

He's Still Not Afraid to Confront

Fred Price has never been known for his tact. At 68, he's still challenging the status quo from his megachurch in Los Angeles.

PLUS: Kenneth Hagin Sr., Larry Lea, Kathryn Kuhlman

The uniformed guard at the front gate of the Crenshaw Christian Center in South Central Los Angeles points to the rear of the 30-acre complex of white buildings and assures first-time visitors that they can park up close. Many in the crowd ride shuttle buses. Others hike en masse down several sidewalks to the entrance of the huge geodesic dome.

Inside, congregants walk past several dozen ushers, identically dressed in blue blazers and white pants, and across acres of sky blue carpet to sit on plush blue theater seats. On the raised platform in the center of the 10,000-seat Faithdome, Frederick K.C. Price sits in a blue swivel chair while his wife, Betty, stands beside him in a tailored yellow suit and opens the morning service with prayer. Despite the crowd, which today numbers more than 6,000 and does not include young teens and children in other services, there is an aura of order, simplicity and peace.

Price speaks from his chair, his voice a bit hoarse. "I'm believing I am well so I can be on the job," he says, modeling the faith message that has been the signature of his ministry and lifestyle.

Price has been on the job since 1953. Shortly after he was saved, he says he heard an audible voice from God saying, "You are to preach My gospel." Almost 20 years later, in 1970, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Since beginning as a part-time preacher and part-time paper cutter, Price has seen his church outgrow two sites, swell to 18,000 members and sit on the former site of Pepperdine University. But despite the ministry's vastness, it was Price's 22-year-old Ever Increasing Faith TV show

that brought him national recognition.

Carrying his Bible open, Price meanders across the carpet beneath the platform and down several aisles as studio cameras follow him. He speaks with the congregation and TV audience with the familiarity of a home Bible study leader. His trademark has been expository teaching that often includes exacting definitions from Webster's dictionary used to make points he substantiates with Scripture. He divides his exhaustive series of messages into hourlong segments that are blunt and sometimes border on the offensive.

"Anybody [who] prays for God to give them more faith is stupid," he says at one point this Sunday. "They don't know that if you're saved you already have it. You just have to develop it."

Later he declares: "People from the television

show are always writing me to pray for them. I don't have time to pray for people. My calling is to teach people how to pray for themselves. Who else can plead my case like I can?"

At 68, Price is showing no signs of mellowing. He remains an uncompromising, shoot-from-the-hip faith teacher whose ministry has seen controversy but no public blemish. Much of his teaching, while grounded in Word-Faith doctrine, flies with prosperity teaching. His current series is "None Suffer Lack," and his previous, "Race, Religion and Racism," lasted for more than a year.

Though this explosive series ended in early 1999, its shrapnel remains imbedded in Price's soul. He strongly believes that racism is an open wound in the body of Christ and an injury the church largely ignores.

"We believers can say that God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us overcome drugs, drink and lying, but it is not quite powerful enough to get rid of racism," he told Charisma. "If we don't deal with it, it taints everything else we do."

Price's series on racism brought to light notes in The Dake Annotated Reference Bible that list 30 reasons why God intended the races to live separately. This 1963 version has since been replaced by a 1997 edition rewritten, according to its authors, to remove any racial overtones. The company issued a letter of apology to Price saying in part, "We agree that racism has no place in the body of Christ, or anywhere else."

Price doesn't believe the company went far enough. "They still have too much left from the old school," he said. "They dressed up some of the things and made an attempt, but still didn't deal with the real issues and left [racism] in. They attempted to do something, but in the final analysis, it didn't amount to much."

He says he doesn't know the remedy but noted that auto manufacturers recall vehicles with inherent defects. "Thousands of people have read those Bibles, and it has impacted their perception of the races, and it is going to stay like that unless something is said that what you have read over the years is incorrect information and has to be changed. You put the Bible out; you need to fix it."

His criticism of statements made by fellow faith teacher Kenneth Hagin the ensuing backlash—still causes pain. The dispute began when Price heard an audiotape by the pastor of the 5,000-member Rhema Bible Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, recorded in 1993. On it Hagin Jr. said that when he found one of his children playing with a black friend, he told his child: "We play. We go together as a group, but we do not date one another."

Hagin Jr. has a policy of not responding to criticism, but he later wrote an apology to his board that read in part: "If I could take the words back, I I can't. I can only apologize for having said them and pray that the hurt and confusion will be healed."

It hasn't. And what's worse, Price holds an honorary degree from Rhema and his church had been a supporter. He also credits Hagin Sr.'s book *The Authority of the Believer*, which he read in a single night in 1970, with making faith his ministry's staple.

He said he has sought a retraction from Hagin Jr., but when asked if he received it, Price replied: "When was the last time you got an e-mail from Mars? He apologized for 'if what I said hurt you,' but that is not a recantation of what you

believe.

“Because you made a statement that made it appear that you have a problem with blacks and whites, you’ve got to come back to the plate and say, ‘Listen, I said thus and so, but I have to take it back.’ They simply apologized for saying something that offended me. They never recanted, and everybody is missing the whole thing. It’s amazing to me how they can’t see that or refuse to see it.”

When informed that Bob Jones University had lifted its long-standing prohibition against interracial dating after a February visit by Texas Gov. George W. Bush created a firestorm of criticism for the Republican presidential nominee as well as the school, Price was suspicious.

“I’d have to know if you made the statement because of a predicament,” he said. “Did you realize you were wrong or did you make [the change] because it was politically convenient? That has to be determined; otherwise it’s a farce.”

Price said the Promise Keepers theme of racial reconciliation was “a step in the right direction,” but he calls it “misguided.” He says reconciliation implies that the different races were unified in the past. “How can you reconcile a dog and a cat?” he asks. “What we need in America from the white community is recognition that black people are equal with white people in the eyes of God.”

Some say that his stand

on racism hurt church attendance, and this Sunday less than 10 percent of his congregation is white. “If it has hurt in any form or fashion it is something I have not been able to

observe," he says. "The congregation has been in favor of my message [on racism]."

Though Price's thoughts on racism remain fixed, the church has taken some new directions. Responding to a growing inner-city Hispanic population, the church offers headsets to hear the sermons translated into Spanish. A large Bible school is being developed for the site's Alpha Center.

Last year Betty, his wife of 47 years and an ordained minister, started the church's Community Outreach Program. Costing the church \$20,000 per week, it has provided food, clothing, job placement and counseling to more than 22,000 people. The church is planning to open a job assistance program and a new multimillion-dollar youth activity center with a computer-training facility this fall. The program's recent one-year celebration attracted Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan.

"It's been awesome," Betty said. "It's something I've been trying to do since the [1992] riots, which is something my heart ached for. There's only so much the politicians can do, and our community is worse than ever. Thousands have received Christ because of the program."

The church's on-site K-12 school has more than 200 students, and roughly 1,000 students take its ministerial correspondence courses. Crenshaw Christian Center has 14 divisions, 17 help ministries, more than 1,600 volunteers, nine associate ministers and a staff of more than 350, who are required to pay tithes. Price also operates the Fellowship of Inner-City Word of Faith Ministries, which he founded in 1990 to foster and spread the faith message by assisting inner-city ministers.

The Prices, both noted authors, have four children, with the three oldest involved in the ministry. Frederick Kenneth Price, 21, their only son, is studying for the ministry. After much prayer, he was born when Betty Price was 45, decades after an older son had been hit by a car and killed on the couple's ninth anniversary.

Ministering in an area where more people die of homicide than stroke and some 40 percent live below the poverty level, Price has a calm, businesslike demeanor, classy but conservative dress, decisive and articulate delivery and immaculate lifestyle that have set a sorely needed standard.

Though his views sometimes cut across the doctrinal grain of other ministers and his bold pronouncements cut like a buzz saw through the ears of his detractors, his ministry remains as solid as a California Redwood. Neither does Price's outspoken stand against racism in the body of Christ tremble in the winds of dissent.

"The 21st-century church is going to have to do something about this racism," he said. "I'm not talking about individuals who have a good heart. The message against it has got to come from our respected leaders, and they have to make an impact because [racism] spoils everything else we do. It compromises our witness in terms of winning the world.

"If the church doesn't make a difference in such a way society can see it, then the credibility and the impact of our witness is gone. But it's got to come from the preachers because that's how it started—in the pulpit.

“There are always those who will cry against what is right and positive, but you have to ignore them. When you are on assignment, if you fulfill it, God will make even your enemies to be at peace with you.”

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