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*Chapter One*

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# MEET OPRAH AND HER FRIENDS

“THERE ARE MANY PATHS  
TO WHAT YOU CALL GOD”

—*Oprah Winfrey*

“HAVE YOU HEARD about the largest church in the world?”

That was the provocative opening question on a video exposé of Oprah Winfrey’s growing obsession with promoting New Age Spirituality. With a daily television audience of millions along with sponsoring *A Course in Miracles* on an XM Satellite Radio program, Oprah has become the high priestess of a new church—some would call it a cult.<sup>1</sup>

The video went on to ask, “What does this new church teach? It requires no belief; heaven is not a location but refers to the inner realm of consciousness. The man on the cross is an archetypal image. He is every man and every woman. What is more, all of us are already holy and we should not make the pathetic error of ‘clinging to the old rugged cross.’”

Oprah Winfrey describes herself as a “freethinking” Christian who turned against the traditional teachings of Christianity when she heard her pastor say that “God is a jealous God.” She couldn’t accept that, she says, because she always thought God was a God of love. This sent her on a quest into Spirituality, to find the true essence of the Christian faith, an essence that is shared by all religions.

Let’s hear it in her own words:

And you know, it has been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ’s consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we are all talking about here. Jesus came to say, “Look, I’m going to live in the body, in the human body, and I’m going to show you how it’s done.” These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn’t come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don’t believe that Jesus came to start Christianity . . . well, I’m a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

Oprah is one of America’s most respected and most admired spiritual gurus. I realize, of course, that to be critical of what Oprah says or does, is, in the minds of many, to be critical of the divine. Indeed, *USA Today* ran an article titled “The Divine Miss Winfrey?”<sup>3</sup> To her credit, she lavishly gives money for many philanthropic causes, and through her “Angel Network” and the “Use Your Life Award” she has made a difference in the lives of many children. She had funded scholarships for black colleges, written checks to churches, and moved families out of the inner city.

More recently she has used her wealth to build a school for disadvantaged children in Africa.

Because Oprah was sexually abused as a child she is able to empathize with those who suffer and particularly those who have experienced the same fate. She has courageously taken on issues such as domestic violence and marital infidelity; she has pulled back the curtain and helped liberate the secrecy and expose the reality of these important themes.

So far, so good.

Why should we be interested in what Oprah believes about Jesus and the divine? After all, she does not claim to be a pastor or preacher. She does not have a degree in theology and makes no claim to being a biblical scholar. To her credit, she does not hold herself up as a god; she is just doing what she does, or more accurately, what she feels called to do. She is at the top or near the top of any list of the most admired women in the world. She connects with millions every day and we dare not ignore her influence.

## OPRAH'S INFLUENCE

Oprah has millions who follow her teachings on Spirituality. The article in *USA Today* says, "After two decades of searching for her authentic self—exploring New Age theories, giving away cars, trotting out fat, recommending good books and tackling countless issues from serious to frivolous—Oprah Winfrey has risen to a new level of guru."

To continue, "Over the past year Winfrey has emerged as a spiritual leader for the new millennium, a moral voice of authority for the nation." She has used her pulpit, says Kathryn Lofton, and so "Oprah has emerged as a symbolic figurehead of spirituality."<sup>4</sup>

If we doubt her impact on her twenty to fifty million viewers each week, we should be reminded that a poll on Beliefnet.com reports that 33 percent of the respondents say that she had a more profound spiritual impact on them than their clergy persons. Cathleen Falsani, religion writer for the *Chicago Sun-Times* asks, “I wonder, has Oprah become America’s pastor?”

“I think that if this were the equivalent of the Middle Ages and we were to fast-forward 1,200 years, scholars would definitely think that this Oprah person was a deity, if not a canonized being.”<sup>5</sup> Marcia Nelson, who has written a book on Oprah, says that she is today’s Billy Graham.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the long list of New Age teachers she promotes on her media outlets, she has done more to promote New Age Spirituality than any other person on planet Earth. And she appears to believe what she promotes. When she recommends a book on her book club, sales soar. And recently she has taken to promoting three of the present leading gurus of New Age religion.

Let’s meet a few of her more recent friends.

## ECKHART TOLLE

Eckhart Tolle is the author of two influential books, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* and *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. Although these books cover essentially the same themes, each gives a slightly different slant to his understanding of Spirituality. Oprah has given most of her attention to *A New Earth* on her TV show, but she has also joined with Tolle on a live Web-based event accessed by hundreds of thousands of people, anxious to learn how they can be awakened. Along with the information there are testimonies of people whose lives have been changed as a result of applying these principles.

Tolle was born in Germany and at the age of thirteen moved

to Spain with his father. He became interested in literature and astronomy. He says, “Even as a child I could already feel what later would become periods of intense depression—even as a child I would sometimes think, How can I eliminate myself from this world? How can I commit suicide? And was working out possibilities to do it.”<sup>7</sup> At the age of fifteen he read books written by a German mystic that opened him up to another dimension of consciousness. Later he graduated from the University of London and became a research scholar at Cambridge University.

At the age of twenty-nine he had a profound “conversion,” a spiritual transformation that dissolved his old identity and radically changed the course of his life. When he could no longer live with himself, he realized that he was conscious of his thoughts—there were actually two of him, not just one. He was able to separate this “consciousness” from his ego (the outer thought forms) and he found peace. He realized that there was a parallel universe into which he could retreat that not only made his problems bearable but actually gave him a quiet sense of presence or “beingness.”

The next few years were spent integrating what he had learned with his own life and then sharing the results with others. He came to realize, he says, that the New Testament had a deeper meaning, and he knew intuitively that some statements attributed to Jesus were added later. After these discoveries he became known as a spiritual teacher and a healer. He was largely unknown until Oprah began to promote him and his books, which she said had changed her life.

*A New Earth* has sold millions of copies; indeed, the speed of sales has surpassed all other books. “What we’re seeing now is so beyond what a bestseller is, it is really a phenomenon,” says the publisher. Oprah says, “Being able to share this material with you is a gift and a part of the fulfillment of my life’s purpose . . . it was

an awakening for me that I want for you too.”<sup>8</sup>

What do we make of his insights and conversion? Later in this book we will discuss these teachings in more detail. For now, I will simply say that their origin actually dates back to an early chapter in the book of Genesis. The underlying assumptions and teachings are as old as occult religion. What Tolle discovered is a spirit world characterized by deception and demonic attachment.

### RHONDA BYRNE

Australian-born Rhonda Byrne wrote a book titled *The Secret*, which was heavily promoted by Oprah. Byrne’s life had collapsed around her, and through searching for answers she discovered that she uncovered the greatest “secret” in history. When she began practicing this secret, her life began to change in ways that were nothing short of miraculous. She was convinced that a variety of famous people discovered “the secret,” which transformed their lives. She decided to make a video called *The Secret* to share her discoveries with others. A DVD then led to the publication of a book, which with Oprah’s help was catapulted to the top of the charts back in February 2007.

The essence of this secret is “the law of attraction.” According to Byrne, the Universe (always capitalized because it is synonymous with God) vibrates on a particular frequency. When you think of something in harmony with the frequency, you attract it to you. If you think wealth, you will receive wealth; if you think about debt, you will be further in debt. “Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts.”<sup>9</sup>

Byrne promises with ironclad certainty, “There isn’t a single thing that you cannot do with this knowledge. . . . The Secret can give you whatever you want.”<sup>10</sup> The claims that are made for

*The Secret* are so grandiose that we will be tempted to smile. The whole universe is at our disposal; it is waiting for us to attract untold blessings. All this and more is ours if only we are open to it!

In promoting *The Secret* Oprah says, “It has been marketed and packaged in such a way that people of our generation, of this time, can receive it in a way that perhaps they couldn’t have received it from other philosophers.”<sup>11</sup> Millions believe that the key to financial advancement, health, and opportunity are found within the pages of this mega-bestseller. Whether this is so will become clear in the chapters that follow.

## HELEN SCHUCMAN

Although Helen Schucman is now deceased, she is the author of the book *A Course in Miracles*, which is taught on satellite radio by Marianne Williamson through Oprah’s inspiration and encouragement. We can’t understand Williamson and her worldwide impact unless we know how Schucman’s book came about.

In October of 1965, Schucman, a Jewish atheist psychologist and associate professor of medical psychology at Columbia University in New York, began receiving channeled messages from an unknown spirit guide that claimed to be the voice of Jesus. She and a colleague began by writing down the dreams Schucman had, and this prepared her for what followed.

Within time Schucman became accustomed to “the voice,” which gave her a rapid inner dictation that she took down in shorthand. And although she could stop the process at any time, she continued to act as a scribe, writing what was dictated to her. In her words, “It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete.” The result was a long, convoluted book titled *A Course in Miracles*.



We should note in passing that this kind of automatic writing, which bypasses the consciousness of the writer, is common in occult circles. The writer's hand forms the words, but the person is unaware of what will be written. Sometimes this writing is done in a trance; at other times the writer is aware of his/her surroundings, but the author passively receives the message from an unseen entity. One of the best-known automatic writers was Helene Smith, an early twentieth-century psychic who felt that her automatic writing was an attempt by Martians to communicate with Earth. She claimed she could translate the Martian language into French.

As in other occult writings, *A Course in Miracles* stresses that what you believe is unimportant, and even irrelevant. What is important is the technique, the application of ideas that will put you in touch with a higher form of consciousness. The book says that we can never agree on what to believe, but fortunately, that is unimportant; what is important is the inner core of our own being that unifies all religions and religious experiences.

We should point out that this is not only a form of brainwashing, but also is consistent with Hinduism, which stresses technique, not specific beliefs. Listen to what the spirit guide dictated to Helen Schucman to write:

Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true.

Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter,

or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reaction to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required.<sup>12</sup>

Imagine, we are told that the book will not interfere with anyone's religion! Its ideas and techniques can harmonize with whatever we believe. I will explain the basic themes and ideas found in *A Course in Miracles* in the succeeding pages. Having spent many hours perusing the book, I can say with confidence that when you pick it up, you are, in effect, holding a version of *The Satanic Bible*. It attacks everything taught in Scripture, especially the atonement and the work of Jesus on the cross. There are powerful reasons to believe that "the entity" that dictated the book was an evil spirit—a demon—who knew much more about Christianity than Schucman could have known; and whatever the demon knew, he hated with a vengeance.

## MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

Marianne Williamson has written a popular exposition of *A Course on Miracles* entitled *A Return to Love*. Since Williamson herself was profoundly changed by the course, she began teaching seminars on it and today is a recognized expert in propounding its teachings. The original book written by Helen Schucman contains 365 lessons, one for every day, and this formed the basis for teaching the course on XM radio to millions of people. Those who took the course will have learned many things such as the following:

Lesson #35, "My mind is part of God's. I am very holy."

Lesson #38, "There is nothing my holiness cannot do."

Lesson #61, “I am the light of the world.”

Lesson #96, “Salvation comes from my one Self.”

Lesson #186, “Salvation of the world depends on me.”

Lesson #191, “I am the holy Son of God Himself.”

What about Williamson herself? She is well acquainted with the realm of demonic spirits and sees herself as a witch. In her words:

During the wee hours of the morning, both angels and demons take shape. . . . In those hours that I’ve lain so inconveniently awake, I think I’ve begun at last to know what awakened means. Noting the witching hour—4:15—at which I awake more often than not, stealing outside to look at the stars and marvel at the moon, I return again to my ancient self. In those hours, I am not a menopausal nutcase, I’m a magical witch, and I can feel it in my bones.<sup>13</sup>

Exactly what Williamson says about the huge issues of life—God, heaven, death, and the like—will become clear later. For now, we must simply grasp the fact that *A Course in Miracles* is an exercise in occultism, the dark side of the spirit world.

Eckhart Tolle, Rhonda Byrne, and Marianne Williamson are at present the three most prominent friends that Oprah has recommended to her vast audience. Of course, she has promoted many New Agers in the past, such as Gary Zukav and the writings of Eric Butterworth; but these three have, thanks to Oprah, extended their influence around the world.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

By the time you are reading this book, Oprah might be promoting some other author or book that claims to unlock the key

to spiritual experience. So in these pages, I want to introduce you to basic principles of discernment that will be of benefit regardless of who the next guru of Spirituality will be. Occultism, no matter its form, always has certain telltale teachings by which it can be identified. In fact, as we shall see, these lies can be traced all the way back to the garden of Eden. It is not just that these ideas are incompatible with Christianity; these are powerful teachings that have their origin in rebellion against God. This is not, as one person thought, “Christianity Lite”; it is a satanic counterfeit.

I write this book for those Christians who thought that the antidote to their own spiritual dryness is to plumb the depths of these teachings. I write for the Christian woman I met who bought Tolle’s book *The New Earth* to share with a friend because she thought that it would help both of them in their own spiritual journey! I write for those who have forgotten that Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light.

Don’t be fooled because of the use of words such as *Jesus, love, peace, reconciliation, and atonement*. These biblical words and others like them are given radically different definitions; it’s equivalent to calling good evil and evil good. Visualize a bottle clearly labeled: Drinking Water. Then imagine someone emptying the bottle and filling it with a clear liquid poison. The label still remains, but the contents are disastrous to anyone who dares take even a sip. In these occult writings, the words are there, but the meanings are entirely different.

Truth for all of its power does have this limitation: there is only one way to be right but many ways to be wrong! There is only one right answer to the equation two plus two equals four. But there are almost an infinite number of wrong answers to the equation! Just so, there are many ways to be wrong about matters of spirituality, but at root, all of these errors can be reduced to

four or five lies. And error can be more easily recognized when you know what you are looking for. I pray that this book will be a primer on discernment. Like a friend of mine says, we have to *learn to discern*.

Also, my prayer is that this book will fall into the hands of many who have already been beguiled by the New Spirituality. I write for the confused person who has tried these techniques, but is unsure about whether he/she has as yet attained enlightenment or experienced an awakening. I also write for the person who has plunged deeply into this unseen realm, only to experience moments of exhilaration as well as moments of despair.

C. S. Lewis was right: “We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.”<sup>14</sup>

I write, praying that we shall be guided by God’s Word.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

“Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:20–22).

Let’s begin a journey that begins in Eden but ends with the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords. Let’s ponder the characteristics of deception and walk toward the One who is the “light of life” (John 8:12).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you been drawn to or influenced by Oprah Winfrey's promotion of New Age Spirituality? If so, what about it attracted you?
2. Why does Dr. Lutzer view Oprah Winfrey's vast influence as a grave concern? To what extent has she been able to spread the teachings of those she promotes?
3. In this chapter, Dr. Lutzer interacts with four authors and their books, *A New Earth*, *The Secret*, *A Course in Miracles*, and *A Return to Love*. Have you read any of those books? If so, which book or books? What were your impressions?
4. Briefly discuss the basic idea of Eckhart Tolle's book *A New Earth*. What is really behind his awakening? To what has he succumbed?
5. What is the point of Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret*? What about it attracts people to its message?
6. What are the origin and premise of Helen Schucman's *A Course in Miracles*? Why does Dr. Lutzer compare it with *The Satanic Bible*?
7. Briefly describe Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love*. What is dangerous about the content of her teachings?
8. In this chapter, Dr. Lutzer presents the purpose for his book. What are some of the cautions he gives his readers regarding the New Age Spirituality movement?
9. What benefits might we gain and what truths might we learn from Dr. Lutzer's book? (See 1 Timothy 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–22; John 8:12.)