

Oprah Winfrey's 'Belief': Millions of Ways to God?

Oprah Winfrey makes headlines whenever she's in the news. For instance, the share price of Weight Watchers International more than doubled after she announced that she is buying ten percent of the company and joining its board.

Now she's back in the headlines with *Belief*, a miniseries that began October 18 and continues through October 24. According to Jonathan Merritt, a respected evangelical journalist, "*Belief* allows the message and core tenets of every religion to shine through in a way that honors them while remaining honest. Even the most exclusivist believers will find something to love in this epic spiritual series."

Leith Anderson and other evangelical leaders approve the way *Belief* characterizes their faith. Other leaders seem to feel the same way about their religious tradition.

Of course, Oprah's own spiritual eclecticism shines through as well. She once claimed that there are "many paths to what you call God." She has endorsed Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, and other New Age gurus. (For more on Oprah Winfrey's faith, see Janet Denison's *Who's Right: Stephen Colbert or Oprah?*)

In the second episode of *Belief* we're told that "our planet is home to countless religions, and nearly every one of those faiths asks us to love—love your God, your family, your neighbor." It's this generic, "faith is whatever you believe it to be" element that concerns me most. Do-it-yourself spirituality certainly did not originate with Oprah Winfrey. Rather, her miniseries reflects a trend that has been growing in popularity for decades.

Commenting on *Belief*, Diana Butler Bass claims in *The Washington Post* that "we are living through a period of

intense spiritual democratization. In all the world's religions, older forms of remote and hierarchical authority—not to mention the very idea of a distant and monarch-like God—are being challenged by ordinary people as they pray, worship, walk pilgrimages, and seek the divine in nature and neighborhoods."

As a result, according to Bass, "Across the planet, people are taking responsibility for their own versions of meaning and, in the process, are remaking faith in ways that are more inclusive, more personal, more connected to the natural world, and more attentive to their community."

She calls this movement "nothing less than a global spiritual revolution" and declares, "All around the world, people are discovering that God—or the gods, or the Goddess, or the spirit of awe—is nearer than has often been taught and that the divine can be accessed by anyone anywhere." Bass is convinced that "human beings can trust themselves to find God and grace wherever the sacred might be discerned."

So people are to take responsibility for "their own versions of meaning" and "trust themselves to find God." This reasoning sounds attractive, but would it work for medicine? Engineering? The law?

If Bass is right, Jesus was wrong: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Oprah Winfrey's *Belief* powerfully narrates some of humanity's faith traditions. But if the miniseries leads even one person from "the Truth" to "my truth," it replaces the physician with the patient.

God gave us only one key to heaven, because His key works for everyone who uses it.

P. T. Forsyth: "Christianity is not the sacrifice we make, but the sacrifice we trust."