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Evangelicalism's Favorite Priest Is Henri Nouwen a Friend or Foe?

by G. Richard Fisher

Roman Catholic priest Henri Nouwen once wrote, "We prayed for many people, living and dead."¹ With allegiance to this and similar doctrines, there should be no question how Evangelicals should regard Nouwen. And yet this oft-quoted — and seldom examined — writer has a large cheering section in the "evangelical" world.

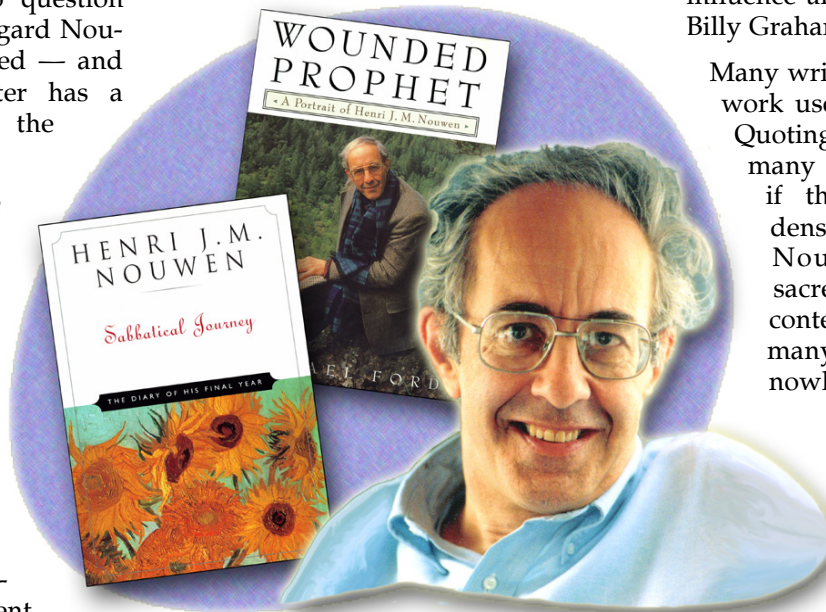
Nouwen is quoted by the likes of Richard Foster, Tony Campolo, Rick Warren, Charles Swindoll, Brian McLaren, and even Ravi Zacharias. *Crosstalk* host Ingrid Schlueter featured on one of her broadcasts an audio clip of Zacharias referring to Nouwen "as being a great saint of recent memory."² Zacharias' organization defends Nouwen's endorsement of contemplative practices simply because these have been part of the Roman Catholic and Byzantine tradition for centuries. However, Evangelicals should use Scripture — not necessarily Church history — as the benchmark.

Nouwen was introduced to the Protestant world in the early 1990s by Robert Schuller when he preached for

three consecutive Sundays at the Crystal Cathedral. He gained mainstream exposure and credibility, and by 1994 he was said to have more influence among Protestants than did Billy Graham.³

Many writers have found Nouwen's work useful for religious citations. Quoting him became popular and many authors did so, especially if they were groping for a dense and esoteric statement. Nouwen's works became sacred without background, context, or examination. For many, he was the man from nowhere — sort of a modern Melchizedek — who says lofty things.

Nouwen's quotes have appeared in the *Our Daily Bread* devotionals published by
(continues on page 15)



Inside this Issue:

- RICK WARREN AND THE SADDLEBAGGAGE OF SADDLEBACK PAGE 2
- GRASSLEY EXONERATES TELEVANGELISTS PAGE 3
- I'VE GOT THE POWER! — THE RETURN OF RHONDA BYRNE PAGE 4

Editorials

RICK WARREN AND THE SADDLEBAGGAGE OF SADDLEBACK

Apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon tell us, "[Emanuel] Swedenborg engaged in regular spiritistic and necromantic contacts; many members today accept this possibility if certain conditions are met."

So who would have ever thought that a long dead mystic and cult leader from the 1700s would make a huge comeback? We have also discovered that his church, once called The Church of the New Jerusalem, is now simply called The New Church. Swedenborg (1688-1772) is still revered by his followers today and his writings taught side-by-side with the Bible.

Swedenborg was the son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop. In late 1744 he was struck with severe illness and delirium. In the spring of 1745 he was stricken to the point that he believed he could see his walls covered with ugly horrible creatures of some sort. At the close of that delusional (or demonic) period, it is claimed that an anonymous man appeared to him to tell him he was directly commissioned by Jesus to have an open door to the unseen world and that he was to write of his experiences.

Like all cult leaders, the Bible was not enough for Swedenborg. He believed himself to be the inspired

initiator of a brand new dispensation. New dispensations are an old lie because the dispensation of grace will continue until Jesus returns (Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:26).

In fact, Swedenborg who was a contemporary of Franz Mesmer (the father of hypnosis) was a trance medium himself which was a popular fad in those days. One author tells us, "In his *Journal of Dreams*, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist-mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg fondly recalled one of his early trance states: 'I had in my mind and body the feeling of an indescribable delight, so that had it been in any higher degree, the whole body would have been, as it were, dissolved in pure joy.'"

In that the religious writings of Swedenborg are so old, so bizarre, so obscure, and so out of date, who would have thought he would make a come back via a television personality and a surgeon no less?

They tell of Swedenborg's entering and communicating with the world of angels and spirits and learning the very secrets of the cosmos. The universal secrets discovered by Swedenborg included a denial of the Trinity and the assertion that fewer than 66 books should be in the Bible. Today, followers of this arcane belief system embrace all the writings of Swedenborg as absolute truth.

Long before Harold Camping and C. Peter Wagner, Swedenborg declared that the Church age had come to an end in 1757 and that his insights and revelations

(continues on page 21)

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GRASSLEY EXONERATES TELEVANGELISTS

After more than three years, an investigation by the Senate Finance Committee headed by Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) concluded with no fines or discipline for six prominent televangelists. The committee released its final report Jan. 6 and it was posted on Grassley's Website. Among those investigated were Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Paula and Randy White, Creflo Dollar, and Eddie Long.

The report disclosed that during the inquiry, Joyce Meyer Ministries "responded fully" and Benny Hinn "also provided complete answers to all questions." However, the other four ministries "either did not provide any information or provided incomplete information." According to *Christianity Today*, the four televangelists refusing to cooperate with details as to their finances, "questioned whether Grassley had the authority to conduct the investigation." "Others accused him of violating their religious freedom," the magazine said.

The Associated Press reported, "Grassley's staff said in the report that they did not issue subpoenas to further the investigation because witnesses feared retaliation if they spoke out publicly and the Finance Committee did not have the time or resources to enforce the subpoenas."

Grassley has asked the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability to move forward in the evaluation process where his committee stopped. The ECFA Website says it "is an accreditation agency dedicated to helping Christian ministries earn the public's trust." Its members include a variety of Christian ministries, churches, and non-profit organizations.

Ole Anthony, president of the televangelist watchdog group Trinity Foundation, was not impressed with Grassley's findings and suggestion. He said he was "disappointed" with the proposal that the ECFA form a commission to further study issues raised by the committee. "The ECFA, he said, has no 'teeth' to compel the televangelists into greater accountability and transparency."

Benny Hinn immediately capitalized on Grassley's press release. He wrote to his followers, "We have a solid reputation of going above and beyond when it comes to our governance and compliance with governmental agencies. I'm glad this latest report from the Senate Finance Committee bears this out once again." However, a few days later, Hinn wrote that as a result of that three-year investigation, his ministry spent millions

of dollars in defending their name and innocence. "At the same time," he said, "we've lost millions in revenue, as some partners walked away, believing there was something financially wrong with our ministry." He stated that his "ministry is facing great financial danger," and that those who stand with him financially will experience "the greatest season of harvest and blessing" they have ever known. "2011 will be your year of recovery and supernatural abundance," he wrote.

—MKG

HAGGARD DEBUTS IN REALITY SPECIAL

Reality television seems to know no bounds. The more aberrant and dubious its protagonists, the better. Case in point: *The Learning Channel's* January broadcast of *Ted Haggard: Scandalous*. The one-hour special, produced by RelativityReal, was hoped to be successful enough to lead to an ongoing series. Haggard was the founder and pastor of the New Life megachurch in Colorado Springs before resigning in disgrace in 2006 after his drug use and involvement with a male prostitute was revealed.

The program detailed the chronicles of Haggard as he established a new church in Colorado Springs last June. His St. James Church, which meets at a local middle school, is said to be a nondenominational fellowship that attracts 300 worshippers at its Sunday morning services.

Haggard maintains, "I don't have any idea about a series." "After what I went through four years ago I'm just glad to be alive and in ministry," he told the *Denver Post*.

Haggard has appeared on another reality show, *Divorce Court*, and has been a featured guest on broadcasts such as *Larry King Live* when moral failure of pastors is the theme.

—MKG

JOHN PAUL II ON FAST TRACK TO SAINTHOOD

Pope Benedict XVI has set May 1 as the date for bestowing upon his predecessor Catholicism's highest honor: sainthood. The beatification of Pope John Paul II is unprecedented for a number of reasons. It will mark
(continues on page 22)

I've Got the Power!

The Return of Rhonda Byrne

by J. Greg Sheryl



Many years ago, a musical group called **Snap!** recorded a catchy piece called "The Power Song," which contains the hook, "I've Got the Power!" The song has been used since then in various commercials, movies, and elsewhere.

Rhonda Byrne is back after a four-year absence to tell us what she has learned since releasing her bestselling book *The Secret*¹ in 2006.² At the beginning of her 2010 follow-up book, entitled *The Power*,³ she explains:

"*The Secret* reveals the law of attraction — the most powerful law that governs our lives. *The Power* contains the essence of everything I have learned since *The Secret* was released in 2006. In *The Power* you will come to understand that all it takes is just one thing to change your relationships, money, health, happiness, career, and your entire life. You don't need to have read *The Secret* for *The Power* to change your life, because everything you need to know is contained in *The Power*. If you have read *The Secret*, then this book will add immeasurably to what you already know."⁴

THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

In the quotation above, Byrne mentions "the law of attraction — the

most powerful law that governs our lives." What is the law of attraction? Christian apologist Ron Rhodes explains that this "law" is associated with a 19th-century philosophical/religious movement called New Thought:

"This law [of attraction] says that just as like attracts like, so our thoughts can attract the things they want or expect. Negative thoughts attract dismal circumstances; positive thoughts attract more desirable circumstances. Our thoughts can be either creative or destructive. New Thought sets out to teach people how to use their thoughts creatively."⁵

Rhonda Byrne gives this explanation:

"In universal terms, the law of attraction says: like attracts like. What that means in simple terms for your life is: what you *give* out, you *receive* back. Whatever you give out in life is what you receive back in life. Whatever you give, by the law of attraction, is exactly what you attract back to yourself."⁶

Byrne speaks of people being magnets that bring things to themselves by thinking about those things and by the feelings they feel inside, whether

good or bad. So, thinking about what you *do* want (and *not* thinking about what you *don't* want); and especially by feeling good inside, you attract the things you desire.

Conversely, by thinking about things you *don't* want; and/or feeling bad inside, you attract things that you don't want. Byrne views your thoughts and feelings as transmissions to the universe, causing things (good or bad) to come back to you from the universe.

The following quotations from *The Secret* will substantiate the assertions stated above:

"Remember that you are a magnet, attracting everything to you ... The more you practice and begin to see the law of attraction bringing things to you, the greater the magnet you will become, because you will add the power of faith, belief, and knowing."⁷

"I want to let you in on a secret to *The Secret*. The shortcut to anything you want in your life is to BE and FEEL happy now! It is the fastest way to bring money and anything else you want into your life. Focus on radiating out into the Universe those feelings of joy and happiness. When you do that, you will attract back to

you all things that bring you joy and happiness, which will not only include an abundance of money, but everything else you are wanting. You must radiate out the signal to bring back what you want."⁸

"As you deliberately focus on what you want, as you begin to radiate good feelings, the law of attraction will respond. All you have to do is make a start, and as you do, you will unleash the magic."⁹

"Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts."¹⁰

Regarding feeling bad, Byrne declares:

"When you are feeling bad, you are on the frequency of drawing more bad things. The law of attraction *must* respond by broadcasting back to you more pictures of bad things and things that will make you feel bad. As you feel bad, and don't make any effort to change your thoughts and feel better, you are in effect saying, 'Bring me more circumstances that will make me feel bad. Bring it on!'"¹¹

As stated above, Byrne regards people as transmitting signals to the universe via their thoughts and feelings:

"...you are the most powerful transmission tower in the Universe."¹²

"When you think about what you want, and you emit that frequency, you cause the energy of what you want to vibrate at that frequency and you bring it to You! As you focus on what you want, you are changing the vibration of the atoms of that thing, and you are causing it to vibrate *to* You. The reason you are the most powerful transmission tower in the Universe is because you have been given the power to focus your energy through your thoughts and alter the vibrations of what you are

focused on, which then magnetically draws it to you."¹³

REWIND ... WHO IS RHONDA BYRNE?

In 2006, Rhonda Byrne made a big splash when she first produced a DVD called *The Secret*, followed later that year by a book with the same name. The book amounted to an edited transcript of the DVD, with additional text by Byrne and a number of quotations from various sources. Both the DVD and the book claimed that there was a secret which a few people had known throughout time, and which had been kept from the masses. This secret was a powerful key of knowledge, which, possessed and used, could bring a person anything his or her heart desired. In her book, Byrne stated:

"There isn't a single thing that you cannot do with this knowledge. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are, The Secret can give you whatever you want."¹⁴

Only a page later, Byrne reinforces what she stated above:

"As you travel through [this book's] pages and you learn The Secret, you will come to know how you can have, be, or do anything you want."¹⁵

Byrne herself is around 60 years old, a divorcee¹⁶ with two daughters, Hayley and Skye. According to the scant biographical information gleaned from her "Creative Biography" on her Website:

"Rhonda was born in Australia and began her career as a radio producer before moving into television production. Many of her shows won industry awards and were screened in major countries outside Australia. Rhonda's experience, background, and skill in film and television production were instrumental in the creation of *The Secret* film. In May of 2007, Rhonda Byrne was recognized as one of the world's most influential people in TIME magazine's

'The TIME 100: The People Who Shape Our World', and shortly afterwards appeared in Forbes' 'The Celebrity 100' list. Rhonda currently lives outside of Los Angeles."¹⁷

As to how Byrne came to produce the popular DVD and book, both entitled *The Secret*, she informs us in the book's Foreword, in dramatic fashion:

"A year ago,¹⁸ my life had collapsed around me. I'd worked myself into exhaustion, my father died suddenly, and my relationships with my work colleagues and loved ones were in turmoil. Little did I know at the time, out of my greatest despair was to come the greatest gift. I'd been given a glimpse of a Great Secret — The Secret to life. The glimpse came in a hundred-year-old book, given to me by my daughter Hayley.¹⁹ I began tracing The Secret back through history. I couldn't believe all the people who knew this. They were the greatest people in history: Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Emerson, Edison, Einstein. Incredulous, I asked, 'Why doesn't *everyone* know this?' A burning desire to share The Secret with the world consumed me, and I began searching for people alive today who knew The Secret. One by one they began to emerge. I became a magnet: as I began to search, one great living master after another was drawn to me. When I discovered one teacher, that one would link to the next, in a perfect chain. ... In a few short weeks I had traced The Secret back through the centuries, and I had discovered the modern-day practitioners of the Secret. ... We [i.e., herself and her production team] did not have a single teacher secured to film, but we knew The Secret, and so with utter faith I flew from Australia to the United States where the majority of the teachers were based. ... We literally magnetized everything and

everyone to us. Eight months later *The Secret* was released."²⁰

While this sounds dramatic and miraculous, things are not always as they appear. One Australian magazine article about Byrne notes:

"Even alternative spiritual teachers such as Paul Wilson have criticised the book's message as simplistic and contradictory. If the law of attraction was a centuries-old secret, how could Byrne find two dozen hugely popular 'teachers' to talk about it?"²¹

And in her book examining *The Secret*, wide-ranging researcher and author Alexandra Bruce observed:

"Whether by dint of the Law of Attraction or a brilliant, calculated move on Rhonda's part, most of the interviews that appear in [the DVD] *The Secret* were filmed at a biannual meeting of the Transformational Leadership Council (TLC). This proved to be fateful, indeed. The TLC is a members-only group of self-help luminaries founded by *Chicken Soup for the Soul* author Jack Canfield, who has become something of a Godfather in the self-help industry. Like Canfield, many of the TLC's members are marketing geniuses who have successful careers as consultants to Fortune 500 companies. The aggregate sales power of all the people interviewed in *The Secret* is mammoth and each was able to mobilize his or her own network in support of the film, catapulting Rhonda into the stratosphere of super-success."²²

The fact that Oprah Winfrey threw her considerable celebrity in support of *The Secret* didn't hurt, either.

Bruce also notes:

"Besides high membership in the TLC, most of the speakers who appear in *The Secret* have been regulars on the New Thought/Unity Church circuit for years and they continue to speak regularly at Unity Churches all over America. The principles es-

poused in *The Secret* are largely those of the Unity Church, the main New Thought denomination, much admired by Oprah Winfrey. Founded in 1889 by American husband and wife team Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, it has a present-day following of some 2,000,000 adherents around the world."²³

In light of the above, "The Secret" doesn't seem to be much of a "secret" at all, nor does there seem to have been much "magnetism" involved in Byrne's securing of the 24 teachers who appear in the DVD and in the pages of her book *The Secret*.

However, in the words of one observer:

"It was an incredibly savvy move to call it "The Secret,"" says Donavin Bennes, a buyer who specializes in metaphysics for Borders Books. "We all want to be in on a secret. But to present it as *the* secret, that was brilliant."²⁴

NEW THOUGHT: THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE SECRET and THE POWER

At this point, it is helpful to discuss the 19th-century philosophical/religious movement known as New Thought. That New Thought is the foundation of Byrne's teachings is evidenced by her many citations of a number of New Thought authors in both of her books, as well as the fact that two important sources she credits with her own introduction into The Secret were both books by New Thought authors: *The Science of Getting Rich*²⁵ by Wallace D. Wattles and *The Master Key System*²⁶ by Charles F. Haanel.²⁷ (She offers both of these books as free downloads from her Website.) Additionally, in the "Recommended Reading" section of her Website, many, if not most, of the sources she recommends are written by New Thought authors.²⁸

An English dictionary defines New Thought:

"A modern religious movement that emphasizes spiritual healing

and the creative power of positive thought."²⁹

One Christian researcher describes New Thought in this way:

"In summary, New Thought was a system of cultic belief that taught that true reality is spiritual, that the spiritual is the cause of all physical effects, and that the human mind through positive mental attitude and positive confession has the power to create its own reality: either health and wealth, or sickness and poverty."³⁰

According to *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*:

"Though it is difficult to summarize New Thought beliefs, since they are so varied and to so large a degree individualistic, it is possible to summarize some of the more prevalent views."³¹

The *Encyclopædia* further informs:

"In 1916 the International New Thought Alliance (formed 1914) agreed upon a purpose that embraces some central ideas of most groups: To teach the Infinitude of the Supreme One; the Divinity of Man and his Infinite Possibilities through the creative power of constructive thinking and obedience to the voice of the indwelling Presence which is our source of Inspiration, Power, Health and Prosperity."³²

Concerning the New Thought view of God, Christian researcher D.R. McConnell states:

"The god in which the metaphysical cults believe is not a *personal* god who *sovereignly* governs the universe. Their god is an *impersonal* force: 'the Infinite Power,' 'the Spirit of Infinite Life,' and 'the Infinite Intelligence.' This infinite, but impersonal, force rules the universe indirectly through 'immutable laws' rather than directly through his presence and wisdom. Historically, this concept of God could be categorized as a spiritualized form of 'deism' so

prevalent in the late nineteenth century."³³

Christian apologist and researcher Robert M. Bowman cites the quotation from McConnell above and then comments:

"The only thing I would add to McConnell's description is that the metaphysical concept of God, while it did develop historically from deism, ended up more akin to pantheism than to deism. *Deism* regards God as a personal being who is distinct from the world he created and who governs the world by unchanging natural laws that even he never violates (so that miracles do not occur). *Pantheism* regards God as an impersonal or semipersonal being immanent in the world and more or less identical to the unchanging laws governing reality."³⁴

MADE IN AMERICA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW THOUGHT³⁵

New Thought arose in America in the latter half of the 19th-century. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* states:

"The origins of New Thought may be traced to a dissatisfaction on the part of many persons with scientific empiricism and their reaction to the religious skepticism of the 17th and 18th centuries. The romanticism and idealism of the 19th century also influenced the New Thought movement, of which Phineas P. Quimby (1802-66) is usually cited as the earliest proponent."³⁶

Christian religious researcher James Beverley states:

"The term *New Thought* refers to the metaphysical tradition associated with Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-66) and his ideological heirs. Quimby, one of the original figures in the theory of mind over matter, was influenced by Mesmerism and hypnosis. He opened an office in Portland, Maine, in 1859. Though he started no church, he had an impact, either directly or indirectly, on numerous religious

leaders, including the following: Warren Felt Evans (1817-89); Julius Dresser (1838-93); Horatio Dresser (1866-1954); Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), the founder of Christian Science; Emma Curtis Hopkins (1853-1925); Charles and Myrtle Fillmore;³⁷ and Ernest Holmes (1877-1960), the founder of Religious Science."³⁸

Mary Baker Eddy, who later founded Christian Science, had at one time been a patient of Quimby's and was influenced by his views.

New Thought author Glenn R. Mosley notes that forerunners of the New Thought movement included "Franz Anton Mesmer, Emanuel Swedenborg, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Phineas Parkhurst Quimby."³⁹

Mosley says that Emerson "was influenced by such schools of thought as English Romanticism, Neoplatonism, and Hindu philosophy."⁴⁰ Another influence on New Thought was that of philosopher G.W.F. Hegel.⁴¹

Mosley also observes:

"New Thought has evolved as a movement that has no specific dogma to which the member religious movements must adhere. ... Although opinions regarding who actually founded New Thought vary, since the essence of the movement is rooted in the interpretation of the teachings of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (known as 'Park'), he is credited as the overall intellectual father of New Thought."⁴²

As Mosley indicates, there is debate as to who actually founded the New Thought movement. Some believe it was Quimby while others believe it was Emma Curtis Hopkins, who was at one time a student of Mary Baker Eddy. Hopkins also worked with Eddy until there was a falling out between them. Hopkins later taught some of the leading founders of the mind science religions. (The mind science religions include Christian Science, Unity, and Religious Science.) Others say it was founded by New Thought author Warren Felt Evans (1817-1889). Regarding Evans, one

contemporary book on the New Thought movement states:

"He was among the first to write of healing as taught and practiced by Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Evans was a Swedenborgian and he integrated the philosophies of Emanuel Swedenborg and Quimby and, to some degree, Franz Anton Mesmer. Several New Thought historians believe that the literary efforts of Evans in synthesizing the work of Swedenborg and Quimby is more important to the New Thought movement than the work of Quimby himself."⁴³

Two additional important figures in the early New Thought movement were Ralph Waldo Trine (1866-1958), author of the book *In Tune With the Infinite*, among others; and Thomas Troward (1847-1918), who was also a judge.

One reason that providing a precise definition of New Thought is not easy is explained by Christian researchers and authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon:

"New Thought is an umbrella designation covering hundreds, possibly thousands, of independent churches around the world. Broadly speaking, Religious Science (Science of Mind), Divine Science, Unity School of Christianity and scores of smaller independent organizations constitute New Thought."⁴⁴

One source notes that, "After 1890 the term *New Thought* came into vogue when a periodical by the same name began."⁴⁵

Christian Science and New Thought share a common spiritual lineage through the teachings of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Although they have some significant theological differences, they also hold some important tenets in common, and are both mind science religions. However, Christian Science is not part of the New Thought movement by design.⁴⁶ Regarding the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, one source notes that she:

“Founded Church of Christ, Scientist, 1881. She was initially a student in the growing New Thought movement, but she became insular and separated herself and her organization from the movement and its outgrowths, such as Religious Science, Divine Science, and Unity.”⁴⁷

McConnell notes that, “New Thought ideas form the foundation of a variety of widely read self-help and success-motivation books.”⁴⁸ Just two examples of this that he gives are Norman Vincent Peale’s bestseller, *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*.⁴⁹ There are certainly many other, both old and new, self-help books by authors who also espouse New Thought concepts including, of course, Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* and *The Power*.

Two prominent 20th-century New Thought promulgators were author and New Thought minister Emmet Fox and author and pastor Norman Vincent Peale⁵⁰ (although Peale was, inconsistently enough, pastor of a Christian church).⁵¹ Della Reese, of the former television series *Touched By An Angel*, is a contemporary New Thought minister.⁵² Additionally, Dr. Michael Beckwith, prominently featured in both *The Secret* book and DVD, is a contemporary New Thought leader.⁵³

Ankerberg and Weldon note:

“Almost every leader in the New Thought and Mind Science movement is either a ‘doctor,’ reverend or both, but it appears that only a relatively few have legitimate Ph.D.s or the equivalent from accredited institutions.”⁵⁴

THE POWER

If we take Byrne at her word that her book *The Power* contains “the essence of everything I have learned since *The Secret* was released in 2006,” the question becomes “What has she learned in four years?”

Apparently not much, because *The Power* seems to be a somewhat less

flamboyant exposition of the law of attraction that she introduced in her original bestseller *The Secret*. Although *The Power* is slightly longer than *The Secret* (by about 50 pages), she seems to cover much the same ground that she had in her earlier book. However, in the latter book she has toned down her language somewhat.

The Power also features a dizzying array of supporting quotations and sources, set off from the text of the book in various places on its pages. Within the text are at least 122 quotations from some 78 sources. (This doesn’t include her quotation at the very beginning of the book from “The Emerald Tablet,” an esoteric source that she dates at “around 3000 BC.” A different quotation from The Emerald Tablet also introduced *The Secret*.) Somehow, however, one suspects that at least some of the quotations she cites might have had a very different meaning in context — and she doesn’t give the context for her quotations.

In *The Power*, Byrne states that the most powerful force in the universe is love⁵⁵ which sounds almost biblical. However, in saying this, what Byrne is referring to by the word “love” is what she referred to in *The Secret* as the law of attraction. The following passage near the beginning of *The Power* shows this:

“To harness the positive force of love and change your life, you must understand its law, the most powerful law in the universe — the law of attraction. From the greatest to the smallest — the law of attraction is what holds every star in the universe and forms every atom and molecule.”⁵⁶

Again, on the very next page, she states, “The force of attraction is the force of love! Attraction is love.”⁵⁷ On the same page, she gives a supporting quotation from New Thought author Charles Haanel:

“The law of attraction or the law of love ... they are one and the same.”⁵⁸

She follows Haanel’s quote by stating:

“The law of attraction is the law of love, and it is the all-powerful law that keeps everything in harmony, from countless galaxies to atoms. It is operating in everything and through everything in the universe. And it is the law that is operating in your life.”⁵⁹

So, as demonstrated above, in revealing this great power of love, she has simply redefined the word “love” as a synonym for the law of attraction. Thus, both *The Secret* and its successor *The Power* are both expositions of Byrne’s understanding of the New Thought concept of the law of attraction. In fact, in *The Secret*, Byrne had already spoken about her belief in the importance of “love” and had also used the word “love” as a synonym for the law of attraction. For instance, in that book, she had written:

“In fact, some of the great thinkers of the past referred to the law of attraction as the law of love.”⁶⁰

However, in *The Power*, Byrne is inconsistent in her use of the word “love,” because elsewhere in the volume she seems to use this same “law of attraction type of love” to mean other things, such as loving actions;⁶¹ or positive feelings about something;⁶² or even “making love.”⁶³ Likewise, in *The Secret* Byrne had used the word “love” to refer to loving feelings.⁶⁴

Manifesting complete confusion and disregard for the meaning of the word, she tries to make her case for love (seemingly, the “law of attraction” that she has redefined as love) by stating:

“What would the world be without love? First of all, you wouldn’t even exist; without love you couldn’t have been born. None of your family and friends would have been born either. In fact, there wouldn’t be a single human being on the planet. If the force of love ceased today, the entire human race would decrease and eventually die out.

Every single invention, discovery, and human creation came from the love in a human heart. If it were not for the love of the Wright Brothers, we could not fly in an airplane. ... Without the love of architects and builders, there would be no homes, buildings, or cities. ... There would be no books, no paintings, and no music, because all of these things are created from the positive force of love. Take a look around you right now. Whatever you see that is a human creation would not be there without love."⁶⁵

She further declares:

"Without love, you wouldn't move. There would be no positive force to propel you to get up in the morning, to work, play, dance, talk, learn, listen to music, or do anything at all. You'd be like a stone statue."⁶⁶

And she also states, "The force of love is *the* intelligence of life and the universe."⁶⁷ Here she seems to almost equate love with God; however, it is clear from both *The Secret* and *The Power* that Byrne's "God" (if she even believes in God) is not the personal God of the Bible, but rather an impersonal force that people are able to manipulate to gain their personal desires and to achieve their ambitions. In her way of thinking, man is not the servant of a personal, loving God, but the potential master of an impersonal, intelligent force. In *The Power*, Byrne called love a "force" about 80 times.

What does appear to be a difference between her two books is the heightened emphasis that she puts on "love" (although as a "force") in the second book. However, because she uses "love" as a synonym for the law of attraction, both books are still about the law of attraction, whichever name she chooses to use for it; the difference being largely semantic.

CONTRASTING THE POWER and THE SECRET

One contrast between Byrne's two books is that in *The Secret*, Byrne made a point of capitalizing two

words throughout the book: The word "You" and the word "Universe," when referring to "the Universe."

Concerning the reason she capitalized the word "You," Byrne explained in the book's Foreword that she did this so the reader would understand that she created *The Secret* for them personally.⁶⁸

As to the reason she capitalized "Universe," it seems to be because she is using the term as a vague reference to an impersonal pantheistic deity that she believes must inexorably and mechanically respond to the law of attraction, for good or for ill.

For unstated reasons, she has dispensed with this capitalization of "You" and "Universe" in *The Power*.

Another difference between the two books is that *The Secret* consisted of an edited transcript of 24 teachers interviewed for the DVD of the same name interlaced with additional text added by Byrne (and a number of quotations by others). By contrast, *The Power* is a solo effort on Byrne's part (bolstered by multitudes of quotations from others).

A third difference between the books is that *The Secret* appeared to feature a combination of New Thought and New Age teachers, although this seeming combination may have been more apparent than real; regardless, *The Power* seems to align strictly with New Thought exponents.

A fourth difference between the two books is that, while one will find Jesus only mentioned once in the text of Byrne's first book,⁶⁹ He is quoted three times in her latest book⁷⁰ and also referred to twice in the book's text.⁷¹ However, in each of the three instances in *The Power* where she directly quotes Him, she refers to Him merely as the "Founder of Christianity."

A fifth difference between the books is the "formula" she gives for attaining desires. In *The Secret*, the formula, which she attributes to the New Testament, is "ask, believe, receive;"⁷²

however, in *The Power*, it is "imagine," "feel," and "receive."⁷³ Interestingly, the words she uses in each formula do not seem to mean the same thing; that is, by "ask," she doesn't mean the same thing as she does by "imagine;" by "believe," she doesn't mean the same thing as she means by "feel." She doesn't even seem to mean the same thing by the word "receive" in each of the formulas.

A sixth difference between the books is that, in *The Power*, she seems to have toned down *some* of her more extreme statements that she had made in *The Secret*. Here are two examples:

1. In her first book, Byrne couldn't say enough about who each person actually is. For instance, according to her, "You are eternal energy."⁷⁴ And most amazingly of all, she asserted:

"You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet."⁷⁵

It would seem that Byrne still believes this, although her language is a little less extravagant in *The Power*, in that she doesn't directly say that "you are God." However, in this latter book, she still wrote:

"You are an eternal being living temporarily in a human body. If you stopped existing, there would be an empty space in the universe, and the whole universe would collapse into that empty space."⁷⁶

And adds:

"And so do you think with all this that perhaps you are a wee bit more special than you ever considered yourself to be? Do you think perhaps you might be a little more valuable than you thought? You, every person you know, and every person who has ever lived have no end!"⁷⁷

2. In her first book, Byrne (and Joe Vitale, one of the teachers featured in both the book and DVD versions of *The Secret*) made some statements about people attracting bad things to themselves. They stated that people who suffered bad things brought those bad things upon themselves through the law of attraction.⁷⁸ In openly stating this, they were actually just being logically consistent with their belief in the law of attraction — that by the creative power of our good or bad thoughts, we draw good or bad things into our lives.

For instance, Byrne asserted:

“Often when people first hear this part of the Secret they recall events in history where masses of lives were lost, and they find it incomprehensible that so many people could have attracted themselves to the event. By the law of attraction, they had to be on the same frequency as the event. It doesn’t necessarily mean they thought of that exact event, but the frequency of their thoughts matched the frequency of the event. ... You have a choice right now. Do you want to believe that it’s just the luck of the draw and bad things can happen to you at any time? Do you want to believe that you can be in the wrong place at the wrong time? That you have no control over circumstances? Or do you want to believe and *know* that your life experience is in your hands and that only all *good* can come into your life because that is the way you think? You have a choice, and whatever you choose to think *will* become your life experience. Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts.”⁷⁹

The clear implications of what both Vitale and Byrne shared in this part of the book were, of course, very controversial, not to mention totally lacking in compassion for those who suffer or have suffered. As more than one person noted, this makes victims of the Holocaust, a tsunami, rape,

murder, or theft, responsible for what happened to them. As odious as this teaching is, the reason for mentioning it here is simply to say that Byrne does not seem quite as explicit about expressing this logical consequence of the law of attraction in *The Power*. For those who are aware of it from the first book, they can still see the teaching in this latter book, where she wrote:

“Good feelings mean you’re on a positive frequency of love. Bad feelings mean you’re on a negative frequency. Whatever you feel, whether good or bad, determines your frequency, and like a magnet you attract the people, events, and circumstances that are on the same frequency!”⁸⁰

“Your entire life is what you have imagined it to be. Everything you have or don’t have, every situation and circumstance of your life is what you have imagined it to be. The problem is that many people imagine the worst! They’re turning the most wonderful tool against themselves. Instead of imagining the best, many people are in fear and imagine all the things that can go wrong. And as surely as they keep imagining and feeling those things, they happen.”⁸¹

“Sometimes life may throw some tricky thing my way, but I know when it happens that I attracted it to me. I always ask how I attracted any problem so I can learn from it — and so I won’t do it again!”⁸²

At one point in the book, Byrne also quotes Job 3:25, a biblical text that some teachers in the aberrational Faith movement use as “proof” that Job brought his troubles on himself through his own negativity:

“For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me.”⁸³

In short, perhaps the primary differences between *The Secret* and *The Power* seem to be that Byrne emphasizes some things in *The Power* more than she had in *The Secret* (such as the

“law of attraction” being synonymous with “the law of love”); and secondly, that, in *The Power*, she has toned down some of the extreme rhetoric that had been evident in her first book. Additionally, her second book is, arguably, not as exciting as her previous book. In the words of my beloved uncle, Thomas Burroughs, “Sequels are seldom equals.” (Although, *The Power* isn’t actually a sequel as much as it is a restatement of material she had already presented in *The Secret*.)

BYRNE’S THEOLOGY

In studying both of Byrne’s books, it is possible to derive her apparent beliefs about certain things, such as God, Jesus, man, sin, the afterlife, and the devil.

God. Byrne evidently does not believe in a personal God. Her view of God is *pantheistic* — God is everything and vice versa — and also *monistic*. She believes that everything in the universe is one.⁸⁴ The following speaks volumes concerning Byrne’s understanding of both God *and* the law of attraction:

“The Universe is the Universal supply and supplier of everything. Everything comes from the Universe, and is delivered to you *through* people, circumstances, and events, by the law of attraction. Think of the law of attraction as the law of supply. It is the law that enables you to draw from the infinite supply. When you emit the perfect frequency of what you want, the perfect people, circumstances, and events will be attracted to you and delivered! It is not people who are giving you the things you desire. If you hold that false belief, you will experience lack, because you are looking at the outside world and people as the supply. The true supply is the invisible field, whether you call that the Universe, the Supreme Mind, God, Infinite Intelligence, or whatever else. Whenever you receive anything, remember that you attracted it to you by the law of attraction, and by being on the frequency and in harmony with

the Universal Supply. The Universal Intelligence which pervades everything moved people, circumstances, and events to give that thing to you, because that is the law."⁸⁵

Jesus. In her writings, Byrne evidences no special devotion or esteem for the Lord Jesus. Incredibly, she regards Him as a "prosperity teacher" and "millionaire" who had a very "affluent lifestyle."⁸⁶ She also acknowledges Him as one of the world's "saviors;"⁸⁷ as a miracle-worker, who knew the power of gratitude;⁸⁸ one of the "great beings" (others being Buddha and Lao Tzu) who taught love;⁸⁹ and as the "Founder of Christianity."⁹⁰ Jesus seems not to be unique, in Byrne's view.

Man. Byrne obviously thinks a great deal about man. According to John Hagelin, one of the 24 teachers Byrne cites in *The Secret*, "Ultimately we are the source of the Universe ... We are the creators of the Universe."⁹¹ Additionally, as cited earlier, Byrne believes that we are "eternal energy;"⁹² "You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You;"⁹³ and "you are an unlimited being."⁹⁴ Without a scintilla of support for her assertions,⁹⁵ she states:

"You are an eternal being living temporarily in a human body. If you stopped existing, there would be an empty space in the universe, and the whole universe would collapse into that empty space."⁹⁶

Sin. Byrne glosses over sin and any need for atonement. She says:

"You are worthy and deserving just as you are. You *are* good enough now. If you feel you have done something that wasn't right, understand that your *realization* and *acceptance* of it is absolution for the law of attraction."⁹⁷

She does believe that the law of attraction somehow punishes those who have done wrong to another person:

"If someone harms another person, the law of attraction responds unfailingly. It may use police or laws or any number of ways to give back to the person exactly what they gave, but one thing is certain with the law of attraction; we receive back what we give."⁹⁸

The afterlife. Byrne believes that all people will experience a glorious afterlife, because all of us are eternal beings.⁹⁹ Those who have died continue to exist, but they attain "the frequency of love ... the highest frequency in creation."¹⁰⁰ She asserts, "You, every person you know, and every person who has ever lived have no end!"¹⁰¹ She believes that we will have many adventures after our life on earth is over, including travel in other worlds and galaxies, all of which we will experience together.¹⁰²

The devil. According to Byrne, the enemy of man doesn't exist:

"There is no other power in life but love. There isn't a force of negativity. In ancient times, negativity was sometimes described as 'the devil' or 'evil.' Being tempted by evil or the devil simply meant being tempted to fall into negative thoughts and feelings, rather than standing firm in the positive force of love. There is no force of negativity. There is only one force, and that force is love."¹⁰³

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: THE BIBLE VS. BYRNE

For starters, the impersonal god of Rhonda Byrne, which is more or less identified with the law of attraction, is most certainly *not* the God of the Bible. Additionally, the Bible doesn't teach the law of attraction. Instead, the Bible teaches a personal God (more on this below) Who responds to people.

There may be a few passages which would seem to support a *limited* sort of law of attraction. For example, Byrne cites Luke 6:38:

"Give, and it will be given to you ... for by your standard of mea-

sure it will be measured to you in return."¹⁰⁴

To this, we could add the previous verse which says, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

Or perhaps, "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him" (Proverbs 26:27; cf. Ecclesiastes 10:8a).

However, these are precepts put in place by a personal God, not by an impersonal law. Because God, being personal, puts natural laws into place, He can at times override or suspend those natural laws. For instance, God put the law of gravity into place. Yet the Scriptures give us occurrences of God overruling that law. For example, God parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the children of Israel to pass through dryshod (see Exodus 14:21-22);¹⁰⁵ God performed the same sort of miracle at the beginning of Joshua's ministry (Joshua 3:13-4:18); there was a time in Elisha's ministry where He caused an iron ax head to float on the top of the water (2 Kings 6:5-7); Jesus walked on water (Matthew 14:25-33); Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), and so forth.

In fact, one might say that what we term a miracle occurs when God intervenes to override some natural law that He has put into place. However, in Byrne's system, the law of attraction is impersonal, exact, and admits of no exceptions.

God. God is personal and has a personal love for man. Indeed, God's very nature is love (1 John 4:8, 16). He is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. His love motivated Him to send the Lord Jesus for our salvation (John 3:16). He blesses faith and obedience and punishes sin and disobedience.

Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God the Son. He is also the Creator of everything that exists (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16). He is the Savior of every sinner who trusts in Him (John 3:16; 6:40; Acts 16:31).

Man. Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). He is a creature, *not* the Creator. Although made in the image of God, all men have turned to their own way (Isaiah 53:6). Because we are all sinners in God's sight, all men need the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:21; 3:21-22).

Sin. Sin is falling short of God's standard of perfection. It can manifest itself as active rebellion against God or passive indifference toward God. The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Bible also says that, "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The afterlife. The Bible teaches the existence of heaven and hell (Matthew 25:34, 41, 46). Those who have trusted in Jesus as their Savior will spend eternity with Him. Those who have rejected Him will spend eternity in hell, which the Bible calls "the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15).

The devil. The devil (also known as Satan — see Revelation 12:9; Matthew 4:1, 10) is a real person, not some metaphor for "negativity." Through him, sin entered our world when our first parents, Adam and Eve, succumbed to his temptation (Genesis 3:1-7). The Bible calls him "the evil one" (Matthew 6:13; John 17:15); "the tempter" (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5); and "the accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10). Two of his weapons are temptation and deception (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 20:3, 7-8). He also causes suffering (Job 1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 2:10). Of the devil, Jesus said:

"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).¹⁰⁶

A CRITIQUE OF BYRNE AND HER LAW OF ATTRACTION

Byrne refers to her "god" as "the One Universal Mind," "the One

Mind," "The Supreme Mind,"¹⁰⁷ and "The force of love."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, she declares that "The force of love is the intelligence of life and the universe."¹⁰⁹ Byrne seems to use "the force of love" and "the law of attraction" as synonyms.¹¹⁰ Despite this, however, "the Supreme Mind," "the intelligence of life and the universe," doesn't seem very smart.

For instance, she says that the law of attraction can't understand the concept of "not."¹¹¹ If we focus on what we don't want, we will still receive it from this intelligent force, because it doesn't understand "not" or "don't want." This doesn't sound very preceptive! In fact, it rather sounds like people who *do* understand what "not" and "don't want" mean are more enlightened than "the Supreme Mind!"

Let it be clearly stated: If God is impersonal, then He is not intelligent. Only a person possesses intelligence.

It seems that the primary appeal of Byrne's teachings in both her books is at least threefold:

1. It offers people the promise of having their dreams fulfilled with very little effort on their part. In the words of one critic of the aberrational Word-Faith teaching, which shares certain similarities with Byrne's teachings:

"Seldom if ever, has there been a gospel that has promised so much, and demanded so little. The Faith gospel is a message ideally suited to the twentieth-century American Christian. ... In an economy fueled by materialism and fired by the ambitions of the 'upwardly mobile,' the Faith gospel preaches wealth and prosperity. The Faith gospel promises health and long life to a world in which death can come a myriad of different ways."¹¹²

Byrne's books might appropriately be entitled, *The Lazy Man's Guide to Obtaining Whatever You Want*.¹¹³ By contrast, the Bible teaches that it is God's will that will prevail, not man's desires (Psalm 33:10-11). In fact, we express this truth whenever we pray

the Lord's Prayer, saying, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

The 20th-century Christian apologist C.S. Lewis once observed:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"¹¹⁴

To focus so strongly on our desires, as Byrne advocates, is to risk making our desires idols which replace our allegiance to God.

2. Byrne's omission of any real mention of sin or a need for true repentance from sin is attractive to people. No need to look to the atonement of Christ for salvation from sin, either. Byrne's "gospel" has no cross! "The offense of the cross has ceased" (see Galatians 5:11).

3. Byrne's teachings offer man the promise of people controlling their own destiny. Again, in the words of D.R. McConnell, criticizing teachers of the Word-Faith movement:

"...in an international environment characterized by anarchy, in which terrorists strike at will and nuclear holocaust can come screaming from the sky at any moment, the Faith gospel confers an authority with which the believer can supposedly exercise complete control over his or her own environment."¹¹⁵

To vainly imagine that we have complete control over our lives is a pleasant illusion, but it *is* an illusion, nonetheless. The fact is that we have very little control over what happens to us.

The idea that we have control over our own lives is also related to pride. Consider the godless pride of William Ernest Henley, who, in his poem "Invictus," wrote, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." And it is the same pride evident in the line from the popular song sung by Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way." It is reminiscent of the saying I once heard a Bible teacher

make, "He's a self-made man, and he worships his maker." By contrast, the Bible reminds us, "Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He Who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3).

Byrne's philosophy is reminiscent of the 19th-20th century French pharmacist Émile Coué, who taught people to say, "Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better."

The law of attraction can be refuted, both biblically and through life experiences.

In the Bible, for example, we see instances where people believed things were going to happen to them, either good or bad, and those good or bad things did not happen to them. For instance, in Judges 17-18, we read of a man named Micah who set up an idol in his home and then persuaded a young Levite who was passing through to be his personal priest. After doing this, the Scripture says:

"Then Micah said, 'Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!'" (Judges 17:13).

What happened to Micah in the following chapter, however, was disaster, not blessing!

Byrne quotes Job 3:25, which states, "For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me,"¹¹⁶ apparently to indicate that Job suffered the ill effects of the law of attraction. But, if this is true, Job elsewhere testified, "But when I looked for good, evil came to me; and when I waited for light, then came darkness" (Job 30:26).

This Scripture shows that the law of attraction didn't work for him here!

We can also show from life experiences that the law of attraction is a false teaching. Some examples include:

1. A man dying of thirst in the desert. He wants water so badly, he may even see a mirage. If the law of attraction were true, his thoughts and desires for water would cause there to be water.

2. A sick or dying person wanting to be well. How many sick or dying people have not received their desired healing, even though, according to the law of attraction, they should have gotten well?

3. Hypochondria is a condition where a person imagines themselves to have medical conditions, sicknesses, or diseases that they don't, in fact, have. Yet, if the law of attraction were true, these people should have those very illnesses, because they would have attracted them by their negative thoughts.

4. Unrequited love is a very well-known phenomenon. Yet, by the law of attraction, if you yearn for somebody, you should attract them to you. There are so many examples of where this didn't happen.

5. Worry is another example of the failure of the law of attraction. For instance, Mark Twain said, "I am an old man and have had many troubles, most of which never happened."¹¹⁷ Just because someone worries or fears something doesn't necessarily mean it's going to happen. Like Mark Twain, I have experiences of this also. The law of attraction would say that what we worry about will occur.

6. Paranoia is an extreme example. Just because a person believes people are out to get them doesn't make it so! Yet, by the law of attraction, it would be so.

7. A final example is daydreams. Many, if not most, people occasionally daydream. By the law of attraction, if we daydream about what we want or don't want, we should attract those things to us.

Additionally, concerning our desires, the Bible says, "The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long" (Proverbs 21:25-26a).

Byrne's prescription for attaining our desires amounts to two words: Wishful thinking. But wishful thinking doesn't accomplish the results we seek. There is an old saying, "If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride." But wishing for some-

thing doesn't make it so, regardless of what Byrne proclaims.


Robert M. Bowman, a critic of the aberrational Word-Faith movement, says about that teaching something that applies to Byrne's teachings as well:

"The Word-Faith teachers set people up for a fall when they tell them that God promises them that they can have what they say."¹¹⁸

Likewise, Byrne sets people up for a fall when she tells them that there is a law of attraction that guarantees people can have whatever they want simply by desiring those things and feeling good.

Endnotes:

1. Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*. New York: Atria Books, 2006.
2. In 2007, *The Quarterly Journal* featured an article on *The Secret*. See J. Greg Sheryl, "Do You Want to Know ... *The Secret*?" *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2007, pp. 1, 11-21.
3. Rhonda Byrne, *The Power*. New York: Atria Books, 2010.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. xi.
5. Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick Handbook on Cults & New Religions*. Eugene, Ore: Harvest House Publishers, 2005, pg. 134.
6. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 13, italics in original.
7. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 56.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 100, capitalization in original.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 166.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 28.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 31, italic in original.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 156.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157, italic in original.
14. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. xi.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. xii.
16. Jerry Adler, "Decoding 'The Secret,'" *Newsweek*, March 5, 2007, pg. 53.
17. Document accessed at: www.theseecret.tv/creative-biography.html and in Adobe .pdf format at: <http://images.theseecret.tv/Creative-Biography.pdf>.
18. Because *The Secret* was published in 2006, "a year ago" would have been in 2005. However, elsewhere Byrne gives the date for her crisis experience as "one night in October, 2004." See her chapter in Jack Canfield and Gay Hendricks with Carol Kline, *You've Got To Read This Book!* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006, pg. 95. In the Foreword to *The Power*, she very specifically gives the date as September 9, 2004, stating that this "is a day I will never forget." (*The Power*, op. cit., pg. ix.)

19. Byrne states that the book was *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles. See *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 76; also, *The Power*, op. cit., pg. ix, footnote 1. Wattles was a New Thought author.
20. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. ix-x, italic in original.
21. Richard Guilliat, "The secret of Rhonda's success," *The Australian*, August 23-24, 2008. Document accessed at: www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/the-secret-of-rhondas-success/story-e6frg8h6-1111117271174.
22. Alexandra Bruce, *Beyond the Secret*. New York: The Disinformation Company Ltd., 2007, pg. 4.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
24. "Decoding 'The Secret,'" op. cit., pg. 53, italic in original.
25. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 76; also, *The Power*, op. cit., pg. ix.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 81.
27. See www.theseecret.tv/gifts.html.
28. Document accessed at: www.theseecret.tv/recommended-reading.html.
29. *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985, Second College Edition, pg. 840, s.v., "New Thought."
30. D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, pp. 39-40.
31. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1993, 15th edition, Vol. 8, pg. 644, s.v., "New Thought."
32. *Ibid.*
33. *A Different Gospel*, op. cit., pg. 134, italics in original, cited (without the italics) in Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *The Word-Faith Controversy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, pg. 52. Bowman cites the quotation from the first edition (1988) of *A Different Gospel*, where the quotation is on pg. 136.
34. *The Word-Faith Controversy*, op. cit., pg. 52, italics in original.
35. Portions of this section are taken from "Do You Want to Know ... *The Secret?*," op. cit., pg. 16.
36. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, op. cit., pg. 644.
37. Charles and Myrtle Fillmore founded Unity; formerly called "Unity School of Christianity," which is misleading because it is not Christian; then again, neither is Christian Science. "Unity" should not be confused with two other non-Christian groups: "Unitarianism" and the "Unification Church" (a.k.a., "the Moonies").
38. James A. Beverley, *Religions A to Z*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005, pg. 154, italics in original.
39. Glenn R. Mosley, *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom: The History and Future of the New Thought Movement*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006, pg. 44.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
41. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, op. cit., pg. 644.
42. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pg. 44.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 132.
44. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 342.
45. Larry A. Nichols, George A. Mather, and Alvin J. Schmidt, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pg. 217, s.v., "New Thought." Formerly published as *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult*, 1993.
46. Some researchers and writers lump Christian Science in with New Thought, but this seems imprecise and glosses over important differences between the two groups. For instance (unlike Christian Science), "New Thought does not deny the existence or reality of matter and does not shun medicine." (*The Encyclopedia Americana, International edition*. Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Incorporated, 1997, Vol. 20, pg. 228, s.v., "New Thought.")
47. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pg. 132.
48. *A Different Gospel*, op. cit., pg. 38.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pp. 70-71, 136.
51. For more regrettable inconsistencies in Peale, see G. Richard Fisher, "The Father of Positive Thinking: Negative Reflections on Norman Vincent Peale," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 1992, pp. 4-6 and M. Kurt Goedelman, "Peale Charged With Occultic Plagiarisms," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1996, pp. 3, 17.
52. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 343.
53. *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., pp. 54-61.
54. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 344.
55. See *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 6.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 12, italic in original.
58. *Ibid.*, ellipsis in original.
59. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
60. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 38. She herself uses them as synonyms on the following page.
61. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 49.
62. *Ibid.*, pg. 207.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
64. See *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 122, 172.
65. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 8.
66. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
67. *Ibid.*, pg. 232, italic in original.
68. See *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. xii.
69. *Ibid.*, pg. 109.
70. *The Power*, op. cit., pp. 14, 21, 141.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 192.
72. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 47-57, 68.
73. *The Power*, op. cit., pp. 62-79.
74. *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 159.
75. *Ibid.*, pg. 164.
76. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 242.
77. *Ibid.*, pg. 245.
78. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 27-28; see also Lisa Nichols' comments on pg. 72.
79. *Ibid.*, pg. 28, italics in original.
80. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 43.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
82. *Ibid.*, pg. 230.
83. *Ibid.*, pg. 199.
84. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 162-163.
85. *Ibid.*, pg. 163, italic in the original.
86. *Ibid.*, pg. 109.
87. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 127.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.*, pg. 192.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 21, 141.
91. Hagelin cited in *The Secret*, op. cit., pg. 160, quote rendered in italics in original.
92. *Ibid.*, pg. 159.
93. *Ibid.*, pg. 164.
94. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 111.
95. In both books, Byrne provides little or no documentation for many of her sweeping statements, extravagant claims, and anecdotes. Some of her statements and claims, such as this one, are patently absurd.
96. *Ibid.*, pg. 242.
97. *Ibid.*, pg. 106, italics in original.
98. *Ibid.*, pg. 234.
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-246.
100. *Ibid.*, pg. 242.
101. *Ibid.*, pg. 245.
102. *Ibid.*
103. *Ibid.*, pg. 235.
104. *Ibid.*, pg. 14, ellipsis in original.
105. It might be objected that God didn't override the law of gravity here because it says that the reason that the sea retreated was because of "a strong east wind." While the Bible does not say it specifically, however, there might have also been some suspension of the law of gravity involved.
106. The NASB renders this last sentence, "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."
107. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 160-161, where she uses all three terms.
108. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 232.
109. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
110. *Ibid.*, pg. 50.
111. *The Secret*, op. cit., pp. 12-15, 102.
112. *A Different Gospel*, op. cit., pg. xix.
113. Thanks to my friend Steve Hazen for this observation.
114. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. New York: Touchstone, 1996, pg. 72, italic in original.
115. *A Different Gospel*, op. cit., pg. xix.
116. *The Power*, op. cit., pg. 199.
117. Twain cited in Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2009, pg. 555.
118. *The Word-Faith Controversy*, op. cit., pg. 203. 

Radio Bible Class.⁴ He has been referred to as the prophet to millions. So one may wonder how could there be anything wrong or questionable about Nouwen.

The problem seems to be that there are two Henri Nouwens. One is a quotable Nouwen; the other a questionable one. Evangelicals citing Nouwen seem unwilling to look into the questionable aspects of his statements and writings and few ever have read Nouwen's primary works. A writer who quotes someone then has to defend himself and it becomes personal and a matter of pride. People who do this fall into the trap of deception by investment.⁵

HENRI WHO?

Some pronounce Nouwen's name as *now-win* (which is the correct pronunciation), while others pronounce it *new-win*. Views and opinions of him vary as well. In many cases, citations of Nouwen are drawn from a quote book or from a Website of quotations. If someone has an emotional conviction from a Nouwen quote, it is used to bolster an argument.

It could be contended that Nouwen lived a life not grounded in reality. He had very few private thoughts or private places in life because it appears that almost everything he did or said was monitored and turned into a book. He knew he was constantly on the public stage and all of his ideas and movements would be reported far and wide. A phalanx of editors constantly reworked and rewrote Nouwen's material and sermons, as well as his thoughts and activities, producing 45 books for Nouwen. It is reported that, at times, there were 3-5 books in progress.

Nouwen was Dutch-born and his official name was Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen. His birth date was Jan. 24, 1932. He died of cardiac arrest in a Holland hospital Sept. 21, 1996, and is buried in Ontario, Canada. Nouwen did his early studies in psychology and psychiatry. His career included teaching at Notre Dame, Yale, and

Harvard. He had a number of honorary doctorates. In 1987, he suffered from clinical depression and had a mental breakdown, which lasted into 1988. Nouwen writes about the six months of this breakdown in his book, *The Inner Voice of Love*.⁶ His last days were spent at L'Arche Community in Toronto, Ontario, working with the handicapped. Michael Ford's biography of Nouwen titled *Wounded Prophet* offers detailed insight into the priest's life and beliefs, including his conflicted sexuality and his anti-Vietnam War and anti-Gulf War efforts.

It is widely known that Nouwen was an avid fan of the desert mystics, which alone should give one pause in quoting him. Desert mysticism included cave-dwelling, starvation, and, at times, bodily mutilation. Solitary mystics and those in monasteries still exist in the southern portion of Israel today. All of this is unnatural and unbiblical, and certainly not to be applauded (1 Timothy 4:1-5). The New Testament is all about community and outreach, not isolationism and self-destruction. Jesus did not say go into the desert, but rather go out into the entire world. Infiltration, not isolation, was His command.

WIDER MERCY OR JUST PLAIN HERESY?

It must be stressed that we are not just talking about a few questionable peripheral interpretations or applications by Nouwen. Some, such as Roger Oakland, have asserted that Nouwen was a Universalist (meaning he believed that everyone will be accepted into heaven). Oakland quotes Nouwen's book, *Here and Now*:

"The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being."⁷

In other writings, Nouwen sounds like a committed Universalist:

"The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now. Pentecost lifts the whole mystery of salvation out of its particularities and makes it into something universal, embracing

all peoples, all countries, all seasons, and all eras. Pentecost is also the movement of empowering. Each individual human being can claim the Spirit of Jesus as the guiding spirit of his or her life. In that Spirit we can speak and act freely and confidently with the knowledge that the same Spirit that inspired Jesus is inspiring us."⁸

This next statement, done in a Christmas setting, makes him sound like a dyed-in-the-wool Universalist:

"...stay close to the small, vulnerable child that lives in our hearts and in every other human being. Often we do not know that the Christ child is within us. When we discover him we can truly rejoice."⁹

So it appears that Nouwen believed there was a mystical inner space where God dwelt in every human being and that through mystical meditation we could unite with the God within. His statement does not seem to be about something potential for all, but something already applied to all.

There are four forms of Universalism. The first form is true Universalism, which teaches that all automatically go to heaven in the end with no strings attached. The second form is that all will have a chance to accept or reject Christ after death so we all can be in if we want. This is also known as post-mortem salvation. The third type of Universalism offers a purgatorial type of punishment for a short duration after which all enter heaven. It will take time to get us all in. And the fourth form teaches that all are in unless they want out. This is what Nouwen taught.

Universalism, in any of its forms, distorts God and tries to rob Him of His right to justice and judgment by stressing only His love. Certainly the Bible does not teach anywhere of a universal indwelling by God or a universal salvation (John 1:12, 8:24, Revelation 20:12-15, 21:27). God will not drag unwilling or unwitting rejecters into heaven. So at times Nouwen sounded just like a Universalist,

but there is a twist and a caveat. He has in reality created what we might call a “modified Universalism.”

Nouwen’s sermons are posted on the Internet. In a number of them he told his audience they are in the Beloved and that they can claim Matthew 3:17 (“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”), just as much as Jesus did. It is shocking to suggest that a general audience is on the level of Jesus and that salvation consists only of a realization of that. That very thing was expressed again in Nouwen’s well-known sermon, “Being the Beloved.”¹⁰ The title says it all. That we just *realize* that we are already in the Beloved and possessing salvation seems central to Nouwen’s theology. It does not take into consideration unrepentant child molesters, murderers, or embezzlers, for example. Years ago, one take-off on this shallow view of man and sin was referred to as “I’m OK, You’re OK.”

IT’S AUTOMATIC

It is impossible to deny Nouwen’s own words and his decidedly unbiblical soteriology (doctrine of salvation) when he says:

“It is not the task of the Christian leader to go around nervously trying to redeem people, to save them at the last minute, to put them on the right track. **For we are redeemed once and for all. The Christian leader is called to help others affirm this great news,** and to make visible in daily events the fact that behind the dirty curtain of our painful symptoms there is something great to be seen: the face of Him in whose image we are shaped.”¹¹

Nouwen was not clear as to when this “once and for all” redemption takes place, whether it is at birth or some other time.

No pastor would be biblically correct by telling people that apart from repentance and a personal saving faith, “we are redeemed.” Such a declaration is the opposite of John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and other Scripture verses. Nouwen’s universal

application of redemption is a gross denial of the Gospel. It is devoid of the doctrines of sin, repentance, and salvation by grace through faith in Christ. The preacher committed to the authority of Scripture is confidently sharing the Gospel, relying on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit for God’s outcome. There is no “great news” that we are somehow already redeemed.

Nouwen did give lip service to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. However, Nouwen’s Universalism leaned toward Inclusionism as it seems that the merits of these acts of Christ are not individually received by faith in Christ (in Nouwen’s system), but rather somehow automatically applied or imputed on most everyone apart from them even knowing it. Inclusionism teaches that almost all will be saved through the sacrifice of Christ with or without personal faith. Only those who hear and reject the Gospel will be lost. The late theological professor, Ron Nash, explains:

“Even though Jesus is the only Savior for [Inclusivists], they argue that it is not necessary for people to know about Jesus or to believe in Jesus.”¹²

This is the theological digress of liberal Protestants such as the late Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and other similar teachers who erred in their soteriology. Nash also tells us that the second body of advocates for Inclusionism is Roman Catholics and that this teaching infiltrated Catholicism by way of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II.¹³ Likewise, many cults and aberrant groups tip their hat to and acknowledge Jesus’ atonement on the cross and His resurrection. However, they distort the meaning and application of what Christ did. For example, in Nouwen’s Catholicism, all of the merits of Jesus can only be accessed through a series of traditional beliefs, religious works, rote prayers, rituals, indulgences, and through the intercession of saints. Christ’s work is not only hidden behind these things, but is only accessed through them. What Nouwen was teaching (that, in fact, we are all already redeemed) is not

even traditional Catholicism. In traditional Catholicism, works plus grace saves. But in Nouwen’s Inclusionism, awareness and affirmation of our already redeemed state is all one really needs. We just need to become aware that we *are* redeemed. That’s his “great news.”

In the last year of Nouwen’s life, he kept a diary that has been published under the title, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. He wrote in that book that he had broadened his view of Jesus’ saving work:

“Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.”¹⁴

It is abundantly clear that his inclusionistic and universalistic thinking was not only a part of his immature early thought, but of his late and finally developed mindset. Biblically speaking, Jesus did not come to open the door. He is the door.

Theologian Henry Clarence Thiesan addressed the error of Universalism:

“There is a necessary order in a man’s salvation; he must first believe that Christ died for him, before he can appropriate the benefits of His death to himself. Although Christ died for all in the sense of reconciling God to the world, not all are saved, because their actual salvation is conditioned on *their* being reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).”¹⁵

YOU ARE IN, UNLESS YOU WANT OUT

Having said all the above, Nouwen’s Universalism was not a consistent Universalism. Like his detour into Inclusionism, other aspects of his soteriology were confusing and contradictory. He did, after all, believe in hell and eternal punishment.¹⁶ He believed in eternal punishment because he believed that, apparently, we could opt out of being the Beloved. It appeared that what he

meant in the end is that everyone automatically gets in, or is in, unless they opt out:

“God offers us a choice. To say yes or no to love. To offer me a choice is to respect me as a free human person. I am no robot or automaton who has no choice. God, who loves me in freedom, wants my love in freedom. That means that no is a possibility. Eternal life is not a predetermined fact. It is the fruit of our own human response.”¹⁷

So it is not yes or no to Jesus, but yes or no to God’s love *already possessed*. The closest analogy we have is that of a child divorcing his parents.

It appears from all that Nouwen wrote and believed that the choice to say no is not a choice about getting into salvation or accepting Christ. When he spoke of those that he’d met who had accepted Christ, he wanted it known that his views were much broader than that.¹⁸ The concept of a personal faith in Christ did not resonate for him. Because everyone in his audiences was already addressed as “being the Beloved,” the choice had to be whether people remained so. This is possibly the only way to reconcile Nouwen’s conflicting statements. For Nouwen, Universalism was a possibility for all, but he taught that there was a back exit for all. He might have argued that he was not a Universalist, and in a strict sense that is correct. In Nouwen’s construct everyone is in the Beloved unless they decide they would rather be out. This is what is meant by a modified Universalism. We could also label it Nouwen’s “gospel of majority inclusion” or perhaps even conditional Universalism. Apologist Ron Rhodes referred to it as a quasi-Universalism.

Nouwen was never clear as to how he arrived at his position of all being the Beloved, but after reading a number of his books one can assemble the following improbable scenario. Jesus in the Incarnation (His coming in flesh) shared humanity. Because we are all human and part of humanity, we automatically share Christ. Apparently just being human does the trick. So the Incarnation of Jesus alone

somehow includes us in salvation and now all we have to do to find real fulfillment is realize it. This is not a highly detailed and systematized teaching of Nouwen, but becomes obvious after wading through many of his rambling statements. However, nowhere in the Bible does it say that the Incarnation alone saves. Christ’s death and resurrection are the basis of salvation.

If anyone would cite 2 Corinthians 5:19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,” in support of Universalism, they could not be more wrong. The word “reconcile” in this verse does not mean to automatically save, but simply means to look with favor. Whereas in the Old Testament God looked with favor on the Jewish nation (and not all were saved), He now looks with favor on the entire world. In reconciliation we could say in a sense that God’s posture toward mankind changed. Paul then urged individual hearers to be “reconciled to God” in verse 21. Sinners can be assured that God is willing to save and is favorable to mankind.

SEND IN THE CLOWN?

Nouwen also had a startling Christology, which may simply have been a bid for sensationalism and attention. He once cast Jesus in the role of a clown:

“But the clown saves us: He is our man, because he fails, like we do, he makes mistakes like we do, he says to us, nonvirtuosity are OK too. And in his white face we recognize ourselves in our daily tasks of which so many fail. ... Christ is the clown who came into our circus and made us laugh because he came to tell us that we are not what we perform. He came for the crying, the persecuted, the weak, the hungry, the poor. He who is called to be a minister is called to be a clown.”¹⁹

Nouwen wanted to write a book on Jesus the Clown, but never did. Yes, Jesus came for the poor and weak, but for the poor and weak *who repent and trust Him*. No comparison of Jesus with a clown should be tolerated.

Note that Nouwen said that Jesus came to make us laugh because “he came to tell us that we are not what we perform.” In other words, our poor performance, our failures, and our sins are permissible with Jesus. In biblical fact, we *are* what we perform and we are in desperate need of being redeemed from our sins. While Jesus may welcome and accept us where we are and as we are, He does not leave us that way.

POOR, POOR ME

For a man so admired and quoted in Christian books, Nouwen had a dead spiritual life:

“So, what about my life of prayer? Do I like to pray? Do I want to pray? Do I spend time praying? Frankly, the answer is no to all three questions. After sixty-three years of life and thirty-eight years of priesthood, my prayer seems as dead as a rock. ... The truth is that I do not feel much, if anything, when I pray. ... the words *darkness* and *dryness* seem to best describe my prayer today.”²⁰

Some may want to give Nouwen credit for honesty, but that’s about all. Yes, there are times in which we all struggle in prayer or even pray against feelings. But no true believer’s prayer life should be a constant time of “darkness and dryness” and “dead as a rock” for years on end. Isaiah’s experience was that waiting on God brought renewal of strength (Isaiah 40:31). Likewise David knew that God restored his soul as he says in Psalm 23:3.

Nouwen as a mentor and model does not give us much. His book, *Sabbatical Journey*, is filled with incessant subjective inquisitions and introspection which leads him to mental torment. It is terribly self-focused:

“The feeling of being abandoned is always around the corner. I keep being surprised at how quickly it rears its ugly head. Yesterday I experienced that nasty feeling in my innermost being. Just raw anxiety, seemingly disconnected from anything. I kept asking myself, ‘Why

are you so restless, why are you so anxious, why are you so ill at ease, why do you feel so lonely and abandoned? ... What to do with the inner wound that is so easily touched and starts bleeding again? It is such a familiar wound. It has been with me for many years. I don't think this wound — this immense need for affection, and this immense fear of rejection — will ever go away."²¹

Nouwen's writings are filled with these kind of mawkish quotes. Christians, however, are to get their focus off themselves and set their mind on things above (Colossians 3:2) and look unto Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). Self-focus is a dark morbid dead end. Nouwen's obsession with needing affection and feeling rejection seems to have marked his life.

Yes, the psalmist spoke of his downcast soul and his ragged emotions, but he always included God's deliverance as he retreated from self-focus. God was always there to deliver him from his ruts. Obsessive self-focus is not to be a biblical way of life.

PROPER INTERPRETATION OR PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

Nouwen tended to make Scripture passages mean what he wanted them to mean. For example, he took the phrase, "Can you drink the cup?" as one of his thoughts for the day.²² Nouwen handled this verse from Mark 10:38 as if drinking the cup is something we can and should be doing. However the reverse is true.

James and John had come to Jesus to request that they have places of honor in the Kingdom of God. Jesus rebukes them and tells them that in their ignorance they have no idea what they are asking. To establish His Kingdom, Jesus must first suffer horribly and die. The agonies of the cross where He becomes a substitute for sin are His "cup." The word cup was a common Jewish metaphor for judgment on sin. Jesus then informs them that they will drink a cup of martyrdom (v. 39) and that God alone gives Kingdom placement (v. 40). In the

context, Jesus' cross is His cup and martyrdom is a cup. Nouwen misunderstood the text when he put forth:

"During the last month, 'drinking the cup' has become for me the best expression for living my life."²³

In Mark's context, drinking the cup is not living of life, but giving of life. It may seem a small thing, but handling the Scripture subjectively makes one an untrustworthy guide.

Another example is Nouwen's misuse of Matthew 11:28-30. Here Jesus entreats, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Nouwen paraphrases the verse while eliminating some words and adding other words. He renders it:

"Take on my burden — which is the burden of the whole world — and you will discover that it is a light burden."²⁴

Nouwen's interpretation is terribly flawed. The verse does not say we are to take on "the burden of the whole world." We are to find our soul's rest in Jesus and with His rest and provision take on His yoke. It was common in the first century to speak of the yoke of the law. In the Jewish setting to take on a rabbi's yoke (Greek: *zugos*) was to simply accept his authority and his teachings and become his disciple; nothing more and nothing less.²⁵ Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden light because He gives us all the grace and enablement that we need (Philippians 4:19). The Pharisees' yoke was far more burdensome than Jesus' yoke. Nouwen had no grasp of the first-century Jewish setting. He was winging it and imposing a meaning on Scripture that is not there by telling us that the Matthew passage somehow means "the burden of the whole world."

EXTREMES IN ECUMENISM

In an early morning meeting for "meditation and reflection," Nouwen refers to "playing the shakuhachi."²⁶

A shakuhachi is a Japanese flute used in Zen Buddhist meditation. Someone could say that the use of this instrument might be benign and just used for the soothing music. In Nouwen's case, it is much more because he believed we need what the Buddhists have:

"I think it is of great importance that Buddhists and Christians meet. There is so much they have to give to each other."²⁷

Buddhists have nothing to give to Christians. Christians, however, have the Gospel that we are to give to them. We want to be as broad and as narrow as the Bible allows. The Apostle Paul strongly stated, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). We can certainly witness to others without surrendering our beliefs, adopting their ways, and using pagan paraphernalia.

Nouwen was comfortable with Buddhist paraphernalia because he was wildly ecumenical. He would serve and partake of Communion every day and distribute the host to whoever was there and wanted it. Being there was all that was required to receive Communion. On one occasion he ran into heavy resistance trying to distribute Communion to all visitors in a monastery where he was staying. Those in charge blocked him.²⁸

THE "BLESSING" OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Nouwen also said that homosexuality is a blessing for America:

"My own thoughts and emotions around this subject are very conflicted. Years of Catholic education and seminary training have caused me to internalize the Catholic Church's position. Still my emotional developments and my friendships with many homosexual people, as well as the recent literature on the subject, have raised many questions for me. There is a huge gap between my internalized homophobia and

my increasing conviction that homosexuality is *not a curse but a blessing for our society.*"²⁹

One wonders why those who favorably quote Nouwen never mention this kind of quote. Blessing never comes from promoting sin of any kind. Scripture declares, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Nouwen, in exalting homosexuality, falls under Isaiah's condemnation: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

So Nouwen moved to a conviction of not just live and let live, but to the very unbiblical, as well as un-Catholic, idea that homosexuality is a blessing for our society. From the very beginning the Israelites were instructed away from any and all forms of immorality including homosexuality. "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:13). Remember that Jesus affirmed the Old Testament law. It was godless and pagan cultures that entered into this kind of vile behavior.

The Apostle Paul also denounced all forms of immorality. Paul, in Romans 1, calls both homosexuality and lesbianism "vile" and "against nature" (v. 26) and "shameful" (v. 27). For Nouwen to call it "a blessing for our society" is totally out of touch with the stand of Nouwen's own Roman Catholic Church.³⁰ All forms of sexual immorality are condemned strongly by the Bible.

NOW WE KNOW WHY

We learn of Nouwen's basis for his approval of homosexuality from the words of an assistant:

"It was very clear to me from the very beginning of our relationship that Henri was a gay man, but he was not able to say those words for a very long time. However, he was eventually able to share with a small circle of

friends that he was gay. That he could share this truth gave him an enormous sense of relief. The coming-out process enables you to build a sense of solidarity and community with others who have shared the hellish journey that gay people have to go through in order to come to a new sense of freedom about who we are."³¹

While Nouwen was reputedly a celibate homosexual, we do know that he openly championed same-sex relationships.

One of the modern tragedies today is the number of religious teachers who try to comfort people living in sin. In fact, it is not a new problem at all, but was rampant in the days of the Old Testament. Jeremiah warned:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. They continually say to those who despise Me, "The LORD has said, 'You shall have peace,'" and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, "No evil shall come upon you." ... But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings'" (Jeremiah 23:16-17, 22).

Those who glibly quote false teachers share their blame.

CONTACTING THE DEAD

Nouwen, like any good Catholic, sought the help of Mary:

"Today is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. May Mary bring unity to the Americas and the world. There is so much division! There is so much need for reconciliation and healing. Mary pray for us."³²

The last time Mary is presented in Scripture, she is in the posture of prayer herself as were all the others in

the upper room, according to Acts 1:14. Mary also confessed her own need of a Savior (Luke 1:46-47), and made the prescribed sinner's offering at the Temple after the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:22-24, referring back to Leviticus 12:2-8).

It is obvious that Nouwen did not believe Jesus was and is the sole Mediator as 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches. In one instance, after he lost his keys he began to plead with Catholicism's patron saint of lost items, St. Anthony:

"Please help me find the keys. Please. I promise that I will give a nice gift to someone who needs it."³³

In Nouwen's telling, he found the keys and thanked St. Anthony. It is decidedly unbiblical to seek the dead for anything. This practice, called necromancy (seeking contact and information from the dead), called for stoning in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 27). At best, Nouwen's practice is delusional, and at worst borders on outright spiritism.

In Catholic belief, prayers to *deceased saints* are permitted and encouraged, but Nouwen goes even further as he prays to a friend who has only recently died:

"As I let my head rest on the casket, I asked Don Sr. to send me his spirit of equanimity, kindness, and humor, and to guide me in the years ahead. I especially prayed to him to intercede with Jesus to take my inner anguish away and to lead me to a greater inner peace."³⁴

Prayer is never made to people, let alone dead people. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray He taught them, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). All prayer is directed heavenward to God. Nowhere in the Bible are we instructed to pray to the departed. The Bible asks the question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5, see also Isaiah 8:19). We should seek the Resurrected and Living One, Jesus, not intrude into the realm of the dead.

HE THAT HAS NO EAR

One of the more bizarre fixations and obsessions of Nouwen was his fixation on Vincent Van Gogh, the Dutch painter who lived in the late 1800s. Van Gogh was mentally unstable and spent time in mental asylums. At one point he mutilated himself by cutting off his ear lobe and delivered it to a prostitute in a brothel. He was a hopeless drunk who died at age 37 from a self-inflicted gun shot to his chest.

Nouwen was so enamored with Van Gogh that for a time he had a small traveling road show imitating Van Gogh for his audiences and students complete with a bandaged ear. He held lectures on Van Gogh for students in New Haven. Some students expressed that with Nouwen's Dutch accent he began to take on the character of Van Gogh. Nouwen biographer Michael Ford stated:

"Van Gogh also became a guide and a teacher to Nouwen, whose future classes on compassion were fueled by his intimate knowledge of the artist's life."³⁵

Proverbs 13:20 is clear in terms of who we choose as models, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed." There are better models than Van Gogh. We may enjoy Van Gogh's paintings and even express sorrow for him, but there is no good reason to try to emulate his life.

Nouwen also had a propensity to make up words and statements that were arcane and misleading. For example, he would write about the Christ of the "descending way." In the end this was code for Liberation Theology, which he also embraced.³⁶ Liberation Theology is a social movement that defines salvation as delivering masses of poor or oppressed people upward to a better life.

Nouwen, as a Roman Catholic priest, naturally embraced the medieval mystics and desert monks wholeheartedly with all their contemplative practices.³⁷

Mystics such as Madame Guyon and Theresa of Avila believed that in

silence and by turning inward they could literally merge with God and become one with Him. This fusing and merging would make them in substance and essence — God! Prayer for them was obsessively seeking voices within that they wrongly believed were the voice of God. Surely this was a strong delusion. As has been shown, Nouwen picked strange models and mentors. Prayer is never to be directed inwardly to ourselves, but directed outside of ourselves to our heavenly Father. Ron Rhodes wrote:

"Perhaps the most significant manifestation of mysticism in the modern church is contemplative prayer, which draws very heavily from Buddhism and Hinduism. In this form of mystical prayer, one becomes deeply quiet, empties the mind (as in eastern meditation), falls into an altered state of consciousness, and goes into his center, where he supposedly merges with the divine. Rational thought is completely transcended. To help induce a mystical state, proponents use breathing exercises (much like Taoists) and a mantra (or sacred word, such as ma-ra-na-tha), which is repeated over and over again to aid in deep meditation. Apparently, Christian mystics believe that simply because they utilize a Christian-sounding mantra makes the practice itself a Christian practice — a dangerously wrong assumption. Amazingly, many who practice contemplative prayer cite Psalm 62:5 in support of the practice: 'For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.' However, this verse has nothing to do with prayer or contemplation but rather simply encourages believers to wait without distraction in eager expectation for God to act in deliverance. Another verse taken out of context is Psalm 46:10 (KJV): 'Be still, and know that I am God.' The act of being still, however, has nothing to do with prayer or contemplation, but

simply indicates that one should slow down and trust God rather than get in a fuss over tough circumstances."³⁸

LASTLY — A PLEA

Nouwen was no friend to Bible believers. He was not a trustworthy guide or teacher. He assigned meanings to Bible passages that were not there and applied salvation universally to most except those who opt out. In his scheme there was no stated need of personal repentance and faith in Christ for salvation. He openly embraced Buddhist concepts and asserted we can learn from them. He was a self-confessed homosexual who supported the idea of homosexual unions.

The only explanation as to why so many professed Evangelicals quote him is ignorance. In defending their citations, they are defending their own undiscerning and unexamined choices. In ignorance they leave relevant facts unexamined that would help us evaluate Nouwen and they become upset, defensive, and even angry if anyone inquires or tries to bring the facts to light.

Nouwen's beliefs were aberrational, radical, and, at points, heretical. He was decidedly neither Catholic nor evangelical. He pushed Vatican II beyond all limits and interpreted its outcome as personal license to believe and teach whatever he wished. The plea we offer to those who quote him is to admit you have not done your homework and select someone more biblical and more doctrinally sound. We are, after all, responsible to our readers and hearers. We need to "Test all things and hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Endnotes:

1. Henri Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998, pg. 47.
2. Ingrid Schlueter with guest Ken Silva, "Evangelicals Embrace Mystics," *Crosstalk*, Sept. 18, 2008. A description and audio version of this program was accessed at: www.crosstalkamerica.com/shows/2008/09/evangelicals_embrace_mystics.php.
3. Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet*. New York: Doubleday, 1999, pg. 35.

4. See David McCasland, "Pursuing Hospitality," *Our Daily Bread*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Radio Bible Class, Monday, Sept. 27, 2010.

5. For more thoughts along the line of deception by investment, see G. Richard Fisher, "What is Behind the 'Energizer Bunny' Syndrome?" *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2010, pp. 2, 22-23.

6. Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

7. Nouwen cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2007, pg. 90.

8. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 161.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 71.

10. Henri Nouwen, "Being the Beloved." Sermon posted on Google Videos and accessed at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3701709082567809182#>. This video is also posted on YouTube.

11. Nouwen cited by Debbie Dewart, "The Contemporary Theology Of Henri Nouwen - Wounded 'Healer' ... or Deceiver?" Hubert, N.C.: Christian Discernment Publications Ministry Inc., pg. 5, emphasis

added by Dewart. Document accessed at: www.christiandiscernment.com under the "View and Print Publications" tab.

12. Ron Nash, "Is Jesus the Only Savior? - Critiquing Evangelicals Who Have Lost Their Way." Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 2004, audio recording, CD-0428.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 51.

15. Henry Clarence Thiessan, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, pg. 330, italic in original.

16. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

17. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.

18. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.

19. Nouwen cited in *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 24, ellipsis in original.

20. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 5, italics in original.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25.

22. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.

25. See Gerhard Kittel, Editor, *Theological*

Dictionary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 900-901.

26. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 19.

27. *Ibid.*, pg. 28.

28. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pp. 122-123.

29. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 27, emphasis added.

30. See further, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994, pp. 625-626.

31. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 66.

32. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 65.


33. *Ibid.*, pg. 171.

34. *Ibid.*, pg. 162.

35. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 109.

36. See further, Michael O'Laughlin, *God's Beloved*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Arbis Books, 2004, pp. 134-139.

37. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 111. See also Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary, Report from a Trappist Monastery*. New York: Doubleday, no date.

38. Ron Rhodes, *5-Minute Apologetics for Today*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishing, 2010, Day 363. 

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

constituted a new dispensation. The claim that true Christianity was somehow lost over the centuries and had to be rediscovered is a myth called "Restorationism" and is the foundation plank of many cults and isms.

Some of Swedenborg's declarations border on the downright silly. He makes the claim, for example, that during one of his out-of-body experiences (while visiting heaven), he was able to convince Martin Luther to renounce his old Reformation ideas and convert to Swedenborg's views.

Also, Swedenborg claimed that during his astral travels he met with and took instruction directly from angels. But the Bible reminds us that false teachers have been corrupted by the one who "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 1:3, 13-14). And we must never forget Paul's warning in Galatians about an angel with another gospel (Galatians 1:8-9).

Researcher and writer Bill Alnor reminds us, "Swedenborg rejected Christ's vicarious atonement on the cross for the sins of the world, calling it an 'abomination.'" And that, "He is one of the first to widely disseminate the unbiblical notion that following death, humans evolve into angels. His stories of heavenly society contain wild tales of sexual experiences, bizarre accounts of angels' sexual practices, their writing styles, and even of male angels' beards. Some angelic communities, he went on to say, are similar to primitive African culture where people are carefree and walk around naked!"

It is also helpful to remember that claimed angelic appearances and angelic messages launched Islam and Mormonism, and are so much a part of the faulty and heretical messages of extremist Word-Faith teachers.

The most famous adherent of Swedenborg's religion was Helen Keller. But there is a follower who has helped put Swedenborg back on the map today: Dr. Mehmet Oz, who *AARP The Magazine* calls, "America's hardest-working doctor." And he is a friend of Oprah Winfrey. It seems that pop religions and show business have become handmaidens. There is no gainsaying Oz's tremendous popularity and enormous influence.

Mehmet Cenjiz Oz, who turned 50 just last year, is a cardiothoracic surgeon, author, and television personality. He is of Turkish descent, speaks both Turkish and English, and has parents who are Muslim. He has written numerous books and hosts a daily television show, *The Dr. Oz Show*. Oz has been called a global leader, as well as being designated one of the most influential men of the 21st century by *Esquire* magazine.

Oz is a devoted follower of Swedenborg, an outspoken member of The New Church, and a lover of Transcendental Meditation, which proves that intelligence and discernment do not always go together. One can have secular knowledge and education without any real spiritual insight.

Another frightening thing about Oz is his endorsement of a New Age practice called Reiki, meaning life force energy. His wife is said to be a devout practitioner of Reiki. It is a massage technique which is not neutral or benign. The claim is made that as the therapist lays

hands on and begins the massage, he or she can be joined by astral divine beings called Reiki guides who assist with the massage. Those receiving treatments have claimed distinct feelings of numerous hands on their bodies. The Reiki practitioner can pray for assistance from the Reiki guide before, during, or after the massage.

In Reiki literature, it is alleged that once the guides show up, they are with the person receiving treatment forever and will assist if called upon. Reiki was developed by a Japanese Buddhist in 1922. However, clinical studies conclude it has no real benefit except for a possible placebo effect. The forms of it promoting spiritual guides amount to historical spiritism. While some would argue it is just meaningless, imaginary bunk and a racket, others would insist it is a very dark force. Whatever it is, one should not toy with it. It certainly has no place around a church.

While Reiki is not an official part of The New Church, it has been embraced by Oz in addition to his other false beliefs. It was probably an easy transition because Swedenborg believed in the nearness of the dead.

So what does all this have to do with Rick Warren and his Saddleback Church? Recent headlines reveal the strange pairing of Warren (and his church) and Dr. Oz. Up until now, many people have tried to be gracious to Warren despite all his goofs, blunders, and questionable alliances — but apparently no more. Earlier this year, Warren engaged Oz to be his weight loss guru for the entire church. This certainly projects the message that Oz is an acceptable mentor spiritually, and worthy to be approved by the church as a teacher of some sort. It is certainly not a match made in heaven.

The Prophet Amos asked the relevant question, “How can two walk together except they agree? (Amos 3:3). The Apostle Paul asked the question, “What part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:15). Of course, Paul was not talking about witnessing, but yoking (v. 14) with unbelievers. This certainly means that we should not get entangled in alliances of any kind with cult leaders. They should be denounced and refuted, not promoted and encouraged.

Saddleback solicited in the “community blog” on its Website: “Be part of this transformational debut to be a healthier you! ... We’ll hear from world-renowned doctors on a plan to get healthy and stay that way in the new decade. Join Orange County in becoming the healthiest county in the nation on this one year plan that starts NOW!” And the megachurch pastor was out in front on this one. According to *Christianity Today* magazine, “Rick Warren pledges to lose 90 pounds during a 52-week church fitness plan, developed by Dr. Oz and two other medical experts.”

As the program kicked off, news reports about Saddleback’s “The Daniel Plan: God’s Prescription For Your Health,” began appearing in mid-January. And it was not just Oz, but a troubling trio of doctors. Saddleback advertised the “OC Health & Fitness Seminar

with Dr. Mehmet Oz, Dr. Daniel Amen, Dr. Mark Hyman, & Pastor Rick Warren.” One report, published on ChristianNewsWire.com, noted that, “All three [of the doctors] have Eastern spiritual connections.” Noting that Oz is a follower of Swedenborg, the report went on to state, “The other two speakers are Dr. Daniel Amen and Dr. Mark Hyman. Dr. Amen teaches tantric sex, a Hindu mystical approach to sex. He teaches Eastern religion meditation and energy-based Reiki, a New Age practice. Dr. Mark Hyman promotes mystical meditation based on Buddhist principles.”

According to Christian Investigator President Steve McConkey, “It is troubling for a top pastor in the United States to promote false teachers. We are living at an all-time low spiritually in the United States with weak leaders. We need to teach basic Bible principles without legalism.”

Warren, when pressed, might say he does not believe everything Oz and the others teach, but there is no disclaimer anywhere offered and no refuting of the teachings of Swedenborg, Reiki, or mysticism. This is more like one big happy family. Warren may say he is using this to evangelize Oz and the others, but one can witness to a person without inflicting that person on their entire church. The Apostle John, on the other hand, commands against such activity (2 John 10-11). And Acts 20 speaks of elders guarding the Church against wolves and false teachers who come in among the flock and from those among you who rise up (vv. 29-30).

This is yet another Saddleback disaster, one of huge proportion setting a course which will not only blur but also obliterate doctrinal lines and massively confuse. We were hoping for better from the one called “America’s pastor.” Warren is an embarrassment to thinking, discerning Christians. It would be a blessing if he just closed his mouth to food and to teaching. Because of him people are being led down a dark maze of error, confusion, and heresy. May God help us!

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

the fastest declaration of sainthood on record, surpassing Mother Teresa’s 2003 beatification by several days. It will also mark the first time ever in which a pope has beatified his immediate predecessor.

Just weeks following John Paul’s death in 2005, Benedict placed the late pontiff on the fast track to beatification by waiving the five-year waiting period required before beginning the process.

Benedict announced the date for the ceremony after it was declared that a French nun claimed she was healed of Parkinson’s disease because of John Paul, who himself

suffered for many years from the effects of the disease. The Catholic Church requires saints to have performed at least two miracles.

Upon his beatification, John Paul will receive the title of "blessed" and can then be publicly worshipped by those of the Catholic faith.

The beatification will result in large numbers making a pilgrimage to Rome for the ceremony, with numbers in the hundreds of thousands being projected. Tour operators in the late pontiff's native Poland are offering bus and airline transportation for the event.

John Paul II was born Karol Wojtyla in 1920. He was elected pope in 1978 following the death of his predecessor John Paul I, who spent only 33 days as pontiff. At age 58, John Paul II became the youngest pope in 132 years.

—MKG

ZODIAC STAR WARS

The signs, they are a-changing. At least that's the claim of one astronomy instructor who started a firestorm of discussion when he recently said that the stars — astrologically speaking — have shifted their alignment. In other words, one who was thought to be a Gemini their whole life may now, in fact, have been a Taurus all along.

Parke Kunkle, board member of the Minneapolis Planetarium Society and a teacher at its city's Commu-

nity and Technical College is at the epicenter of the controversy. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* interviewed Kunkle and reported, "The ancient Babylonians based zodiac signs on the constellations the sun was 'in' on the day a person was born. During the ensuing millenniums, the moon's gravitational pull has made the Earth 'wobble' around its axis, creating about a one-month bump in the stars' alignment."

According to the Associated Press, "By the reckoning of Kunkle and other astronomers, astrologers are not only a month off in their zodiac signs, but they are neglecting a 13th constellation, Ophiuchus (Ooh-FEE-yew-kus) the Serpent Bear, for those born from Nov. 30 to Dec. 17."

But astrologers aren't worried by Kunkle's revelation, saying that they have long known of the argument. Shelley Ackerman, a spokeswoman for the American Federation of Astrologers, warns those devoted to astrology not to panic. "This doesn't change your chart at all," she said. She also cautioned, "Every few years, a story like this comes out and scares the living daylights out of everyone, but it'll go away as quickly as it came."

Astrologer Jeff Jawer also stresses that, "Astrology is geocentric. It relates to life on Earth to the Earth's environment, and seasons are the most dramatic effect, which is why we use the tropical zodiac." The tropical zodiac, used by Western astrologers, is fixed to seasons and deviates from the sidereal zodiac which is fixed to constellations and used by Eastern astrologers.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

HOW TO OVERCOME EVIL

by Jay E. Adams

P&R Publishers, 152 pages, \$6.99

It is too often the rule that good theological books quickly go out of print, while the aberrational and heretical are reprinted numerous times.

Thankfully, Jay Adams' *How to Overcome Evil* is an exception to the rule. It first was published in 1977 and has stood the test of time as it is one of the most helpful books available for nearly 35 years. Recently, P&R Publishers reissued this volume with a clean, crisp, new appearance.

Those who have left a cult or abusive church often do so with overwhelming feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, and a desire for retaliation. Adams speaks to those debilitating emotions and offers solid biblical counsel to avoid such "hand-to-hand combat with evil." But the war is not just reserved for the cult victim. The "battle is with sin wherever it is found — within you, outside you."

Adams instructs, "No one should be surprised when he is maltreated in a world of sin; that's only to be expected. Apart from Christ, there is no perfect person. 'All have sinned' (Rom. 3:23). If that is so, it should not be a surprise that others have wronged you, even wives, husbands, parents, and children. Both believers and unbelievers will wrong you — often with evil intent" (pg. 20). And so this is a book for the growing Christian because it provides "help for and insight into everyday conflicts for ordinary believers, church leaders, and counselors."

The volume is subtitled, "A Practical Exposition of Romans 12:14-21," and furnishes the biblical response toward conflict with not only enemies, but with family, fellow believers, co-workers, and neighbors. After all, conflict occurs most often with those who we more closely associate. This information is so very vital because, as Adams writes, "so many Christians are defeated precisely at the point of their response to attacks on them by evil persons."

Adams asks his readers, "Are you a winner?" and confronts the feelings of self-pity, defeatism, and hopelessness that often occur when people sin against them. He subsequently answers with, "You can be a winner," offering hope and a foundation for his biblical exposition of Paul's instruction.

From there Adams instructs as to the evils we fight, our battle orders for today, the aggressive essence of fighting evil, the weapons of our warfare, how our mouth can be a problem — and how to manage it, the fact that our fight is not alone, how to do "good" to an enemy, and a lot more.

While the book is clearly biblical, from the biblical comes the practical. The reader is urged to plan, because "Sinful tendencies and habits will prevail unless you have previously taken the time to plan (1) what (concretely) you will do and (2) how you will do it. ... Only deliberate planning for different responses, carefully spelled out in the cool rather than in the heat of battle, is adequate. When you've been hit on the nose or kicked in the shins (literally or figuratively), pain and anger can cloud any but the most plain and deliberate plans" (pg. 93).

Christians are confronted with far too many quick fixes and fads, full of bizarre and unscriptural precepts, presented as methods for fighting evil. Christian publications and airwaves are full of faulty and unbiblical direction. Therefore, Adams' handbook is crucial for the believer. It is faithful to Scripture and not only instructs the Christian as to the nature of evil and what a Christian must do to overcome evil, but how to do it.

The battle plan for fighting against evil, when drawn from the Word of God, is simple and effective. Yet it is not passive and does not come without great effort. Evil can only be stopped with good. Adams writes, "If you try to destroy evil with evil you spread more of the same, thereby enlarging rather than destroying it" (pg. 72).

This reviewer has often prescribed a "daily dose" of Romans 12 to those he has counseled over the years. A prescription which included reading, praying, and personalizing the mandates of Paul's passage (e.g., "I will bless those who persecute me ... I will rejoice with those who rejoice ... I will repay no one evil for evil."). *How to Overcome Evil* is a further antitoxin to kill off the deadly poison of evil.

—MKG

Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.