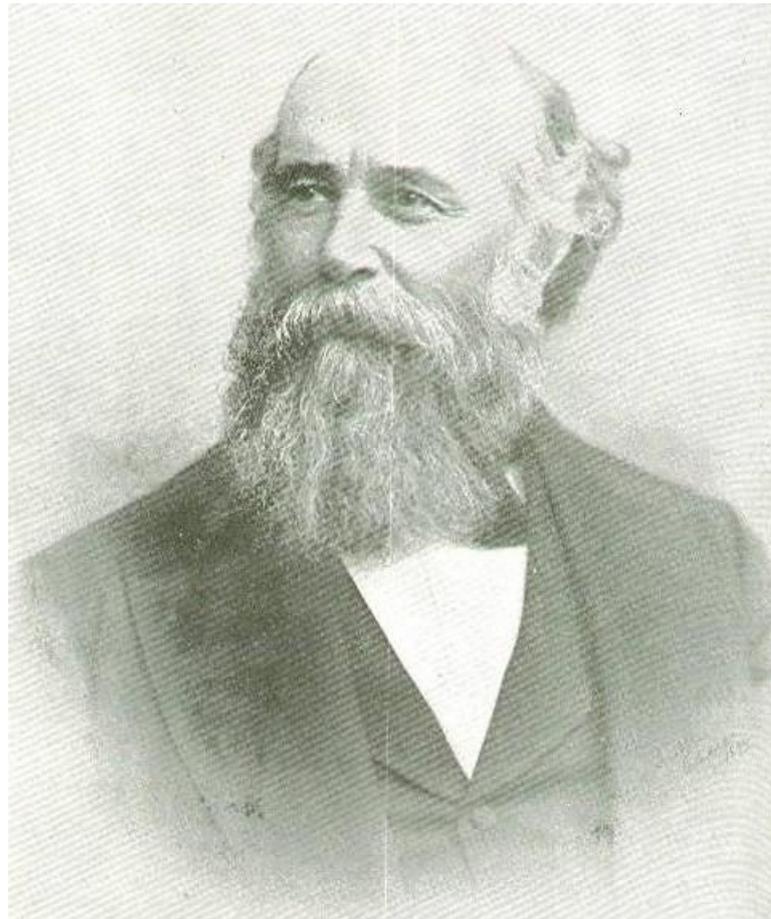


# THE APOSTLE'S SCREED



Simon Cross

## **PLAYING THE TRUMP CARD**

The Amway Centre, Orlando, Florida. June 2019

A large crowd has gathered for the launch of the incumbent President Trump's re-election campaign. A slim blond woman in a knee length red dress and high heels takes to the stage. Pastor Paula White is used to addressing large congregations from her time as pastor of Without Walls International Church, which at its peak reported a congregation of 20,000 people, making it the 7<sup>th</sup> largest church in the USA. Paula has since left Without Walls, which she set up with her ex-husband Randy White, and after a stint at another congregation now focuses on other forms of ministry, including her television work. Of all her many achievements, she is perhaps most famous around the world for having converted President Trump to Christianity.

As Paula steps toward the microphone, she adopts a characteristic approach of a certain subset of Pentecostal preachers, "are you ready" she asks, "for a great night of victory?" For Paula, and for the many people who know her brand of Christianity well, this is a heavily loaded term. Victory doesn't just mean another term in the White House, victory is a religious term bound up in ideas of achievement, status, wealth and prosperity. Victory is a term that invoked for the initiated, ideas and images of a heavenly battle royale, of a battle between angels and demons. "As our president often says....we worship God, not government..." White continues, underlining the sense that the crowd gathered before her are there for a sacred purpose. This is not about a man, it's about God, the divine, the transcendent. Then she asks the crowd to do something awkward, "I'm going to ask you to grab that person's hand next to you, if you don't mind standing up all over this beautiful arena..." The camera covering her shows the people immediately behind her too, as they rise to their feet, smiles breaking out as they overcome the awkwardness of holding hands with a neighbouring stranger. Once they have given her their hands, Paula has the crowd.

At this point, Pastor Paula White, thrice married, twice divorced, brought up in the midst of hardship in Tupelo Mississippi, who knew at an early age what it meant to be bereaved, her father having killed himself after her parents split up, at this point, she begins to pray. Prayer is key to the way that White believes that God works. Prayer has been a key part of the way in which she has amassed an estimated \$5 million fortune. Paula White is

pretty sure that prayer works. It is powerful. And once she launches in to it, her purpose becomes dramatically clear: she is engaged in spiritual warfare.

“...Let every demonic network, that has aligned itself against the purpose, against the calling of President Trump, let it be broken, let it be torn down in the name of Jesus. Let the counsel of the wicked be spoiled right now, according to Job chapter 12 verse 17. I declare that President Trump will overcome every strategy from hell and every strategy of the enemy, every strategy, and he will fulfil his calling and his destiny. Destroy and divide their tongues O Lord, according to Psalm 55 verse 9...”

## ANGELS AND DEMONS

Peppered with direct references to individual verses from Biblical texts, White's prayer serves an apparent dual purpose, it makes a heavenly petition citing specific 'contract clauses' whilst simultaneously delivering a direct message to mortal listeners: Those who have chosen to oppose President Trump, the man who she refers to as God's anointed, are on the side of the devil. They are directly opposed to God. Pastor White's intervention is not the only time that this kind of language has been deployed by sections of the church to give their man an added sense of spiritual legitimacy. At the beginning of June 2019, Franklin Graham, son of the late evangelist Billy Graham, posted on his Facebook page, encouraging followers to join in a day of prayer for President Trump.

“Along with 250+ Christian leaders, I am asking followers of Christ across our nation to set aside next Sunday, June 2, as a special day of prayer for the President, Donald J. Trump.

President Trump's enemies continue to try everything to destroy him, his family, and the presidency. In the history of our country, no president has been attacked as he has. I believe the only hope for him, and this nation, is God.

This is a critical time for America. We're on the edge of a precipice. Time is short. We need to pray for God to intervene. We need to ask God to protect, strengthen, encourage, and guide the President.”

Graham doesn't elaborate on quite why 'time is short', but again this is messaging that is familiar to Christians who have a belief that we are now living in the 'end times' –

which means the end of the world, and the return of Jesus – this is very much spiritual warfare territory, the earth as a demonic stronghold, which can ultimately only be rescued by the second coming. In the meantime we must all do our best to fight on the side of good against evil, by opposing those malign forces which array themselves against God's purposes. Granted, a subtle reading of the text of his message might seem to indicate that Graham is somewhat less of an entirely uncritical supporter of Trump than White, nevertheless, Graham signs off his message with a continuation of the same sort of messaging, an invocation of spiritual warfare, drawn directly from the Bible:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Again: the language of battle, of enemies, of violence and attack, of 'spiritual warfare' is redolent throughout the text. It is familiar territory for many Christians, drawing from a few key Bible verses, the Ephesians verse perhaps chief amongst them, and it forms a key part of an Evangelical Charismatic mindset. There's something resembling an irony about this type of thinking, it is ultimately 'restorationist', which is to say that adherents believe it to be a return to an early form of Christianity, a return in fact to the mindset of the time of Pentecost, when the disciples were apparently gifted with the miraculous ability to speak a range of languages. While there are other readings of this passage, for this group of Christians, the reading is straightforward: God grants, by the Holy Spirit, gifts (charismata) such as the ability to speak other languages, or the ability to prophesy the future, to those who have enough 'faith' to receive them. But although it claims deep historical antecedents, it is really very young, dating back only to the early days of the twentieth century, and sparked by events like the Asuza Street revival and figures like Charles Parham and William Seymour. The Charismatic movement, at least as understood through Evangelical Pentecostals, is a thoroughly modern restoration.

## **THE WAR OF THE PROPHETS**

Zion Tabernacle, Zion City, Illinois. June 1901

Among the congregation awaiting the sermon in Zion City's only church, is John G Lake, a Canadian born roofer and construction worker, who had moved to the emerging city to work in its civic construction department. As the service begins, a diminutive figure steps

forward, and up to the pulpit – it is the city's charismatic and colourful founder, John Alexander Dowie. Having made his name as a faith healer and something of a religious showman, Dowie has managed to gather enough followers, and crucially enough money, to found the new town of Zion City, a metropolis designed to function as an effective theocracy, with Dowie as it's spiritual leader, as well as the owner of all the buildings in the town, including (perhaps most notably) the bank.

Dowie's sermon on that June morning, only days before the official opening of the city, included an extraordinary claim: that he was not just a faith healer and evangelist, but that he was also the third incarnation of the Prophet Elijah, the first having been the original prophet, and the second having been John the Baptist. Now, evidently, it was Dowie's turn to take on the mantle of this prophet, as he ushered in a new era of Christianity. A controversial figure, Dowie suffered perhaps from a kind of "small man syndrome", standing only 5' 4" tall. Dowie, who boasted an enormous beard of suitably Old Testament proportions, was rather prone to making grandiose statements and claims about himself, and was similarly happy to make rather disparaging claims about others. In particular he had it in for the religion of Islam, and made a number of inflammatory remarks about Mohammed, describing him, among other things as 'the king of impostors'. Rather than simply responding 'it takes one to know one' as well he might, in 1902, the Indian Muslim leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (founder of the Ahmadiya school of Islam, a kind of new religious movement within the religion) challenged the Scottish born Dowie, to what was effectively a 'prayer duel', sometimes referred to in Islam as a Muhabila. Deciding that there was ultimately only one way to settle the dispute, Ahmad wrote in a leaflet:

"Dowie need not repeatedly announce his prophecy of the destruction of all Muslims. He should keep me alone in his mind and should pray that of the two of us, the one who is false may die before the other..."

It was a challenge of Old Testament proportions, Elijah verses Ahab on Mount Carmel, each invoking their God to rain down fire on their sacrifices, had become Dowie versus Ahmad in 'who will die first?'. But while Ahmad committed to the challenge, Dowie was having none of it, saying that his opponents were 'gnats' whom he could crush beneath his feet if he so wished. Strange language, you might think, for a man who had made his name as a faith healer and evangelist, but Dowie was no run of the mill Christian, and as for the threats of death, well he already had form in this specific sort of department. After getting in to a row

with the evangelist D. L. Moody in 1898, Dowie declared that Moody would die because of his enmity towards him. Sure enough, Moody did die the following year, aged 62. This, Dowie declared, was the judgment of God. Emboldened, Dowie then took up cudgels against Moody's successor, R. A. Torrey, prophesying his demise too – ultimately of course Torrey did die, but not until some twenty years after Dowie himself.

Besides these disputes, Dowie was also controversial for another reason. The Irish journalist Thomas Power O'Connor wrote of him:

“...the one incomprehensible element in the man's gigantic success is the personal luxury in which he lives, and his superb refusal at the same time to account for any of the sums of money entrusted to him. His horses are worth a fortune in themselves; his carriages are emblazoned with armorial bearings; his wife is said to dress with the gorgeous extravagance of an empress. When he travels, hemmed round with a little army of servants, the prophet of humility and self-denial has a special train chartered, and whenever the spiritual burdens become too great a tax there is a delightful country residence belonging to him in which to retreat from the clamour and importunate appeals of the faithful.”

Ultimately this was to be his downfall, he ended his days disgraced after a financial scandal. In the years following Ahmad's challenge, his health and wellbeing started to take a knock or two, and while recuperating from an illness, he was accused of defrauding his followers of millions of dollars, failing to defeat the accusation he eventually had to relinquish his position. He eventually died in 1907. A year before Ahmad.

## **THE RIPPLE EFFECT**

But all this was as yet unknown to John G Lake, as he and his fellow congregants listened in attentive silence to Dowie as he expounded his personal vision of Christianity. Although Dowie himself was not a Pentecostal, as Pentecostalism as we now know it had yet to be invented, he was certainly a forerunner. By virtue of his great personal wealth, he was a forerunner too of the 'Prosperity' movement which has developed in and through Pentecostalism, espoused by a number of leading Christian figures such as Paula White and the televangelists Kenneth Copeland (estimated net worth \$300 million) and Benny Hinn (estimated net worth \$60 million) whose own great personal wealth has also been the source of significant controversy. Despite Jesus' apparent injunctions against amassing monetary

wealth, riches, according to Copeland, Hinn, and other mega-rich Christian leaders, are actually a sign of God's material blessing. It is because God is pleased with them, that they are quite so wealthy – that and the generosity of their supporters many of whom give sacrificially in the hope of receiving a reciprocal blessing. Copeland and Hinn's luxurious lifestyles draw comparisons with Dowie, although rather than expensive horses, they have a preference for Gulfstream jets. Because it's neater to draw circles rather than to persist on parallel tracks, it's worth noting that in 2011 Hinn's publishers Strang Publications sued him for a quarter of a million dollars, alleging breach of a morality code. They claimed that Hinn had admitted to an affair with Pastor Paula White after the pair were photographed emerging from a hotel, hand in hand. Hinn continued to deny this however, saying the nature of his relationship with White did not constitute an affair.

Dowie's rhetoric and charisma had an undoubted effect on Lake, who was still living in Zion City in September 1906 when a Big Tent Revival came to town. Charles Fox Parham had arrived in Zion, in an effort to win over some of Dowie's supporters. He was successful, and a number of them, including Lake, experienced 'baptism of the spirit' – as evidenced by 'Glossolia' or 'speaking in tongues'. This caused a huge stir in Zion, which was now effectively split between followers of Dowie's kind of Christianity, and the new Pentecostalism of Parham. A kind of war was now underway, the first shot may have been the revival, but it wouldn't end there. Soon, Parham was being accused of 'unnatural acts' with a young man, an allegation that would dog him for the rest of his life. Meanwhile the Parhamites of Zion City, including Lake were being accused of far worse.

In September 1907, Zion City police investigating the torture and death of Letitia Greenhaulgh, 64, a Zion City resident, arrested five Parhamites – including a man called Harold Mitchell and his wife, as well as the son and daughter of the victim. Mitchell admitted to the murder. The Ottawa Evening Herald reported it as follows:

“Five Chicago enthusiasts who twisted the arm and neck of their patient too hard, in attempting to drive out a devil, are under arrest, charged with murder. They drove out life. What disposition they made of the devil is not stated. The account of the treatment by the Parhamites of their aged and crippled victim is a story of ignorant frenzy and religious mania carried to the last degree of absurdity.”

It seems that here was an example of a family which was split between followers of Dowie and followers of Parham, the older couple were Dowie loyalists, while their children were Parham's followers – they arranged for the man of the house to be out, before bringing in the Mitchells to perform a violent exorcism, which went horribly wrong. The subsequent police investigation uncovered a number of other suspicious deaths linked to the Mitchells, and by extension the rest of Parham's followers. The time had come for Lake and others to move on. For Lake, this was just the beginning of his ministry, which would extend in to parts of Africa, and elsewhere around the world. Parham kept on his ministry too, until his eventual death some years later. His followers would eventually become part of the newly formed 'Assemblies of God'.

Lake's African ministry was hugely influential, but never terribly far from controversy – like Dowie, he was accused of various sleights of hand when it came to his healing miracles, involving audience plants. He was also accused of the misappropriation of funds which were intended to go to the poor, but never made it past Lake's deep pockets.

One biographer wrote of him:

“An analysis of the missionary career of John G Lake shows that the initial spread of Pentecostalism and Zionism in southern Africa was facilitated by the systematic use of fraud and deception. After having fled from Zion City in America in 1907 to escape popular justice, Lake and his missionary party introduced to South Africa an array of faith healing techniques used by the original Zionist John Alexander Dowie. They used these and other forms of deception to build a unified Zionist/Pentecostal movement.”

This is not however, the portrayal of Lake which is found in the book: “John G. Lake: His Life, His Sermons, His Boldness of Faith” published in paperback by Kenneth Copeland ministries.

## **A TUBE FULL OF DEMONS**

A drive way, Branson, Missouri. May 2019

Lisa Guerrero, the chief investigative correspondent for the TV programme 'Inside Edition' races towards a large black car, into which an elderly man is being helped by two staff members. She is polite but firm, as she has been with the other mega rich televangelists she has tried to interview about their extreme wealth. The man, his slick dark hair scraped

back, white cuffs protruding the required two inches beyond the suit sleeves, is none other than the televangelist Kenneth Copeland. Guerrero is there to ask him about the reason he won't fly in commercial aeroplanes, something he has previously described as like 'getting into a tube with a bunch of demons'. In the full interview which extends beyond ten minutes, Copeland goes from manic to passive, and from gentle to aggressive, prompting some viewers to express alarm at his 'demonic' visage. At times he calls Guerrero 'baby' and 'sweetheart'. When challenged about the price he paid for his most recent private plane, he at first denied that it was anybody else's business, before explaining that it was for sale at such a good price, it would have been wrong not to purchase it. Again, Copeland makes reference to the Ephesians passage to which Graham also referred. The spiritual war continues.

Copeland and his ilk sit at the extreme point of a confluence of teachings which take in the kind of thinking that was developed in and through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dowie, Parham, Lake and many others set the seeds for a way of thinking that sees the world at war – demons ranged against angels, and human beings as active participants on one side or the other. This way of thinking is threaded throughout the history of contemporary Pentecostalism, but is particularly clear in the New Apostolic Reformation movement aka 'Third Wave Charismaticism' which has developed in recent years (the first and second waves being the birth of Pentecostalism at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the development of Evangelical Charismaticism towards its end respectively). Particularly key to understand, is this mindset of "spiritual warfare": which includes the idea that the heavenly struggle is played out in the 'principalities and powers' (politics) of the earth.

For this form of Christianity, the accumulation of massive amounts of wealth is natural, in fact it is to be expected, if you are on God's side. A politics of sharing, or of redistribution, which might seem to fit more readily with the Jesus of the gospels and the actions of the early church, is swept aside, while prosperity is favoured. "I really believe" explained Jesse Duplantis (estimated net worth \$40 million) "that if Jesus was physically on the earth today, he wouldn't be riding a donkey." That so many of these Christian leaders have allied themselves with Trump therefore, is unsurprising, for them, his is the message of God. The long history of charismatic (in all senses) but 'flawed' (at times criminally so) leaders within this branch of the church only goes to cement the view that Trump – despite his public and private failings, is God's man for America, and by extension, for the world.

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Morton, B., 2012. *'The Devil Who Heals': Fraud and Falsification in the Evangelical Career of John G Lake, Missionary to South Africa 1908–1913* African Historical Review Vol 44 Issue 2

## Other Media

Franklin Graham FB post:

<https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/2497135067009326>

Inside Edition Video: <https://www.insideedition.com/media/videos/inside-lisa-guerreros-interview-televangelist-kenneth-copeland-53519>

O'Connor's description of Dowie: The Bulletin Vol 24 No.1228 (27 Aug 1903) Available from the National Library of Australia at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-659229080/view?sectionId=nla.obj-664172503&partId=nla.obj-659238552#page/n16/mode/1up>

Paula White video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY4MYPCzAfk>

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## IMAGE

Page One: A photograph of John Alexander Dowie, taken before 1907, photographer unknown. Believed to be public domain.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John\\_Alexander\\_Dowie.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Alexander_Dowie.jpg)

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