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BOOK REVIEWS

The Bible Code, by Michael Drosnin. Published by Simon & Schuster, New York, 1998 (264pp.).

Michael Drosnin is a reporter who lives and works in New York City. *The Bible Code* is a book popular in character, which claims to unfold “scientific discoveries that may change the world.” It is derived from the text of the Bible and its (apocalyptic) prophecies.

Right from the start the book asserts that there is a code in the Bible which for three millennia “has remained hidden.” The computer has now unlocked this code, a rare success that promises that even the future of the world may be revealed in the same way, says Drosnin. He warns that events like World War II, the Moon landing, and the Gulf War had been foretold in the code and have already taken place. He conveys that the prediction encoded in the Bible of a global future catastrophe such as a nuclear world war must be taken seriously by the readers of this book.

The way Drosnin views the Bible is not a result of his own genius. He has excitedly and uncritically accepted the premises laid down by others whose conclusions he considers to be scientific and reliable. Some of the premises are:

1. The Bible is not only a book, it is also a computer program.
2. The Bible is constructed like a giant crossword puzzle and encoded from beginning to end with words that connect to tell a hidden story.
3. There is a bible beneath the Bible.

Drosnin’s methodology is complex and subjective. He deals with the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible that was put together without word divisions. His computer searches the “strand of letters for names, words, and phrases hidden by the skip code.” The process of searching for possible skip sequence begins with the first letter of the Bible and continues to the last. After finding a key word, the computer then looks for related information. The end of this process yields a number of sensational discoveries which force the author “to accept what the Bible itself can only ask us to believe—that we are not alone.” Moreover, since the Hebrew consonants have numerical values, the procedure is similarly applied to discover dates of the events foretold.

What to think of Drosnin’s proposed code and of his book? There is little doubt that out

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of curiosity many people will be tempted to buy the book and read it. Human thirst for something sensational or out of the ordinary may never be quenched, not even by reading a book like *The Bible Code*. An informed reader, however, is capable of classifying this book together with the others that have through the centuries come out of the school of mysticism which is known for its speculative guesswork with which the text of the Bible is approached. To borrow the words of one reviewer, the way this book reads is more amusing than amazing. Yet, there is something amazing about the book. One newspaper predicts that Drosnin's book in paperback "is likely to become more widely read than the Bible."

Whether the code is correct or not it is bringing a fabulous fortune to the publisher and the author. It is good to be reminded at this point that God's intention in giving us the Bible was not to conceal but to reveal his plan of salvation. To understand that plan and to accept it one does not have to rely on a secret code and a computer to help decode God's message. Rather, one needs faith—a gift of God. Drosnin, an atheist, does not embrace this concept.

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The Servant, by James C. Hunter. Published by Prima Publishing, Rocklin, CA, 1998 (187 pp.).

The Servant is not a real-life story but a timely, well-tailored allegory. It shows the transformation experienced by a successful business executive attending a leadership retreat at a remotely located Benedictine monastery in northern Michigan.

John Daily, a young and bright general manager, works for a world-class manufacturing company near Detroit. His work is fulfilling and he enjoys a great deal of autonomy as well as a healthy salary and bonuses. John is married to Rachel, a beautiful and intelligent psychotherapist. They have two teenage children and live in a nice home along the shores of Lake Erie. They own a large pleasure boat, two brand new cars and have the chance to take at least two family vacations every year.

But things are not as wonderful as they appear. The couple starts experiencing marital problems. John's relationship with his children also deteriorates. There are troubles at work with the hourly employees campaigning to have a union represent them. Even John's favorite hobby, coaching a Little League baseball team, starts falling apart.

With all of this stress, John blames his subordinates, his wife, his children, and the children on the Little League baseball team. He takes no responsibility for his woes. Rachel puts pressure on him to talk to their church pastor who suggests the idea of a monastery retreat. John reluctantly agrees to attend.

Bidding his wife good-bye, John sarcastically says: “Maybe after this week I’ll be the perfect guy you want me to be and then give it all up to become a monk!”

His initial, cynical attitude quickly softens when he finds that one of the monks, Brother Simeon, is actually Leonard Hoffman, a legendary businessman acclaimed for his multiple talents and especially for his ability to motivate people. Among other notable accomplishments, he transformed several dying corporations into multi-million dollar revenue generators. While at the peak of his career, he resigned and disappeared from public life. Only a few knew that he had entered monastic life at the St. John of the Cross Monastery.

John adopts Brother Simeon as his leader for this meaningful retreat. From here on, John learns many sensible principles of leadership, most of them quite new to him. The contributions from each of the varied participants in the seminar (an army sergeant, a public school principal, a basketball coach, a nurse, and John) under the wise guidance of their teacher make the encounter colorful and fruitful.

Throughout the seminar sessions, as well as a number of early morning personal meetings with Brother Simeon, a variety of ideas are discussed:

- Management is quite different from leadership. The former is for objects, time, money, etc. The latter is for people. People are not to be managed, but led.
- Power is very different from authority. Power comes with a position; but authority goes with the person.
- Relationships are so important if authority is to be properly exerted. Power without authority erodes relationships.
- The true leader is a servant throughout—this is the principal theme running across the book.
- The proposed model of leadership contains *Will* and *Love* as foundations and they are followed by *Service*, *Sacrifice*, and *Authority*. Only through them can leadership be reached.
- Love is not a spontaneous feeling but a deliberate choice that translates into action.
- Leaders can create the kind of environment where people can be trusted, liked, appreciated and respected. This makes people grow.
- More than money or material benefits, the true payoff for a leader is the joy obtained by serving others.

The book is also deeply spiritual. In the context of the monastery and with Brother Simeon as leader, Hunter puts in the monk’s mouth a great deal of godly wisdom. One of the most salient examples is the parallelism established between each of the nine components that comprise the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) and the fundamental attributes of a good leader. It becomes clear that leading, even in the secular world, is nothing other than serving.

By the end of the week, John is a different person. He decides to drop his phoniness and to become authentic with people. When Rachel arrives to pick him up, John held her close until she let him go. She was surprised and could not remember the last time she let go first. “Just a small first step on a new journey,” John replied proudly.

The Servant is readable, entertaining and packed with good counsel for successful interpersonal and group relationships. Much advice is Gospel-based and Jesus is clearly identified as the greatest leader of all time. The book is highly recommended for anyone who is in a position of influence on others.

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Asia Under Siege: How the Asian Miracle Went Wrong, by Ranjit Gill. Published by Epic Management Services Pte. Ltd, Singapore, 1998 (196 pp.).

Ranjit Gill, a veteran journalist of more than 25 years and keen observer of the Southeast Asian economic and political scenes examines the 1997 Asian currency crisis. Gil is a reporter, not an economist, therefore, his book is liberally referenced with the thoughts and statements of the “movers and shakers” in the region or those recognized as having expertise in the field of economics and finance. He goes back and tries to put the regional pieces of the puzzell together to help explained what happened, why, and what the future likely holds. The book reveals how greed, unchecked globalization, and bad governance exacerbate the slide when speculative trading of the region’s currencies depleted international reserves and lead to an inability to control the economies amidst huge foreign debts. Reference is made to South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hongkong in East Asia, but the main characters are the emerging economies of Asean, notably, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

The author notes that a number of economist from around the world voiced their fears regarding the “breakneck speed of growth in Asia.” They warned that sustained growth was depended upon expansion of a country’s output rather than on heavy reliance on growth from inputs (expansion of employment, increases in educational skills, and massive investments in physical capital). Paul Krugman, Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is quoted by the author as saying “Economic growth that is based on expansion of inputs, rather than growth in output per unit of input, is inevitably subject to diminishing returns.” Gil follows this up by drawing a parallel to the growth and collapse of the former Soviet Union.

The International Monetary Fund, not without its detractors, sent warnings to Asia about the need to address the excesses and to strengthen its microeconomic infrastructure. Each of the Asean emerging regional powers was offered specific advice to address their own particular

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problems. But alas, the warnings largely went unheeded.

The crash of the Thai baht in June caused a domino effect in Asean as the ringgit, the peso, and the rupiah followed a downward course. Gill observes, If the region had acted as a united body early on, it may have reduced, to some degree, the impact of the financial turmoil. What is presented instead is the name-calling and accusations, not between the Asean countries but primarily between Dr. Mahathir, Prime Minister of Malaysia and billionaire George Soros.

An upbeat feeling seems to prevail that the Asian Economic Miracle is far from over. Gill refers to Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, who states that if East Asian countries are to recover from the economic crisis, they must experience sweeping reforms in both their economic and political systems. He called for regulation, supervision, and more transparency in the financial system. He cautions, "Relationships amongst businessmen and civil servants must not degenerate into cronyism where favours are given for return favours."

Gill has prepared an interesting and well written documentary that reveals the various factors that caused the Asian Economic Miracle to fall in 1997. Even though the book contains an abundance of statements and quotes from a number of sources, the specific references where this information may be found is generally absent. It, therefore, has limited use as a research source for the subject matter.

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