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EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

Is the Bible a Book of Mysteries? Examining the Prophetic Shtick of Jonathan Cahn

by J. Greg Sheryl

When Messianic Jewish pastor/rabbi Jonathan Cahn's first book, *The Harbinger*, was published in 2012,¹ it became a publishing success. Almost two years later, it was reported to have been on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for 100 weeks and to have sold more than 1.2 million copies.² In that book he used fiction to convey what he believed to be a truth that God had revealed to him: That the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in New York City initiated the replaying of what he called a "biblical template" or "pattern" of God's judgment³ spoken of in Isaiah that had originally occurred when the Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom of Israel in 732 B.C. The Scripture passage Cahn cited was Isaiah 9:9-10:

"All the people will know — Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria — *who say in pride and*

arrogance of heart: "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are

cut down, but we will replace them with cedars" (emphasis added).



Cahn's application of this Scripture to 21st-century America was novel and the book was hailed by some Christians⁴ and criticized by others. The criticisms came particularly from those Christian discernment ministries such as Personal Freedom Outreach.⁵

Because of *The Harbinger's* success in the marketplace, Cahn was "asked to write and help put together a companion to the book as well as a study guide."⁶ So Cahn produced *The Harbinger Companion and Study Guide* in 2013.

(continues on page 12)

Inside this Issue:

- POLITICAL AND PROPHETICAL FLIP-FLOPPING PAGE 2
- MORE CONTROVERSY FOR ANDY STANLEY..... PAGE 3
- CHRISTIANITY BY THE NUMBERS — MAZE OF THE ENNEAGRAM .. PAGE 4

Editorials

POLITICAL AND PROPHETIC FLIP-FLOPPING

Early in 2016, prominent Word-Faith teacher Kenneth Copeland introduced Sen. Ted Cruz's father, Rafael, at Copeland's Eagle Mountain International Church. Copeland said, "I believe, with all my heart, that his [Rafael's] son is called and anointed to be the next president of the United States."

That June, after Ted Cruz, the Texas Republican, had withdrawn from the presidential race, Copeland became a member of Donald Trump's Evangelical Executive Advisory Board, along with a number of well-known Evangelicals, including James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, Jr., Robert Jeffress, David Jeremiah, Michele Bachmann, and others. A June 21, 2016, *Huffington Post* article observed, "As Politico reported on Monday, members of the board were not asked to endorse Trump as a condition for appointment." Yet the headline of the *Huffington Post* article noted about Copeland that, "Donald Trump's New Evangelical Advisor Was Sure God Had Chosen Ted Cruz To Be President." And immediately underneath the article's title, in large print, was the word, "Oops."

Then on Nov. 9, 2016, the day after Donald Trump had been elected president, the online news source, WND, reported that the night before, "A large prayer group had gathered in Dallas, hosted by Ken Copeland ministries. It was broadcast by the Daystar channel. Presenters David

Barton and former Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., invited viewers to join in prayer."

Whatever you make of these events, two facts are clear: Copeland was certain that God had "called and anointed" Ted Cruz to be the next president. However, not only did this not occur but Copeland wound up being part of Trump's Evangelical Executive Advisory Board and praying for his presidential success.

Unfortunately, when people such as Copeland, who relish at prophesying, confidently assert God's will about a matter and when it fails to come to pass, rarely if ever do they admit to being mistaken or apologize for their error. And rarely are they called to account for presumptuously speaking for God. One could argue that Copeland didn't actually claim to be speaking for the Lord. However, even if he didn't use the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord," he sounded confident that he knew the Lord's will regarding who the next president would be. And he was wrong. Even a liberal publication like the *Huffington Post* picked up on his hubris and error in doing so.

In the Old Testament, God warned the children of Israel:

"[T]he prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has

(continues on page 21)

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P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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MORE CONTROVERSY FOR ANDY STANLEY

Pastor Andy Stanley seems to crave controversy, going from one troubling theological statement or position to the next. In December, the Atlanta-based megachurch pastor told members of his North Point Community Church that, “Christianity doesn’t hinge on the truth or even the stories around the birth of Jesus. It hinges on the resurrection of Jesus.”

According to *The Washington Post*, “In his sermon, Stanley acknowledged that some people dispute the miracle of the virgin birth as a later addition or because it does not appear in two of the Gospel accounts, those of Mark and John.” The *Post* also noted that, “The Baptist Press wrote that Stanley ‘doesn’t have a problem’ with the people who doubt the biblical Christmas story.”

Stanley’s remarks drew immediate rebuttals from several key evangelical leaders, including Al Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

In reply to the debate, Stanley told the *Post*, “Anyone who listens to all three [sermons in the series] will know that I stand firmly within the orthodox Christian tradition regarding the incarnation of Jesus — including the birth narratives as presented [in] Matthew and Luke.” He further remarked that, “The real story is the handful of Southern Baptist professors and writers (not so much preachers) who seem to have nothing else to do but listen to bits and pieces of my messages.”

Stanley is the son of Charles Stanley, who is the longtime pastor of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. The younger Stanley is senior pastor of the nondenominational North Point Community Church, which has six campuses in suburban Atlanta and claims to draw attendance of 36,000 weekly.

In the past, Stanley has been opposed for his weak attitude toward doctrine and for successfully modeling North Point after the programs first used by other megachurch pastors Bill Hybels and Rick Warren. Stanley has also come under fire for his negligence in adopting a biblical stand toward homosexuality. Stanley and his church’s position appears to exhibit a real tolerance for homosexuals who are in a same-sex relationship or marriage, rather than to call them to repentance.

—MKG

LEAKED DOCUMENTS SHOW LDS LEADER’S SALARY

Pay stubs for a high-ranking official of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the latest private documents to be posted online by former Mormon Ryan McKnight on his MormonLeaks website.

According to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, “Copies of the biweekly stubs for Henry B. Eyring — then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles — report that he earned \$83,132.75 from the start of 2000 until the first week of December. Two more pay periods at \$3,096.15 each would have put Eyring’s salary at \$89,325.05 for the year.” Despite being over 16 years old, many are surprised at how low the reported salary was. The salary was designated as a living allowance, including housing (or parsonage) and child allowances.

Other, more recent, documents which were also posted online include a “2014 memo from the church’s Presiding Bishopric (which handles all financial issues for the faith), noting that the ‘base living allowance’ for all Mormon general authorities was being raised from \$116,400 to \$120,000,” the *Tribune* reported.

According to the news article, McKnight “is not taken aback by the salary amounts, but does argue that the Utah-based faith should be more open about its finances. ‘We are interested in transparency, pure and simple,’ he said. ‘Let the public decide whether this reflects positively or negatively on the church.’”

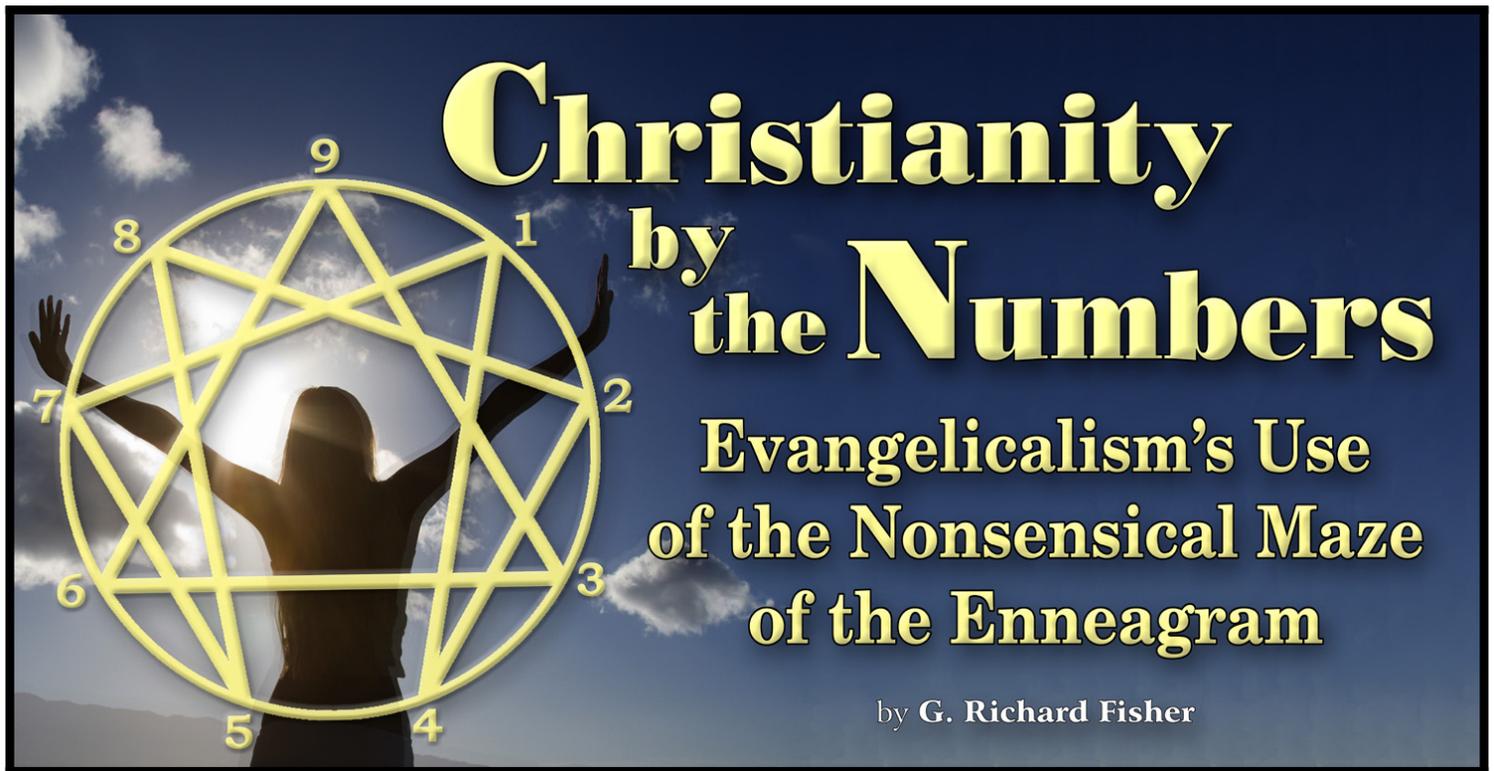
In response to the online posts, a spokesman for the LDS church said that the funds for the living allowances do not come from the tithes of church members, but rather from proceeds of the church’s financial investments.

—MKG

MEGACHURCH PASTOR EDDIE LONG DIES

Pastor and author Eddie L. Long, whose international ministry was clouded the past several years by accusations of sexual misconduct, has died. Long died Jan. 15 after reportedly battling “an aggressive form of cancer.” He was 63.

Long was pastor of the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga., since 1987. Under his leadership
(continues on page 23)



Some believers continue to stray from the Christian faith and Word of God to pursue novel promises of spiritual growth and development. One website asks:

“What if you had a roadmap — a ‘soul-map’ — for understanding who you are and what makes the people around you tick? A time-tested system that integrates your whole being and can be applied to every area of your life? And what if this map could help you tap into your essential nature, resulting in truly authentic relationships and a deep sense of living ‘on purpose’?”¹

Less than a century ago, most professing Christians would have said that their soul map was the Bible. Today, many are not sure. They have been told — and believe — that the Bible is an antiquated book with old-fashioned principles, insufficient to deal with 21st-century problems. Some believe they need something new. And the aforementioned website tells us, “This map exists, and it’s the Enneagram.”²

You may now be asking: What is the Enneagram? According to one source:

“The Enneagram is a powerful system for understanding Human Nature. Like other personality type systems, the Enneagram describes different groups of behaviours and characteristic tendencies of people. However, the Enneagram goes deeper, describing the unconscious motivations underlying our behaviour. These motivations describe why we think, feel, and act the way we do.”³

Another source adds:

“The Enneagram is a mysterious model of the psyche that is not originally Christian, but probably derives from the Eastern tradition of Sufi wisdom. ... There is much to be learned from the sages of the East.”⁴

And while some may think that Christians should avoid a “mysterious model” derived from “Sufi wisdom,” others disagree. One Anglican vicar wrote:

“The Enneagram is a sophisticated and practical tool for helping us to discover our inner selves, and to understand other people better. Since I first en-

countered it in 2001, I have been endlessly fascinated by its accuracy and insight, and find it crucial to my personal development and to my work as a parish priest.”⁵

With such hype — even from “Christians” — it is easy to see that those who call themselves Evangelicals are prone to embrace all sorts of fads and religious novelties.

Christians for a time were enamored with the WWJD movement. Then we were urged to pray *The Prayer of Jabez*, lest we get stuck in spiritual famine and loss. Others promoted “Holy Laughter.” Not long ago, angels were the obsession before many moved on to demons and spiritual warfare. Books on satanic ritual abuse once were all the craze. Theophostic counseling made a run for top place and then its “light” dimmed and all but went out.

Once tales of visits to heaven — contradictory details and all — were the rage. “The Purpose-Driven Life” and Promise Keepers received attention for a while. At times fads compete and trip over one another. And some movements, such as Tony

Campolo's Red Letter Revolution, never got off the ground.

We were treated to the paranoia of Jonathan Cahn's *The Harbinger* and John Hagee's *Blood Moons*. These ran their course and faded from prominence — but not before significant sales and hefty royalties were made. New books launch new fads all the time. Some sell big while others fail. Piles of the unsuccessful books often end up in discount stores.

WHAT'S NEW?

All this faddism seems to mirror the pagan Athenians described in Acts: "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). W. Herschel Ford wrote:

"These men were consumed with curiosity and rushed up to Mars Hill every day to hear the latest gossip or slander. ... They made no contribution to the city, they helped no one; they just gathered and gossiped and looked for something new. There are certain centers like this in America, places where men are always looking for something new and always inventing some new religion. We have about as many gods today as those Athenians had."⁶

NUMERICAL CHRISTIANITY

Personality-evaluation tools are not new. The Meyers Briggs test is one of the better known and was drawn from the theories of the occult, mystic, spiritist psychologist Carl Jung,⁷ who claimed he received direction from a spirit guide named Philemon. It is widely used today, even by some Christian counselors.

But the latest fad to find its way into pastoral counseling is the Enneagram, or Enneagram of Personality. Its exponents claim it will help us analyze and categorize ourselves and others. The Enneagram is not based on any kind of science, but was developed through observation, speculation, special revelation, and guesswork. The system is a mix of old and new, with a checkered past.

The Enneagram is a man-centered tool that, in the view of some of its promoters, identifies humans as divine. Some Enneagram teachers say that the revelation of God's nature and attributes cannot be found in the Bible, churches, or Jesus, but rather in the deepest levels of every individual. In other words, we find God within ourselves.

Ennea is the Greek word for the number 9 and *gram* refers to something written or drawn with lines. The Enneagram system is built on the theory that there are nine personality styles or types. Beyond the number of types, there is little agreement among different teachers regarding the theories of personality.

Astrology points to 12 types of personalities. Some in the past have said there were three personality types and others 16. It has not been that long ago that we were to believe that there were four personality types⁸ and that these insights were supposedly crucial in understanding ourselves and others — or so said the advertising.

The Enneagram essentially is Numerology: divining significance and secret meaning from numbers. The theory of the Enneagram is that learning one's number helps a person work on one's positive traits and thus grow in character.

John Davis in his book, *Biblical Numerology*, says:

"The system of symbolical numbers, as used in the Christian church must be regarded as a post-Apostolic development. Most of the meanings adopted today for the symbolic numbers are those that were proposed by the Church Fathers. ... It is rather interesting that not one New Testament writer ever pointed back to the significance of a symbolic number occurring in the Old Testament."⁹

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW?

One thing is certain: the roots of the Enneagram are disputed. One Enneagram website says:

"Some authors believe they have found variations of the Enneagram symbol in the sacred geometry of the Pythagorians who 4000 years ago were interested in the deeper meaning and significance of numbers. This line of mystical mathematics was passed on through Plato, his disciple Plotinus and subsequent neo-Platonists. Some believe this tradition found its way into esoteric Judaism through Philo, a Jewish neo-Platonist philosopher, where it later appears as the Tree of Life in the Cabalistic symbolism of ninefoldness. Variations of this symbol also appear in Islamic Sufi traditions, perhaps arriving there through the Arabian philosopher al-Ghazzali. Around the fourteenth century the Naqshbandi Order of Sufism, variously known as the 'Brotherhood of the Bees' (because they collected and stored knowledge) and the 'Symbolists' (because they taught through symbols) is said to have preserved and passed on the Enneagram symbol. Speculation has it the Enneagram found its way into esoteric Christianity through Pseudo-Dionysius (who was influenced by the neo-Platonists) and through the mystic Ramon Lull (who was influenced by his Islamic studies.)"¹⁰

No matter which source one accepts, the theory suggests that being old equals being right. Enneagrams are presented as being ecumenical and thus a tool for all. Amazon.com carries more than 30 different titles on the Enneagram. And its influence in Christian camps is obvious; the Christian Book Distributor's website also offers 30 products on the subject.

Author and former New Ager Marcia Montenegro also weighs in on the Enneagram, its early promoters, and the origins of its myths. She writes:

"An increasingly popular tool of personality analysis, the Enneagram is a diagram depicting numbers one through nine, with lines connecting each number to two other numbers. The Enneagram was promoted by mystic

George Gurdjieff (1866?-1949) and by his followers, P.D. Ouspensky (1878-1947) and Oscar Ichazo (b. 1931). Gurdjieff claimed to have learned the Enneagram from the Sufis (a mystical spin-off sect of Islam), though many dispute this. Psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo (b. 1932), a pioneer of New Age related psychological theories, breathed new life into the Enneagram by refining it as a tool of psychological assessment in which a person discovers his number in the chart and then studies the best and worst traits of that number via the diagram. Each number represents a particular personality type and is connected to two other numbers, one which supposedly highlights the worst traits, and the other representing the best.¹¹

The trail of the Enneagram system, however, is a bit clearer in modern times:

“In the early 1970’s Robert Ochs, S.J. and Helen Palmer (1988; 1995) studied the Enneagram system of personality with Naranjo. Through Ochs the Enneagram was introduced to various Christian communities, where Jerome Wagner, Maria Beesing, Robert Nogosek, and Patrick O’Leary (1984), Don Riso (1987; 1990), Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert (1990; 1992), Kathleen Hurley and Ted Donson (1991; 1993), Suzanne Zuercher (1992; 1993), et. al. became acquainted with it. These and other authors promulgated the Enneagram to a broader spiritual, psychological, educational, business and commercial audience.”¹²

The name George Gurdjieff (pronounced *Grr jev*) has been mentioned in association with the Enneagram. George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, an Armenian mystic from Central Asia, taught that a higher consciousness could be reached through psychic powers and spiritism. Gurdjieff, whose birth date is uncertain, thrived on being a man of mystery. He claims that his wisdom had been gathered from a coterie

of spiritual masters. He fed on a stew of heresies and quirky claims. He had a dark, heretical side as well.

Gurdjieff rejected Christianity. He said that he hated Jesus and classified God as an “idiot.” Man, in Gurdjieff’s view, is inwardly divine and salvation can be attained by personal effort and enlightenment. He also taught that the Bible had to be interpreted in a subjective, mystical fashion. Gurdjieff taught that some people would be annihilated and others reincarnated.¹³

There is nothing spiritually profitable or edifying for Christians in Gurdjieff’s teaching and practices. James asks in his epistle, “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?” (James 3:11). There is no wheat and chaff with Gurdjieff, just refuse.

ANTHROPOLOGY WITHOUT THEOLOGY

The Enneagram has a self-centered view of man. Peter Washington, who details the history of spiritualism from the early 19th century through the 20th and traces the origins of the modern New Age movement, tells us:

“The purpose of these methods was to promote self-observation and ‘self-remembering’ so that pupils could begin to wake up from their deep slumber and become conscious of their true selves. Only then would they cease to be human machines. Gurdjieff’s distinction between being — or essence — and superficial personality acquired from heredity and environment depends on the fact that most of us most of the time identify with our surface life, which is entirely subject to external influences. Before we can develop spiritually we must find our true self.”¹⁴

Christ’s followers will not grow in grace by learning the Enneagram. Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Paul added, “that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6). God’s Word is all we need for doctrine,

reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness and to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Growing in grace consists of rejecting error and a growing knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3:17-18).

Last October, *Christianity Today* magazine legitimized the Enneagram with an article by John Starke, pastor of Apostle’s Uptown Church in New York. The article, titled “An Evangelical Guide to the Enneagram,” proposed that the Enneagram can be an aid to personal growth:

“I believe the Enneagram can enhance, not replace, our participation in the normal means of Christian grace and growth.”¹⁵

Starke offers no biblical proof for that belief and claim, but at least admits there may be a downside:

“Like every tool, a popular self-assessment test known as the Enneagram has the capacity to heal or to harm, depending on how it’s used.”¹⁶

As to why would one take a chance of harming others, Starke remains silent. He continues:

“In the first Enneagram resource from an evangelical publisher, InterVarsity Press’s new release *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery*, co-author Ian Morgan Cron calls new Enneagram fans ‘number thumpers.’ They ‘run around typing people and pets, hacking off family members, and alienating people who have no idea what they’re jabbering about,’ he writes.”¹⁷

Starke continues:

“The Enneagram is not a spiritual tool, per se, but it is increasingly being used as one in church classes and faith-based counseling settings. Its origins are obscure. We do know that it was introduced in the West in the 1970s by Chilean psychiatrists, then adopted by Jesuit priests and popularized in 1992 by Franciscan spiritual director Richard Rohr’s *Discovering the*

Enneagram: An Ancient Tool for a New Spiritual Journey."¹⁸

Finally, Starke confesses:

"My description thus far probably doesn't give evangelicals warm feelings. Indeed, some connect the Enneagram's roots to Sufism (Islamic mysticism), while others see in the Enneagram a Gnosticism that encourages users to find their 'hidden,' true self."¹⁹

The Enneagram can become all things to all men. In regard to the Sufis, Catholic priest Mitchell Pacwa writes:

"The Sufis had used the enneagram for numerological divination. (Numerology is an occult 'science' which holds that the characteristics of people and virtually everything in the universe are determined by numbers, and that such characteristics can be divined if the people or things' individual numbers can be identified [e.g., from their names or dates of birth] and the meaning of those numbers can be determined.) The Sufis searched for the mystical meanings of the decimals .3333..., .6666..., and .9999... (based on dividing the number *one* by *three*), and of the decimal .142857... (based on dividing the number one by seven and containing no multiples of three). The multiples of three correspond to the triangle inside the circle, and the decimal .142857 (derived by dividing seven into one and resulting in a repeating decimal that never contains three or its multiples) corresponds to the points of the circle that connect the six-sided figure."²⁰

The Sufis created a system that is almost impossible to follow. And while others are not as strange as the Sufi version, other practitioners of the Enneagram explain the meaning of the numbers differently. For example, Starke explains each one of the nine numbers with "I want..." His descriptions are: 1. I want to be good. 2. I want to be needed. 3. I want to achieve. 4. I want to be unique. 5. I

want to think things through. 6. I want to be safe. 7. I want to have fun. 8. I want to be in charge. And 9. I want to be at peace.²¹

This writer took one Enneagram test online and was classed as a "One," a "Reformer," despite having personal traits in all nine of the types. But in the Starke Enneagram, I was portrayed as "I want to be good." Everyone reading through an Enneagram, no matter which type is used, will see some of themselves in nearly all of the numbers.

The more honest promoters of Enneagrams admit that it is an imprecise practice and that the whole of a person cannot be reduced to a number. Moreover, Christians should be sure that what they want is what God wants. When wants become needs in our eyes, we can get into trouble.

I'M OK, YOU'RE OK

Because of our sinful nature, we love to hear good things about ourselves, even if they are less than true. For the most part, the good Enneagram types are positive and flattering.

The nine customary Enneagram types and their descriptions appear to be the ones given by the Enneagram Institute. These eliminate the "I wants" of Starke and are listed as:

1. The Reformer — The Rational, Idealistic Type: Principled, Purposeful, Self-Controlled, and Perfectionistic;
2. The Helper — The Caring, Interpersonal Type: Demonstrative, Generous, People-Pleasing, and Possessive;
3. The Achiever — The Success-Oriented, Pragmatic Type: Adaptive, Excelling, Driven, and Image-Conscious;
4. The Individualist — The Sensitive, Withdrawn Type: Expressive, Dramatic, Self-Absorbed, and Temperamental;
5. The Investigator — The Intense, Cerebral Type: Perceptive, Innovative, Secretive, and Isolated;
6. The Loyalist — The Committed, Security-Oriented Type: Engaging, Responsible, Anxious, and Suspicious;
7. The Enthusiast — The Busy, Fun-Loving Type: Spontaneous, Versatile, Distractible, and Scattered;
- 8.

The Challenger — The Powerful, Dominating Type: Self-Confident, Decisive, Willful, and Confrontational; and 9. The Peacemaker — The Easy-going, Self-Effacing Type: Receptive, Reassuring, Agreeable, and Complacent.²²

This system is reminiscent of the generic horoscopes found in daily newspapers. The words in the Enneagram are like Play-Doh and can be squeezed and shaped in almost any way.

In some systems, even animals are given Enneagram numbers. Each number is given a color and has symbolic nations assigned to it. Cartoon characters such as Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang are used to illustrate certain numbers in the Enneagram,²³ along with Bible characters and figures from Church history such as the Apostle Paul and Reformer Martin Luther.²⁴

One wonders how the Enneagram would classify Hitler, Osama bin Laden, or Pontius Pilate. Some Enneagrams about grossly evil people are dropped into Type 6 (Loyalist, or Loyalist Skeptic), but even here there is no reference to sin, future condemnation, or hell. Neither is there any hopeful message regarding God's grace: "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," as Paul tells us in Romans 5:20.

Those who live in the worst form of evil could simply claim that they are stuck in the negative side of an Enneagram with no exit and no way out. Sinners can claim they were born this way and they are fatalistically determined by their Enneagram.

As for Pilate, historian Simon Montifiore plainly describes him as "an aggressive, tactless martinet out of his depth in Judaea. He was already loathed in Jerusalem, notorious for his 'venality, violence, theft, assaults, abuse, endless executions and savage ferocity.' Even one of the Herodian princes called him 'vindictive with a furious temper.'"²⁵ Finding those qualities listed in an Enneagram evaluation would be tough.

LIVING BY THE NUMBERS OR LIVING BY THE BIBLE?

Few like to be told that they are needy sinners. Facing that reality is the first step toward true repentance and salvation. Few want to hear that “we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) or that we are lost sinners and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). But if we do not define ourselves in biblical terms, we end up looking at ourselves unrealistically. The Apostle Paul urges the believer “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Romans 12:3). Unredeemed people are not presented as being lost eternally and totally undone, but rather as folks who have not grasped the positives of the Enneagram. Self-salvation is taught in place of the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus.

THE ROHR OF THE ENNEAGRAM

One of the current promoters of the Enneagram is Richard Rohr. Amazon.com describes him:

“Fr. Richard Rohr is a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (www.cac.org) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he also serves as Academic Dean of the Living School for Action and Contemplation. Fr. Richard’s teaching is grounded in the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy — practices of contemplation and self-emptying, expressing itself in radical compassion, particularly for the socially marginalized.”²⁶

Rohr wraps his Enneagram types around the word “need.” He defines them as:

Type 1 — The Need to Be Perfect;
Type 2 — The Need to Be Needed;
Type 3 — The Need to Succeed; Type 4 — The Need to be Special; Type 5

— The Need to Perceive; Type 6 — The Need for Security/Certainty;
Type 7 — The Need to Avoid Pain;
Type 8 — The Need to Be Against;
and Type 9 — The Need to Avoid.²⁷

Rohr must know that his own church is not sympathetic to the Enneagram. The Catholic Answers²⁸ staff cited a Vatican document that identified the Enneagram as “New Age,” “Gnostic,” and “heterodox.”²⁹ The word “heterodox” means “not conforming to accepted beliefs.” According to Wikipedia, Rohr “supports the mission of homosexual advocacy groups, asserts that the Crucifixion of Jesus was not necessary for the redemption of mankind, and criticizes Catholic rituals for a lack of efficacy.”³⁰

Among Rohr’s many writings is a book titled, *Discovering The Enneagram - An Ancient Tool for a New Spiritual Journey* (co-authored with Lutheran minister Andreas Ebert).

The back cover of Rohr’s book says:

“This is clearly the best book on the Enneagram amongst a market already flooded by new publications every week. ... Rohr’s emphasis is not in contemporary psychology but in an authentic contemplative spirituality. Rohr’s book authentically enables us to identify our compulsions and weakness. The Enneagram is undoubtedly a useful ancient spiritual tool and this book is a useful modern introduction to that tool.”³¹

The preface, written by co-author Ebert, calls the Enneagram “an aid for self-knowledge and spiritual guidance of others that is quite ancient (though the West has discovered it only in our time). ... Since the mid-1980s a whole series of books on the Enneagram has appeared; many psychologists and theologians believe that the Enneagram is an excellent tool for helping people on their way to intellectual *and* spiritual growth.”³²

Christian pastors used to offer spiritual guidance exclusively through the Scriptures with the aid of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23-26; 16:7-15). The

undermining of God’s Word here is not subtle at all.

PAGAN PAST

Ebert admits a non-Christian origin for the Enneagram. He writes, “I believe that the Enneagram can help us to find a deeper and more authentic relationship with God — even though it was not discovered by Christians.”³³

Rohr uses Christian verbiage when he speaks of sin, repentance, and redemption, but he defines these words from the perspective of the Enneagram. Sin is not sin against a Holy God or a violation of God’s law. Redemption is not accomplished by the grace of God and faith in Jesus Christ as Paul declares in Ephesians 2:8-9. Rohr appears to be saying that self-knowledge and self-discovery are what these words point to as we get rid of our “inner barriers and blockages.”³⁴ This all clearly demonstrates the Gnostic quality of Rohr’s ideas.

Rohr further links the Enneagram to the Jewish Kabbala and says that the Enneagram contains the nine virtues described as the fruit of the Spirit³⁵ from Galatians 5:22-23.

After mentioning George Gurdjieff and Oscar Ichazo, and his indebtedness to them, Rohr writes:

“Since the mid-1980s a series of books have appeared about the Enneagram, partly growing out of the work of American religious orders with the Enneagram and partly stemming from psychoanalysis or humanistic psychology. ... Most of what I say here is based on my many years of teaching and spiritually directing people through the Enneagram. Once I ‘knew’ because a Jesuit taught me; now I know by experience and confirmation.”³⁶

Even though admitting indebtedness to false teachers, different approaches to reality, humanism, and heretical roots, Rohr still tries to sell his ideas based on his experience.

Rohr does not speak of God in biblical terms or in the language of historical, orthodox Christianity. He

rather refers to God as “the Totally Other,” “the Not-I,” and “the Center.”³⁷ Yet in Scripture God reveals Himself in His ways, works, and names. Ultimately, He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ (John 1; Hebrews 1).

Rohr does mention a personal relationship with Jesus as a goal, but then adds:

“The Enneagram is a related tool, and in some ways a still more precise tool, for reaching this goal.”³⁸

This is a false gospel. Paul warned us in his letter to the Galatians:

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-8).

In one narrative, Rohr shares a “clairvoyant” essence to his early counseling sessions using the Enneagram:

“When I was first ‘initiated’ into this system, we were enjoined not to pass it on in writing nor to reveal the method behind our ‘insight.’ I have to confess that later I felt somewhat dishonest because of this. It has happened on several occasions that someone would come to pastoral counselling with me, and that after a while — thanks to the Enneagram — I would be able to comprehend the energy or the ‘mode of perception’ of this person rather precisely. While I put my ‘secret knowledge’ to work, my interlocutor would think: ‘Richard Rohr is reading my soul like an open book, and focussing exactly on my problem. Just where did he learn that?’ Thus I seemed almost clairvoyant to this person, as if I had the gift of ‘seeing the heart’ attributed to a

number of saints in the Church.”³⁹

Such musings are a departure from Scripture. Jeremiah says man’s heart is so wicked that he wonders whether anyone can know it (Jeremiah 17:9). He then says that only God can search the heart (v. 10). God alone is the heart-knower. The Apostle Peter declared: “God, who knows the heart” (Acts 15:8).

Pride has surfaced among Enneagram teachers that sometimes results in a lack of sympathy for one another. Rohr reports:

“Presently Oscar Ichazo is trying to claim that the nine points are original to him and were taught him ‘by an Archangel while he was on mescaline.’”⁴⁰

Mitchell Pacwa is a Roman Catholic priest who at one time taught the Enneagram. Upon realizing the occult roots, he ceased teaching it. While rejecting most of Pacwa’s theology, believers can draw from certain aspects of his evaluation of the Enneagram:

“The enneagram is particularly popular among Catholic groups, with parishes and retreat houses offering workshops across the country. Rarely are teachers or participants aware of its occultic origins, something that should be a source of real concern for the Christian church. Echoes of a false, Gnostic theology are heard in enneagram teachings, though its occult roots are masked. The lack of scientific research into the enneagram system is an additional cause for concern.”⁴¹

It is easy to see the speculation and imagination of Rohr as he identifies, for instance, Type 2 with its symbolic animals, the cat, the donkey, and the licking puppy. The country of the “Twos” is Italy and their color is red.⁴² Then he writes, “Mary Magdalen, Martha, and John (the beloved disciple) are the symbolic figures of type TWO from the Bible.”⁴³ So again the Bible is dragged through and interpreted by the Enneagram.

Rohr undermines the Bible’s truthfulness when he says of the Apostle John:

“He was Jesus’ favorite disciple (whether he really was that or only would have liked to have been is not known. In any case he is called that in the Gospel of John and only there).”⁴⁴

There are many things mentioned in one Gospel and not in another. It does not make the Bible any less true. He later says that Jesus never spoke the words of John 8:44.⁴⁵ Rohr, like contemporary skeptics Bart Ehrman or members of the Jesus Seminar, becomes the judge and jury over the Bible as he inserts whatever thoughts he wishes and as he questions the validity of Scripture.

By contrast, consider how the psalmist regards the Word of God:

“Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me. My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times. You rebuke the proud — the cursed, who stray from Your commandments. Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies. Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word. I have declared my ways, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes” (Psalm 119:17-26).

Rohr also provides details and brief biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, and James Dean as “FOURS”⁴⁶ — the need to be special. In this section, he writes:

“Many FOURS take their feelings very seriously and are deeply offended when they are ‘hurt.’ Criticism of their artistic expressions can wound them in their

innermost selves and drive them into retreat. On the other hand they tend to run themselves down. A painter who is a FOUR is the only one allowed to criticize his pictures. Hollywood is an El Dorado of FOURS. Theater and film are their domain, because FOURS view their whole life as a great stage."⁴⁷

The symbolic animals for the FOURS are the dove and the basset hound, their symbolic country is France, and their color is bright violet or mauve.⁴⁸ How this kind of information enables a believer to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is never addressed.

Rohr associates FIVES with lettuce, saying:

"Some one has said very finely that the symbolic plant of FIVES is green lettuce, the plant that has its heart in its head."⁴⁹

FIVES can also be locked into a sad end:

"When you touch a FIVE, he or she generally gives a start or jumps back. For this reason many FIVES have a celibate make-up. They can choose celibacy for false motives and turn into cranky bachelors or old maids."⁵⁰

Rohr says that at times FIVES — people like Ebenezer Scrooge, Howard Hughes, and J. Paul Getty — "sometimes need a challenging kick in the behind."⁵¹

Enneagram teachers often will assign positive words and practices to the numbers. Rohr does this when he speaks of conversion and redemption. However, he does not come close to the Bible's definition of those words. Conversion, according to the Bible, is turning to God in repentance and faith. Redemption means to be set free from sin's condemnation through the finished work of Jesus. Rohr, on the other hand, defines conversion and redemption to be when we begin to exhibit good traits and positive practices. He writes:

"We all remain who we are. But

on the way to healing or liberation we have to do what the Romans called *agere contra*: we have to act against the grain of our natural compulsions."⁵²

Self-improvement, according to Rohr, somehow secures the experience of God.

BAIT AND SWITCH

Rohr uses biblical words but defines them differently. For instance, he says:

"When Jesus called people to repent, he did so with the words: 'The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the Gospel!' (Mark 1:15). The Greek word *metanoiete*, which is found at this point in the original text of the New Testament, means literally 'Change your mind, think differently!' Or as I like to put it, 'Unlearn!'"⁵³

Rohr then tells us:

"Jesus invites people to see the world and God in a completely new and different way. He calls them to break out of their customary ways of thinking and to dare 'new thinking,' which takes into account the Good News that the reign of divine love is near."⁵⁴

He then explains that, "The Enneagram spells out the **pitfalls** or dead ends in our thinking."⁵⁵ There is a subtle bait and switch going on here. Repentance is the act of turning to the positive qualities in the Enneagram, according to Rohr. When Rohr says the Gospel is a "message from God,"⁵⁶ which we are to believe and embrace, he means we are to believe and embrace the Enneagram.

Rohr also has a defective understanding of sin. He says that, "**Root sins** are emotional compulsions or mistaken attitudes. 'Sin' means a separation or failure to reach a goal."⁵⁷ Given all he has said, it will not take the reader long to conclude what the "goal" is. Rohr's ambiguous definition leaves things open to any explanation that he wants to give. Rohr says "failure to reach a goal" is

equal to failure to live up to the best qualities in the Enneagram. However, linguist W. E. Vine says sin "denotes an act of disobedience to Divine law" and further identifies it as literally "to miss the mark" being used in the New Testament as "of sinning against God."⁵⁸

Thus, sin is against God and is a violation of His law, not the Enneagram. King David, in his psalm of confession, realized that his sin was against God, "For I acknowledged my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:3-4).

Even Jesus can't escape the Enneagram. With some exegetical gymnastics and questionable proof texts, Rohr is able to find Jesus in all of the nine personality types.⁵⁹ And because it is Jesus being "typed," Rohr picks just the positive sides of each. Attaching Jesus to the Enneagram and looking at Him through that filter is risky. Rohr not only offers his readers "another gospel," but "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

It is difficult to imagine someone trying to analyze the Lord. He is the judge, not us. Such should be soundly condemned. One can only obtain a true interpretation and understanding of Jesus through the Bible. The writers of the New Testament did not receive their facts about Jesus from an Enneagram, but from eyewitness accounts and the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Enneagrams were not fully developed until 1,800 years after Christ and had no connection to Judaism and the Jewish Jesus. The beginnings of the Enneagram can only be traced to Gurdjieff. To read Enneagrams back into the first century is to impose later practices on an earlier time.

Rohr even interprets the Lord's Prayer through the Enneagram. He reports, "J. G. Bennett, a follower of Gurdjieff, has coordinated the Our Father with the dynamic of the Enneagram."⁶⁰ It's a stretch, but with Bennett as inspiration, Rohr manages to fit the Enneagram personality types into the phrases of the Lord's Prayer.

In the end, some believe that the Enneagram will usher in Utopia:

“The Enneagram tells it ‘like it is.’ As a ‘mirror for the confessional,’ it makes us aware of blocks and abysses that enslave us. All religions sense the human need for enslavement and redemption. Hinduism and Buddhism speak of *karma*, which must be worked out as many reincarnations run their course until we can finally enter the condition of having no desires or passions (*nirvana*). Even atheistic Marxism proceeds from the economically caused alienation of people, which is to be overcome in the course of history, so that in the end there will be paradise on earth, the ‘classless society.’”⁶¹

GOING WAY BACK

Memory is a marvelous thing. Some might recall the radio shows *The Shadow*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *George Burns and Gracie Allen*, and *The Lone Ranger*.

And then there was the *The Tom Mix Show*. Best of all was the Tom Mix decoder ring. After saving pennies, nickels, and dimes, children sent away for the decoder ring, believing that Tom Mix himself would be sending them messages to decode with their ring.

Today there are spiritual children who believe they are getting inside information through the Enneagram. But they mistake stunted growth for real progress. They are trading their birthright for a poisoned meal.

Given the many heretical teachers in the lineage of the Enneagram, Bible believers should shun it. Many, if not all, teachers of the Enneagram deny the inspiration and finality of God’s Word. Believers would better spend their time studying Scripture. As Paul instructs, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

The Enneagram is a false gospel and a diversion that could lead one far from Christ and salvation. Jesus said

that He was the Truth as well as the Way and the Life (John 14:6). That should be more than enough for us. Paul’s words to the church at Colosse and to his protégé Timothy provide a fitting conclusion:

“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” (Colossians 2:8).

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Endnotes:

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4. Andreas Ebert in Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *Discovering the Enneagram*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997, pp. xiii, xv.
5. Dave Tomlinson, “The Enneagram,” from The Bad Christian Manifesto blog. Document accessed at: www.dave.tomlinson.co.uk/enneagram/. Tomlinson is the vicar of St. Luke’s Church in Holloway, North London.
6. W. Herschel Ford, *Simple Sermons From the Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969, pg. 45.
7. See Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life Of Carl Jung*. New York: Random House, 1997.
8. In 1927, Norwegian Ole Hallesby borrowed the idea from the pagan Greeks.
9. John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968, pp. 121-122.
10. See “History of the Enneagram” from The Enneagram Spectrum of Personality Styles website. Document accessed at: www.enneagramspectrum.com/173/history-of-the-enneagram.
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- Christian Answers for the New Age website. Document accessed at: www.christiananswersforthenewage.org/Articles_Enneagram.html.
12. “History of the Enneagram,” op. cit.
 13. See John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 119.
 14. Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995, pp. 181-182.
 15. John Starke, “An Evangelical Guide to the Enneagram,” posted on *Christianity Today’s* website, Oct. 21, 2016. Document accessed at: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/november/evangelicals-guide-to-enneagram.html.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Mitchell Pacwa, “Tell Me who I Am, O Enneagram,” from the Christian Research Institute website, brackets and ellipsis in original. Document accessed at: www.equip.org/article/tell-me-who-i-am-o-enneagram/#.
 21. “An Evangelical Guide to the Enneagram,” op. cit.
 22. See “The Nine Enneagram Type Descriptions” from The Enneagram Institute website. Document accessed at: www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions/. Other sources offer slight variations of the types presented by The Enneagram Institute. For example, Vicar Dave Tomlinson identifies them as: 1. Perfectionist; 2. Giver; 3. Achiever; 4. Romantic; 5. Observer; 6. Loyalist Skeptic; 7. Epicure; 8. Protector; and 9. Mediator (“The Enneagram,” op. cit.).
 23. *Discovering the Enneagram*, op. cit., pg. 43.
 24. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
 25. Simon Montifiore, *Jerusalem The Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011, pg. 109.
 26. Richard Rohr biography and product page on Amazon.com. Document accessed at: www.amazon.com/Richard-Rohr/e/B000AQ2WB4/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1481744870&sr=8-2-ent.
 27. As summarized from the Table of Contents in *Discovering the Enneagram*, op. cit., pp. ix-x. Rohr’s commentary on each of these types make up Part II of his book, pp. 35-177.
 28. Catholic Answers is a large Roman Catholic apologetics and evangelization organization. It is based in El Cajon, Calif.
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31. *Discovering the Enneagram*, op. cit., back cover endorsement, ellipsis in original.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. xi, italic in original.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. xv.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 30.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
41. "Tell Me who I Am, O Enneagram,"

- op. cit.
42. *Discovering the Enneagram*, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 59, upper case and bold type in original.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 61.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91, upper case in original.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 90.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 101, upper case in original.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 106, upper case in original.
51. *Ibid.*, pg. 108.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 111, italics in original.

53. *Ibid.*, pg. 181, italic in original.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, bold type in original.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 183, bold type in original.
58. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's – Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 1046.
59. *Discovering the Enneagram*, op. cit., pp. 213-226.
60. *Ibid.*, pg. 226.
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BOOK OF MYSTERIES

(continued from page 1)

Cahn's next book, *The Mystery of the Shemitah*,⁷ an expansion of the topic dealt with in Chapter 17 of *The Harbinger*, came out in 2014. The *shemitah*⁸ is the Hebrew word for the sabbatical year spoken of in the Old Testament (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22; 26:32-35, 43). Despite the limited biblical revelation regarding the sabbatical year and despite the fact that God gave the sabbatical year to only the Jews to observe, Cahn believed that the sabbatical year explained financial collapses and disasters, especially in the United States. He made numerous claims about its significance — significance that the Bible never even hints at.⁹

Cahn strongly suggested in *The Mystery of the Shemitah* that something might occur in the *shemitah* of 2014-2015¹⁰ that took place from Sept. 25, 2014 through Sept. 13, 2015.¹¹ The book was released just before the beginning of that sabbatical year, the so-called "seventh *Shemitah*."¹² While it is debatable whether anything of financial significance occurred during that "seventh *Shemitah*," Cahn insisted that it did. As recently as Oct. 9, 2016, on a broadcast of *Sid Roth's It's Supernatural!* Cahn still pleaded his case.¹³ Most people would agree that the *shemitah* was a non-event.

THE BOOK OF MYSTERIES

Cahn's latest book is called *The Book of Mysteries*.¹⁴ This is an appropriate title for virtually any of Cahn's books, because he frequently uses the word

"mystery" in all of them. PFO director G. Richard Fisher has said, "If Jonathan Cahn wrote on the 23rd Psalm, he'd call it 'The Mystery of the Shepherd.'" Cahn's second-favorite word might be "ancient," as in "ancient mysteries." A third word that Cahn favors is "secret." To refer to virtually everything, as Cahn does, as a "mystery" renders the term meaningless, much as referring to anything out of the ordinary as a "miracle" cheapens the value of that term. If *everything* is a "mystery," we must then find a different way to describe things that really *are* mysteries.

CAHN AND HIS WORLDVIEW

Cahn is clearly in the Charismatic camp, given that he believes in the continuation of the so-called "sign gifts," such as prophecy.¹⁵ In *The Harbinger Companion with Study Guide*, the following observation was made and a subsequent question raised: "People have called Jonathan Cahn a prophet. Does he claim to be a prophet?"¹⁶ The book's response to the question was, "No. Jonathan Cahn never calls himself a prophet. He would call himself a watchman."¹⁷ The next question posed in the book is: "How did Jonathan Cahn get these revelations?"¹⁸ "Revelations" is a term consistent with supernatural insight that a prophet would receive from God.

In light of the book's denial of Cahn having called himself not a prophet but rather a watchman, we should remember that God called the prophet Ezekiel to be a watchman (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7). At one point in *The Mys-*

tery of the Shemitah, Cahn compares his ministry to Ezekiel's:

"The Harbinger and The Mystery of the Shemitah are not only the revealing of mysteries but also the sounding of alarms. Whenever I've been tempted to rest from sounding the alarm, I'm reminded of God's word to Ezekiel: If the watchman sees the danger coming and doesn't sound the trumpet to warn the people, when the calamity comes, their blood will be upon his head. So I sound the trumpet."¹⁹

Cahn may be making a distinction without a difference. Furthermore, so far as this writer is aware, Cahn has never denied that he is a prophet. And, as we've seen, Ezekiel the prophet was appointed by the Lord as a watchman. Therefore, the question remains, "Does Cahn see himself as a prophet in the same way Ezekiel was a prophet?"

An e-mail to Cahn's Hope of the World Ministries posed these questions:

1. What does he believe is/are the function(s) of a biblical prophet?
2. Does he believe there are prophets, in the biblical sense of the word, on earth today?
3. How does he see himself? And, specifically, does he see himself as a prophet (in the biblical sense of the word)? If not, how does he perceive [his] role(s) in the Body of Christ?²⁰

The only specific answer given by Cahn's ministry was, "Jonathan has

never called himself, depicted himself, or represented himself as a prophet.”²¹ This answer reflects the quotation above from *The Harbinger Companion with Study Guide*. Attempts to clarify whether Cahn perceived himself as a prophet went nowhere. Thus, the questions remain: Does Cahn believe that he is a prophet? And, if he doesn’t, why doesn’t he try to correct this misunderstanding when others call him a prophet?

Just because Cahn doesn’t call himself a prophet doesn’t mean that he doesn’t perceive himself that way. It is possible that he leads others to believe that he is a prophet although not calling himself one. Some factors indicate that this is the case.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Ellen G. White, who was one of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism, also declined to call herself a prophet. Here is a portion of what an official explanation of Seventh-day Adventism says about White’s not referring to herself as a prophet:

“Ellen White never assumed the title of prophetess, but she did not object when others called her by that title. She explained, ‘Early in my youth I was asked several times, Are you a prophet? I have ever responded, I am the Lord’s messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. ... To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has covered so many lines that I can not call myself other than a messenger.’”²²

Despite her disclaimer, Seventh-day Adventism still regards White as a prophet. She clearly believed herself to be one and fostered that belief among Seventh-day Adventists while she was alive.²³

Given the lack of clear answers regarding Cahn’s attitude toward being called a prophet, one can assume that he appears to enjoy the accolades of those who view him as such. He

also seems to perceive himself as a “revealer of mysteries,” which is something we might associate with a prophet. And like a biblical prophet, he seems to feel compelled to speak to America and its leaders to give them warnings of God’s judgment unless the nation repents. While his burden to see America repent and turn to the Lord is admirable, he appears to view himself as a prophet in this regard. Furthermore, the heroic protagonist in *The Harbinger*, who reveals the “mysteries” to the other protagonist in the story, is called “the Prophet.” As a “revealer of mysteries,” this mysterious figure resembles how Cahn sees his own role.

OTHER INDICATORS OF CAHN’S POSITIONING HIMSELF AS A PROPHET

Cahn tells stories about alleged miraculous events that occurred in connection with him and his ministry for the Lord. It is impossible for the average person to verify the details of many of these stories in order to know whether or not they occurred the way Cahn describes them. For instance, in a 2015 documentary DVD about Cahn called *The Harbinger Man*, Cahn describes miraculous events in connection with his ministries in places such as India, Cuba, and Nigeria that are unverifiable.²⁴

In a recent article he wrote for the WND website,²⁵ Cahn told of a 1999 visit to Cuba he made in connection with an evangelical celebration. He told how, during that visit, God opened the door for him to give Fidel Castro a Bible, a note he had written to Castro, and a shofar (a Jewish trumpet made of a ram’s horn). The shofar Cahn gave to Castro — which is a trademark of Cahn — was the “prophetic sign” to which the article’s title refers. Cahn’s having an audience with the country’s leader would have been an exciting occurrence all by itself. However, both in this article and in the DVD referenced above, Cahn relates some other unusual and/or “miraculous” incidents he claims occurred during his visit to Cuba that are impossible for the average reader to verify.

Cahn also associated the end of Castro’s reign with the biblical year of Jubilee,²⁶ despite several facts to the contrary: Castro was not Jewish, Cuba is not Israel, and Cuba is still under Communist rule under Castro’s brother Raul. So Cahn’s calculations prove nothing to anyone except to Cahn and to anyone who believes that something must be so, simply because Cahn says that it is.

In the article, Cahn also misinforms the reader regarding the deceased Cuban leader’s name. Cahn says, “Most people don’t realize that his name, ‘Fidel,’ means ‘faith.’”²⁷ But the Spanish word for “faith” is *fe*. (The Spanish word for “faithful” is *fiel*, which might be what Cahn is confusing “Fidel” with.)

In a different article Cahn wrote for the WND website under the title, “The Harbinger of Baal Appears in NYC!,”²⁸ Cahn finds parallels between Israel’s worship of Baal and the unveiling of a reproduction of the arch leading to the temple of Baal that was transported to New York City last September. In this article, Cahn states:

“So in the template of ‘The Harbinger,’ [a reference by Cahn to his own book by that title] when the judgment finally fell, when the ancient kingdom of Israel was wiped off the earth, the people were worshiping Baal. In the last days of Israel, when the harbingers appeared, they appeared in a land covered with the images of Baal. It was the worship of Baal that ultimately brought about the harbingers of judgment. Thus Baal was the god of the harbingers.”²⁹

Later, he writes:

“The idea that anything linked to an ancient Canaanite god would be erected in America would seem unthinkable. But just as it was with the nine ancient harbingers of judgment, so it has now taken place — the Sign of Baal has manifested on American soil. It took place on a rainy Monday afternoon, Sept. 19, 2016. It happened in the city of the harbingers of judgment — New York

City. No one who erected it or who unveiled it had any idea what they were doing — just as with the harbingers — but they did it anyway.”³⁰

While Cahn’s alarm is understandable, another article gives more perspective:

“A recreation of Palmyra’s Arch of Triumph was unveiled in New York on Monday, almost a year after Islamic State militants destroyed the original structure. The 1,800-year-old Roman arch was blown up by the extremist group last October, but a team of archaeologists at Oxford University’s Institute for Digital archeology (IDA) set about recreating it, in an act of resistance to Isis’s [sic] rampant acts of cultural destruction in Iraq and Syria.”³¹

The article later notes:

“The arch historically served as the entrance to the 2,000 [year-old] Temple of Baal, which was then converted to a Christian church and finally, a mosque. First put on display in Trafalgar Square in London last April, it will stay at City Hall park for one week, before moving to its next destination, Dubai.”³²

Toward the end, the article states:

“The IDA’s dedication to preservation, means it ultimately intends to return the arch to Palmyra. At the unveiling, deputy mayor Alicia Glen said, the arch ‘was a symbol that we will not stand for acts of terrorists, we will not stand to have people murdered and thrown out of their countries.’”³³

So in Cahn’s zeal to be a watchman and perhaps a prophet, he has misconstrued what was intended to be an act of defiance against terrorists like ISIS to be an act of defiance toward God. And because this reproduction of the arch to the temple of Baal (not the actual temple of Baal) was only intended to reside in New York City for a week before moving back to its place of origin in Palmyra, Syria, Cahn seems to have read into this event more than was warranted.

CAHN’S LATEST OFFERING: *THE BOOK OF MYSTERIES*

Three features about Cahn’s beliefs — all of which find expression in *The Book of Mysteries* — should be mentioned prior to looking into Cahn’s latest book.

First is Cahn’s belief that “the age”³⁴ is organized around the Jewish calendar. He states, “There’s a mystery, that God set up the age as a Hebrew year.”³⁵ Cahn also mentions this in the devotional for Day 359 in *The Book of Mysteries*, where the book’s protagonist, “the teacher,” tells the story’s “student” (a stand-in for the book’s reader), “‘The seven pillars,’ said the teacher, ‘representing the holy days and times of Israel. They hold the mystery of the age.’”³⁶ At another point in the book, we read:

“‘The age has unfolded,’ said the teacher, ‘according to the mystery of the Hebrew calendar, with each prophetic event foreshadowed by a Hebrew holy day. But where in the age are we now?’”³⁷

In another devotional, Cahn explains:

“God has set up the present age according to the pattern of the sacred Hebrew year. The sacred year begins with Passover. Its mystery foreshadows the death of the Lamb that begins the age with salvation.”³⁸

Cahn’s conclusion — through the teacher — is that we are currently in “the summer of the age, the time of the summer harvest,” which follows the feast of Pentecost.³⁹ In one of the devotional entries referenced above, he elaborates:

“The fifth mystery, the Feast of Trumpets, [represents] what is next to come. Its mystery foretells the sounding of the trumpets at the end of the age to herald the coming of the King.”⁴⁰

The second thing to realize is that Cahn believes that the Hebrew language is God’s language and that we must align ourselves with the Hebrew language. This is revealed in Cahn’s

devotional for Day 162, where the teacher tells his student, “In God you must live in accordance with the sacred tongue.”⁴¹

Third, one of Cahn’s “mysteries” in the book, which he calls “The Chiasma,”⁴² propounds one of Cahn’s beliefs about how God has arranged “the age.” Presumably he means the same “age” as he defined it above — the present age, which began with the death of Jesus. In Cahn’s book, the teacher instructs his student:

“‘[God used the pattern of the chiasma also] in the age’ ... ‘He ordained the end to be as the beginning, and the beginning as the end.’ ... ‘In the beginning of the age, Israel disappeared from the world. But it was prophesied in the Scriptures that at the end of the age, Israel would reappear into the world. In the beginning of the age, the Jewish people were scattered from Israel to the ends of the earth. But it was prophesied that at the end of the age they would be gathered from the ends of the earth back to Israel. In the beginning of the age, the Jewish people were driven from Jerusalem. But at the end of the age, they must dwell in Jerusalem once again. In the beginning of the age, believers in Messiah were persecuted by an anti-Christian world civilization. So at the end of the age, it is prophesied there will again be an anti-Christian world civilization and persecution against believers in Messiah. At the beginning of the age, Messiah left this world from Jerusalem. So at the end of the age, He will return to this world and to Jerusalem. And, lastly, it was at the beginning of the age that the believers of the Book of Acts walked the earth. So at the end of the age.’ [Here the student interjects:] ‘They are to walk the earth again,’ I said. ‘And we are to be that people.’ ‘Yes,’ [the teacher] said.”⁴³

A DISCLAIMER

Cahn did not make the claim in his book that the Bible is a book of

mysteries. In fact, on the dedication page of *The Book of Mysteries*, Cahn's final dedication is to God, "the Mystery of all mysteries."⁴⁴ So it is likely that the "mysteries" that Cahn discusses in this book all have to do with God Himself, rather than strictly referring to the Bible. Nor is *The Book of Mysteries* limited to things in the Bible. For at least a couple of the mysteries he uses the Talmud,⁴⁵ for one, a Jewish prayer book;⁴⁶ and, for one, called "The Mystery of Europa," the Greek myth of Europa.⁴⁷ There are other non-biblical topics, including "The Mystery of the Triangles"⁴⁸ and General Edmund Allenby.⁴⁹ However, because virtually everything Cahn touches becomes a "mystery," it is fair to assume that Cahn likely *does* view the Bible as a book of mysteries.

THE STRUCTURE OF CAHN'S THE BOOK OF MYSTERIES

The Book of Mysteries is a 365-day devotional wrapped around by a paper-thin story. The story is that a man encounters a figure called "the teacher" in the desert. "The teacher" — a stand-in for Cahn — runs a year-long course for students in which he teaches about these mysteries. This teacher invites the unnamed "student" — a stand-in for the reader — to join his unconventional school in the desert. Each day, the teacher expounds upon a "mystery." *The Book of Mysteries* is the student's "journal."

At the end of the 365 days, the book concludes with the student departing from the teacher, who challenges the student to share with others what he has learned, thus becoming "the teacher" to other students. The book concludes with the student sharing with the reader how he became a Christian and how the reader can become one, too. This short section closes with a salvation prayer.

Each day's devotional is one page. Each devotional has a title and, at the end of the devotional, an application is given. Below the action step(s) are some Scripture references supposedly keyed to the "mystery" revealed in that day's devotional. At the very bottom of each day's devotional is an

italicized title. On the copyright page, Cahn explains:

"At the bottom of every mystery is a title that identifies the full teaching or message that goes deeper into the mystery or gives more information than can be given on one page. You can find information on ordering those teachings or messages [by Cahn] in the back of this book."⁵⁰

A BRIEF REVIEW

Although Cahn oversells his subject matter as being mysterious, it is amazing that he was able to produce a book containing 365 mysteries and even to have a story — thin though it was — woven around and through it. There is wit in some of the dialogue, as the student and the teacher interact or as the teacher has the student do things that have humorous results. Portions of the book are clever. Overall, Cahn does well with the dialogue and interaction between the teacher and the student.

The Book of Mysteries has four kinds of entries.

First, some of Cahn's entries seem helpful. "The Roads of Zion,"⁵¹ "The Tent World,"⁵² "Heaven's Descent,"⁵³ and "The Celestial Currency Exchange,"⁵⁴ to name a few.

Second, some of Cahn's entries contain good, but not always original, observations and concepts. Three examples are "The Double,"⁵⁵ "The Two Waters,"⁵⁶ and "The Spectral Messiahs."⁵⁷ In "The Double," for example, Cahn makes the point that Jesus was the Son of the Father and that "Barabbas," the name of the guilty man who was released in place of Jesus, means "son of the father."

In "The Two Waters," Cahn observes that at the northern end of the Jordan River is the Sea of Galilee, which has creatures such as fish living in it, whereas the Jordan River flows south to the Dead Sea, where nothing lives. He points out that what makes the difference is that the Sea of Galilee not only receives from the Jordan River to its north but that it also feeds into the Jordan River to its south,

whereas the Dead Sea receives from the Jordan River but has no outlet. The application is that if we merely receive God's blessings, but never give, we become dead and lifeless. In order to live, we must give from that which we receive.

In "The Spectral Messiahs," the teacher points out to the student that early rabbis expected two Messiahs. One who would be a suffering Servant (Mashiach Ben Yosef, Messiah Son of Joseph) and the other who would be a victorious king (Mashiach Ben David, Messiah Son of David). However, what they *didn't* expect was one Messiah and two comings. John Ankerberg and John Weldon pointed this out in *The Facts on Jesus the Messiah*.⁵⁸

So while these three examples of this type of devotional are interesting, the insights in them are neither unique to Cahn, nor are they mysteries.

A third type of devotional is one where there is some sort of dissonance between the devotional and the application or else within the devotional itself. Some examples of this type of devotional are: "The Power to Cast a Forest,"⁵⁹ "The Arch of Titus,"⁶⁰ and "The Eucharistia."⁶¹

And finally, the last type of devotional contains those that are incomprehensible. These include "Infinity in a Jar,"⁶² "The I Am of All I Ams,"⁶³ "The Elohim Mystery,"⁶⁴ "He Whose Name Is Like Oil,"⁶⁵ and "King of the Curse."⁶⁶

Because Cahn's other two major books, *The Harbinger* and *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, were best-sellers, it is likely that this new book will also sell well. Additionally, Charisma, the publisher of all of Cahn's books to date also has published *The Book of Mysteries Prayer Journal*.

CAHN'S METHODS IN THE BOOK OF MYSTERIES

Regarding Cahn's devotionals — as mentioned earlier — they are laced with terms such as "mystery," "secret," and so forth to make what he is saying sound exciting and exotic. Further contributing to the esoteric

aura of the teachings is Cahn's strong reliance on Hebrew words.

CAHN'S REVELATIONS BASED ON HEBREW NOUNS AND VERBS

Cahn assigns special meanings to the plurals of certain Hebrew words. Some of these Hebrew nouns are:

- God — *Elohim*.⁶⁷
- Lord — *Adonai*.⁶⁸
- face — *panim*.⁶⁹
- mercy — *rachamim*.⁷⁰
- heaven — *Shamayim*.⁷¹
- death — ???⁷²

A Ph.D. student at Dallas Theological Seminary⁷³ observed that in every one of the instances above, when Cahn expounded on the significance of the plural form of the Hebrew noun, he misfired. There was also some question about his use of the plural *Adonai*. However, even in his exposition of that term, the Hebrew student found fault with at least a portion of Cahn's exposition.

Regarding Cahn's explanation of the tenses of Hebrew verbs in the devotional "The Days of Future Past,"⁷⁴ the doctoral student noted that what Cahn stated as factual about the tenses of Hebrew verbs in this devotional entry is a subject of scholarly debate. She added that she believed the weight of current Hebrew scholarship doesn't favor Cahn's understanding. In another day's devotional entry, "The Day of Time and Timelessness,"⁷⁵ Cahn focuses attention on the tenses of Hebrew verbs used in Isaiah 53, where part of his point in the devotional has to do with his assertion that the first part of verse 3 is written in the present tense. The student pointed out that the phrase to which Cahn refers is a participle and is not written in present tense.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS REGARDING CAHN'S USE OF HEBREW

One tactic that Cahn often employs in his explanation of Hebrew words is to give different meanings for the same Hebrew word and then to pretend that the word can have all

these meanings at the same time. The authors of a book on English Bible translations, when discussing the strengths and weaknesses of *The Amplified Bible* said this about that translation:

"The strength of this version is that it acknowledges that no single English word or phrase can capture precisely the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek. *Its weakness is that it gives readers the false impression that Hebrew and Greek words are 'packed' with theological content and can mean many things at once.* Another weakness is that readers may simply pick whichever meaning they like instead of discerning the single correct meaning that fits the context."⁷⁶

The portion of the paragraph above that is italicized is applicable to the way Cahn treats Hebrew words in *The Book of Mysteries*.

RABBINIC METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

Dr. Gordon Johnston, professor of Hebrew Studies in the Old Testament Department at Dallas Theological Seminary, said this about Cahn's interpretive method:

"Here is what you need to know about rabbinic interpretation in a nutshell. In contrast to Christian interpreters who say that every passage has only *one* meaning but many applications, rabbinic interpreters say that every passage has *many* meanings and therefore many applications. Here is the smorgasbord of rabbinic interpretive methods:

(1) *peshat*: this is what we would call literal historical-grammatical-contextual interpretation of the Hebrew text. When rabbinic interpreters practice *peshat*, they have a lot of valuable insights to offer into the exegetical meaning of the Hebrew text. However, this is not what [Jonathan Cahn] is doing that has you so troubled. More than likely, he is practicing one or more of the following

other kinds of rabbinic interpretation.

(2) *midrash*: this is a very creative approach to the Hebrew text designed to tease out contemporary applicational relevance rather than the original historical meaning;

(3) *peshet*: this is another very creative approach to the Hebrew text, albeit limited to prophetic oracles in the Hebrew Bible, but focusing on the eschatological extension of the original prophecy; according to this mindset, every prophetic oracle in the Hebrew Scriptures had two interpretations/meanings — one that referred to the original historical fulfillment and the other that referred to the ultimate eschatological fulfillment;

(4) *sod*: this is yet another creative approach to the Hebrew text that was designed, not to tease out the original historical meaning, but allegedly hidden esoteric mysteries that are only loosely connected with the grammatical meaning of the Hebrew text; this kind of approach is often little more than a license for the interpreter to read into the text whatever philosophical or theological meaning that he/she wants to see; and

(5) *gematria*: still another creative approach to the text, which often involves calculating the numerical value of words (since Hebrew did not have a separate set of numerical digits, such as 1, 2, 3, etc., Hebrew simply used its letters to stand for numbers, e.g., the Hebrew equivalent to A was 1, B was 2, C was 3, etc; hence, every word or name in Hebrew had a numerical value).⁷⁷

It would appear that Cahn often uses the *sod* method, which is subjective, whereas evangelical interpretation is more akin to the *peshat*, or "literal historical-grammatical-contextual" method. While literal interpretation recognizes that the Bible at times uses figures of speech, it also follows the rule that "when the literal sense

makes the best sense, seek no other sense.”

In connection with Cahn’s flexible method of hermeneutics, it should be noted that he cheats in his application of the yearly Hebrew festivals, which he bases on the list given in Leviticus 23.⁷⁸ The second annual festival given in Leviticus 23 is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a festival that Cahn omits in his discussion of the “mystery of the [present] age.” Instead, and presumably to arrive at the same number of festivals listed in Leviticus 23, he inserts a non-existent event between the Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) and the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), which he names “the time of the summer harvest,”⁷⁹ and where he posits we are now located within “the mystery of the age.”

Summer harvest is not one of the Hebrew festivals listed in Leviticus 23. Neither is there any explanation as to why Cahn omits Unleavened Bread, the second of the seven annual holy convocations mentioned in Leviticus 23, from his list. One can assume that Cahn’s exclusion of Unleavened Bread and his insertion of an unmentioned harvest is because this better fits his “mystery of the ages” scheme.

For the scope of this article it wasn’t feasible for the scholars to examine all of Cahn’s arguments based on Hebrew vocabulary. This would have required reading and evaluating Cahn’s arguments for many, if not most, of the devotionals in the book.

Thus, Dr. Johnston counseled:

“To be perfectly honest, ... It will be a waste of your time to expend much energy chasing down every rabbit trail by critiquing each and every interpretive sleight of hand [utilized by Cahn]. It would be better to simply identify the various rabbinic methods, then state your preference for the so-called *peshat* (literal historical contextual) as the foundational meaning.”⁸⁰

CAHN’S OBSESSIVE USE OF THE TERM “MYSTERY”

Because Cahn uses the words “mystery” and “mysteries” so liber-

ally in all his books to date — occasionally also using synonyms such as “secret” — a short discussion of biblical and theological uses of this word is warranted.

THE BIBLICAL USE OF THE WORDS “MYSTERY” AND “MYSTERIES”

In the Old Testament, the words “mystery” or “mysteries” are English translations of the Aramaic word *raz*, which means “a secret.”⁸¹ This word is used nine times in the Old Testament,⁸² all “in the Aramaic sections of Daniel.”⁸³ It is used only in Daniel 2 and Daniel 4 and it is used all but one of those times in Daniel 2. Daniel 2 concerns Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which God revealed to Daniel and enabled him to interpret for the king. One Bible dictionary notes, regarding the use of *raz* in Daniel:

“In this context the word carries a specialized reference, and, as in the phrase ‘there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries’ ([Daniel] 2:28), it means primarily that which is hidden and still needs to be made known.”⁸⁴

In the New Testament the words for “mystery” or “mysteries” is the Greek word *musterion* (also spelled *mysterion*) which means “a mystery or secret doctrine.”⁸⁵ It is used 27 times. Twenty of the 27 times it is used in the writings of Paul.⁸⁶ And it is used in a parallel passage in each of the synoptic Gospels in connection with the kingdom of God.⁸⁷ The other four non-Pauline occurrences of the word are in Revelation.⁸⁸

Concerning the use of the words “mystery” or “mysteries” in its one-time use in a parallel account in each of the synoptic Gospels, one source explains:

“Here the term is used to refer to the kingdom of God, the knowledge of which, just because it is God’s kingdom, is reserved for those to whom it is ‘given’. As a result, the unrevealed mystery is, for those ‘outside’, ... hidden in ‘parables’.”⁸⁹

Another source says this about its

New Testament usage, “In the New Testament, ‘mystery’ refers to a secret that is revealed by God to His servants through His Spirit. As such, it is an ‘open secret.’”⁹⁰

Summarizing its usage in the letters of Paul, this source states:

“Most of the [NT] occurrences of the word mystery are in the Pauline Epistles. ‘Mystery’ refers to the revelation of God’s plan of salvation as that plan focuses in Christ. The gospel itself is a ‘mystery which was kept secret since the world began’ (Rom. 16:25). This mystery was revealed by God through the prophetic Scriptures to Paul and the church (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3). ‘Mystery’ also refers to the future resurrection of Christians (1 Cor. 15:51), the summing up of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9), the inclusion of Gentiles in the church (Eph. 3:3-9), the future salvation of Israel (Rom. 11:25), the phenomenon of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7) and the godliness of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16).”⁹¹

For the most part it doesn’t seem that Cahn uses the word “mystery” in a New Testament sense. And he is much more liberal in his use of the term than is the Bible.

MYSTERIES

With Cahn’s fixation on mysteries, perhaps he could explain some *real* puzzles, such as the presence of evil in the world or why evil things happen to relatively “innocent” or “good” people. Mysteries that troubled biblical authors include: Why evil people sometimes prosper, while the righteous seem to suffer (Job 21:7-34; Psalm 37:1-8ff.; Psalm 73; Proverbs 23:17-18; 24:1; 24:19-20; Habakkuk 1:13) or why God sometimes allows those who suffer seemingly unendurable pain to continue to live when their lives seem so useless to them (Job 3:20-26; 6:8-13; Jeremiah 20:14-18).

Perhaps Cahn could unravel the mystery of the Trinity or the incarnation. Or explain how man’s free will

and God's predestination can be reconciled.

AN EVALUATION OF CAHN'S MINISTRY

By all accounts, Cahn is a Christian and he is serving the Lord in some helpful ways. When he calls for national leaders and others who aren't Christians to repent and warns of God's judgment if they don't, he seems to be functioning biblically. However, he tends to overlay his warnings with eccentric and esoteric biblical interpretations, such as those put forth in his two previous books, *The Harbinger* and *The Mystery of the Shemitah*. These interpretations are both unhelpful and unnecessary.

From what Cahn has published, the source of his biblical "insights" appears to be subjective "leadings," which he believes to be from the Lord. The fact that his interpretations don't evidence sound principles of biblical interpretation argue against his subjective insights and intuitions being from the Lord. This may say more about a dearth of spiritual discernment among the populace and a thirst for the novel and the sensational than it does about Cahn's insight.

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Concerning Cahn's interpretation of Scripture, a couple of things cited in an earlier *Quarterly Journal* article⁹² bear repeating here.

Lutheran pastor and author Don Matzat has pointed out, "You cannot replace sound exegesis [Scriptural understanding] with 'The Lord showed me.'"⁹³

The other item quoted in the earlier article on Cahn was the guide to Bible interpretation, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, where Pentecostal New Testament scholar Gordon Fee wrote:

"Let it be said at the outset ... that the aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness; one is not trying to discover what no one else has ever seen before. Interpretation that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be

attributed to pride (an attempt to 'out clever' the rest of the world), a false understanding of spirituality (wherein the Bible is full of deep truths waiting to be mined by the spiritually sensitive person with special insight), or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against that bias). Unique interpretations are usually wrong. This is not to say that the correct understanding of a text may not often *seem* unique to someone who hears it for the first time. But it is to say that uniqueness is *not* the aim of our task. The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the 'plain meaning of the text.' And the most important ingredient one brings to that task is enlightened common sense. The test of good interpretation is that it makes good sense of the text. Correct interpretation, therefore, brings relief to the mind as well as a prick or prod to the heart."⁹⁴

In accordance with Fee's statement, one rule of hermeneutics is "when the plain sense (of a text) makes the best sense, seek no other sense." Three other rules are: "the plain things (in Scripture) are the main things and the main things are the plain things," "always interpret obscure passages of Scripture using clear passages and not vice versa," and "when interpreting Scripture, don't isolate texts, but interpret them in their context."

R.C. Sproul in his book, *Knowing Scripture*, states:

"In the sixteenth century the Reformers declared their total confidence in what they called the *perspicuity* of Scripture. What they meant by that technical term was the clarity of Scripture. They maintained that the Bible is basically clear and lucid. It is simple enough for any literate person to understand its *basic message*. This is not to say that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages or sections to be found in it. Lay-

people unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis may have difficulty with parts of Scripture, but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily. Martin Luther, for example, was convinced that what was obscure and difficult in one part of Scripture was stated more clearly and simply in other parts of Scripture."⁹⁵

In addition to the two books on hermeneutics cited above, two other resources may be found helpful: Roy B. Zuck's *Basic Bible Interpretation*⁹⁶ and a *Quarterly Journal* article by G. Richard Fisher.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Cahn seems to have made a fetish out of naming each and every insight that he believes he has as a "mystery" or a "secret." This is unhelpful for several reasons.

First, it makes him look like a mystic who has a secret decoder ring no one else has. Whether or not he believes this to be the case isn't clear. Yet the effect elevates Cahn rather than Christ.

Second, Cahn takes advantage of his readers by his excessive use of Hebrew words. He exploits their ignorance because they can't judge the veracity or lack of it in his explanations of these Hebrew terms. And, by exploiting their ignorance, he again elevates himself over his readers, who can only assume that Cahn has special expertise that is inaccessible to the uninitiated.

Third, an unfortunate "bonus" of what has been said is that by seeming to possess esoteric knowledge, he elevates himself over his readers, which can engender spiritual pride by leading them to believe that they are part of this group that possesses special knowledge.

Fourth, it is not certain that Cahn is correctly defining Hebrew words. Thus, he may be further damaging his disciples by giving them inaccurate information.

Last, Cahn's method of interpreting Scripture (the *sod* rabbinic method of interpretation) lacks interpretive con-

trols to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Thus, the meaning of the Bible is up for grabs and people interpret the Bible as they see fit.

It is also unclear whether Cahn views himself as a biblical prophet. He seems to cultivate this perception of himself, even though he doesn't call himself a prophet. As we have seen, Ellen G. White boasted that she didn't call herself a prophet but, apparently like Cahn, didn't object to others calling her a prophet and fostered this perception while she was alive. The result is that Seventh-day Adventists still regard her as a prophet. This current apparent unwillingness for Cahn to distance himself from being regarded as a prophet is disturbing and bears watching.

Whether or not Cahn views himself as a prophet, he certainly comes across as a teacher and revealer of mysteries. This being the case, Cahn and all who view themselves as Bible teachers need to give heed to the scriptural warning:

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

In view of this stricter judgment, one thing that teachers should strive for is accuracy in handling the Scriptures. As the Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).

Teachers need to be accurate in their presentation of scriptural truth and not strive to appeal to “itching ears” with novel and/or sensational teaching. While the Bible certainly contains mysteries, it contains many plain things to which we need to give our attention. As Mark Twain said:

“Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand, but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture

which trouble me most are those which I do understand.”⁹⁸

Those who aspire to be teachers must specialize in feeding people on the good Word of God, rather than on ephemeral fluff that excites but which doesn't nourish or promote spiritual growth. The Apostle Paul said this about his own ministry:

“You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us” (2 Corinthians 2:17, NLT).

Endnotes:

1. Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery That Holds the Secret of America's Future*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2011. Despite its copyright date being 2011, *The Harbinger* was actually published in 2012.
2. Ann Carroll, “The Harbinger Spends 100 Weeks on NYT Best-Sellers List,” *CharismaNews* online post dated Dec. 27, 2013. Accessed at: www.charisma.com/news/42227-the-harbinger-spends-100-weeks-on-nyt-best-sellers-list. More recently, on the Nov. 14, 2016, radio broadcast of “Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk,” Cahn told Dobson that *The Harbinger* sales had exceeded 2 million copies. (“The Book of Mysteries 1,” 1:12 timemark. Accessed at: www.drjamesdobson.org/Broadcasts/Broadcast?i=56f75642-036d-4c01-b932-063d2aeb03f9.)
3. “Template” and “pattern” are two words that Cahn uses to describe his view of how Isaiah 9:9-10 can apply in America, as well as in eighth-century B.C. Israel. See Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2013, pp. 4-5, 7, 174.
4. Those people who seemed appreciative of Cahn's message in *The Harbinger* include such notables as Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, David Regan, Sid Roth, David Tyree, *Charisma* magazine founder Steven Strang, and WND website founder Joseph Farah. Cahn has been highly acclaimed and promoted by his book publisher Charisma (FrontLine) and by the online website WND. He has also been promoted by James Dobson and Rabbi Jonathan Bernis (Jewish Voice Ministries International).
5. See G. Richard Fisher, “The Harbinger: The Cahn-ing of the Church,” *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2012, pp. 2, 21-22 and J. Greg Sheryl, “Jonathan Cahn: Man of Mystery – The Art of

Making God's Word Complex and Sensational,” *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2015, pp. 1, 12-21. Other Christians and/or ministries that specialize in discernment that were critical of *The Harbinger* included David James, the Executive Director of the Alliance for Biblical Integrity. James has written what is probably the most thorough critique to date of *The Harbinger*. (David James, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?* Bend, Ore: The Berean Call, 2012.) Additionally, T.A. McMahon of The Berean Call, biblical prophecy author Thomas Ice, and Berit Kjos were also critical of *The Harbinger*.

6. *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pg. xi.

7. Jonathan Cahn, *The Mystery of the Shemitah*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2014.

8. It can also be spelled *shmita* or *shemittah*.

9. For more on Cahn's teaching on the sabbatical year (i.e., the *shemitah*), see especially, David James, *Biblical Guide to the Shemitah and the Blood Moons*. Bend, Ore.: The Berean Call, 2015. For a very brief treatment, see “Jonathan Cahn: Man of Mystery – The Art of Making God's Word Complex and Sensational,” op. cit., pp. 16-20. See also the News Update by M. Kurt Goedelman, “Cahn's Ancient Mystery Message Appears Unstoppable,” *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2016, pp. 22-23.

10. See, for example, *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, op. cit., pp. 237-244, 256-260, 272.

11. *Ibid.*, pg. 239.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

13. “Jonathan Cahn - Shemitah & Harbinger Update,” *Sid Roth's It's Supernatural!*, 3:09 timemark. Published on YouTube, Oct. 9, 2016. Video accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPxKFFxxUak.

14. Jonathan Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2016.

15. E-mail from a staff member at Cahn's Hope of the World Ministry dated Dec. 5, 2014. Copy on file.

16. *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pg. 171.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, op. cit., pg. 252.

20. E-mail to a staff member at Cahn's Hope of the World Ministry dated Nov. 30, 2016. Copy on file.

21. E-mail from a staff member at Cahn's Hope of the World Ministry dated Dec. 6, 2016. Copy on file.

22. The Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, pg. 255. Explaining the source of the quotation, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* states, “[Ellen G.] White, ‘A

- Messenger,' *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1906, p. 8. The title 'the Lord's messenger' was given by inspiration (*Ibid.*)," *ibid.*, pg. 261.
23. For additional information on Ellen G. White, see J. Greg Sheryl, "Investigating Ellen G. White: Prophetess of Seventh-day Adventism," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2012, pp. 4-11.
24. Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger Man: The Jonathan Cahn Story*. WND Films, 2015.
25. Jonathan Cahn, "The Day Jonathan Cahn Gave a Prophetic Sign To Fidel Castro," WND online post dated Dec. 4, 2016. Accessed at: www.wnd.com/2016/12/the-day-jonathan-cahn-gave-a-prophetic-sign-to-fidel-castro/.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Jonathan Cahn, "The Harbinger of Baal Appears in NYC!," WND online post dated Sept. 25, 2016. Accessed at: www.wnd.com/2016/09/the-harbinger-of-baal-appears-in-nyc/.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.* All of Cahn's references to "harbingers" in this paragraph are references to things in his book *The Harbinger*.
31. Raya Jalabi, "Replica of Syrian arch destroyed by Isis unveiled in New York City," *The Guardian* online post dated Sept. 20, 2016. Accessed at: www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/20/palmyra-arch-syria-new-york.
32. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
33. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
34. Although it is unclear in the DVD exactly what age Cahn refers to, from one of his devotionals in *The Book of Mysteries*, entitled, "The Seven Mysteries of the Age," it appears that Cahn is referring to "the present age," which began with the death of Jesus. See *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 327.
35. *The Harbinger Man: The Jonathan Cahn Story*, op. cit., 36:34 timemark.
36. *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 359.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 175.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 327.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 175.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 327. In this devotional entry, Cahn elaborates on what he believes each of seven Hebrew feasts represent in this present age.
41. *Ibid.*, pg. 162.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 183. Although Cahn calls it "The Chiasma" (which is a biological term), from the explanation Cahn proceeds to give, he is more likely confusing this term with a grammatical construction called a "chiasmus," involving a chiastic structure (named for the Greek letter "chi," which resembles the English letter "X"). An example of a "chiastic sentence" is Psalm 2:9: "You will break them with a rod of iron; like earthenware you will shatter them." (Todd J. Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003, pg. 40, s.v. "chiasmus" and "chiastic sentence," bold type and italics in original.) Another source notes that in "a chiasmus ... parallel phrases are connected in reverse order." (Earl Radmacher, Ron Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Compact Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004, pg. 888, from the note on Philemon verses 4 and 5.)
43. *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 183.
44. *Ibid.*, n.p.; however, if the dedication page had a number printed on it, it would be pg. iii.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 322.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 192.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 206.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 100.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 239.
50. *Ibid.*, n.p.; however, if the copyright page had a number printed on it, it would be pg. ii.
51. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 50.
53. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.
54. *Ibid.*, pg. 81. This devotional ends with an obvious, but unacknowledged, version of the famous quotation from martyred missionary Jim Elliott, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."
55. *Ibid.*, pg. 29.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 73.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 246.
58. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Jesus the Messiah*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1993, pp. 32-33.
59. *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 188.
60. *Ibid.*, pg. 197.
61. *Ibid.*, pg. 199.
62. *Ibid.*, pg. 1.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.
64. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 23.
66. *Ibid.*, pg. 25.
67. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
68. *Ibid.*, pg. 306.
69. *Ibid.*, pg. 298.
70. *Ibid.*, pg. 56.
71. *Ibid.*, pg. 361.
72. *Ibid.*, pg. 63. In this devotional, Cahn does not give the Hebrew word for "deaths" (*bemotayv*) used in Isaiah 53:9, which is why it isn't given in the right hand column.
73. The student I met with was Jessica Lee. She is a Ph.D. student in Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary. We met on the evening of Jan. 11, 2017.
74. *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 127.
75. *Ibid.*, pg. 291.
76. Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How To Choose a Translation For All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007, pg. 149, emphasis added.
77. E-mail from Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Gordon Johnston, dated Nov. 25, 2016, italics in original.
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78. *The Book of Mysteries*, op. cit., pg. 327. See also this Scripture reference at the bottom of his exposition of the mystery of the ages on pg. 359 and the devotional entry on pg. 175, although he doesn't cite Leviticus 23 at the bottom of that day's entry.
79. *Ibid.*, pg. 175. See also pg. 359.
80. E-mail from Dr. Gordon Johnston, dated Nov. 25, 2016, op. cit., italic in original.
81. *Zondervan NASB Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, pg. 1470, s.v., "7328. raz," italics in original.
82. Daniel 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47 (twice); 4:9.
83. Ronald F. Youngblood, general editor, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, pg. 872, s.v., "Mystery."
84. S.S. Smalley in J.D. Douglas, editor, *New Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996, pg. 794, s.v., "Mystery."
85. *Zondervan NASB Exhaustive Concordance*, op. cit., pg. 1549, s.v., "3466. musterior," italics in original.
86. Romans 11:25; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 3:4; 3:9; 5:32; 6:19; Colossians 1:26; 1:27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9; 3:16.
87. Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10.
88. Revelation 1:20; 10:7; 17:5; 17:7.
89. Smalley in *New Bible Dictionary*, op. cit., pg. 794, italic in original, s.v., "Mystery."
90. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, op. cit., pg. 872, s.v., "Mystery."
91. *Ibid.*
92. Both the quotations below are in "Jonathan Cahn: Man of Mystery," op. cit., pg. 19.
93. Don Matzat, *Inner Healing: Deliverance or Deception?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1987, pg. 155.
94. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, pp. 13-14, italics in original.
95. R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2016, pp. 17-18, italics in original.
96. Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor, 1991.
97. G. Richard Fisher, "Hermen Who? – Biblical Hermeneutics: An Excursion in Fantasy or Exercise in Discipline?," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2002, pp. 1, 11-20.
98. Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2009, pg. 36.

not spoken? — when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

We see that under the Law, if a prophet spoke on God’s behalf but the word failed to come to pass, then God charged that prophet with speaking presumptuously and God pronounced that such a prophet should die. Under grace, we don’t put false prophets to death. However, such prophets are not harmless because they lead God’s people astray by claiming to speak for God when they do not. They must be held accountable because it is a serious thing to claim to be speaking prophetically for God.

In the Bible, God brought strong indictments and, at times, severe judgments against those who prophesied falsely to His people. For instance, through the prophet Jeremiah, God said concerning the false prophets in his day:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD’” (Jeremiah 23:16, NASB).

And again God said through Jeremiah:

“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jeremiah 23:21).

In Ezekiel 13, God said to the false prophets:

“Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the LORD!’ Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! ... They have envisioned futility and false divination saying, “Thus says the LORD!” But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, “The LORD says,” but I have not spoken’” (vv. 2-3, 6-7).

Although God said these things through Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel many centuries ago, one can only marvel at how relevant and contemporary His Word continues to be today. Those who prophesy falsely in the name of the Lord are still with us and God has already given us His evaluation concerning those who do such things.

—JGS

BRIAN McLAREN: WAY OUT OF FOCUS

The grave of the long-dead social gospel continues to be dug up and its agenda resuscitated by the likes of Francis Chan, David Platt, and emergent-movement leader Brian McLaren.

In his recent book, author Scott R. Burson has inspected the framework of Brian McLaren’s teachings. In his volume titled, *Brian McLaren in Focus – A New Kind of Apologetics*, Burson drills deep into McLaren’s faulty presuppositions and skewed theology.

The advertisement for the book says that Burson’s critique is a balanced appraisal answering the question: Is Brian McLaren a villain or a hero?

Burson begins by saying that other apologists have been too negative or too hard on McLaren and maintains that he will be committed to a hermeneutic of charity, not a hermeneutic of suspicion. It seems, however, that McLaren in his frequent questioning of Christian doctrines arouses all kinds of suspicion for himself. Perhaps there is a subliminal message in the cover of the book, *Brian McLaren in Focus*, which bears an out-of-focus photograph of McLaren’s face.

McLaren is a prolific writer who spends a substantial amount of time on book tours, book signings, and sales campaigns. His website promotes his recent book, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, released last September and describes it in this way: “With his trademark brilliance and compassion, McLaren invites readers to seize the moment and set out on the most significant spiritual pilgrimage of our time: to help Christianity become more Christian.”

McLaren presents himself as a utopia-builder. He describes how the Church will heal “the planet, building peace, overcoming poverty and injustice, and collaborating with other faiths to ensure a better future for all of us.” He comes off as a self-proclaimed messiah, rather than as a messenger of the Messiah.

What McLaren offers is not the biblical Gospel or a sinner’s personal transformation through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus codified a Gospel that was fixed and which transcends time and culture when He said, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). This preaching and disciple-making is an age-long endeavor (Matthew 28:18-20).

Burson acknowledges, “McLaren does not believe there is a universal, abstract, timeless essence to the gospel message that transcends each concrete situation” (*Brian McLaren in Focus*, pg. 44).

One should be suspicious of the message that McLaren is offering. It is a threadbare political philosophy that was tried and found wanting more than a century ago. It is the old social gospel, full of political slogans, political correctness, and empty nostrums. In reality, it is more utopian, liberal, and socialist than biblical.

The social gospel movement arose in the late 1800s in England. (See “The Social Gospel of the Past” by Gary E. Gilley, *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2012, pp. 12-13.) The liberal church began focusing not on doctrine, exegesis, apologetics, and evangelism, but rather upon social inequality, labor problems, world peace, and ecumenism.

The social gospel spread in America during the early 1900s through the efforts of Walter Rauschenbusch. The grand scheme for world peace and utopia was largely discredited and forgotten because of two World Wars and severe ongoing moral decline. Utopia became dystopia. All McLaren seems to be doing is regurgitating the old social gospel ideas. His message is defective. It’s the old broken, repackaged social gospel.

Burson maintains that McLaren has been on a long search for “a new way of following Christ” (pg. 35). What, however, is wrong with the tried and true biblical way of following Christ? What McLaren has found is not a new way at all, but rather the old way of Rauschenbusch and company. The question that looms large is: What is the problem with the scriptural way of following Christ?

Burson also tells us that, “McLaren began writing for *Sojourners*, a progressive Christian social activist periodical founded by Jim Wallis” (pg. 45).

It is difficult to take McLaren seriously, especially when he admits that he obscures the truth. “I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated and that shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue (carefully articulated) often stimulate more thought than clarity” (quoted by Burson, pg. 46, from McLaren’s *A Generous Orthodoxy*, pg. 23). So McLaren obscures the truth and exults uncertainty and lack of clarity.

McLaren has been selected by *Time* magazine as one of the 25 most influential Evangelicals in America. However, influence can be positive or negative. McLaren obscures the doctrine of eternal punishment, so one following McLaren’s lead and love for questions could ask the question: Is McLaren truly an Evangelical? Burson shows clearly that McLaren uses the language of liberals and non-Evangelicals (pg. 160).

McLaren, according to Burson, is described as “an international ambassador for Emergent” (pg. 53). What that means is that he networks with others on the issues of global community, environment, justice, peace, and the eradication of poverty. His understanding of the

Kingdom of God is wrapped around these social issues. Ambassadors are appointed. Who appointed McLaren is unclear.

Early in his book, Burson examines “The Early McLaren” (1956-1994), “The Emerging McLaren” (1995-2005), and “The Emergent McLaren” (2006-present) (pp. 31-66). McLaren’s teachings are much like the expression from the erstwhile “Original Amateur Hour” talent show, “Round and round it goes; where it stops nobody knows.”

Jesus, according to McLaren, is a counter-cultural revolutionary with a secret message. This new perception of Jesus, in McLaren’s view, could bring global peace apart from the triumphal return of Christ to rule forever in His righteous kingdom. McLaren offers up a paradigm that can somehow save the entire world. It is an incredible and unbiblical claim.

McLaren lost some support within the evangelical community by way of his overt backing of the Obama presidency in 2008 (pg. 56). Then his approval rating diminished even further with many conservative Evangelicals as he made “his gay-affirming position public and clear when he presided over his son’s same-sex commitment ceremony” (pg. 62).

There is no doubt that McLaren has created a totally new hermeneutic in his approach to the Bible. Any former way of looking at the Bible, he would say, is wrong. To speak of Eden, the fall, salvation, heaven, and hell is in error and obsolete; all of it is an outdated story line. McLaren calls it a Greco-Roman narrative. If that is true, the Bible would have little or no relevance for today.

McLaren’s new hermeneutic is so dense and so philosophical that most people would get lost trying to understand it. McLaren, not the Bible, is the one who is out of touch with the common man. McLaren has developed insider language that is totally foreign to most people. At times he seems to be on another planet of his own making.

McLaren’s ultimate boogeyman is Calvinism. McLaren charges that Calvinism has distorted and destroyed the true Christian message. Yet, what McLaren himself offers in its place is certainly not the true Gospel message. McLaren’s aversion to the “TULIP” of Calvinism has pushed him into the heavy and poisonous weeds of open theism (see Chapter 4 in Burson). Open theism denies that the God of Scripture is all-knowing and maintains that He is growing in knowledge just like a human. God, like us, can only guess about the future.

McLaren tends to label everything he disagrees with as a “virus.” Burson observes that McLaren “clearly has identified what he believes are aspects of Reformed theology that have poisoned and corrupted both the morals and the intellect of many of its followers, and by extension have damaged countless lives in their wake”

(pg. 109). McLaren accuses Calvinists of focusing too much on individual salvation and ignoring social issues. However, quite the opposite is true. That is, in ignoring individual salvation and systematic theology one can be too immersed in social issues. A person can then become ego-centric (man-centered) and not theo-centric (God-centered). Modern man does not like to be told what to do or be controlled. To affirm too strongly that God is absolutely sovereign over man has McLaren rejecting that view of God as mechanistic and casting humans as robots, puppets, or chess pieces (pp. 115-116).

Burson has a helpful section discussing the differences between determinism, libertarianism, and what he labels soft-determinism (pp. 126-136). Burson unfolds that McLaren seems unaware that a finely nuanced Calvinism does not hold to a hard-determinism (fatalism), but rather a soft-determinism. McLaren, in rightly rejecting a hard-determinism, falls into the camp of libertarianism. His critique of a nuanced Calvinism misses the mark and creates a straw man.

Burson also shows that McLaren does not hold to the historical, orthodox view of the fall and the depravity of man. Man's total being is tainted with sin (Romans 1-3). That truth is muted and ultimately lost in McLaren's view.

We are born with a sin nature (Psalms 51:5; 58:3). Scripture indicates that we derive our sinful nature by natural generation. We sin by nature and then by choice. The disobedience of Adam is imputed to all mankind. While there is some debate among theologians in regard to this theory, which is called Traducianism, McLaren holds the opposing view. He maintains that we sin by way of the sociological mechanism of mimesis, which is simply mimicking others. This imitating is labeled as the mimetic theory. As we mimic sin it results in rivalry (pp. 138-141). Yet, McLaren does not answer the question as to why we would mimic sin and indulge in rivalry in the first place. If man is not bent toward sin, he could just as easily mimic doing good.

Burson also spends time analyzing McLaren's views of the future and the afterlife. McLaren does not hold to the literal, physical return of Jesus or the Rapture in any form. Burson describes McLaren's view of the Second Coming to simply mean "the fullness of Christ's royal presence working through the church, the figurative body of Christ" (pg. 151). McLaren argues that after A.D. 70 and the destruction of the Jewish Temple, a new era of planet restoration began. This would be a form of very extreme Preterism. Planet deterioration, not planet restoration, is more plausible. History, experience, and the Bible tell us so (Hebrews 1:10-12).

Burson shows without question that McLaren does not believe in hell, but is rather a Universalist who believes all will be saved (pp. 154-157). In light of everyone being in heaven, it seems strange and inconsistent that McLaren refuses to discuss the eternal fate of the

unevangelized (pp. 157-158). Burson proposes, "In other words, questions concerning the eternal destiny of others are considered by McLaren to be idle conjecture and a deterrent to focusing on temporal social concerns and one's own personal spirituality" (pg. 158).

In two chapters (7 and 8), Burson discusses the interplay of Arminian theology with McLaren's teachings. Burson suggests what Evangelicals can learn from McLaren's teachings. This writer concludes there is not much to learn.

Burson's more than 300 pages are a challenge and will stretch the mind. He does a good job of wading through McLaren's terminology. His paperback is a necessary book if one wishes to see where liberalism and the emergent movement is going and how it is deceiving with "deceptive words" (2 Peter 2:3) and "flattering speech" (Romans 16:18). In the end, the discerning believer will not see McLaren as a hero, but rather quite the opposite.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

the church in suburban Atlanta grew from 300 members to more than 25,000, including "athletes, entertainers and politicians." As "one of the country's most powerful independent church leaders" and through his television ministry and books, Long became known worldwide. He was also known for advocating the prosperity gospel message. According to the Associated Press, "Long was also known for his flamboyant lifestyle, as he flew around the world on a private jet, drove around metro Atlanta in a \$350,000 Bentley and lived in a \$1.4 million house with six bedrooms and nine bathrooms."

Last year word began spreading that Long was suffering from a serious illness. In September, he issued a brief statement saying, "I am recovering from a health challenge that I trust God to deliver me from" and that he and his family were requesting privacy. According to a story posted on the online news source, Heavy.com, Long "returned to his congregation in October 2016, telling them he had been healed by God."

In 2010, Long and his ministry were plagued by scandal when he was accused by four men of sexual coercion. Two men said that Long "groomed them for sexual relationships through the church's LongFellows Youth Academy." Two other men made similar claims. All four filed lawsuits against Long. "Eight months later, Long settled the cases out of court for an undisclosed amount and has never admitted any wrongdoing," the AP reported.

—MKG



Books in Review

BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED

by Preston and Kelly Condra

Sufficient Word Publishing, 170 pages, \$14.95

Apologetics has been called the handmaiden to evangelism. In *By Which We Are Saved*, Preston and Kelly Condra demonstrate how evangelistic efforts should be firmly based in apologetics. Their “handbook for witnessing” thoroughly explains the Gospel and biblically defends it against objections that may be raised.

The Condras express “three hopes” for their book. “The first is to promote a thorough explanation of the Gospel in witnessing situations. The second hope we have is to help Christians feel confident about engaging others in biblically-related conversations. Our third hope for this book is that it will be marked up and dog-eared because it is often used to answer the questions of hearers,” they write in the Introduction (pp. 3-4).

For far too many Christians, witnessing to lost family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others is not a priority. The Condras correctly note that, “witnessing can be daunting, discouraging, and difficult in many ways” (pg. 3). In view of this unfortunate reality, *By Which We Are Saved* is a strategic resource filled with much biblical teaching and great practical advice.

As the Condras note, we live in a time when sharing the saving message of God’s love is becoming more challenging. The Gospel is met with hostility and often seen as “hate speech” and an affront to “political correctness.” Adding to the challenge is the contextualizing of the Bible and its doctrine by prominent leaders and megachurches that has so diluted and corrupted the Gospel.

The strategy laid out in Chapter 2 is logical and effective and will help dispel the fear of witnessing. From developing a proper motivation and an eternal perspective to personal introspection, the reader is called to cultivate a mindset that will enable his or her evangelistic efforts to be more fruitful. Asking for permission to share the Gospel, using qualifying statements, and avoiding the use of leading questions are all part of the practical advice given. And we are reminded that a witnessing

encounter does not need to be a protracted conversation. Neither does it have to end in the “conversion” of the one to whom we are witnessing.

Next, the Condras put forth their evangelism concept in what could be defined as an inductive study and presentation of the Gospel. They offer five elements of the Gospel, examining its *who* (Jesus), *what* (His death, burial, and resurrection), *why* (the reason He died and rose), *how* (the means of salvation) and *where* (the source for the Gospel). As each of these components is examined, objections one may hear are met with concise, biblical answers. For example, within the “who” element, the reader is provided with responses to challenges to doctrines such as Christ’s divinity and the triune nature of God, and to objections such as a God of love wouldn’t send people to hell or allow suffering.

Despite all its sound biblical commentary and counsel, there are a couple of causes for concern. The first chapter states, “Jesus’ death saves us because He paid both a physical and a spiritual price for sin. ... He was also the object of wrath in the spiritual punishment for our sins, spiritually separated from God the Father and the Holy Spirit while He hung on the cross” (pg. 17). Elsewhere, the authors state, “The significance of His resurrection is that He, after having been made sin, would not have been released from hell if there was even one sin which had not been paid by His sacrifice. He would have remained there, awaiting the lake of fire to pay for that sin (2 Cor. 5:21, Acts 2:24)” (pg. 83). Without a more thorough explanation, these remarks are ambiguous at best and, at worst, closely align with the Word-Faith movement’s view of the atonement. These comments would have been better left unsaid.

The book concludes with an appendix that provides a complete index which lists every objection offered and answered in the book, along with an index of all the Scripture verses cited — and there are many. One item that is lacking and would have been equally helpful is a listing of additional apologetic works to study further and cultivate an even more prepared defense of the faith in witnessing.

Even with these concerns, *By Which We Are Saved* is a valuable resource to edify members of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12) making them ready, willing, and able to share the Gospel by which we are saved to a lost and dying world.

—MKG

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