

## OUT OF BODY OR OUT OF MIND?

*Out On A Limb* presented a demonstration of spiritual power that has shaken many Christian viewers. MacLaine's encounter with trance channelers, her psychic connection with other people miles distant, the apparent directing of her life from some unseen powers that seem to have chosen her for a special mission in life—these all worked together to weave a story with tremendous impact. One of the most unnerving sequences dramatized her first out-of-body experience while on her trip to the Peruvian Andes with David Manning.

Sensing MacLaine's call to be a witness for the New Age, Manning led her step-by-step to her own self-realization. Knowing the impact that an out-of-body experience would have in persuading her that she was on the path to truth, his first approach was gentle and seemingly innocent.

Taking MacLaine to a hot mineral spring, Manning's objective was to teach her to allow her body to relax so that her mind—specifically her subconscious—would take control of her senses. While in the hot spring, Manning told her to concentrate on the light from a candle located on a ledge directly across from her, and to think of herself as one with the light—to become the light; to become the candle.

This exercise caused MacLaine to momentarily slip into a hypnotic trance, but she snapped out of it before entering totally into an altered state of consciousness. Though not knowing where she was headed through submission to Manning's direction, she was impressed by the euphoria that had swept over her.

Later on, in another hot spring, MacLaine went fully into an altered state. She saw energy in the form of colored auras emanating from the plants surrounding them and from Manning, resting in a trance across from her in the spring.

Suddenly she felt herself rising out of her body, and was soon above the spring looking down on herself, connected by a thin, silver cord. Her ascent accelerated, taking her above the clouds and into outer space toward the moon and beyond. Seeing a distant galaxy whirling in space, she wondered if her silver cord would stretch that far. "With that limiting thought," she said, she returned to her body.

Such an experience attested to by someone as reputable as Shirley MacLaine can easily plant seeds of doubt in Christians who take their eyes off God's Word. It is difficult to maintain faith in Jesus as the only way to truth when unquestionable spiritual experiences of a seemingly beautiful nature take place among those whose beliefs conflict with God's Word.



# Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

## SPECIAL REPORT

# OUT ON A LIMB

## NEW AGE EVANGELISM AND THE CHURCH

by Albert James Dager

In February, 1987, ABC-TV aired a two-part made-for-TV movie version of Shirley MacLaine's best selling book, *Out On A Limb*. Though the ratings were not as good as ABC had anticipated, the number of viewers was substantial.

In its attempt at good theater the movie fell short due to much of the dialogue which was obviously contrived to elicit the philosophical underpinnings of MacLaine's testimony. But in terms of viewer impact the results were significant, as evidenced by a surge of interest not only in MacLaine's writings, but in New Age writings in general after the film was aired.

Though *Out On A Limb* was obviously an evangelistic outreach for New Age philosophy, MacLaine denies that that has been her intent in writing her books or promoting her film. Rather, she says, her purpose is merely to express her own inner feelings in order to fulfill herself. Whether or not anyone accepts what she says isn't important to her.

*Out On A Limb* traced MacLaine's quest for spiritual truth apart from that afforded her by her Protestant upbringing. Having abandoned Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, she was open to the possibility that an inward search of self would reveal truth and bring her into contact with God (the higher Self in New Age philosophy).

Through her acquaintance with David Manning, an artist whose paintings reflected his own New Age beliefs, she came to believe that she is God, as are all people—a pantheistic concept that denies the reality of a personal, transcendent God, and relegates Him to the position of Universal Mind or Cosmic Consciousness.

Her trips to Peru with Manning proved spiritually satisfying, and resulted in her first out-of-body experience as well as the consideration that UFO's are real. Many New Agers believe that they are manned by superior beings who are observing humanity and guiding us along the evolutionary path to perfection.

It was MacLaine's trip to Stockholm, Sweden, to rendezvous with her married lover, that provided an experience that would set her on a new course in life. While there she witnessed her first channeling session—a method by which a spiritual entity (supposedly a highly evolved being) speaks through a willing "trance-channeler" (medium). The spirit's messages are generally designed to guide listeners into realms of higher consciousness and affirm their essential deity.

Miss MacLaine has herself become a channeler of a different sort. She does not claim to be a channel for another spirit being, but rather for her own higher Self (her subconscious).



Shirley MacLaine

What we saw in *Out On A Limb* was an account of New Age philosophy packaged in an entertainment format. Though the film was a reenactment of MacLaine's personal experiences, portions of it incorporated actual channeling sessions. MacLaine conversed with the spirits through the mediums or "trance-channelers" beforehand so the spirits could rehearse their lines.

As shocking to the sensibilities of many Christians as the overall message was, there were specific points within the film that caused inordinate consternation and must be addressed.

I have no doubt that Shirley MacLaine's out-of-body experience was genuine, and that such experiences are common among those who seek them through occult meditation techniques. I particularly found of interest her reference to a silver cord which, in death, would break and sever completely the attachment of the soul and spirit to the body. Ecclesiastes 12:6 makes reference to just such a silver cord.

But what of such experiences? Why should Christians not seek to have them? The answers are found in Scripture.

When sin entered the human race through Adam, God pronounced a curse upon him and his descendants (Genesis 3): a life of hardship and, ultimately, death.

But man did not want to accept his lot. He turned to spirits in rebellion—fallen angels and demons—who offered knowledge that would provide man with a technology capable of alleviating the hardships placed upon him by God.

Thus were established the various mystery religions which offered secret knowledge of the sciences in return for allegiance to evil spirits masquerading as gods and goddesses of nature. The privilege of contact with the spirit realm was given to the priests of the mystery religions. The methods and means included meditation, hypnosis, and drugs. The latter two were also used to bring their subjects into obedience and to initiate them into the realm of demonic spiritism, making them channels for spirit entities.

Soul travel, a practice of many in the deeper occult mysteries, provides a means to contact spirits above the earth and, by some reports, on other planets and even in other galaxies. Many practice it just for the euphoria and excitement of discovery. But it is also a method by which the personality of the individual is removed in order to make his body available for possession by one or more spirits.

Through these spirit entities man has received genuine knowledge of the universe and its mechanisms. But Scripture tells us that "the secret things belong to the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). God chose to reveal His Word to us in order that we may live righteously by faith. What He has not revealed belongs to Him.

The alleged goal of man's spiritual and physical evolution is to attain to godhood. The occult sciences promise immortality and godhood through reincarnation, each stage of which supposedly leads man to higher levels of consciousness and realization of his inherent godhood.

## REINCARNATION

Because mankind has rejected Jesus Christ as the only Way to God, they have also rejected belief in the resurrection. Almost every religious system in the world believes either in reincarnation (the soul experiencing many human rebirths until it has purged itself of all negative karma), transmigration (the soul being reborn through different life forms, sometimes as an animal, an insect, man, etc., depending upon its previous quality of living), or some form of eternal existence as a spirit.

Reincarnation is the prevalent belief among New Age adherents, resulting from the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism. It is also the central theme of Shirley MacLaine's teachings and an important element in her movie.

The film stirred controversy and caused consternation for many Christians by giving the impression that reincarnation was a tenet of early Christianity, expunged from the Scriptures by Roman emperor Justinian in the sixth century. This was conveyed in a segment that, unless one was listening very carefully—in fact, unless he could play it back and listen to it—he would think that some historical truth had been stated which would affirm reincarnation as a basic tenet of Christianity.

**Shirley:** Why isn't reincarnation in the Bible? Why isn't it taught in Christianity?

**David:** Ah, well, that brings us to the controversial Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. which was so dominated by the emperor Justinian that the pope, in protest, refused to attend. So Justinian got his way. And in spite of the fact that reincarnation could be found in many of the writings of the early Church fathers, his council condemned the idea of the pre-existence of the soul.

**Shirley:** Emperor Justinian. What did he want to do a thing like that for?

**David:** Well, I guess once you get used to the idea of being an emperor, you don't want to have to believe that someday you might have to come back as a pig stumper.

**Shirley:** Yeah, but why did the Church go along with it?

**David:** Well, I think at first Justinian pressured them into it. But then later I think they went along with it because they just didn't want people to assume responsibility for their own karmic destiny.

One might get the impression that belief in reincarnation was once a part of Scripture, and held by the early Church. But the fact is, it never was held by the Church. Nor was reincarnation purged from Scripture, because it was never a part of Scripture.

Simply because Shirley MacLaine asked, "Why isn't reincarnation in the

Bible?" and David Manning gave her some opinionated reference to the sixth-century Roman Catholic council, doesn't mean a thing. He never answered the question about reincarnation and the Bible, which had been completed in the first century; instead he tells us what he *thinks* happened during the Council of Constantinople.

The Council of Constantinople had nothing to do with establishing Scripture. The Scriptures had been completed hundreds of years before.

There are other considerations in the movie's allusion to reincarnation as a tenet of early Christianity. Manning says, "In spite of the fact that reincarnation could be found in many of the writings of the early Church fathers, his [Justinian's] council condemned the idea of the pre-existence of the soul."

In the first place, "the early Church fathers" does not refer to the Apostles, but to the hierarchy of the early Roman Catholic Church. The Apostles never endorsed belief in reincarnation. On the contrary, they pointed to the resurrection as the hope of the Church (1 Corinthians 15). The argument that reincarnation could ever be a tenet of Christianity is put to rest by Hebrews 9:27: "...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

In the second place, the Council of Constantinople focused on defining the nature of Jesus Christ; the issue of the pre-existence of the human soul was also addressed.

David Manning's statement that Justinian's council "condemned the pre-existence of the soul" is made in a very deceptive way, tying it in with reincarnation. But belief in the pre-existence of the soul does not necessarily entail belief in reincarnation. Many believe in the soul's pre-existence but not in reincarnation.

That some Christians who watched *Out On A Limb* were shaken by this segment demonstrates how easily we can be swayed by what we think we hear rather than what is actually said. It also demonstrates how, unless we know the Word of God and are walking in faith by the light of the Word, we can easily be led from the truth.

## GOD WHO?

The lie that has led to all lies is recorded in Genesis 3:1-6:

*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

*And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:*

*But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said,*

*Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:*

*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*

*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

Satan told Eve that she and Adam would become like gods. Fallen man has gone even further, succumbing to the ultimate deception—that he is God. This is why David Manning and Shirley MacLaine could boldly proclaim in unison on nationwide television, “I am God!”

**David:** Do you want to know a good exercise that helps you to get in touch with the realization that we each have God inside of us?”

**Shirley:** Exercise?

**David:** Here’s what you do. Just stand up, hold your arms out like this and say, “The kingdom of heaven is within. I love myself.” No, wait! Better than that, say, “I and God are one.” No, wait, wait! Better than that, I’ve got the best one; this is the best one. Just say, “I am God.”

**Shirley:** David, I can’t say that.

**David:** See how little you think of yourself. You can’t even say the words.

**Shirley (after much hesitation):** I am God. (pause) I am God.

**David:** A little louder please, with maybe a little more conviction.

**Shirley:** I am God! (pausing) Well if I am God, what does that make you?

**David:** We always see in others what we see in ourselves. I am God.

MacLaine’s testimony was not a first among Hollywood’s elite. In 1977, John Denver, appearing with George Burns to plug their movie, *Oh, God!* on *The Dinah Shore Show*, told the audience that George Burns really is God. And so is Denver, Shore, and everyone else. To this the studio audience gave resounding applause. Many celebrities (possessive of inflated egos) have succumbed to this philosophy.

The idea of the inherent godhood of all persons stems from the eastern mystical and western esoteric belief that the universe is really one giant organism. There is but one intelligence that permeates the cosmos and manifests itself in the form of energy. This is what they call “God.” Therefore, God is everything, and everything is God.

In their book, *Rebirthing in the New Age*, Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray relate the process called “rebirthing,” whereby a

person goes through an altered state of consciousness to re-experience his initial birth. This is done in order to overcome the trauma of that birth and to become more enlightened and more perfected in his path of evolution toward godhood:

...breathing is not only the focal point of birth, but is the primary vehicle of restoring divine energy into the human mind and body. So rebirthing primarily means the rehabilitation of breathing. Rebirthing is more descriptively called *conscious breathing* or *energy breathing*...the purpose of the breathing is to breathe life energy as well as air. Breathing life energy cannot be done with a mechanical breathing technique. Energy is the source of the physical body and the universe. (Emphasis authors.)

The concept behind eastern religious breathing techniques (including yoga) is that energy is God. And if energy is really matter in a different form, then matter is God. It follows, then, that we are all God. Meditation coupled with breathing exercises is believed to lead people to full self-realization, or realization of Self as God.

Ray also tells of an out-of-body experience similar to MacLaine’s, while engaged in a group therapy session:

And then they carried me to the Rolfing table in the middle of the sunny meadow. I still had not opened my eyes. John pressed on my body gently and the ecstasy was so great, I floated. I was above the trees. I suddenly realized I was having an out-of-body experience. I wondered if he could tell. And then he said, “Well, Sondra, there is no point in working on your body if you are not in it.” How did he know? What was all this telepathy going on? When I got back in my body it was just as good, so I stayed in. It seemed like the first time I had ever entered my body totally. It was a new experience to be in it totally like that. And I loved my body more than I ever thought possible.

So I told John, “I am going to open my eyes now,” as if I knew it was going to be something special. I didn’t feel funny about announcing it like that. What I saw was a real spectacle. I actually “saw” all the electrons in the universe at once, all the particles in the air, and all of it was sparkling. And then I began to see the trees. They were vibrating many colors of green that I had never seen before.

### THE CHURCH DECEIVED

Many Christians expressed shock at the idea that MacLaine and Manning could equate themselves with deity. But if all this sounds far-fetched and alien to our Christian faith, the reader should know that these

experiences and beliefs are coming into the Church through some prominent teachers. Although some who are involved in occult philosophy and false teachings may not be recognized as brothers in Christ by knowledgeable Christians, the fact remains that they exert considerable influence among the weak in faith and among new Christians as well as others—teachers, pastors, and so-called “lay persons”—having itching ears, blown about by every wind of doctrine.

Whether those who propagate these errors are deliberate deceivers or naive victims of deception themselves is not mine to judge. But to demonstrate the degree to which occultism is entering the Church I quote Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Notice the similarity between Peale’s testimony and that of Sondra Ray:

Marilyn Helleberg [author of *Beyond T.M.: A Practical Guide to the Lost Tradition of Christian Meditation*, published by the Paulist Press] suggests a meditation in which you visualize a white mist filled with myriads of little points of energy that gleam like diamonds. Scientists say this is the life substance, the life force—this creative energy beyond that which we consciously experience! Visualize this mist high above you, around you, and at your feet, cascading down like a waterfall of scintillating light.

Then deeply breathe in the white mist, and visualize it as proceeding upward into your throat, into your nasal passages, into your brain, vitalizing, sharpening and quickening your mind, making it alive with a new power, filled with light and wonderment. Then expel the white mist; draw it in again until it permeates every element of your physical being again and again and again. The creative energy of Almighty God is all around us all the time.

...I have been practicing this type of meditation for several days and I can report that after using it only a half dozen times one begins to feel different. It induces a sense of vital energy; an awareness of God’s presence.

Who is God? Some theological being? He is so much greater than theology. God is vitality. God is life. God is energy. As you breathe God in, as you visualize His energy, you will be reenergized! You will live longer, you will live better, you will have greater health, you will have dynamic energy.

Peale has the unique ability to be all things to all people. His affection for religious tradition of all sorts is apparent by reading his works. To Christians he speaks of Jesus, but he will lend credibility to any religious system as long as it produces

what he perceives to be positive results in its adherents' lives. As a 33rd degree Mason, Peale can be expected to endorse any humanistic philosophy as long as it contains an element of outward good. In this instance, to give credibility to Marilyn Helleberg's "Beyond TM" breathing techniques betrays lack of understanding.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God can be breathed in. The idea that God is energy is a Satanic lie, equating God with His creation (Romans 1:18-25). So, too, is any teaching that elevates the creation to the status of divinity, or implies that man is a kind of god, or even equal to God.

Many in the Church have succumbed to this deception. Kenneth Copeland has stated emphatically that we should think of ourselves as equal to God. When asked by Paul Crouch, head of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, "Are you a god—small 'g'?" Copeland, after building an elaborate but illogical case to affirm himself as a god, read from Philippians 2:5:

**Ken Copeland:** Let me ask you this. Will you do anything the Bible tells you to do?

**Paul Crouch:** Yes sir!

**Copeland:** If you understand its command you'll make an effort to do it won't you?

**Paul and Jan Crouch:** Yes.

**Copeland:** Alright. Let's see what it tells us to do. In Philippians, chapter two, verse five, "Let this mind"—it won't just come on you automatically, and if you walk in traditions you'll not do this—"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Now, He says, "Now you ought to think that way."

**Jan Crouch:** And we do.

**Copeland:** "Made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: [And] being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."

Now, what happened here? He said Jesus came, took of Himself no reputation. *But* His attitude was, "I don't call it robbery to be called equal with God; I'm not robbing God to say that I'm His Son."

**Paul:** Hmmmm.

**Copeland:** God's happy over this. I'm not making Him mad to say I'm His son. I don't know why you're upset about it.

**Paul:** It was all His idea in the first place.

**Copeland:** Yeah, man! God wanted sons. Wasn't no use in Him sending Jesus if He didn't want some more.

**Gloria Copeland:** Just like Him.

**Paul:** Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh.

**Ken Copeland:** He could have left me the sorry turkey I was back there before I got saved, man. If that's what He wanted. But He didn't. And He paid the ultimate price to get you and me. Why? to leave me the way I was?

**Paul:** No.

**Copeland:** "Just as I am, just as I am, without one plea." Well, thank God He didn't leave me just as I was. Amen? So He said, "You let this same mind be in you."

**Paul:** "Who thought it not robbery."

**Copeland:** "Who thought it not robbery to be called equal with God."

**Paul:** Ooooo! You're going to really get 'em mad now! (laughter)

**Copeland:** Naaw, I won't! They ain't listenin'. (laughter)

**Paul:** Yeah, I think they are!

**Copeland:** Well, I'll bet you they're not; most of them aren't. A guy that listens to what we're saying, with spiritual ears, you figure out where we're coming from, you see?

Now wait a minute; we ain't quite finished with this. You gotta finish this off. Because you can't just read a Scripture for them and say, "Well that's it."

It says that God exalted Him. First Peter, five, the fifth verse, "Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." How? By casting all your care upon Him.

Prior to this exchange Copeland built a lengthy dialogue attempting to prove that born again believers are gods by quoting Psalm 82. Yet God's words to the judges [*elohim*] of Israel were words of chastisement. He was dealing with rebellious men, not born again believers. Likewise, in John 10:34, Jesus was addressing rebellious men and making them see their error in calling Him a blasphemer because He called Himself the Son of God, when they held the erroneous assumption that they were gods themselves. Those who use these Scriptures as a proof text to establish themselves as gods are in reality identifying with rebellious men.

Copeland, however, twists these verses to make it appear as if the Jews wanted to stone Jesus because He called God His Father. He then builds a case to justify thinking of ourselves as equal with God because, since we are God's sons, God is pleased if we think of ourselves as equal with Him. Those who would disagree he accused of having an anti-Christ spirit, defined as "an anti-anointed One spirit" (Copeland being the anointed one to bring this new truth).

A careful reading of Philippians 2:5-8 shows that to have the mind of Christ is not to think of ourselves as equal with God, but rather to exercise the same degree of humility that Jesus did in His obedience.

The amazing thing is that Copeland so cleverly twisted the Scriptures out of context that he made it appear as if thinking of ourselves as equal with God, being little gods ourselves, is humility for which He will exalt us! Yet Scripture says there is only one true God, and no others (Isaiah.44:6). Therefore, if Copeland and the Crouches are gods, then they are false gods.

## CONCLUSION

True humility dictates that we not exalt ourselves in any manner. To support the idea that we are gods is to take the Scriptures out of context and bend them to suit that idea. If it were important to think of ourselves as gods the Scriptures would certainly be emphatic in teaching that doctrine.

The world has many voices that offer solutions to mankind's problems. The most prevalent voices today tout the idea that man must enhance his self-esteem—he must think only good of himself, and all negative references to man's nature are to be avoided or at least downplayed. If man can think of himself as God—or equal to God—he can overcome all obstacles that lie in the way of his achieving perfection.

But the answer to man's basic problem—his sin nature—lies only in surrender to Jesus Christ. And though His enemies—both inside and outside the Church—may exalt themselves in their own minds, the truth is that God has given only Jesus a name that is above every name: "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Is anyone "equal" to that? ■■

## NOTES

1. Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray, *Rebirthing In the New Age* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1983), p. xvii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
3. Norman Vincent Peale, "No More Stress or Tension," *Plus, The Magazine of Positive Thinking* (Pawling, NY: Foundation for Christian Living, May, 1986).
4. *Praise the Lord*, circa Spring, 1986, Trinity Broadcasting Network.



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