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There Are No New Heresies — New Thought Isn't New

Friday, March 30, 2007



False teachings emerge anew in every generation it seems, but inventing a new heresy is quite a challenge. After all, once every doctrine vital to Christianity has been denied, all that remains is a change in packaging.

That is what we see in the case of *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne, the nation's best-selling book. Millions of Americans are buying, reading, or talking about a book that repackages ancient paganism in the guise of positive thinking and mental energy. There is nothing here that is genuinely new (Byrne openly admits finding the "Law of Attraction" in a nineteenth century book). But, as the sales of *The Secret* now prove, a heresy does not have to be new to be attractive.

Americans have long been especially attracted to ideas associated with "New Thought," a movement centered in positive thinking and mental power. The New Thought promoters have promised health, wealth, success, comfort, popularity, and much more through the exercise of positive thoughts and mental focus.

Interestingly, *USA Today* published a report on the historical background to *The Secret* in the March 29, 2007 edition. As reporter Marco R. della Cava explained, the movement has deep roots and many contemporary representations.

From [his article](#):

Oprah dedicated two shows to The Secret; Australian video producer Byrne has a roundup on how the mind can deliver a laundry list of goodies, from health to a helicopter. Saturday Night Live was quick to lampoon the book, while Pulitzer Prize-winning political columnist Maureen Dowd invoked it while wondering if wishful thinking could lead to a change in the White House.

But such pop culture fascination leaves actress and minister Della Reese Lett laughing.

"Child, The Secret hasn't been a secret since the times of Moses, if not before," says the former Touched by an Angel star, founder and minister of the Understanding Principles of Better Living church in Los Angeles. "But every generation needs a new way to look at things that have been around a while. I suppose right now The Secret is it."

Della Reese Lett is "founder and minister" of her own New Thought congregation, known as the [Understanding Principles of Better Living Church](#). According to the group's Web site:

Understanding Principles for Better Living is a teaching ministry geared toward meeting the needs of the total man/woman. We are among the mighty forces at work today to change man's thought about God. Through prayer, we reckon with the vital forces of spiritual hunger, shaking the foundations of all who come. We know that filling this hunger is the greatest need in the world today. We are the religion for the New Age.



More:

Our basic message is that man, through his God-nature, can be the victor of circumstances rather than a victim of circumstances; that no matter what happens to him, man can learn to cope with and overcome any and all obstacles. At Understanding Principles for Better Living, we do not attempt to teach you what to think, but rather how to think so that you may go forth into the Infinite Mind and experience a revelation of Truth that is right for you.

The group teaches that “man can learn to cope with and overcome any and all obstacles” by going forth into the “Infinite Mind.” Della Reese Lett may have been the star of “Touched by an Angel,” but no angel in the Bible ever instructed humans to “go forth into the Infinite Mind.” Not by a long shot.

Mr. della Cava correctly points to the similarities between *The Secret* and older New Thought movements, such as the Unity School of Christianity. As he explains:

Lett's church is one of hundreds of loosely affiliated metaphysical churches that have been around for more than a century. Their guiding principles are anchored to self-fulfillment via the power of the mind.

The number of American followers of these so-called New Thought churches (don't call them New Age) hovers around 200,000, which includes 100,000 who regularly attend the nation's 700 Unity churches, says James Trapp, CEO of the Association of Unity Churches in Lee's Summit, Mo.

More:

What's particularly interesting about The Secret phenomenon is that beyond finding its way into millions of homes, it is in some instances getting the curious to step out of those houses and seek like-minded fellowship.

*“We've got more people coming on Sundays than ever;” says the Rev. Temple Hayes of the First Unity Church of St. Petersburg, Fla., whose small bookshop has sold 860 copies of *The Secret*. The church holds regular workshops using the book as a teaching tool.*

Overall, services at First Unity have decidedly Christian overtones, with regular readings from the Bible and references to God and Jesus, although the latter isn't viewed as the Son of God. Communion is reserved for holidays such as Easter. Sunday staples include sermons (the preferred term is “message”) and a moment of silence, which can be filled with any form of meditation.

“We teach people how to think, not what to think, and folks find that appealing,” Hayes says. “But we do make sure to tell people that, while the mind is a powerful way to get what you want, you may face some pain along the way. Nothing comes easy.”

We are told that First Unity Church has “decidedly Christian overtones” except for the fact that Jesus is not understood to be the Son of God. That is a big exception, to say the least. These groups borrow symbolism, selected texts, and public recognition from Christianity, but deny the core of the Church's faith.

Look closely at a claim that appears on the Web site of the Understanding Principles of Better Living Church and, most interestingly, is also offered by the minister of the Unity congregation. They both claim to teach *how* to think, not *what* to think. This statement implies that the groups offer no doctrine, merely a route to transformed thinking.

But the claim is false — and must always be false. The distinction between *how* to think and *what* to think is artificial. It is sloganeering and advertising, not serious thought. Every pattern of thinking is based on certain presuppositions and leads to certain conclusions. A pattern of thinking that begins with relativism as a presupposition will inevitably (if at all consistent) lead to relativistic conclusions. In other words, when it comes to thinking, there is no *how* that does not include a *what*.

You cannot begin with the presupposition that you are the center of the Universe and then reason to conclusions that are in any way consistent with the Bible. You cannot get from the presupposition that you are a sinless victim of negative thinking to the conclusion that the cross of Christ is the answer to our deepest need. You cannot reason from the presupposition that you can cope with all your problems by the exercise of positive mental imagery to the conclusion that your greatest need is for a Savior. The *how* is a *what* when it comes to thinking about anything of importance.

Beware the movement that promises to teach you *how* to think rather than *what* to think. A moment's honest reflection should tell you *what* to think about that.

There are no new heresies, only heresies dressed up and repackaged for a new generation. New Thought is back — but *The Secret* really isn't new.

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