

Dear friends,

You really should read this one, even though it's long. I've been paying attention to Rod Parsley's shenanigans for awhile now, and people should look at them for what they are before rejecting them. Evil takes many forms, and one of them is this Word of Faith. What this church does is what Jesus meant when he spoke of the church devouring widows' houses. I wonder which is worse, "Word of Faith" or "Growing in Grace", the church of that joker De Jesus, who preaches he's the anti-Christ and that there is no sin? If you're going to measure evil by the impact on people's lives so far, then you'd probably have to go with "Word of Faith," simply because of the church's impact on the 2004 election, but there are probably arguments to be made both ways.

Read this whole thing for yourself, but at least check out the third paragraph in bold that lays out the tenets of this church. Ignorance may be bliss, but a country run by the ignorant is going to fail. This country was founded by enlightened men who believed in both God and enlightenment. God and understanding are not mutually exclusive concepts. We have already eaten of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, one might say, and the burden of understanding remains a part of our lives. There is a reason that right and wrong exist, and our ability to use reason is the key to getting closer to understanding it. Don't let these hateful priests convince you that your understanding of right and wrong don't matter, and don't let them entrench you in believing that there is no God. There is a God, and he is good, and so should we endeavor to be.

So it is.

Bob Young.

## **God's Profits: Faith, Fraud and the GOP Crusade for Values Voters** <http://altnet.bookswelike.net/isbn/0979482216><http://ninaberman.com/>

*The following is excerpted from Sarah Posner's new book, God's Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters. It is reprinted courtesy of PoliPoint Press.*

Inside the Trinity Christian Church in Irving, Texas, a crowd starts gathering in the afternoon for a Victory Healing and Miracle Service that is to begin at 7 p.m. that evening. People have traveled from as far away as Ohio and Arkansas and Georgia to participate. Most are waiting in the perimeter lobby of the church, camping out with pillows and Bibles, ordering pizza, and waiting for an event that has been hyped on Christian television for months. I approach one woman, an African American member of televangelist Rod Parsley's World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio. Judging from her clothes, the woman could scarcely afford the plane ticket she bought to see a performance of the preaching phenomenon whose services she can attend three times a week at home in Columbus. She's almost in a trance, barely able to focus on me or what I am asking her, and she brushes me aside as I inquire about her journey. People are waiting to see healings and miracles; Parsley claims a quarter of a million people have mailed in prayer cloths (and money) so that he could put his "anointing" on them. Once returned to the donor, the prayer cloths can be used to heal anything in a broken life, from depression to cancer to joblessness to

debt.

Trinity Christian Church is owned by the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), the largest Christian television network in the world, and is on the grounds of the Irving outpost of the Orange County, California-based conglomerate that monopolizes the Christian airwaves with its Word of Faith message of health and wealth. As a movement, not a denomination, Word of Faith has no membership or doctrinal requirements, but its tenets have become embedded in the late-twentieth-century nondenominational movement known as neo-Pentecostalism. Yet while it presents itself as a benign message of hope and purpose, critics of Word of Faith charge that it is a heresy that robs its followers of spiritual fulfillment, an affinity fraud that robs them of their money, and a distortion of the Scriptures, run by authoritarian preachers who rob their followers of their autonomy.

**The main tenets of Word of Faith are revelation knowledge, through which the believer derives knowledge directly from God, rather than from the senses; identification, through which the believer is inhabited by God and is another incarnation of Jesus; positive confession, or the power of the believer to call things into existence; the right of believers to divine health; and the right of believers to divine wealth. The believer, a "little god," is anointed and therefore can reject reason in favor of revelation, a "higher knowledge that contradicts the senses." It is through revelation knowledge that the Word of Faith movement has created its alternate universe in which rational thought is rejected and where the media, intellectual thought, science, and any type of critical thinking are scorned. Drawing on the Pentecostal tradition of casting out devils, pursuits associated with the Enlightenment are denounced as the work of Satan.**

Parsley has emerged as a leading figure in Christian conservative politics and is a frequent visitor to the Bush White House and Capitol Hill. Many credit him with the GOP victory in his native Ohio in 2004, a result that gave Bush the necessary electoral votes to capture the White House a second time. Although Parsley was well-known in Word of Faith circles for years from his church and his television program, *Breakthrough*, he became a nationally recognized name in 2004 for his relentless campaigning for Ohio's gay marriage ban.

Well before the service is scheduled to start, the church sanctuary fills up. The best seats are reserved for pastors affiliated with Parsley's franchise, the World Harvest Church Ministerial Fellowship. Soon church employees are shuttling people to overflow rooms inside the TBN studios a couple of parking lots away. I am crammed to the point of immobility in an upper-balcony pew of the four-thousand-seat sanctuary. The praise and worship bands are louder than I've ever experienced at any Word of Faith service, hyping the crowd into a frenzy and making it impossible to talk to anyone around me. People are dancing and singing, reaching their arms out toward the stage and holding their palms cupped upward, all set to receive the anointing.

The overamplified pop music of the Crabb Family, a band frequently featured on TBN programming, is nothing compared to the collective shriek of thousands of whistles that Parsley's assistants pass out in buckets. The whistles, it turns out, are surrogate shofars (the ram's horn blown in synagogues on high holidays) because, Parsley tells us, he couldn't find actual shofars. Parsley has a real shofar for himself, and after he blows it, he anoints himself the arbiter identified in the Gospel of Luke who will announce Jubilee. It's Jubilee, Parsley says with his

characteristic absence of humility, "when the prophetic voice announces it. And I'm here to tell you, it's Jubilee." As pandemonium breaks out in the crowd, Parsley continues: "It's time for a perpetual party. Your long face is out of order. Your depression has got to go. . . . No more quiet services, mundane Christianity has got to go. Shout it, it's Jubilee!" He implores his audience to blow their whistles, which he claims can miraculously heal; he proclaims, "All tumors, swallowing problems, and cataracts are healed as people blow the whistles."

Parsley pays homage to his TBN patrons, who are broadcasting the service, saying "Let's thank God for Paul and Jan for making this night possible. We love you." The Crouches, who first hosted Parsley on their programming in 1983, when he was only twenty-six years old, have proclaimed Parsley a prophet who "challenged God's people to break through beyond status quo Christianity - invade enemy territory and overthrow the kingdom of darkness." Parsley recounts that Jan Crouch had "something wrong with her throat for years and God gave her a tremendous healing" after she used one of Parsley's prayer cloths.

Over the course of the evening, Parsley will slay people in the Holy Spirit, lay hands on them, and profess to heal their cancer, homosexuality, and financial problems. He will walk over the pews as people sway and fall to the floor. He will take credit for a woman's new job as a marketing and database manager, which she says she got after she sent Parsley her last \$6. He will claim, with two members of his congregation as his witnesses, that he cured their adopted baby who was born without a brain. "His head was the size of his shoulders, nothing but water in that globe," Parsley boasts. "They brought him into service, we laid hands on him. The six o'clock news carried it; the eleven o'clock news carried it. Here are the brain scans. Here's the child with no brain. Here is the child after the prayer with a fully developed, completely normal functioning brain."

Parsley recognizes that for many people his faith healing doesn't quite jibe with his recently acquired -- and carefully cultivated -- status as a political player. In a relatively short time, Parsley has hoisted himself onto the national political stage. He has been named one of the fifty most influential Christians in America and one of the ten most influential GOP religious kingmakers shaping the 2008 race for the White House. In a television broadcast a week before this service, Parsley claimed to be "the only preacher brave enough to be in the White House one day and praying over prayer cloths the next, casting out devils." But his in-your-face attitude spills over into a nationally televised nose-thumbing at his critics, in which he showcases the Word of Faith revelation knowledge. As one Word of Faith follower told me, "In a nutshell, that's what faith is. Believing the word instead of the circumstances." As a result, scholarship, journalism, and other non-biblical pursuits of truth are derided.

Parsley, a Bible college dropout, notes that his political celebrity has mushroomed despite the efforts of skeptics. "Somebody said to me the other day, 'You are the strangest person I've ever seen. . . . One day you're in the halls of Congress and the next day you're shouting and screaming in other tongues and laying hands on prayer cloths.'" Parsley sneers at his imaginary critics. "That's because I don't determine my theology based on my experience. Don't let anybody back you down on truth. Don't let anybody stare over the brim of their glasses with a circle of smoke enwrathing their head. Don't let anybody sitting on a university or college campus or behind a news desk somewhere intimidate you from truth. Once you know you've got ahold of absolute

truth, you let nothing turn your plow." The crowd cheers wildly, and people are speaking in tongues, but the din is eclipsed by the earsplitting screech of the whistles.

Like Bush's 2000 campaign slogan, Compassionate Conservatism, Word of Faith preachers often give lip service to their church's community service projects yet worship at the altar of hyperindividualism and unregulated capitalism. Many of these televangelists spend millions of dollars of church funds on luxury jets, take huge salaries out of church coffers to build themselves mansions, and treat themselves to other luxuries like clothes, vacations, and high-end dinners. They use the free advertising of their churches and television shows to sell countless books, tapes, and DVDs of their sermons, raking in millions that go into for-profit church-related enterprises that line their own pockets. All of this activity is rationalized as obeying Jesus' command to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Yet it is all possible precisely because there is virtually no oversight of the preachers' activities. Tax-exempt churches do not file tax returns and are under no obligation to divulge their finances to donors or the public. Where profit-driven church meets the cornerstone of conservative economic ideology, televangelists have been enriching themselves in an unregulated marketplace trading on God, the cult of personality, and American dreams of riches and success.

Although some observers of the 2006 election have pronounced the conservative Christian movement dead, Parsley's preaching in the service reveals exactly why the Word of Faith movement will play a big role in keeping it alive through the 2008 elections and beyond. While Parsley's audience is under his spell, the mayhem is suddenly suspended when Parsley yells, "Stop! I just heard the Holy Ghost." The audience falls silent, hoping for a direct line from God. Instead, Parsley delivers a political speech.

To his rapt audience, Parsley answers the question he says many people are asking him in the wake of the 2006 midterm election that was a disaster for Republicans. "What happened to the values voters?" Parsley insists that they didn't go away; they just became what he calls "integrity voters," meaning that "they stood up and said regardless of what you espouse with your rhetoric, if your lifestyle doesn't produce godliness, you're not going to have our vote."

Parsley takes his self-created opportunity to parlay his own rendering of "integrity" into his speech, melding his prosperity gospel with a message of individualistic entitlement that fuels the Word of Faith movement. Parsley's own wealth is built on the tithes and offerings he solicits through his church, television show, and Web site, but he justifies taking the donations by claiming that he serves God's kingdom by giving some of the money away. He says that "the government cannot do what the church must," insisting that the church must focus on issues of justice in addition to those of "righteousness." He claims that "if every church in Ohio had done what mine has done in the last year, there would not be one hungry person in the state. Not one hungry person." But he doesn't say what it is his church has done; did it take in the homeless or help people find jobs? That is not clear. But the Word of Faith message, the gospel of money and greed is clear, and Parsley implies - though he offers no proof - that his wealth is godly because he redistributes it. "It's time we stop being intimidated by the naysayers who say it's godly to have nothing. That's a lie, that's a lie. It's godly to believe for more than enough because there are always those who don't have enough."

He will not document his generosity, however. Parsley operates his ministry under tight familial

control, with a complete lack of transparency and accountability. But mixed up in his contrived message of his own generosity, he implores his audience to be generous to him. That, the Word of Faith credo goes, will result in givers being blessed with their own financial harvest. With the thousands in the audience repeating each phrase, he tells them to "throw your hands up and say, 'Bless me, Lord! I'm a giver. I'm a tither. I'm going to bless your kingdom. And I receive financial abundance!'"