

# The Quarterly Journal



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## Do You Want to Know... *The Secret?*

by J. Greg Sheryl

It has been the subject of articles in *Newsweek*<sup>1</sup> and *People*<sup>2</sup> magazines; newspaper articles in *USA Today*,<sup>3</sup> *The Christian Science Monitor*,<sup>4</sup> and television shows, such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*,<sup>5</sup> *Larry King Live*,<sup>6</sup> and *Nightline*.<sup>7</sup> "It" is a book<sup>8</sup> and DVD<sup>9</sup> called *The Secret* — the work of 55-year-old Australian TV producer Rhonda Byrne, who now lives in California.

Seminary professor and author Donald S. Whitney, in an online review of *The Secret*, wrote:

"In March of 2006 it was released on the Internet, but soon went to DVD. By late autumn, the phenomenal success of the video placed it on two episodes of *Larry King Live*. Shortly after, two of the teachers featured on *The Secret* were guests on Ellen Degeneres' daily TV show. Before Christmas, *The Secret* DVD had spun off a book by the same title which Oprah Winfrey catapulted to the top of the charts in February of 2007."<sup>10</sup>

*The Secret* promises just about everything a person might want:

health, wealth, happiness, success, fulfilling relationships, and peace of mind. And it has been well-received, judging from book and DVD sales and media coverage.

The message of *The Secret* is an attractively packaged form of monistic, pantheistic<sup>11</sup> Hinduism presented as New Thought and New Age concepts.

The terms "New Thought" and "New Age" are difficult to define, and there is some overlap between the two movements. The 19th-century New Thought movement preceded the 20th-century New Age movement. Both movements are eclectic, with deep roots in Hinduism. The worldview of New Thought can also be seen in the "mind science" religions, such as Christian Science, Unity, and Religious Science.

Calling it *The Secret* is clever. Valerie Reiss, Belief.net spirituality editor said of it, "everybody wants to know a secret."<sup>12</sup> A second hint about its

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# Editorials

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## AND EVERYWHERE THAT BENNY WENT, CONTROVERSY WAS SURE TO GO

Some things never change. Like the fact that wherever Benny Hinn takes one of his healing crusades, controversies follow. Case in point: the faith healer's campaign last May in Namboole, Uganda.

Pastor Robert Kayanja, the local host for the Uganda crusade, along with other evangelists from that country were put under the control of Hinn's powerful spiritual anointing, repeatedly falling unconscious to the ground. Such is standard fare for Hinn, but this time his actions caused reports to circulate among Ugandans that Hinn had cast demons from Kayanja, rumors which Hinn supporters deny.

Adding to the comic turmoil of Hinn's stage escapade is the report being circulated that the demons exorcised from Kayanja traveled 20 miles northeast of Nelson Mandela National Stadium and seized a herd of 32 pigs owned by an elderly woman named Maria (called Jajja Hornsleth by her neighbors).

"Maria's neighbourhood is now pure mayhem. The monsters have been tearing up and devouring anything they can get their snouts on. The mud walls of the sty are

down. Clothes are ripped from their lines. Potato gardens have been dug up. A neighbour's ducks have been mauled and partly eaten. The pigs dragged the mutilated corpses to the sty and trampled over them just for the *ffujjo*, the hell of it," Alan Tacca reported in *The Monitor* (Kampala). Where's the Sea of Galilee when you need it?

According to Tacca, "A witchdoctor has offered to cleanse the pigs, if Maria will pay with a black goat and a piece of bark-cloth."

Elsewhere, Hinn displayed another type of power: the power to have someone physically removed from his meetings in New Zealand. During his healing crusade at Auckland's Vector Arena in June, a woman apparently suffering from Tourette's syndrome began making verbal outbursts and was "rudely ushered" out of the meetings. *The New Zealand Herald* reported that Hinn yelled, "Shut up. You cannot be speaking when I am preaching. Nobody can do that here. We cannot allow people to be speaking back to me when I am ministering the word."

Somehow Hinn's anointing lacked discernment and did not allow him to understand the woman's true situation or to heal her from her condition.

Back at home in the U.S., Hinn raised the ire of some government officials in Trinidad when he said the country's Prime Minister Patrick Manning was a "foolish man." Hinn's comments were made on the May 15 installment of his *This Is Your Day* program.

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## MORMON MEMBERSHIP CONTINUES TO RISE

According to recent statistics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worldwide membership is approaching 13 million. The report containing the figures, which was announced at the church's general conference last April, also indicated "steady growth" of "about a million new members being added every three years or less."

In 2006, there were more than a quarter-million "convert baptisms" to the Mormon faith. An increase of nearly 100,000 "children of record" also was posted during the same time. "Children of record" are those from Mormon families who, upon reaching the age of nine, are baptized into the LDS church.

The report also acknowledged an issue faced in citing statistics of any religious denomination — growth numbers are not always interpreted accurately. The LDS report recognized that the published figures "represent the number of Church members, but they do *not* represent activity rates — that is, the number of members attending their local chapels every Sunday."

Despite that disclaimer, in the United States alone, more than 250 LDS congregations were started in 2006.

—MKG

## TAMPA NEWSPAPER SPOTLIGHTS WHITES' EXCESSES

In May, an article in *The Tampa Tribune*, the hometown newspaper of Paula and Randy White, targeted the extravagant lifestyle and perks of the couple. The Whites are the founders and pastors of the Without Walls International Church, which now claims 23,500 members.

The report disclosed, "They travel in a \$1.9 million business jet. They own a home they purchased for \$2.1 million on Bayshore Boulevard and a \$3.5 million Trump Tower condo in New York. Randy rents a waterfront villa in Malibu, Calif." The article also stated that most of "the couple's personal income comes from private businesses, including a real estate company, sales of nutritional supplements, and speaking engagements."

Yet not all is "positive" for the pastoral couple deeply ingrained in the positive confession movement. "In the

past 18 months, more than 60 church associates, some on staff and some unpaid, have left or been 'released' from their jobs," the *Tribune* reported. Also mentioned in the article were several of the legal wranglings the Whites have encountered during the past several years as they "renege on deals and didn't pay their bills."

And the "health" component of their health and wealth gospel was also subject to a realistic investigation. "Both the Whites have undergone cosmetic surgery, seeming to grow younger over the past five years," the newspaper said. And in a more serious concern, last December Randy's eldest daughter from a previous marriage was diagnosed with "an advanced brain tumor."

All of this seems to be taking its toll on both Paula, who hails herself as a "life coach," and Randy. The newspaper indicated that the Whites have "acknowledged rumors have been flying for a long time about their relationship. Randy said the two are best friends and will always remain so. Asked whether they're contemplating divorce, he said, 'No one can predict the future.'"

For more information on the doctrine and practice of the Whites, see "White Lies" in the April-June 2007 issue of *The Quarterly Journal*.

—MKG

## CREATION MUSEUM OPENS

What was a dream for more than a dozen years — and six years after ground was broken — became a reality for creationist Ken Ham on Memorial Day as his Creation Museum opened its doors to a capacity crowd of more than 4,000 visitors from over 30 states. The \$27 million, 60,000 square-foot facility is located on a 49-acre parcel just south of Cincinnati in Petersburg, Ky.

Ham heads up the Answers in Genesis ministry, an organization dedicated to using the sciences including biology, geology, anthropology, and astronomy to confirm the biblical account of creation and to challenge evolutionary thought.

The museum contends for creationism in a high-tech, state-of-the-art way. Throughout the tour, visitors will encounter 55 animatronic and static figures (of humans and dinosaurs), see a 30-foot-tall model of Noah's Ark, and embark into a 200-seat, cutting-edge special effects

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# The New Mystic Youth: No Longer Just Pulp Fiction



## Sorting Out the Mystical from the Biblical in Today's Youth Ministry

by **Gary E. Gilley** and **Brian E. Gilley**

For many years, publishers of comic books added to their roster of adult super-hero characters — and subsequently their selection of available titles and profits — by creating new, younger breeds of fictional heroes. One of the teams of young warriors spawned in recent times was DC Comics' "The New Mystic Youth," a band of young super-heroes formed by the fictional character Tim Hunter, an English teenager with superficial similarities to Harry Potter. If today's "mystic youth" were confined only to pulp fiction, there would be little concern. Unfortunately, for the Body of Christ, there is a whole other — more serious — dimension to "mystic youth" which transcends the pages of comic books.

Engaging over-stimulated teenagers with the truth of the Word of God without boring them to tears has challenged teachers since the invention of the teenager.<sup>1</sup> Many programs and philosophies have been tried. Some appear successful for a time only to fade away when more carefully analyzed or a new generation becomes immune to currently accepted techniques.

The youth rallies sponsored by parachurch organizations such as Youth for Christ have been touted as both the beginning of aggressive and effective ministry and the beginning of the end of the very same. Proponents point to the great turnouts and

obvious interest of that generation of young people. Opponents wonder if all that the programs did was condition youth to want entertainment rather than substance.

More recently we witnessed Willow Creek Church modeling an already fading fad in which young adults were separated from those over thirty years old by using dedicated buildings, different music, and teaching formats with specially trained leaders. But Willow Creek abandoned this concept in the face of mounting evidence that such ministries neither effectively changed the lives of the youth nor integrated those young people into the adult body of the church as they grew older.<sup>2</sup>

A new fad is making the rounds of evangelical churches. It could be called "mystical youth ministry."

Perhaps the strongest promoter of this philosophy is Youth Specialties, which through its seminars and conferences affects the lives of tens of thousands of youth leaders and young people every year.<sup>3</sup> Youth Specialties publishes a great deal of literature as well, much of it promoting mysticism.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Yaconelli's recent book, *Contemplative Youth Ministry, Practicing the Presence of Jesus*, seeks to propagate an approach to youth work that would mirror ancient Roman Catholic mystical practices of the Middle Ages. This

book well represents what some are trying to introduce as the next wave of youth ministry.

### AN IDEA IS BORN

Yaconelli's ideas were born out of frustration. Mark, the son of the late Mike Yaconelli, founder and longtime leader of Youth Specialties, learned firsthand about mysticism from his father, who later in life sought a solution to his own frustrations with the Christian life. But Yaconelli's mystical formation went well beyond his father's input. He participated in the "Program in Christian Spirituality" and received a diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction at San Francisco Theological Seminary, which is perhaps the leading seminary in the country for mystical studies. He co-founded and co-directed what would become a seven-year (1997-2003) endeavor called "Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project."<sup>5</sup> And he has drunk deeply at the well of classical mysticism, both past and present. Concerning all of this, Yaconelli writes:

"In recent years there has been a rediscovery of the significance of presence within the Christian life. Locked away within ancient books, monastic communities, and the lives of individual praying Christians is a deep concern for presence — presence to God

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# What is the Still, Small Voice?

## Manufacturing Mystics Young and Old

by G. Richard Fisher



Dave Breese's book, *Know the Marks of Cults*, contains a chapter on what he called "segmented biblical attention." He writes of those who ignore the wide scope of Scripture to focus on a tiny aspect — an obscure verse or a phrase — that usually is taken out of context. In addition, such teachers ignore passages that might correct the error. A major distinctive grows from a minor error and often becomes a test of fellowship, and a criterion for judging salvation.

Many modern mystics who advocate medieval contemplative prayer practices and mystical exercises such as *lectio divina*,<sup>1</sup> Taize,<sup>2</sup> and labyrinths,<sup>3</sup> say they are seeking the "still, small voice" (a phrase from 1 Kings 19:12). This means that people must try to hear God's voice from inside themselves through the practice of centering and emptying the mind. There is, as well, a latent pantheism and universalism beneath the surface. Rather than people praying — talking to God — this distorted teaching instead has God talking to people.

Even children are being taught this. A publication from NavPress called *PrayKids!* contains lessons on "hearing God" and "contemplative prayer." Youngsters are enticed into this movement with bait such as, "If you like to play video games, you know that it's all about getting to the next level! Prayer is like that too — only much better than any video

game!"<sup>4</sup> They are further told that through contemplative prayer, God "reveals Himself in a new way."<sup>5</sup> Our children are also told that "Prayer is also listening, because God loves to talk to you, too"<sup>6</sup> and "When we hear like this from God, it is called the 'still, small voice of God.'"<sup>7</sup>

When Jesus gave what is called the Lord's Prayer, there was a lot about praying outward and upward to "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9), but absolutely nothing about listening because people are to listen to God in Scripture (Matthew 22:31). The words "pray" and "listen" are not even remotely connected. Prayer is prayer and listening is listening. All of the Greek words translated "prayer" refer to talking to God, not God talking to us.

A Youth Specialties writer, Steve Case, says in his article, "Listening for God's Still, Small Voice":

"The Bible says there was an earthquake but God wasn't in the earthquake. There was a fire but God wasn't in the fire. There was a tornado but God wasn't in the tornado. Then there was a still, small voice. ... I have a friend named Al who frequently reminds me that God will speak to me in one of two ways. God will whisper in my ear, or hit me on the head with a brick. ... God is still speaking. God is speaking volumes to us. Sometime we

have to shut up long enough to hear what we are being told. The choice is ours; we can listen for the whisper, or we can wait for the brick. Trust me. The brick hurts. Listen for the whisper."<sup>8</sup>

There is no dispute that God is speaking today. It is His method that is in question. The practice described above brings to mind the primitive American Indian "vision quest," where an individual seeks contact with the spirit world to receive guidance.<sup>9</sup>

This teaching comes from one phrase pulled out of context from 1 Kings 19:12 that has been invested with all kinds of meaning.

### IT IS ONLY AS GOOD AS ITS SOURCE

To paraphrase a Bible verse, "Can anything good come out of the Middle Ages?" The Middle Ages was filled with religious craziness and chicanery:

"The arrival of some of Christ's blood in England, Oct. 13, 1247, was solemnized by royalty and furnishes one of the strange and picturesque religious scenes of English medieval history. ... Its genuineness was vouched for by the Masters of the Templars and the Hospitallers, and by the seals of the patriarch of Jerusalem, and the archbishops and other prelates of the Holy Land. After

fasting and keeping watch the night before, the king, Henry III., accompanied by the priests of London in full canonicals and with tapers burning, carried the vase containing the holy liquid from St. Paul's to Westminster."<sup>10</sup>

First the phrase "still, small voice" is not phrased "the still, small voice of God" as stated in NavPress' *PrayKids!* material. The words, "of God" are slipped in and added. It literally reads, "and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."

The Hebrew phrase is not easy to translate. Translators and commentators have struggled with its precise

- The *New International Version* translates it "a gentle whisper."
- The *Amplified Bible* has "[a sound of gentle stillness and] a still, small voice."
- Gerhard Kittel suggests "the soft 'rustle' of a slight breath of air" and the "sound of a still, small blowing."<sup>12</sup>
- Hebrew linguists Johann Keil and Franz Delitzsch render it "a still, gentle rustling ... literally the tone of a gentle blowing ... a soft, gentle rustling."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the exact wording is by no means certain. However, the general idea is apparent from these various

The English word "voice" is the Hebrew word *qol* (pronounced "coal"). Israel Radio is called "Kol Israel" or the "Voice of Israel." Thus the Hebrew word *qol* can mean "voice," that is, someone speaking. When used in that way it is quite easy to translate. However, *qol* is a generic word and can mean just about any noise at anytime and anywhere.

So *qol* can mean a voice, a sound, or just noise as in Exodus 32:17. The context determines what kind of noise it is. This is true of many Hebrew words. In Genesis 3:8, Adam heard the sound — *qol* — of God walking. At times the word is used in a covenantal context and speaks of God being on the scene. This lends a layer of meaning in the Genesis 3:8 passage that can easily be missed. *Qol* is also used of crying as in Isaiah 65:19. In Exodus 9:12, it is used of thunder. Usually the context makes word meanings easy to translate. An exception is 1 Kings 19:12. There translators gave ranges of meanings for what the King James Version calls "a still small voice."

### NOW IT GETS INTERESTING

When the words "still" and "small" are added to *qol*, which also have primary and secondary, and possibly more meanings, it is easy to see why translators struggle in a quest for precision. Perhaps, in this case, absolute precision is not necessary because a major doctrinal issue is not at stake. What all of them seem to agree on, however, is that whatever is going on, it is something very gentle or peaceful.

First Kings 19:13 says Elijah heard *it* — whatever *it* was. He heard a still, small *qol*. The text does not say he heard it inside or within himself, and the normal word for hearing is used. There is nothing in 1 Kings 19 that would lead the reader to believe this had anything to do with monastic practices that were invented more than 1,900 years later. Also, it was only *after* the experience of verse 12 that it says he began to converse with God outside of himself (vv. 13-14).

No one can be absolutely certain what a still, small *qol* was, but that is



### Cultivating young mystics:

The *PrayKids!* newsletter, a publication by The Navigators, is aimed at children (ages 7 to 12) and lures them into emotionalism, subjectivism, and mysticism.

meaning. Mystical practitioners should at least be honest enough to admit that. Doctrine and practice should be built on clear and redundant teachings of Scripture and not on a single obscure and difficult phrase. Unclear passages should be translated in the light of clear ones.

The difficulty of the Hebrew term "a still, small voice" is clear when considering the following:

- J.R. Dummelow's *Commentary on the Holy Bible* translates it as "the peaceful calm that followed the tempest."<sup>11</sup>
- The Septuagint and the *Jerusalem Bible* both translate it "sound of a gentle breeze."

renderings. Keil and Delitzsch are to a great degree in sync with Kittel.

Adam Clarke refers to it as a "gentle breeze" and says, "that is, a sound with which no other sound was mingled."<sup>14</sup> Clarke does not even hint that this passage is about us, our feelings, and our experiences, but rather he says throughout that God is displaying Himself in various ways to Elijah.

### WHEN IS A VOICE A VOICE?

It is easier to understand this passage when it is also understood that Hebrew words can have primary and secondary meanings, and at other times — depending on context — even other levels of meaning.

not the point. The contrast between a still, small *qol* and loud noises of thunder, fire, and earthquake is the point. The contrast is between the loud and the soft, the noisy and the gentle. This particular *qol* was a huge contrast to the roar and din of the other noises. When all the noise died away, everything went still. Elijah stayed alert and ready for God's new revelation and it must be remembered that these were days of direct, divine revelation. There is no evidence that Elijah went mindless and vacant and centered down within himself. That is foreign to the context. He is not in a mindless altered state, but in a state of keen awareness as God gives him teaching and new marching orders in verses 15-18.

### GOD CAN DO AS HE PLEASES

Elijah learned that whether God works in earthquake, fire, and thunder as at Mount Sinai, or if He thunders through the prophets, or whether He works quietly and unnoticed, God is still God. He can display Himself in judgment or in mercy. He can display Himself in justice or in grace. The thunder of Ahab and Jezebel's secular policies and threats were not bigger than God. God is at work even when it is not apparent.

Even if the KJV rendering of "a still small voice" is used, there is no basis on which to build a theology and major practice. To then impose these false and potentially harmful practices on gullible children is mindless, manipulative, and almost abusive. Jesus gave strong warnings about those who would mislead children (Matthew 18:6).

As far as Elijah was concerned, it was probably simply a sudden quietness. Earlier, Elijah had run from Jezebel, fearing for his life. More importantly, he was running from the call of God and obedience. The earthquake, wind, and fire — reminiscent of Sinai and the Law — were not what pulled Elijah back into God's will, but rather God revealing Himself in gentleness. David must have experienced something like that when he proclaimed, "Your gentleness has made me great" (Psalm 18:35). Perhaps the contrast between thunder

and stillness could be applied to the dispensations of Law and Grace.

### AN OLD BUT QUESTIONABLE ROOT SYSTEM

Historians trace the introduction of mystical practices into Catholicism and the mania of seeking the voice of God apart from Scripture via the Greek or Eastern Church in the 9th-10th centuries A.D.:

"Since God is a mystery beyond words and understanding, Evagrius Ponticus (the most influential spiritual writer in the Greek East) taught that the human mind has to rise above concepts, words, and images and above discursive thinking in order to apprehend and gaze upon God intuitively."<sup>15</sup>

This practice may also have had a boost from Talmudic Judaism. The Roman Catholic Church, in its effort to be the New Israel, clearly borrowed elements of Judaism. One instance is the repository of the consecrated host being called a tabernacle, a new Holy of Holies.<sup>16</sup>

Rabbis of the early Talmudic period (4th-12th centuries) spoke of the *Bath-Qol*, literally the "daughter voice" or the echo of God's voice. Jews after the time of Christ sought this voice of God in bizarre ways. Alfred Ederheim writes that eventually the *Bath-Qol* fell into disfavor. "Indeed, so strong became the feeling against this superstition, that the more rational Rabbis protested against any appeal to the *Bath-Qol*."<sup>17</sup>

### LESSONS LEARNED

Beware of biblical phrases taken out of context and segmented biblical attention. Beware of persons and groups that build theology and practice on an obscure word or group of words. To impose error on the Church straight from the monasteries and superstition of the Dark Ages should be unthinkable. Test all things and hold fast to that which is true.

We have come fairly close to knowing to a great degree what "a still, small voice" is really all about. We certainly know what it isn't.

### Endnotes:

1. The mystical practice of *lectio divina* is called the ancient art of sacred reading and includes reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. For more information, see the accompanying article, "The New Mystic Youth: No Longer Just Pulp Fiction," in this issue of the *Journal*.
2. Taize is a meditative style of worship which blends together music, words, and silence.
3. Labyrinths are said to be a tool to move the worshiper into a mystical union with God.
4. Kim Butts, "Going to the Next Level," *PrayKids!*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Nav-Press, 2005, "Contemplative Prayer" issue, pg. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, no author given, "The Word On... Contemplative Prayer," *PrayKids!*, "Contemplative Prayer" issue, pg. 1.
6. Cheri Fuller, "Hotline from Heaven," *PrayKids!*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Nav-Press, 2006, "Hearing God" issue, pg. 1.
7. *Ibid.*, Dick Eastman, "The Word On ... Hearing God," *PrayKids!*, "Hearing God" issue, pg. 1.
8. Steve Case, "Listening for God's Still, Small Voice," (originally titled: "Waiting for the Brick"). Article available on the Youth Specialties web site ([www.youthspecialties.com](http://www.youthspecialties.com)).
9. Leonard George, *Alternative Realities*. New York: Facts on File, 1995, pg. 301.
10. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1907, Vol. V, pg. 847.
11. J.R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: Macmillan, 1958, pg. 225.
12. Gerhard Kittel, Editor, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974, Vol. IX, pg. 281, 284.
13. Johann Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984, Vol. III, pg. 258.
14. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*. New York: Abingdon Press, no date, Vol. II, pg. 462, italics in original.
15. J.D. Douglas, General Editor, *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1991, "Contemplation," pg. 234.
16. See, Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology*. Waynesboro, Ga.: Authentic Media, 2004, for detailed historical documentation of Roman Catholicism's borrowing of numerous elements of Judaism.
17. Alfred Ederheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965, Vol. I, pg. 286, note 2.

as well as presence to other people. ... Contemplation means 'being' with God within the reality of the present moment. Contemplation is about presence."<sup>6</sup>

Yaconelli has incorporated what he learned from his mystical studies into his "contemplative youth ministry," which he defines as "courageously beholding the reality of our own lives, the reality (whether it be joy or suffering) of the young people we serve, and the reality of God's love beneath it all."<sup>7</sup> In addition, Yaconelli's incentive for developing his youth ministry philosophy was his observation of weak youth programs, which he calls a "Nickelodeon approach to youth ministry that seeks to appeal to kids' propensity for fun and recreation. ... It's the ministry of excitement; discipleship through fun, culture-friendly, 'Christian-lite' events."<sup>8</sup>

Mike King, in his book *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*, writes, "The notion of youth workers as entertainers and program directors must give way to youth workers as authentic shepherds, spiritual guides with a holy anointing to lead youth into the presence of God."<sup>9</sup>

The problem that Yaconelli and King see is genuine. Their solution is a mystically oriented youth ministry, which has at its heart contemplative prayer. The problem with Yaconelli's solution becomes apparent when he quotes Roman Catholic mystic Thomas Keating, saying, "Contemplative prayer is the opening of mind and heart — our whole being — to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions."<sup>10</sup>

Yaconelli prescribes a type of prayer not found in Scripture. Biblical prayer is rational. It uses the mind and words and can involve the emotions. Contemplative prayer is super-rational: it "relied not on words, study, and reason, but on silence, prayer [the contemplative variety], and imagination."<sup>11</sup>

Such prayer is the heart and soul of classical mysticism. The goal of mystically oriented youth ministry is to share with young people "the idea of sacred space, a thin place where heaven and earth meet, where God's presence is so real that the place and encounter take on profound sacredness."<sup>12</sup>

Yaconelli describes the mechanics of contemplative prayer:

"Take a moment to set down this book and simply become aware of your surroundings. Allow your eyes to receive the light, colors, and shapes around you without seeking to 'do' anything with what you see. Then gently close your eyes and turn your awareness to your ears. Allow yourself to receive the sounds and noises around you without judgment. Then take a moment to become aware of your body. Beginning with the top of your head, allow a gentle attention to move down your body to the soles of your feet. Allow yourself to notice places of tension or pain without passing judgment. Can you compassionately receive your physical self? Spend a few moments allowing your body, just as it is, to breathe and rest in the presence of God. When you're ready, take a moment to direct your attention toward God. Quietly turn your awareness to the presence of God within all that you see, all that you hear, and all that you feel."<sup>13</sup>

No such directives are ever found in Scripture. However, they are found in Eastern mystical religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism as well as medieval Roman Catholic mysticism.

### THE FORMS

"Christian" mystics have tried to connect with God in numerous ways. To this end, Mike King, in his book, prescribes virtually every practice ever invented by Catholicism: sacred spaces where God's presence is so real,<sup>14</sup> labyrinths or prayer chapels,<sup>15</sup> stations of the cross,<sup>16</sup> incense,<sup>17</sup> icons,<sup>18</sup> respiratory prayers,<sup>19</sup> the

Jesus prayer,<sup>20</sup> prayer ropes,<sup>21</sup> making the sign of the cross,<sup>22</sup> daily offices and liturgy of the hours,<sup>23</sup> *lectio divina*,<sup>24</sup> crucifixes,<sup>25</sup> and confession to a priest.<sup>26</sup> Yaconelli gives his attention to two primary practices.

### LECTIO DIVINA

This is Latin for "holy reading," and is becoming a popular method of contemplative "Bible reading" in mystical and emergent circles. It was introduced to the West by Eastern "desert father" Cassian in the fifth century and became part of the Benedictine monastic tradition. As Yaconelli tells us, "When we engage in *lectio divina*, we are not seeking to read the Bible for knowledge or instruction (although both of those may come), nor are we seeking the escape of a good story. Instead we come to the words of the Bible seeking to be with God."<sup>27</sup> Ken Boa, another promoter of mystical Christianity, explains that *lectio divina* involves four movements:<sup>28</sup>

**Reading (Lectio):** "Since *lectio divina* engages the whole person, your bodily posture is important. A seated position that is erect but not tense or slouched is best ... Remember that unlike ordinary reading, in *lectio* you are seeking to be *shaped* by the Word more than *informed* by the Word."<sup>29</sup>

**Meditation (Meditatio):** "Meditation is a spiritual work of holy desire and an interior invitation for the Spirit to pray and speak within us (Romans 8:26-27) in such a way that our whole being is transformed into greater conformity with Jesus Christ. ... Meditation will do you little good if you try to control the outcome."<sup>30</sup>

Incorporating the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola is recommended for meditation.

**Prayer (Oratio):** "*Oratio* [prayer] is a time for participation in the interpenetrating subjectivity of the Trinity through prolonged mutual presence and growing identification with the life of Christ."<sup>31</sup>

**Contemplation (Contemplatio):** To the uninitiated, "contemplation is often confused with meditation" but

they are not the same. The word "meditation" can describe deep thinking and analyzing with a rational mind and some may use contemplation as a synonym for this activity. But contemplation in mystical circles "is a theological grace that cannot be reduced to logical, psychological, or aesthetic categories. ... it is best for us to stop talking and 'listen to Him' in simple and loving attentiveness. In this strange and holy land we must remove the sandals of our ideas, constructs, and inclinations, and quietly listen for the voice of God."<sup>32</sup>

Yaconelli tells us that one technique to help in this process is take a word or phrase (in essence a mantra) and "repeat it to yourself, allowing the rest of the text to fall away. As you prayerfully repeat it, different thoughts, feelings, and images may arise."<sup>33</sup> By this methodology, Yaconelli maintains that we can "pray" ourselves "empty" and "Sink into God beneath all your thoughts and feelings."<sup>34</sup>

## CENTERING PRAYER

This fourth and final movement of *lectio divina* overlaps with the second way Yaconelli tries to connect with God, which is centering prayer, sometimes known as contemplative prayer or breath prayer. Boa tells us that this is a practice "recently revised and updated by three Cistercian monks — Thomas Keating, William Meninger, and Basil Pennington. This method of prayer is based on the fourteenth-century classic of mystical theology *The Cloud of Unknowing*. ... In this tradition, the invocation of the name of the Lord Jesus is used to create a state of receptivity and interior recollection of the presence of God."<sup>35</sup>

While biblical prayer is vocal, mental, rational, thoughtful, and reflective, contemplative prayer is wordless, mysterious, filled with silence and a loss of feelings, mental images, and concepts, and even the ability to meditate.<sup>36</sup> Boa explains, "This is a discipline of silence, of loss of control, of abandoning the attempt to analyze and intellectualize, and of developing the intuitive faculties."<sup>37</sup>

Yaconelli wants us to know that, "In centering prayer we remove the temptation to spend our prayer time in thought and study,"<sup>38</sup> and the best way to do that is through the use of a mantra:

"Before you begin in prayer, choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to be with God. This word expresses your desire to be in God's presence and to yield to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal a word that is suitable for you. Examples include *Jesus, Lord, Abba, Love, Mercy, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Shalom, and Amen*."<sup>39</sup>

King offers a version of this he calls respiratory prayers, which "are usually said in association with the breathing rhythm."<sup>40</sup> In conjunction with what he calls the "Jesus Prayer," King gives these instructions:

"With the inhale, pray the first part, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.' With the exhale, pray the second part, 'Have mercy on me, a sinner.'"<sup>41</sup>

These men assure us that centering prayer is "time tested"<sup>42</sup> and "is a summary of various silent prayer practices that can be traced back to the very beginnings of Christianity."<sup>43</sup> But when Yaconelli footnotes this statement he takes us back to the "Desert Fathers and Mothers" of Roman Catholicism of the 14th and 15th centuries, not to the "very beginnings of Christianity."

There were, in fact, some mystics prior to the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation of this period, but they were few and mysticism certainly was not a mainstream Christian practice. And when we examine the "true beginnings of Christianity" as found in the New Testament, nothing resembling centering prayer can be found. The only feeble attempt at proof-texting Boa offers for contemplative prayer is Matthew 17:4-5 in which the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him," and Psalm 37:7, "rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."<sup>44</sup>

Yaconelli's only effort at finding a Scriptural base is a misinterpretation of Romans 8:26, "Yet God often communicates [with us] in 'sighs too deep for words'."<sup>45</sup> The modern mystical movement has no roots whatsoever in God's Word. Rather, it is drawn from the corrupt doctrines and practices of medieval Roman Catholicism.

Yet Yaconelli, Youth Specialties, Zondervan, and a horde of others want to take our young people down this path of mysticism. Some Christian ministries are introducing mysticism to small children. NavPress, the publishing arm of the Navigators, produced a curriculum aimed at children ages 7 to 12, entitled *PrayKids!*. An entire issue is devoted to contemplative prayer. One article recommends praying the *lectio divina* and tells the children to "Be still before God. Get a picture of a sunset in your mind ... or something else He has made that amazes you. Wait quietly to let Him tell you about Himself."<sup>46</sup> The children are given a sample prayer to repeat which begins, "God, I'm really glad to be with You today. I want to hear everything You want to tell me about Yourself, Your ideas, Your plans, and Your world."<sup>47</sup>

Yaconelli, in his book, supplies an appendix purporting to show the superiority of contemplative youth ministry with other approaches. He stereotypes biblically oriented youth ministries as complacent, conforming, dogmatic, indoctrinating, regurgitating, and institutional. On the other hand, he claims contemplative oriented youth ministry is loving, informed, the way of Jesus, reflective, and seeking the living God.<sup>48</sup> Sounds great, but contemplative youth ministry fails one very important test: the test of Scripture.

Toward the back of Yaconelli's book, numerous other resources are offered to youth leaders to help with guiding young people into mystical Christianity. These include: *Enjoy the Silence, Soul Shaper, The Book of Uncommon Prayer 1 & 2*, and Brian McLaren's *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Rather than following this literature into the unbiblical snare of mysticism, there is a better way — a way that

can truly be traced to “the very beginnings of Christianity.”

## **BIBLICALLY BASED YOUTH MINISTRY**

There are two missing ingredients in many evangelical churches’ youth ministries, but the ingredients are no secret. At some point we decided young people could not handle the deep teaching of Scripture, so we contrived new plans and came up with “fresh thinking.” Much of the youth ministry world has bought into the theory that the Bible alone cannot get the job done. But these programs may be just pacifying youth rather than bringing them to the “fountain of living water.”

It is time to consider how to take back the ground we have surrendered. We have given in to pressure for numbers and impressive programs that have the appearance of success, but lack the blessing and power of God. Our teenagers do not need another “cool” extracurricular activity. They need to learn how to read, study, and apply the Scriptures. There is room for games, parties, and events, but they need to be in their proper place.

We need to faithfully preach the concept of biblical authority: to instill the idea that the Bible is the blueprint for how we walk, talk, eat, and breathe, and to expound and explain how we can do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). God’s Word is the authority for our lives; our self is not. This is the message our teenagers must hear. We cannot be badgered into believing that the Word of God is not exciting enough, not relevant enough, and not powerful enough for children. If we want to change their lives and reach them in a “relevant” way, then we must trust in the power of the Word to convict, encourage, comfort, and correct people of all ages.

## **ONE SOLUTION**

One alternative to the commercially available programs is for churches to develop their own youth curriculum. Many congregations are doing this.

One approach would be this: Teach 4-5 year olds selected Bible stories. Ages 6-7 go through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation in two years. Ages 8-9 go through the Bible once again. Ages 10-11 learn hermeneutics and Bible study methods. In junior high, students learn systematic theology for most of their two years. After all this, they enter high school full of knowledge and stories. There the goal is to give their faith legs, to challenge them to take all that knowledge and live it.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “The Word of God is like a lion. You don’t have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.” We have forgotten what we are keeping caged up. We forget our place and many times we stand in His way.

We have no greater tool than what God has given to us. It is our program and starting point; without the Scriptures we are helpless, hopeless, and powerless. Our starting point is the Word. We must get our youth into the living and active pages of Scripture and let the Lion do its job.

## **INTEGRATING YOUTH INTO BODY LIFE**

We often hear that youth are the “future of the church” or “That kid will do so much for the Lord when he gets older.” However, we never see this teaching in Scripture. We never see an age standard for ministry. The church is weaker because youth in so many churches are marginalized.

There is a troubling trend among teenagers. Many leave the nest and, upon receiving their freedom, drop out of church.

This may happen because they don’t see why church matters. Life is going well and they see no need for God’s help. Or they grew up in a fun, active, entertaining youth group that fostered a consumer mentality that makes attendance at regular church services seem dull. Or maybe they are overlooked and feel lost in the crowd.

In addition, we have a generation of youth who are failing to connect on a

personal level with anyone outside their peer group. They hide behind their computer screens and MySpace accounts and gather most of their understanding for life and priorities, not from the wise, but from their peers. They never became an active, vital, serving, essential member of the church where they grew up.

The good news is that many of the threats from pop culture can be fended off by a healthy church life. Body life in a local church should do wonders for the adolescent struggling to find where he fits in. We need to make a concerted effort to integrate youth in the ministries of the church.

Teenagers typically get to rake leaves, clean gutters, shovel driveways, help in the nursery, and maybe even spread some mulch. There is nothing wrong with those chores, but there is much more they could be doing.

Churches can involve teenagers in ways where God has gifted them: ushering, playing special music, choir, participating in congregational music, leading youth group worship, teaching small group Bible studies, teaching beginners and primaries, VBS, leading in many ways in Back Yard Bible Clubs, sound room (both audio and video), puppet ministry, prayer groups, decorating, writing, designing, organizing youth group publications, and numerous other ministries.

As they grow, they can be given more responsibility as they show faithfulness, just as is done with adults. Teenagers should not be considered an annoyance or plague on the rest of the church. They should be motivated to serve.


On a show called *Dog Whisperer*, the star is often asked, “Why is my dog tearing up my yard, couch, shoes, etc.?” The answer usually is, “The dog is bored. He needs exercise. Walk your dog 45 minutes a day and you won’t have the problem.” The dog just needs an outlet for his energy! Many balk at this idea because it requires a lot more work than they honestly want to put into a dog.

The same principle can be applied to teenagers. They need to be exercised spiritually. Their energy can be harnessed and used for the good of the body.

### Endnotes:

1. The term "teenager" is of recent origin, only having appeared around the mid-20th century.
2. See Madison Trammel, "Axis Denied," *Christianity Today*, October 2006.
3. Youth Specialties claims to serve more than 100,000 youth workers worldwide every year through their training seminars and conventions, resources, and web site.
4. For a more complete understanding of the resurgence of classic mysticism, see G. Richard Fisher, "What a Marriage! Why Did Evangelicalism Marry Catholicism's Stepchild?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2005, pp. 1, 13-19, and Gary E. Gilley, "The Lure of Mysticism - A Path to Spiritual Growth or Road to Deception?," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2005, pp. 1, 13-23.
5. Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pp. 26-27.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 23.

7. *Ibid.*, pg. 24.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
9. Mike King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pg. 25.
10. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 82.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 56.
12. *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 87.
13. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 81.
14. *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 87.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-134.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-123.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.
21. *Ibid.*, pg. 123-124.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-132.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-136.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 147.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 170.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 171.
27. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 85.
28. Kenneth Boa, *The Trinity: A Journal*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001, pp. 12-23.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15, italics in original.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 17.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 19, italic in original.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.
33. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 86.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *The Trinity: A Journal*, op. cit., pg. 21.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 88.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89, italics in original.
40. *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 122.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *The Trinity: A Journal*, op. cit., pg. 21.
43. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 87.
44. *The Trinity: A Journal*, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
45. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 89.
46. Kim Butts, "How Divine!," *PrayKids!*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2005, "Contemplative Prayer" issue, pg. 3, ellipsis in original.
47. *Ibid.*, no author given, "Welcome, God," *PrayKids!*, "Contemplative Prayer" issue, pg. 2.
48. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 240. 

## THE SECRET

(continued from page 1)

author's "street smarts" is that neither the book nor the DVD ever uses the phrase "New Age" (although the phrase "New Thought," is correctly used to describe some of its promulgators).

### THE STORY BEHIND THE SECRET

Byrne briefly describes her discovery of what she calls "The Secret" in the Foreword to her book:

"A year ago [October 2004<sup>13</sup>], my life had collapsed around me. I'd worked myself into exhaustion, my father died suddenly, and my relationships with my work colleagues and loved ones were in turmoil. Little did I know at the time, out of my greatest despair was to come the greatest gift. I'd been given a glimpse of a Great Secret — The Secret to life. The glimpse came in a hundred-year-old book, given to me by my daughter Hayley."<sup>14</sup>

### THE SCIENCE OF GETTING RICH

This book goes unnamed by Byrne until page 76 of *The Secret*, where we learn that it was *The Science of Getting Rich*, written by Wallace Wattles in 1910.<sup>15</sup>

In a chapter she wrote for a different book, Byrne says that when her daughter gave her Wattles' book:

"I began reading. With each sentence I read, my eyes widened. I had never read anything like this before. The book, as it turns out, is about getting rich — not only in terms of money, but in every possible way, including relationships and health. As I read, it became clear to me that what Wattles was presenting was actually the science of life. ... I was barely breathing as I turned the pages. Deep within, I knew that every single thing he said was true: This was the Truth, with a capital T. ... I began doing research on Wallace Wattles. I read about his life and every

single thing he had ever written. Then I wanted to find out who his mentor was. My research led me back through history, century after century, reading book after book after book."<sup>16</sup>

In *The Secret*, Byrne writes:

"I began tracing The Secret back through history. I couldn't believe all the people who knew this. They were the greatest people in history: Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Emerson, Edison, Einstein."<sup>17</sup>

During this time, Byrne says she "read dozens of books,"<sup>18</sup> and "In a few short weeks I had traced The Secret back through the centuries, and I had discovered the modern-day practitioners of the Secret."<sup>19</sup> She reveals further:

"What I discovered in my search was the secret to having everything I wanted in life: money, health, love, success. When I applied this knowledge that I now call 'The Secret' to every

single aspect of my life, my life was completely transformed."<sup>20</sup>

Byrne continues:

"Incredulous, I asked, 'Why doesn't *everyone* know this?' A burning desire to share The Secret with the world consumed me, and I began searching for people alive today who knew The Secret. One by one they began to emerge. I became a magnet: as I began to search, one great living master after another was drawn to me. When I discovered one teacher, that one would link to the next, in a perfect chain. If I was on the wrong track, something else would catch my attention, and through the diversion the next great teacher would appear. ... The vision of taking The Secret to the world in a film had become fixed in my mind."<sup>21</sup>

Byrne next explains:

"We [Byrne and her television production crew] did not have a single teacher secured to film, but we knew The Secret, and so with utter faith I flew from Australia to the United States where the majority of the teachers were based. Seven weeks later The Secret team had filmed fifty-five of the greatest teachers across the United States, with over 120 hours of film. With every step, with every breath, we used The Secret to create *The Secret*. We literally magnetized everything and everyone to us. Eight months later *The Secret* [DVD] was released."<sup>22</sup>

Byrne also states:

"Today, my whole life is so magnificent. The happiness I felt before has been multiplied many times over: I am surrounded by people I love, I have more than enough money, and my work is fascinating and fulfilling. The joy I have in just being alive and being able to be on this marvelous planet one day after another is incredible. Feeling this way —

and knowing how simple it is to create the life you want — how could I not share 'The Secret' with everyone?"<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in *The Secret*, Byrne writes, "My intention in creating *The Secret* was — and still is — that it will bring joy to billions around the world."<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Byrne's mother, Irene Izon, offered this assessment to *Newsweek*:

"The thing is that Rhonda just wants to bring happiness to everybody. That's the reason it all began. She just wants everybody to be happy."<sup>25</sup>

### TEACHING OF THE SECRET IN THE WORDS OF ITS TEACHER

The book and the DVD present identical material in different fashions. The DVD consists of sometimes dramatized audio and video snippets of 24 contemporary American "teachers of The Secret," including *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series co-creator Jack Canfield; author Denis Waitley; John Gray, author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*; and lesser-known attractive and charismatic speakers, both men and women, including two quantum physicists, metaphysicians, a Feng Shui expert, and so on. Interspersed are quotations from various figures from the past who, it is presumed, are being quoted because they supposedly knew "The Secret." The book is essentially an edited transcript of the DVD with additional commentary on the concepts supplied by Byrne.

### THE ESSENCE OF THE SECRET

The Secret revealed is a New Thought concept called "the law of attraction." According to this teaching, our thoughts are powerful forces that create corresponding realities. Those who think about something with intent and desire cause that very thing to come into being. "Thoughts become things," teacher Mike Dooley says.<sup>26</sup> Byrne explains:

"You are the most powerful magnet in the Universe! You contain a magnetic power within

you that is more powerful than anything in this world, and this unfathomable magnetic power is emitted through your thoughts."<sup>27</sup>

*The Secret* teacher John Assaraf writes, "You become what you think about most, but you also attract what you think about most."<sup>28</sup> And Byrne promises, "If you can think about what you want in your mind, and make that your dominant thought, you *will* bring it into your life."<sup>29</sup>

Byrne then sums up:

"Thoughts are magnetic, and thoughts have a frequency. As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the Universe, and they magnetically attract all *like* things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out returns to the source. And that source is You."<sup>30</sup>

After stating that our thoughts are magnetic, Byrne says:

"You are a *human* transmission tower, and you are more powerful than any television tower created on earth. You are the most powerful transmission tower in the Universe. Your transmission creates your life and it creates the world. The frequency you transmit reaches beyond cities, beyond countries, beyond the world. It reverberates throughout the entire Universe. And you are transmitting that frequency *with your thoughts!*"<sup>31</sup>

### IF IT FEELS GOOD...

Marci Shimoff, another of *The Secret* teachers, explains how one controls what one thinks:

"It's impossible to monitor every thought we have. Researchers tell us that we have about sixty thousand thoughts a day. Can you imagine how exhausted you'd feel trying to control all sixty thousand of those thoughts? Fortunately there's an easier way, and it's our feelings. Our feelings let us know what we're thinking."<sup>32</sup>

Byrne writes, "The importance of feelings cannot be overstated. Your feelings are your greatest tool to help you create your life."<sup>33</sup> A little further in the book, she writes:

"When you are feeling good feelings, it is communication back from the Universe saying, 'You are thinking good thoughts.' Likewise, when you are feeling bad, you are receiving communication back from the Universe saying, 'You are thinking bad thoughts.'"<sup>34</sup>

So important is this aspect of "The Secret" that, at the end of the book, Byrne writes, "*The only thing you need to do is feel good now.*"<sup>35</sup> And again, she writes:

"Be happy *now*. Feel good *now*. That's the only thing you have to do. If that's the only thing you get from reading this book, then you have received the greatest part of The Secret."<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Byrne confides:

"I want to let you in on a secret to The Secret. The shortcut to anything you want in your life is to BE and FEEL happy now! It is the fastest way to bring money and anything else you want into your life. Focus on radiating out into the Universe those feelings of joy and happiness. When you do that, you will attract back to you all things that bring you joy and happiness, which will not only include an abundance of money, but everything else you are wanting. You must radiate out the signal to bring back what you want."<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the last scene on the DVD presentation of *The Secret* is that of a woman — presumably Byrne — writing the words "FEEL GOOD" in the sand on a beach with a stick, and then hurling the stick into the air.

Jack Canfield, co-creator of the *Chicken Soup* series of books and a teacher of *The Secret*, similarly states:

"When I really understood that my primary aim was to feel and experi-

ence joy, then I began to do only those things which brought me joy. I have a saying: 'If it ain't fun, don't do it!' ... I want to constantly put myself in that state, and when I do, then all I have to do is have the intention of what I want, and what I want manifests."<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps someone with Canfield's money can afford to live this way. However, it's unrealistic for the vast majority of humanity.

If thoughts alter or create reality, as *The Secret* teaches, and good thoughts are more desirable as they create better things for the thinker, the next step is to learn how to think good thoughts. *The Secret* teaches a formula for getting what you want which sounds biblical enough: "Ask," "Believe," and "Receive."<sup>39</sup> Byrne explains:

"The Creative Process used in The Secret, which was taken from the New Testament in the Bible, is an easy guideline for you to create what you want in three simple steps [Ask, Believe, and Receive]."<sup>40</sup>

However, as biblical as these three steps sound, the exposition of the "Ask" step shows it to be unbiblical. Teacher Lisa Nichols explains: "*The first step is to ask. Make a command to the Universe. Let the Universe know what you want. The Universe responds to your thoughts.*"<sup>41</sup> Byrne echoes: "Step One is simply your step to get clear about what you want. As you get clear in your mind, you have asked."<sup>42</sup>

Some of what *The Secret* teaches about believing appears to have merit. However in describing Step 3, "Receive," Byrne writes, "Ask once, believe you have received, and all you have to do to receive is feel good."<sup>43</sup>

She adds:

"When you are feeling good, you are on the frequency of receiving. You are on the frequency of all good things coming to you, and you will receive what you have asked for. You wouldn't ask for anything unless it was going to make you feel good in the receiv-

ing of it, would you? So get yourself on the feel-good frequency, and you will receive."<sup>44</sup>

In reading what Byrne says above, the reader might think that she is using the word "frequency" in a metaphorical sense. However, Byrne and the other *The Secret* teachers propound that everything in the universe is energy, including us.<sup>45</sup> As support for the claims of *The Secret*, appeals are made to "science," especially to the branch of science known as quantum physics.

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SECRET

No part of *The Secret* is more opposed to the Gospel than the last two chapters of the book: "The Secret to You," and "The Secret to Life." Here the core of *The Secret* philosophy is unveiled:

- "We are One. We are all connected, and we are all part of the One Energy Field, or the One Supreme Mind, or the One Consciousness, or the One Creative Source. Call it whatever you want, but we are all One. If you think about the law of attraction now, in terms of us all being One, you will see its absolute perfection ... We are One!"<sup>46</sup>
- "We often get distracted with this thing called our body and our physical being. That just holds your spirit. And your spirit is so big it fills a room. You are eternal life. You are God manifested in human form, made to perfection."<sup>47</sup>
- "You are God in a 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."<sup>48</sup>
- "Well, now you know you are the Supreme Mind and that you can draw anything you want from that One Supreme Mind.

Any invention, any inspiration, any answer, anything. You can do anything you want. You are a genius beyond description, so start telling yourself that and become aware of who you really are."<sup>49</sup>

- "Are there any limits to this? Absolutely not. We are unlimited beings. We have no ceiling. The capabilities and the talents and the gifts and the power that is within every single individual that is on the planet, is unlimited."<sup>50</sup>

- "Whether you want to regain perfect eyesight, dissolve disease and restore well-being, turn poverty into abundance, reverse aging and degeneration, or eradicate any negativity, focus on and love the presence within you and perfection will manifest."<sup>51</sup>

- "The Universe emerges from thought. We are the creators not only of our own destiny but also of the Universe."<sup>52</sup>

- "An unlimited supply of ideas is available to you. All knowledge, discoveries, and inventions are in the Universal Mind as possibilities, waiting for the human mind to draw them forth. You hold everything in your consciousness."<sup>53</sup>

- "The Secret is within you. The more you use the power within you, the more you will draw it to you. You will reach a point where you won't need to practice anymore, because you will Be the power, you will Be the perfection, you will Be the wisdom, you will Be the intelligence, you will Be the love, you will Be the joy."<sup>54</sup>

- "The earth turns on its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You. The birds sing for You. The sun rises and it sets for You. The stars come out for You. Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there, for You. Take a look around. None of it can exist, without You. No matter who you thought you were, now

you know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe. You are the heir to the kingdom. You are the perfection of Life. And now you know The Secret."<sup>55</sup>

## AN EVALUATION AND CRITIQUE

Because it is not possible in an article of this length to thoroughly critique *The Secret*, we will take a few aspects of its teachings and examine them.

The appeal of *The Secret* is obvious, in that everyone wants to achieve the desires of their heart, and we can be vulnerable to something that promises to give these things to us. In addition, we all like to feel important — although *The Secret* takes this to an extreme. What D.R. McConnell wrote in *A Different Gospel* regarding the appeal of the teachings of the Word-Faith movement<sup>56</sup> also applies to *The Secret*:

"Seldom if ever, has there been a gospel that has promised so much, and demanded so little. ... In an age in America characterized by complexity, the Faith gospel gives simple, if not revelational, answers. In an economy fueled by materialism and fired by the ambitions of the 'upwardly mobile,' the Faith gospel preaches wealth and prosperity. The Faith gospel promises health and long life to a world in which death can come a myriad of different ways. Finally, in an international environment characterized by anarchy, in which terrorists strike at will and nuclear holocaust can come screaming from the sky at any moment, the Faith gospel confers an authority with which the believer can supposedly exercise complete control over his or her own environment."<sup>57</sup>

*The Secret* makes sweeping assertions without supporting them:

"The greatest teachers who have ever lived have told us that the law of attraction is the most

powerful law in the Universe. Poets such as William Shakespeare, Robert Browning, and William Blake delivered it in their poetry. Musicians such as Ludwig van Beethoven expressed it through their music. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci depicted it in their paintings. Great thinkers including Socrates, Plato, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Pythagoras, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Isaac Newton, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Victor Hugo shared it in their writings and teachings. Their names have been immortalized, and their legendary existence has survived centuries. Religions, such as Hinduism, Hermetic traditions,<sup>58</sup> Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and civilizations, such as the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians, delivered it through their writings and stories. Recorded throughout the ages in all its forms, the law can be found in ancient writings through all the centuries. It was recorded in stone in 3000 BC. Even though some coveted this knowledge, and indeed they did, it has always been there for anyone to discover. The law began at the beginning of time. It has always been and will always be."<sup>59</sup>

The following are typical examples of the book's extravagant, unsupported claims:

- "The leaders in the past who had *The Secret* wanted to keep the power and not share the power. They kept people ignorant of *The Secret*. People went to work, they did their job, they came home. They were on a treadmill with no power, because *The Secret* was kept in the few."<sup>60</sup>

- "There isn't a single thing that you cannot do with this knowledge. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are, *The Secret* can give you whatever you want."<sup>61</sup>

- "People who have drawn wealth into their lives used *The Secret*, whether consciously or

unconsciously. ... Whether they are aware of it or not, their predominant thoughts of wealth are what brought wealth to them. It is the law of attraction in action."<sup>62</sup>

And recall that Bryne has told us:

- "You are the most powerful magnet in the Universe! You contain a magnetic power within you that is more powerful than anything in this world, and this unfathomable magnetic power is emitted through your thoughts."<sup>63</sup>

At one point in the book, *The Secret* teacher Neale Donald Walsch contradicts basic scriptural teaching about every man standing before God for judgment (e.g., Genesis 18:25; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; 24:15-16, 25; Romans 2:16; 3:6). Walsch asserts:

"So your purpose is what you say it is. Your mission is the mission you give yourself. Your life will be what you create it as, and no one will stand in judgment of it, now or ever."<sup>64</sup>

### THE SECRET GETS SPOOKY

Byrne recommends a technique that amounts to divination, which is condemned by God in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:9-14):

"As you become aware of the power of *The Secret*, and begin to use it, all of your questions will be answered. As you begin to have a deeper understanding of the law of attraction you can start to make asking questions a habit, and as you do, you will receive the answer to each one. You can begin by using this book for that very purpose. If you are seeking an answer or guidance on something in your life, ask the question, believe you will receive, and then open this book randomly. At the exact place where the pages fall open will be the guidance and answer you are seeking."<sup>65</sup>

Bryne's method is not as unbelievable as one may think. Regretfully,

there are Christians who employ just such a practice using not *The Secret*, but rather their Bibles.

### RHONDA BYRNE'S DRAMATIC WRITING STYLE

Minor, but noteworthy, features about Byrne's book include that the book version of *The Secret* is introduced with a piece of pseudo-esoteric drivel, a quotation from *The Emerald Tablet* (c. 3000 B.C.):

"As above, so below. As within, so without."<sup>66</sup>

Presumably, we are supposed to be impressed with a quotation, which has no meaning apart from the greater context — if any — in which the words occur.

Byrne's writing is overly dramatic, even within her Acknowledgements. There she speaks of people who "illuminated me through their presence."<sup>67</sup> Some of these people are "magnificent human beings."<sup>68</sup> She "pay[s] homage" to some for "generously sharing their wisdom, love, and divinity."<sup>69</sup> She further acknowledges her "amazing family,"<sup>70</sup> including her two daughters who "illuminate every breath I take through their very existence."<sup>71</sup>

She also gives artificial-sounding titles of importance to some of the 24 teachers featured in both the book and DVD versions of *The Secret*. More than one receives the title of "philosopher."<sup>72</sup> Another receives the epithet of "moneymaking expert."<sup>73</sup> One of the teachers is a "personal transformation specialist"<sup>74</sup> and another receives the title of "visionary."<sup>75</sup> Still others receive the honorifics "law of attraction specialist,"<sup>76</sup> "personal empowerment advocate,"<sup>77</sup> and "spiritual messenger."<sup>78</sup> Some of *The Secret* teachers are described as "a non-aligned, transreligious progressive,"<sup>79</sup> "a 'life adventurer,'"<sup>80</sup> and "a transformational leader."<sup>81</sup>

One curious feature in the book, *The Secret*, occurs when Byrne is teaching about gratitude. She states, "In the book that changed my life, *The Science of Getting Rich*, written by Wallace

Wattles in 1910, gratitude is its longest chapter."<sup>82</sup> Likewise, in a chapter she wrote for another book, she also cites Wattles' book, and mentions that gratitude is that book's longest chapter.<sup>83</sup> Yet a glance at that book's Table of Contents reveals that the chapter on gratitude is one of the book's *shortest* chapters.

### THE SECRET'S ROOTS IN ANCIENT HINDUISM

The worldview of *The Secret* derives from Hinduism through the New Thought and New Age movements. Among the Hindu doctrines evident in *The Secret* are its belief in an impersonal Higher Power, as opposed to the personal God of Scripture; its monism, the belief that everything in the universe is one; and its pantheism, the belief that everything that is, is God. You are God, I am God, the tree is God, etc., and we are all one. "All there is is one, and all there is is God," would be another way of expressing it.

The impersonality of the "god" of *The Secret* is evident in the frequent references in the book to "the Universe," where the "U" in universe is always capitalized. The "Universe" is likened to the Genie of Aladdin's lamp, who *always* and *only* says to us, "Your wish is my command."<sup>84</sup> This brings up another critical difference between the "god" of *The Secret* and the God of the Bible: The "god" of *The Secret* is the servant of man and his desires. *The Secret's* concept of God is too small: *The Secret's* "god" is one "who must dance to men's attempts to manipulate the spiritual laws of the universe."<sup>85</sup> In contrast, the God of the Bible *cannot* and *will not* be manipulated by man.

Jesus is never mentioned by name in *The Secret* DVD, and His name is mentioned but once in the book — as the final name in a list of biblical personalities, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, who "were not only prosperity teachers, but also millionaires themselves, with more affluent lifestyles than many present-day millionaires could conceive of."<sup>86</sup>

What a surprise! Who could have guessed that the Son of Man, Who had “nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20) and Who “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9), was *actually* a prosperity teacher and a millionaire!

### THE NEW THOUGHT MOVEMENT

As mentioned earlier, the terms “New Thought” and “New Age” are somewhat difficult to define, and there is some overlap in the two movements. The New Thought movement preceded the New Age movement. Both are eclectic, but have roots in Hinduism. The worldview of New Thought can also be seen in the “mind science” religions, such as Christian Science, Unity, and Religious Science.

A contemporary book on the subject of the New Thought movement states:

“New Thought has evolved as a movement that has no specific dogma to which the member religious movements must adhere. ... Although opinions regarding who actually founded New Thought vary, since the essence of the movement is rooted in the interpretations of the teachings of [19th-century metaphysical healer] Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (known as ‘Park’), he is credited as the overall intellectual father of New Thought.”<sup>87</sup>

Glenn Mosley also notes that fore-runners of the New Thought movement included “Franz Anton Mesmer, Emanuel Swedenborg, [and] Ralph Waldo Emerson.”<sup>88</sup> Regarding Emerson, Mosley says that, “He was influenced by such schools of thought as English Romanticism, Neoplatonism, and Hindu philosophy.”<sup>89</sup>

As just noted, one reason New Thought is hard to define is its lack of specific doctrines or theological creeds which the religious movements embrace. Researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon give another reason that a precise definition of the movement is not easy:

“New Thought is an umbrella designation covering hundreds, possibly thousands, of independent churches around the world. Broadly speaking, Religious Science (Science of Mind), Divine Science, Unity School of Christianity and scores of smaller independent organizations constitute New Thought.”<sup>90</sup>

Two prominent 20th-century New Thought promulgators were author and New Thought minister Emmet Fox, as well as author and pastor Norman Vincent Peale.<sup>91</sup> Peale was pastor of a Christian church.<sup>92</sup> Della Reese, of the former television series *Touched By An Angel*, is a contemporary New Thought minister.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, Dr. Michael Beckwith, prominently featured in both *The Secret* book and DVD, is another contemporary New Thought leader.<sup>94</sup>

### THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

Philip H. Lochhaas, a Lutheran minister and expert on the New Age, defined it this way:

“The New Age may be defined as a network of otherwise dissimilar people intent on replacing the reality of a personal God with the idea that humanity is the center of all things. Indeed, it is claimed that each person is God, one with a universal energy, and only needs to develop the potential of divinity to the fullest. ... The New Age Movement appears to be a confusing and contradictory mix — until one understands that there are two distinct expressions of the movement: the occult and the humanistic. The *occult* expression involves such ideas and practices as reincarnation, crystal power, channeling spirit guides, UFO phenomenon, and the worship of self. The *humanistic* expression focuses on developing unlimited human potential and an ethical system centered in responsibility only to one’s self.”<sup>95</sup>

Lochhaas gives and expounds on the following six defining concepts of the New Age movement:

“1. *All is one; therefore all is God.* This principle expresses the twin concepts of *monism* and *pantheism*, ... 2. *Humanity, like all creation, is divine and has unlimited potential.* ... 3. *Humanity’s basic flaw is its ignorance of divinity and oneness with all things.* ... 4. *Humanity’s only need, therefore, is transformation — the awareness of divinity.* ... 5. *Transformation can be produced by a wide variety of techniques.* ... 6. *Personal transformation is the springboard to global transformation.*”<sup>96</sup>

Concerning the origins of the New Age movement, Dr. Walter Martin wrote:

“For all practical purposes, the New Age Cult can be equated with the transplantation of Hindu philosophy through the Theosophical Society founded by Helena Blavatsky in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the United States. Madame Blavatsky, as she was known, promoted spiritism, seances, and basic Hindu philosophy while manifesting a distinct antagonism to biblical Christianity.”<sup>97</sup>

Lochhaas adds:

“[Helena Blavatsky’s] prize pupil, Alice Bailey, developed Blavatsky’s teachings into an organized system and coined the term *New Age*. Bailey taught that humanity must achieve enlightenment by realizing its divinity. ... Another block in the New Age foundation is the New Thought Movement. Its origins generally are traced to the mental healing practice of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby in the mid-19th century. The Church of Christ, Scientist, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, is one of the better known developments of New Thought teachings.”<sup>98</sup>

While there are also differences between Hinduism and the New Age movement, “Hindus and New Agers hold quite similar views about God, the world, humanity, and salvation.”<sup>99</sup>

That *The Secret* relies on a Hindu worldview is made clear in the book that inspired it: Wattles' *The Science of Getting Rich*. In that book's Preface, Wattles wrote:

"For the benefit, however, of those who wish to investigate philosophical theories and so secure a logical basis for faith, I will here cite certain authorities. The monistic theory of the universe — the theory that One is All, and that All is One; that one Substance manifests itself as the seeming many elements of the material world — is of Hindu origin, and has been gradually winning its way into the thought of the western world for two hundred years. It is the foundation of all the Oriental philosophies, and of those of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Emerson. The reader who would dig to the philosophical foundations of this is advised to read Hegel and Emerson for himself."<sup>100</sup>

The source that inspired Byrne's book and DVD himself wrote that its philosophical underpinnings are that of Hinduism. As well, in *The Secret* book, the unusual term "avatar" is used several times.<sup>101</sup>

The edition of *The Science of Getting Rich* from which the quotation above is taken, is published by Jeremy P. Tarcher, "a New Age book publisher," according to Christian researcher Ron Rhodes.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, Wattles was a New Thought author,<sup>103</sup> and an article on *The Secret* in *Newsweek* noted that Beyond Words Publishing, the arm of Simon & Schuster which published Byrne's book, is a "New Age-oriented publishing house."<sup>104</sup> Thus, we clearly see the Hindu, New Thought, and New Age connections of *The Secret*.

As well, Rhodes notes that "the law of attraction," around which Byrne's teachings revolve, is a New Thought concept. Rhodes explains:

"New Thought proponents subscribe to the 'law of attraction.' This law says that just as like

attracts like, so our thoughts can attract the things they want or expect. Negative thoughts attract dismal circumstances; positive thoughts attract more desirable circumstances. Our thoughts can be either creative or destructive. New Thought sets out to teach people how to use their thoughts creatively."<sup>105</sup>

In his book on the New Age movement, Martin wrote:

"The great English apologist and writer C.S. Lewis saw the battle lines clearly drawn. He noted that in the final conflict between religions, Hinduism and Christianity would offer the only viable options because Hinduism absorbs all religious systems, and Christianity excludes all others, maintaining the supremacy of the claims of Jesus Christ."<sup>106</sup>

Thus, Hinduism, as expressed through both New Thought and the New Age movements, is the foundation for the teachings of *The Secret*.

### BLAMING THE VICTIMS OF TRAGEDY

When someone has suffered a genuine misfortune, there is probably nothing as insensitive or so cruel as telling such a person, "This is your own fault," even if such a charge is true. Job's friends sought to comfort him with just such "wisdom." And there is the blind man in John 9, of whom Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

While Rabbi Harold S. Kushner fails to grasp a biblical understanding of pain and suffering, he nonetheless graphically illustrates the insensitivity and cruelty of blaming victims of tragedy when he writes:

"I once read of an Iranian folk proverb, 'If you see a blind man, kick him; why should you be kinder than God?' In other words, if you see someone who is suffering, you must believe that he deserves his fate and that God wants him to suffer. There-

fore, put yourself on God's side by shunning him or humiliating him further. If you try to help him, you will be going against God's justice."<sup>107</sup>

Yet *The Secret*, with its "you-are-the-creator-of-your-own-life" teaching, *does* blame victims of tragedy for their own plight, even though in media settings, some of *The Secret* teachers have sought to distance themselves from this aspect of the teaching.<sup>108</sup> Yet, to be logically consistent, someone who believes in Byrne's teachings would *have* to believe that they bring misfortune and tragedy upon themselves. After all, if your thoughts are what create your life — as *The Secret* teaches — then how else would tragedy ever befall you, unless you created it for yourself by persistently thinking about it? And that is exactly what *The Secret* teaches. Joe Vitale, a metaphysician and *The Secret* teacher says:

"Everything that surrounds you right now in your life, including the things you're complaining about, you've attracted. Now I know that at first blush that's going to be something that you hate to hear. You're going to immediately say, 'I didn't attract the car accident. I didn't attract this particular client who gives me a hard time. I didn't particularly attract the debt.' And I'm here to be a little bit in your face and to say, yes you did attract it. This is one of the hardest concepts to get, but once you've accepted it, it's life transforming."<sup>109</sup>

Byrne amplifies Vitale's words:

"Often when people first hear this part of the Secret they recall events in history where masses of lives were lost, and they find it incomprehensible that so many people could have attracted themselves to the event. By the law of attraction, they had to be on the same frequency as the event. It doesn't necessarily mean they thought of that exact event, but the frequency of their thoughts matched the frequency of the event. ... Nothing can

come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts."<sup>110</sup>

Here we see a "dark side" to *The Secret*. At least Vitale and Byrne demonstrate consistency in stating the clear implications of their teaching. Indeed, these implications were not lost on former occultist and professional astrologer Marcia Montenegro, who, in response to this part of the teaching of *The Secret*, wrote:

"This has hideous implications if you apply this theory to horrific events like the Holocaust and 9/11. But I can tell you that this is how people who believe you create your own reality really think. People who have suffered must have attracted it into their lives. This is the kind of callous thinking that inevitably results from the belief in the 'law of attraction.' So if you get cancer, break an arm, are raped, are robbed, etc., then you have brought this on yourself."<sup>111</sup>

### THE SECRET'S "SCIENTIFIC" CLAIMS

*The Secret* uses scientific jargon and makes scientific claims, but without any documentation. Assertions are made and the public is asked to accept them as fact:

- "The law [of attraction] began at the beginning of time. It has always been and will always be. It is the law that determines the complete order in the Universe, every moment of your life, and every single thing you experience in your life."<sup>112</sup>
- "What most people don't understand is that a thought has a frequency. We can measure a thought."<sup>113</sup>
- "Thoughts are magnetic, and thoughts have a frequency. As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the Universe, and they magnetically attract all like things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out

returns to the source. And that source is You."<sup>114</sup>

- "The law of attraction is the law of creation. Quantum physicists tell us that the entire Universe emerged from thought! You create your life through your thoughts and the law of attraction, and every single person does the same."<sup>115</sup>

- "The amazing work and discoveries of the quantum physicists over the last eighty years has brought us to a greater understanding of the unfathomable power of the human mind to create. Their work parallels the words of the world's great minds, including Carnegie, Emerson, Shakespeare, Bacon, Krishnamurti, and Buddha."<sup>116</sup>

- "... it has been scientifically proven that an affirmative thought is hundreds of times more powerful than a negative thought."<sup>117</sup>

- "The study of quantum physics helped me to have a deeper understanding of *The Secret*, on an energetic level. For many people, their belief is strengthened when they see the perfect correlation between the knowledge of *The Secret* and the theories of new science. Let me explain how you are the most powerful transmission tower in the Universe. In simple terms, all energy vibrates at a frequency. Being energy, you also vibrate at a frequency, and what determines your frequency at any time is whatever you are thinking and feeling. All the things you want are made of energy, and they are vibrating too. *Everything* is energy. Here is the 'wow' factor. When you think about what you want, and you emit that frequency, you cause the energy of what you want to vibrate at that frequency and you bring it to You! As you focus on what you want, you are changing the vibration of the atoms of that thing, and

you are causing it to vibrate to You."<sup>118</sup>

- "You are an energy magnet, so you electrically energize everything to you and electrically energize yourself to everything you want. Human beings manage their own magnetizing energy, because no one outside of them can think or feel for them, and it is thoughts and feelings that create our frequencies."<sup>119</sup>

- "I don't care what city you're living in, you've got enough power in your body, potential power, to illuminate the whole city for nearly a week."<sup>120</sup>

Before we attempt to look at the "science" of *The Secret*, we should remember Paul's admonition:

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:8-10).

We would suggest that these words of Scripture are relevant to the teachings of *The Secret* in relation to science. Jerry Adler, writing for *Newsweek*, says:

"On a scientific level, the law of attraction is preposterous. Two of the 'teachers' in the film are identified as quantum physicists, which they are, although on the fringes of mainstream science. One, Fred Alan Wolf, is mostly an author of science books with a quasi-mystical bent, and the other, John Hagelin (who has run for president on the Natural Law ticket), is affiliated with Maharishi University of Management, in Fairfield, Iowa, which does research on Transcendental Meditation.<sup>121</sup> Both of them, contacted by *Newsweek*, distanced themselves from the idea of a physical law that attracts neck-

laces to people who wish for them. 'I don't think it works that way,' says Wolf dryly. 'It hasn't worked that way in my life.' Hagelin acknowledges the larger point, that 'the coherence and effectiveness of our thinking is crucial to our success in life.' But, he adds, 'this is not, principally, the result of magic.' Wolf said he used his time in front of the camera to talk about the relationship between quantum mechanics and consciousness, but all that evidently wound up on the cutting-room floor. What he might have said is something like this: modern physics says that atomic particles influence one another in ways that violate our ordinary understanding of space and time, a phenomenon called 'quantum entanglement.' The question is whether quantum signals can be perceived on the scale of something like a neuron, a brain or a human being. Overwhelmingly, physicists dismiss this idea. A minority, very much out of the mainstream, think it's worth investigating, and a few claim to have experimental evidence that thoughts can influence physical objects, such as the circuitry in a random-number generator. But the effects are tiny, on the order of a few hundredths of 1 percent. And there's no evidence you can use it to move a BMW into your driveway."<sup>122</sup>

Likewise, on a *Nightline* broadcast examining some of the claims of *The Secret*, Dr. Brian Greene, a leading physicist at Columbia University, interviewed by the show's anchor Cynthia McFadden, denied that our thoughts produced any significant gravitational or electro-magnetic "pull" that directly drew things to us.<sup>123</sup> The moral of this story is: Don't take science lessons from *The Secret*!

### HEALTH, WEALTH, AND MORE

Cathy Goodman, featured in both the book and the DVD of *The Secret*, gives the following testimonial:

*"I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I truly believed in my heart, with my strong faith, that I was already healed. ... I believed in my heart I was healed. I saw myself as if cancer was never in my body. ... From the time I was diagnosed to the time I was healed was approximately three months. And that's without any radiation or chemotherapy."*<sup>124</sup>

To include this in *The Secret*, as if this were the way to proceed in dealing with sickness and disease, is dangerous and irresponsible. Cancers sometimes go into partial or complete remission. In a complete remission, the person has no symptoms. Such remissions can last for years, but may not indicate permanent healing;<sup>125</sup> although, for her sake, it is hoped that she is permanently healed. If she is healed, however, it is only due to God having had mercy on her, and not because of her healing herself, as she believes (Philippians 2:27).

Byrne also directs:

*"Think thoughts of perfection. Illness cannot exist in a body that has harmonious thoughts. Know there is only perfection, and as you observe perfection you must summon that to you. Imperfect thoughts are the cause of all humanity's ills, including disease, poverty, and unhappiness. When we think negative thoughts we are cutting ourselves off from our rightful heritage. Declare and intend, 'I think perfect thoughts. I see only perfection. I am perfection.'"*<sup>126</sup>

As for wealth, on the *Nightline* program that examined some of *The Secret's* claims, Cynthia McFadden interviewed former Secretary of Commerce Pete Peterson, co-founder of The Blackstone Group, which manages billions of dollars, concerning *The Secret's* teaching that one can have wealth by thinking about it with intent. In part, Peterson responded by saying, "It's psychotic, really, to believe that people are going to give you money simply because you wish it."<sup>127</sup>

The sad, but logically consistent, results of believing *The Secret's* teachings about money may be seen in a story in a recent *People* magazine article devoted to *The Secret*. There it was reported that one of the believers in the teachings of *The Secret* "recently signed a contract to pay \$15,000 to have her house painted this summer. 'I have no idea where the money is going to come from, but there is no question in my mind it will work out,' she says. 'I know it like I know my name.'"<sup>128</sup>

### MORE ABSURDITIES

Time and space don't permit a complete listing of absurd thoughts and statements in *The Secret*. But below are a few examples:

- "... the condition of being overweight was created through your thought to it. To put it in the most basic terms, if someone is overweight, it came from thinking 'fat thoughts,' whether that person was aware of it or not. A person cannot think 'thin thoughts' and be fat. It completely defies the law of attraction."<sup>129</sup>
- "The most common thought that people hold, and I held it too, is that food was responsible for my weight gain. ... Food is not responsible for putting on weight. It is your *thought* that food is responsible for putting on weight that actually has food put on weight. Remember, thoughts are [the] primary cause of everything, and the rest is effects from those thoughts. Think perfect thoughts and the result must be perfect weight. Let go of all those limiting thoughts. Food cannot cause you to put on weight, unless you *think* it can."<sup>130</sup>
- "So now you start to have different beliefs, like, 'There is more than enough in the Universe.' Or you have the belief that, 'I'm not getting older, I'm getting younger.' We can create it the way we want it, by using the law of attraction."<sup>131</sup>

We might add, "Yes, and there are people in asylums who really believe that they are George Washington or the Queen of England!" Contrary to the teaching of *The Secret*, thinking things are so doesn't make them so, unless they really are so. In fact, there is a phrase that pretty well sums up the teaching of *The Secret*: "wishful thinking."

Christian apologist and author Robert Bowman wrote something about the Word-Faith movement that can easily be applied with equal ease to the teachings of *The Secret*:

"Perhaps the most serious danger of the Word-Faith position is that, since it is unbiblical and unrealistic, those who believe it are in for serious disappointment. The result can be — and often has been — disillusionment. ... The Word-Faith teachers set people up for a fall when they tell them that God promises them that they can have what they say."<sup>132</sup>

Basically, the same things as were said above for the Word-Faith position and the Word-Faith teachers could be said for *The Secret* and its teachers: *The Secret* teachers set people up for a fall when they tell them that they can have whatever they desire and think about with intent. The results of believing in such wishful thinking can be disastrous.

Donald Whitney concludes his insightful review of *The Secret* with these words:

"'The Secret to everything' (to use Byrne's term) is God Himself. And God, the 'Great Secret,' has been revealed in Jesus Christ, 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3). God has freely told us in the Bible everything we need to know about discovering the unlimited 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge' found in Christ. And He remains an unknown Secret only to those who will not look for Him there."<sup>133</sup>

The most tragic effect of all concerning *The Secret* is that it turns people away from the Savior as their source of hope and eternal salvation, and places the focus on themselves as savior. The words of Jesus are apropos:

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37; see also Luke 12:15-21).

#### Endnotes:

1. Jerry Adler, "Decoding 'The Secret,'" *Newsweek*, March 5, 2007, pp. 52-55, 57-58.
2. Maria Eftimiades, "The Secret: Salvation or Hype?," *People*, March 19, 2007, pp. 125-126.
3. Carol Memmott, "'Secret' attracts plenty of attention," *USA Today*, Feb. 15, 2007, pg. 1D; and Marco R. della Cava, "Secret history of 'The Secret': An old-time self-help religion gets new face," *USA Today*, March 29, 2007, pg. 1D.
4. Peter Jones, "This 'Secret' isn't worth keeping," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 10, 2007.
5. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Feb. 8, 2007, and Feb. 16, 2007.
6. *Larry King Live*, March 8, 2007.
7. *Nightline*, March 23, 2007.
8. Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*. New York: Atria Books, 2006.
9. *The Secret*, Extended edition DVD, TS Production LLC, 2006.
10. Donald S. Whitney, "A Review of *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne." Review posted on Whitney's Biblical Spirituality ministry web site ([www.biblicalspirituality.org](http://www.biblicalspirituality.org)).
11. "Pantheism" is the belief that "everything is God." The implications of these two beliefs are a worldview that is diametrically opposed to the Christian worldview.
12. *Nightline*, op. cit.
13. The October 2004 date is derived from Byrne's chapter in Jack Canfield and Gay Hendricks with Carol Kline, *You've Got To Read This Book!: 55 People Tell the Story of the Book That Changed Their Life*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006, pg. 95.
14. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. ix.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 76. See also the short biographical information that Byrne gives on Wallace Wattles on pg. 197. This book by Wattles was published in 1910. Wattles died the following year.
16. *You've Got To Read This Book!*, op. cit., pg. 96, italics in original.
17. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. ix.

18. *You've Got To Read This Book!*, op. cit., pg. 96.
19. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. x.
20. *You've Got To Read This Book!*, op. cit., pg. 96.
21. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. ix-x, italic in original. On the DVD, Byrne mentions that she knew that she wanted to create a television show; but says nothing about making a film.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. x.
23. *You've Got To Read This Book!*, op. cit., pg. 99.
24. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. xi.
25. "Decoding 'The Secret,'" op. cit., pg. 58.
26. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 9.
27. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 8, italics in original.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 9, italic in original.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 10, italic in original.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 11, italics in original.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30, italics in original.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 30.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 33.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 184, italics in original.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 179, italics in original.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 100, capitalization in original.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 178, italics in original.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-54, which both lists and discusses these three steps.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.
41. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 48.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-159, 162, 175.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 162.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 164, italics in original. Stated by *The Secret* teacher Lisa Nichols. This quote is also on the DVD.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 170, italics in original. Stated by *The Secret* teacher and contemporary New Thought personality Michael Bernard Beckwith.
51. *Ibid.*, pg. 173.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 175, italics in original.
53. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
54. *Ibid.*, pg. 182.
55. *Ibid.*, pg. 183.
56. In saying that the two share certain similarities, I certainly do not mean that the teachings of the Word-Faith movement and *The Secret* are identical. Far from it! For one thing, the God of the Word-Faith movement is the personal God of the Bible, in contrast to the pantheistic, impersonal "god" of *The Secret*. Additionally, there are sincere, born-again Christians who embrace the teachings of the Word-Faith movement. By contrast, to embrace *The Secret* is to

depart from biblical Christianity and the Christian worldview altogether. This is so, because the foundation of *The Secret* is anti-Christian at its very core.

57. D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995, pg. xix.

58. "Traditions deriving from an [ancient] Egyptian ... mystical philosophical text, it honours the Egyptian God Thoth who is identified with the Greek Hermes under the name of Trismegistus (Thrice-Greatest)." Rosemary Goring, editor, *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Ware, Herefordshire: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 1995, pg. 215, s.v., "Hermetica, Hermetism." (Originally published as *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Edinburgh: W&R Chambers, Ltd., 1992.)

59. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

60. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, italics in original. These assertions stated by *The Secret* teacher Denis Waitley.

61. *Ibid.*, pg. xi.

62. *Ibid.*, pg. 6.

63. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.

64. *Ibid.*, pg. 177, italics in original.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

66. *Ibid.*, pg. v.

67. *Ibid.*, pg. xiii.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

70. *Ibid.*, pg. xv.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. On pg. 1, used of *The Secret* teacher Bob Proctor. On pg. 2, used of *The Secret* teacher Dr. John DeMartini.

73. *Ibid.*, pg. 1, used of *The Secret* teacher John Assaraf.

74. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, used of *The Secret* teacher Dr. John DeMartini.

75. *Ibid.*, used of *The Secret* teacher Michael Bernard Beckwith.

76. *Ibid.*, pg. 7, used of *The Secret* teacher Bob Doyle.

77. *Ibid.*, pg. 13, used of *The Secret* teacher Lisa Nichols.

78. *Ibid.*, pg. 177, used of *The Secret* teacher Neale Donald Walsch.

79. *Ibid.*, pg. 185, used of *The Secret* teacher Michael Bernard Beckwith.

80. *Ibid.*, pg. 189, used of *The Secret* teacher Mike Dooley.

81. *Ibid.*, pg. 195, used of *The Secret* teacher Marci Shimoff.

82. *Ibid.*, pg. 76.

83. *You've Got To Read This Book!*, op. cit., pg. 96.

84. *The Secret*, op. cit., e.g., pp. 45, 46, 59, 89, 102, 168. Although, at one point, Byrne states, "The Genie is the law of attraction" (pg. 46), it appears that, in certain places, "the Genie" refers to "the Universe" or *The Secret's* "god" (e.g., see pg. 59, 89).

85. *A Different Gospel*, op. cit., pg. 185. McConnell was using this phrase to describe the God of the Word-Faith movement. Whether or not such a description accurately describes the conception of God held by that movement, it is *definitely* an accurate description of the impersonal "god" of *The Secret*.

86. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 109.

87. Glenn R. Mosley, *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom: The History and Future of the New Thought Movement*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006, pg. 44.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.

90. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 342.

91. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pp. 70-71, 136.

92. For more regrettable inconsistencies in Peale, see G. Richard Fisher, "The Father of Positive Thinking: Negative Reflections on Norman Vincent Peale," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 1992, pp. 4-6; and M. Kurt Goedelman, "Peale Charged With Occultic Plagiarisms," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1996, pp. 3, 17.

93. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 343.

94. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pp. 54-61.

95. Philip H. Lochhaas, *How To Respond: The New Age Movement*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995, pg. 8, italics in original.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13, italics in original.

97. Walter Martin, *The New Age Cult*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989, pg. 15.

98. *How To Respond: The New Age Movement*, op. cit., pg. 16, italics in original.

99. Ron Rhodes, *New Age Movement*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, pg. 28.

100. Wallace D. Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2007, pg. viii. On the page containing the book's publication information, it is noted that "*The Science of Getting Rich* [was] first published in 1910."

101. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. xiv, 76, 81, 160, 181. *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd edition, defines "avatar" as "The descent to earth of a Hindu deity, esp. Vishnu, in human or animal form." It is true that "avatar" need not be used in a Hindu sense; however, given the Hindu roots of *The Secret*, a Hindu use of this word in the book seems probable.

102. *New Age Movement*, op. cit., pg. 8.

103. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 197.

104. "Decoding 'The Secret,'" op. cit., pg. 58.

105. Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick Handbook on Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2005, pg. 134.

106. *The New Age Cult*, op. cit., pg. 13.

107. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Avon Books, 1981, pg. 87.

108. For instance, on the *Larry King Live*, March 8, 2007, program, *The Secret* teachers John Assaraf and Lisa Nichols sought to distance themselves from this aspect of *The Secret* teaching. *The Secret* teacher Bob Proctor did the same in the *Nightline*, March 23, 2007, broadcast.

109. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 27-28, italics in original.

110. *Ibid.*, pg. 28. Byrne repeats the final sentence of the paragraph above in her chapter summary on pg. 43.

111. Marcia Montenegro, "The Secret: A Cosmic Dream Machine." Article posted on Montenegro's Christian Answers for the New Age ministry web site (<http://cana.userworld.com/cana>).

112. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 5.

113. *Ibid.*, pg. 9, italics in original. Stated by *The Secret* teacher John Assaraf.

114. *Ibid.*, pg. 10, italic in original.

115. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.

116. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

117. *Ibid.*, pg. 22, italics in original. Stated by contemporary New Thought leader Michael Bernard Beckwith.

118. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157, italics in original.

119. *Ibid.*, pg. 157.

120. *Ibid.*, pg. 158, italics in original. Stated by *The Secret* teacher Bob Proctor.

121. Transcendental meditation is a form of Hindu practice; so, here again, we see evidence of *The Secret's* deep roots in Hinduism.

122. "Decoding 'The Secret,'" op. cit., pg. 57.

123. *Nightline*, op. cit.

124. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 128, 129, italics in original.

125. See The American Cancer Society's article on remission posted on its web site ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)).

126. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 130.

127. *Nightline*, op. cit.

128. "The Secret: Salvation or Hype?," op. cit., pg. 126.

129. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 58.

130. *Ibid.*, pg. 59, italics in original.

131. *Ibid.*, pg. 167, italics in original. Stated by *The Secret* teacher Joe Vitale.

132. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2001, pg. 203.

133. "A Review of *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne," op. cit.

On the broadcast, Hinn related how Manning had come to visit him during his May 2006 crusade in Trinidad. Manning told Hinn, "I have a gift for you," and brought to Hinn a woman who claimed to be a "prophetess" and who supposedly had a "word" for the American faith healer. Manning told Hinn, "God speaks to me through her. She has been a great blessing to the Government." As Manning told Hinn these things, Hinn told his audience he was thinking, "You foolish man."

Hinn also identified the "prophetess" as a "foolish woman" and described to his audience, "This woman, who reaches out to touch me, and I grabbed her hand in mid-air, 'Don't touch me!,' I said." He instructed his viewers that, "I didn't care if it was the prime minister or the president. Nobody lays hands on me. I didn't know what spirit is in her," a practice he said he learned from the late faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman.

For many of Hinn's followers, the fact that will be sadly missed is that Hinn claims for himself a spiritual elitism and a walk in the supernatural in a way few others have experienced. Yet he is unable to employ the spiritual gift of discerning of spirits.

In July, Hinn moved from an on-stage performance to playing to the media — and perhaps bidding for a Nobel Peace Prize. Hinn gathered what one news report called "Top U.S. evangelical Christian leaders" to meet with a variety of Arab ambassadors. Several on Hinn's roster of "evangelicals" at the meeting were the progeny of more well-known fathers. They included Paul Crouch Jr., son of Trinity Broadcasting Network president Paul Crouch; the Rev. Jonathan Falwell, son of the late Jerry Falwell; Gordon Robertson, son of Pat Robertson; and the Rev. Joshua Youssef, son of Michael Youssef. Other notables were Christian lobbyist Ralph E. Reed Jr., faith healer Reinhardt Bonnke, and Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals. Those attending on behalf of the Arab countries included representatives from Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and several other countries. The meeting took place at the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

In a press release, Hinn's organization touted the gathering as "the beginning of productive and positive dialogue between Arab and Christian leaders" and said the assembly "will represent the beginning meeting of other private, confidential meetings to be hosted by Pastor Hinn and Arab ambassadors."

Falwell hailed the two-hour event as an "historic meeting," and took the opportunity to promote Liberty University by marketing its Distance Learning Program. "Any student in their countries could receive a fully accredited American university degree online," Falwell said. However, not everyone shares Falwell's enthusiasm. Ingrid Schlueter of Slice of Laodicea ministry wrote:

"With the powerful political overtones of such a meeting, I am wondering what the State Department thinks of this kind of diplomacy by private citizens. Richard Cizik from the National Association of Evangelicals and long a bridge-builder to those who despise the Gospel, claims that the Muslims are sizing up the 'next generation'. I'm sure they liked what they saw: publicity happy, pandering, compromising evangelicals who are eager to be thought of as movers and shakers on the international scene."

Amidst the fanfare from Hinn and his entourage, what many Christians will fail to grasp is that those who truly take the uncompromised and unadulterated Gospel to the lost within Arab nations must do so in secrecy. It should also be questioned as to whether the "Christian leaders" may be unwittingly used by radical Arabs to make Islam appear benign. Hinn, being an Arab himself, ought to know better, but as he has demonstrated time and again, it is press and image that he is after. His "historic meeting" in July is yet another example of the attention-seeking facades employed by the controversial faith healer.

—MKG

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

theater. Patrick Marsh, the scenic designer for Universal Studio's Jaws and King Kong rides, joined the project in 2001 and helped to design the museum.

The \$27 million construction cost was a mere fraction of the museum's actual value. "If you were to build it just by contracting everything out, it probably would have cost you around \$100 million," Ham told the Baptist Press. "People wanted to be part of this. Someone would sell us equipment that would have cost us \$2 million for \$1.5," he added. In addition, hundreds of volunteers provided labor and some companies donated materials.

Less than 10 percent of the funding to build the museum came from single donors; three families donated \$1 million each. About three-quarters of the donations averaged around \$100.

The museum is not without its critics, who call it "anti-science." "Everything science has taught us over the course of the last 200 years teaches us that this [museum's] kind of literal, biblical, creationist notion is misguided at best, and just plain false at worst," Alan Leshner, chief executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, told *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. During the opening day, the Campaign to Defend the Constitution group hired a plane to circle overhead with a banner that read, "DEFCON Says Thou Shalt Not Lie." Atheists and some scientific groups have signed and circulated a petition

stating the museum cultivates “superstition” and confusion among schoolchildren. A spokesman from DEFCON argued the museum “is part of a campaign to deceive children and undermine scientific understanding in our country.”

The museum is open Monday through Saturday and takes a full day to thoroughly visit at a unhurried pace.

—MKG

## STELLAR CELLAR

Plans to remodel basements normally do not make the news, but one recently did. In 2004, the Boulder, Colo., house where JonBenet Ramsey was murdered was purchased by the daughter and son-in-law of televangelist Robert Schuller. Carol and Tim Milner paid slightly more than \$1 million for the home where one of the most notorious unsolved murders of recent times occurred. In December 1996, the 6-year-old’s body was found in the basement, strangled and bludgeoned to death.

Recently, plans were submitted by the Milners to the City of Boulder to renovate the basement. According to the Associated Press, the refurbishment will include, “a bar, wine cellar, flat-screen television and gas fireplace.” The utility room where the child’s body was found is not part of the renovation.

Tim is employed by Schuller at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif. County records indicate the current value of the home to be \$1.6 million.

—MKG

## BYU CHANGES HONOR CODE ON HOMOSEXUAL STUDENTS

In a move that is being praised by pro-homosexual advocates, Brigham Young University has modified its honor code and will no longer classify homosexual behavior or advocacy as a violation. Kevin Dion, a leader of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons, was cited on his organization’s web site, says the revision “deserves our strongest applause and recognition.” Members of the homosexual-rights group, Soulforce Equality Ride, welcomed the change as a “significant victory.”

Despite such accolades, the Mormon university is calling the move a “clarification,” rather than a “change.” “Our Honor Code has not changed, but there has been a clarification,” according to Carri Jenkins, a spokeswoman for the university.

The former Honor Code stated, “Advocacy of a homosexual lifestyle (whether implied or explicit) or any behaviors that indicate homosexual conduct, including

those not sexual in nature, are inappropriate and violate Honor Code.” The revised text now reads, “One’s sexual orientation is not an Honor Code issue. However, the Honor Code requires all members of the university community to manifest a strict commitment to the law of chastity. Homosexual behavior or advocacy of homosexual behavior are inappropriate and violate the Honor Code.”

The change means that “the university will respond to a student’s behavior, not their sexual orientation,” Jenkins said.

Prior to — and perhaps helping to precipitate — the change, BYU’s Honor Code Office disciplined five of its students for their part in a Soulforce demonstration last year. The protest was in violation of BYU’s rules regarding on-campus demonstrations.

Other “clarifications” may be forthcoming as the university is reviewing its policies regarding alcohol, living a chaste and virtuous life, and respecting others.

—MKG

## NO MORE LIMBO

For nearly 800 years, The Roman Catholic Church has taught that Limbo is a permanent and intermediate place between heaven and hell occupied by babies and infants who have died without being baptized. Those in Limbo do not suffer the pains of hell. Yet, while they enjoy happiness, they are kept from the “beatific vision” of the Creator. However, the belief in Limbo is now being renounced following a three-year study by the Vatican’s Theological Commission. A 41-page report released by the 30-member committee in April, said that Limbo reflected an “unduly restrictive view of salvation.”

The doctrine was originally established as a way to harmonize the concept of a merciful God with the belief that baptism and the church were necessary for salvation. Yet Limbo has been repeatedly questioned — even more so during the past several decades. The abundance of abortions was just one factor in rethinking the position.

A hint that change was on the way may have been in that Limbo is not addressed in the Roman Catholic Catechism’s current edition.

Pope Benedict XVI has sanctioned the report. Casting aside Limbo by the current pontiff is not surprising — and perhaps was even expected. According to a Religious News Service report, “‘Limbo was never a defined truth of faith,’ then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger told Italian journalist Vittorio Messori in 1985. ‘Personally ... I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis.’”

Despite removing Limbo, the report encourages parents to have their babies baptized as the normal means of salvation.

—MKG



# Books in Review

## THE 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ISLAM

by Ron Rhodes

Harvest House Publishers, 155 pages, \$10.99

Why are books examining the Islamic faith from a Christian perspective important and necessary? Because, as Ron Rhodes tells us, one in five persons alive today embraces the Muslim religion. In the past 20 years, the number of mosques in the United States has grown from 30 to 3,000. Millions of dollars are being invested by Middle Eastern countries to promote Islam in America. These figures sound alarming. But from the Christian's perspective, it represents a great opportunity for evangelism.

As he has in other books in his "10 Things" series, Rhodes takes the complex and makes it simple and takes the comprehensive and makes it concise. Yet, as he notes, "brevity should not be confused with superficiality" (pg. 7).

The 10 things that Rhodes wants his readers to know about Islam include the divisions of Islam, the scripture of Islam, the prophet of Islam, and the God of Islam. He also surveys the five pillars (or acts) of Islam, examines Islamic teachings on salvation and judgment, and summarizes what Muslims believe about Jesus and the Bible. In each chapter he also distinguishes and clarifies what Christians believe and provides Scripture references for these beliefs.

Rhodes covers the spiritual and the practical by advising his readers on how to dialogue with and witness to Muslims.

Rhodes proffers in his Introduction, "In the short time it takes you to read this book, you will become well-versed in the Muslim worldview, Muslim theology, Muslim ethics, and the Muslim view of Christianity." He delivers as promised. This book can prepare its readers for a growing mission field in our own neighborhoods and communities.

—MKG

## TRANSFORMED INTO HIS LIKENESS

by Armand P. Tiffe

Focus Publishing, 32 pages, \$9.95

In a day when the therapies and gimmicks of the modern pop-psychologists and "life coaches" are rampant, this book is a welcome and valuable tool. *Transformed Into His Likeness* is a thorough and precise study for personal change directed toward godliness. Scripture repeatedly stresses a two-pronged approach to such change and the book's subtitle, "A Handbook for Putting Off Sin and Putting On Righteousness," aptly describes this method.

Tiffe first outlines the "Key Biblical Principles for Personal Transformation," describing the proper mindset, the biblical process of change, and the "Put Off-Put On" dynamic. This introduction is succinct and easy to understand — even for one previously unfamiliar with the methods for biblical change.

Tiffe then lists more than 100 sins and problems with which Christians struggle. The list includes personal issues, worldly-mindedness, challenges to spiritual growth, and issues specific to husbands (and fathers), wives (and mothers), and teens and children.

The sin/problem list is divided into three columns. The left side lists the sin/problem to be put off, the middle column gives the scriptural practice to be put on, and the last column provides extensive biblical references pertinent to breaking the old and establishing the new. The final pages of the handbook contain several blank "Personal Transformation Worksheets" which helps the reader to bring together and make personal the elements necessary for biblical transformation. A sample of a completed worksheet is provided, and permission to copy blank worksheets for personal use is granted.

While the book's format is oversized (8.5 x 11), it is thin and spiral bound. These latter factors allow it to be easily used, lying open and flat for study.

The Bible calls for a change of the person, not just his actions. And by God's grace and His Word, sinners can be transformed. This is a wonderful resource not only for the individual wanting to fulfill the biblical process of change in his or her life, but also for the Christian who wants to help those who seek to change.

—MKG

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