

From Oprah to Oz—And Beyond

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If you were asked to name America's most influential spiritual advisor for the past 25 years, what would your response be? Billy Graham? Robert Schuller? Perhaps Rick Warren or Joel Osteen? It may surprise you to learn that none of these men have been as successful numbers-wise as Oprah Winfrey! Her programs drew a daily audience as high as 12.4 million and averaged 7.4 million in 2007, diminishing only slightly when she touted Obama during the 2008 election year. Her closing program had its highest-ever rating, with 16.4 million viewers.

All of this adds up to an incredible amount of influence. What do I mean by including Oprah in this group of "spiritual advisors"? What religion might she have been promoting? Oprah hinted at the answer to those questions on her final program: "*People often ask me, 'What is the secret of success of the show? How have we lasted 25 years? I non-jokingly say, 'My team and Jesus.' Because nothing but the hand of God has made this possible for me'*"(http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/The-Oprah-Winfrey-Show-Finale_1/1). She then further identified the God to whom she referred: "*I'm talking about the same one you're talking about. I'm talking about Alpha and Omega, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Ultimate Consciousness, the Source, the Force, the All of everything there is, the One and Only G-O-D*" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/...>).

If it's still not clear to you exactly who or what this "One and Only G-O-D" is, you're not alone. All the commentaries that I've read regarding Oprah's farewell program have noted that reviewers also were confused about the deity to whom she paid homage. What should be clear is that the "Jesus" and the "God" whom she describes are not the biblical Jesus and God. But that may not be so clear for some—especially those who consider themselves Christians and who think that Oprah is talking about the same Jesus in whom they believe.

No matter what anyone has in his or her mind about Jesus, only the Scriptures can set the record straight, and here's why. Mankind has only three options when it comes to our knowledge about God. Either God has revealed Himself to humanity in both general (His creation) and very specific terms (His words), or man has conjured up his own ideas about God. The third option is by far the most common: it's a mixture of the two that includes bits and pieces of God's revelation combined with mankind's opinions and speculations. Of the three, which one will be the most accurate? Obviously, communication from God himself would be best.

Is that a reality? Well, that's what the Bible claims. More than 4,000 times throughout the Scriptures, God's prophets have written phrases such as "*Thus saith the Lord*" and "*The word of the Lord came to me.*" If that isn't the case, then they were all lying. That would be amazing because the "*lies*" were consistent among all 40 who wrote the Scriptures—men who lived during different cultural times over a period of 1,600 years and who reflected quite diverse occupations in life: Moses was raised in the court of Pharaoh of Egypt; others were fishermen or shepherds; one was a tax collector, another a physician, and a few were royalty.

Further proof that God has communicated to mankind through His Word are the miraculous aspects of what He says, especially through prophecy: "*Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them....Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them [pagan idols] bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me*" (Isaiah 42:9; 43:9-10).

Only God is omniscient, and He challenges any gods that humans have concocted to demonstrate their ability to foretell the future. In contrast to the failed prophecies of the idol worshipers, the record of the Scriptures

contains hundreds of prophecies accurately detailing events foretold by the God of the Bible that would take place days, months, and even hundreds or thousands of years from the time they were issued. Fulfilled prophecy is the foremost verification that God's Word is just that: the Word of God (TBC, 8/06; 9/06, et al.).

Oprah's widespread influence on America's spirituality can be attributed to many factors, from the popularity of the New Age Movement (of which she was a chief promoter, by featuring wannabe gurus such as Shirley MacLaine, Marilyn Ferguson, and Marianne Williamson), to the national rush to psychotherapy as the solution for all of life's problems, to our historic Yankee love affair with self-help theology and practice. All of these, Oprah dished up daily.

The reason for the incredible acceptance of her spiritual teachings, however, must be credited primarily to her ability to make even the most far-fetched Hindu/Buddhist concepts appear to fit with Christianity—a mix that she has fed to viewers who, for the most part, profess to be Christian yet are largely ignorant of the teachings of the Bible. This has effectively disabled their ability to recognize God's direct revelation as the authority for spiritual truth and has opened the door for any mixture of thoughts one has about God (e.g., opinions, speculations, guesses, or whatever a person "*feels*" regarding the nature of God).

Oprah's own "*Christianity*" leans heavily upon the Christianity of the Mind Sciences, including New Thought, Religious Science, Christian Science, and Unity School of Christianity, all of which incorporate into their teachings ideas drawn from Eastern mystical religions. Although some feature the Christian name, they are diametrically opposed to biblical Christianity. Oprah is a latter-day composite of Madame Blavatsky and Mary Baker Eddy, the former a co-founder of Theosophy, who popularized Buddhist occultism in the West in the last half of the 1800s, and the latter, who founded the Christian Science cult in New England in the same century. Oprah's background is Baptist, which she left in her late 20s.

She claims that her eyes were opened to the fact that "*God*" was bigger than the doctrines she had been taught, and she later was excited to discover views that taught that there were many ways to God besides through Jesus. The Cross, to her, was not a matter of Jesus' reconciliation of man to God through His payment for the sins of the world but rather a preeminent lesson in overcoming the obstacles in one's life. She recalls that transition period in her life as the time when she began her search for more than Bible doctrines. She turned to those who have Westernized and homogenized Eastern religious concepts for the American consumer, such as Eckhart Tolle, Gary Zukav, Deepak Chopra, Iyanla Vanzant, Carolyn Myss, and Elizabeth Lesser.

According to the Scriptures, when people like Oprah either drift away from or reject biblical doctrine, they have turned from God's instructions to the rationalizations of men, at least, and/or to the doctrines of demons at worst (*1 Timothy 4:1*). She raised false spiritual teaching to new technological heights when she began her series on A New Earth with Eckhart Tolle. The initial program reached 139 countries with simultaneous, interactive worldwide instructions and grew from there. Another attraction that drew the multitudes were her celebrity guests with "*spiritual insights*" that she paraded before her audience (80 percent of whom were women) day after day, including Scientologists Tom Cruise and John Travolta, Unity minister Della Reese, Eckhart Tolle-disciple Jim Carrey, and Kabbalah devotee Madonna, among a litany of others. Tragically, for untold millions, she's paved the broad road that leads to eternal destruction.

Although Oprah and her friends seem to be all over the spiritual map, their beliefs and practices can be simplified from a biblical perspective. They all promote 1) the deification of self, and 2) salvation through good works. Here is what Oprah gleaned from her spiritual advisors: Jesus came not to pay for everyone's sin but to teach Christ consciousness—the idea that each person is a part of God and needs to be conscious of that. Hindus call it "*self-realization*," i.e., realizing that one's own self is God. That was the ultimate message of *The Secret* (see *TBC's The Secret Seduction*), a book and DVD that millions purchased due primarily to Oprah's

endorsement and enthusiastic promotion.

In Oprah's words as she considers one Christian woman's view against a non-Christian woman's path to God: "[There are] many paths to what you call God. Her path might be something else, and when she gets there she might call it the Light, but her loving and her kindness and her generosity, if it brings her to the same place it brings you, it doesn't matter whether she calls it God or not." This is "*works salvation*," and it is the foundational belief system of all the world's religions. Only biblical Christianity rejects works unequivocally as a path to being reconciled to God: "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us*" (Titus 3:5); "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that [salvation] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Scripture is emphatic that no loving act, no kindness, no generosity, or any other "*good*" deed qualifies anyone for eternal life with God. The problem is sin, regarding which every human (except the sinless God/Man Jesus Christ) is guilty (Romans 3:23), and for which no sinner can do anything to pay off the penalty that God established. Why not? The penalty is eternal separation from the presence of God. Oprah and all her spiritual teachers may reject the biblical teaching concerning sin and its penalty, but the absolute fact is—it must be paid in order for God's divine justice to be satisfied and for one to receive the gift of everlasting life with Him: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). Their "*many paths*" statement is a rejection of the most unfathomable act imaginable. In fact, it is so incredible that none of the non-Christian world religions have ever even hinted at such a deed: the Creator of the universe Himself would pay the penalty for His rebellious creatures and would offer the free gift of eternal life to them on the basis of their simply receiving it by an act of faith. Charles Wesley immortalized Jesus' astonishing achievement in song when he wrote, "*Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*"

It's doubtful that Oprah Winfrey will be giving up her pulpit; it is more probable that she'll seek effective ways and means to spread her gospel in other venues. Of her many "*apostles*" (aka Oprah's Allstars) whom she has established over the years, it will very likely be Dr. Oz who will fill the gap and keep the bastion of false spirituality thriving on daytime TV.

Mehmet Oz is highly qualified for the job. He is a Sufi Muslim, given more to the metaphysical and experiential than to the legalism of Sharia law, which is practiced by most Muslims. His medical expertise lends credibility to his religious offerings, which reflect the Indian guru Mahesh more than Mohammed.

Oz is a national spokesperson for Transcendental Meditation, or TM, which was introduced to the US in the late '60s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (*guru to the Beatles*) as The Spiritual Regeneration Movement. It was pure Hinduism packaged for the West. However, legal issues related to the introduction of religion into the schools prevented its spread until the name was changed to TM, and it was subsequently repackaged and promoted as a scientific stress reducer that employed the use of meditation.

TM is currently back in the limelight not only for millions on daytime TV but also for evangelicals. Oz and two other medical doctors have been drafted by Rick Warren to "*shape up*" himself and his Saddleback Community Church, as well as all the thousands of evangelical churches that partner with Saddleback. Warren's "*Daniel Plan*" is an attempt to give biblical support for improving the physical welfare of overweight and out-of-shape believers. The "*Daniel*" reference is to the young man described in chapter one of the book of the Old Testament that bears his name. This is one more example of the biblical illiteracy that has infected the church through marketing, seeker-friendly, and purpose-driven programs that have weaned Christians off the Word of God and have all but completely eliminated their ability to discern what's biblical and what's not. Daniel was hardly an overweight teenager in need of an exercise, nutritional, and meditation program but rather a godly youth whose fear was that he would defile himself before his holy God.

But that doesn't sell today. All three doctors to whom the shepherd of Saddleback has turned his sheep over for their physical well-being feature occult meditation (See TBC Newswatch 2/11; Q&A, 3/11) in their programs under the pseudo-scientific labels of TM and the Relaxation Response (See *America, the Sorcerer's New Apprentice*; also <http://www.saddleback.com/thedanielplan/webcast/>).

The spiritual climate of America in the 21st century is neo-pagan in general, neo-gnostic among most professing Christians, and severely lacking in biblical discernment among those who may well be true believers. We are in the throes of rampant spiritual delusion. What can be done to stem the tide? Nothing that the Bible seems to indicate. On the other hand, God has given believers marching orders for these times—orders that appear to be designed more for a rescue operation than for a reversal of widespread apostasy: *"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26)*. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to, *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5)*.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). TBC