

“God’s Dream”: A Deceptive Scheme?

By Warren B. Smith

I am not fully forgiven until I allow God to write his new dream for my life on the blackboard of my mind . . . God has a great plan to redeem society. He needs me and wants to use me. 1

—Robert Schuller, 1982

THIS WEEKEND, I’ll begin a series of five messages on God’s dream to use you globally—to literally use YOU to help change the world! 2

—Rick Warren, 2003

I live inside God’s dream for me. . . . God can dream a bigger dream for you than you can dream for yourself. 3

—Oprah Winfrey, 2006

So people interested in being a new kind of Christian will . . . want to find out how they can fit in with God’s dreams actually coming true down here more often. 4

—Brian McLaren, 2007

“God’s Dream” is a term Robert Schuller adopted years ago and has popularized for more than thirty-five years. As previously mentioned, it appears that Rick Warren first encountered the Schuller concept of “God’s Dream” in 1974 as a twenty year-old. Six years before he started Saddleback Church, he read Schuller’s 1974 book *Your Church Has Real Possibilities*. 5 In the last chapter of his book, Schuller introduced the term “God’s Dream” in his exhortation and charge to budding young pastors. In the chapter titled “How You Can Dream Great Dreams” Schuller writes:

How do possibility thinkers dream their dreams? Here’s how—just follow these three steps as you plan, pray and prepare to become a great leader to build a great church for Jesus Christ:

He [God] has a dream for your life and your church. He will reveal His dream by causing you to desire what He wants. Prayerfully ask God to fill

your life full with His Holy Spirit . . .

Now pray the prayer of surrender, “God I’m willing to do and be whatever you want me to be. I’m yours to command.” Then ask the Holy Spirit to fill your mind with God’s dream for your life.

Big beautiful dreams will come . . .

Listen to this dream, “For it is God at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve His purpose” (Phil. 2:13, Phillips). Now . . .

Show them your dream. . . .

So, friend, dream your dreams and make them great! I have every confidence that you are about to turn a corner in your ministry . . .

Why am I so sure? Because the principles of success are all here. You’ve already read them. Now believe them and apply them. They will work, if you work them!

And if this is done, the Twentieth Century church in America will see a fantastic future unfold before it as it moves into the Twenty-First Century. 6

As Robert Schuller finished his exhortation and concluded his book, the young Rick Warren read:

Some reader of this book will build the greatest church ever built in America . . . It will be a sensation for Christ! 7

In this 1974 Schuller book, Rick Warren was introduced not only to Schuller’s concept of “God’s Dream,” but also to Schuller’s admiration for Norman Vincent Peale and Peale’s book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Schuller wrote that it was Peale’s landmark appearance at his drive-in theater church that launched Schuller’s worldwide ministry. 8 I reviewed what Schuller wrote about Peale and “God’s Dream,” and Schuller’s instruction to “work” the “principles of success”:

[T]he principles of success are all here . . . Now believe them and apply them. They will work, if you work them! 9

Recognizing these New Age principles of occult manifestation from my own days in the New Age, I looked again at Norman Vincent Peale’s endorsement of Florence Scovel Shinn’s occult/New Age book *The Game of Life*. Peale had written:

THE GAME OF LIFE is filled with wisdom and creative insights. That its teachings will work I know to be fact, for I’ve long used them myself.

By studying and practicing the principles laid down in this book one may find prosperity, solve problems, have better health, achieve good personal relations—in a word, win the game of life. 10

Robert Schuller had simply adopted the occult/New Age principles Norman Vincent Peale had adopted from Shinn and other New Age writers. Schuller renamed these principles “possibility thinking” and used the metaphor of “God’s Dream” to customize the metaphysical/New Age techniques. It is no wonder that [New Age leader] Neale Donald Walsch commended both Peale and Schuller as “extraordinary” Christian ministers: they were presenting New Age teachings on how to create your own reality through occult manifestation. As previously cited, Walsch had written:

*This phenomenon [occult manifestation] is discussed with extraordinary insight in the classic book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, written over fifty years ago by the Reverend Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, a Christian minister who understood that feelings are a gift from God, giving us the power of creation. 11*

Norman Vincent Peale’s adapted approach from occultist Florence Scovel Shinn encouraged his readers to “prayerize,” “picturize,” and “actualize” to create what they wanted—to create their own reality so they could be successful. 12 Schuller used slightly different wording to encourage people to dream “God’s Dream” to obtain their desires, or in the case of pastors, to create “successful” churches and to make their churches grow. In his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren referenced Schuller’s book *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* to describe a Schuller canvassing technique he used in starting Saddleback Church. 13 Warren also used the occult/New Age/Peale/Schuller technique of confidently picturing and affirming future success before it happens. Warren made his affirmations by publicly declaring Saddleback’s future success in a series of dream statements patterned after Robert Schuller. 14

Schuller continues to use the term “God’s Dream” today. “God’s Dream” is the subtitle of his 2005 book—*Don’t Throw Away Tomorrow: Living God’s Dream for Your Life*. As already mentioned, that book has a back cover endorsement by Gerald Jampolsky—the man who introduced me to the New Age teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. And Rick Warren chose to use the term “God’s Dream”—above all others—to describe his worldwide Purpose Driven P.E.A.C.E. Plan. In an e-mail announcing his P.E.A.C.E. Plan, he called the P.E.A.C.E. Plan “God’s Dream For You—And The World!”¹⁵ But Jesus never talked about living your dreams or imagining your dreams. In *Deceived on Purpose*, I wrote:

When the Bible says that in the last days “your old men shall dream dreams” it isn’t talking about these kinds of [“God’s Dream”] dreams. The only dreams mentioned in the Bible are dreams that occur during sleep. Biblical dreams and visions have nothing to do with those that are imagined and found in men’s hearts [the kind of “dreams” that Robert Schuller, the New Age, and a deceived church were conceiving]. 16

More Saddleback Spin

Rick Warren's use of Robert Schuller's "God's Dream" metaphor is another one of the many issues that have not been straightforwardly addressed by Warren and his Saddleback apologists. They have avoided dealing with the fact that the term "God's Dream" is an unbiblical Schuller concept. Rather than dealing directly with that fact, Warren's apologists simply isolated the single word "dream" instead. They made it appear that I was saying that the word "dream"—not "God's Dream"—was unbiblical and that I was wrong in taking Warren to task for using the term "dream." With this damage-control strategy, the word "dream" became the issue, not Warren's use of the Schuller term "God's Dream" to describe his P.E.A.C.E. Plan. By not identifying the real issue—the term "God's Dream" and its linkage to Schuller—they simply argued that the single word "dream" was a biblical concept. This, of course, made my argument look foolish to the reader who was relying on Saddleback's integrity to accurately describe my concerns. In his "Response to *Deceived on Purpose* by Warren Smith," Saddleback apologist Gilbert Thurston wrote:

As for the word dream, Mr. Smith is technically correct when he says that every time the word dream is used in the Bible it's referring to sleeping dreams or waking visions. However, he's incorrect when he tries to imply that the kind of dreams that Rick Warren, Bruce Wilkinson or even Robert Schuller, for that matter, talk about are not found in the Bible. 17

Thus, the full phrase "God's Dream" was avoided altogether. Saddleback apologist, Richard Abanes, took it one step further. Also avoiding any mention of the term "God's Dream," he suggested that Warren's reference was patterned more after Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech than Robert Schuller. He wrote:

Smith plays the same word game with "dream"—a term used by both Rick Warren and Robert Schuller. . . . [Rick] Warren has talked about his dream for the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. And Schuller has often used the word dream in his teachings regarding church leadership, church growth, and New Age concepts. But that does NOT mean the two men are using the word in the same way.

*In fact, Warren's use of the word "dream" dates all the way back to his first sermon at Saddleback in 1980 (BEFORE Schuller's 1982 book *Self-Esteem: A [sic] New Reformation*). He listed several dreams he had for his church. And, in my opinion, it is more reminiscent of Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech in Washington D.C. than anything Schuller has ever said/written. 18*

But these two Saddleback apologists were the ones playing the word games. In this second example with Richard Abanes, the single word "dream" was again substituted for the actual phrase in question—"God's Dream." Also, this apologist never addressed the real issue of Rick Warren's specific use of the Robert Schuller term "God's Dream" in describing his

Global P.E.A.C.E. Plan. Just like Gilbert Thurston, he tried to contain the discussion to the more generic and easily defensible term “dream.” Then when he argues that Warren’s use of the term “dream” in his first Saddleback sermon in 1980 was “more reminiscent of Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech,” he overlooks the fact that in 1980 Warren had just graduated from The Robert H. Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership where—according to Kay Warren—her husband had been profoundly influenced by Robert Schuller. 19 Abanes also overlooks the fact that in Warren’s book *The Purpose Driven Church*, Warren had written that six years before he founded Saddleback Church, he had read Schuller’s book *Your Church has Real Possibilities*. In this book, Schuller made several references to the term “God’s Dream” before he issued the following challenge to young pastors near the end of his book:

You’ve got to believe it before you see it! So believe you can build a Twenty-First Century church now! You can be the founder and the leader of such a great new inspirational center. You can make your church a great church for Jesus Christ. 20

Some reader of this book will build the greatest church ever built in America. 21

Saddleback apologists completely avoided what had been so clearly described in *Deceived on Purpose*—the fact that Rick Warren’s use of the term “God’s Dream” was directly related to Robert Schuller. But the Schuller term “God’s Dream” doesn’t stop with Rick Warren. It now stretches into the worldwide church and into the New Age itself. The concept that Schuller popularized over the years is becoming a frequently used metaphor for world peace. It seems obvious from all the spin that Saddleback apologists did not want to advertise the fact that the “God’s Dream” metaphor Rick Warren used to describe his P.E.A.C.E. Plan was a term that Schuller had been using and popularizing for over thirty-five years.

“God’s Dream” and Brian McLaren

In his 2006 book *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything*, alternative emerging church figure Brian McLaren proposes that Christians adopt new metaphors that the church can use to introduce the world to Jesus—a new user-friendly language to more effectively communicate with the prevailing culture of a “postmodern” world. The first new metaphor that McLaren suggests is the old Robert Schuller metaphor, “God’s Dream.” And like Abanes, McLaren tries to link this Schuller concept to Martin Luther King’s “I have a Dream” speech rather than attributing it to Schuller. McLaren explains:

For all these reasons, “the dream of God” strikes me as a beautiful way to translate the message of the kingdom of God for hearers today. It is, of course, the language evoked by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. His dream was God’s dream, and that accounted for its amazing power. 22

It is significant to note that using the Schuller “God’s Dream” metaphor and then linking it with

Martin Luther King's civil rights movement and King's "I have a Dream" speech are what many church and New Age leaders are presently doing. It is part of the emerging "merging" process going on. New Age leaders are linking the New Age Peace Plan—what they are now calling their "civil rights movement for the soul"—to the same Martin Luther King "I have a Dream" speech. 23 Marianne Williamson's Peace Alliance—formerly the Global Renaissance Alliance of New Age leaders—even has a poster with Martin Luther King's picture featured on their website.* The poster proclaims that "One Dream Can Change Everything." 24 [The poster has two photos on it: Martin Luther King and Gandhi.] As described in *Deceived on Purpose*, Marianne Williamson's New Age colleague Wayne Dyer has made it clear that the "One Dream" that can change everything is "God's Dream":

Who is the ultimate dreamer? Call it as you will: God, higher consciousness, Krishna, Spirit, whatever pleases you. . . .

One dream, one dreamer, billions of embodied characters acting out that one dream . . . Your true essence is that you are part and parcel of the one big dream. 25

This is the quintessential message that is available from all the spiritual masters . . . You, the dreamer . . . God, the dreamer. 26

I assure you that when you truly know that there is only one dream and that you are connected to everyone in that dream, you begin to think and act as if you are connected to it all, rather than attached to your separateness. 27

Linking "God's Dream" with Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech is a clever device that touches a deep emotional pocket within most people. This, in turn, opens them up spiritually to whatever teaching is being pushed—such as "we are all one" because God is "in" everything. This whole Schuller "God's Dream"/Martin Luther King/"I have a Dream" device is being used to create a false sense of togetherness and unity—to bring everyone together psychologically and spiritually as "One."

An Internet search could find no instance of Martin Luther King ever using the term "God's Dream." It is Robert Schuller—not Martin Luther King—who has popularized the term "God's Dream" over the years. It is no wonder that Marianne Williamson's colleague Neale Donald Walsch is so eager to describe Schuller as an "extraordinary minister" and someone who could help create a bridge between the church and the New Age with his God "in" everyone "God's Dream" theology of self-esteem. In *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*—the 1982 book that obviously inspired both Rick Warren and Neale Donald Walsch—Schuller wrote:

Tremendous human energy is needed to walk God's walk, work God's work, fulfill God's will, and complete his dream for our self-esteem. 28

Saddleback Men's Ministry

If there is any doubt about Rick Warren and Saddleback's continued use of the Robert

Schuller term “God’s Dream,” simply read Saddleback men’s pastor Kenny Luck’s 2007 book —*Dream: Have You Caught God’s Vision?* and his accompanying *Dream Workbook*. Both books use the term “God’s Dream” throughout their texts. In *Dream*, Kenny Luck sounds a lot like Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale when he concludes the foreword by writing —“Dreaming big with you.” Here is a brief sampling of that Saddleback pastor’s use of the term “God’s Dream”:

God’s dream for us is dangerously attractive, inviting, and controversial. 29

My prayer is that as you, and several of your friends, grapple with the content of this workbook, God’s dream for your life will erupt for His glory and the advancement of the cause of Christ. Our world desperately needs men living out the dreams God has burned into their hearts. 30

God’s dream for you is a heaven-owned vision of greatness, a God’s man image built upon that of the God-Man. 31

God’s dream is to see you reach that summit. 32

Five years after Rick Warren introduced his P.E.A.C.E. Plan as “God’s Dream For You—And The World!,” Robert Schuller’s metaphor continues to be emphasized by a wide cross-section of church and New Age leaders. Even Oprah Winfrey is using the term. 33

The Spiritual Trap

Using the term “God’s Dream” and other overlapping transformational language, Rick Warren’s ever-evolving Global P.E.A.C.E. Plan is in the process of semantically merging with the PEACE Plan of the New Age/New Spirituality. “God’s Dream” has become the “Pied Piper” *Field of Dreams* rallying cry for a deceptive world peace plan that purports to establish the kingdom of God here on earth through humanitarian effort and global good works.

But “God’s Dream,” as described by its proponents cannot and will not succeed. It is not a case of “if you build it, he will come.” 34 While humanity is to always do its best in meeting human and environmental needs, the kingdom of God will not be established by humanity imagining and creating world peace by invoking a Schulleresque New Age “God’s Dream” PEACE Plan. The kingdom of God comes just as prophesied in the Bible—through the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the real Jesus Christ—not the false Christ of a deceived and apostate church. Not the false Christ of a New Age/New Spirituality.

Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:32)

Who's Talking About God's Dream?

Church Leaders

Now—find God's dream for your life and go all out for it! 1

—Robert Schuller

On October 18-19 [2003], I shared God's dream for our church locally. On October [27-28], Bruce Wilkinson shared God's dream for us individually. THIS WEEKEND, I'll begin a series of five messages on God's dream to use you globally to literally use YOU to help change the world. I'll unveil our Global P.E.A.C.E. plan, and how God has uniquely prepared you for this moment of destiny. 2

—Rick Warren

When you begin to create the life of your dreams—or maybe better stated, when you begin to live the life that God dreams for you—you take responsibility to prepare for the future. 3

—Erwin McManus

You have been handcrafted by God to accomplish a part of His Big Dream for the world. 4

—Bruce Wilkinson

The end of war begins with people who believe that another world is possible and that another empire has already interrupted time and space and is taking over this earth with the dreams of God. 5

—Shane Claiborne

The time to save God's Dream is now. The people to save God's Dream are you. 6

—Leonard Sweet

That in itself is an act of peacemaking, because we're seeking to align our wills with God's will, our dreams with God's dream. 7

—Brian McLaren

Who's Talking About God's Dream?

New Age/New Spirituality Leaders

I live inside God's dream for me. I don't try to tell God what I'm supposed to do . . . God can dream a bigger dream for you than you can dream for yourself.

8

—Oprah Winfrey

Who is the ultimate dreamer? Call it as you will: God, higher consciousness, Krishna, spirit, whatever pleases you . . . One dream, one dreamer, billions of embodied characters acting out that one dream . . . Your true essence is that you are part and parcel of the one big dream. 9

—Wayne Dyer

God says, "Please, please help me realize this dream." And some of God's best collaborators are the young, because you dream. You dream God's dream. 10

—Desmond Tutu

God's dream still remains unfulfilled. It was not fulfilled 2,000 years ago, or in the home of any religious leader or any American home, and today the Unification Church is here to pledge to fulfill that dream. We don't want to confine that fulfillment to our Church, but to expand it all over the world. Wouldn't that be the Kingdom of God on earth? 11

—Sun Myung Moon

Just start on your journey upward, inward and forward-upward to see God's Dream, inward to possess God's Dream, forward to become God's Dream. This Dream is the Dream of absolute Fulfillment. 12

—Sri Chinmoy

Excerpted from *A "Wonderful" Deception*, pp. 82-95.

1. Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* op. cit., p. 104.
2. Rick Warren, Saddleback Church e-mail, October 27, 2003, GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU—AND THE WORLD!, op. cit.
3. Ann Oldenburg, "The Divine Miss Winfrey" (*USA Today*, May 10, 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2006-05-10-oprah_x.htm).
4. Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), p. 4.
5. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, op. cit., p. 190.
6. Robert H. Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books Division, G/L Publications, 1974), pp. 176-179.
7. Ibid., p. 179.
8. Robert Schuller, *My Journey: From an Iowa Farm to a Cathedral of Dreams*, op. cit., p. 228.
9. Robert H. Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities*, op. cit., p. 178.
10. Florence Scovel Shinn, *The Game of Life & How to Play It*, op. cit., (Peale's endorsement of this book is on the back covers of a number of different editions).
11. Neale Donald Walsch, *What God Wants: A Compelling Answer to Humanity's Biggest Question* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2005), p. 189.
12. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, First Fireside Edition, 2003), p. 55. Actual quote reads: "1) PRAYERIZE, 2) PICTURIZE, 3) ACTUALIZE"
13. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, op. cit., p. 190.
14. Warren B. Smith, *Deceived on Purpose*, op. cit., pp. 104-105.
15. Rick Warren, Saddleback Church e-mail, October 27, 2003, GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU—AND THE WORLD!, op. cit.
16. Warren B. Smith, *Deceived on Purpose*, op. cit., pp. 124-125.
17. Gilbert Thurston, "Response to *Deceived on Purpose* by Warren Smith," op. cit.
18. Richard Abanes, "Warren Smith: Still Self-Deceived on Purpose," op. cit.
19. Tim Stafford, "A Regular Purpose Driven Guy" (*Christianity Today*, November 18, 2002, Vol. 46, No. 12, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/012/1.42.html>).
20. Robert Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities*, op. cit., p. 6.
21. Ibid., p. 179.
22. Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message Of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, a Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), p. 142.
23. Neale Donald Walsch, *Tomorrow's God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2004), p. 262.
24. See: <http://www.thepeacealliance.org>.
25. Wayne Dyer, *You'll See It When You Believe It: The Way to Your Personal Transformation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, First Quill Ed., 2001), p. 108.
26. Ibid., p. 109.
27. Ibid., p. 110.
28. Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, op. cit., p. 112.
29. Kenny Luck, *Dream: Have You Caught God's Vision?* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2007), p. 146.
30. Luck, *Dream Workbook: Have You Caught God's Vision?*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
31. Ibid., p. 17.
32. Ibid., p. 142.
33. Ann Oldenburg, "The Divine Miss Winfrey," op. cit.
34. Quote from movie *Field of Dreams*, 1989, Universal City Studios, Inc.

Sidebar:

1. Robert Schuller, *Don't Throw Away Tomorrow* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 36.
2. Rick Warren, Saddleback Church e-mail, October 27, 2003, GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU—AND THE WORLD!, op. cit.
3. Erwin McManus, *Wide Awake: The Future is Waiting For You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 179.
4. Bruce Wilkinson, *The Dream Giver* (Sister, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc, 2003), p. 77.
5. Shane Claiborne, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 307.
6. Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami, Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 34.
7. Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, op. cit., p. 161.
8. Ann Oldenburg, "The Divine Miss Winfrey," op. cit.
9. Wayne Dyer, *You'll See it When You Believe It*, op. cit., p. 96.
10. Desmond Tutu, "Archbishop Desmond Tutu Speech" (March 18, 2004, Bender Arena at American University, <http://www1.media.american.edu/speeches/desmondutu.htm>).
11. Sun Myung Moon Speaks on New Morning of Glory (January 22, 1978, <http://www.unification.net/1978/780122.html>; information courtesy of Discernment Ministries, "A Global Kingdom Dream," <http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/08/discernment/8-5-dream-peace.htm>).
12. Sri Chinmoy (late resident Indian guru at the United Nations, http://www.yogaofsrchinmoy.com/god_the_author_of_all_good/mangod).

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