

A Review of Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*¹

by Mark Pretorius²

Byrne R 2006. *The Secret*. New York: Beyond Words, 190 pages.

Since *The Secret* debuted in 2006—and was given widespread exposure on the Oprah Winfrey show—its sales have exceeded the four-million mark. Celebrities from all genres are endorsing it. At the writing of this review, it is even reported to have outsold the latest Harry Potter book by JK Rowling's. Clearly, this book is attracting much attention, and people are prepared to spend money to read it. The question is: what is *The Secret* that so many people are clamouring to find out about?

The 'secret' is simply *the law of attraction*. It is a method developed—perhaps I should say 'discovered'—by Rhonda Byrne after facing a particularly difficult time in her life. In her forward, she explains that she was only able to come out of this difficult time after discovering 'the secret' and applying its principles to her life (pp. ix-x).

According to Byrne, the law of attraction is a powerful law within the universe. If properly used, the law of attraction can make all our dreams come true. It has to do with how we direct our thoughts, and how we lock into the power found within this law of attraction. Because it is an absolute law, it will always respond to our thoughts, no matter what they may be. In her view, and in the view of the many contributors to her book, we human beings are the most powerful force in the universe. This is simply because whatever we think

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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about will come to pass. By what we meditate on, we shape the world around us, either positively or negatively.

In her view, you shape your own life and destiny through the power of the law of attraction. Through positive thinking and visualisation, you can attract wealth and health, and anything else you may desire. These are two of many keys that, when properly applied, cause the law of attraction to work. Byrne states that “nothing [good or bad] can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts” (p. 28). She expands on this thought on page 33: “Your thoughts are the primary cause of everything”. Your current reality or your current life is the result of the thoughts you have been thinking (p. 71).

Doubtless, there are aspects of this law that are attractive to the human heart. We all like to think that we have ultimate control over our lives and that we can have anything we want. We all want to control our destinies and to feel that the universe is at our beck and call—that it is a friendly force working with and not against us. This is, I am convinced, what draws people to the law of attraction.

The Secret reminds me of the days when the ‘word of faith’ and ‘positive confession’ movements were sweeping the globe. One only has to look at the so-called father of the faith movement, EW Kenyon, who was a student of Emerson College of Oratory, a breeding ground for New Thought philosophical ideas, to see the comparison between his writings and ideas and Rhonda Byrne’s views and ideas.

Kenyon taught that the words of our mouths betray faith or fear in our minds, and the combined affect of positive or negative belief and words cause the positive or negative realities that come into existence. This is almost exactly what *The Secret* is teaching, but in a more modernised way.

Kenyon also formulated laws of prosperity which were embraced by many ‘faith teachers’ for daily rehearsal and recital to cultivate a mind of faith that would result in a life of complete health and material wealth. *The Secret* is no different, except it is written for a larger audience by not pushing a Christian stance. But it definitely has been written in a way that would attract a

Christian readership as well. This is clear by the scriptures she quotes on page 47 (i.e., Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24). She claims that if we just ask and believe, we are able to create whatever we desire. Mark 11:24 is a scripture made famous by a well-known word of faith minister named Kenneth Hagin. He quoted this scripture in almost all the books he wrote. Nothing is new in *The Secret*; it has all been taught before.

However, Rhonda Byrne takes this teaching one step further. The true essence of her book comes out near the end, where she makes this statement:

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 (p. 164).

The book pushes a pantheistic view, meaning, no real lines are drawn between creation (or, as she calls it, "the Universe") and the Creator, God.

I believe the mind is one of the most powerful organs with which God has blessed humanity. There are more than 900 references in scripture to the mind, soul, intellect, thinking faculty, and so on. Doubtless, God is telling us the importance of the mind. However, only a mind submitted to God, and daily renewed by the Word and power of the Holy Spirit, can have any meaning in God's kingdom. To believe that simply meditating, visualising and confessing the things you desire will automatically bring them to pass is naïve and makes a mockery of God's omnipotent power and sovereignty over all creation.

The Secret is a simple read. It is clearly a New Age book written to popularise age-old beliefs for a new audience. Byrne tries hard not to offend anyone. Her book states what the latest fad in Hollywood is. If converted into a film like the Da Vinci Code, it could rake in a small fortune for the author and contributors, and further advance the 'new age' of so-called enlightenment.