents, 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 or 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 or her entire life by using his or 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).

According to these authors the principle of the law of attraction is 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).

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 to 6000–7000 years ago, where it found expression in the mystical traditions and beliefs of ancient magicians and sages. The Emerald Tablet of Hermes⁷ seems to be an example of this phenomenon, and supposedly 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 (n.d.: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 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 attraction.⁸ Proctor (2011) also mentions that all the great leaders throughout history were in agreement of the apparent fact that you become what you think.

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, supposedly 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

7. This is an ancient, cryptic text. There are numerous translations and interpretations of this text.

8. 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.

officially labelled the 'law of attraction'. P.P. Quimby⁹ 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 one of the most influential contributors 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. Atkinson¹⁰ in 1906. This is actually not correct since the term 'law of attraction' already appeared in P. Mulford's¹¹ book *Thoughts are things*, in 1889, and later in R.W. Trine's¹² 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. Blavatsky¹³ in her two-volume book titled *Isis unveiled: the master-key to the mysteries of ancient and modern science and theology* (Blavatsky 1877a, 1877b; Taylor 2010:55). Unfortunately it is not clear what exactly she meant when she used the term.

The 'law of attraction' was further popularised by C.H. Haanel's¹⁴ book *The master key system*, in 1917, and N.V. Peale's¹⁵ 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 are an indication of this spiritual law's unreliability.

9. 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). 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).

10. 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).

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

12. 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.

13. 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).

14. 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).

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

Nearly every proponent has a different explanation for the origin of the law of attraction. When the proponents' backgrounds are taken into consideration nearly all of them were involved in New Thought practices.

The New Age worldview and the law of attraction

When considering the development of the law of attraction above, it became clear that the relation to the beliefs and practices of the New Age movement¹⁶ should also be contemplated and discussed. According to 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 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, being 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 not 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 New Age spirituality as a jelly-like substance which is very hard to identify. 'New Age movement' is 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, 2007:267).

Accordingly, the New Age movement can be described briefly as a vast and widespread, 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 humans 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 brings forth a syncretism of Eastern and

16. 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.

Western worldviews (Campbell-Jack, McGrath & Evans 2006:484–485; Honsberger & Halverson 1996:161, 163; 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).

Honsberger and Halverson (1996:164) explain this concept by referring to each individual as a stream that flows from an 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), 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. (p. 164)

The beliefs and practices within the New Age movement place a strict emphasis on the self. The main focus is on empowering oneself rather than on 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 explains that every individual is his or her own best teacher and that there is no place for any other idol to be worshipped, because the God everyone is seeking lies within oneself and not outside (Chepkwony 2006:318).

Many of the New Age beliefs and practices are in one way or another based on creating one’s 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) 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. (p. 68)

Lastly, Byrne (2006) affirms:

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. (p. 150)

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) is of opinion 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 states that no qualified physicist would claim these kinds of connections without committing fraud (Zacharias 2012a:87).

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 (discussed under point 3 above) overtones in the modern Word of Faith movement.¹⁷ Hanegraaff (2009:15–16) also emphasises that the similarities between the Word of Faith movement and New Thought metaphysics are indeed significant. It is considered important by this research 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 one directs 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 1998:36; 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 one's mental attitude determines what one believes and confesses, which in turn determines what one gets from God. If one thinks rightly, believes rightly and confesses rightly, nothing is impossible. This doctrine is seen as some kind of spiritual activation 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).

Essek W. Kenyon¹⁸ (1998:66–67), who is considered to be the grandfather or father¹⁹ 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.

17. 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".'

18. 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).

19. 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).

He further adds that it is not only your thinking, but also your words, that build power or weakness in yourself (Kenyon 1998:72). 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. Hagin²⁰ (1979b:2), your words will either lead to destruction or 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, 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 11:23²¹ as the supposed biblical teaching to motivate the statement that one will have whatever one speaks.

The well-known faith teacher Kenneth Copeland²² (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 or her words to change their environments and circumstances (Copeland 1983:15, 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'.

20. Hagin (1917–2003) is widely accepted as a guardian, teacher and prophet by faith teachers. He claimed to have died and to have 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).

21. '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' (Bible 1982).

22. 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).

According to Copeland, intangible words do indeed take on tangible reality (Hanegraaff 2009:25).

In turn, Joyce Meyer²³ (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 do not. 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 2002:87–88). Meyer (2005) also writes about a principle that she finds in Matthew 9:29²⁴:

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. (pp. 9–10)

She applies this principle to Job who feared the bad things that happened to him (Job 3:25²⁵), and so he seemingly brought the bad things upon himself. Peters (2013) connects this statement of Meyer directly to the law of attraction.

It is clear that Joel Osteen²⁶ (2004:129, 139) also underlines this same principle when he explains that everyone draws into their experience what they are 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; you must also speak words of faith over your 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 you use.

To some extent it seems that, locally, At Boshoff (2008:40) also writes about this positive confession doctrine, explaining that you must change from the negative to the positive because, in the same way your faith can be seen and heard, your unbelief is also very visible and audible. Although God is all-powerful, he cannot override your will since he gave men free will. Accordingly, God can only work with the positive or negative power that is within yourself. Everyone must therefore be careful with their thoughts and words

23. 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).

24. 'Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you"' (Bible 1982)

25. 'For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me' (Bible 1982).

26. Osteen is the pastor of the largest church in America (Jones & Woodbridge 2011:72). Jones and Woodbridge (2011:76) is of opinion that, in his teachings, Osteen 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).

since God, the angels and the demons are all always listening to your faith or unbelief. The moment you open your mouth to speak, you can invite God into the equation or leave him out of it. If there is a 'no' in your words, God cannot intervene on your behalf (Boshoff 2008:40–41).

Jones and Woodbridge (2011:59) compare proponents of the New Thought with many of the faith preachers²⁷ 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).

While New Agers use the law of attraction ostensibly 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 creatures.²⁸

Conclusion

Preliminary issues regarding the law of attraction have been described above, indicating how it is understood to work by its proponents and where the underlying principle of the law of attraction originated from. The New Age worldview, underlying the law of attraction, has also been touched upon in order to establish that the law of attraction is indeed related to New Age practice, incorporating 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.

All of this was done to provide a background and framework regarding the law of attraction. The stage is now set to move on to the second article in which At Boshoff's sermons (Boshoff 2010a, 2010b) on the law of attraction will be evaluated. The ultimate question to answer in this two-part series is: *Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction?* This theoretical background is not enough to answer this question adequately. Because Christian doctrine rests on the Scriptures, the Scriptures should be drawn on in order to answer this question.

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27. 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).

28. Some critics connect positive confession to the world of the occult as a New Age practice (Simpson 2007:85). Frigulti (2015:61) for example affirms a strong link between the doctrine of positive confession and the occult, specifically the use of the law of attraction.

Authors' contributions

D.J.M. is the author and H.G.S. is the co-author.

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